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THE CONTEST OF MARRIAGE: DOMESTIC AUTHORITY IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

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
Morgan Lindsay Richardson

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Ellen Rosenman, Professor of English

Lexington, Kentucky

2016

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

THE CONTEST OF MARRIAGE: DOMESTIC AUTHORITY IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

In "The Contest of Marriage: Domestic Authority in Victorian Literature", I argue that depictions of engaged and newlywed couples in the Victorian novel consistently dismantle the concept of marriage, depicting the process of two individuals attempting to become one couple as a tenuous and even dangerous project to be undertaken during the nineteenth century. By looking at works where the decision to marry comes at the beginning of the novel rather than the conclusion, I examine the ways in which different novelists document and anatomize the consistent failures in the theoretical underpinnings of domesticity and conjugality. Given that gender, separate spheres and even the family unit have been increasingly viewed as unstable divisions and demarcations by prominent voices within nineteenth-century criticism, I argue that certain novelists were consistently engaged in exposing these insufficiencies in not only the establishment of marriage as a concept, but in the home space itself as a hypothetical location of domestic stability and success. This project will contribute to scholarship in the field not only by tracing the similar patterns and structures of seemingly disparate novels, but also by suggesting that the domestic instability discussed in groundbreaking accounts of Victorian gender ideology is not merely a feature of historical and personal accounts of the era, but is in fact a tension running through much of the period's most popular and widely read literature as well.

In recent years, Victorian critics have collectively worked to demonstrate that separate spheres ideology is no longer a sufficient interpretive tool to employ in our attempts to excavate the nineteenth century's construction of marriage and conjugality. Just as John Tosh has argued for the husband's place within the home and Mary Poovey and Elizabeth Langland have argued for the woman's place beyond it, so too does my work demonstrate that more complex systems of gender and power relationships were functioning within even a "typical" Victorian home. Studies of domesticity have typically focused on either those citizens who embraced its precepts or the rebels who rejected them. In my work, I turn instead to characters whose earnest attempts to embody and enjoy domestic perfection are continually thwarted, proving that many writers consistently locate the trouble with domesticity not in the flaws of specific married couples, but in the implicitly universal claims domesticity makes on all married couples. I argue that in many novels of the period, even marriage enthusiasts are often transformed into its bitterest critics, due to its demands for performance and self-erasure of both spouses. Furthermore, even the seemingly neutral space of the idyllic Victorian home is often shown to be destructive to domesticity's goals, rather than lending structural support to the matrimonial endeavor. I conclude that these authors are suggesting that even marriage's harshest critics can never manage to be as persuasive about the relationship's

pitfalls, hazards, and breakdowns as the actual experience of getting married inevitably proves to be.

KEYWORDS: Victorian Literature; Nineteenth-Century England; Domesticity; Social Life and Customs; Social Problems in Literature

Morgan Richardson

August 1 2016
Date

THE CONTEST OF MARRIAGE: DOMESTIC AUTHORITY IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

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Chapter One: Introduction

Everyone knows that David Copperfield's marriage to Dora is a bit of a disaster. Their mutual incapability when it comes to housekeeping reads like the fulfilled prophecy Mr. Bennet once predicted for Jane and Mr. Bingley-- "You are each of you so complying, that nothing will ever be resolved on; so easy, that every servant will cheat you" (329), and Dora's problematic status as "child-wife" is regarded with concern by the novel's characters as well as the many critics who have studied it since its publication. However, I would like to suggest that not enough attention has been paid to Dickens's portrayal of the young couple's near-incapacitating shock in response to their sudden cohabitation. The idea that getting married means literally living in the same house is so patently obvious that neither Dora nor David takes a moment to worry about it until they find themselves thrust into the same domestic space, until Dora's death will do them part. "It seemed such an extraordinary thing to have Dora always there" (617) David writes in awe, baffled by the intimacy and physical presence which is supposed to be theirs forevermore. Dickens's focus on their mutual alarm at the sheer mundanity of their permanent proximity draws our attention to an important facet of the Victorian novel: betrothal and newlywed narratives and their relation to navigation of shared domestic spaces.

In a culture with such an extraordinary focus on matrimony and domesticity as driving forces and motivators for the functionality of morality, empire, and human existence itself, it is remarkable to note how many novelists of the period focus in on the early days of marriage (and the days leading up to it) as a temporal space of negotiation, panic, self-revision, and conflict. Much of their focus is equally on the suddenly-shared

space of the home. Just as David marvels at the uncanniness of Dora's perpetual physical presence in their marital home, so too do many of the betrothed and newlywed couples of Victorian literature exhibit ongoing perplexity at living inside a house where one's beloved now lives too. To share the space of the home is to see, hear, and sense the other inhabitant with a constancy that exerts unforeseen pressures on an imminent or recently solemnized marriage.[1] For a culture so focused on marriage, why do so many Victorian novels portray young couples as ill-equipped for the cohabitation domesticity requires? Dora explicitly warns David that she is unable to manage the running of his household, so why is he so stunned to discover that she is, in fact, lacking in that ability? In a century filled with conduct books, why so few of them offer suggestions for the transition period following the vows? Helena Michie's work, *Victorian Honeymoons*, features extensive archival research necessitated by the fact that the topic was so rarely discussed in commonly read and available publications—and yet her focus is on the honeymoon itself, the discovery of new intimacy in places *other* than the home.

How were young couples (or old, for that matter) supposed to act once they began their everyday lives in their marital spaces? As *David Copperfield* amply illustrates, the lack of instruction or guidance for that transitional time left an enormous gap to be navigated by young people entirely unprepared for this process of negotiation and adjustment. Having both been raised and educated to believe that domesticity is both natural and yet highly regulated, the sudden realization that one's spouse might have

[1] As Mary Poovey has argued, "the middle-class ideology we most often associate with the Victorian period was both contested and always under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations" (3). What these novelists depict are the emerging of those oppositional formulations.

radically different notions of how the house is to be run and lived in means that these early months were necessarily a time of abrupt disillusionment. Furthermore, the conflicts these fictional couples discover are frequently exacerbated by their literal proximity in the home space-- doors creak and slam, muffled sobs permeate other rooms, hushed conversations are unintelligible but nevertheless overheard. Domestic performance is no longer merely a hypothetical form of ideology or marital pledge: it is instead a daily set of lived behaviors, and each spouse is suddenly able to viscerally see and hear the other partner's daily performance (or lack thereof), from morning til night. The Victorians invested so much of their moral, mental, and patriotic self-worth in the management of the home that this process of disillusionment and increasing frustration was exponentially more traumatic than it had been in ages past, given that every detail of household functioning was weighted down with the freight of unavoidable symbolism. Mrs. Beeton likened housewives to the commander of an army, while British husbands were bruited about Europe to be the "kings of their castle" when at home. With all these militancies laid out on the battlefield of the marital home, there were bound to be some casualties.

Those casualties are often played out in specific fields of battle. Although the comforts of home were an obsession of the age, the fiction of the period is equally invested in the ways in which the family home is also a land of overlapping borders, annexations, vigorous rounds of defense against enemy incursions, and a collective inability to consider detente. With both husband and wife being told that they had unique forms of authority and power within the space of the home, the moments when those different varieties of authority clashed were inevitably devastating for both sides. In

many of the novels with the unhappiest marriages, the spaces of the home where a wife and a husband's spheres of influence overlap are literally the spaces of the home where families most often interact on a daily basis, and yet in spaces where neither wife or husband (or mother or father) can lay claim to absolute authority. The dining rooms, sitting rooms, hallways, and parlors are especially fraught in these nineteenth-century novel. The spaces where the entire family and visitors to the domestic space are most likely to interact are also the spaces where many fictional marriages are fractured and worn away.

In my study of newlywed and betrothal narratives in the Victorian novel, I examine the startling frequency of disruptions and fractures of the domestic narrative between characters whose only goal is domesticity's seamless continuance. The couples and families who subscribe wholeheartedly to conventional domestic ideology are often the quickest to discover its insufficiency, inconsistency, and even its tendency to undermine conjugality and a functional home life.[2] Indeed, the Victorian home itself--subject of so many paeans to its power--instead serves to sabotage these new (or impending) families, leading to rupture, conflict, public humiliation, and even murder. Furthermore, the home frequently served as a site of contest over whose authority would dominate in any given household conflict. Would it be the wife, trained in domestic arts, constantly told that her place as the spiritual center and manager of the home left her

[2] Phegley writes that "The biggest impediment to determining the character of one's future spouse was that young ladies and gentlemen were not allowed to spend time alone together. In fact, dating as we know it was nonexistent and all interactions between the sexes were expected to take place in public or under adult supervision" (37). However, the novels I study suggest that these husbands and wives could never truly know a spouse until living with them, because domesticity exposed their true selves—a rather unfortunate double bind.

responsible for everything that took place within its walls?[3] Or would it be the husband, who spent most of his time elsewhere but was nonetheless assured that his was right to rule and command in every household matter? Women were taught to be creatures of the home and experts within the home, but what were they to do with that expertise when a husband's whims conflicted with her carefully orchestrated household schedule? Men were told to trust the management of the home to their wives, and yet were also expected to serve as arbiter of household dilemmas without knowing the details of how the house was actually run. How did these two individuals cope when they found these competing notions of authority placed at odds within the same home? Moreover, the physical layouts of the built spaces only add to these ideological conflicts. The conventionality of the layout and the increasing specialization of room utilization only added to the strain of inherently conflicting ideas about home governance. The carefully monitored behaviors within particular rooms, the movement of servants throughout the house, and even the timing of opening and closing the front door (or the library door, or the bedchamber door, or the nursery door) are all integrally involved in the domestic disturbances of the Victorian novel. These shared spaces often serve the function of a crucible for otherwise insignificant domestic disagreements, amplifying their effects, and involving members of the household who might otherwise have nothing to do with a minor spat. In this way, a conflict between husband and wife can begin to ripple outward, permeating not only their

[3] Laura Fasick points out that wives are in the uniquely untenable position of being blamed for any problems within the home, but with their authority rendered invisible/ineffable whenever the home runs smoothly: "Although Victorian gender ideology assigned women to the private rather than the public sphere, it did not authorize women to assert themselves openly in the home." (78)

entire house and household, but even their families and communities beyond the house's walls, if the infection of domestic strife is not adequately contained.[4]

