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STRONG ANGELS OF COMFORT:
MIDDLE CLASS MANAGING DAUGHTERS
IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
At the University of Kentucky

By
Emily Ann Dotson

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Ellen Rosenman, Professor of English

Lexington, Kentucky

2014

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

STRONG ANGELS OF COMFORT: MIDDLE CLASS MANAGING DAUGHTERS IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE

This dissertation joins a vibrant conversation in the social sciences about the challenging nature of care labor as well as feminist discussions about the role of the daughter in Victorian culture.

It explores the literary presence of the middle class managing daughter in the Victorian home.

Collectively, the novels in this study articulate social anxieties about the unclear and unstable role of daughters in the family, the physically and emotionally challenging work they, and all women, do, and the struggle for daughters to find a place in a family hierarchy, which is often structured not by effort or affection, but by proscribed traditional roles, which do not easily adapt to managing daughters, even if they are the ones holding the family together.

The managing daughter is a problem not accounted for in any conventional domestic structure or ideology so there is no role, no clear set of responsibilities and no boundaries that could, and arguably should, define her obligations, offer her opportunities for empowerment, or set necessary limits on the broad cultural mandate she has to comfort and care others.

The extremes she is often pushed to reveals the stresses and hidden conflicts for authority and autonomy inherent in domestic labor without the iconic angel in the house rhetoric that so often masks the difficulties of domestic life for women. She gains no authority or stability no matter how loving or even how necessary she is to a family because there simply is no position in the parental family structure for her.

The managing daughter thus reveals a deep crack in the structure of the traditional Victorian family by showing that it often cannot accommodate, protect, or validate a loving non-traditional family member because it values traditional hierarchies over emotion or effort.

Yet, in doing so, it also suggests that if it is position not passion that matters, then as long as a woman assumes the right position in the family then deep emotional connections to others are not necessary for her to care competently for others.

KEYWORDS: Victorian Novels, Victorian Daughters, Domestic Labor, Redundant Women, Victorian Middle Class

Emily Ann Dotson

April 18, 2014

STRONG ANGELS OF COMFORT:
MIDDLE CLASS MANAGING DAUGHTERS
IN VICTORIAN LITERATURE

By

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April 18, 2014

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Wesley Council and Dorothy Dotson
who sadly did not live long enough to see the completion of this project,
but never stopped believing in the author
and
to the many managing women
I have known and loved,
Lillian Elizabeth Watson, Dorothy Nell Dotson, and Margaret Susan Dotson.

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My Dissertation Chair, Dr. Ellen Rosenman, exemplifies the high quality scholarship and collegial mentorship to which all faculty should aspire. She provided timely and instructive comments at every stage of the dissertation process, challenging my thinking and guiding me to new ways of reading and understanding the fascinating field of Victorian literature and culture. I am grateful beyond words for her support and encouragement. Next, I wish to thank my Dissertation Committee: Drs. Susan Bordo, Lisa Zunshine, Virginia Blum and Karen Tice. I was fortunate enough to be a student in each of their classes and am honored by the opportunity to work on this project with these magnificent scholars. They are inspiring and enthusiastic teachers who have made me not just a better student, but a more conscious and introspective person. I would also like to thank Dr. Janet Eldred, my supervisor and friend of many years, who has been supportive and understanding throughout this long process.

In addition, I am grateful to family and friends for the love and support which helped this dream become a reality. My parents provided not just emotional and financial support, but also inspiration. My mother, Peggy Dotson, instilled in me, from an early age, a love for literature and learning. My father, Don Dotson taught me the value of hard work and the virtues of dedication to a project. This project would not have been completed without them. My wonderful partner, Andy Johnson, was a trusted reader, editor, and supportive cheerleader from day one. He offered unfailing encouragement and the voice of quiet reason throughout this process. I would also like to thank Jess Peters, Rebecca Beach, and Sandy Slater for their friendship, encouragement, and support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement	iii
Chapter One	1
Chapter Two	17
Chapter Three	52
Chapter Four	80
Chapter Five	108
Chapter Six	136
References	143
Vita	152

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Victorian novelist Charlotte Brontë's genius was unique. Her life was not. As the oldest surviving daughter in a middle-class home, for most of her adult life, when she wasn't serving as a governess, she was home caring for her father. In writing a biography of her, Elizabeth Gaskell deliberately focused on Brontë as an idealized angel in the house, selflessly and joyfully caring for her father and siblings. This Brontë myth, which obscures her ambition and talent, is a tough sell, though, for modern readers who have access to her journals and letters. Brontë wrote at length about the difficulty of caring for her father and his home, saying that she felt "buried" beneath her domestic responsibilities (Miller 6). Her close friend Mary Taylor said, "I can never think without gloomy anger of Charlotte's sacrifices to the selfish old man, her father" (qtd in Murray xvi). Sadly, novels of the period show that the difficulties of Charlotte Brontë's domestic labor as the managing daughter in her father's home was not unusual. Her situation was like that of many women who long into adulthood bore the burden of caring for others in their family, yet their story is one largely untold in the scholarly criticism.

Census records from 1851 show a dramatic increase in the number of unmarried women and, that women who did marry were marrying significantly later in life. The "redundant" women of the middle class had few economic opportunities other than being a governess or staying home to manage the family home as Brontë did. Because marriage was understood as the natural destiny of all women, unmarried women became, for some Victorian social critics, a "crisis" that pointed to a need for greater educational

and economic advancement for women and was tied to larger questions about the changing role of women in society. This dissertation, which explores the role of daughters in four novels written within fifteen years of the 1851 census, asserts that managing daughters were also expressions of a domestic problem. While novels are not documentaries, when they tell similar stories about the experiences of a class or category of persons, as they do here with managing daughters, they provide valuable insight into cultural concerns about the role of managing daughters. This dissertation joins a vibrant conversation in the social sciences about the challenging nature of care labor as well as feminist discussions about the role of the daughter in Victorian culture. It uses a cultural studies approach to argue that these novels collectively articulate social anxieties about the unclear and unstable role of daughters in the family, the physically and emotionally challenging work they, and all women, do, and the struggle for daughters to find a place in a family hierarchy, which is often structured not by effort or affection, but by proscribed traditional roles, which do not easily adapt to managing daughters, even if they are the ones holding the family together. These novels present adult women managing a parent's home as a loving extension of one's traditional family duty, but also as an anomaly that is deeply problematic for the women who do it and potentially even for the family structure itself. The managing daughter is a problem not accounted for in any conventional domestic structure or ideology so there is no role, no clear set of responsibilities and no boundaries that could, and arguably should, define her obligations, offer her opportunities for empowerment, or set necessary limits on the broad cultural mandate she has to comfort and care others. The extremes she is often pushed to reveals the stresses and hidden conflicts for authority and autonomy inherent in domestic labor

without the iconic angel in the house rhetoric that so often masks the difficulties of domestic life for women. She gains no authority or stability no matter how loving or even how necessary she is to a family because there simply is no position in the parental family structure for her. The managing daughter thus reveals a deep crack in the structure of the traditional Victorian family by showing that it often cannot accommodate, protect, or validate a loving non-traditional family member because it values traditional hierarchies over emotion or effort. Yet, in doing so, it also suggests that this could at times offer an advantage. If it is position not passion that matters, then as long as a woman assumes the right position in the family then deep emotional connections to others are not necessary for her to care competently for others or for her to have stability or authority.

This dissertation does three things: It attempts to map the unclear role and responsibilities of managing daughters, it challenges the idealization of caring labor, and reflects the unstable position daughters have within the structure of the Victorian family. The role of managing daughter is an identity, arguably an occupation, which has not been previously identified in scholarship of the period. These daughters are all middle-class adult women who manage the family home, but without clear roles. They are never given authority or guaranteed a permanent position in the family, yet are often essential to the family stability. These novels reveal that under the umbrella of caring, and without a clear role in the home, daughters often take on excessive and inappropriate responsibilities and that they are often unable to set necessary boundaries emotionally or physically on their work. Their emotional investment in their families also can make it

hard for them to form healthy attachments and can slow or even stop what Victorians assumed to be the natural transition from daughter to wife.

Secondly, this dissertation challenges the idealization of caring labor which imagines domestic labor as the opposite of work and as something always motivated by a loving heart. Because a daughter's labor has much less of the iconography of ministering angel that surrounds a wife's caring labors to obscure the difficult realities of their work, it is possible to see in their experiences the challenges of that labor. Collectively, these novels demonstrate that caring labor can be motivated as much by duty, gratitude, or self-interest as it is by love or affection. They also clearly indicate a fact social scientists would identify nearly 150 years later: that a woman's selfless caring for her family can feel physically and emotionally exploitive, similar, some authors argue, to being a servant or factory worker. Yet, the novels also reflect the powerful drive personally and culturally for home and family attachment which motivates women to eagerly give all for others.

Finally, this dissertation suggests that the rigid structure of the Victorian family doesn't easily allow for managing daughters to hold a permanent place in their own families even when they are the ones holding the family together. These novels all feature families cared for and protected not by a strong or engaged father, but by a resourceful managing daughter. Yet, no matter how much she loves or works for her family, in the traditional family hierarchy she is always a secondary, arguably disposable, figure. Not only will she never be her father's equal or partner, she can be easily replaced, as these novels show, by a new wife or even a good housekeeper. The disturbing, but also liberating, realization of these novels is that family hierarchy need not

be structured by emotional relationships. It is position, not affection or effort, that grants women an authoritative permanent role in the family. This suggests quite radically that daughters, and by extension wives, need not be emotionally invested in the family to manage it successfully.

In 1851, Victorians were disconcerted to discover some 400,000 unmarried women as a statistical reality in the census (Braca). The census also calculated that the average age to marry was now age 25 and rising each year, and that 40% of all women, including 28% of women under age 25, were unmarried, of which nearly two million would never marry at all (Branca). The supposed problem of these “redundant” women was largely an economic one in which the status of these women and their access to resources was tied to larger questions about the changing role of women in society. Upper-class daughters had the money to make a comfortable life alone and working-class daughters had employment opportunities in factories and shops, but middle-class daughters had few respectable employment options, so they largely became the focus of the discussion. W.R Greg’s famous essay “Why are Women Redundant?” poses several solutions including governess training centers and mass emigration of middle class women to the Australian outback and American wilderness to solve the problem of these “quite abnormal” unmarried women (32). Early feminists seized upon the census numbers as proof of a need for increasing education and employment opportunities for women. Bessie Rayner Parkes argues that industrialization, which removed industry from the private home, had essentially forced women to work outside the home: “For it is clear, that since modern society will have it so, women must work ...” (24). Josephine Butler agreed and pushed for educational reforms, stating plainly that “to get knowledge

is the only way to get bread” (<http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/>). Without the option of early marriage or other respectable occupations immediately at hand many daughters had no choice but to stay home to manage or assist with their family home. While managing one’s family of origin may never have been a plan or goal, the role of managing daughter arguably became a de facto career for some middle-class women, at least for some period of their life.

Although critics have not noted this before, there are, in fact, a significant number of novels at this time that highlight the plight of the managing middle-class daughter: Dickens’ *Dombey and Sons*, Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* and *Men’s Wives*, Jessie Fothergill’s *Kith and Kin*, Mary Taylor’s *Miss Miles*, Trollope’s *The Warden*, and Mary Elizabeth Bradden’s *Lost for Love* are just a few of the novels which feature an adult unmarried managing daughter. I have chosen to focus on four novels which feature the managing daughter as the main or title character. These novels are all written in a fifteen-year period after the 1851 census, the date when census records indicate that adult unmarried daughters were a statistically significant factor in the home. Charles Dickens’ canonical classic *Bleak House* was published in installments between 1852 and 1853. It is the story of the anxious and selfless Esther Summerson’s endless care for her guardian and his wards. Elizabeth Gaskell’s dark industrial novel, *North and South*, was written in 1855. It follows the exhausted minister’s daughter Margaret Hale as she cares for her father and invalid mother in a city ripe with labor problems that are similar to her own. Ellen Wood penned the now obscure *Lord Oakburn’s Daughters* in 1864. It tracks the sad progress of Lord Oakburn’s eldest daughter Jane as she struggles for authority in a home she manages for her tyrant of a father. Margaret Oliphant’s ironic satire *Miss*

Marjoribanks was created in 1866. With gentle and often charming irony, it mocks the domestic battles of the managing daughter Lucilla to be a comfort to her father, while also feathering her own nest and ambitions. These novels represent a variety of authors, both male and female, and novelistic daughters at various places within the middle class from the orphaned and destitute Esther, the frugal minister's daughter Margaret, the wealthy doctor's daughter Lucilla, and Lord Oakburn's impoverished daughter Jane. All these women show the struggle of daughters to maintain middle-class values of care and comfort in the midst of economic rises and falls. Collectively these novels tell a previously untold story about the cultural anxieties of the managing daughters who cared so tirelessly for others.

There has been considerable scholarly work on the role of mothers, fathers, and on domesticity as a whole, but little work on daughters, and even less on their domestic labor. Lynda Boose argues daughters have long been ignored by scholars because of a general disinterest in single women outside a romance plot. This dissertation focuses exclusively on unmarried adult daughters and their work in their father's homes. It maps a very unique and significant narrative convention, a female story that is entirely outside the erotic romance plot. In separating the domestic plot from the romance, these novels demonstrate the stresses of domesticity without the potential rewards of love and marriage. It pulls together the ongoing multidisciplinary debate in social science about the nature of domestic labor and Victorian conduct literature which focused on domestic management and the role of Victorian daughters. These topics have rarely merged in spite of the fact that daughters were involved in domestic labor in important ways.

Victorian scholarship has also largely dismantled the idea that home was, as Ruskin imagined, “a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth” created and sustained by the love of a selfless woman (85). Women’s domestic work included a multitude of difficult tasks hidden behind the cultural assertion that care for others was what Sarah Stickney Ellis called a “high and holy duty” rather than actual labor (23). This was a supposedly innately driven instinct to care for others which evades description like other forms of labor. Nancy Armstrong calls it, “labor that is not labor” (80). Conduct books make it clear that the role of the daughter in the home is a subordinate one. There is no cut-off age for a daughter in the home, but the expectation is always that they will be moving to their own homes at some very soon point. Conduct books are curiously at a loss about what might happen if daughters do not marry, if they stay home and manage the family. The description of them and the advice to them presupposes that are young, fresh from school, and home only for a brief transitional period. As a result they are described much like servants firmly under a mother’s control. A daughter’s responsibilities in the home, from laundry to cooking, are often indistinguishable from that of servants, but she should never forget that as a member of the family “more” is expected of her (137). They are a valuable, but temporary, aide to their mothers, to whom they are always subordinate, even when she is incapacitated or absent. They were told to understand her mother as “the voice of reason” and her instructions, no matter how gently phrased, as having the “force of a command” at all times (Arthur, 52 and *Female Excellence* 136). Mothers generally scheduled a daughter’s day and authorized any authority the daughter has in the home. With a mother’s blessing a good daughter becomes “her mother’s right hand assistant” (*Female Excellence* 154). But, she is not a

partner or equal to her mother. What happens when the mother is absent is never discussed. The absence of a managing mother, which is the case in all the novels I discuss, clearly makes a daughters position even more complicated because without a mother, she has no one to authorize her authority or define her boundaries and no matter how much she reproduces the mother's role she will never have the authority of a mother.

Conduct books also do not account for her role in the home as an older managing daughter. The position many "redundant" women must have faced is simply not imagined in the conduct literature. Daughters in these roles then must carve their positions carefully around the boundaries of respectability they are given in conduct literature. This can lead to odd disconnects in propriety and authority, like the thirty-year-old Lucilla still wearing a virginal high white gown to dinner or Jane being forced by her father to accept the former governess she fired now dressed in her dead mother's clothes as her new mother. The women in my study all struggle to find a clear position for themselves in the family and authority in their roles, but the way daughters are minimized in the rhetoric of family life makes this unusually difficult.

What the daughters in my study do learn and apply from the conduct books is a notion of constant labor as a part of their identity. Their motto they were told should always become, "None liveth for herself" (*Female Excellence* 13). Daughters were good when they provided, not for a glittering show of empty talents, but the ability to competently care for others. Sarah Stickney Ellis calls these daughters without practical skills "languid, listless and inert" (54). This focus on practical skills corresponds to what Monica Cohen notes is a new recognition of domestic labor as a specialized and challenging skill for middle-class women. She argues that women in the nineteenth

century achieve what she calls “professional domesticity” by virtue of parallels between domesticity and the work of male professionals. Cohen’s study validates the importance and difficulty of women’s labor in the Victorian period. However, Cohen does not explore the contradiction in domestic work between skilled paid labor and loving duty and does not discuss emotional labor itself at all. Her study begs for an analysis of both the rigors of that physical labor and, even more importantly, the emotional dimensions of caring work, what Marjorie DeVault calls “a critical part of the puzzle,” (16). This is what my study adds to this conversation.

Critics like DeVault and other social scientists have struggled to determine how domestic labor, especially caring labor, is different from other labor. The social sciences have long debated whether domestic labor is in some way special, what Sarah Berk calls “a unique work site generating special configurations of constraints, costs and conflicts” (19). Simone de Beauvoir called housework “the torture of Sisyphus,” an endless repetition of invisible tasks consumed by others largely without acknowledgement or any corresponding improvement in rights or status of those who do it (451). Scholars have argued that domestic labor is rooted in institutionalized and cultural power inequalities. They complain that female domestic labor benefits male capitalists and reinforces patriarchal ideology and forms of gendered servitude and is thus at some level women have no choice but to be “forced to care” for others (Glenn 7). In Ann Oakley’s 1974 *Sociology of Housework*, the first large-scale study of women in the home, Oakley argued that women in the home felt that domestic labor was “parallel to that in the factory or office world” (169). She theorized that women at home were “exploited” by the constant demands of their domestic responsibilities and those that did not, she asserted, had

“internalized their own oppression” (169). Psychologists have pointed out that full-time housewives have increased risks of both depression and addiction issues (Morton). The complaints of insomnia, headaches, nightmares and anxiety are so common as to have a name, “housewives syndrome” (Haavio-Mannila).

My study suggests that Victorian managing daughters experience all the challenges of caring labor social scientists identify. Freed from the iconography of angel in the house, daughters show domestic labor for what it often really is—challenging and frustrating. An overwhelmed wife that complains about caring for others is unloving: An overwhelmed daughter that complains is learning what it means to be a woman and able to highlight the problems of caring labor. The novels in this study provide example after example of work that is challenging both emotionally and physically and yet offers little status or authority to those who do it. Jane assumes every responsibility, including parenting her sisters and negotiating with creditors, but she can be replaced without warning or hesitation by her father’s new wife, a woman she despises. Margaret has to fight even for the right to nurse her dying mother. These women are pushed into caring roles they often can’t refuse and that are well beyond their experience or expertise. The young and inexperienced Esther is forced to be a guardian to her guardian’s irresponsible male ward. Margaret must do her father’s job and tell her mother about her father’s religious crisis and their financial fall. The constant need to care for others, even when the responsibilities are inappropriate for a daughter, extends from these daughters not just to the family, but to everyone they encounter. Neither Esther nor Margaret hesitates to nurse the suffering poor around them. Margaret even stops a mob protest as part of her

“women’s work.” Jane, Esther, and Margaret all end up feeling alienated from their feelings at some point and exploited by the constant demands of others.

However, amazingly for all its punishments, domestic labor is not without rewards too. Studies since Oakley have made it clear that exhaustion and potential exploitation is only one side of a complex experience. Other studies reveal that domestic work is embedded in emotional ties to people and places in such a way that most women who work in the home do not think of their work as work. They call it “love” or “not quite a job” (De Vault 10). As Arlie Russel Hochschild explains, “Most care labor is so personal, so involved with feeling, that we rarely imagine it to be work” (16). These scholars argue that women are predisposed to care, not as an “essential” female domain, but because social arrangements, particularly status positions women earn inside and outside the home for successful care of others, make caring more desirable for women. In fact, there are significant emotional and social rewards in domestic labor that make it desirable and even preferable. Women who engage in domestic labor develop strong bonds to their spaces, what industrial psychologists call home attachment (Hidalgo), and see their labor as a way of connecting in meaningful ways to others (Goodenow). In addition, they see their labor as an expression of creativity and even a specialized skill which they offer either in exchange or as gifts to others (Berk). The challenge of domestic labor is that it can often at the same time be both deeply rewarding and remarkably exploitive.

The women in these novels also reflect this deep need for purpose and home attachment. Caring for others gives their lives meaning, which is itself rewarding and often brings them closer to those for whom they care. Esther’s childhood of deprivation

leaves her profoundly grateful to her guardian/father and hopes to “win some love” with constant care. Her almost pathological need to care is rooted in her need for love and approval. Margaret’s idealized images of home and family make her unwilling to leave her parents even for a good marriage. The idealized vision of a caring home makes her unable to find fault with her father even when his decisions make her life difficult and shatter that very image of a peaceful home. Jane’s powerful love for her deeply flawed father enables her to forgive him and rush to his side even after he humiliates and alienates her. Lucilla’s obsession with a beautiful home and active home life guide almost every decision she makes. Under the claim of “being a comfort to Papa” she remakes her home and community to give herself a sense of purpose and her life some meaning, the depth of which the narrator often notes is amusingly trivial and shallow. Nonetheless, it is that powerful need for a sense of purpose in the home, not any romantic notions, which ultimately convinces her to marry and she marries the man most in need of her ambition and vision.

Domestic labor for managing daughters, then, is a complex blend of challenging and rewarding opportunities. But, this project is not just about the nature of domestic labor, but about what this labor brings in terms of stability or position to the women who do it. Critics who write about the domestic role of daughters in the family generally assert they do not have an easy time or a clear role in the family. Paula Cohen (1991) claims the exploitation of daughters are, in fact, a necessary evil in family life. She argues that the daughter serves as a mediator of public and private stresses. Eager to please, they are the natural scapegoat for the conflicts of the family. Hilary Schor (1992) looks at patterns of alienation and exile in multiple Dickens novels to show how the

dutiful daughter represents a place of contradictions. According to Schor, daughters are always “displaced,” that is family members (insiders) that are always destined to leave and become part of another family (outsiders). Daughters represent the uncomfortable overlap between home and other, between family and outsider (6). My study builds upon the idea in both Cohen and Schor that adult managing daughters are indeed problematic figures not easily classified or structured in a traditional family and that they do not have a good claim to authority or even stability in the family even though they may very well be essential to the family’s survival. The conduct literature and the novels both show that daughters are arguably disposable figures with little stability or permanence even when they want to remain in the family home. Margaret and Lucilla both end up orphaned isolated spinsters with no financial support when their fathers die. Both have to marry to find any role for themselves that allows them a defined and respected position in a family. Esther is a pawn traded between men. She is so emotionally disconnected from her own needs she willingly sacrifices herself in daughterly devotion to the guardian who wants to marry her. Her happy ending is almost an accident. Jane is hurt and humiliated, isolated from her sisters and living in frugal isolation while the former governess she hated raises her beloved sister and spends her father’s inheritance. These women all discover that neither love nor hard work guarantees stability or position in their family of origin.

The traditional family model has no clear place for a managing daughter. The rigid nineteenth century traditional family model of a tier path from father, mother, son, and daughter shows clear signs of cracking. It doesn’t have a place for the managing daughters who are a statistical reality and who are in many cases holding the family

together. However, the potential silver lining is that if love can be disconnected from domestic care then women are free to choose marriages based on their own ambitions rather than any fantasy of love and still be caring women. More significantly, if care for others doesn't have to be rooted only in selfless love, then it should be possible to care for others in ways that still are intimately caring and yet also accommodate one's own personal needs. This is a liberating, strikingly modern understanding both of family relationships and of domestic care.

The chapters that follow explore the stories of four fictional managing daughters. The goal within each is to identify the defining feature of the role of managing daughter, to explore the complexities and contradictions in her caring labor, and to determine family by family what her love and labor earn her in terms of a position in the family structure. Each chapter tells a different story, with distinct challenges and rewards. I have ordered the chapters by virtue of the managing daughter's ability to finally find a clear role, authority, and stability in a family. Lonely Jane Oakburn, whose unhealthy family dynamic leaves her isolated, sad, and nursing old family grudges is at one end. The anxious Esther's endlessly grateful and complex relationship with her mercurial guardian/father/potential suitor is the second chapter. Resilient Margaret, who never stops believing in the virtues of home and family even after hers is gone, is third. And, the delightful domestic general, Lucilla, the daughter who shows that caring for others need not be entirely selfless, is last. These women reveal the best and worst of caring labor and of Victorian managing daughters. Their stories though are not exclusively Victorian. They reflect the challenges that face nontraditional family members to find a

clear position and authority today and the complex blend of selfishness and sacrifice we now understand is inherent in most caring labor.

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Chapter Two: Lord Oakburn's Daughters: The Managing Daughter and the Governess

Ellen Wood, also known as Mrs. Henry Wood, was one of the most popular and prolific writers of the nineteenth century. She turned to writing seriously after her husband's business failures and rose to popularity initially on a story that praised temperance. Her first novel, *East Lynne*, marked her entrance into a new genre, sensation fiction, and made her a household name. Ironically, this conservative middle-class woman became the author of possibly as many as forty novels and short story collections most of which, called sensation fiction, focused on brutal crime and horrifying scandals. Tamara Wagner contends that her unique contribution to this genre was in capturing the realism of a domestic household. The contrast between the ordinary daily lives of her characters and the shocking crime heightened the perceived horror of the crime. Her three-part novel, *Lord Oakburn's Daughters*, was written in 1864. It is what Ellen Casey calls a "silver fork" sensation novel, a precursor to sensation novels, which focuses on crime in aristocratic life, hence the silver fork. Silver fork novels pined for outmoded ideas of gentility, but also emphasized with gothic drama the decline of the aristocracy in a world in which middle-class domesticity now reigned supreme (Wagner 36).