For the last twenty years, nineteenth-century criticism has been rife with accounts of domestic ideology's imperfections and breakdowns in lived experience, and many of those accounts have been essential background for the readings I produce here. My exploration of fictional domestic failures explores a point of convergence between the work of John Tosh, Elizabeth Langland, Monica Cohen, and Jennifer Phegley, all of whom have produced vital works on the tensions and networks of power running throughout the Victorian home space. Elizabeth Langland's *Nobody's Angels* was one of the most important works to discuss domestic ideology's impossibilities in the context of what it instead made possible—the openings that emerged for Victorian women as a result of domesticity's breakdowns allowed for greater latitude and exploration of gender and women's right to "work" (whether or not it was labeled as such) in a variety of venues and cultural institutions. These opportunities for expansion often appear closer to the end of the novels I study, but the hopefulness they represent is often indicated by the authors of these works. Similarly, in *A Man's Place* John Tosh was one of the first to suggest that men were burdened with equally powerful cultural mandates regarding their place in the home, and his description of the masculine longing for home—even while residing within it—is an important prerequisite to my study of male characters located

[4] Jane Hamlett writes that "The organisation of domestic space and material culture in middle-class homes had a crucial impact on authority practices in the home. Although the arrangement of the home differed from family to family, the relatively rigid use of domestic space in the nineteenth century encouraged the construction of intimacies and distances" (111). The complication I explore here is that those new intimacies and distances were often constructed in ways that weakened the entire edifice of domestic harmony.

within domestic spaces. The contrast between their longing for home and the status of their wives as professionals at work can be seen in Monica Cohen's *Professional Domesticity*, and her account of the necessary erasure of work happening simultaneously with the increasing demands for "professionalism" on the part of housewives and mothers helps us to understand why the home was such a powderkeg. In *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England*, Jennifer Phegley writes that the rise of companionate marriage meant that "husband and wife were to work together to create a private realm of comfort and happiness" (6), but her work explores the ways in which the changing landscape of gender and domesticity made that mutual project increasingly difficult in the increasingly fraught space of the home.

Indeed, the literal space of the Victorian home is at the center of many of the conflicts I explore here. The ideological power of the notion of home was universally accepted—as the bosom of the family, as the moral foundation for all of society, and even as the central engine powering the British Empire. As Judith Flanders has written, "The home was a microcosm of the ideal society, with love and charity replacing the commerce and capitalism of the outside world. This dichotomy allowed men to pursue business in a suitably capitalist--perhaps ruthless--fashion, because they knew they could refresh the inner man by returning at the end of the day to an atmosphere of harmony, from which competition was banished" (6). But for all the claims placed upon the home regarding its role in society, fictional and non-fictional accounts show that navigating life within its walls was far from simple. In the twentieth century, Henri LeFebvre's *The Production of Space* posited that physical space is as much an ideological construct as an inhabited locale, writing that "(Social) space is a (social) product" (26).

Given that LeFebvre was primarily interested in the way this product was created in his own era's power struggles, he made specifically twentieth century critiques of the way that ideological structures of particular spaces were often at odds with a given regime or culture's hopes for what kind of culture those spaces would produce. Lefebvre suggested that part of communism's failure in Russia could be traced to the state's inability (or refusal) to create truly communal spaces, thereby undermining the ideology of their overarching social experiment. I would like to argue that the same effect can be found in the typical Victorian home. The claims so often made on behalf of that home--its moral influence over the entire family, its ability to provide a refuge from the secular world outside, even its fundamental fitness as the place for a woman to expend the bulk of her intellectual and spiritual energies--all these claims are perpetually made on behalf of the home, and yet the novels of the period consistently show their characters as being forced to fight against their domestic locales in their sincere attempts to embody these ideals.

In some ways, the lack of real communal space that Lefebvre describes as so problematic within the Soviet experiment is actually presaged within the Victorian home. Conduct books and sermons of the period may continually make claims about the communal nature of the home space--the sanctifying effects of residing within the bosom of the family--but the domestic records and novels of the period instead give the lie to this claim. In three of the most important recent studies about the dynamics and spaces of the Victorian home-- Thad Logan's *The Victorian Parlour*, Deborah Cohen's *Household Gods*, and Judith Flanders' *Inside the Victorian Home*-- the home is instead revealed to be a site of separation, classification, and carefully coded performance--hardly the stuff

domestic comfort is made of, and certainly not conducive to the blissful mutual felicity young couples were supposed to be able to produce between themselves. Indeed, the details embedded within these studies instead suggest that the layout and management of the typical Victorian domestic space was often more of an obstacle to be overcome in order to achieve marital and familial intimacy.[5]

Logan, for example, suggests that "Spatially…the house became increasingly specialized in the nineteenth century.... Differentiation of space, not the size of individual spaces, or ease of access, was what mattered" (26-27). In some ways, this was of course an expression of class status, since the ability to devote individual rooms to specific purposes required having the space to do so, and the money to furnish such spaces appropriately. In another way, however, this classification and rigid demarcation of space had an entirely different function: that of keeping the family apart. Deborah Cohen gestures toward this effect when she points out that: "In many families, houses were, in all likelihood, divided into spheres of influence: because the drawing-room was… widely seen as the ladies' chamber, a wife's preferences might rule; similarly, the study or library (if the house had one) reflected her husband's desires" (93). These different "spheres of influence" and the rigid gendering of which room was for what purposes (and what family members) meant that an entire family could conceivably be inside the same house at the same time and yet, as a matter of course, kept apart. Even as volumes on domestic management rhapsodized about the home's hypothetical ability to bring its inhabitants

[5] Caroline Levine has suggested that "the metaphor of domesticity, far from imposing a coherent order on social experience, actually unleashes a jumble of organizing principles that support contradictory political aims and produce a profoundly unstable political-cultural field" (640). Logan, Cohen, and Flanders explicate the myriad ways in which that "jumble of organizing principles" destabilizes the home and the familial environment.

together, the mandated layout and governance of actual home spaces resulted instead in division. Judith Flanders discusses the extent to which this philosophy was conventionally carried out:

> Inside the house, the need to classify and divide did not end: houses were designed to keep the function of any one group of inhabitants from impinging on any other. Home was a private space, guarded watchfully from contamination by the life of the world; but within the home too, each separate space had its own privacy, and each enclosed a smaller privacy within it. Every room, every piece of furniture, every object, in theory, had its own function, which it alone could perform; nothing else would serve, and to make do with a multipurpose substitute was not quite respectable. Privacy and segregation of function, especially as the latter defined social status, were the keynotes to the terraced house. (31)

The result was that the Victorian domestic space did not foster the intimacy and domestic collaboration described as so essential a part of the home's function. The problems that this poses are manifold-- one character's entry into an "unsanctioned" area of the house is rendered a striking breach, rather than a normal movement or errand. The way a character moves (or does not move) furniture can stand for emotional warfare. Furniture coverings and the timeliness of a tea service become stunning insults or forms of neglect. In Anthony Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right*, Emily Trevelyan longs for her husband to come upstairs and see her, but he remains closeted within his study. In Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Arthur Huntingdon's malicious refusal to respect the decorum of his wife's drawing room is depicted as evidence of his abandoned character. In George Meredith's *The Egoist*, Sir Willougby Patterne uses the gendered nature of rooms within his house in order to entrap Clara into conversations she tries to avoid, but then he withdraws to masculine enclaves within the house (his laboratory, his library) to avoid her attempts to temper or withdraw her earlier allowances. Time and again, novels

of the era display this "segregation of function" as a destructive force to be fought against, rather than an aspirational element of comfortable middle- or upper- class homes.

Furthermore, as cultural and historical studies have repeatedly demonstrated, the domestic space was fundamentally a housewife and mother's place of work--and hard, exhausting work, in the majority of cases. The idea that the typical middle class woman left the majority of housework to her servants was a common polite fiction, but as Judith Flanders points out, "among the middle classes only the very top levels could afford the number of servants that made work for housebound women unnecessary" (13). Similarly, Kay Boardman points out that "the home that ran like clockwork did not run like clockwork without a great deal of effort and skill" (154)[6]. Yet her role as avatar of her husband's class status and his ability to provide depended on a housewife's ability to hide and deny her labor, rendering the extensive and demanding work of running a house invisible. Domestic ideology demanded that she must be the moral center of her family, yet it simultaneously required the ongoing work of deception and self-erasure, neither of which is particularly compatible with her alleged work as sanctifying influence. In her book, *The Bourgeois Interior*, Julia Prewitt Brown has suggested that "the bourgeois interior functions as a *medium* through which something is transmitted, a many-layered fabric across which different energies travel: psychological, political, economic,

[6] Kay Boardman expands on the "great deal of effort", and its necessary concealment: "Articles and features on domestic economy consistently focused on the need to regulate the house, the family, and the servants in accordance with the domestic ideal. The home was a place of both work and leisure for middle-class women and as such was both a site of women's work and a denial of that work. . . . Connected to this also is that housework, when performed by the housewife herself, was to be rendered invisible… . Women's work in the home became almost a symbolic or representational task; the cult of domesticity demonstrated that the domestic middle-class woman's role had meaning because of what it represented rather than because of what she actually did" (154).

aesthetic, cultural, historical" (3). What, then, are we to make of these housewives who work tirelessly but are taught to make that work invisible, who become experts in domestic management but are always expected to defer to the husband's uninformed expectations? What ideals of domesticity are "transmitted" through a model of home management which was based on intentionally invisible labor? Monica Cohen suggests that "nineteenth-century English culture perpetuated an idea of the home as a warm and protected depository of familial affection and leisured personability perversely divorced from the cold world of work done among strangers" (74), but housewives were simultaneously held to professional standards of expected excellence (or more, considering the portraits we have of lax professional life during that century) while performing leisure and personability regardless of their daily workload.

Even women who were not engaging in the more strenuous forms of manual labor[7] were essentially placed in management roles—keeping track of staff and family schedules[8], household inventory, accounting, human resources, keeping track of the most

[7] Judith Flanders points out that the idea of a mistress of the house who left all the hard work to servants was largely a polite fiction, writing that "the majority of women worked regularly and hard in their houses: they made the beds, cleaned the lamps, washed windows, skinned and prepared meat for cooking, and made preserves and wine, as well as cooking daily meals, dusting, sweeping, scrubbing, sewing and upholstering, doing the laundry, making curtains and clothes, and cutting and laying carpeting; many even repaired shoes and boots. All the things that it is now thought that "genteel" women of the time did not do, they did. If they then discussed their work as little as the books suggested, it is not difficult to understand why men thought that their homes were so comfortable that women were pleased to remain there-and why the women were less convinced" (245).

[8] Kay Boardman describes the many functions and responsibilities embedded within domestic management, all of which resemble project management and staff supervision more than leisure: "Middle-class women, whether mistresses of large households with a considerable number of domestic staff or mistresses of one maid-of- all-work, had the

up-to-date theories of sanitation and child psychology[9], and tracking the socio-cultural implications of fashion[10], to name a few of their responsibilities. As Brian McCuskey points out, servant management alone could amount to a full-time job: “The domestic manuals recommend diverse strategies of keeping an eye on servants below stairs; they advise employers to monitor any visitors to the servants’ hall, to double-check the kitchen accounts, to enforce strict curfews, and so on” (360). Mrs. Beeton’s classic volume, *The Book of Household Management*, not only suggests surveillance of the servants on a daily basis, but encourages housewives to go visit every prospective servant’s employer to make sure the new hire will suit: “IN OBTAINING A SERVANT'S CHARACTER, it is not well to be guided by a written one from some unknown quarter; but it is better to have an interview, if at all possible, with the former mistress. By this means you will be assisted in your decision of the suitableness of the servant for your place, from the appearance of the lady and the state of her house. Negligence and want of cleanliness in her and her household generally, will naturally lead you to the conclusion, that her

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responsibility of regulating the domestic economy and this included the servants who were subject to strict scrutiny of both work and moral habits” (157).

[9] Toni Weller describes the way that periodicals created and disseminated the belief that a proper housewife should always be keeping track of the latest scientific findings about household health: “Contemporary understandings and attitudes toward scientific and medical knowledge also featured prominently throughout nineteenth- century etiquette literature, particularly in their application to personal hygiene or domestic sanitation. Keeping one’s person and surroundings clean was a serious matter in the nineteenth century for reasons of both mortality and sociability” (668).

[10] Sylvia’s Home Journal ran an ongoing campaign to urge women to stop wearing stuffed songbirds on their hats, turning a fashion accessory into a moral (or immoral stance). In one issue, they rewrite “Who Killed Cock-Robin?” to condemn such thoughtless fashionistas: ““The sentence then is, for the future from now/ She shall wear poor Cock Robin’s redbreast o’er her brow,/ Or his head, or his wing, or even one feather,/ To mark her as a murderess now and for ever./ And men, when they meet her shall know that, apart/ From her soft pretty face she is hardened at heart.” (224)

servant has suffered from the influence of the bad example" (14). Not only does this demand an enormous expenditure of time, but it also allows any given housewife the chance to check out her domestic competition—and while Beeton suggests that finding a house in disarray might lead to a sense of superiority, it would be just as likely that the woman heading out on such errands would end up discovering new duties of household management which she would need to add to her own repertoire.

In her discussion of separate spheres, Catherine Waters writes that "By the early nineteenth century it was no longer socially or economically desirable for middle-class families to live on premises which combined workplace with living space. They were increasingly living, or desiring to live, in homes which were separated from work, away from the pressures of business" (14). This ignores, however, the fact that women were literally always at work in the space of the home. Martin Danahay writes that "Upper- and middle-class women were not expected to work, because to be leisured was a marker of the wealth and success of their husbands. They were therefore told to devote their energies to maintaining the household and organizing a few servants to carry out the physical labor in the home" (6). Yet "organizing a few servants to carry out the physical labor in the home" is, in fact, work—and the cultural refusal to label it as such caused inevitable tensions within the households that attempted to ascribe to this ideal. In a culture that believed hard work had moral virtues, there was something perverse about women being expected to work hard but then pretend that it had never happened, for the benefit of a husband who was never supposed to suspect that anything other than leisure took place in his comfortable house. As Judith Flanders points out, the façade was supposed to be complete: "women were not supposed to speak to their husbands or

family of the work they were doing; segregation of function was not only for activity, but even for thoughts about that activity. If women spoke of what they did all day, then it would have to be acknowledged that this private sphere was just as much a place of work as the public sphere. The artificiality of the dichotomy would be exposed" (210-211)[11]. Yet in a space that allegedly fostered genuine family feelings and respite from the toiling world outside, the result was that women were called upon to perform a false form of leisure while maintaining constant control of their household environments.[12] As Kay Boardman notes, "the ideal domestic woman used all her time to make the home run smoothly" (150). That means that the domestic space of the husband was never the same as the domestic space of the wife—his associations with the house were those of leisure, while hers were those of labor that never ended. Davidoff and Hall pointed out that even when it came to the desire for quiet moments of religious contemplation, "While the home could be to some extent a scene of retreat and seclusion for men, for middle-class women it was the site of their responsibilities" (90). Monica Cohen writes that "domesticity supposedly allowed workhorses and calculating machines" to become human again—but only for men. In the Victorian home, women were always on the

[11] Flanders writes that "Once women married, the greatest feat they could achieve was making the household machinery move in complete silence-- and this machinery encompassed much of what we would today regard as the pleasures of family life. Women's greatest task was the home, but it was not proper to acknowledge it" (211). In other words, a woman's entire working life was only perfect when it was invisible and unacknowledged.

[12] Jennifer Phegley writes that "Men, then, had to dramatically switch gears to fit into two worlds: that of the rough-and-tumble working world and that of the domestic sanctuary" (7), but the implication is that women did not have to do the same. However, if women were always being required to render their labor invisible, then they, too, had to switch gears—from the daytime, where they could perform work out in the open, and the evening mode, after the husband returned home, where work had to become covert and coded.

clock. And since the woman's default space is the home—she has no clubs, and even walking on the streets by herself makes her an object of suspicion—she, unlike her husband, is uniquely cut off from the restorative effects that domesticity was supposed to provide.

And yet successfully maintaining the home according to ever-shifting standards of what the home was supposed to be was still not sufficient for the average Victorian housewife—because creating a method of maintenance that depended on routine ran the risk of making men bored. In 1869, Robert Kemp Philp claimed the authority of science in his volume *The Reason Why: Domestic Science According Intelligible Reasons for the Various Duties Which a Housewife Has to Perform* in order to warn housewives of the hazards of making their work either visible or unvarying,[13] writing:

> If housewives only knew how many evils arise from rendering home monotonous--if they understood how their daily ordinances are insensibly and unintentionally reflected in the countenances and conduct of fathers and children--they would treasure the philosophy which we are endeavouring to impart to them. Many a man has been fed up to an ill-humour by bad management; coldness, sameness, and gloom about his home, have gathered up the elements of strife, which have broken out in storm; then some little extra attention on the part of the wife has cleared the atmosphere for a short time. But there ensues another stagnation of the moral elements--the same chain of domestic routine is gone through link by link--and the storm breaks out again, as might have been predicted by any one who understands the meteorology of the human heart, stomach, and brain. A wife should look upon home as her empire, and if she desired loyal subjects she should rule that empire well. Men emigrate to foreign

[13] This, despite the fact that the most common domestic management publications encouraged routine, as Megan Ward points out: "*The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* is typical of the period in its emphasis on the virtues of a strict routing in the home. Routinized behaviors were reliable and efficient, two domestic virtues that might be instilled by the working of patterns. . . . The capacity for routinized thought, feeling, and action, in other words, was not limited to the industrial towns of the north but existed literally and imaginatively in the home." (252)

> lands when they are dissatisfied with their native soil: they wander from home when it has no attractions for them. (30)[14]

The wife's home may be her empire, but she is hardly empress, if her first concern at all times should be whether her empire's masculine inhabitants are constantly on the verge of emigration inspired by "bad management" that is not tied to filth, discomfort, or sloth, but to monotony and "sameness." Moreover, if her ability to fulfill her destiny as a daughter of the British empire depends on the possets she makes or how straight her seams are sewn, then the everyday minutiae of her household activity is made into an ongoing examination of her fitness for married life. Even her leisure is open for censure, when her femininity is so frequently coded into the tangible, visible, and frequently used accouterments of the home.

Even while her own mandated silence regarding her labor was undermining her moral authority, the housewife's inability to move freely throughout the house meant that her authority was by no means as far-reaching as some tended to claim. The parlor may have been the emotional heart of the home according to convention, but the ability (and willingness) of men in the household to avoid and circumvent it meant that her influence was only ever as universal as the menfolk permitted it to be. A housewife was coded as radically out of place if she entered the home's den, study, or library for any purpose other than maintenance or supervision of the servants cleaning it--and the number of husbands and sons who gravitated to those masculine spaces as their household base of operations meant that the parlor could be *called* the home's center, but there was no way

[14] Thad Logan describes one of the ironies of the parlor as locus of family life when he writes that "Men are usually represented as enjoying the domestic scene as a respite from the rigors of the world. Their relation to their homes, however, was marked by one difference from that of women: they were free to leave" (34). It was perhaps easier to be sentimental about the home for someone who was allowed to go anywhere else.

of compelling a family's masculine half to enter it or remain there on a regular basis. This is illustrated especially clearly in Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right*, and the eagerness with which many other male denizens of the nineteenth-century novel avoid parlors and drawing rooms indicates that not a few authors were fundamentally dubious about a wife's ability to act as a moral force when when the layout and navigation of the Victorian home rendered her so easy to avoid. As Barbara Black asks in her work on Victorian gentlemen's clubs, *A Room of His Own: A Literary-Cultural Study of Victorian Clubland*, "If a man's home is his castle, if a wife is his angel in the house--as John Ruskin and the separate spheres ideology strenuously taught the Victorians--how does one account for the many fictionalized scenes of what might be called "male flight" from home? Why did so many male characters leave their domestic sanctuaries to spend evenings with other men in their clubs?" (3)[15]. With all homes being measured against some hypothetical standard of domestic perfection, how telling that the daily struggle to achieve that ideal was perceived by so many of those uninvolved in its creation as "sameness" irritating enough to be actively avoided. In *The Politics of Domestic Authority since 1800*, Lucy Delap, Ben Griffin and Abigail Wills point out that "it was central to the relatively restricted social positions open to women that they could construct themselves as authorities in the home" (1), and yet that authority was all rendered moot when her method of domestic management did not live up to the ever-shifting standards of either fashion or the home's masculine inhabitants. As editor of the

[15] David Skilton describes the variety of options available to husbands and fathers, none of which were open to his wife at home: "Alongside domestic life, a middle-class man was expected to enjoy a homosocial life of work, club, sport, charity dinners, and so on, which constituted a quasi-bachelor life co-existing with family life but largely separate from it" (129).

collection *Keeping the Victorian House*, Vanessa Dickerson writes that “The Victorians' insistence on clearly defined functions for each room limited ladies' access to many rooms. Male territory included the study, the gunroom, the library and the billiards room, and the dining room after dinner” (176), pointing out that in the palatial estate houses, there were even more spaces where a woman would be out of place.