Wood's novel was inspired by the bigamy discussion created after the real case of Major William Charles Yelverton. Yelverton was rumored to be guilty of bigamy after refusing to pay the debts of his alleged first wife, Theresa Longworth, after he married Emily Forbes in 1861 (Fahnestock 47). True to sensation fiction's demand for "murder, madness, and mystery," Wood's novel ups the ante by having her potential bigamist, Dr. Carlton, poison his first wife, Clarice, after she gives birth to his son because he wants to

marry Laura Oakburn, whom he does not realize is actually his wife's younger sister in hiding (Wagner 301).

Sally Mitchell has noted that the melodramas women craved like candy in the 1860s presented "a world of suffering" (45). The suffering in this novel, though, is not in the two brides, one murdered and one socially ruined and both betrayed in love. Instead, Wood's novel actually centers on the domestic struggles of the eldest sister Jane, the managing daughter whom the narrator states "is fit only for a quiet home life" (154). In a novel of impulsive and hot-tempered people it is the placid Jane who pleads with her father and sisters for peace and reason. Possibly because of its sheer length of well over a thousand pages, the novel resists the impulse common to sensation fiction to focus on plot at the expense of character (Fantina 23). Instead, the portrait of the dutiful and agonized Jane is as nuanced and complex a characterization as any in literature. Tamara Wagner calls Jane "obnoxious," but that assessment fails to take into account the fact that she is forced to be an agent of her father's prejudices even as she recognizes and argues against the destructiveness of his bad parenting (289). For all the horrors of murder and bigamy that are revealed, the reality of Jane's slavish servitude to her despotic and contradictory father is easily just as chilling. *Lord Oakburn's Daughters* is a cautionary tale of what can happen to a daughter, without a mother's guidance and support, when she stays in the home to care for an unpredictable and unappreciative father instead of marrying. It exaggerates and pathologizes the stresses of unusually despotic domestic life for daughters to show the underlying powerlessness of this dynamic in which an adult daughter can potentially have less stability and opportunity for authority than a governess, a paid stranger in the home. The narrator confidently explains her sister's

rebellious retreats from home saying, “When a father is unusually despotic, a daughter is justified in breaking through her trammels,” and yet this story is primarily about the tragedy of the dutiful daughter who never breaks free (209).

Jane’s situation was like that of many motherless middle class unmarried daughters who, long into adulthood, bore the burden of caring for others. The 1851 census revealed that there were an estimated 400,000 unmarried adult “redundant” women (<http://www.histpop.org.uk/>). Pauline Simonsen notes that redundant women were a subject of intense middle class speculation and cultural anxiety from the 1860s to the 1880s (509). Because they waited longer to marry, and many never married at all, adult daughters in the nineteenth century often negotiated domestic responsibilities in the family home for significantly longer periods of their life. The question of what becomes of the middle-class women who cannot or simply do not marry has long been understood as an economic concern of the period, yet novels of the period show that these “redundant” women are also very much a domestic problem. While it is important to remember that novels are not historical truth, they can be motivated by social issues making it easy to see a parallel between the social concern for redundant women and the appearance of fictional managing daughters like Jane at the same time. What happens to the Oakburn family and to Jane when she takes on the managing responsibilities in the family instead of getting married is an important question not just in terms of economics, but also in terms of the role she fills in the family and how this influences the hierarchy and structure of the family itself. The novel, published just as this debate was emerging, imagines the lives of one caring adult daughter at her very worst—a powerless pawn manipulated by a despotic father and alienated from the very people she loves and cares

for most. It shows the dangerous dysfunction that can result from a daughter's inherently marginalized position in the family. She is a member by blood, but always assumed to be in training for and moving on to a new family of her own, which separates her emotionally from her father's confidences and arguably his affection. No matter how hard she works or how much she cares for him and for those in the home she never gains authority or stability.

Jane tries to craft a permanent and stable role for herself out of her caring labor, but this is simply impossible. Patriarchal Victorian culture did not invest daughters with any real position or power no matter how competent they might be or how useful or needed they were within the family. Jane's extended and extensive care for her father is rooted in the Victorian expectation that daughters have a duty to care for a parent, yet her servitude goes far beyond what would have been typical or expected. Unlike the endlessly anxious Esther Summerson in *Bleak House*, Jane has a biological tie to the family to justify and encourage her to attempt to manage the family and give her confidence in her work. If her father were more passive or appreciative she might well end up like the fictional domestic "General" Lucilla Marjoribanks, able to enjoy her management and with some genuine authority in the home. Unfortunately, though, Jane's caring labor is more like the endlessly laboring Esther. Both suffer under a man who is only randomly directive, unpredictably putting tremendous responsibility on them without clear boundaries or a stable and easily understood role in the family. She, like Esther, struggles to figure out her role in the family and has no one to authorize her power or set reasonable boundaries on her care. However, unlike Esther, whom Jarndyce values and appreciates to a certain extent, Jane never has the satisfaction of a job well

done. Her father is an unpredictable and unappreciative tyrant who is impossible to understand and thus impossible to please. As a result, she can never rest comfortably in her authority and never knows when her caring work will be seen by her father as a grudging, but necessary, extension of his authority or an attempt to “thwart” him (116). Tossed about on the stormy seas of his whims, she is neither valued nor validated. In addition, her attempts to please him result only in making her as “cold” and unreasonable as her father and alienating her from the sisters she loves, pushing them closer to rebellion and their dark fate. Complicating this, too, is the fact that the relationship she develops with her widowed father is similar enough to that of a wife to cause her to develop an unhealthy attachment and emotional dependence on him, which makes her unable to imagine a life or family of her own. Unlike Esther Summerson though, she has no hopeful and more appropriate suitor in the wings for her father figure to direct her attention and affection. Her father never notices her need for connection and family. He takes her caring as his right, never imagining her as more than his daughter. In some ways, Jarndyce’s ability to imagine Esther as more, as awkward as that is for her, saves her from the lonely life of daughterly service Jane experiences.

This novel critiques the rigid structure of family hierarchy that denies a meaningful role to worthy adult daughters who manage their father’s home. It does this through an internal critique by Jane’s sister Laura, who is horrified by her servitude and by an extensive parallel between the adult daughter and the liminal figure of the governess. Laura points out both the inappropriateness and excessiveness of Jane’s labors as well as their father’s neglectful stewardship of both home and family. The comparisons between Jane and the governess further illustrate the fragile position of the

managing daughter. In this novel the managing adult daughter has less security and opportunity for authority and empowerment than a governess in the same home. A position as a stable and powerful partner to her father simply does not exist in the rigid family hierarchical structure of the time which placed daughters firmly beneath her father and his wife, regardless of the inappropriateness of that wife. But, the governess, at least in novels, and the cultural imagination, can easily rise to power using her very vulnerability as a justification for her need for a greater position. The novel uses the governess to symbolically highlight the structural plight of the daughter. The daughter's potential for exploitation within the family is theoretically greater than even that of the disempowered governess. Because she is sexually available and offers a potential heir, the plight of the governess actually touches the earl, unlike the desperate pleas for stability by his equally dependent daughter. The governess can exchange fertility for stability. The daughter has no bargaining chips. Like Esther Summerson in *Bleak House*, Jane is so invested in her role as domestic caregiver to her father she never imagines he might need or want a partner who can provide more than just domestic comfort. Yet, unlike Mr. Jarndyce, Jane's father never sees her as any sort of partner. Faced with a choice between a loving daughter and a pretty wife who can care for him equally well and possibly provide him a male heir, the earl does not hesitate to make the governess his wife. For this aging earl, the potential male heir is more valuable than the living caring daughter and more important than any class prejudices that might have made the governess an unsuitable match. His marriage gives the governess an equal partnership, at least in theory, and the authority and power Jane could never have in the home. The governess as wife claims not only Jane's father and home, but also the young sister Jane

has raised like a second mother. Jane reconciles with her father, winning his favoritism and appreciation, but little else, on his deathbed, yet the happy ending in this story is clearly for the governess, not the caring daughter. For all her caring labor, Jane's reward is exile and isolation.

The novel points painfully to the fact that family attachments connecting the wife/mother/ father/daughter are complicated and often confusing. Jane's mother forces her into a pseudo-wife position on her deathbed. Days before she dies, Jane's mother begs her engaged daughter to commit to a life that will sacrifice her ability to be a bride or a wife as she planned to do just a few months later. "Stay always with your father, Jane; he will be lost without you when I am gone" (349). Obediently, she forsakes her fiancée in India explaining, "I thought it was my duty and I loved Papa almost as well, in another way, as I loved him. There was a little creature in my care also besides: You, Lucy" (347). In a moment of grief and crisis, her mother leads her daughter to a life of extreme and inescapable emotional attachment to her father, an attachment further complicated by the pull of her dependent infant sister. The newly married Lucy is horrified by inappropriate sacrifice, but Jane is eager to qualify the emotion as "almost as well, in another way" because she needs, even after her father's death, to validate this intense attachment which has robbed her of marriage and maternity (347). The narrator hints that "care and its bitter fruits—bitter to bear ... had come to her early," but doesn't reveal the sacrifice of her lost engagement until the end of the novel when she is alone and sad and readers can see it for the great loss it has become (161). Her caring heart turned against her, love and duty stretched out of bounds in a moment of family crisis trapping her in a life of eternal daughterhood. Instead of becoming a wife and mother for

her own family, she slides into an unclear and complicated role as daughter-wife for her father and sister-mother to her sisters.

Jane is not unlike other Victorian daughters in feeling she has a duty to care for her father. In fact, Victorian conduct books were clear in asserting a directive to daughters to honor their parents with their domestic service. An adult unmarried daughter was expected to serve her family under her mother's direction, easing her mother's burden, and practically preparing herself for own future as wife and mother. Daughters must become "her mother's right hand assistant" (*Female Excellence* 154). A daughter with a mother to direct her is actually encouraged to function as an extension of maternal authority in the home as a way to reward her family for their support of her and as useful training for her own future home.

However, without a mother to direct and authorize her, a daughter's role becomes problematic. After her mother's death, Jane is more than helpful: she is largely in control. As his biological daughter, Jane has some confidence, even arguably a degree of arrogance, as Tamara Wagner notes, in her authority in the home early in the novel. Unlike the hesitant and always-anxious Esther, Jane has a clear and direct biological tie to the family and logically some support from her position as oldest daughter to justify and encourage her management of the family and give her confidence in her work. This enables her to rule her sisters with an iron first, mouthing platitudes like "Adversity hardens the heart or opens it to Paradise," when they complain about their isolation and poverty (210). As difficult as her life is, she is "in her element," caring for her father and hopes for a life as "her father's constant companion" (196). However, this is an unusual,

even odd, expectation, clearly a byproduct of her extreme and permanent attachment to her father.

Victorian conduct books make it clear that a permanent and stable position at her father's side managing his household is not a future an adult daughter should expect no matter how competent they might be or how useful or needed they were within the family. Conduct books state a daughter is "always seeking qualifications for a future life" (*Female Excellence* 65). Daughters at home are "apprentices" for their future marriages (Arthur 22). A daughter's future was always hoped to be in her own happy marriage and children. W.R Greg's famous essay, "Why are Women Redundant?" notes that single working-class women who serve men as domestics can never be redundant, but their unmarried middle-class equivalents are "quite abnormal" without "the essentials of women's being: they are supported by and minister to" husbands (32). Because paid domestic work was unthinkable for middle-class women, Greg proposes few options beyond life as a governess, emigration, or vocational training as alternatives. Gregg points to a central problem of adult domestic daughters like Jane: What do you do when you have been trained for marriage and the opportunity for that marriage simply doesn't appear? For women like Jane, the natural transition from daughter to wife just doesn't happen. This break in the expected story of daughter to wife leaves adult women still at home in an uncertain position. Jane manages her father's domestic life like a wife, but never gains the emotional or financial rewards possible in a good marriage or the secure sense of place and position wives often enjoy. They never share confidences, humor, or warmth of any kind. She can't advise or even suggest financial solutions to their pressing debt or parenting advice for her restless sisters. And, while she may feel comfortable

early in the novel ordering her sisters about, it is clear that her security is an illusion and her life a series of excessive work and frustration.

Her need to be a good daughter and her intense attachment to her father push Jane far beyond what would have been typical or expected for a daughter. She becomes the “mistress” of the house, parenting her sisters, bearing the burden of their financial problems, overseeing their two servants, mending clothes, serving meals, and shopping for the family (317). Her sense of duty drives her to endless responsibility. “It was Jane who bore the brunt of it all” (155). Her sense of responsibility is so out of proportion that when she realizes debtors prison might be a reality for her father, she sincerely wishes that “England’s laws could be altered and permit a daughter to be arrested in the place of her father” (157). She has lost any sense of her individuality or self. “I would almost sell myself, she added with a burst of feeling, rather than bring these annoyances before Papa!” (181). Endless caring labor for an unappreciative father and resentful sisters leaves Jane exhausted and depressed. She wears “a patient wearied expression” of a “tired life” of endless unappreciated care (153). Even the family doctor is “pained at the look of care on Miss Chesney... at the evident marks of sleepless and miserable nights” (261). Her caring labor leaves her sleepless, anxious, and overwhelmed: “the anxiety for the present, the sickening dread of the future, and what might be the climax—Jane bore it all meekly, patiently, but it was wearing her out” (155).

Part of the reason Jane’s care becomes excessive is that without a mother to structure her role in the family she has no one to authorize her power or set reasonable boundaries on her care. Jane’s unstable domestic position is in many ways problematic because of her absent mother. Had there been a mother to supervise and set boundaries

on Jane's duties then Jane's life would likely have been remarkably better. Mothers play a central role in a daughter's development and also in her independence from the family and marriage. The absence of this pushes Jane to feel that her care is never enough. Jane invokes her mother several times throughout the novel as she tries to parent her sisters, but always with a sense of her own inferiority. She tells Lucy, "If Mama had lived ... she would have taught you and trained you more efficiently than I have done" (206). She calls upon their mother's authority again, "by the remembrance of our dead mother," to urge Laura to abandon Dr. Carlton (291). There is a sense not only of the loss of vital nurturing, but also of maternal approval which would validate and structure her parenting. It is presumptuous and, not surprisingly, completely ineffective. Even when she is right, as she is with Laura, she lacks the authority to direct or structure their lives. Without a mother to authorize her, none of her attempts to parent her sisters are effective.

Also, Jane's domestic care is excessive because the parent Jane does have does little to ease her burdens or set limits on her labor. Her father has driven the family deep in debt expecting his retirement half pay stretch as his full pay once did and borrowing until he can borrow no more. They have had to relocate at least twice to escape creditors and have sold off almost all that they once owned. They live almost entirely in rental furnishings in a rental house, too poor to socialize even casually with those her father feels are his equals. Her father is often neglectful and disengaged. He is consumed by his intermittent gout pain and oblivious to the responsibilities of the home. Jane takes on everything, including responsibilities like dealing with creditors, almost all the household chores, and disciplining her sisters—jobs that are more like that of a wife, servant, or even a father. It is important to note, though, that she does so for the most part blindly,

without ever clearly receiving his approval or direction. Her sister Laura pushes her to share these burdens with her father, but as a point of pride and out of an out-of-control sense of duty she tries to hide them from him. He clearly knows, though, and instead of offering to help, he complains about her cheap jam and other frugalities. He puts the full burden on her to solve the family problems big and small. As a daughter she should share full knowledge of the household concerns with her father. John Tosh states that for the Victorian father, “keeping order in the household was a key attribute of patriarchal power” (25). It is dysfunctional of her not to tell him how bad things have become and it is dysfunctional of him not to see what is happening. He complains about details like bad tea while ignoring constant irate solicitors calling. She refuses to acknowledge the depths of their poverty even to the sisters who suffer with her. She is able to maintain the family’s fragile sense of status only through isolation from society and considerable emotional denial to herself and others.

In part, too, Jane’s desperate need to please her father makes her unable to understand appropriate boundaries. She is not going to criticize his financial failure any more than she is going to point out his failure to provide emotional support for his family. She does not want to admit the truth of either. Like an abused child, she constantly assumes his rages are her fault. She never loses patience as he throws cups at the door behind her and snarls at her every kind gesture. She adapts to his every need, soothing his rages when her other sisters hide from them.

Perhaps no father had ever been loved with a more yearning ardent and dutiful love that was Captain Chesney by his daughter, Jane. To save him one care she would have forfeited her existence; if by walking through a sea of fire—and this is not speaking metaphorically—she could have

eased him of a minute's pain, Jane Chesney would have stepped lovingly to the sacrifice. (155)

Her idea of caring for her father is to accept any behavior and take on every responsibility for him, which he allows even as he criticizes. Her notion of duty is complete self-sacrifice. This echoes the idealized view of domestic care common in both conduct books and in magazines of the period which cultivate a cult of home dependent upon a woman who cares for others with no consideration of herself or her own needs. The novel shows how this exaggerated notion of daughterly duty is unhealthy and ultimately unstable and results in a complicated attachment that blurs boundaries in family structure and inhibits the daughter's ability to pursue the hetero-normative ideals of marriage and family that the culture also advocates for daughters. Her inability to set boundaries on the caring work she does for her father is nothing short of pathological.

Her need to please is complicated by the fact that unlike Lucilla Marjoribanks and other daughters with passive, even pliable fathers, Jane's father is an unpredictable tyrant who takes full advantage of his structural power as a patriarch with no regard for any of his daughter's needs or concerns. Jane is never sure when he will care about a domestic problem. His interest in the home flickers like a candle. The only thing she is certain of is that she will never be able to satisfy him. In many ways, their relationship is more like that of a mother to a spoiled child than that of father and daughter. He is constantly in need and never appreciative and she is endlessly patient and forgiving of his tantrums. John Tosh notes that although the separate spheres ideal of stoic hardworking British masculinity might suggest a life removed from the home, in fact, paternity and domesticity were actually central to masculinity for Victorian men. Oakburn's behavior reflects not just his own domestic chaos, but the failure of his paternity and masculinity.

He is shown throughout the novel weak in everything but rage. Bedridden, impulsive, physically and emotionally clumsy, and almost comically embarrassing in his wooing of the governess—everything about him speaks to an immature and childlike state. Captain Chesney attacks his daughters verbally and physically: “Laboring under frequent attacks of gout, Captain Chesney, naturally hot tempered, had grown irritable and more irritable” (50). He is “all turmoil and impatience, rapping incessantly” on the floor with his walking stick and threatening servants and daughters with equal vehemence (102). When he hears six-year-old Lucy playing the piano, he screams, “I should have her whipped” (103). When twenty-three-year old Laura upsets his pillows, he shrieks, “You should be shot” (166). Laura describes his as “a hard man, . . . heartless as the grave” (196). He summons his daughters by throwing dishes at the walls. Thirty year old, Jane has learned “when he called he brooked no delay and she must run” to his every whim (169). Jane’s father is an unpredictable and unpleasant man who seems to be capable of no emotion other than rage. Jane works around and for this angry man-child tirelessly in the hopes that he will recognize and appreciate her efforts, but even when they are in perfect agreement, as they are in their dislike of Laura’s suitor, he never acknowledges their alliance.

Her father is completely unappreciative of her efforts. He rages at her when she suggests contacting her lost sister and then later turns on her for not contacting her in spite of his orders. Because his reaction to everything is a rage, she can never tell if she has actually pleased him. He responds to every kind word or deed with cruelty, calling her names and attacking her efforts to make him happy. When she hesitates to enter a fever-ridden home, he criticizes her caution snarling, “Just like you! You never do things

like anybody else” (269). When she can’t track down the sister he has exiled, “he storms, he thumped [his stick], he abused the scapegoat, Jane, and claimed “You were always good for nothing, you know” (364). When her sister doesn’t answer her letters he screams at her, “You are a simpleton for your pains” (395). Paula Cohen argues that daughters are often the natural scapegoats for the family. The struggles of the family often are directly and indirectly blamed on the daughter, who is “conditioned by reason, age, and sex to be the most accommodating to others’ needs” (24). This is certainly true for Jane, who is constantly criticized by her father. As head of the family her father has a right, even an obligation, to correct his daughters, but Jane’s father abuses his paternal rights by attacking Jane for problems she has no control over. He makes her the scapegoat for every family problem, a role she accepts because in her need to please him accepting his wrath is all she can do to help him.

Worse, her attempts to please her father result only in making her as rigid and unhappy as he is and alienating her from the sisters she loves, pushing them closer to rebellion and their dark fate. She models herself after her father, becoming the mouthpiece for his prejudices and the agent of his discipline. For example, she shares his dislike for her sister’s boyfriend, Dr. Carlton, entirely because of a snobbish class-based belief that the wealthy young doctor is beneath the daughter of a cousin to an earl, which is their status when the relationship begins. In spite of the fact that the doctor can offer Laura a life of comfort and ease far beyond the borderline destitution she has at home, they both reject him out of what seem to be hollow and distant claims to aristocratic vanity. She becomes what Laura calls “cold,” and even her father calls “harsh” in her “haughty pride” in the family name and her “condescending and contemptuous manner”

to those she feels are beneath her which ironically often includes her own sisters (139). She becomes this person because she is so eager for her father's approval that she feels she must imitate what she believes are her father's feelings: "Jane only cared for what he cared for" (403). Echoing her father's prejudices, she is incapable of understanding or appreciating her sister's loneliness and frustration. Jane believes her father wants her to take a firm position in the discipline of her sisters, harshly rebuking them when they seem to stray from the high moral ground that she and her father share. When her lonely sister Laura wants to meet with other young ladies in the village, Jane is horrified because they are the daughters of tradesmen. They are too poor, isolated, and arguably tenuously socially positioned to entertain other aristocrats, but Jane is too vain to allow them to associate with anyone else. A good name is little comfort to her beautiful, energetic sister. In her role as sister-mother she actually acts not as a mother might, but as her father would—with anger and hostility, which leaves them as disgusted by her as they are by their father. When Laura is banned from contact with the family through a curt note from Jane, she asks their maid, "Does that edict emanate from my sister herself?" (282). To which the maid replies, "I think not Miss Laura. She cannot go against the wishes of the Earl" (282). Laura's scornful comment says it all. "I know that she will not" (282). As the agent of her father's discipline, she loses her sister's respect, love, and, ultimately, contact with them. They see Jane as "foolish" and worse, as little more than a pawn of their father (188).

For example, when Clarice leaves to be a governess, Jane's father forces her to write Clarice telling her she should never come home again and will never be forgiven. Jane knows the potential disastrous effects of his discipline: "It would have the effect of

hardening Clarice, as Jane knew, but she could only obey” (305). As she predicted, that letter caused Clarice to stop writing home, to take on an assumed name, and disappear from their lives only to be found years later as a murder victim in a pauper’s grave. Jane knows it is wrong for a parent to abandon his daughter in this way and struggles to make her father a better parent: “In vain Jane pleaded that Clarice might be sought out, might at least be seen after,” but her father “would not listen and quarreled with Jane on her persistence” (305). But, for all her arguments, Jane never breaks his rules. No matter how many bad dreams and sleepless nights she has, she is her father’s daughter and never contacts Clarice. She loses Clarice forever because she is an agent of her father’s discipline rather than a caring sister.

In addition, Jane’s father also causes her alienation from her sister Laura. When Dr. Carlton finally asks their father for permission to marry Laura, Captain Chesney naturally “rages out” against him refusing him “by right of power” rather than for any legitimate reason (207). He raves,

You are a common apothecary, sir- a dispenser of medicine! And you would aspire to a union with the family of Chesney? ...I’d rather see her in her coffin, than disgraced by contact with you! (258)

Selfish and thoughtless, he never imagines his isolated and poverty-stricken daughter might not have better options than this. He forces Jane to ban Dr. Carlton from the house. Jane does so even as she knows that “But for his having been forbidden the house she might never have ventured the next step” (207). When Jane catches the couple in the garden she reacts just as her father had to Dr Carlton. She rails at Laura about class differences, echoing the words their father had said: “The daughter of Captain Chesney marry a common country apothecary! ... I would rather see you in your grave than

matched to him” (186). As the agent of her father’s prejudices and his rage, she is as unreasonable and insensitive as he has been. Instead of love and support, she can offer only a feminized version of her father’s rages. As much as Jane loves her sister and is frightened for her future, her paternal loyalty makes her unable to go against her father’s commands. As an agent of his discipline, she alienates yet another sister at a crucial time.

Jane’s slavish devotion to her father alienates her not just from her sisters, but also from her own needs. One of the most problematic elements of Jane’s caring labor is that her selfless devotion to her father makes her unable to make a healthy or normal attachment to anyone else. Caught firmly in the role of managing daughter Jane is unable to find the time or energy for anyone but her father. Their poverty and her pride leave them emotionally and intellectually isolated from others, so she has no friends, interests, or life beyond her father’s needs. Her sisters rebel as soon as they are old enough, but because Jane has sacrificed her own emotional life, she fails to recognize her father or, for that matter, her sister’s need for love, romance, or even children and curiously never seems to feel the need for more in her own life. Jane no longer considers herself as suitable for anything more than being her father’s caregiver. Laura repeats her objections saying, “Papa can do better with a great deal more than you can ... and it far more fit that he should” (178). The exchange which follows is a stunning revelation of the complete loss of independent ambition, romantic dreams, and self that has become Jane’s life

‘He is my dear father, and I could ask for no better than to devote my life to warding off care from his.’

‘Would you wish no better,’ she said in a low wandering tone as she gazed at the bliss presenting itself for her future life- the spending it with Lewis Carlton.

‘Nor wish better,’ replied Jane. And the younger sister gazed at her in compassion and half disbelief (178).

Laura is shocked, as Lucy will be later, by Jane’s inability to see herself as more than a managing daughter endlessly trying to please an impossible to please father. Her need to be her father’s daughter has stolen any ability to think of her own needs. As she tells Lucy, “My romance wore itself out long ago” (308). The hopeful, romantic young woman eager to care for a husband has been worn away by her role as the responsible and dutiful daughter who cares only for the needs of others.

The novel critiques the fragile and unstable role of dutiful managing daughters like Jane in several important ways. Jane’s sister Laura offers an opportunity for a direct assault on her unappreciated and excessive caring labor. Laura recognizes that her selfless caring is inappropriate and attempts several times to get Jane to step back into more a reasonable role as daughter. Laura is disgusted by their poverty, her father’s selfishness and dramatics, and Jane’s constant stress, which she sees as self-imposed. When Jane complains about the difficulty of always providing her father’s expensive jelly Laura is annoyed: “Anyone but you would let him know of the difficulty, boldly returned Laura. But Jane only shook her head” (167). Jane’s silence is a powerful symbol of her refusal to even consider stepping back from her responsibilities. Laura challenges Jane’s notions of a daughter’s duty and sacrifice multiple times in the novel, arguing that many of their cares should be her father’s to solve. Jane’s job is more to placate her infantile father than to run the household.

Though Laura is described as “vain” and “rebellious” she also appears to be a realist who blames their vulnerable position as destitute daughters on her father (198). “I can’t help feeling the difference there is between ourselves and other young ladies in the

same rank,” she says. “Our days are nothing but pinching and perplexity” (202). Laura points out repeatedly that is their father’s former “extravagance” that has left them debt ridden (157). “It is his own imprudence which has brought it all one,” she tells her sister (202). Jane is incapable of acknowledging any fault in her father and refuses to even discuss this. “Be silent, Laura!” she directs with “stern authority” (202).

But, Laura won’t be silent. She constantly challenges Jane’s decision to take on responsibilities well beyond what a daughter could reasonably be expected to do. Laura asks,

What other young lady—in saying a young lady I mean an unmarried one, still sheltered from the world’s cares in her father’s home—has to encounter the trouble and anxiety that you have? (157)

Jane rebukes her sister: “Many for one, I dare say. For myself, if I do but save the trouble and anxiety to my dear father, I think myself amply repaid” (157). Laura pushes back, pointing out their father’s financial mismanagement and disengagement from his daughters’ lives has left them “shamefully barred up—it’s no better—in a house like so many hermits not daring to visit or be visited” (204). Jane can only respond with platitudes, “It is our lot, and we must bear it patiently” (204). While she agrees it is difficult, she can’t bring herself to acknowledge her father’s financial failures in the past or failure to care about his daughters’ happiness in the present. Acknowledging this would also mean acknowledging her failure to manage things successfully under the current family system.

The failure of the patriarchal promise is a critical part of this novel. Laura’s argument that domestic cares are their father’s responsibility is deeply troubling to Jane because it challenges her authority and the very dysfunctional structure of their home.

Laura asserts not just that her father should be taking care of them, but that he is actually better-positioned as father and man to do the things Jane is attempting to do unsuccessfully. Laura understands that in Victorian culture it is father's job to protect his daughters from the stresses of the public and commercial world. As Ruskin argues,

The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial: — to him, therefore, the failure, the offense, the inevitable error: often he must be wounded, or subdued, often misled, and always hardened. But he guards the woman from all this. (85)

It is a man's responsibility to keep women separated from worries, especially financial ones. John Tosh explains men played an important role in domesticity. He argues, "The Victorian ideal of domesticity was in all respects the creation of men as much as women. 'Women's sphere' was a convenient shorthand, not a call to exclusivity" (50). A good father should be invested in the domestic life of his daughters'. Oakburn's failure to do so is a marker of masculine and paternal failure.

This is interesting in this novel because Jane represents her work as always taking on her father's cares, taking his place, speaking for him. She knows her father is incapable of exerting any discipline or structure on the family so she knows that if she doesn't exert herself in his role her sisters will have no direction. Her mother's deathbed request that she "stay" with her father has expanded to the point where she feels she needs to *be* her father. She also knows that as a sister she has no real claim to any authority over her sisters, so her only way to make them listen to her is to invoke his name as she had tried to do with her mother. Her only authority is through the roles she has assumed in other's names. In a traditional family hierarchy, Jane would have no right to commandeer or dictate orders. Being the eldest gives her some advantage, but she

knows that no matter how hard she works, a managing daughter has no real right to parent her own sisters, even if they desperately need it.

What Laura suggests is a truth Jane doesn't want to face: Duty does not necessarily confer authority. She feels she has a duty to solve the family problems for her father, but this doesn't mean she has the authority to actually do so successfully. Jane simply does not have the power to solve the financial problems they face. Laura tells her to "let it all go," repeatedly begging her to let her father handle the mushroom cloud of constant creditors, depressingly bare rooms, and disgruntled unpaid servants that are forming at this new residence as quickly as they had at their last one. Jane finds shocking (203). Laura asks her pointedly, "What good can you do by worrying and fretting over them? What good do you do?" (157). She tells Jane repeatedly that their father is "better able" as a man and as their father to handle most of the responsibilities Jane takes upon herself (202). "Let it go" becomes her mantra anytime Jane is stressed. Speaking about their constant frugality she argues, "He is more fit to handle such troubles than you are" (202). When an angry debt collector comes to the house, Laura urges Jane to make their father face him at the gate (202). She argues, "Papa can do battle with them a great deal better than you can ... and it is more fit that he should!" (230). Jane can't step back. To do so would threaten her very idea of a daughter's duty and her authority in the home, ineffective as it is and would suggest that her own life has been a waste. Her excessive care leads her to imagine she can act for her father, when he has given her no reason to think he would authorize her.

The novel also engages in a fascinating critique Jane's unstable and unappreciated labor through a comparison and contrast between Jane and the governess, Eliza Lethwait,

who becomes essentially Lady Oakburn and Jane's "new mother" as her father calls her (378). The governess was a problematic figure in Victorian culture. The glut of redundant women led middle-class women into service positions like governess. As Nancy Armstrong explains, the governess "blurred the distinction on which the very notion of gender appeared to depend" (79). The governess, as a woman who cares for others for money, challenges the deeply revered notion that competent domestic labor can only be the joyful product of a loving heart. The governess shows that other factors, like a need for financial independence, pride in her education and breeding, and even personal ambition may also motivate a woman to do the most intimate and caring of work. She also threatens the walls between public and private, family and employee, and inside and outside, which were theoretically important divides that made the home the refuge of peace and comfort from the brutal outside world. She is welcomed into the most intimate domestic cares of the family and yet always held at a distinct distance as a hired employee. She may love and be loved by the family, but she is never fully an equal or guaranteed a stable position as a governess. This novel suggests, though, that the unstable position of governess can easily shift, allowing the governess to become a wife, a possibility that threatens to collapse not only the divide between the private family and the outside world, but also the subtle class division between the governess and Jane, the unofficial mistress of the house. The Oakburn's governess attains in one awkward civil ceremony the authority and position Jane has been working for all her life and, in fact, pushes her very role in the family into obsolescence. There is no need for a managing daughter with a new countess in the home.

Interestingly, both Jane and the governess are in many ways interchangeable in the family. Both Jane and the governess have been led to a life of unstable servitude by the absence of their mothers. Eliza Lethwait, the governess, is the well-educated daughter of a middle-class minister. She is described chiefly in her proud bearing: “She looked made to adorn a coronet” (111). Yet, her mother’s long illness and death forced her home from school and depleted the family fortune. Her decision to become a governess is one Jane’s sister Clarisse has also done for exactly the same reasons. Clarisse’s domestic service is a matter of family dishonor, hidden from everyone, allowing Jane the aristocratic pretention of being better than the governess, when in fact their positions are remarkably similar.

When the governess first becomes a problem for Jane it is something that seems much like sibling rivalry. She describes her as “pretentious,” and “above her station” disliking the governess’s regal bearing (341). Though she is encouraged to dine and spend evenings casually relaxing with the family, filling Lord Oakburn’s pipe and sewing with Jane by the fire, there is tension between the young women immediately. A good servant should fit into a family and share its values. The fact that this middle-class governess, with a nearly identical background, would do so too well is a common complaint in the period. Isabella Beeton claimed one of the most difficult parts of household management was that “domestics that no longer know their place” (392). It is inconceivable to Jane that the governess, two years younger than her, would be a romantic interest for her father. But, this young woman, who unlike her real sisters, doesn’t enrage her father, challenges the family structure by virtue of the very fact that

she seems to be so comfortable and well-suited for their private domestic circle. Jane sees her as a rival daughter and complains to her father,

She comports herself as if she were a daughter of the house taking more upon herself, a great deal, than I think is seemly ... She never seems to recollect when in a drawing room of an evening that she is not one of ourselves ... A stranger coming in might take her for the mistress of the house, certainly for an elder daughter. (342)

Her father, who cares about the family structure only in sporadic and unpredictable bursts, has little interest in his daughter's happiness or at this point, it seems, even in the governess. To him they are roughly interchangeable tools to his comfort. He refuses to be engaged in what is a critical structural issue of this family deferring authority to Jane, without ever really authorizing her or establishing her position. "You are the best judge of whether she is fit for her berth," he tells Jane (342). Jane assumes this vague pronouncement authorizes her as an authority above the governess and keeps her employed in spite of her reservations. With her sister rival mitigated, she assures herself her annoyance with the governess, a common frustration echoed in women's magazines of the period according to Margaret Beetham, is a mere "trifle" (342).

Yet, their battle for primacy is an interesting one that says much about the fact that the managing adult daughter in many ways has less security and opportunity for authority and empowerment than a governess in the same home. Unlike Jane, Eliza is well aware of the unstable position she has in the family and keenly aware of the "tempting bait" Lord Oakburn presents as well as the full opportunities for power and authority he can provide when and if he marries her (111).

Interestingly, the governess uses her fragile position, a position she and Jane share, as the very lure to capture the earl. She echoes his dislike for parties claiming, “the best society is that of our own fireside –those of us who have firesides to enjoy” (113). She speaks of her isolation, a single tear rolling down her cheek, explaining, “It is not my fortune to have one; and perhaps never will be” (113). Intrigued by her beauty as much by her vulnerability, the patriarchal earl presses her and she responds explaining that “our destinies are unequally marked out in this world” (114). The monologue she gives about her frustrated servitude could as easily be spoken by the selfless Jane as by the governess.

And the worst is you are so chained down to your lot that you cannot escape from it. As a poor bird entrapped into a cage beats its wings against the wires unceasingly, seeking to free itself from its prison, and seeks in vain, so do we wear out our minds with our never-ending struggle to free ourselves from the thralldom that is forced by destiny upon us. I was not made to live out my life in dependence, in servitude; every hour of the day I feel that I was not. I feel that my mind, my heart, my intellect, were formed for a higher destiny; nevertheless it is the lot that is appointed to me, and I must abide it. (114)

The distinction she makes between caring work that is a paid duty, a “thralldom,” and the “higher destiny” of caring work that is an unpaid familial responsibility is a significant one, although looking at Jane’s life, it seems to be largely a semantic one. The bonds of family love and loyalty have chained Jane to her father far more effectively than any paid relationship the governess has held. The governess, unlike the daughter, is always essentially an independent free agent able to seek another family. She knows that her position is an unstable one. In contrast, Jane has come to believe that caring for her father is her destiny and her familial affection and sense of duty blinds her not only to the brutality of that life, but also to her own unstable position in the family. Jane’s life of dependent servitude is disguised by the rhetoric of domestic

duty and family relations. Yet, unlike the governess, who can express her frustrations dramatically, Jane's position as daughter allows her little freedom to even conceive of her work as servitude. The governess can, though, and she traces a clear line between women's domestic work inside and outside of the family using the ideology of domestic rhetoric to paint herself as a romantic damsel in distress whose "heart" is waiting for "destiny." She uses the very victimization the earl's family imposes on her to carefully suggest that the frustrations of domestic caring labor she faces as a governess can be erased by the "higher destiny" she hints at as the earl's wife. It is a risky gamble that could easily be seen as the complaints of an ungrateful servant or worse as sexually predatory social climbing, which is exactly how Jane later views it.

However, the aging invalid earl, who is oblivious to his daughter's identical suffering, is easily swayed by the plight of this beautiful young woman whom he can rescue. His proposal is immediate: "If you'll be countess of Oakburn and make my fireside yours, I'll take care of you." (115). Touched by her beauty and vulnerability, he offers her the care and support he has never provided his own daughters. In his typical unpredictable style, on a wild impulse he offers her the position and authority Jane has long assumed was hers.

Jane's father is able to make a stronger bond with the governess than he had with his daughter because his marriage follows a traditional patriarchal pattern for widowed earls. Unlike Mr. Jarndyce, Jane's father never saw Jane as any kind of partner. Faced with a choice between a loving daughter who mends his socks and a pretty wife who can sexually satisfy him and possibly provide him a male heir the earl does not hesitate to make the governess his wife. His choice is understandable in a patriarchal culture in

which women are valued for their potential maternity and a daughter cannot inherit the earldom he has just inherited. The earl's marriage to the governess, an irony Laura is quick to note, violates the very principles of class pride and division he has used to oppose Laura's marriage and sow dissension between Laura and Jane. For this aging earl, the potential male heir is more valuable than the living, caring daughter and more important than any class prejudices that might have made the governess an unsuitable match.

Once he decides to marry, a managing daughter becomes an obstacle to her father's desire for marriage and a male heir. Her father is quick to set traditional daughter boundaries on her when he decides to marry. When the governess begs Lord Oakburn to discuss and reconcile his pending marriage with Jane he is outraged. He responds, "My daughters! What have they to do with it? I am not their husband. They'll be getting husbands of their own!" (376). He says this in all sincerity, apparently never realizing that Jane has sacrificed her chance at marriage to care for him. He repeats it to his new wife's father: "My daughters have nothing to do with this" (402). Because Jane's care has been so extensive and for nearly two decades, she assumes she has a right not just to know about his courtship, but also to stop him from marrying someone she doesn't approve of and whom she fears will push her out of her own family. But, her authority has rested only on the fact that it was convenient for him to allow her authority. Though Jane's pathological dependence on him should be obvious, it has certainly been noted by her sister repeatedly, he believes that as his daughter—not his wife—she has no real authority or right to challenge his plans. In a traditional family structure daughters do not get to approve their father's wives. He tells Jane her protests are "rubbishing

folly” and she just needs to “get her sea legs” and accept it (415). However, after years of being the managing and caring daughter, wife, sister, mother, she can’t step back and be just a passive daughter.

The governess is aware that she has, in essence, manipulated the system using her closeness to the earl to secure a better future for herself. She “never quite reconciled that night with her conscience” after she seeks him out privately after a party (112).

However, the governess now has an unquestioned and unchallenged authority in the home and out as Lady Oakburn and definitive rule over Jane as her new mother. It is for this reason, perhaps, that she tries to reconcile with Jane once she is married: “Lady Jane, I implore you, let there be peace between us” (159). Jane rejects her, calling her a “serpent” who has “brought your arts to bear upon my unsuspecting father and torn him from his children” (159).

Jane, like Esther Summerson in *Bleak House*, is so invested in her role as domestic caregiver to her father she never imagines he might need or want a partner who can provide more than just domestic comfort. Her desire to please her father is also problematic because it is so extensive that it blurs the normal boundaries between daughter love and romantic love. Lynda Zwinger writes that in Victorian novels a daughter’s need for love and approval from her father often shapes her very identity, preparing her for love outside the family. Zwinger argues that the daughter’s need for a father’s love and approval is a “struggle of desire and resistance” that forms the very foundation of heterosexual love (8). All heterosexual erotic narratives, she asserts, are grounded in a daughter’s need for approval from their father or some a paternal figure which gets transferred outside the family in a healthy relationship. However, Jane’s need

for approval never successfully transfers outside the family. Instead of moving on to her own traditional family she is stuck in a strange limbo in her father's home.

This is not an isolated issue in this novel. Examples of daughters with complicated father figure-husbands appear in other novels throughout the period, like *Lady Audley's Secret*. These novels suggest that the progress from being a daughter who cares for an older father to a wife who cares for an older husband is not a simple movement from one house to another. Instead it can be potentially confusing and unhealthy. Paternal love and romantic love can get tangled easily when the sense of familial obligation and the labor involved are essentially the same.

Jane is horrified and confused to discover that anyone else could be "mistress of his plentiful home" (317).

She was hurled without warning from the post of authority in her father's house in which she had been mistress for years; she was hurled from the chief place in her father's heart. What she could not bear was that another should become more to her father than she was. He whom she had revered and loved, in whom her very life had been bound up had taken to himself an idol and Jane henceforth was nothing. (414)

Jane evicted the governess "like a dog" when she caught her in the study alone with her father and never imagined the governess would return to her home to do the same to her (196). Even though she has seen her father reaching out to kiss the "passive" governess, Jane clings to the idea that the governess has seduced her father (412). She calls her "a serpent that entwines its deadly coils around its victim" (412). She never imagined he would act without her knowledge or consent on something so important or that marriage would ever be a need for him. "In her devotion, her all absorbing love, there had existed not a crevice for any such idea" (378). Her dedication and his

dependence have made her narcissistically certain of her role in his life. She never anticipates her father's secret courtship and hidden marriage to the very woman she had ordered out of her home in disgrace and without references. That he might marry at all is shocking to her, but that he might marry a woman she dislikes and place her firmly above her is humiliating. She never imagined herself being, as Laura describes it, "driven from his home like a dog" (336). And yet, this is exactly what happens, and it happens with the earl's blessing. He tells his new wife, the former governess, that she might now, "cock pit over her," order her about and evict her at will if she chooses and that it is now her right to do to Jane exactly what Jane had done to her.

He announces his marriage and introduces her to his daughters as "your new mother, Lady Oakburn" (391). To further emphasize the point, he dresses the new countess in his first wife's clothing, clothing Jane has preserved and treasured after her mother's death, when he presents her to his daughters. The earl tries to forcibly assert a family structure in which Jane steps down from her role as household manager and as his pseudo-wife and into the shadows behind her new mother, whom she is now expected to honor, obey, and serve. He slashes the vague partnership he has allowed between them and all her authority. He attempts to force Jane into a subservient position beneath the woman she had once coldly fired and ordered from her home. But, Jane simply can't accept this. Proud and elitist, Jane despises his new wife as a scheming immodest social climber and believes that because she was once her former employee she is eternally socially beneath her even though they are, in fact, class equals. She tells her father, "This is no longer a home for me" and proposes going to their drafty old home to live out her life in isolation (414).

Her frustration and indignation at her father for his marriage and for her demotion below the former governess she had fired a month before is depicted as understandable and even tragic. Even the narrator in a rare address begs for sympathy,

Oh, Reader! Surely you can feel for her! She was hurled without warning from the post of authority in her father's home, in which she had been mistress for years; she was hurled from the chief place in her father's heart. (413)

Her loss is dual: position and affection. What the narrator mourns is a sad reality in the life of adult managing daughters. Adult daughters like Jane are more disposable than a governess in the father's house under the traditional family hierarchy. His marriage gives the governess an equal partnership, at least in theory, and the authority and power Jane could never have in the home. Jane realizes at long last that a position as a stable and powerful partner to her father simply does not exist in the rigid family hierarchical structure of the time which placed daughters firmly beneath her father and his wife.

The sting is especially sharp because the governess as wife claims not only Jane's father and home, but also the young sister Jane has raised like a second mother. Her father's lack of appreciation for her hard work is clearly apparent in his decision to separate her from Lucy, whom she has raised since infancy. After he marries the governess, Jane begs him to allow her to take Lucy to live with her. He refuses without even an explanation. On his deathbed a few months later, instead of assigning Jane guardianship, his will specifies that Lucy will go instead the former governess he has just married, whom Jane despises. The governess has known the family less than a year while Jane has cared for Lucy all her life. She questions him on his deathbed, "You surely have not left her away from me. Father, I have brought her up from the cradle. I have been to her a second mother. You could not leave her away from me!" (236). His response is as

simple as it is telling: "I did not think of it" (236). In fact, this is exactly what is wrong with endless caring labor for an ungrateful father. Even on his deathbed, he never recognizes or appreciates her caring work no matter how difficult or extensive. He is not able to see Jane's hard work as sister-mother to Lucy. To him she is just another disposable daughter. This points to the frustration of the dysfunctional family the earl attempts to force in which family hierarchy, not emotions, determines connections. The hierarchy of roles ignores the emotional connections that are supposed to maintain the very relationships that sustain the hierarchy. Daughters belong to wives not to daughters, so the governess as wife gets Lucy regardless of the fact that she barely knows her and Jane would be a better mother.

The battle between governess/wife and daughter does not end until the earl is dead. When Jane goes to be with her father in his last days, she shows what appears to be a strange territorial, perhaps even sexual, jealousy toward the new wife. She is irritated that his new wife, who has just given birth to the male heir he needed, is recovering in his bed, the bed she selected and purchased for her father before his marriage. When she is told she is resting in his bed, "Jane resented the news in her heart. He to be put out of his room for a Miss Lethwait!" (225). She refuses to accept the governess as his wife. In part, she is reluctant to have her rival enjoying the fruits of her labors, but there is also an odd element of female sexual rivalry which is hard to dismiss when the object of their rivalry is the father's bed. This rivalry is encouraged by her father who conspires with her to keep his new wife out of his sick room.

She had nourished a secret hope that she and her father should come together again; that she should be his dear daughter, living in the sunshine of his presence, ministering to his comforts of old. (228)

In the war to care for her father, it is Jane who finally wins his preference, keeping her rival a long hallway away as she nurses him. He calls in his last moments for his wife, but it Jane who answers. "My own Jane, with me at last" he says (235). At the end, her father returns to the firm control of his caring daughter, who happily distances the new wife, weak from delivering his son and heir.

Her victory, though, is pyrrhic. Jane comes to learn that all her domestic work builds a house of cards. She cannot make her father happy by alternately protecting and shunning her sisters and she can't stop Clarice or Laura from running away or from the sad ends they both meet. She can't keep her father from falling for the advances of their governess and taking away her home and last remaining sister. She never thought the capricious coldness her father shows to her sisters could be directed at her, but he does not hesitate to do what he desires without any consideration of her feelings. Her life of obedience does not keep him from replacing her in the home with a new wife, forcing her from her home, or giving custody of the youngest sister she has raised from infancy to this new wife. All her work at keeping the family running ultimately ends with her alone and dependent on the kindness of the former governess she once coldly dismissed.

It is only after his death, when everyone she cared for has been taken away, that she learns to care for herself. She spends the years after his death isolated and "desperately" lonely on a small income left by her aunt in the drafty old house her father had abandoned as soon as he became earl. Though she and the countess are at peace, her pride keeps her forever distant. She refuses to live with her and visits her only when told there is an emergency regarding Lucy. Though she loves Lucy, their contact is minimal and Lucy grows to love the governess as a mother. The frustrating work and complicated

and unhealthy relationship that developed as she cared with her father has left her retreating into spinster isolation rather than attempt to forge any new relationships even with the family that survives her father. At Lucy's wedding, seven years after her father's death, Jane, who cares now only for herself, seems finally at peace: "The signs of care had left her face; it was of placid gentleness and existence in a calm way" (308). She tells Lucy, "I think that I am best as I am" (349). The managing daughter finds true contentment only alone.

Chapter Three: Esther Summerson's Bleak Work

The night before she goes to Bleak House, the managing “daughter” of Charles Dickens’ novel *Bleak House*, Esther Summerson, falls asleep in her chair under the uncomfortable weight of a weeping Caddy Jellyby. In a fitful sleep, Esther has a terrifying and prophetic dream that she will lose herself in a life of constant domestic care.

I began to lose the identity of the sleeper resting on me. Now, it was Ada; now, one of my old Reading friends from whom I could not believe I had so recently parted. Now, it was the little mad woman worn out with curtseying and smiling; now, someone in authority at Bleak House. Lastly it was no one, and I was no one. (63)

She imagines herself as an exploited maternal lap that never closes. She sees the people in her life as an interchangeable stream of needy bodies that use her for their own comfort until she is ultimately alienated from herself.

It is a bleak vision of caring work, yet Esther’s anxiety and alienation are by no means unusual for managing domestic “daughters” or for any woman engaged in caring work. Esther is never quite certain what her role or responsibilities are at Bleak House. She is not biologically related to the family, although she suspects she may be, but she is also certainly not just an employee. Jarndyce rejects her efforts to set clear labor boundaries and pushes her into the role of a managing daughter. Her role as managing daughter, a job without boundaries, and the boundless sense of familial obligation that comes with it, push her to take on more extensive and more challenging roles and responsibilities. She assumes challenging and dangerous physical duties, willingly risking her life to care for others. More significantly, she takes on the inappropriate and

impossible emotional responsibility of making the disconnected Jarndyce claimants, especially the troubled Richard, into a family. Truly selfless, she becomes incapable of setting boundaries or advocating for herself, and ultimately offers herself as a willing sacrifice of daughterly duty and submission to her father-figure employer. The “second Bleak House” she is rewarded with at the end of the novel arguably offers little improvement for a caregiver like Esther. While her role may be clearer and the duties easier as wife, Esther clearly trades one form of extreme gratitude and endless responsibilities for another, which suggests little hope for a domestic work life that is not to some extent bleak. Esther’s anxiety reveals a larger cultural anxiety about the caring work of young women whose boundless sense of duty and obligation, justified by cultural expectations of women’s care and a daughter’s duty, make it difficult, if not impossible, to set physical and emotional boundaries on caring. Esther’s unusual position, both inside and outside the family, like a governess, but more highlights the hidden dimensions of a daughter’s role in the family. Daughters are always liminal figures, always subordinate to the father, so never full partners or equals and generally expected not to remain in the family for long. Their temporary exploitation for the good of the family is both part of their duty as daughters and part of their training as future wives. They bear the burden of not just physical labor, like a servant in the house, but also the emotional burden of caring for family members. Esther shows that daughters in many ways have less stability and fewer options than a servant in the same house. She shows how critical a managing daughter can be to structure and stabilize a family. It is not Jarndyce, but Esther, a woman poised between inside and outside the family, who holds the family together often at great sacrifice to herself.