Furthermore, women of the century themselves acknowledged that this state of affairs was a problem. In an 1879 edition of *Sylvia's Home Journal*, the editor herself discusses the arrangement of the typical Victorian home (i.e., men with private rooms where they can retreat for study and contemplation, but the women of the family with no such resources) in contrast with her description of one particular family home where every member of the family is given his or her own space. "How nice it would be if we could all manage this," she writes, and "How much better-tempered some of us would be!" (116). She goes on to describe the fantasy of freedom to move within the home space in a tone that is simultaneously wistful yet rueful, as if the longing wives and daughters have for domestic space to call their own is both universal and universally impossible:

> In the average English middle-class family there are the drawing-room, the dining-room, and occasionally the library, for all the members of the family to choose among for their different pursuits. Whether a daughter be inclined to read, to work, or to idle, she must do it in company with others who are talking, practising, or receiving guests. If a son is reading for any examination, he has a den apportioned to him, where he may often be found with a cigar in his mouth and a novel in his hand! But a daughter's a different thing. She has no right to read constantly. She would be much better employed in darning her stockings or doing some of the mending so necessary and inevitable in households. So thinks the mother. But the daughter does not—and cannot be expected to take the same interest in patches as the careful *Hausmutter*. The wings of her mind are getting strong. She is longing for a flight. How she would like an hour or two in the library, but papa is there writing a sermon, or Tom is there, engaged in what he is pleased to call "cramming." How nice it would be to have a little boudoir all to

> herself as rich girls have—with a piano in one corner, bookshelves between the windows—not empty bookshelves!—a bird or two in a cage or two, and pretty knicknacks scattered through the room. Has not every girl—whether active or idle—wished for such?
>
> Ah, well! After all, it might not be good for us. We should get too fond of it, and not help the good mother as we ought. We might neglect the necessary stocking darning, and let it fall to tired eyes and fingers a little weary. (116-117)

This is a narrative of rooms denied to the wife and daughters--spaces, and the enjoyment of space--they have no right to lay claim to,[16] no matter their roles in maintaining the cleanliness and upkeep of those rooms for the sake of others. Vanessa Dickerson points out that "architecturally the house...reflected a particular...concern for the needs of the male within the domestic arena" (xxvii). Yet the longing of female subjectivity and individuality for personal space is subordinated to the undarned stocking. In Barbara Black's study of men's clubs, then, we have a striking number of examples of men feeling driven out of the "femininity" of the home, and yet in *Sylvia*'s, a well-loved women's magazine, we have women left in those homes but denied the enjoyment of their alleged restorative faculties. Who is this home for, if all its inhabitants are struggling to enjoy its role in their daily lives, and to escape from the sense of entrapment its walls apparently engender?

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[16] Lynda Nead gestures toward another iteration of this belief that women should take up as little space as possible in her discussion of backlash against the crinoline: "The second reason that men hated crinolines was because of their volume. Within a discourse of scale and propriety, the crinoline represented excess, its expansive layers an ostentatious display of extravagant consumption. Women in crinolines took up too much room, they invaded men's space and swept them off the pavement with their enormous girth. . . . It is easy to dismiss this simple equation of size and power, but within the critique of the crinoline there is a strong sense that women have become too big, that they have lost their sense of scale and gone beyond their natural boundaries." (499-500)

The specialization and atomization of the spaces within the Victorian home were then both signs of its elegance and troublingly at odds with the home's ideological function. The most rosy-eyed visions of Victorian paeans to the home's sanctifying influence are rooted in scenes of family togetherness, but rarely do they address the intentionality required for the commencement of those scenes, or the emotional health presumed to be a condition of everyday family life. LeFebvre later wrote that "the spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space; it proposes and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it. From the analytic standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space" (38). In the context of the nineteenth-century novel, we are forced to ask—does the domestic space of the Victorian home engender domesticity, or hinder it? Do the domestic practices and requirements of the Victorian home heal familial rifts or widen them?

The novels I examine ask how these spaces function in the lives of families whose impetus for collective existence is less obvious. When a marriage is under strain, for example, how might the potentially undermining effects of the home space add to that strain, rather than easing or mitigating it? When one spouse is determined to avoid conventional scenes of intimacy, is the abandoned partner aided or undermined by the home's systems? The novels I study offer a series of portraits where the home space cannot be counted on as a stabilizing force within fraught domestic relationships, and instead it is shown as a fundamentally antagonistic element.

I want to depart from readings of these novels as featuring oppressive enforcers of domesticity clashing with forward-thinking rebels who seek out liberation. The characters

of all classes and genders who attempt to unquestioningly embrace domestic visions are punished, and the only characters with remotely "happy endings" at the close of these novels are those who have radically revised their understanding of domesticity's purpose and functionality within the daily experience of the Victorian home. The novelists I study here seem determined to explore what might happen in a domestic setting where one or more participant refuses to recognize the possibility of altering or editing ideology to suit circumstances, personalities, or even experience.

In my first chapter, I look at domesticity's effects within a fictional example of the middle-class home. In "The Gall to Obey: Submission and Permission in *He Knew He Was Right*," I look closely at how the shared space of the elegant London townhouse serves to undermine the Trevelyan marriage. The rift between Emily and Louis Trevelyan is widened initially through each partner's ongoing surveillance of the other, their closeness in the home changing from a mode of intimacy to a form of reconnaissance. This damage is amplified through the collapsing hierarchy of home organization that comes from entrusting servants or employees with intimate knowledge or supervisory authority in the domestic space of their employers. Even as Emily and Louis Trevelyan are increasingly alienated from one another through their inability to cope with the rigid boundaries of domestic space, I argue that Trollope explores the more successful pseudo-marriage of Miss Jemima Stanbury and her niece Dorothy to suggest that successful domestic partnerships rely more on willingness to negotiate domestic practices than strict adherence to conventional patterns of governance within the home.

In the next two chapters, I explore the ways that domestic ideology is experienced in the landed estates of the wealthy. In Chapter Two, "Reforming/Revising the Rake in

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall", I focus on Anne Brontë's Arthur Huntingdon as a pre-Reform Regency rake baffled by the middle-class tendencies of his increasingly religious wife, and Helen Huntingdon herself as a reformed lady of fashion. Despite their palatial estate at Grassdale Manor, Brontë depicts Helen and Arthur as claustrophobically trapped within the confines (physical and cultural) of their house.

In Chapter Three, "Enclosure and Entrapment in *The Egoist*", I study the ways in which Sir Willoughby Patterne tries and fails to use his estate, Patterne Hall, as a lure and a snare in his determination to find a wife who will be willing to subsume her subjectivity into his desire to be master of all he surveys. His attempts to "collect" Clara as a showpiece/wife take place throughout Patterne Hall's rooms and grounds, but it is ultimately another "prize" in his collection that allows Clara to escape—Laetitia Dale, permanently on display in a mock Dower House. Willoughby's determination that he will have all the domestic consolation he could ever desire means that Clara slips through his fingers, as do Crossjay, Vernon Whitford, and (in a sense) Laetitia herself.

By looking at these texts, I hope to enter into a critical conversation that has become increasingly robust over the past few years in Victorian scholarship. The examination of narratives of alterity within the Victorian novel has become a topic of keen interest explored in a variety of contexts--the law, religious belief, and the structure of narrative itself. The novels I study are filled with characters baffled and appalled by their failed attempts to comprehend the minds or motives of their nearest and dearest, but they also feature occasional glimpses of successful relationships where acknowledgment of the mind of the other leads to conjugality rather than alienation. In *Narrative Middles: Navigating the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (2011), Caroline Levine and Mario

Ortiz-Robles suggest that a focus on the "middle" parts of life rather than the beginnings, highlights, or endings can offer a fascinating insight into how Victorian authors were exploring the process of self-formation. They write that "the middle points us to such crucial phenomena as changes and processes, ebbs and flows, hubs and breaks. And, most of all, it points us to the tough, imperfect, anxious, exciting experience of having decidedly left our beginnings behind" (3), which is precisely the topic I study in the novels of this work. What happens after the marriage is begun, or after the longed-for engagement is official? How do the authors of this period portray the daily life that follows such auspicious beginnings? The everyday running of a household is the stuff of the middle, and Levine and Ortiz-Robles gesture towards its power as well as its focus on gender. They draw our attention to the fact that the nineteenth-century novel is known for "persistently intertwining marriage and *Bildung*," (9), and thereby making the process of life-making into its main subject matter. They emphasize the importance of alterity to the narrative function when they write that "Far from imagining the solitary, questing, masculine self as the prototype of modernity, the British novel puts at its center two people, to be precise, two *different* people, whose difference depends precisely on the binary division of gender" (9). The ongoing process of negotiation and conciliation that these authors portray as an essential part of successful marriage (and as entirely lacking in the failed relationships I study) is a central question of the period's fiction. In the preface of her book, *Victorian Lessons in Empathy and Difference* (2011), Rebecca N. Mitchell writes that realist art "makes empathy possible by teaching us that the alienation that exists between the self and the other cannot be fully overcome, that the alterity of the human other is infinite and permanent. But in that radical, inalterable alterity exists the

possibility of ethical engagement" (x). The potential that comes from the recognition of alterity is not overcoming it, in Mitchell's formulation, but in the growth that the impossibility of overcoming it can inspire. Mitchell suggests that the overwhelming prevalence of "intimate interpersonal relationships" (12) in realist fiction and art of the Victorian period is inspired by the ways in which the closeness belies the distance between any two individuals. She suggests that the fiction of the period suggests that these relationships "prove most difficult to navigate, in large part because intimacy itself (even proximity itself) obstructs one's realization of the other's alterity, despite the necessity of that realization" (12). This easily translates into the work of my argument, which takes this claim a step further, framing even the physical closeness of a shared home space as a site of contest.

In *Narrative Hospitality in Late Victorian Fiction* (2013), Rachel Hollander has recently suggested that throughout the century, "an ethics based on sympathy and the ability of the self to identify with others gives way to an ethics of hospitality, in which respecting the limits of knowledge and welcoming the stranger define fiction's relationship to both reader and world" (1). This emphasis on the ability to make room for different modes of thought through acceptance and incorporation rather than an attempt to purify or correct them leaves room for disagreement even when social and relational cohesion is the primary goal, and Hollander argues that, as a result, "the concept of home shifts to acknowledge the permeability of domestic and national spaces." (3) There is an obvious contrast between that "permeability" and the rigid boundaries of space and function which influenced use of the home space for most of the century, but Hollander directs our attention to precisely the same concepts which most of these novelists suggest

as most functional in the face of a malfunctioning concept of domesticity. In *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economy in Mid-Century Novels* (2013), Ilana Blumberg has suggested a similar movement in the development of religious thought. Blumberg writes that "Only by setting aside a vision of human beings as isolated individuals who would rise or fall alone could these novelists define an ethics responsive to both the self and others. In place of social atomism, the novelists imagined a world where human beings were mutually dependent" (12). She examines the reconfiguration of the religious concept of sacrifice in this context, and suggests that a new vision of collaborative and mutual good was responsible for reconsidered ideals of whether it was right for one individual to suffer on another's behalf. She suggests that Victorian literature is imbued with the concept that "literature is a privileged site for studying and cultivating the ethics of alterity" (22), and that is certainly an element I have emphasized in my own work. In the portraits of broken conjugality that I study, the authors repeatedly draw our attention to the ways in which the "ethics of alterity" are actively ignored or violated by characters like Louis Trevelyan or Willoughby Patterne--two men who spend long novels determined to believe that they already understand the minds of particular women, despite the monumental amounts of evidence to the contrary. Their refusal to consider alterity as an interpretive tool results in the shattering of their visions of domestic bliss, and Blumberg points out that this is a central concern throughout the century.

Martin A. Danahay has suggested in *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture* that we must consider "'men' as a relational category that must be analyzed in combination with the term 'women'" (3) in the literature of the period, and in some ways this can be viewed as both a symptom of the disease and an element of the cure within this literature. The

fact that a Victorian man's success, class status, and self were contingent on his wife's performance of "woman" was the root of great anxiety and pressure. If a man is defined by his wife, then his demands for her perfection are not entirely personal, after all--her beauty is a part of his own resumé, her ability to run his house is a referendum on his own moral fiber, and her performance of submission to his demands is an essential element of his own character. In many ways, the contingency of a man's "manliness" resting on his wife's performance was a destructive framing for both spouses. Yet alongside this grim vision (so frequently revisited in the novels I examine) is the possibility of a more collaborative form of contingency such as Blumberg illustrates--one where a wife is not a clinging vine but an acting partner, and a husband's success is relative to his wife's place not merely as his dependent, but as his comrade. In *The Egoist*, Clara Middleton laments that she would prefer a comrade to a lover, because as far as she can tell her lover's vision of love itself is one where her perspective and desires are unwelcome. Her author and the others I study, however, suggest that the need for a comrade in marriage is paramount, and use their novels to explore the ways in which marriages lacking in that model of partnership quickly devolve into dysfunction. In their Introduction to *Subversion and Sympathy: Gender, Law, and the British Novel* (2013), Alison L. LaCroix and Martha C. Nussbaum argue that a large part of the work of these novels was in not just revealing the impact of alterity on lived experience, but in exposing the ways that legal ignorance of it led to injustice and cruelty. They write: " If there could be said to be one goal of the novel in this period, it was to open the eyes of the law to women's lives by means of artfully packaged vicarious experience. Novels reveal women's powerlessness--but they also show the many forms of agency and resistance available to women, even in

constrained circumstances" (5). The hypothetical worst case scenarios of the fiction of this period (and especially in the novels I study here) are about exposing harsh truths, but also about the ultimate unknowability of individual experiences within marriage and the need for a legal system which made allowances for contingencies which inevitably arose.

In many ways, contingencies themselves--and the ideological room they require--are at the center of my project. How is a woman to respond when she discovers her husband's bachelor vices have not been left behind following their marriage? How is a husband to cope when he discovers his wife considers her right to determine her own social acquaintances to be inalienable? How does the disillusioned fiancée recover when she is forced to choose between a future as porcelain prize or heartless jilt? And how are any of them expected to cope within the unexpectedly volatile environment of the Victorian home? The authors I study here ask these questions and others like them in order to not only deflate the pretensions of marital expectations, but to defuse some of the landmines littering the parlor. They also ask these questions in order to offer a recuperative vision of marriage between the self and the other as a potentially collaborative enterprise rather than a battle for dominance. Even David Copperfield in his Dora days (rather than his more mature Agnes era) is able to recognize that hypothetical marriages rarely bear much resemblance to everyday life, after all. He abandons the fantasy that he will be able to turn Dora into the wife he wants more quickly than he abandons any of his other aspirations. He initially dreams of "the time when there should be a perfect sympathy between Dora and [himself], and when [he] should have formed her mind to [his] entire satisfaction" (675) with full confidence in his ability to transform her mistakes into domestic perfection. Yet when confronted with who Dora really is on a

daily basis, David begins to consider the possibility that "perhaps Dora's mind was already formed" (676). Dickens imbues this realization with humor and mockery of David's naiveté, but it is a transformational moment, and one which many of the fictional spouses I discuss in this volume never manage to achieve.

Having learned that there is nothing “natural” after all about domesticity’s demands, the central couples of *He Knew He Was Right*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and *The Egoist* are all set adrift—convinced that something in their houses is not right, but each individual character equally convinced that if the fault is not in one’s self, then it must be within one’s partner. Francesco Marroni has written that “The Victorians felt continually besieged by the specter of disharmony and, in response to this dominant fear, transformed their lives into a tireless search for order. From their self-protective perspective, there could be no room for a world that was not built on interpretative codes that united and harmonized all those factors that took on the cast of conflicting forces and transgressive divergences before the accepted norms of behavior. Indeed, nothing was more dangerous for the Victorian mind than the idea of disharmony” (11). The cultural insistence that disharmony within the home was necessarily a moral failing (and potentially a national security risk!) rather than a normal and necessary part of cohabitation between any humans made conflict impossible to endure with equanimity. The disharmonious chord of conjugal conflict is never given room to resolve, largely because each clash expands to fill every room, every cushion, and every blessed hearth.

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Chapter Two: The Gall to Obey: Submission and Permission in *He Knew He Was Right*

When Louis Trevelyan heard on the stairs the step of the dangerous man, he got up from his chair as though he too would have gone into the drawing-room, and it would perhaps have been well had he done so. Could he have done this, and kept his temper with the man, he would have paved the way for an easy reconciliation with his wife. But when he reached the door of his room, and had placed his hand upon the lock, he withdrew again. (12)

Immediately afterwards Colonel Osborne went away, and Mrs. Trevelyan was left alone in her drawing-room. She knew that her husband was still down-stairs, and listened for a moment to hear whether he would now come up to her. And he, too, had heard the Colonel's step as he went, and for a few moments had doubted whether or no he would at once go to his wife. (17)

As these paired epigraphs suggest, Louis and Emily Trevelyan spend much of *He Knew He Was Right* waiting for one another—waiting for the other one to relent, apologize, act, promise, speak, write, forgive, admit, collapse, and even die. Those modes of waiting do not cease once they are no longer living underneath the same roof, but the narrative tenure of their cohabitation certainly emphasizes their constant practice of waiting for the other to make a move before making a personal choice in conduct. Louis listens for Colonel Osborne's step with fury; Emily anticipates her husband's step with initial eagerness, and eventual disappointment. Every movement in the house is of keen interest to each—and yet this interest in common only serves to drive a wedge between them, neither one recognizing that they are trapped in the same inability to determine a course of correct behavior. Their subsequent stasis is continually induced by wavering notions of who should act (and how) at any given moment. Each one considers his or her ideas of correct behavior to be the culturally sanctioned ideals they should both believe in, and therefore the progressive realization that his or her partner disagrees continually leaves them both frozen, unwilling to cede ground, yet also unsure as to how to proceed at all. Even though these two partners claim to share a goal of traditionally gendered

domestic bliss, the model of a wife's complete deference to a husband's authority is at odds with Emily's own role as governing mistress of the house. The goal of becoming an "ideal" husband or wife is persistently undermined by the insufficiency of the home space to support such a practice, and the Trevelyans respond by evacuating the troubled spot, choosing instead to mediate their relationship through distance, text (in the form of increasingly casuistic letters), and other characters reduced to proxy actors. In this novel, marriage transforms the vague notion of traditionally gendered behavior into an endless cycle of negotiation, with the struggle for authority undermining conjugality.

I would argue that one of the novel's most pointed critiques of Louis Trevelyan's conduct comes from the fact that he responds to Emily's intractability and stubbornness with repeated attempts to reduce her to a textual object, a readable collection of signs which might be more easily understood and governed (or, perhaps, edited) than her gloriously idiosyncratic self. At times, this means listening to her movements throughout their home; later, it means attempts to reduce their marriage to its formal legal status and their communications to badly-written letters. Even her technically innocent behavior is viewed not as lack of actual guilt, but as what it might seem like to an outside viewer—or, in Louis's perspective, an outside "reader". His willingness to strip away context from the "text" of Emily's words and behavior, while demanding a more charitable reading of his own, reduces their marriage from the give and take of a functioning marital relationship to his increasingly wretched attempts at omniscient narration and close reading of his own life and family.

Not only does Trollope's narrator offer repeated critiques of the inevitable failure of these attempts, but so too is the novel structured to depict this strategy as

fundamentally flawed, and also designed to inevitably undermine Louis's own desires. Critics have often commented on Trollope's willingness to describe even character types with whom he strongly disagrees as human, well-intentioned, and trying their very best, so that *his* ability to depict personality and behavior through text does not merely reduce characters to parody. Trollope depicts Louis Trevelyan as doing the opposite. Louis's attempts to reduce Emily to pure text are depicted as violently dehumanizing and even cruel, and his increasing willingness to erase or ignore her subjectivity in the name of calling her "disobedient wife," "adulteress," and "failed mother" become further proof of his delusion. In these efforts, however, Trollope shows that Louis inevitably does the same to himself in the world of the novel. Carol Pateman has argued that domesticity "denotes not just a pattern of residence or a web of obligations, but a profound attachment: a state of mind as well as a physical orientation" (4). As Louis detaches himself from coexistence with Emily, therefore, he claims domestic stability as his utmost goal, while effectively doing all he can to undermine its mechanisms of functionality. Louis's efforts to remove himself from the presence of Emily's personality and behavior for the sake of having no one to disagree with him when he labels her "rebel" results ultimately in his own isolation, and the necessity of even his friends and family being to reading him as a cipher. Having rendered his own voice absurd and unintelligible, they must read his erratic behavior, dramatic postures, consorting with a lower-class detective, kidnapping of his own son, and even his markedly un-English clothing and setting as a series of signs which add up to "mad". That he repeatedly chooses this state of affairs over actually listening to his wife, Trollope suggests, is a sort

of worst case scenario made possible by the legal quirks and cultural expectations of Victorian marriage.

Despite the furious rhetoric of many indignant bystanders throughout the novel that might suggest otherwise, neither Emily nor Louis ever sets out to do wrong toward one another. Indeed, a painful opposite is clear—each is constantly agonizing over what the right course is, what choice of action will appease the other and rectify the situation, and which words or attitude will somehow restore their family to what it once was. The mutual space of their fashionable London townhouse, far from facilitating their conjugal happiness, continually undermines and sabotages their efforts to understand one another through the dictates of propriety, interactions with their servants, and even the gendered spaces and conduct implied by parlor, bedroom, nursery, and study. As Deborah Dennenholz Morse has pointed out, Trollope uses this novel to explore the level to which he is unconvinced of the domestic narrative's ultimate stability: "Trollope's sympathetic depiction of these untraditional female characters is only one form his disquiet with Victorian society's core myths about womanhood takes. Another central manifestation of his critique is the alteration of narrative conventions that embody the conventional view that feminine fulfillment lies only in love and marriage. The structure of the conventional romantic courtship plot is broken in every novel, and there are elements that qualify perfect closure in each novel's comic resolution" (3). In depicting a marriage as irreversibly damaged by the typical Victorian domestic space rather than bolstered by it, Trollope asks whether the stories his culture told itself were at all likely to result in the pat resolutions they claimed to crave.