Critical commentary about Esther struggles to reconcile her selfless and giving behavior with her apparent constant anxiety and sense of worthlessness. As the narrator for most of the story, Esther recounts her extraordinary acts of selflessness and generosity in a story she punctuates with self-deprecation well beyond that required for the average Victorian lady's modesty. Her altruistic acts lead not to happiness, but often more often to hand-wringing, anxiety, and sleeplessness. This leads Charlotte Bronte to disparage her characterization saying, "It seems to me too often weak and twaddling; an amiable nature is caricatured, not faithfully rendered" (qtd in Newsom 55). Some critics are quick to dismiss her as a "parody," or worse, a "boring paragon" of Victorian ideals that assume that domestic labor, specifically the selfless desire to care for others is simply part of women's nature (Newsome, Gottfried). Critics striving to resolve what Timothy Pelson calls the "Esther problem" assert her as a model of psychological dualism in which what Carolyn Dever calls the eager and obedient "good Esther" battles with what others, like John Jordan, sees as a repressed and depressed self. These critics wisely point to Esther's dualism as an example of the ways idealized separations between public and private, family and society, collide and often collapse. Esther's dualistic emotions seem understandable in light of her dualistic position inside and outside the family and the nature of her often very exploitive caring work in the private home. Chris Louttis asserts that Dickens believes in and celebrates middle-class hard work. He explains, Dickens "does not only confirm dominant middle-class values ascribing the benefits of purpose and hard graft, but also sympathizes with those suffering the human costs of hard work" (5). Esther genuinely cares about the residents of Bleak House, but her position at Bleak House is one that also seems to require nearly constant emotional and physical

labor for the management and care of others, a complex situation typical of managing daughters who care for others in the home. Esther's unique labor position and her complicated emotional role in the family are typical in many ways for managing daughters in the family and sheds new light on their unique role in the family and the emotional consequences of their labor.

Esther's role at Bleak House is a complex one that evolves into something that is most like that of a managing daughter. As Nicola Bradbury notes in her "Introduction" to *Bleak House*, "We are uncertain whether her role is that of child or wife, housekeeper or companion. Yet she seems to fulfill many of these roles" (XIV). Esther enters Bleak House as Jarndyce's ward, although she doesn't know why he has chosen to help her, and as Ada's companion. However, she is uncertain what this will mean for her. Although she likes Ada, her responsibilities as companion are unclear and her emotional connection to Jarndyce as his ward is tenuous enough that she is "anxious and nervous" about her position and having nightmares before she even arrives (81).

By mid-century, almost half of the upper middle class like John Jarndyce had more than three servants; Eighty-two percent of servants were female and more than one-third were, like Esther, under age twenty (Census). Children and distant relations, especially the unmarried "redundant" daughters of the middle class who had few other options, were often absorbed into the wealthier households of distant relations where they doubled as apprentices or servants (Davidoff and Hall 390). Esther initially believes she may be one of these unclaimed relatives cared for since childhood out of an unacknowledged family obligation. This practice made sense both in terms of rescuing

relations on hard times without acknowledging them legally, but also because family members would be naturally invested in the success of the home.

Going into Bleak House, Esther is uncertain whether she is family or servant, yet the distinction is a critical one in terms of her duties and obligations. Fears about collapsing class boundaries created ideological divisions between the two throughout the period. Governesses became a particularly sensitive cultural icon for the concerns about how paid outsiders could take on the most private and intimate of tasks of a family (Poovey). Women's magazines were obsessed with a concern about how the governess or lady's maid might be inappropriately intruding into the family (Beetham). Isabella Beeton claimed one of the most difficult parts of household management was that "domestics that no longer know their place" (392). Beeton, for example, urges servants to exhibit "deference to a master or mistress," but defines that in rigidly improbable ways for people cohabitating and depending upon one another for the most basic of necessities.

A servant is not to be seated, or wear a hat in the house, in his master or mistress's presence; nor offer any opinion, unless asked for it; nor even to say 'good night,' or 'good morning,' except in reply to that salutation.
(429)

These divides were obviously theoretical rather than practical in most homes because domestic work was difficult and often required mistress and servant to complete tasks, and also because a certain level of emotional attachment was understood to be necessary when performing caring tasks in the home. The domestic management of the middle-class home required not just hard workers, but what Beeton called "attached domestics" (393). Caring for others demands if not an emotional connection to the

inhabitants, at minimum, an emotional investment in its processes and outcomes. The most definitive study of domestic labor, Ann Oakley's 1974 *The Sociology of Housework*, argues that this is why many women who work in the home rarely saw their labor as labor.

The women I talked with referred to their activity as something other than 'work' in any conventional sense, as an activity embedded in family relations... some speak of their efforts as 'love' while others talk about caring as not quite a job, but as "something different" (10).

Domestic caring work is understood to be more than just a job. The boundaries of caring labor, though, were significantly more challenging for the Victorians who still held tight to class and labor distinctions, at least ideologically, that make Esther's duty and obligations in Bleak House even more muddy.

The boundaries between servant and family are blurred in Esther's situation resulting in emotional obligations for Esther that her labor position as a servant would not otherwise demand. Jarndyce makes an immediate distinction between Ada, who is invited to call him "cousin," whom he knows is biologically connected, and Esther, whom he knows, even if she doesn't, is not. Unlike Ada, she is told to call him "Guardian." He tells her,

I think you had better call me Guardian, my dear.'

I felt that I was choking again--and I taxed myself with it, 'Esther now you know you are!--when he feigned to say this slightly as if it were a whim, instead of a thoughtful tenderness. (120)

He is insisting that Esther be aware of her family connection and its emotional dimension. He is trying to move her work from paid job to emotional responsibility. She chokes because this is a lot of responsibility for one untrained and unprepared for it, but also because she is surprised and grateful to be considered family.

The difference he makes between cousin and guardian is an important one. Ada's biological claim as a cousin makes her the much more logical choice to invest with household responsibility as a managing daughter. Managing daughters were understood to be wives in training for their own future marriages. Advice books for daughters explained that daughters at home were "apprentices" for their future marriages (Arthur 22). This makes it odd that Ada is not the one given the opportunity to seek "qualifications for a future life" (*Female Excellence* 65). However, Esther does have a more subordinate role, so logically if there is work to do, and managing daughter is a difficult position, then it should fall to Esther. However, the position of managing daughter need not be without rewards. In the absence of a mother, a managing daughter could be allowed the autonomy of a wife. For example, in the novel *Miss Marchbanks*, Lucilla Marchbanks uses her role as managing daughter to develop a leadership role her community and to order her household to her exact specifications. A position like this would be ideal for Ada who will soon be on the marriage market and needs practical training in household management.

However, Jarndyce's decision is less about household management and more about an attempt to pull a deeper emotional connection from Esther. He understands that Ada, already deeply attached to her cousin Richard, will likely marry and leave him, but his young ward Esther, whom he has imagined since she was "very young" as his wife,

could potentially move from managing daughter to his own wife seamlessly with this position (964). He places Esther inside the family enough to be emotionally invested in it now, but outside of it enough to avoid incest prohibitions when she matures and hopefully grows fond of him. By making her his managing daughter, he allows her time and opportunity to mature and develop the skills needed to be a wife and get his home competently cared for by someone with a strong emotional investment in its success. She doesn't understand his intentions, though, so to her, while this is flattering, it is also emotionally overwhelming and confusing.

Esther enters Bleak House assuming she will be companion to Ada. It is a vague, but manageable, role limited to the care of the agreeable Ada. However, when Jarndyce sends Esther the housekeeping keys on her first day at Bleak House, he pushes her into a new role, that of managing daughter, that she struggles to comprehend. She isn't given an actual job offer or really any choice in this matter. In fact, there isn't even a discussion about her new position. For Esther though, there is no negotiation, no discussion of salary, hours, duties, or any of the very practical and necessary arrangements that are discussed in housekeeping manuals of the period. Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management*, stresses this saying,

We here would point out an error--and a grave one it is--into which some mistresses' fall. They do not, when engaging a servant, expressly tell her all the duties which she will be expected to perform. This is an act of omission severely to be reprehended. (14)

Yet, this is exactly what Jarndyce does. The tools of the trade, a basket and the household keys, are brought to Esther by a maid who is surprised that Esther is unaware of this new position.

Our luggage having arrived, and being all at hand, I was dressed in a few minutes, and engaged in putting my worldly goods away, when a maid (not the one in attendance upon Ada, but another, whom I had not seen) brought a basket into my room, with two bunches of keys in it, all labeled.

“For you, miss, if you please,” said she.

“For me?” said I.

“The housekeeping keys, miss.”

I showed my surprise; for she added, with some little surprise on her own part, “I was told to bring them as soon as you was alone, miss. Miss Summerson, if I don’t deceive myself?”

“Yes,” said I. “That is my name.”

“The large bunch is the housekeeping, and the little bunch is the cellars, miss. Any time you was pleased to appoint to-morrow morning, I was to show you the presses and things they belong to.”

I said I would be ready at half-past six; and, after she was gone, stood looking at the basket, quite lost in the magnitude of my trust. (88)

Giving her the keys and the responsibility for household management isn’t a small, or even logical, addition to her workload and doing it without even discussing it with her makes little sense from a labor perspective.

Housekeepers were distinctly different positions from companions, with very different salaries and significantly more expectations, for which Jarndyce knows Esther has not been prepared. Just two years before the first installment of *Bleak House* was published, the 1851 census made a distinction between housekeepers, paid employees, and what it called the “fifth estate,” which included housewives, unpaid wives and adult

managing daughters (Census). This was the first attempt to recognize the contributions of women in the home as work, what Monica Cohen calls “professional domesticity.” Cohen notes, though, that Esther is an anomaly in this classification system. She is “an amateur with professional skills” (66). She is neither housekeeper nor wife.

The housekeeper is, in fact, after the mistress of the house, “second in command in the home,” a position of tremendous responsibility and considerable additional work (Beeton 32). The emphasis in this job description is on vigilant, constant labor. She must “bring to the management of the household, all those qualities of honesty, industry and vigilance, in the same degree as if she were at the head of her own family” (Beeton 32). “Constantly on the watch ...she will overlook all that goes on in the house and will see that every department is thoroughly attended to” (Beeton 33). Considering this extra work, Esther is puzzled and uncomfortable with this additional responsibility and uncertain how to react to this new role. Her lack of emotion, barely above dazed surprise, says much about her powerless position and her discomfort with this new responsibility. However, by the time Ada comes to meet her, she has accepted this new [responsibility] as an obligation. She shows Ada the keys saying, “It would have been insensibility and ingratitude not to feel encouraged” (89). Her word choice is significant. It is gratitude, her emotional obligations to the family, which motivates her to accept this new position which she understands implicitly to be more than just a new job.

However, Esther is not without concerns and goes to Jarndyce hoping to set limitations on her position and responsibilities. She hopes to establish a clear labor position for herself in a life of what appears to be increasingly expanding duties with

significant emotional obligations. She warns him from the start about what she fears are unrealistic expectations for her:

I gave the housekeeping keys the least shake in the world as a reminder to myself, and folded my hands in a still more determined manner on the basket, looked at him quietly.

‘I hope, Guardian, said I, ‘that you may not trust too much to my discretion. I hope you may not mistake me.’ (120)

It is significant that she shakes her keys and that she folds her hands over her basket. She is physically connecting to the symbols of the one labor position she does understand, that of housekeeper. She is reminding him and herself of the markers of her servant position. The basket and keys, which she jingles compulsively when stressed, define her as an employee, a clearly defined position that would be much more comfortable than the uncertain role she fills more often in the home.

Her ambiguous last sentence carries multiple requests. In asking that he not “mistake her,” she is asking in part that he not mistake her competence to manage things, not surprising since she has not been prepared for all of the many positions she is suddenly being asked to assume. But, she is also likely asking him not to mistake her for more than a servant. She wants him to recognize her limitations. She is not family and she wants him to remember that boundary between servant and family, which she is humbly pointing out. Interestingly, if he were to accept her boundaries it would also protect her by requiring less of her emotionally.

His response rejects all her attempts to set any boundaries on her duties and instead places her in an idealized, even fantastical, role.

‘You are clever enough to be the good little woman of our lives here, my dear,’ he returned playfully; the little old woman of the Child’s (I don’t mean Skimpole’s) Rhyme

Little old woman, and whiter so high?

To sweep the cobwebs out of the sky.”

You will sweep them so neatly out of her sky, in the course of your housekeeping, Esther, that one of these days we shall have to abandon the Growelery, and nail up the door.’

This was the beginning of my being called Old Woman, and Little Old Woman, and Cobweb, and Mrs Shipton, and Mother Hubbard and Dame Durden, and so many names of that sort, that my own name soon became quite lost among them. (121)

Critics have shrewdly identified this scene as a point when Jarndyce desexualizes the young, unmarried Esther, making her safe for the home and for his own later attempts to marry her. However, from a labor perspective, this scene is also critical because this is a clear example of the exploitation of her labor position. She has very wisely asked about the boundaries of her obligations and expectations and instead she is given not just a vague, but unrealistic, fantastical, and impossible position. He is forging not a labor position, but an emotional relationship in which she is expected to be capable of any sacrifice to make their lives better.

There is no paid labor position in the Victorian household that even comes close to this responsibility. Housekeepers had clear legal and culturally understood limits (Cohen). What he is asking her to do is to understand herself in an idealized expectation of caring, much like that of a wife, the angel in the household. Coventry Patmore, who coined the term, solidified an ideal of the wife as a loving woman in constant patient and obedient service to husband and home. He claimed, “Man must be pleased; but him to

please/ Is woman's pleasure” (Patmore 44). Women’s domestic work included a multitude of difficult tasks hidden behind the cultural assertion that caring is what Sarah Stickney Ellis called a “high and holy duty” rather than actual labor (23).

But, Esther is not his wife. Fresh from the schoolroom, she is not prepared for managing a household and has no real emotional connection to him or the family to make that relationship even conceivable to her. In fact, she doesn’t realize his matrimonial intentions until much later. Since he knows he can’t ask her to be his wife, he asks her to be the next best thing--a managing daughter. As a managing daughter she will run his household competently and, unlike a housekeeper, do so with the endless affection and gratitude that is idealized in caring work.

The role of managing daughter is a position she is rightly concerned about because it is a position of expansive and unbounded duties. Caring for others doesn’t have clearly defined limits when you are family. Books directed at daughters made it clear that they should expect difficult and constant work. Their motto they were told should always become, “None liveth for herself” (Female Excellence 13). As wives in training, their struggles were expected to be largely invisible. “You must bear your sorrows in silence, unknown and un-pitied. You must often put a face of serenity or cheerfulness when are torn with anguish in sinking into despair” (Gregory 7). Happiness, they are told, is only the result of being “constantly and usefully employed” (Female Excellence 18). This is “not merely a spirit of submissive yielding, but of cheerful satisfaction” (Female Excellence 14). They are told they must be willing to push themselves constantly. “Endeavor to excel. Be not content with attaining mediocrity.” (Female Excellence 64).

More importantly though, the role of a managing daughter is one defined by boundless gratitude. Conduct Books told daughters should feel a “firm obligation” toward their parents (Arthur 26). These guides emphasize their “infant obligation” and the many advantages provided for them by their family (*Female Excellence* 38). A daughter should never forget that “the first of all pervading principles is a sense of responsibility” toward her family (*Female Excellence* 38). The period between school and marriage rightfully belongs to the family who needs and has earned the obligation of her daughter’s labor (*Female Excellence*). Parents are “benefactors” whom daughters repay with their labor (*Female Excellence* 70). The job of a managing daughter is to be grateful and to understand that their work for the family is not a matter of choice or altruism, but a debt they must repay for the care given to them.

Esther’s already intensely grateful to Jarndyce long before she meets him. With her godmother’s death, she had few options. Jarndyce stepped in and sent her to the school she loved and then to Ada, whom she also adores, saving her from what would likely have been a grim fate for an orphaned girl with no connections. She had been almost completely speechless when told by his attorney of his kindness in sending her to school.

What the destitute subject of such an offer tried to say, I need not repeat. What she did say, I could more easily tell, if it were worth telling. What she felt, and will feel to her dying hour, I could never relate. (35)

Her gratitude as she leaves the school to go to Ada is no less overwhelming. She says, “Could I help it if I was quite bowed down in the coach by myself, and said, ‘O, I am so thankful, I am so thankful!’ many times over.” (42). She has been well educated, made

friends, and been happy and credits that entirely to Jarndyce, “my benefactor and sole early dependence” (81). Meeting him privately leaves her trembling and choking with gratitude.

I could not help it: I tried very hard: but being alone with that benevolent presence, and meeting his kind eyes, and feeling so happy, and so honored there, and my heart so full –. (117)

Her gratitude and sense of obligation are so great she is barely able to even speak. She would agree to do almost anything to repay his kindness.

However, Jarndyce refuses to accept or even acknowledge her gratitude. She explains, “Jarndyce could never bear acknowledgements for any kindness her performed, and that, sooner than receive any, he would even run away” (81). When she discusses this, she correctly predicts that this is going to be a problem for her.

I had not considered how I could thank him, my gratitude lying too deep in my heart for that; but I now begin to consider how I could meet him without thanking him, and felt it would be very difficult indeed. (81)

Not being able to thank him compounds her sense of constant obligation because she has no way to thank him except more and more work. Jill Rappaport argues that “altruism and self-assertiveness went hand-in-hand for Victorian women” (i). Her study explains that giving is more than just about generosity. Giving, whether it is a cup of tea or their own bodies in marriage, allowed women to form alliances and repay obligations outside of market relations. Rappaport points to Esther’s caring as a building of caring network of alliances with Caddy Jellyby. However, by this same logic, Jarndyce’s refusal to acknowledge or accept her thanks forces her into an endless cycle of obligations that she can only repay only with more giving. A system develops in which every positive day at

Bleak House makes her feel more obligated. It is a debt she can never discharge or balance except with work.

However, Esther's gratitude is excessive not just because she feels she owes much to Jarndyce, but also because her childhood of neglect and cruelty has led her to believe herself unworthy of kindness. Esther's own personal history of displacement and disconnection makes her vulnerable to emotional exploitation and eager to emotionally invest in what she believes to be her new family. Her life and later labor are guided by a solemn vow she made during her lonely childhood that almost predestines her for a life of domestic labor exploitation and endless obligation:

I would try as hard as ever I could ... and would strive as I grew up to be industrious, contented, and kind hearted, and to do some good to someone and win some love to myself if I could. (31)

Her frigid aunt and the frosty, paid housekeeper who care for her, but never love her, are the antithesis of Victorian expectations that domestic care labor is motivated by and solidifies emotional connections. Her aunt tells her she is a "disgrace" and "degraded from the first" (30). Her earliest memories are of alienation: "I felt so poor, so trifling and so far off" (28). Esther has learned that love doesn't always motivate domestic care. To her aunt and Miss Rachael she is a nothing more than a job and though she admits that she "ought" to know or love them better, she simply does not. Miss. Rachael tells her this relationship is not her fault, but her "misfortune" (34). What was no doubt meant to be cutting and cruel is also remarkably accurate. Esther, a destitute orphan child, is completely outside the system of exchanges and relations that would allow her to warrant or demand recognition. As an unloved daughter, she believes she has to "win" love with

constant giving. She understands herself as always owing, always in a debt, and always unworthy.

This sense of never being good enough to deserve happiness is problematic, too, because it keeps Esther from ever being able to take any pride or pleasure in her work. She doesn't value her work, even when others praise her because her sense of obligation is so great she never feels she can do enough. It is clear from her descriptions of her labor that she is never comfortable with her own competence or authority. When Caddy begs her to teach her housekeeping she laughs about her lack of experience: "Now mercy upon us! The idea of her learning housekeeping of a person of my vast experience was such a joke, that I laughed and colored up" (477). She says, "Whenever I jingled my housekeeping keys ... you might have thought that there never was a greater imposter than I" (477). While modesty is expected of a Victorian housewife, Esther is unable to even take pride or pleasure in her work.

Esther's gratitude pushes her to take on more extensive and more challenging roles and responsibilities physically and emotionally. Esther willingly goes well beyond the boundaries of any traditional employee or even acceptable limits for a daughter. Her need to care for others becomes as much a mission as Mrs. Jellyby's Africa, but with far more potentially dangerous consequences for her. She is as obsessed and focused as any of Dickens "telescopic" philanthropists. Dickens criticizes female philanthropists because their larger political or social missions make them unable to notice the domestic problems right in front of them. They have "devoted themselves to an extensive variety of public subjects" but neglect the problems of the private home and family (49). Mrs. Jellyby, whose unorganized and filthy home and neglected children are in epic ruins

around her “neither knows nor cares” about her own daughter’s life (476). Mrs. Pardiggle is even worse. Esther notes that her charitable visit to the brick makers was “in this, as in everything else, a show that was not conciliatory, of doing charity by wholesale” (133). She is so focused on “mechanical” rather than compassionate attention to the family that she fails to even notice the grief-stricken woman clutching her dead child (133). Esther echoes Dickens’ concerns that home is the more appropriate focus for women. She tells Jarndyce,

It is right to begin with the obligations of home, sir; and that, perhaps, while those are overlooked and neglected, no other duties can possibly be substituted for them.” (83)

However, while Esther understands her attention should focus on the domestic, she fails to see why this level of dedication is itself problematic. She has no models of women who care for others without losing themselves in the task. Mrs. Jellyby proudly admits her obsession: “It involves the devotion of all my energies, such as they are; but that is nothing, so that it succeeds” (53). Mrs. Pardiggle, too, takes pride in her endless work: “You can’t tire me, good people,’ ... ‘I enjoy hard work; and the harder you make mine, the better I like it’” (132). Esther never realizes that her excessive commitment to the Jarndyce family makes her different from the female philanthropists only in the focus of her attention. They are her mission and it is one she approaches with the same obsessive focus as the ridiculous philanthropists.

As a managing daughter who feels responsible, and even obligated, to obsessively take on everything related to the care of the family, Esther willingly assumes a broad range of constantly changing responsibilities. Her first descriptions of her labor describe

it as taking inventory, replenishing household supplies, and surveying the garden, which would have been useful in planning future meals and for medicinal herbs.

Every part of the house was in such order, and every one was so attentive to me, that I had no trouble with my two bunches of keys: though what with trying to remember the contents of each little store-room drawer, and cupboard; and what with making notes on a slate about jams, and pickles, and preserves, and bottles, and glass, and china, and a great many other things; and what with being generally a methodical, old-maidish sort of foolish little person; I was so busy that I could not believe it was breakfast-time when I heard the bell ring. Away I ran, however, and made tea, as I had already been installed into the responsibility of the tea-pot; and then, as they were all rather late, and nobody was down yet, I thought I would take a peep at the garden and get some knowledge of that too. (115)

In another scene, she reveals that she has developed a method for inventory, accounts, and organizing: “I showed her all my books and methods, and all my fidgety ways” (477). Clearly Esther has a system for household management that she knows is extensive, hence the term “fidgety.” Later, Esther is involved in correspondence, management of the servants, and even light cleaning.

I was very busy indeed, all day, and wrote directions home to the servants, and wrote notes for my guardian, and dusted his books and papers, and jingled my housekeeping keys a good deal one way or another. (270-280)

She also claims responsibility for much of the shopping, budgeting, and spending the household funds. These business tasks must be significant because Jarndyce praises her business sense saying, “There never was such a Dame Durden, said my guardian, for making money last” (941). It is clearly she who keeps the creditors from Bleak House.

Since it was the day of the week on which I paid bills, and added up my books, and made all the household affairs as compact as possible, I remained at home ... Well! I was full of business, examining tradesmen’s books, adding up columns, paying money, filing receipts, and I dare say making a great bustle about it (147-148)

She seems to have no real assistance in her work either. Jarndyce gives her the orphan child Charley as a maid, but only so that she can “teach me now and then” (386). Only Esther would get a maid who creates more work for her, not less.

Her obsessive obligation to care almost kills her. When Charley tells her there is someone sick, she never even hesitates to ask herself if this is her responsibility. Her need to care is so out of control that she feels obligated to extend her care not only to the family, but also to anyone connected to the house. Charley tells Esther about Jo’s illness, “her round eyes filling with tears” (488). Her compassion for Charley leads her to conclude that “you and I can do no better than to go” to try to help (488). It is clear immediately how sick Jo is and when Charley starts showing signs of the same illness Esther knows how dire the situation will be for her. Yet, her obligation and labor have no limitations. She goes to them just as she had gone to Skimpole when he was “taken” and she assumed he was ill on her very first night at Bleak House.

She does not even get a break from her domestic exploitation after her life-threatening illness. Jarndyce’s visit to her reminds her of her duty and makes her deliberately want to discount her serious and disfiguring illness as “the little trial that I had to undergo” (563). She remembers her childhood vow with a “reproachful sense” of guilt for being “weak” and “repeated the old childish prayer in its old childish words, and found that its old peace had not departed from it” (563). When she asks for an additional week to recover, Jarndyce calls her “our spoilt little woman” (561). A week later he uses guilt to send her back to work:

I found another letter, asking me to tell Dame Durden, if I should see that little woman anywhere, that they had moped most pitiably without her, that the housekeeping was going to rack and ruin, that nobody else could manage the keys, and everybody in and about the house declared it was not the same house.” (686)

Even when she is ill she is not allowed time to recover without being reminded of her duty. Her labor is without limits, even reasonable physical ones.

Her work is physically exhausting to the point where she becomes alienated from her own feelings. She is honest about the drudgery of her work. After her illness, when she thinks she has lost Woodcourt she says, “I could go, please God, my lowly way along the path of duty” (570). When Richard complains that his job is monotonous she responds, “but I am afraid, said I, ‘his is an objection to all kinds of application- to life itself’” (270). After she informs Jarndyce of Ada and Richard’s engagement he cautions, “But we must take care, too, that our little woman’s life is not all consumed in care for others” (214). Later, when Richard is proving disappointing, Jarndyce sends her to bed saying “These are late hours for working and thinking. You do that for us, all day long, little housekeeper!” (277) During Caddy’s illness she initially tries to travel back and forth from London to Bleak House serving as housekeeper in both homes each day. Jarndyce says, “Now, little woman, little woman this will never do. Constant dropping will wear away a stone, and constant coaching will wear out a Dame Durden” (769). She makes it clear, though, that she works just as hard during Caddy’s illness:

I had always been there in the morning to make my guardian’s breakfast, and he had a hundred times laughed, and said there must be two little women, for his little woman was never missing. (775)

But, her exhaustion must be significant because even the self-obsessed Mr. Turveydrop asks, “And our dear Miss Summerson. She is not quite prostrated by fatigue?” (773). She is so exploited that she is unable to even recognize her own exhaustion.

However, her physical labor is only one part of the work she feels obligated to do at Bleak House. Her emotional work, especially as Richard’s guardian, is equally exploitive and alienating. When Jarndyce, who should be managing the family, becomes detached and disinterested in family responsibilities, notably the care of his adult male ward, it is Esther who steps forward to assume the neglected paternal role and responsibilities no matter the appropriateness, the chances of success, or the personal costs to her own health and happiness. As Ada’s companion she would be expected to report to Jarndyce on Ada’s activities. Isabella Beeton describes a similar position, one of an upper nurse who is responsible for the physical and emotional wellbeing of her charge and has a responsibility to report back to her guardian when she is concerned for her safety or character (465). But Jarndyce, she quickly learns, expects much more. He expects her to be his confidante and to act in his place as guardian, not just to Ada, but also to Richard. It would have been highly inappropriate for a housekeeper or Ada’s guardian to advise Richard, but this is exactly what Jarndyce expects of her. When Jarndyce initially asks her opinion about Richard she exclaims, “O my goodness, the idea of asking my advice on such a point!” (121). Jarndyce ignores her protests and foists his responsibility as guardian onto Esther.

Perhaps it would be best, first of all,” said I, “to ask Mr. Richard what he inclines to himself.”

“Exactly so,” he returned. “That’s what I mean! You know, just accustom yourself to talk it over, with your tact and in your quiet way, with him and

Ada, and see what you all make of it. We are sure to come at the heart of the matter by your means, little woman.”

I really was frightened at the thought of the importance I was attaining, and the number of things that were being confided to me. I had not meant this at all; I had meant that he should speak to Richard. But of course I said nothing in reply, except that I would do my best, though I feared (I really felt it necessary to repeat this) that he thought me much more sagacious than I was. (122)

This moment is a clear example of the fact that Esther is more than concerned; she is “frightened” early on about her endless obligations and the exploitation of her labor. She knows her responsibilities are spiraling well beyond any reasonable boundaries. Yet, this is what Jarndyce demands and because she feels obligated to him she does it.

Even when she imagines a happy ending for Richard and Ada this is one in which she is obligated to hold their family together. Her future is automatically delegated to their needs. “I was to be Ada’s bridesmaid when they married; I was to live with them afterwards; I was to keep all the keys of their house (215). She reports this not as emotional choices she has made, but as labor facts. Toward the end of the novel, when she notices a difference in Ada’s attitude toward her, she fears she has failed in her responsibility and doubles her efforts:

What could I do to reassure my darling ... Well! I could only be as brisk and busy as possible; and that, I had tried to be all along. ... I resolved to be doubly diligent and gay. So I went about the house, humming all the tunes I knew; and I sat working and working in a desperate manner ... (775)

When Jarndyce and Richard argue, Richard spirals downward pushing Esther to assume more and more responsibility. Jarndyce moves from being his guardian to

declining any responsibility for him: “I am only your friends and distant kinsman. I have no power over you whatever,” he tells him at their final parting (212). It is an odd statement largely because it isn’t true. Richard is still under age and under Jarndyce’s care. It is true, though, in the sense that he foists Richard’s problems onto Esther.

Her work as Richard’s guardian is difficult emotionally because she cares for Richard: “He made my heart ache keenly, sorely” (373). She knows he is a lost cause, though, and worries that Jarndyce will blame her for Richard’s problems. When Richard leaves his training in medicine for a career in law she sees her own failure in Jarndyce’s face. She says

I saw something of a shadow on their benevolent expression. His glance was changed, and even the silent look of confidence in me which now followed it once more, was not quite so hopeful and untroubled as it had originally been. (273)

Concerned about this she is sleepless and “low spirited” (274). She finally seeks of Jarndyce to ask him directly “I hope I was not the trouble.” He waves her concerns away. In this moment he could set boundaries on her responsibilities for Richard, but he doesn’t. Instead he leaves her believing she has a duty to save Richard.

Though she is “resolved to set Richard right,” she quickly realizes that she has neither the authority nor the influence to make a difference (561). She is forced to admit at last, “You place great confidence in me, but I fear you will not take advice from me” (600). She is sent on multiple secret meetings with Richard trying first to help him find a profession, then to keep him in those professions, and finally to lure him away from the lawsuit which consumes his mind and body:

I felt so deeply sensible of the danger in which he stood, that I tried, in Ada's name, in my guardian's, in my own, by every fervent means I could think of, to warn him of it, and to show him some of his mistakes. He received everything I said with patience and gentleness, but it all rebounded from him without taking the least effect. (601)

Unable to sway his course, she devotes herself to Ada and Richard as he quickly succumbs to his illness. Her sense of obligation makes her see Richard's failures as her own. She wants desperately to absolve herself in some way for her failure as her guardian, but all she has is her labor which she offers without limits: "Not a day passed, without my going there, of course (930). She repeats this in her narrative to emphasize that Richard's failure and death is not because she didn't work hard enough: "I was there as I have mentioned at all hours" (936). Her sense of obligation increases as Richard fails becoming what she calls "desperate work" (775). But, in the end no amount of labor on her part will save Richard, who ironically she had thought might have been saved by a worthwhile job.

Her constant obligations and exhausting physical and emotional labor alienate her from her own emotions. Though the jobs, locations, even the days may change, every place in her life is the same. When she is ill she dreams of herself in constant labor, climbing endless stairs or like a struggling worm powerless to do anything but work. Bleak House, Greenleaf, and her aunt's frosty home are all places where she, echoing the old vow, has felt intense obligations to work as hard as she could. Every role in her life is connected by her powerless constant labor and the exploitation and alienation that labor has created. As her dream becomes more literal, the exploitation and alienation are even more pronounced:

For the same reason I am almost afraid to hint at that time in my disorder--it seemed one long night, but I believe there were both nights and days in it--when I laboured up colossal staircases, ever striving to reach the top, and ever turned, as I have seen a worm in a garden path, by some obstruction, and labouring again. I knew perfectly at intervals, and I think vaguely at most times, that I was in my bed; and I talked with Charley, and felt her touch, and knew her very well; yet I would find myself complaining, "Oh, more of these never-ending stairs, Charley--more and more--piled up to the sky', I think!" and labouring on again. (555-556)

The exploitation of her labor is clearly represented in her dream of a struggle to labor on endless stairs. She describes the frustration and powerlessness of her endless labor in animal terms. In her powerlessness she imagines herself like a blind, struggling worm always laboring and always obstructed by forces she can't see or understand. Her dream reflects the reality of her life- constant obligation and constant work.

It is not surprising then that she ultimately offers herself as a willing sacrifice of daughterly duty and submission to Jarndyce. In a symbolic representation of daughterhood and feminine caring, Esther is willing to sacrifice even her own marital happiness to her sense of gratitude and duty. She is so alienated from her feelings she is barely able to discuss Allan Woodcourt. She mentions him in asides and through the veiled comments of others. She introduces him almost grudgingly. She says, "I have forgotten to mention- at least I have not mentioned" Woodcourt (237). She admits she cares for Woodcourt only when she believes he is lost to her. Her endless obligation to Jarndyce makes her feel there is no sacrifice too great--even that of herself, "To devote my life to his happiness was to thank him poorly, and what had I wished for the other night but some new means of thanking him?" (692). It is obligation, not romantic love, which leads her to accept marriage to Jarndyce.

The “second Bleak House” she is rewarded with at the end of the novel arguably offers little improvement for a care giver like Esther. Esther clearly trades one form of extreme gratitude and endless responsibilities for another which suggests little hope for a domestic work life that is not to some extent bleak. While she feels a very different kind of love for Woodcourt, her description of their marital life is also one in which she is in another cycle of endless self-effacing gratitude. Describing her happiness as a doctor’s wife she says, “I owe it all to him, my love, my pride! They like me for his sake, as I do everything I do in life for his sake” (989). Esther’s life is still grounded in a sense of overwhelming obligation. Yet, the ending is arguably a happy one for Esther because, though it is likely the endlessly grateful Esther will still have difficulties setting boundaries on her work, she no longer is in the curious position of pseudo daughter /servant. As a wife she has a clear role as partner to her husband and some authority in her home, whether she chooses to acknowledge or claim it or not. Her unusual role in the Jarndyce family, though, tells us much about the hidden challenges of managing daughters who may be required to take on the physical responsibilities of the home, almost like a servant, and the emotional responsibilities of nurturing others without a clear sense of authority or any ability to set boundaries on their work. Esther provides an excellent example of why marriage, even a marriage to an impoverished doctor that requires hard work, might be more attractive than the strange limbo of a managing daughter’s life in a sprawling wealthy country estate. Being the unequivocal “mistress” of a small bleak house is infinitely better than being the uncertain “little old woman” of a much grander one. While the work may still be challenging, the position and its

responsibilities are much clearer than the life she and other managing daughters experience.

Chapter Four: Domestic Labor in North and South: "Have I Not Care?"

At a critical point in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* the dying working-class girl Bessy rebukes the middle-class managing daughter Margaret for having "never known want or care" (137). However, Margaret is quick to defend herself: "Have I not care? Do I not know anxiety though I go about well-dressed and have food enough?" (137) Bessy backs down immediately: "I ask your pardon" (137). Both Margaret and Bessy are willing to sacrifice themselves to bring comfort to others. Bessy's lament that, "all I've been born for is just to work my heart out and my life away" echoes Margaret's cry that, "I am so tired--so tired of being whirled on through all these phases of my life, in which nothing abides me, no creature, no place" (400). In many real ways, Margaret's labor and her life are certainly not more difficult than that of the factory workers and Gaskell is never suggesting an equal relationship between the two. Bessy dies while Margaret merely faints. But, by minimizing the harsh living and working conditions of the factory workers and dramatizing Margaret's stressful and often inappropriate physical and emotional tasks she suggests important parallels between the exploitation and lack of appreciation in both kinds of work. At the same time, Gaskell also suggests why work this challenging might also be appealing for middle-class women like Margaret, who care for others at considerable cost to their own health and happiness long before they become wives or mothers.

North and South focuses on Margaret's struggles to care for her invalid, unhappy mother and her loving, but disconnected father, whose crisis of conscience about his church salary forces the family out of pastoral ease and into the harsher world of the

industrial north where she befriends the working class “hands” and eventually marries the mill “master” John Thornton. Published in serial form from 1854-55, *North and South* is at once a social problem novel, an industrial novel, and a novel about domestic relations. Critics see the novel as an important blend of personal and political in which what happens in the domestic home is deeply entwined with larger social issues. Catherine Stevenson, Pearl Brown and Sarah Drudge all note that the novel is concerned with the problem of finding meaningful work for middle-class women, although their focus is on emerging forms of paid labor. Deanna Davis looks at work in the home, but only as a way of demonstrating the “high cost of mothering” (524).

However, while Margaret is “mothering,” she is not a mother and that distinction is an important one in terms of understanding the challenges of her labor and the role of middle-class managing daughters in the family. Gaskell shows Margaret’s work as a daughter is particularly difficult because both of her parents waver between dogmatic and disengaged, refusing to either authorize Margaret’s authority or set necessary boundaries on her labor. The path of care that should make Margaret the one who is cared for is reversed in her family in such a way that it is she who is often forced to assume the inappropriate and stressful responsibilities of paternal authority for the family. Gaskell also shows also how the sanctification of domestic labor masks the difficulties of that labor. It also leaves Margaret feeling responsible to provide endless caring for others, even outside the home. Unlike the workers, women caring for others in the home do not have the same sense of solidarity or sympathy for their difficulties. While Margaret is appreciated by men outside the family, it is only as a future wife, not as a managing daughter, which is problematic, too, because her caring labors blind her to possibility of

any life beyond her parents. Yet, Gaskell also shows how the power of idealized images of home and family and the sense of purpose that caring for others provides motivates women even when the work is incredibly difficult.

Gaskell explores many of the emotional factors that make domestic work appealing. Margaret loves her father. Her willing obedience is, in part, because as a loving daughter, she is incapable of acknowledging that her father, who has brought them to this situation, is flawed. To acknowledge the trauma his bad parenting has brought upon the family would shatter not only her familial relationships, but also her attachment to the very concept of home. Her father's crisis of conscience creates a real hardship for the family, yet she is so deeply invested in caring for him and in the idea of his authority that she is incapable of admitting this even to herself. Her understanding of her father as a good man who cares for others is a central foundation of her world. Discovering his crisis, she feels as if "the one staid foundation of her home, of her idea of her beloved father, seemed reeling and rocking" (34). When he tells her of his religious crisis and their impending move, she is worried more about him than herself. She worries about her forced abandonment of their parishioners, but never questions his loyalty to them. The narrator says, "entertaining the idea of hypocrisy for a moment in connection with her father savored of irreverence" (56). She worries about her own abandonment of their parishioners, but never questions his loyalty to them. She needs to imagine him as caring and thoughtful, not only to his parishioners, but also to his family.

Margaret has been displaced and longs for home and family. Sent away from her family at an early age, childhood rejection leaves Margaret, like Esther Summerson in *Bleak House*, eager to prove her worth and win love and approval. Another "displaced

daughter,” as Hilary Schor calls them, Margaret has been both biologically and emotionally inside the family even as she remained with her aunt (6). Her years in London with her financially and socially comfortable aunt and her beautiful “dear,” but “spoiled” cousin Edith have provided a relatively typical upper-middle-class daughter’s life filled with no stress greater than a “never ending commotion about trifles” (6,11). Her life is so traditional and predictable that even the young lawyer Henry Lennox can describe her day (13). It is a household that never “called for much decision” (50).

Her image of home and family is an idealized one. Margaret wants the more amorphous “delight of filling the important post of only daughter in Helstone parsonage” (12). However, she conceives of this only in a vague concept of home. She explains, “It is home and I can’t put its charm into words” (12). Aside from the romantic landscape, “like a village in a poem,” she can’t describe her life there except in the contrast she imagines to her life with her aunt (12). Lennox complains, “You will only tell me that you are not going to do this and that” (13).

The home attachment she feels, though, based in idealized images rather than real relationships, is nonetheless a powerful motivating factor that can inspire women to idealize not just home, but also the people there, and the domestic care they provide for others even when it is exhausting (Hidalgo). The displaced daughter’s need for a clear and meaningful familial and geographic place for herself are woven together in a way that neatly corresponds with Victorian ideology of the home, which imagined it as Ruskin eulogizes, “a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth” (85). Margaret is oblivious, even at eighteen, to the fact that Lennox’s questions about her plans for her life, and even her wedding, are meant to suggest the opportunity of a different path,

marriage, to her. Her need for home is the displaced daughter's need to be a daughter to her own parents in her own home. Like the orphaned Esther Summerson, Margaret's deprivation makes psychological sense of her extreme self sacrifice. Her need blinds her to other home possibilities and makes her vulnerable to exploitation in her parents' home. Only the death of her family releases Margaret from her exhausting and inappropriate domestic service.

After her parent's death she returns to her aunt's home, but can't resume her former life "watching, admiring and ministering to her cousin" (372). She wants to be needed and they simply don't need her in their life of ease and comfort. Her identity has been forged in her devotion to family, dysfunctional as it was, and she can't go back to a leisurely life of fetching shawls and attending dinners. Helstone, and even the hard life at Milton still "composed her idea of home" because it was a place where she could meaningfully care for others (372). She returns to Helstone thinking it will fortify her, and yet, it shows her only her own displacement in the world: "I am so tired--so tired of being whirled on through all these phases of my life, in which nothing abides by me, no creature, no place" (400). With the loss of both parents, her godfather, and her only friend, she finds herself at the end of the novel exhausted, but also longing for someone and some place to call home. She experiences a kind of breakdown in which she sits for hours on the beach considering her "past and future" (377). Lennox return to the scene determined to win her. Her loneliness makes spinster life unappealing and her beloved cousins simply don't need a domestic manager. She considers marriage at last: "She tried to settle that most difficult problem for women, how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority, and how much might be set apart for working in freedom" (377).

The emphasis on work is significant in showing she understands a future marriage as work and hopes for some autonomy in that new life.

Thornton recognizes this. The flower he shows her from her Helstone home is his acknowledgement of her displacement and lost sense of home and family. The hope is that this gesture shows that he recognizes her frustrations and will try to ease them, just as he has learned to mitigate, if not solve, the workers' pain. Her relationship with Thornton promises, though, to be potentially one of mutual comfort. He is "a man of great force of character, of power in many ways" (163). His strength and authority offers the patriarchal leader she wanted, but never found, in her father. Yet, he also recognizes her suffering and is capable of being her emotional support. He imagines "that his great love might come in to comfort and console her" (269). Like others outside the family, he sees and respects her quiet strength and her painful labors.

This union offers her a release from the unstable role she has had to fill and opens the door to a more traditional partnership marriage. It is, however, a plot twist that has long been frustrating to critics who see it as sidestepping class and labor problems through conventional marriage. In some ways, though, Margaret's labor problems are beginning again and it is unclear if it will be better. The hope is that he will remember this once they are married. Parthenhope Nightingale, whom Gaskell visited as she completed the novel, was doubtful:

I am afraid Margaret will not be happy, tho she will make him so.; he is too old to mould and the poetry of her nature will suffer under the iron mark which has so compressed his so long. ... They (Mrs. T and M) cannot live together and be happy and yet she cannot be turned out of the house, but when do one's friend's marriages satisfy one? They are the most melancholy things generally one goes through. (Qtd in Shelston 414)

Her caring domestic work has been challenging, thankless, and unrewarding. Yet, it is also tied up in a need for home and purpose.

However, the message to managing daughters is a cautious one. Gaskell emphasizes Margaret's labor as both physically challenging and emotionally brutal with distinct parallels to factory work and yet also with unique features that make Margaret's work challenging in very different ways. Conduct literature of the period agrees that daughters should be working hard. They all emphasize the importance of practical domestic skills as essential daughterly training. Daughters are "good" when they provide not for a glittering show of empty talents, but the ability to competently care for others. Sarah Stickney Ellis calls these daughters without practical skills "languid, listless and inert" (54). She argues there is a "catalogue of miseries as the consequence of this mistaken ambition of the women of England to be ladies" (69). For example, "modern refinement" has resulted in a butcher's daughter "seized with nausea at the spectacle of raw meat" (68). T.S. Arthur laments the decline of practical skills saying, "Not one in ten can bake a good loaf or cook a dinner" (18). Daughters at home must strive to be hard workers with practical skills not objects of display or ornament.

Margaret is certainly a model of practical skills. She does not flinch from hard physical work, which only multiplies when they are forced to move and resettle in Milton. She reassures her mother,

I don't mind ironing, or any kind of work, for you and papa. I am myself a born and bred lady through it all, even though it comes to scouring a floor, or washing dishes. (76)

Margaret assumes all the responsibilities from packing and shipping their belongings to locating and redecorating a new house in spite of her age and "inexperience" and the lack

of anyone who might assist or advise her (49). Their income and staff depleted, she must manage their one servant, reining in her “airs,” and work hard in a life in which “the domestic worries pressed so very closely, and in so new and sordid a form” (88). Their Milton home is “a strange desolate, noisy, busy place with diminished comforts on every side of home life” (104).

Margaret’s labor is not just physically difficult, but more significantly in terms of the burden it places on her, it is also emotionally exhausting. Unlike Lucilla Marchbanks whose desire to be “comfort to papa” is arguably a tool to empower her own independence, Margaret’s need to be a “comfort him and mama” commits her to inappropriate emotional work (16). The narrator states, “There was no comfort to be given” as they enter their Milton home (66). Yet, Margaret becomes the sole source of emotional comfort and support for her entire family. Her parents go to Margaret--not each other--with their grief and fears. Her parents were “equally out of spirits and equally came upon Margaret for sympathy” (66). As her mother declines in health, her burdens increase, not just in caring for an unhappy invalid, but also because her father demands even more emotional support. The only reason she is even at the Thornton home when the workers strike and she is injured is because she is getting a waterbed to comfort her mother. When she is assaulted in the strike, it is not her own emotional wounds she nurses, but her father’s.

Mr. Hale now came in. He had left his sleeping wife; and wanted, as Margaret saw, to be amused and interested by something that she was to tell him. With sweet patience did she bear her pain, without a word of complaint; and rummaged up numberless small subjects for conversation--all except the riot, and that she never mentioned once. (191)

Her work is challenging because neither of her parents are particularly good parents. After the dogmatic decision that forces them to Milton, her father retreats from any authority or responsibility in the family. For all his championing of the workers' need for "independent action," her father seems to take full advantage of the fact his daughter feels she has a "natural pious duty" to unquestioning obedience to him (322). He makes his plans to leave the church and their Southern home entirely alone and presents it to his daughter as an accomplished fact. He tells her "you must not deceive yourself into doubting the reality of my words--my fixed intention and resolve" while looking at her in a "steady stony manner" (40). His decision is "irrevocable" no matter the consequences to the rest of the family (40). When Margaret suggests they move to some other rural community he refuses to even discuss it:

No. We must go to Milton. That is settled. I can always decide better by myself, and not influenced by those I love, he said as a half apology for having arranged so much before he told any one of his family of his intentions. I cannot stand objections, they make me so undecided. (38)

The only criticism Margaret ever allows of her father is in his refusal to discuss his move with his wife. His wife is his partner and should be, if not an equal decision maker, at least equally well-informed of potential changes to the family:

It came strongly upon Margaret's mind that her mother ought to have been told; that whatever faults of discontent and repining might have been, it was an error in her father to have left her to learn his change of opinion. (44)

However, her father does not just demand that she uproot her comfortable life, but also that she be sympathetic to what he views as "martyrdom" (40). Mr. Hale chokes back sobs and turns to Margaret "imploping a merciful and kind judgment," from his daughter (33). Margaret is horrified by her father's break with the church: "The hard

reality was, that her father had so admitted tempting doubts into his mind as to become a schismatic-an outcast” (42). It is not enough that she accept his plans, though, he demands she also be supportive of what she views as a “night-mare” (40). He wants to control not just her actions, but also her emotions.

Yet, after this one decisive action, her father steps entirely out of the picture. He isolates himself in his office and is “anxious and uneasy” with an “absence of mind” and a “heavy heart” that frightens and saddens her. Her father depends upon her for everything. As Sally Shuttleworth has noted, “Gaskell’s depiction of Mr. Hale focuses strongly on his weakness, a weakness which is repeatedly cast in gendered or childlike terms” (XV). Unlike Lord Oakburn’s daughter, Jane, Margaret’s father is dogmatic only in his rejection of his church position. Once that decision is made, he retreats to his study and his tutoring and disconnects from the family. His passive and indecisive nature then forces Margaret to make decisions for the family. He never grants or acknowledges her authority, like Lucilla Marchbanks father does, but rather manipulates her into sorting out the family messes.

Gaskell frames the labor dispute of the Milton workers as also a problem of emotionally detached, but occasionally despotic, authority figures. Margaret describes the labor dispute as a problem of bad parenting. She criticizes the current system as “the masters would like their hands to be merely tall, large children” (119). She does not understand why Thornton doesn’t explain labor problems from his perspective to the workers. She argues they are “two classes dependent upon each other in every possible way, yet each evidently regarding the interests of the other as opposed to their own” (118). She sees the solution in “wise parenting” by which there is “an equality of

friendship between the advisor and the advised,” what she calls a respect for the “mutual dependence” of master and hand (122). She argues this is essential because much like members of a family “your lives and your welfare are so constantly and intimately interwoven” (122).