Immediately following the epigraph's second quotation, Trollope's narrator returns to Louis Trevelyan's agony, writing:

> Though he believed himself to be a man very firm of purpose, his mind had oscillated backwards and forwards within the last quarter of an hour between those two purposes of being round with his wife, and of begging her pardon for the words which he had already spoken. He believed that he would best do his duty by that plan of being round with her; but then it would be so much pleasanter—at any rate, so much easier, to beg her pardon. ... He could not live and continue to endure the feelings which he had suffered while sitting down-stairs at his desk, with the knowledge that Colonel Osborne was closeted with his wife up-stairs. (17)

As the novel progresses, Louis will feel the urge to apologize to his wife less and less often—but here, at the beginning of the novel, he frequently feels torn between the desire to scold Emily for her poor conduct and to apologize for his own.

A large part of this shift takes place once they are no longer sharing the residence at Curzon Street. In one sense, this is only logical—once they are no longer sharing a home, both Emily and Louis are thereafter capable of forgetting their actual affection for one another, while also exaggerating their mutual antipathy. Trollope, however, does not contrast that later antagonism with an earlier domestic paradise within the shared home. Instead, he shows that the cozy domestic arena is frequently a cause of greater anxiety and concern as to how the other does—or even *might*—behave. Louis hearing steps on the stairs and hovering with indecision in the middle of his study is very far from experiencing the peace and security that a happy Victorian male "ought" to, ensconced in his home and family circle. His agony of hesitation (while he strains his ears to hear anything even potentially troubling) is the opposite of the peace and rest that he believed would arrive with wife, child, and home all achieved. His walk to the door, the brief moment where he "had placed his hand upon the door" but right before "he withdrew

again" is an early encapsulation of the state of mind that will ultimately destroy his health and sanity. Even the subjunctive interjections of the narrator ("it would perhaps have been well had he done so," "he would have paved the way for an easy reconciliation with his wife") add to the tension of these half-made and immediately abandoned decisions. His ability to hear and experience the presence of his wife within his house is not a universal pleasure, but instead a frequent source of pain as he is forced to guess at her conduct, bearing, and emotions. As Rachel Ablow suggests, "Neither a scholar, politician, adventurer, bookworm, philosopher, nor prig, Trevelyan very nearly embodies the unremarkableness that Trollope identifies as the key characteristic of the gentleman…Trevelyan is perfectly domesticated, and hence entirely dependent on that domestic sphere to define who he is" (125). With nothing to do but ponder scientific articles he never finishes and go back and forth between home and club,[17] Louis's primary identity is that of husband—and his anxieties about what it means to inhabit a role that ultimately depends on a woman's performance of wife means that his often-frantic fears that she will fail are not so much misogyny as an agony of his own lack of self-definition.[18]

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[17] David Skilton points out that Louis's dissatisfaction with his club as an alternative to home serves as an interesting precursor to his imminent difficulties at home: "Alongside domestic life, a middle-class man was expected to enjoy a homosocial life of work, club, sport, charity dinners, and so on, which constituted a quasi-bachelor life co-existing with family life but largely separate from it" (129). Louis's hatred of going to his club, and his feeling that being reduced to socializing there is a sort of punishment for which his wife is to blame only serves to magnify his problems at home.

[18] Louis Trevelyan never gets the chance to worry what his beloved wife will do when she goes out into society, of course, because his marriage is destroyed while he is merely wondering what Emily is doing one floor up in his own house, and how he might interpret the mood of Colonel Osborne's descending footsteps.

For Emily's part, her own attempts to aurally track Louis's emotional state through the language of his movements in the house are almost always reactive rather than active. Emily knows better than to disturb him when he is "working" in his study (although, of course, he is primarily studying *her* through the petri dish of her footsteps and creaking doors), and frequently resorts to interpreting his silences and movements even while she hopes Louis himself will appear to fill in the blanks through interaction and dialogue.[19] He has already reached the point, however, where he prefers reading his wife as a textual object to interacting with her as a person, let alone as his wife.

When Louis, hearing Colonel Osborne's departure, thereafter goes out himself, Emily's state in the parlor upstairs can only change once she has heard him leave. Knowing full well how much he dislikes Osborne, but also hoping to defend herself, she waits for Louis to create the opportunity to discuss both—but his decision to take a walk and clear his head means that she must also move on. After Emily hears Louis exit, the narrator explains:

> As soon as he was gone Emily Trevelyan went up-stairs to her baby. She would not stir as long as there had been a chance of his coming to her. She very much wished that he would come, and had made up her mind, in spite of the fierceness of her assertion to her sister, to accept any slightest hint at an apology which her husband might offer to her. . . Had he gone to her now and said a word to her in gentleness all might have been made right. But he did not go to her. (18)

Emily makes it clear, here, that although she does not plan to take her husband's word as gospel, she is nevertheless ranking her role as wife above that of mother, in that her decision to retire to the nursery only comes after the possibility of interaction with Louis (and Louis's fears) is no longer possible. This hierarchy of Emily's domestic conduct,

[19] It is notable that where Louis frequently infers the most malicious and adulterous of impulses to Emily's normal movements throughout the house, Emily almost invariably interprets Louis's movements correctly—as outbursts of pique.

however, is continually lost on Louis, who (as the narrator continually reminds us) always manages to avoid Emily right at the moments when she is feeling the most apologetic or open to reconciliation. In his continual claims that Emily refuses to care or think about his wounded feelings, Louis always misses the fact that those same feelings actually shape her daily activity, movement, and most of her discussions with other characters. Louis's eavesdropping through the walls of his house is, in this way, always incomplete—as it is intended to be. Text, Trollope suggests, can only ever tell a fraction of reality.

Furthermore, Louis begins to resent the everyday accidents of timing and circumstance as somehow attributable to Emily's neglect—even when their cause has been her desire to accommodate his own schedule. Having left the house without speaking to Emily, Louis then gets back too late to have a private discussion with her:

> As soon as he reached his house he went at once to his wife's room, but her maid was with her, and nothing could be said at that moment. He then dressed himself, intending to go to Emily as soon as the girl had left her; but the girl remained,—was, as he believed, kept in the room purposely by his wife, so that he should have no moment of private conversation. He went down-stairs, therefore, and found Nora standing by the drawing-room fire. (21)

The news that his wife tried to wait for him—anticipating his wish to speak to her, in fact—only angers him more. Desperate for her submission, yet obsessed with the fact that she is not capable of or willing to try it, Louis becomes increasingly resentful of the moments that show Emily understands *him* better than he understands her. When he tries to guess at to her motives and actions, the results are often ridiculous bitter fantasies; whereas when Emily tries to anticipate her husband's movements and feelings, she is invariably correct. That ability to predict his wants and needs is not a crime in and of itself, of course—to have a wife capable of such prognostication would be heaven itself

to Mr. Trevelyan, if she would only use her powers to *fulfill* his desires, rather than to foresee and then deride them.[20]

Louis's frustration is not merely at his wife's intractability, however. He is equally frustrated by the normal details of everyday nineteenth-century life in his nice home in a fashionable neighborhood. Finding his sister-in-law when he wants to find Emily is hardly a surprising result, given that it was his own suggestion for his sister-in-law to live with them—but he begins to take it as a personal insult that Nora is inside their house at all. Even her status as sister-*in-law* recalls Louis's attention to the status he obsesses over and tries to vaguely enforce. Having contracted the habit of resenting her presence, Louis will eventually use Nora as an excuse to prevent reconciliations with his wife—despite the fact that Nora is one of his strongest defenders, and consistently urges Emily to apologize without reservation, no matter how appalling such a step would be to Emily's pride. In several ways, Nora begins to represent Louis's failure as much as Emily herself does. Her singleness reminds him of his own married state, her deference and eagerness to calm and placate him underline not only the unreasonableness of his behavior and conduct (Louis will later crave an audience, but early in the novel it only humiliates him further), but even the possibility that he may have chosen to marry the more intractable sister. Furthermore, whenever Louis is tempted to believe that Emily's

[20] Emily's origins in the tropical Mandarins may actually add to this frustration, since the implication that she should be abjectly grateful for his willingness to rescue her from the islands and spinsterhood is often suggested—narratively as well as in Louis's resentful ruminations. He couches his concern over Colonel Osborne in such terms: "And then this poor wife of his, who knew so little of English life, who had lived in the Mandarin Islands almost since she had been a child, who had lived in one colony or another almost since she had been born, who had had so few of those advantages for which he should have looked in marrying a wife, how was the poor girl to conduct herself properly when subjected to the arts and practised villanies of this viper?" (13).

recalcitrance is a result of her family or upbringing, Nora is within his view as an embodied counter to that possible claim.

The previous passage also highlights another key feature of the domestic disintegration, however. Just as Nora can prevent Louis's desire to make amends with his wife (based mostly on his willingness to abandon any attempt before it is begun), so too does the presence of servants in the Trevelyan home consistently damage and undermine their increasingly precarious relationship. Though Emily will later be the partner who objects most strongly to servant intervention in private affairs, Louis starts the trend here, viewing even the maid Jenny's normal duties as somehow exemplifying his wife's intractability: "…he went at once to his wife's room, but her maid was with her, and nothing could be said at that moment. He then dressed himself, intending to go to Emily as soon as the girl had left her; but the girl remained,—was, as he believed, kept in the room purposely by his wife, so that he should have no moment of private conversation." He knows enough about Jenny's movements to note that she almost invariably dressed and coiffed Nora last—otherwise, it would not occur to him to be angry that the normal order of preparation has been altered on this particular day. Louis might suppose himself to be uninvested in the habits and movements of a lady's maid in his home, but Trollope never fails to emphasize that Louis *does* understand these domestic codes and chooses to ignore them whenever he finds it convenient as a method of nursing his frustration. Even the household "texts" of conduct Louis *can* read are the ones he chooses to *mis*read.[21]

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[21] RD McMaster emphasizes the tendency for both Emily and Louis to attribute the worst possible motives to one another during every subsequent disagreement: "Interpretation, often bizarre, about each other's motives, character, and actions, abounds between the protagonists as their marriage disintegrates" (19). Of course, where Louis's accusations are works of fiction, Emily's often turn out to be prophecy.

The supposition that Emily is hiding in her room with Jenny acting as a willing accomplice against marital duty can only be entertained through the manufactured pretense that he has no earthly idea of how long it might normally take a lady to dress and prepare for an evening out.