The model of mutual dependence, like parent and child, she offers is starkly contrasted against her analysis of existing conditions in which “every man has had to stand in an unchristian and isolated position” (122). She urges Thornton not to neglect his paternity, “his duty as a steward” (118). Thornton agrees his relationship to his workers is that of a parent and child and believes firmly, “In our infancy we require wise despotism to govern us” (120). Mr. Hale objects, pointing out that his hands are “in that troublesome stage which intervenes between childhood and manhood” when “unreasoning obedience” no longer works (120). Thornton is unmoved. He refuses to take any responsibility for her workers saying, “I choose to be the unquestioned and irresponsible master of my hands during the hours that they labour for me. But those hours past, our relationship ceases” (124).

It is not until the end of the novel as his friendship with the worker Higgins develops that he has any real sense of “charity and sympathy” (420). Yet, the dining hall he provides, which the men actually pay for, is the only change that he has made or seems willing to make. Even in that he resists Mr. Bell’s suggestion that there is “nothing like the act of eating for equalizing men” (362). There is little doubt that he still rules the mill and men with an iron fist. Bad parenting, a refusal to acknowledge and act upon mutual dependence, is at the root of both industrial labor disputes and the struggles of the middle-class managing daughter.

However, it is not just her father who makes Margaret's work more challenging than most daughters. Her mother, too, wavers between dogmatic and disengaged. Conduct literature directed to daughters stresses the need for mothers to authorize and structure a daughter's work. Daughters are told that they should become "her mother's right hand assistant" (*Female Excellence* 154). This creates a relatively straight line of authority from husband, to wife, and through her, to daughter. Victorian family structure imagined wives as a husband's equal partner, reigning over the private and domestic while he directed the public and commercial. A daughter with a mother to direct her is capable of functioning as an extension of maternal authority in the home.

Yet, Margaret has no authoritative mother and household mistress to manage her labor. While her mother is alive for most of the novel, she has little-to-no interest in the household or her daughter. "Overpowered by all the trouble and necessities for immediate household decisions," Mrs. Hale retreats into claims of illness, which quickly become real in the unhealthy Milton climate (49). Margaret's "childlike" invalid mother is emotionally closer to their servant than to Margaret, withholding her affection, approval, and confidences from her daughter (146). Her perpetual unhappiness is as impossible to lift as the "thick yellow November fogs" of Milton (65). She and her maid Dixon clearly prefer Margaret's brother, Frederick, frequently praising him by criticizing her. "He was much prettier than you," she states matter-of-factly (202). When the time for the move comes she is sent off on a seaside vacation while Margaret does the literal and figurative heavy lifting of the family. Her mother's only attempt to help Margaret is to ask Mrs. Thornton, a woman who clearly despises Margaret, to "help" her (242). She takes no interest in her daughter or her struggles.

This is important because it is her mother who can authorize and empower her in the home. Even though Margaret works constantly, her labor in the home grants her little authority. Her mother's disconnected and borderline neglectful housekeeping still does not negate her maternal and marital right to direct in the home. A wife has some rights to a partnership role by virtue of the sanctity of marriage and the idealized view of wives as angels in the household. However, a daughter has only what she is granted by her father and in that case that is not much. She is the one who takes charge and makes things happen, yet she often has to fight for the right to do so. For example, their maid, Dixon so discounts her authority that she openly criticizes her father to her:

‘Dixon! You forget to whom you are speaking.’ She stood upright and firm on her feet now, confronting the waiting maid, and fixing her with a steady discerning eye. ‘I am Mr. Hale’s daughter. Go!’ (48)

She forces Dixon into obedience by claiming a daughter's right to respect, and yet, it is a right she must insist upon at every turn. When the doctor comes to examine her mother she is left out of the exam and has to force the doctor to stay and talk to her. She is able to do so only by aggressively “assuming her rightful position as daughter of the house” (125). She recognizes this as being “ridiculously grand,” yet knows it is the only way to get information from the doctor. Still she must reassure him she is the one in the house who will do the work if nursing is needed: “I am the only child ...I can do this. I can nurse my mother” (125). Still, he hesitates until she forces him saying, “I am her daughter, Sir” (125). She must also beg her mother to let her care for her asserting her right as a daughter. She says, “You know I am your child and I do think I have a right to do everything for you” (128). Curiously, though she works tirelessly and is largely successful at bringing comfort to her needy family, she has to fight for right even to

comfort her parents. As a daughter with a living, albeit useless, mother she must repeatedly insist on her authority as a managing daughter in her mother's home.

Margaret should be the one cared for in her family and yet both parents force her into exploitive paternal roles inappropriate for her position. She is forced to assume numerous responsibilities that rightly should weigh upon her father's shoulders. The first example of this is when Margaret's father forces her break the news of the move to her mother. He manipulates her into doing so by complaining of the pain it will bring him: "I think I could do anything but that: the idea of her distress turns me sick with dread" (37). She agrees because she loves him and sees it as her job to care for him even in this bizarre situation: "Margaret did dislike it, did shrink from it more than from anything she had ever had to do in her life before" (37). But, she "conquered herself" and agreed "with a brave strong look on her face" (37). "It is a painful thing, but it must be done, and I will do it as ever I can. You must have many painful things to do" (37). In fact, he does not. It is Margaret who will bear the burden of his one dogmatic decision.

Forcing her to be the one to talk to her mother is also problematic because it destabilizes the family structure which places a wife above a daughter. When she tells her mother about their move, her mother is initially most upset by the fact that Margaret had been told first. Margaret tries to deflect this, but is so concerned that she will be read as usurping her mother's position that when her father's returns she deliberately stays away from him "for fear of her mother's jealous annoyance" (47). Her mother rightfully resents her for filling the place that is hers as advisor and partner to her husband. There is no hint of sexual inappropriateness, but her father has blurred the boundaries between daughter and wife, leaving both women confused and frustrated.

Additionally, her father's passive disconnection from the family forces her to parent and protect her brother Frederick. When Frederick is almost caught leaving town and is involved in a murder, it is she who steps forward to care for him. She tells Frederick, "I am getting very brave and very hard" (262). Her father never even considers escorting his son to the train. Instead he sends his unmarried young daughter at dusk to the desolate train station. The inappropriateness of this act is one that will haunt Margaret when the Thorntons see her very presence there as a stain on her character. When she who is forced to lie to the police about Frederick, she does so though it brings her tremendous anxiety and shame. Her lie torments her and is the final strike that ruins her reputation with the Thorntons: "Frederick! Frederick!" She cried, 'what have I not sacrificed for you'!" (283). She has risked her safety, her peace of mind, and her very character doing the things that were her father's rightful duties. She becomes the realist, the practical problem-solver her father is incapable of being.

Her mother, too, emotionally exploits her by forcing her into roles inappropriate for a daughter. Her dogmatic insistence, the only time she asserts any authority in the home, that Margaret bring her exiled brother back to England forces her into paternal leadership in the family. In "violent hysterics," on her deathbed she demands Margaret--not her husband--return her lost son in spite of the fact that he cannot return to England for fear of being hung for his mutiny at sea (109). The narrator points out that this is a seemingly impossible task stating, "There was no comfort to be given" (109). Yet again, Margaret finds a way to take charge and comfort even in this situation. Mrs. Hale knows her daughter is the active agent of the house and that her husband has lost any ability toward decisive action. It is Margaret who writes Frederick and posts the letter

requesting his return. Her mother insists she do so before she even has a chance to talk to her father. It is likely her mother is well aware that her passive husband would be unwilling to exert himself to any effort. Her father essentially admits this saying, “I should have hesitated, till, perhaps, it might have been too late” (206). This creates an agony for Margaret as she worries until he arrives that she will have been the reason her brother was caught and hung for his crimes.

Gaskell sets Margaret’s labor in relation to industrial labor to highlight the extreme stress of the daughter’s position. However, to do so she must minimize some of the difficulties of industrial labor. Gaskell deliberately obscures conditions in the town, in the homes of the workers, in the factory, and, most significantly, Bessy’s death. Friedrich Engels’ study *The Conditions of the Working Class*, published some ten years before *North and South*, documents Manchester as clearly the “highest point” of industrial “degradation” and provides a useful parallel to “social murder” he described in actual conditions (83). He describes Manchester as “heaps of debris, refuse and offal” everywhere and “a plan-less, knotted chaos of houses, more or less on the verge of uninhabitableness” (90). But, in Gaskell’s hands the city of Manchester, which was the model for Milton, experiences a little literary cleansing. There is little mention of the sanitation problems that were notorious in industrial towns. Mrs. Hale’s complaint about the difficulty of keeping a clean house with the industrial pollution is the only criticism she allows: “I only know it is impossible to keep muslin blinds clean here above a week” (82). When Margaret’s father fears he has threatened his wife’s delicate health by coming to Milton Margaret vehemently denies this: “Oh, Papa! Don’t imagine such things, said Margaret, shocked” (102). She never asks the doctor about the role the

unhealthy air plays in her mother's decline and ultimate demise (102). The physical press of the factory workers in their ingress and egress in the crowded streets is the only problem Margaret encounters and even that she says "amused her even while they irritated her" (66).

Gaskell's description of the Higgins home is also whitewashed. Engels describes the workers homes starkly:

In comfortless, filthy houses, hardly good enough for mere nightly shelter, ill furnished, neither rain proof nor warm, a foul atmosphere filling rooms overcrowded with human beings, no domestic comfort is possible. (154)

In contrast, Margaret rather stunningly tells her mother, "I don't believe they are very poor--at least they don't speak as if they were" (157). She seems to believe this despite the fact that their next-door neighbors are essentially in the same situation and are starving and they themselves have discussed starvation in previous strikes (157). Unlike her other novel, *Mary Barton*, we are given little sense of their home's geographic location, although Engels claims that few working-class homes were housed in anything other than the dank underground cellars so memorable in her earlier novel. She describes the Higgins house as "uncleaned," but seems to see that as the inevitable result of lack of training. Margaret is not judgmental about this, accepting it as others of the period did as merely as a fact of life for working-class homes (Parkes). She never expresses any discomfort in their home except for their roaring fire, which we are told is a sign of their hospitality. In many ways, their working-class home is less disturbing to her than the Thornton's luxurious "icy snowy discomfort" which she can't wait to leave (112). John Paul Kanwit notes the Thornton house is described as industrial. Even the furniture has been bagged up and protected from any chance of offering human comfort or contact.

Margaret runs from the Thornton's icy drawing room to the warmth of the Higgins' hearth.

Margaret, and through Margaret, the reader sees only the outside of the Milton factories, "an immense many windowed mill, whence proceeded the continual clank of machinery and the long groaning roar of the steam engine" (111). However, she never ventures inside. Gaskell never takes us any further than this brief description of the outside walls. There is little if any description of the brutal nature of the work that goes on inside. Margaret presses Bessy twice to tell her about her work, but Bessy remains cryptic. It is "not worse than many others, I reckon" she states succulently (89). Even during the strike, Margaret is on Thornton's home doorstep not in the factory. Though the home and factory are connected, the glimpses she has from the drawing room window are as close as she gets to the factory itself.

Bessy's "feebleness" and depression are clearly described, but Gaskell deemphasizes working-class suffering at this critical poignant moment by choosing not to show Bessie's death. Margaret only discovers it the day after she dies and, in a novel that often tugs hard on the heartstrings, we get no description of her final moments. Margaret's encounter with Bessie's lifeless body is a positive one in which the good daughter is shown happily finally released from her caring work. Margaret describes her with "the faint soft smile of eternal rest" declaring she "looked more peaceful than life" (218).

Downplaying the suffering of the workers makes it easier for Gaskell to connect Margaret's exhaustion and exploitation to the industrial labor which surrounds her: "I am tired now, just for a little while; but in a half hour I shall be ready to do the same over

again,” Margaret says describing her work as a chore not unlike the mechanized repetition of the factory (76). The physical consequences of her constant labor are also shown to be remarkably like the toll factory work has taken on the depressed Bessy. The sleepless Margaret is “chilly with over fatigue,” moving “stiffly and slowly” from the strain of physical exertion (53). Deanna Davis explains that Gaskell was mothering four adult daughters at the time of the novel’s composition and traces in Gaskells’ letters a theme of exhausted mothering much like that her “mothering” characters experience. Gaskell complains,

I know so well what it is to have a great many people coming en masse, dependent on you for a certain amount of amusement and help, and coming in & going out, and talking, and requiring an amount of civility and exertion that almost breaks you down. (qtd. in Davis 714)

Like Gaskell, Margaret’s labors threaten to break her down. In Milton, she feels a “stupor of despair” for the life ahead (66). When she sees her mother’s rapid decline in Milton she feels a “dim fear lying like a weight on her heart” (88). Margaret finds herself working through “the irritation of weariness” and chronic headaches to care for her family (75). When she faints after being questioned by an officer about her brother, the image of Margaret prone on the floor overwhelmed with exhaustion is described in ways remarkably similar to Bessy on her death bed:

Margaret lay still and white as death on the study floor. She had sunk under her burden. It had been heavy in weight and long carried; and she had been very meek and patient, till all at once her faith had given way, and she groped in vain for help. There was a pitiful contraction of suffering upon her beautiful brow, although there was no other sign of consciousness remaining. (277)

Her maid describes her as “more dead than alive” (281). She, like Bessy, laments her sense of premature aging saying, “Not yet twenty! And she had to bear up against such hard pressure that she felt quite old” (235).

Margaret’s work is different from factory work, though, because as a good daughter she is expected to hide that struggle. Books directed at daughters made it clear that they should expect their difficult work to be hidden: “You must bear your sorrows in silence, unknown and un-pitied. You must often put a face of serenity or cheerfulness when are torn with anguish and sinking into despair” (Gregory 7). Margaret is unable to share her suffering with anyone, even Bessy, her only friend. She admits to Bessy only that her mother is ill. When her mother dies she says she “could not think of her own loss in thinking of her father’s case” (251). She debates telling her father at one point of her suffering and decides against it as a selfish act. She believes, “it would add materially to her father’s nervousness” so she keeps all her fears to herself (286). Though she is physically assaulted in the riot and faints, she never tells her own family what happened. It is only when she is alone that she allows herself to feel: “She let her color go--the forced smile faded away--the eyes grow dull with heavy pain” (191). Again and again she reassures her father that he has not hurt her even though he has. Even when she bursts into tears at the railway station, as they leave her beloved home for the last time, she still refuses to admit he has hurt her: “It is only that I am tired tonight; don’t think that I am suffering from what you have done, dear papa” (56). She even blames herself for worrying him, saying she is “fanciful” even though she was “glad to see [his anxiety] awakened” (110). It is only when her father goes to visit Mr. Bell that she acknowledges, even to herself, how difficult her labor has been since she came home:

It was astonishing, almost stunning, to feel herself so much at liberty; no one depending upon her for her cheering care, if not positive happiness; no invalid to plan and think for; she might be idle, and silent, and forgetful- and what seemed like worth more than all the other privileges- she might be unhappy if she liked. (344)

Margaret has no one to sympathize with her situation. Her mother seems oblivious to anything happening beyond her bed sheets and views Margaret's labors as a reminder of her own lost status. The long-suffering Mrs. Thornton might well have offered Margaret the compassionate solidarity she deserves, but while she admires "the patience with which she had endured long and wearing care," she sees Margaret only as a marriage minded gold digger out to steal or hurt her son (368). She functions only as a second disapproving mother for Margaret. Rebellion is never an option for Margaret as it is for her father or the millworkers. Margaret has no one to support or share her experience. She, like the millworker Higgins, is pushed toward a childlike "blind unreasoning kind of obedience," but unlike Higgins has no one to turn to even for sympathy (119). To reject her role as domestic caregiver, even in its extremes, would be to reject the very markers of her class and gender, stoic domestic care and compassion.

In Margaret, we see a central problem of caring labor in the home for both daughters and wives. Margaret refuses to show her pain because care labor is the kind of work that is understood not as work, but as originating in and creating loving emotional connections. Victorians imagined the home as a sacred space completely separated from work or commerce. The wives who managed them were considered angels in the house whose care for home and family was part of their loving feminine nature. As Coventry Patmore declared, "him to please is woman's pleasure" (*The Wife's Tragedy*). Domestic work is so deeply embedded in emotional ties to people and places that most women who

work in the home do not think of their work as work. They call it “love” or “not quite a job” (De Vault 10). As Arlie Russel Hochschild explains, “Most care labor is so personal, so involved with feeling, that we rarely imagine it to be work.” (16). When her mother dies, Margaret’s efforts to soothe her father and brother are described in the sanctifying way more commonly used for a wife’s caring labor. The narrator explains, “Then Margaret rose from her trembling and despondency, and became as a strong angel of comfort to her father and brother” (250). Idealizing her work reflects an understanding of the emotional ties which motivate it even as it separates it from traditional labor. It reflects the unique problem of caring labor that because it is rooted in emotions and is completely voluntary it seems incompatible with frustrated wage labor even when it is completely exploitive. If Margaret refuses to openly complain it is because the nature of care labor makes it difficult to complain without appearing unloving or ungenerous.

The ideal of hiding emotional pain is also deeply tied to middle-class status. Margaret she sees an important distinction in the way middle-class and working-class women show their feelings: “Women of our class don’t go [to funerals], because they have no power over their emotions, and yet are ashamed of showing them. Poor women go, and don’t care if they are seen overwhelmed with grief” (267). In her emotional classification system, feeling pain and yet hiding that pain become another marker of her middle-class status. Public grieving, even at a parent’s funeral, is shameful and not class appropriate for middle-class women. It is this logic which also motivates her attempts throughout the novel to hide both her labor and her suffering. Her father allows her to attend her mother’s funeral only when she promises to “be no trouble” (267). The trouble he fears is an emotional breakdown. It also perhaps explains her almost complete lack of

public emotional reaction when her father dies. The British stiff upper lip, a phrase which rose to prominence in Victorian Britain as a reference to middle-class stoicism, here extends to women. This spirit is immortalized in Rudyard Kipling's poem "If," which suggests that "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs" then "Yours is the Earth." (<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/175772>). Gaskell keeps Margaret suffering silently because she views the expression of suffering as a shameful thing for middle-class women.

The dilemma of hard physical work in the home that is not recognized as work is developed in the novel not just in the plot, but also with a complicated play on the word "hand" both in the sense of a hand, the Milton term for a working-class worker, and in the sense of Margaret's own beautiful, capable hands. Margaret comes home because she wants to be "at hand to comfort to him and mama" (16). And, Margaret is indeed always at hand, arguably a hand, the Milton term she dislikes.

In a novel about labor struggles, she is the only one we see actually at work. Her father describes her as a hand, "Margaret is my staff- my right hand" (169). In fact, she is more like both his hands. It is not just her work, but her actual hands that are the focus of so many characters. Her mother comments that the constant cleaning of industrial pollution has her washing her hands three times before tea (82). When she struggles to light the fire, her brother, who does not realize the amount of work that has fallen to her, orders her to wash her hands, hands dirty from physical work, exclaiming, "I never saw such a little, awkward, good for nothing pair of hands!" (246).

Yet, Thornton's working-class sensibilities are "fascinated" by her "soft" "round ivory hands which moved with pretty, noiseless, daintiness" (79). At his dinner he

admires her, focusing primarily on her “taper hands, laid lightly across each other, but perfectly motionless in their pretty attitude” (162). Margaret at tea or at Thornton’s dinner presents an iconic picture of feminine beauty and domestic care.

Her hands, which were ironing the linens and scouring the floors in the last scene, are now unrecognizable as the hands that were “working away like a servant” that morning (76). She tells her mother she is both “Peggy the laundry-maid and Margaret Hale the lady” (76). After Thornton’s dinner party Margaret laments, “I felt like a great hypocrite to-night, sitting there in my white silk, with my idle hands before me, when I remembered all the good, thorough, house work I had done to-day” (167). She believes her hard labor has left a physical mark, as indeed it can, on her hands. Gaskell is describing two irreconcilable versions of Margaret’s hands to acknowledge the contradiction inherent in women’s domestic work.

There is an uncomfortable disconnect here between gender ambitions of feminine delicacy and the middle-class reality of tough economic times that put everyone, especially managing daughters, to work. Women’s domestic work included a multitude of difficult tasks hidden behind the cultural assertion that care for others was, what Sarah Stickney Ellis called a “high and holy duty,” rather than actual labor (23). Nancy Armstrong calls it, “labor that is not labor” (80). The different conceptions of Margaret’s hands show the dualism of middle-class domestic work, in which delicate, seemingly idle feminine hands are often by necessity the very ones engaging in the gritty physical labor of domestic care behind closed doors.

Margaret’s labor isn’t just challenging because it is hidden, it is also presented as more challenging than factory work because unlike those tasks which end when the

worker leaves the factory, Margaret is expected to care for others wherever she goes. A caring heart never stops. Sarah Stickney Ellis asserted that endless labor is an ideal. The “woman of right feeling” should concern herself with “How shall I endeavor through this day to turn the time, the health, and the means permitted me to the best account” (30). Women are uniquely advantaged to be able to “devote myself to the general good of the whole” (30). Margaret sees selfless comforting as a normal part of all relationships and, like Esther Summerson, crosses gender and class boundaries comforting everyone she meets, even stopping a factory riot as part of her “woman’s work.” Margaret’s caring labor is expected to be everywhere she goes. The millworker Bessy says, “when you’re here about me, I reckon I feel easier in my mind and comforted, just as a fire comforts one of a dree day.” (149). Even though she dreads it, she is the one who informs Boucher’s wife, who she has never even met before, of his suicide, staying long enough to rock her in her arms like a child (299). She cares for Edith and her aunt almost like a servant. Margaret becomes a kind of caring machine bent on soothing and comforting everyone she encounters. The novel initially admires, but later seems concerned about, her labor and is openly sympathetic to the hidden toll this takes on her.

Though her caring work is noticed by those outside the family in terms of her potential success as a future wife, she is seemingly unable to even imagine any role beyond that of a managing daughter. Her unflinching willingness to be a comfort to her parents impresses the hardworking doctor who exclaims, “That’s what I call a fine girl! ...What a queen she is! ... That girl’s game to the backbone!” Such a girl as that would win my heart” (127). The doctor recognizes her determination to bring comfort to others even if her family does not and worries that she will “overstrain herself” (127).

Thornton, too, recognizes that Margaret is the source of the domestic comfort the Hales find in Milton. The “graceful cares” that make their home comfortable are “especially of a piece with Margaret” (79). When he comes to tea the first time, he is struck by the contrast between his own opulent, but cold home and the Hale’s home, which is described as “comfortable,” “warm,” and “pretty,” a parallel to Margaret in her “pretty” pink dress (79). Her godfather, Mr. Bell, also admires her, though he knows at his advanced age he can only hope to have her as his “housekeeper – the village Lady Bountiful” or daughter (339). It is significant that the only people who ever recognize her caring work or the toll it takes on her are men outside the family. It is typical of a daughter’s caring labor as largely invisible, unappreciated, and exhausting within the family and yet arguably a marketable commodity on the marriage market outside the family.

Though she is admired by potential future husbands, her devotion to her family has made her put her own sexuality in stasis to serve her family. She is so committed to being a caring daughter that she is unable to think of herself as a wife and never even tells her father about her proposals. It is she who becomes the protector of the family though all her efforts are unrecognized and unappreciated. She is so committed to her idea of herself as caring daughter that she is unprepared for either of the two proposals she receives. She rejects Lennox on “instinct” because a home with him holds no attraction compared to life with her parents. His proposal makes her feel “guilty and ashamed of having grown so much into a woman as to be thought of in marriage” (32). Yet, the night before she leaves Helstone, it is Lennox she longs for in her dreams: “He was falling, and she was struggling to save him, but held back by some invisible powerful

hand” (43). Her commitment to her family, and especially her father, are indeed an invisible powerful hand firmly gripping her present and her future.

She rejects Thornton for much the same reason. She has never imagined herself marrying, and certainly not to Thornton, and is offended by his suggestion that there has been an attachment. It is not until she realizes that he is no longer interested that she even considers him or marriage:

Oh, how unhappy this last year has been. I have passed out of childhood into old age. I have had no youth- no womanhood; the hopes of womanhood have closed for me- for I shall never marry; and I anticipate cares and sorrows just as if I were an old woman, and with the same fearful spirit. I am weary of this continual call upon me for strength. ... ‘No, I will not, though’ said she springing to her feet. ‘I will not – I *will* not think of myself and my own position. I won’t examine into my own feelings.” (322)

Excessive caring for others has kept her from caring for herself in the most important daughterly way. Putting her own life in a sexual stasis, the opportunities for a different home with a husband have passed her. She still refuses to examine her own feelings even as she realizes she must at long last “take her life into her own hands” (416).

In the end Margaret’s marriage to Thornton enables her to have the home and a clear role with some authority within it as his wife. Many of the stresses of Margaret’s life as a managing daughter are resolved with the authority and stability marriage offers. “Miss Hale is a guardian to herself,” Thornton tells his mother (312). This suggests a positive endpoint for the managing daughter who has developed the ability to manage herself once her parents have died. However, the stresses of domestic work, the invisible and thankless exhausting tasks of comforting others physically and emotionally, do not disappear with marriage. In Margaret, we see the displaced daughter able to claim a

much longed for home, yet we come to understand that the domestic labor of her past and future life, framed against the industrial labor that surrounds her, can also be exhausting and exploitive.