The presence of servants as exacerbating humiliation or showcasing marital discord becomes an increasingly fraught point of contention for Louis and Emily as the novel continues. More than her husband, Emily is well aware that the household servants will understand and disseminate her humiliation if she is treated like a pre-adulteress. This is perhaps because she, as Elizabeth Langland has pointed out, is the member of the household tasked with controlling and monitoring their servant labor force. More than that, however, Emily knows that the breakdown of their marital understanding will prove intensely interesting to the rest of society. (Louis only becomes aware of this fact once he realizes that his name and reputation are becoming more damaged than his wife's.) As Chase and Levenson have famously noted, "A middle-class family secluding itself behind garden walls was exposed to tales of other seclusions behind adjacent walls. One of the abiding activities of midcentury life was the production of family tableaus, the ceaseless manufacture in text and image of scenes of home life, the publication of a privacy" (7), and Emily is well-aware that those around them are all-too eager to disseminate knowledge of less-than-perfect family tableaus of discord and dissatisfaction. Although Louis will eventually perish from the agony of wondering what other people think about him, in early chapters he is curiously reluctant to understand how inviting servants into his domestic troubles must turn those troubles into public property.

Emily, however, knows all too well that servants, no matter how loyal, are exceedingly unlikely to remain silent. In "The Kitchen Police: Servant Surveillance and Middle-Class Transgression," Brian W. McCuskey cites a remarkable work on the subject: "'Everything that you do, and very much that you say at home,' cautions an 1853 *North British Review* article, 'is related in your servants' families, and by them retailed to other gossips in the neighborhood, with appropriate exaggerations, until you almost feel that you might as well live in a glass house or a whispering gallery'" (359). When Nora herself suggests recruiting the servants as barriers against trouble, Emily points out the flaw in the plan:

> "...Am I to tell Colonel Osborne not to come? Heavens and earth! How should I ever hold up my head again if I were driven to do that? He will be here to-day I have no doubt; and Louis will sit there below in the library, and hear his step, and will not come up."[22]
>
> "Tell Richard to say you are not at home."
>
> "Yes; and everybody will understand why. And for what am I to deny myself in that way to the best and oldest friend I have? If any such orders are to be given, let him give them and then see what will come of it." (5)

Nora does not have to ask who "everybody" is—to her, as to her sister, it is patently obvious. This collective societal consciousness is repeatedly mentioned by the narrator. Sometimes "everybody" knows about the Trevelyan tragedy, sometimes about Colonel Osborne's true reputation, sometimes about Emily's humiliation.[23] This nebulous cloud

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[22] In this moment of prognostication, Emily accurately forecasts Louis's recalcitrant tendencies as a reader—yet another example showing that her own skills at reading human behavior are far more advanced than his.

[23] Chase and Levenson refer to "the rise of a self-conscious public sphere with the excavation of a more circumscribed and defined realm of privacy. To invent the open space of visible civic life was at the same time to forge its invisible, personal contrary" (6-7). The Trevelyans, with so much of their focus on what other people might think, perpetually ignore the second half of this equation. Their recognition that their private lives are public matter is never counterbalanced by any effort to circumvent such attention.

of witnesses is always vague, but always in place as a threat—and while the collective consciousness of London remains undifferentiated, the fact that its communal knowledge of intimate details always ends up getting passed along to named characters like Lady Milborough or Hugh Stanbury speaks to the effectiveness of "everybody's" channels of information. Indeed, Lady Milborough herself is forced to face the truly impressive speed and breadth of gossip when she discovers that her own sources of knowledge are far from the only ones in existence, and that any attempt to control the Trevelyan news items would be ultimately futile: "She had become aware that Mr. Glascock had already heard of the unfortunate affair in Curzon Street. Indeed, every one who knew the Trevelyans had heard of it, and a great many who did not know them" (120). The Trevelyans are increasingly being reduced to a collectively enjoyed "text" in the world at large—the unfortunate consequence of Louis's approach to interacting with his wife.

Emily herself has no hope that the rift between herself and her husband will remain private—but she also insists that involving the servants in the matter will make their troubles more interesting to the world than anything else could. Louis, despite his earlier frustration at the maid Jenny's inconvenient presence, is the one who attempts to recruit the servants in the interest of protection and privacy—but Emily knows that such gestures will only make their situation more ludicrous. McCuskey suggests that "Servants were expected to guard vigilantly not only the silver and plate, but also the physical safety and emotional well-being of the mistress. In some cases, the manservant assumed the place of the absent husband as chaperone" (361), and this is certainly Louis's initial

thinking when he tells Richard that Colonel Osborne is not to be admitted[24], or that any of his letters arriving should be made known to the master at once. Emily knows that her husband's suspicions will become public knowledge, and that her humiliation is assured. But suspicion bolstered by servants instructed to guard her against the rapacious appetites of a threatening lothario effectively turns her from a normal housewife into a princess secreted away in a locked chamber, which implies that she has no virtue of her own to protect her—and one of Emily's main frustrations throughout the novel is not only that her good name (and her husband's good name, as she sometimes suggests) is being dragged through the mud, but that the mud is being stirred up by Louis himself. Emily, obedient but never servile (and often openly antagonistic), can only continually express her astonishment:

> "I never was more in the dark on any subject in my life. My wishes at present are confined to a desire to save you as far as may be possible from the shame which must be attached to your own suspicions."
> "I have never had any suspicions."
> "A husband without suspicions does not intercept his wife's letters. A husband without suspicions does not call in the aid of his servants to guard his wife. A husband without suspicions—" (52)

By the end of the novel, Emily is incapable of being surprised by any of Louis's bizarre behavior—but early in the novel, it still has the power to reduce her to sputtering dismay.

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[24] James Eli Adams writes: "When domestic space admits a single man identified with the acquisition of knowledge--whether a father-confessor, a doctor, or a detective--his entrance perplexes the boundaries of public and private and creates a corresponding gender dissonance that is then attributed to his agency. By exposing the domestic realm to a public gaze, the confessor turns private space into a repository of secrets. That collapse of privacy into secrecy in turn undermines the aura of security and ease that virtually defines the home in Victorian domestic ideology. Still more disturbing, the confessor not only exposes the family's shared privacy to a prurient gaze, he thereby brings to light secrets that have always already existed within that ostensibly idyllic space of perfect confidence and repose" (106). Though not a father confessor per se, Colonel Osborne is sent as a sort of emissary from Emily Trevelyan's father—and his destabilizing influence on the household is similar to what Adams describes.

Furthermore, Emily's ability to function as the mistress of the home and steward of the servants themselves is damaged by their involvement in the fluctuating restrictions Louis variably imposes, as she repeatedly tries to point out. To lose face in society is bad enough, she suggests, but to be degraded in front of one's own servants is the greatest humiliation possible. "How can I look the servant in the face and tell him that any special gentleman is not to be admitted to see me?" (46) she asks, and later tells Louis that he will have to decree any restrictions that he desires—she will not do so on his behalf: "It will be for you to tell the servant. I do not know how I can do that" (47). If, as Langland and others have suggested, the woman of the house is expected to set a high moral tone for her servants live up to[25], then Louis is destroying his wife's ability to perform her duties while claiming to do so in the name of saving her wifeliness. Emily cannot effectively supervise her domestic staff while they simultaneously do the same to her.[26] Even the normal hustle and bustle of servants moving through the house to follow her orders becomes another sign of her husband's mistrust, once the servants have been ordered to track her own actions and correspondence.

Since Louis is curiously incapable of admitting he is ever wrong (just as Emily stubbornly refuses to admit that even innocent conduct can look less so under certain circumstances), he begins to experience some of this servant-related anxiety as well, once

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[25] Kay Boardman writes: "Middle-class women, whether mistresses of large households with a considerable number of domestic staff or mistresses of one maid-of-all-work, had the responsibility of regulating the domestic economy and this included the servants who were subject to strict scrutiny of both work and moral habits" (157).

[26] Jenny Bourne Taylor emphasizes how easily Louis's mantle of authority can become a license for tyranny: "Trollope . . . shows how easily apparently upright forms of masculine behavior can become pathological-- how the seemingly stable world of marriage can become the site of morbid masculinity when the rights of husbands over wives are too successfully internalized" (95).

he realizes that his internal conflict is increasingly being made obvious to his staff. This is mostly due to his continual orders that are initially retracted, slightly altered, and then reinstated. Desperate to seem like an upright gentleman of firm purpose and domestic authority, his sinking feeling that his servants know better bleeds through into his instructions to them regarding his wife:

> "Richard," he said to the servant, as soon as he was down-stairs, "when Colonel Osborne calls again, say that your mistress is—not at home." He gave the order in the most indifferent tone of voice which he could assume; but as he gave it he felt thoroughly ashamed of it. Richard, who, with the other servants, had of course known that there had been a quarrel between his master and mistress for the last two days, no doubt understood all about it. (48)

His failed performance of nonchalance is compounded by his sudden understanding of what Emily had meant when she said she could not give such orders to her own servants—not because such orders would not be obeyed, but because the giving of them would necessarily divulge the sort of intimate knowledge that she did not want circulating belowstairs.[27] Emily, as keenly (and viciously) aware as ever of her husband's state of mind, is then able to use his new self-consciousness against him:

> …there came another note from Colonel Osborne. The servant brought it to his mistress, and she, when she had looked at it, put it down by her plate. Trevelyan knew immediately from whom the letter had come, and understood how impossible it was for his wife to give it up in the servant's presence. The letter lay there till the man was out of the room, and then she handed it to Nora. "Will you give that to Louis?" she said. "It comes from the man whom he supposes to be my lover."
>
> "Emily!" said he, jumping from his seat, "how can you allow words so horrible and so untrue to fall from your mouth?"

[27] The fact that he constantly takes back, edits, and alters his supposedly final commandments is another factor that damages his authority with wife *and* servants. Ablow points out the damage done by his tendency to vacillate: "This insecurity regarding how he—or a man like himself—should act leads to incoherent commands as well. Thus, one moment he forbids Emily to see Colonel Osborne, and the next he encourages her to act as if nothing has happened" (128).

> "If it be not so, why am I to be placed in such a position as this? The servant knows, of course, from whom the letter comes, and sees that I have been forbidden to open it." Then the man returned to the room, and the remainder of the dinner passed off almost in silence. (49)

The collective understanding of husband, wife, sister/sister-in-law (Nora's relationship to either spouse), and servant in this scene shows not only how much Louis has overestimated his own household mastery, but how willing Emily is to use that misstep to make a point.[28] Louis had somehow forgotten that the decrees given to his staff must be followed by seeing those same employees every day, in every room of his house, during every uncomfortable moment his wife is willing to endure until he admits his mistake. It is also worth noting that both the Trevelyans repeatedly worry more about what the *servants* will think of their problems than of what the other one thinks—and interesting inversion of the much-discussed fear of the era that servants would take too much interest in their masters' affairs. We are never allowed to find out what Jenny or Richard thinks of the state of the Trevelyan marriage—but Emily and Louis continually agonize, speculate, and argue over what those unspoken and unheard thoughts might be.