Chapter Five: Being “a Comfort to Papa:” Margaret Oliphant’s Managing Daughter

Approaching her thirtieth birthday and the ten-year anniversary of her decision to stay unmarried and at home to be “a comfort to Papa,” the managing daughter and title character of Margaret Oliphant’s *Miss Marjoribanks* grows reflective:

To be sure, there were still the dinners to attend to, a branch of human affairs worthy of the weightiest consideration, and she had a house of her own, as much as if she had been half a dozen times married; but still there are instincts which go even beyond dinners, and Lucilla had become conscious that her capabilities were greater than her work. (395)

This passage reflects well the sharp irony of the narrator who is remarkably traditional in asserting domestic management as the proper sphere for women, yet radical in constantly trivializing that work and the managing daughter, Lucilla, who does it. Oliphant’s Lucilla of Grove Street is a clear parody of Hannah More’s Lucilla of the Grove and other novelistic daughters who present the idealized view of domestic management as challenging but necessary, meaningful, private, and, above all, deeply emotional work. With a light and pleasurable irony, Oliphant humorously applies the standard conventions used to describe idealized domestic management to her Lucilla. In doing so, she reveals domestic work as a complex blend of frivolous, even selfish, yet empowering and enjoyably public labor. She also, more significantly, deconstructs the emotional scaffolding that holds domestic relationships together, even as she advocates for traditional family hierarchies and praises domestic labor as the best, if not only, path for women. She shows that love need not be the basis for domestic caring or family relationships and that there can be hidden power and pleasure in what is seemingly the most conventional of domestic work. Oliphant’s Lucilla shows that doing one’s duty can actually be satisfying and rewarding, even if it is at times trivial, and more significantly

that daughters and even wives, for Lucilla ends the novel as a bride, may care for others in very successful traditional ways without necessarily needing to have deep emotional connections to those whom they comfort and care. Oliphant's Lucilla suggests an entirely new kind of dutiful daughter and future wife, one who "managed to please everybody by having her own way" and who is emotionally at best only capable of "feelings sufficiently real in their way" (133, 27).

Throughout the nineteenth century domestic management was idealized as sanctified work for wives who ensure the comfort of others out of duty and an innate selfless love for others. For daughters who assisted their mothers or, in many cases, managed the households alone, it was advocated as both essential training and evidence of familial duty and affection. The idealized view of domestic labor and the women who do it emerged early in the period. Evangelical author Hannah More's 1809 *Coelebus in Search of a Wife*, a conduct book thinly disguised as a novel, is in many ways a training manual for dutiful daughters hoping to become wives. It offers lengthy sermons by the father of the skills and behaviors he has taught his daughter Lucilla coupled with moralizing descriptions by their young house guest Charles, who eventually marries Lucilla, about Lucilla's virtues in action. The ideal More proposes comes to a zenith by the 1850s with numerous novels offering poignant examples of dutiful managing daughters. Margaret Hale in Elizabeth Gaskell's 1854 *North and South* and even pseudo-daughters like Esther Summerson in Charles Dickens 1853 *Bleak House* depict managing daughters silently enduring sleepless nights and long days agonizing over the family they care for at great costs to themselves. These novels highlight the emotional and physical frustrations of domestic care, a truth that often can't easily be acknowledged by angelic

wives, yet suggest that stability and real authority or empowerment is possible only in marriage. They suggest that a daughter's life in her father's home should prepare her to accept the wedding ring and angel's wings of a Victorian wife. Daughters, they advocate, should be wives-in-training who must learn to suffer domestic struggles in serene silence because it is their duty to the family and because they love those for whom they care.

However, Margaret Oliphant's 1866 novel *Miss Marjoribanks* indicates an interesting cultural shift in the way domestic labor and the dutiful managing daughter who do that work can be imagined. Early critics viewed Oliphant's novels as "wholesome" accounts of Victorian middle-class values that were "safe to give to children," a claim to fame which almost sent her out of print (Clark 131). Since the 1990s critics have called for a reassessment of Oliphant, stating that novels like *Miss Marjoribanks* offer a much more complicated critique of Victorian life for women. Elizabeth Langland praises Lucilla as a woman who "hoards the clichés of her culture like candy and serves them back to a gullible public" as she consolidates class and gender power in her bourgeois domestic management (26). Margaret Oliphant was distrustful of politics and suspicious of anything theoretical, including feminism. She vehemently opposed women's suffrage and women's advances in equal employment and as a result developed a reputation as antifeminist. However, as Merryn Williams and Elizabeth Jays have shown, Oliphant's feminism is as nuanced and complex as her irony.

Critics who read Oliphant assert that understanding the target of her irony is the key to understanding the novel and Oliphant's own complex feminism. In *Miss Marjoribanks* irony appears through both her conventional and likable, but self-serving

heroine, Lucilla, and in her emotionally detached narrator, who functions almost like a character. Carefully balanced between idealism and cynicism, her irony is fluid, directed at heroine, narrator, and the world at large, and unrelenting even in somber moments of the novel. Oliphant's irony is slippery making it difficult to track her targets. It shifts effortlessly between dark truths and playful teasing. For example, it reveals the harsh reality of a daughter's inability to grieve for her mother at one moment and then a playful mock-heroic battle between her heroine and her cook over the sauces in the next scene. As a result, critics disagree about its ultimate tone or target. Many critics see Oliphant's irony as "gentle subversions" hidden in conventionality (Trela). In a recent work, Andrea Kanston Tange, for example, suggests the irony is directed at a playful exploration of feminine identity in a world frustratingly limited to the drawing room. Others, though, like Linda Peterson and Patricia Stubbs, argue that there is a much darker tone in some places. They assert Oliphant's irony reflects a disgust with the mundane life of decorating and entertaining that has come to define women's work and attacks the "hollow promises of feminism," which offer little real alternative (Stubbs 68). Gail Houston and Margaret Homans complicate this further by suggesting the irony is entirely political and directed at specific, but remarkably very different, public figures, while Elsie Michie, who also agrees the target is political, argues it is an ideological swipe at theories of capitalism and Mill's utilitarianism. All that critics seem to agree on is that "Oliphant constantly undercuts the heroic and idealized view of life" (Rubik 131).

Indeed, Oliphant's mock-heroic managing daughter and her almost anti-idealized domestic labor are the center of this novel and its witty fun. Oliphant's Lucilla, who lives on Grave Street, is likely a parody of Hannah More's Lucilla, who lives at a house named

The Grove. Both novels depict idealized adult managing daughters who care for their father and his household, but Oliphant twists the clichés of domestic caring dry with her Lucilla. Oliphant would certainly have known of More's work, as it was still being reprinted when *Miss Marjoribanks* was published, and was still extremely popular (Stott). More's Lucilla is an idealized version of feminine virtue. Through her Lucilla, More argues that a daughter's domestic care is challenging, private work needed by a family to thrive, and grounded in familial love. It suggests the purpose, and presumably the pleasure, of being a daughter is the potential it offers to be a good wife. More's humorless, pedantic Lucilla and the conventional ideals she represents would have been an easy target for Oliphant's sharp wit. In More's version, we read about the mind and character of Lucilla from her housekeeper, her sister, her mother, and extensively from her father. Yet, she makes few actual appearances in the novel and speaks at length only once. The narrator, Charles, makes pronouncements about her virtues, but he is unable to see what she is really thinking or feeling. Oliphant changes this perspective in *Miss Marjoribanks*, taking us and the narrator directly into Lucilla's mind. From this vantage point, we and the narrator see how the qualities More advocates for a daughter might have amusing or even shocking consequences when put into action. This is not to say that Oliphant's Lucilla is a rebel. "I always make it a point to give in to the prejudices of society," she announces primly (72). She warmly embraces the rhetoric of idealized domesticity and a daughter's duty. Yet, her experience of this life is one in which her labor and her relationship to her father are remarkably different. Oliphant's Lucilla suggests that domestic labor can be easy, trivial and even selfish, notoriously public and

most shockingly of all, emotionally empty all within a traditional family structure that actually works quite well for all involved.

On the surface, More and Oliphant offer very similar portraits of domestic labor in the managing daughters both novels call “genius.” More’s Lucilla, the “presiding genius” of her father’s home in the Grove, has much in common with Oliphant’s “genius” on Grove Street (2848, 81). Mrs. Comfit, the housekeeper in *Coelebus*, makes it clear that More’s Lucilla bears all the burdens of her home: “She has taken all the family cares from her mamma” (1266). More’s Lucilla makes sure her mother “has no care, nor trouble” because it is she who is “always at home, always employed” (5210). Oliphant’s Lucilla has lost her mother and is thus in a more confusing place. Without a mother there is no one to encourage or discourage her domestic authority. She eagerly imagines taking not just the hidden labor expected of daughters, but “the reins of state” and all domestic decisions out of her father’s hands (50). Both women engage in domestic work that is extensive and seemingly endless. More’s Lucilla inspects the household, orders food and supplies, prepares menus with the cook, skillfully handles the accounts, makes breakfast, supervises the younger children, nurses those who are ill, and reads and writes her father’s letters (1275). Oliphant’s Lucilla does all this and redecorates the house and plans weekly dinners evening gatherings for the community in their home. More’s father is very proud of her ability to improve “the garnish and decorations of life” in their home. She has developed a “passion” for gardening and manages the grounds and the gardens with an aesthetic and practical skill that is repeatedly described as “genius” (1304). Oliphant’s father, too, is “amazed and amused” by his daughter’s domestic enthusiasm (50). More’s Lucilla is described as selfless,

understanding fully that “life is too short and its duties too various and important” to waste time on “selfish” music, books, dress, or any interest that does not directly benefit others (1304). Her mother laments the wasted efforts of other parents who have “educated their daughters for holidays and wonder that they are of no use” in their own home (3933). Bred not for “showy accomplishments,” her father repeatedly stresses that Lucilla has been trained in “practical” skills (2341). Oliphant’s Lucilla claims her serious education in “political economy” has given her practical skills that help her “manage everything” (33). She, who excuses her evening gatherings as necessary for her father’s comfort, also disdains parties, professional musicians, and elaborate dress. She tells her father parties are “dreadful,” because of the young people who are not what she views as “society” (70). She also rejects any discussion of fashion and insists on the “sweet simplicity” of “a white frock high in the neck” as the only attire appropriate for herself and the other single women (74). In addition, both Lucillas also serve their community. Both are actively involved in the village charity school and both take advisory roles with both men and women in the community. More’s Lucilla advises cottagers when to prune their rose bushes and plant their lettuce and it is she whom the neighbors seek out to review the architectural plans of their conservatory. Her father summarizes her extensive duties saying, “We encourage her to give us her opinion on matters of business as well as of taste.” (4523). Oliphant’s Lucilla is instrumental in several marriages and advises many of the men in the community on politics. She is “a Power in Carlingford” (395).

The differences become apparent most notably through Oliphant’s delightful ironic narrator. More’s Lucilla is described quite sincerely as a Christian soldier in the home fighting behind the scenes for its every comfort. Her caring labors, her father

proudly proclaims, are “nobler ways of exercising courage than even in the field of battle” (3914). Arguably, this metaphor of domestic warfare was quite conventional, even predictable, by the time of Oliphant’s novel. Isabella Beeton’s famous *Book of Household Management*, an established success with over six million in print by the time Oliphant wrote *Miss Marchbanks*, had used this same military metaphor to describe the importance of a domestic manager in the very sentence which opens the work (i): “As with the commander of an Army, or the leader of any enterprise, it is with the Mistress of a house. Her spirit will be seen through the whole establishment” (1). Oliphant twists this with her narrator who uses these same military metaphors to describe the trivial and often selfish preoccupations of her Lucilla. The narrator call her desire to plan menus and redecorate her drawing room overdramatically as “battles ” and her weekly Thursday gatherings an attempt to “revolutionize society” (36).

Oliphant’s narrator arms Lucilla in her battles with a weapon no one can counter or question. No matter what she faces she can always assert herself using the rhetoric of domestic care, particularly the claim that she wants to “be a comfort to papa.” She says this sixteen times in the novel, usually when trying to get her own way in some struggle. For example, her “victory” over her father’s “prime minister” and cook, Nancy, begins and ends with her assertive parry that her only desire is to be a “comfort to her father (51).” When Lucilla arrives, Nancy raises real concerns about women not always understanding the costs of meals and the preferences of men. Instead of responding to her issues, Lucilla repeats her mantra, in what in this case seems almost to be a non-sequitur: “I want you to know the object of my life is to be a comfort to poor Papa; and now let us think what we had better have for diner” (52). The battle is over almost as

soon as it begins leaving Nancy “mystified” and unable to object (52). Though she has real concerns about Lucilla’s capabilities, she cannot argue with a daughter’s desire to comfort her father. The narrator shows how she uses domestic rhetoric to justify “dethroning” her father and his cook. Caring for her father becomes the rationale for her trivial need to get control of the menus (52).

Nancy is her first battle, but certainly not her last. Her battle with the impoverished singer Barbara Lake satisfies her selfish and vain plans to be the center of Carlingford society. She finds a way to highlight her voice, “which had been used to applause,” without the “bad style” of dominating the evening or being too obvious in her need for attention (59). She pushes into the Lake home after hearing Barbara sing and ruffles her pride until she agrees to sing with her. Instead of offering any clear reason or explanation for her interest in Barbara, who is not only socially beneath her, but sullen and argumentative, she throws out her standard domestic cliché: “You know, my dear, it is not as if I was asking you for mere amusement to myself; my grand object in life is to be a comfort to papa” (56). Barbara is understandably “amazed and indignant” by this intrusion and bizarre invitation and doesn’t understand how their duet could comfort Dr. Marchbanks. Lucilla simply repeats her mantra again. “I wish you would not talk in riddles,” Barbara responds (56). Yet, she agrees because she, like Nancy, has no easy answer to a plea justified by such conventional domestic rhetoric. The narrator explains that Lucilla is “the accomplished warrior, who had her wits always about her, and had made, while engaged in a simple reconnaissance, so brilliant and successful a capture (59). The narrator’s ironic tone and martial metaphors show that the rhetoric is empty and the battle one in which what really wins is Lucilla’s vanity and pride.

Even when she ventures “like Joan of Arc” into politics, the narrator shows that her “active mind” and “great energies” stray no further than the trivial (347, 405). Politics relieves her of her evenings, which had become a “bore” (395). It also makes her metaphoric “campaign” an actually political campaign, yet her battle for Parliament is no different than her battle for sauces (395). Even in the serious arena of politics, she reduces the election to triviality, frivolousness and empty rhetoric. Once she has chosen her man, Mr. Ashburton, she addresses him privately and intently: “There is one thing that is really important and must be fixed upon. If we were to make any mistake you know” (349). Then, she proceeds to hold up ribbons from her redecorated sofa to her face and suggest he adopt her colors for his campaign. Political positions carry less weight for her than drapery or campaign colors. Worse, she convinces him and quite a few other men that his views are irrelevant. “What did it matter about opinions, if it was a good man,” she asserts with full conviction and remarkable persuasive power (379). She repeats this hollow phrase, a vague critique of his opponent whose class position and background is less known until bizarrely it begins to influence voters. Yet, the narrator’s irony makes it clear that what really matters to her is her own boredom and a selfish need for influence: “There is little good in existence of a Power unless it can be made of use for some worthy end” (395). Her political campaign is no different from any battle she faces. It is a means to a selfish end justified by hollow domestic rhetoric. It is important to note that her selfishness is not offered as a lesson and Oliphant offers no alternatives to Lucilla’s strategies or punishments for her selfishness. Lucilla has no ethical awakening, even when her father dies mid-election. This indicates that there simply isn’t much at

stake. It suggests that the Parliament position, like her father's role in the home, is a hollow title devoid of any real power or authority.

The narrator's irony in Oliphant's novel shows the shallow and often selfish battles of her Lucilla. Yet, that is not the only striking difference the ironic narrator illustrates between the two Lucillas. While More's Lucilla works in the background silently, Oliphant's Lucilla is anything but hidden or silent. More's Lucilla engages in her extensive domestic labor in the silent and long-suffering manner idealized in depictions of wives and managing daughters. In fact, although Lucilla is the central focus of the novel, she is largely absent from all but one conversation in the lengthy novel. Charles "catches" her at work occasionally, but for the most part we are told she is "at her duties," obviously busy elsewhere keeping the house running (2812). Her neighbor praises her stating,

Economists of a higher strain execute their well-ordered plan as an indispensable duty, but not as a superlative merit. They have too much sense to talk of it. It is their business, not their boast. The effect is produced, but the hand which accomplishes it is not seen. The mechanism is set at work, but it is behind the scenes. The beauty is visible; the labor is kept out of sight. (3866)

The domestic fantasy here is a common one of the period, and arguably even today. The work of running a home just happens. It is a multitude of ongoing invisible tasks, "a mechanism" or machine that operates quietly and privately behind the scenes. Nancy Armstrong calls woman's work of the Victorian period "labor that is not labor" because it required a woman to "disappear into the woodwork to watch over the household" (80). It is work which women never expect to even have noticed, and certainly not praised.

Though we never see More's Lucilla's pleasures or frustrations, we are assured that she is

assuredly the hidden hand that makes the in the well-regulated home and beautiful gardens function.

In contrast, Oliphant's Lucilla never hides her work. In fact, domestic work seems at times almost theatrical stage crafting in part because of the studied detail we see deliberately put into each choice and action and the need she seems to have for an audience. Oliphant takes us into the mind of Lucilla to show us the most mundane of domestic tasks, from lighting a fire to choosing draperies, are often motivated as much by the need for public display as they are from necessity. The fire in the drawing room and the draperies are both far more the result of Lucilla's desire to create the domestic scene which makes her *look* like a caring domestic manager than out of any real interest in the needs of others. Her father hates the fire, demanding it be put out immediately and finds the redecoration unnecessary and annoying. "I never heard that was a sort of thing a man had to do for his daughter," he huffs at her irritably (68). As a young woman with little real preparation for domestic management and without the authority of a wife, these shows vividly consolidate and illustrate her power and authority in the home. She becomes the domestic manager because she looks it.

Theatricality is not actually an unusual or even necessarily negative feature in idealized descriptions of domestic care. Idealized views of domestic care are often portrayed in scenes of extreme and dramatic action. More's hero falls in love with her Lucilla in a scene so melodramatic it seems almost maudlin. Charles stumbles into a tenant's cottage looking for Lucilla's favorite roses and "accidentally" finds her reading Psalms aloud with a dying woman gasping her last breath in her arms: "Her labor of love gave her a naturally animated countenance, formed a fine contrast to the angelic

tranquility and calm devotion which sat on the sweet face of Lucilla” (4543). He claims “faith hope and charity seem to beam from her fine uplifted eyes” (4543). He is immediately overwhelmed by the picture she presents and rushes to her father to arrange their marriage. Oliphant uses this same theatrical technique, but lowers the stakes considerably. Instead of dying cottagers, her Lucilla has a series of much more mundane, but nonetheless dramatic moments.

One of the best examples of this is the “pretty picture” Lucilla makes for her father to get him to consent to her redecoration and her dinners. Her father discovers her plans for a renovation he sees unnecessary when he finds her preening girlishly in front of a mirror “triumphantly” testing ribbons the color of her proposed curtains against her “tawny curls,” “fresh complexion,” and “vestal” white dress (68). The narrator mocks her frivolousness and the self-indulgent pleasure of this experience which is shared by her father and cousin in a moment that seems to suggest familial openness and intimacy. “I don’t mind talking before Tom, for he is one of the family,” she begins her scene (67). She stages herself to her best advantage as an attractive and young woman in white eagerly trying to make the home more comfortable. While the “large” Lucilla is far from beautiful, the picture she paints of herself as a young and vulnerable woman is charming and appealing to her father and her lovesick cousin (27). She makes the need for carpets and curtains both intensely personal and pleasurable: “Lucilla was quite in earnest in thinking that the color of the drawing room was an important matter, and that a woman of sense had a very good reason for suiting it to her complexion” (68). The curtains and draperies merge into the woman herself becoming part of her identity and her authority. Though she is “the natural mistress of the house,” her father has been reluctant to allow

her control or authority (47). Scenes like this show him his daughter in a kind of feminine power, attractive and focused on the comforts of the home, a role which has power in part, as Nancy Armstrong has noted, because it seems so completely disinterested in power. Her father, who shares the narrator's amusement, leaves the scene smiling. The narrator concludes, "Lucilla would have everything her own way" (71).

This room would be the scenes of her great "triumphs" and she sets it like a stage with the community like an eager audience peeking in the windows as she plans her social conquests. The domestic work she does is incredibly public and remarkably theatrical from the upholsterer's "astonishment" when she repeats this very scene for him to the duet she sings poised in front of the new curtains. The narrator's tone makes these scenes more like a comedy than the drama More offers, yet they are essentially the same theatrical staging More uses to allow women a place of respect and honor. Spectators provide the stamp of approval that empowers both Lucillas.

The advantage of seeing into the mind and heart of Oliphant's Lucilla is that it suggests truths about domestic work that More's silent paragon would likely never utter. As More explained, hard work "is their business, not their boast" (3866). The difficulty of the work is part of what makes it supposedly meaningful. Being selfless and caring for others is its own reward. The idea that those tasks might just also be pleasurable in themselves is a challenge to the notion of selfless care. Any yet, that is exactly what Oliphant's Lucilla shows. While both Lucillas are from similar socio-economic conditions and the demands upon them quite similar, Oliphant's narrator does not hesitate to show that her Lucilla takes undeniable pleasure in much of her work. When trying to lure Rose Lake back to her public entertainments she asks rhetorically, "You don't think I

chose it for the pleasure?" (177). The question is a moment of rich irony because it is clear that Lucilla fully enjoys her work. The narrator mocks her supposed heroism in claiming she "won't shrink from my duty" because she enjoys being "the queen of Carlingford" (178). She is verbally petted and praised by both her staff and the community. She is enthusiastically hailed as a "genius" by her satisfied guests and thoroughly enjoys their praise. Even Nancy is won over declaring, "There ain't one young lady in a hundred as knows what's good for her, like Miss Lucilla" (144). As her evenings become legendary, her guests rave, "Nobody but Lucilla could have thought of anything so delicious" each time she offers a slight change to the events (154). Beeton describes a very similar reward both in the satisfaction of a job well done and in the power of such a position:

She ought always remember that she is the first and the last the Alpha and the Omega in the government of her establishment; and that it is by her conduct that its whole internal policy is regulated. She is, therefore, a person of far more importance in her community than she usually thinks she is. (29)

Oliphant's Lucilla accepts this as her due knowing she is "a Power" and enjoying every minute of the work that makes her such (395). She shows that domestic labor can be enjoyable in and of itself and reveals that the status it builds for women is also deeply rewarding and empowering not only in the home, but also in the community.

The question of why the labor of the Lucillas is so different is an important one that actually goes to the heart of the very different family structures. Both Lucillas have a patriarchal father who is, at least in theory, at the top of the family hierarchy. Their relationship to their fathers shapes not only their position in the family, but also the way they approach marriage and how they understand domestic duty itself. More's Lucilla

has an unusually engaged father who raises her to a concept of duty grounded in the deep affection and respect they feel for one another. Oliphant's Lucilla challenges the notion of duty and care based on affection or emotional connection. Her Lucilla essentially trains herself as her stoic disengaged father retreats from any responsibility for her. The concept of duty that emerges from such a relationship is, not surprisingly, emotionally detached. It suggests a shockingly depersonalized, yet potentially liberating, new model of family structure that still maintains in appearance its traditional and conventional patriarchal structure.

More's father is unusually actively engaged in his daughter's domestic development. Conduct books make it clear that the mother and wife is the person, structurally beneath the father, who would oversee the children, even the adult daughters in the home. Instead of the wife, who would generally be the one to train her daughter, he takes on these responsibilities. Daughters must become "her mother's right hand assistant" (*Female Excellence* 154). It is only at the end of the novel we learn he does so because he has promised Charles' father that he will raise his Lucilla to be an ideal wife for Charles. He has made a gentleman's agreement to personally oversee his daughter's development. He describes himself as a gardener tending the "blossom of talents" in his daughters (4331). In Lucilla, this propensity has been directed toward what is called "domestic economy" (3866). At the heart of More's presumptions about caring work is that idea that caring acts are motivated entirely by love. She believes that behind the clichés is a caring heart. This is typical of the domestic care which sociologists like Marjorie DeVault argue is so embedded in family relations that it is usually seen not as work, but as "love ... as not quite a job, but as "something different"

(10). As Arlie Russell Hochschild explains, “most care labor is so personal, so involved with feeling, that we rarely imagine it to be work” (16). More claims that her Lucilla “relishes the superior pleasure” of caring for others (5486). Her work is rooted in her concept that “charity itself is an indulgence” (4959). Indeed, her father asserts that “Charity is the calling of a lady. The care of the poor is her profession” (2828). We assume her work is based on an emotional connection to others, but interestingly there is not an easy way to tell if this in fact accurate and her treatment of the gardener actually raises questions about her benevolent actions. The gardener tells Charles about Lucilla’s care for him saying,

She is always watching for fear it should it be too hot or too cold or too wet for me and she brings me my dose of bark herself into this tool house that she may be sure I take it for she says servants and poor people like to have medications provided them but don’t care to take them then ...she watches that I don’t throw my coat on the wet grass which she says gives laboring men so much rheumatism and she made me this nice flannel waistcoat with her own hands. (3041)

Charles never assumes her careful surveillance and care for the man who keeps her beloved gardens tended could ever be motivated by anything except compassion and kindness. The fact that she still requires work from a man this old and that he is essential to her one “passion” is never explored. It is simply understood that her care for the gardener, like her care for her father is based on an emotional connection.

The emotional relationship with her father, though, is much easier to see and understand. He takes a special pride in her “presiding genius” and praises her well above her sister or even his wife, whom he is remarkably silent about (2848). Her father seems to genuinely love her and dread her future marriage even as he prepares her for it and essentially woos Charles with her praises for her. He tells Charles that she is “not only

our delightful companion, but our confidential friend” (4523). He describes her in a kind of companionate relationship far more typical of a wife than a daughter. Although, it must be noted that he has agreed to her marriage and approved of Charles, so perhaps this is part of what he sees as a necessary sales pitch and a way of structuring her future role with Charles. Her family is so attached to her that even after Charles proposes they are unwilling to let her go. She is their “treasure” and they view her departure as a “heavy trial” and “sadness” refusing to allow them to marry for several years until she is nineteen (5152).

Oliphant’s Lucilla encounters a very different experience in her home. The novel opens with such a shocking lack of sentimentality about family affection that Oliphant’s early editor begged for a revision (vii Jays). The novel opens on Lucilla and her father unable to grieve for the “useless” woman who had been wife and mother respectively (27). The lack of real care in what should be a sublime moment of emotional pain is conveyed by the narrator with a hard, dark irony. It is appropriate though for this home headed by a father who has only “the remains of a heart” (25). He is “too busy a man to waste his feelings on mere sentiment” for his wife, whom he seems to have forgotten long before her death, or for his eager emotional daughter (25). When Lucilla comes home at fifteen for her mother’s funeral, she is an idealistic child who enjoys thinking about and then finally clumsily proposing in a dramatic tearful scene to sacrifice herself in order to be “a comfort” to her father (31). She is, like most school girls, ready for liberation from the classroom sees “being a comfort” as a convenient means to that end. The narrator makes it clear that her tears are for dramatic effect. He describes her feelings as “sufficiently real in their way” (27). Her father is a stoic, emotionally distant

man who has long been accustomed to his own company. He sends her away, explaining not only that he doesn't need her, but that "the responsibility of having you here ... would not neutralize any comfort you might be" (32). He is very clear about the fact that she is unable to ever bring him comfort:

It would have been a satisfaction to him just then to have been left to himself, and permitted to work on quietly at his profession, and to write his papers for the *Lancet*, and to see his friends now and then when he chose; for Dr Marjoribanks was not a man who had any great need of sympathy by nature. (30)

Instead of seeing her as a comfort, he views her with "dismay" and faces the scene in which he send her back to school as "an embarrassment" (30). He exiles her back to school and keeps her there as long as possible.

The problem for Oliphant's Lucilla is not just that she is not wanted, but that she is not really needed. Her father has a housekeeper and staff that take care of his every need and he entertains his male friends at well-respected dinners which are the social life he desires. The narrator explains, "it was undeniable that he managed tolerably well in external matters, and gave very good men's dinners, and kept everything in perfect order" (34). His cook is a "great artiste" whose sauces make him "unrivaled in Grange Lane" (35). His home is one that has "gotten along well without any mistress" (35). Lucilla is aware of her father's content and relatively successful social life and "piqued to think that they owed nothing to herself," but there is nothing she can do about this (36). The narrator's detached irony brutally shows at times the reality of this situation. The fact is that as much as she might want to be a comfort to her father, she is simply not wanted or

needed. For a managing daughter a self-sufficient father is a problem that Oliphant shows challenges the ethics of domestic care More's Lucilla has established. Their relationship is one that builds slowly, but it never reaches the level of love.

The interesting revelation of the novel is not just that Oliphant's Lucilla and her father never emotionally bond, but that it seems neither is capable of a deep emotional connection. Considering that "the object of my life" is to bring him comfort, it is disconcerting to realize she never does and probably never could because of the insurmountable emotional distance between them (42). He greets her with the almost comically detached, "Well, Lucilla; so this is you!" (49). To which she responds coolly, having learned on her last visit home the error of emotional outbursts, "Yes, papa, it is me" (49). Once he sees her plan to manage the house, he responds with a "Humph" and "became aware all the same that he had abdicated" (50). He disconnects from daughter and home, appearing almost as a guest at the dinners she now controls. Other than telling her she should marry and marry well, he never offers her advice or attempts to direct her in any way. He also never praises her or acknowledges any comfort she brings him. He is fond of her and this feeling grows, but it is always clear there is little she can do to bring this independent man comfort and that he might even prefer her gone. He views women as a "restless and troublesome" element which he has kept "long peacefully ignored and kept at a distance" (73). He "was not a man to feel so keenly as some men might have felt the enthusiasm of filial devotion" (203). He has a "respect" for her, but "felt a consoling conviction that she was quite able to conduct her own affairs" and would not need his help or advice (203). He takes little pleasure in the evenings she claims will be a comfort. If anything they become little more than background noise to

his own solitary pursuits. The narrator says, “after looking on for a little with a half amused consciousness that his own assistance was totally unnecessary” he retreats to a corner and then his library (124). His only gesture of warmth or comfort is to put his hand on her shoulder the night before he dies. It is an affectionate gesture so unusual that she seeks him out after he retires only to be gruffly sent away.

With an emotionally disengaged father it is not surprising that Lucilla is equally emotionally detached not just with him, but with her potential suitors as well. Elsie Mitchie has noted the significance of John Stuart Mill in Oliphant’s critiques of wealth as a means to an end. It seems clear though that Oliphant’s Lucilla is also at times not afraid to suggest what would have horrified Mill most, that caring women can sometimes use other people as means to their ends. The harsh narrative voice makes it easy at times to read Lucilla as a cold and calculating woman. Nancy, Barbara, Rose, even Cavendish, she evaluates based on how they may “be of use” to her (54). Her lack of humor, a “defect” she acknowledges to snubs the witty Mrs. Woodburn, is actually quite accurate and quite revealing. Pablo Neruda says laughter is the language of the soul. Lucilla doesn’t understand humor for the same reason she doesn’t understand the feelings of others. Barbara Lake, and even Cavendish, ruled by their passion for one another, are a mystery to the rational, practical Lucilla. She never even feels the need for revenge against Cavendish for his very public rejection in her own home. Her lack of visible pain is so striking the ladies gossip about it. Lady Richmond says, “I am sure she is full of feeling; It is sure to come out when she sings” (153). She repeatedly says of each potential and failed suitor that “my heart was never engaged” and it seems clear that it is her pride, not her heart, that is wounded by Cavendish’s passion for Barbara. Lucilla is

puzzled by his impractical choice for the impoverished and socially obscure Barbara, sadly calling it “proof of the imperfection of human nature” (340).

She is so emotionally disconnected from others that she never hesitates to manipulate others for her own ends. She humiliates and manipulates Mrs. Mortimer and the rector when it serves her interests: “She did not hesitate as a weaker woman might have done out of consideration for anybody’s feelings” (86). She does the same to Cavendish and indirectly his sister, seemingly unconcerned about their social ruin in a darkly amusing scene in which she, like a puppet master, pulls and presses the emotional strings of others at a dinner scene reminiscent of the comic savagery of human nature common in an eighteenth century play. Cavendish is placed right in the light and across from the minister determined to destroy him. He is exposed in the light just after Lucilla has pretended to swoon after claiming he is her sweetheart. Neither Cavendish’s morals nor his supposed bad behavior to Mrs. Mortimer concern her. She doesn’t really even care if Cavendish is a scheming social pretender as long as it doesn’t “destroy public confidence forever in the social leaders,” meaning her (171). She blames Barbara’s “selfishness” for destroying Rose’s career instead of seeing how she herself may have inadvertently hurt Rose by toying with Barbara until she is so ashamed and depressed she leaves town to governess.

Lucilla’s very obsession with domestic trivialities, a factor which has led critics to dismiss the novel entirely, is in many ways indicative of a lack of interiority, or psychological depth in Lucilla. This is a woman obsessed with domestic details because she lacks the capacity for deep emotional connections that would otherwise fill her life. Her domestic labor is the opposite of More’s conventional picture. She performs her

duties precisely because she does not have deep feelings for others. She has no friends with whom she shares any real details of her life. When she announces her engagement, her closest friend and mother substitute, Mrs. Chiley, guesses two possible alternative suitors first. She is so emotionally disconnected even from her closest companion that Mrs. Chiley never imagines Tom as her future husband.

Her marriage to Tom is perhaps the best example of the lack of emotional center in her domestic care and in the ways he understands family connections. She is told in school before she even comes home that she cannot remain a managing daughter all her life. Listening to her grand plans, her school friend pipes up, “But, you cannot go on all your life being a comfort to dear papa” (39). Her response is a flippant “profanity,” “We must leave that to Providence” (39). Managing daughters could not expect to remain managing their father’s homes forever. There was always the possibility of their father’s remarriage, financial problems, or even his death could unseat a managing daughter. It was not a safe and stable position. When Tom proposes to her at nineteen she tells him “duty is happiness” and that she has decided that it is “not fun to be married” (93). His intrusion into her plans gives her a nightmare in which the rector, “with inflexible cruelty” marries her to Tom (83). She sends Tom to India in hopes that her “awkward and “unlucky” cousin will improve or at least be out of her way (82). Her father, who considers Tom “an ass” who will never be more than a poor man encourages his departure and distance (400). She is young and has a vision of herself as ministering daughter, which is only complicated by potential suitors.

Once he is out of the picture she toys with the idea of marriage several times, but Lucilla seems incapable of passion or romantic love. Her claim is that she stays home to

care for her father, but it is clear she never finds anyone whom she can love. She tells her father she would not “swindle him” by marrying for at least ten years since he has renovated the house for her (203). She announces she will wait until she has been home ten years, until she has begun to “go off” (69). Marriage ages throughout the period were rising, but this is still an usually long wait at home. The average age of marriage for middle-class women climbed from age 20 in 1803 to age 25 by 1851 (Branca). The 1851 census calculated that 40% of all women, including 28% of women under age 25, were unmarried (Branca). As suitors come and go it is clear she would “reconsider her resolution” but as she always says her “affections were not engaged” (110, 131). The absence of a potential stepmother, although her father’s brief flirtation with Mrs. Mortimer “struck at the root of all faith in him as a father,” and lack of an acceptable groom keep Lucilla home longer than she anticipates (300). She considers Mr. Cavendish, the rector, and Mr. Ashburton, but all three fall for other women.

There is a suggestion in the novel that without a husband to please Lucilla has a great advantage over married women. None of the marriages in the novel from Lucilla’s parents outward seem to be enjoyable to rewarding. Dr. Marchbanks feels his “incapable bride” had “wearied his life out” (67, 31). Mrs. Woodburn offers one of the worst examples. Her husband, “for whom she had contempt,” has a “cruel and overwhelming power over her and she fears him more than she loves him” (305). She envies Lucilla and thinks,

It would be very foolish of Miss Marchbanks to marry, and forfeit all her advantages, and take somebody else’s anxiety upon her shoulders and never have any money except what she asked from her husband (374).

Even loving couples fail to provide models of partnership and independence. The rector loves Mrs. Mortimer, but her opinion “had not the weight of straw upon him” and he is willing to make her miserable to prove a point (318).

For Lucilla, marriage seems unnecessary to independence and contrary to happiness. This is a remarkably interesting discovery that challenges much of what other managing daughters have encountered in novels of the period. Margaret Hale in *North and South* and Esther Summerson in *Bleak House* both find real independence and authority only in their marriages. Margaret and Esther both led lives of constantly shifting and often exploitive physical and emotional labor with little sense of power or authority in the homes. Their love and sense of obligation for the family they manage keeps them trapped in powerless and exhausting responsibilities without a clear role in the home. In contrast, Lucilla, free from emotional attachments to her frosty father, is able to script her domestic labor to her advantage. It is not surprising that she hesitates to marry when marriage looks to her as if it might clip her wings as it has other women in the novel. Her aunt articulates Lucilla’s advantages well, “You have had everything your own way, and all that you wanted, without any of the bother” (354). Mrs. Woodburn, her social rival, Mrs. Chily, her godmother, and even her aunt all agree that Lucilla is “too comfortable” in her father’s house to ever marry, but it seems more likely that she never finds anyone she loves enough to encourage or who loves her enough to propose (376). Lucilla is seemingly incapable of love, though she encourages several love matches for her own potential suitors. In her own life, she “did not account for the action of such an unknown quantity as love” (258). When her father tells her he is pleased she is “old enough to have gotten over all the love-in-a-cottage ideas” (397). She assures him

romantic love has never appealed to her: “I don’t think I ever had them” (397). Her debate over the proposal she expects from the rector reveals clearly the dispassionate way she approaches marriage:

She thought it only her duty to him, to herself, and to society in general, to take his claims into full consideration. And, no doubt, if these claims had seemed to her sufficiently strong to merit such a reward, Miss Marchbanks had it in her to marry the Archdeacon, and make him an admirable wife, though she was not at the present moment, so far as she was aware, absolutely what foolish people call in love with him. (210)

Romantic love is not a part of her understanding of marriage or family. What had interested Lucilla about each of the men who entered her life was the ways in which they “offer the very field that was necessary for her ambition (114). It is not love, but ambition that guides Lucilla. The idea of the foolish, but adoring Tom gives her “something to lean on” even though he is far away (267). She has “a certain regard and an impulse of protection and patronage” to Tom, but she is not in love with him (91). Like her father, Tom trusts her to handle her affairs, which suggests that like her father, he too will allow her to hold the reins of their marriage. Tom’s enthusiastic adoration is a counter to the frustrations she encounters managing others, who are not always grateful for her direction: “It gave her a certain support to think, amid all the want of faith she was encountering, Tom believed in her, heart and soul” (267). His confidence in her and belief in her offer her the strength she needs without ever requiring any returning emotion on her part.

Tom phrases his proposal in the practical way that will make best sense to Lucilla: “My poor uncle is gone, and can’t be left by yourself in the world. Will you have me or not?” (475). She has already realized that single life in her financial straits will not be pleasant and he must know this at some level. He repeats his proposal several times

refusing to let her evade or avoid. We are told “Lucilla’s powers seem to fail her” and she cries. The narrator claims, “fate and honest love had been waiting all the time till their moment came” yet there is little reason to assume some great love has evolved from what was at his arrival seconds before only “fondness” (477). The unemployed Tom gives her a project, not just in planning his life as a country gentleman and future member of Parliament, but also in the new home she tells him to buy, their ancestral home of Marjoribanks. “Her active mind sprang up with redoubled vigor” as she contemplated all the projects a marriage to this fixer-upper husband would bring (481). For a woman experienced at managing, the clueless Tom and the “wretched hovels and miserable cottages exhilarated her heart” (488).

Romance is given the lip service her other domestic clichés have been given, but carefully. She never claims to love him. She only says, “I could never in my heart have accepted anybody but Tom” (492). Her statement is actually quite true, but not for the romantic reasons her friends suppose. Tom doesn’t just offer her love; he offers her meaningful occupation and unquestioned authority, which means much more to Lucilla than romance. The ending is frustrating only if one assumes it must end in an idealized romance. She is Beeton’s “Alpha” through and through, and would not be happy with anything but a beta like her Tom who would happily let her order their life and work with her to the extent of his capabilities to make her happy. Oliphant suggests that there are things more important than romantic love and that traditional families actually do not need deep emotional connections to grow or thrive.

In conclusion, Oliphant’s *Miss Marjoribanks* is a significant exploration of the ethics of care idealized in works like Hannah More’s *Coelubus in Search of a Wife*.

Oliphant holds idealized virtues of practical, private, necessary, and loving care in the light of reality with a young and ambitious character who is likeable and yet also manipulative. Unlike More, Oliphant avoids questions of faith to focus on the problems of common humanity: “Religious convictions are not at the center ... instead she focuses on human flaws and eccentricities” (Rubik 226). Oliphant’s irony works magnificently in the service of something that for Oliphant was much more important than abstract theories--realism. Oliphant cared about real life and her detached irony allows her to explore the ways her Lucilla grapples with the challenge of her caring responsibilities, what she repeatedly calls “being a comfort to Papa” (27). In her character Oliphant shows that the caring work of women is what Martha Gimenez calls a complex blend of “socially necessary contradictory experiences, some unpleasant and some enjoyable” (279). Oliphant challenges the ideals by showing the real experience for women as infinitely more complex. Caring labor can be quite public, trivial and selfish and rooted not in emotion, but personal goals and ambitions. It is shocking and yet also potentially liberating. Although rarely considered a feminist, by showing the ironic gaps between reality and the ideals of women’s caring life, she too makes an attempt to kill the angel in the house. The woman she replaces her with is in many ways a modern woman. Oliphant’s Lucilla is more likable and sympathetic by far the More’s prim heroine. Lucilla of Grove Street is a flawed, but well intentioned realist not afraid to make her life her own.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In summary, this dissertation looks at four novels written in the fifteen years after the 1851 census, a time when there were statistically more unmarried women marrying later and staying home to care for parents longer. The concerns about unmarried women tied into larger questions about the changing role of women in society. The novels in this study look at the unusual figure of the adult unmarried daughter as a site of tension in which questions and concerns about the roles of women play out. The novels all feature a managing adult daughter as either the title or main character and all reveal a cultural anxiety about the uncertain and unstable role the daughter has in the family, a frustration with the often hidden and unacknowledged physical and emotional exploitation of domestic care labor for all women, and a real concern for the fact that adult daughters simply do not easily fit into the traditional family structure even when they are loving or very much needed by the family.

Lord Oakburn's Daughters offers an example of a managing daughter who struggles with a dogmatic and unpredictable father. Jane invests herself in serving her bedridden father not only through her care of their home and of him, but also through her willingness to take on the roles and responsibilities of parenting her younger sisters. However, Jane's total immersion in her role as her father's managing daughter makes her unable to set boundaries on her own labor, to stand up against her father's despotic orders, or to understand the need her sisters and her father have for romantic relationships and marriage. The central problem this novel reveals about managing daughters is that daughters and their fathers often have competing visions of family structure, hierarchy

and roles. Lord Oakburn thinks of Jane as little more than his disposable tool, an agent and enforcer his will. He does not see her as an authority in the home that must be consulted or even considered in family decisions. However, Jane believes her complete subservience and her willing and eager constant labor, justifies a place of permanent authority for her in the home. In fact, she even imagines her role to be that of a “second mother” providing comfort and guidance to her sisters. The clashes over these competing positions end decisively with her father’s surprise marriage to the governess, a marriage which highlights even further Jane’s lack of authority or position in the home. Jane is never sure what to make of this other managing woman, viewing the governess first as a rival sister and later as a romantic rival. This novel points out that the managing daughter and the governess share much in common in terms of their liminal position in the family. Yet, the governess, as a biological outsider, has the ability to move beyond her transitional role to an undisputed permanent one as wife. This novel shows other managing daughters that while their work may not have clear boundaries, their authority and position in the home certainly can be bound by a father’s will or whim.

Bleak House presents an example of a young woman who is like a daughter to the family yet, who is pushed into ever increasing difficult emotional and physical labor well beyond the boundaries of a daughter’s duty. Esther is vulnerable and desperate to do her “duty” and “win some love” after an unhappy childhood. Her place in the Jarndyce family though is ambiguous. She is not biologically related to the family, although she suspects she may be, but she is also certainly not just an employee. She is expected to work and, more importantly, to care for the family in ways that go well beyond traditional employee or even daughter boundaries. Her guardian, who should be

managing the family, is detached and disinterested in the family responsibilities, notably the care of his adult wards. A dysfunctional system develops in which as her Guardian, the father figure, disengages from his responsibilities, Esther pushes herself to assume these roles no matter the appropriateness, the chances of success, or the personal costs to her own health and happiness. As the boundaries blur, her labor becomes an experience of exhaustion, constant anxiety, and alienation from her own needs. She becomes incapable of advocating for herself and willing to sacrifice even her own marital happiness to her sense of duty. This is problematic too because while Esther's imagines her role as one of managing daughter, her Guardian ultimately reveals he has always seen her as a potential wife. Their intertwined pathologies make this a stark picture of a difficult domestic life for women who care for a family "like a daughter."

The novel *North and South* offers a very different picture of the managing daughter in Margaret Hale and her struggle to care for her childlike parents in the harsh industrial town of Milton. The central labor imperative of the novel is the need for recognition and respect for those who work and a more caring relationship between those who work and those who demand that work. This issue can also clearly be seen in Margaret's struggle to care for her unhappy perpetual invalid mother and disengaged father, a helpless intellectual obsessed with his own religious crisis. Margaret's attachment to her home and those in it, although based on idealized rather than real relationships, is none the less a powerful motivator for her caring labor. However, it also blinds her to any opportunities beyond her role as managing daughter.

Problematically, Margaret sees selfless comforting as a normal part of all relationships and like Esther Summerson crosses gender and class boundaries comforting

everyone she meets, even stopping a riot as part of her “woman’s work.” The novel initially admires, but later is concerned about her excessive emotional labor and is openly sympathetic to the hidden toll this takes on her as she, like so many other managing daughters, bears her emotional burdens alone. She sees her own feelings as selfish and expressions of her pain as a violation of middle class values. Only the death of her family releases her from her exhausting and inappropriate domestic service.

Margaret’s invisible and exploited domestic labor shares remarkable parallels to Bessy’s industrial labor which highlight the unique challenges of the unbounded largely unrecognized and unappreciated difficult physical and emotional domestic work which managing daughters do in the home. The novel’s focus on her hands, alternately the soft round hand of a lady and the dirty hand of a laborer vividly illustrates the dualism of women who often work like servants, but must hide signs of their labor. Ironically, the genteel Margaret is often discounted as a managing daughter and often must insist on her authority and the right to care for her own family. Unlike the workers, she has no one to turn to for solidarity or even sympathy and rebellion is not an option when to rebel would mean to reject the relationships she values most and the caring nature which forms her very identity.

In *Miss Marjoribanks* Margaret Oliphant’s domestic heroine Lucilla challenges the domestic ethics of care through a critique of a novel by an earlier author Hannah More, pedantic and humorless character Lucilla is almost a caricature of feminine virtue. More uses her Lucilla to argue what is a fairly traditional view of domestic labor: She argues domestic care, which is always difficult hidden work, is wanted and needed for family success, and that it is motivated entirely by love. In contrast, Oliphant’s Lucilla

explores each of these premises showing the complications and challenges between idealized care for others and the experience as her wealthier and more modern Lucilla lives it. Oliphant's Lucilla uses the language and expectations of traditional daughterly duty to justify a much more expansive and empowering role for herself than More's Lucilla could ever imagine.

Unlike More's well prepared Lucilla, Oliphant's Lucilla raises questions about the notion the domestic care is always wanted and needed because her stoic father is perfectly contented with his housekeeper and his private circle of men. She isn't needed to cook or clean and so her domestic care must take on different forms. She imagines her role as managing daughter to be a broad form of "comfort" for her father. For her, it is a social position in which she unites and solidifies not just their home, but her father's community as well. Her labor is also not particularly difficult or hidden, but rather an enjoyable public spectacle that challenges the notion that a successful home just happens. Because she wants to be a public figure, she makes her labor "pretty" and makes it too public. She uses the logic of a daughter's love and care for her father to justify exactly what she wants to do. Her pleasurable housekeeping is described solemnly as a "war" by the mocking narrator. Miss Marjoribanks shows that the rationale which grounds domestic care can justify a wide stretch of caring acts including those that are at times selfish and self-serving. As the narrator states, "Miss Marjoribanks managed to please everybody by having her own way." (133). She offers a model of domestic care that remains caring and yet also allows for remarkable independence and authority.

In conclusion, the adult managing daughter is an anomalous figure whose appearance in many of the novels of the period reflect cultural concerns about the

changing roles of women. These novels express a frustration with the fact that there seem to be no clear roles for adult managing daughters in the families they love and for whom they care often devotedly. There were no clear responsibilities or duties in conduct literature or other domestic literature to clarify what she should be doing under the vague cultural directive that daughters should be grateful to their parents and a comfort to others. These daughters reveal social tensions around the fact that there seems to be no real authority or stability in the role of managing daughter as there would be with marriage.

Yet, the anxiety expressed is not just about the uncertain role of daughters in the family. Because daughters do not have the idealized status in family life that a wife has, they also provide a way to highlight the challenges of domestic labor for all women. Her uncertain role and her emotional connections to the family and the ideals of home can make her an enthusiastic giver, but also leave her subject to endless obligation and potential exploitation. A wife who claims to be exhausted and overworked risks being seen as a bad domestic manager since her labor should be invisible. Worse, she also risks being called unloving because her care for others should be something she doesn't consider to be labor. However, a daughter can show the hidden stress and conflicts of domesticity without fear of criticism because she is still in training and is not expected to have the same emotional investment in her family of origin as she will in the home she makes with her husband. My study contributes to the deconstruction of idealized labor by showing that domestic labor, especially which involved emotional care for others, was challenging work that could be as potentially exploitive and alienating as work outside the home.

This study also shows that no matter how loving they are or how hard they work managing daughters just do not seem to have a stable place in traditional family structure. They can easily be replaced and in many ways they have less security or opportunity for empowerment than a servant. The novels seem uniformly sympathetic to what seems like an unfair situation in which hard work and love is not rewarded. This suggests that even in the supposedly deeply traditional Victorian culture, there was a sense of frustration with the narrow restrictions that defined one's membership in a family. The fact that biologically connected daughters who love their parents and are competent managers still struggle for a place in the family suggest frustrations with how unaccommodating and unrealistic this traditional hierarchy is for many families. It also suggests that that traditional structure has lost its emotional foundations. If it is one's ability to fit a proscribed job title that makes one family then something has clearly gone wrong and the novels express anxiety about this trend in the treatment of managing daughters.

Yet, the novels also seem to point to a more surprising finding that is tied to the loss of emotional connections between family members. The suggestion that domestic relationships may not always be based on emotional connections is also in some ways potentially quite liberating. Without the need for emotional ties women can negotiate marriage and even the ways they care for others based on their own ambitions, needs and desires without ever losing the status and security of a traditional role. It opens the door for some sense of self within very traditional acts of care for others. It presents opportunities for empowerment and pleasure in domesticity even as one serves the needs of others. It is a complex, arguably modern, relationship in which caring for oneself and caring for others need not be mutually exclusive.

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