Yet for all that Emily is willing to use the presence of her servants as goads to her husband's pride, it is his decision to fully trust one of them as a counselor for their problems that reduces her to appalled incredulity—and ultimately acts as a catalyst for their separation. Shortly after a period of peace (and Nora's usual urgings for a reconciliation), Louis makes the fatal error of turning to a loyal family domestic for

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[28] Ablow points out that Louis's inconsistency undercuts his desires at every point: "This insecurity regarding how he—or a man like himself—should act leads to incoherent commands as well. Thus, one moment he forbids Emily to see Colonel Osborne, and the next he encourages her to act as if nothing has happened" (128).

comfort without considering the fact that doing so disrupts the delicately balanced ecosystem of the home and its structures of authority:

> And on the afternoon of the Sunday a new grievance, a very terrible grievance, was added to those which Mrs. Trevelyan was made to bear. Her husband had told one of the servants in the house that Colonel Osborne was not to be admitted. And the servant to whom he had given this order was the—cook. … when Mrs. Trevelyan heard what had been done,—which she did from Mrs. Prodgers herself, Mrs. Prodgers having been desired by her master to make the communication,—she declared to her sister that everything was now over. She could never again live with a husband who had disgraced his wife by desiring her own cook to keep a guard upon her. Had the footman been instructed not to admit Colonel Osborne, there would have been in such instruction some apparent adherence to the recognised usages of society. If you do not desire either your friend or your enemy to be received into your house, you communicate your desire to the person who has charge of the door. But the cook! (95)

For Emily, having the servants employed in watching her (and controlling Osborne's access to her) is dreadful, but it is at least a straightforward order lacking in context or intimacy. Louis's decision to pour his heart out to the cook, however, implies two offensive things: familiarity with a servant, rather than merely making use of one; and a disregard for the feudal order of power within the domestic sphere.[29] The familiarity, Trollope makes clear, is the sort of slippage of class and superiority that happens when loyal family retainers live their lives in service to any particular bloodline[30]—an especially important relationship to Louis not only because of Mrs. Prodgers's fealty, but also because, given Louis's status as orphan, she is portrayed as an almost maternal figure in his eyes. Yet here, too, Louis's misstep is in misjudging (intentionally or no) the

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[29] John Tosh writes: "The man who was not master in his own house courted the scorn of his male associates, as well as economic ruin and uncertain paternity. It is not surprising that political thinkers held that the authority relations of the household were a microcosm of the state: disorder in one boded ill for the stability of the other" (3), but Louis is actually courting the disorder and insatiability he simultaneously fears by circumventing the proper channels of power.

[30] The many liberties allotted to Gabriel Betteredge in *The Moonstone* shows the rewards of intimacy that such unwavering loyalty can bring.

dynamics of the anthropology of the home, as is made clear by the fallout after Emily's finding out about this spilling of secrets from Mrs. Prodgers herself. Her loyalty to the Trevelyan line is one thing, but Mrs. Prodgers and Emily both know that a proper cook answers to the mistress of the house, never mind that she helped patch up young Master Louis's scraped knees once upon a time. Louis's disregard for the home's organization of authority simultaneously turns Mrs. Prodgers into the detested figure of a pseudo mother-in-law *and* elevates a servant whose realm is the kitchen and scullery into an arbiter of the parlor. By allowing sentiment and history to circumvent the proper channels of the domestic hierarchy, Louis accuses Emily of failing in wifeliness not merely by suggesting she is susceptible to adulterous nudges, but he also simultaneously attacks her authority and station as manager of his domestic sphere.[31]

Here, as in the incident with Jenny the lady's-maid, Louis pretends to be unaware of levels and structures of authority that organize the labor of the home, as well as the status of its inhabitants, whether family or servant. Yet as John Tosh has suggested, for Louis to do so is to disclaim all the domestic adulation he indulges in at other times. Louis, as one who will eventually weep over the cruel loss of such comforts, does not even have a job to occasionally pull him away[32]—making his obtuseness regarding

[31] Kay Boardman points out that "Whilst men accumulated money to support home and family, women regulated household consumption in activities ranging from spending surplus income to organising servants, and the ideal domestic woman used all her time to make the home run smoothly." (150) In other words, Louis is not only accusing Emily of disobedience and possibly adultery, he is also making her worse at her job.

[32] Kathy Psomaides describes the way that Trollope designs Louis's social position to serve as a warning for the type of man he so easily becomes when marriage proves mildly difficult: "Not merely historically, however, but also theoretically, Louis is the reluctant embodiment of liberalism's outmoded other. He combines classic tropes of aristocratic decadence-- he doesn't work, he becomes increasingly feminized, he dresses extravagantly and falls into a certain amount of alcohol and drug dissipation-- with an

domestic power structures read as increasingly specious, as he becomes a man whose only reason to leave the home space is to complain about its insufficiency. Trollope's narration constantly undermines Louis's emotional claims, noting time and again that Louis ignores essential details when they are contradictory to the rhetorical point he wants to make. It is safe to argue, therefore, that Louis pouring out his heart to the cook is portrayed as both a natural search for sympathy *and* a subtle attack on Emily's domestic authority, knowing as he does that Emily's ability to command and even discipline the servants depends heavily on Louis's willingness to lend his power to her demands.

The infamous Prodgers affair, however, coincides with one of the major transformations of Louis in the novel: his decision to henceforth communicate with his wife only through letters. Shortly before the cook reveals Louis's ability to speak frankly to her, one of his soon-to-be infamous missives begins to replace his physical presence in Emily's daily life: "So they went on for two days, and on the evening of the second day there came a letter from Trevelyan to his wife. They had neither of them seen him, although he had been in and out of the house" (95). The shared space of the home has instead become a space of avoidance and careful staging of absence, at least on Louis's part. Where he once tracked his wife's movement through the house desperate to guess at her conduct, he can now do so solely to avoid her—thereby paving the way for their relationship to become solely textual. In response to Emily's rage at being dictated to by his beloved cook, Louis signals the new phase in their relationship with a patently disingenuous refusal of his own agency:

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overweening will to power. He uses the political language of mastery-- "master," "command," "obey," "submit"— yet he is a man "absolutely unfitted by nature to have the custody or guardianship of others."" (36)

On the morning of the third day there came the following letter:—

Wednesday, June 1, 12 midnight.

Dearest Emily,

You will readily believe me when I say that I never in my life was so wretched as I have been during the last two days. That you and I should be in the same house together and not able to speak to each other is in itself a misery, but this is terribly enhanced by the dread lest this state of things should be made to continue. (96)

Since Emily continually answers back whenever he tries to speak to her in person, Louis convinces himself that his letters are the only way to speak his mind to her—but, as Emily herself snidely points out, there is something pathetic about his refusal to engage in actual conversation. He speaks of their mutual inability to speak to one another, but Emily has no problem at all speaking to *him*—he is merely unwilling to hear her do so. Louis can leave his masculine enclave whenever he pleases—but Emily, knowing all too well that a wife has no place in a husband's study, will not condescend to beard him in his lair. The study where he once read scientific journals has become the enclave where he studies *her*—and yet refuses to engage in any real world fieldwork (even that of going up to luncheon occasionally) that might test his increasingly wild hypotheses.

Louis's letter also shows the new role of melodramatic hero he has begun to design for himself, as the petulant and insistent temporality of "Wednesday, June 1, 12 midnight" suggests. Louis has moved on from being upset that his wife has made friends with a man he does not care for, and is now upset that she is forcing him to write letters in the middle of the night, that he is reduced to writing letters at all, and that he does not have the presence of mind to say what he wants to say in actual conversation.[33] The

[33] To be fair, Emily's disconcerting bluntness is upsetting to more characters in the novel than Louis—and if he chooses his position to be that of the wretched husband in a wretched melodrama, then she is similarly devoted to her part as the furiously virtuous wife who will brook no doubts about her conduct.

“inability to speak” is all his, and his efforts to speak through letters and even Lady Milborough essentially guarantee a widening of the rift, rather than closing it. Furthermore, Trollope’s narrator refuses to let this farcical performance proceed unnoted, and the letter is undercut by an extensive omniscient exposé of Louis’s many twisted motives and missteps:

> … there were certain words in the letter which were odious to Mrs. Trevelyan, and must have been odious to any young wife. He had said that he did not "as yet" suspect her of having done anything wrong. And then, when he endeavoured to explain to her that a separation would be very injurious to herself, he had coupled her sister with her, thus seeming to imply that the injury to be avoided was of a material kind. She had better do what he told her, as, otherwise, she and her sister would not have a roof over their head! That was the nature of the threat which his words were supposed to convey. (97)

Louis cannot admit to himself that all the power in the household belongs to him, but the narrator never lets the reader forget it—and Emily, likewise, is well aware that poetical protestations of love are merely flourishes surrounding his immutable authority. Indeed, Christopher Herbert suggests that Emily often stands in as an unconventional proxy figure for Trollope himself, writing that “her lucidity, which is Trollope's own, dominates the novel” (459). Louis’s fatal flaw is not in assuming that his wife should be tractable, complaisant, and supernaturally interested in fulfilling his every wish—after all, those expectations, unrealistic as they were, had been impressed upon him for most of his young life. His inability (and refusal) to realize their fictional nature once entering the married state, however, is the linchpin of his eventual destruction—as well as that of his marriage and family. Emily is as far from a mysterious creature as anyone could be—she tells him exactly what she wants, what she is willing to do, and what she expects of him. Louis’s unwillingness to accept her terms, and his choice to instead continually make his own increasingly fantastic is as unbelievable to his wife as to the rest of society.

The more incapable Louis becomes of seeing his wife for the flawed yet earnest woman she is (rather than the ludicrous temptress of his imagination), the more clearly she understands and despises his own motives and choices. Indeed, Louis's decision to shift from interpersonal interaction to a textual form only convinces Emily that his primary motivator is cowardice, rather than love or self-respect. Herbert's remarkable work articulating the crux of Louis's madness explains Emily's increasingly clear vision:

> Her sharpest insight, and the crux of the novel's study of marital politics, is that the issue between Victorian husbands and wives lies after all not so much in simple tyranny as in a web of euphemism and ideological mystification that makes effective male tyranny unrecognizable for what it is. Male coercion operates not in direct but in insidious fashion, she says. She therefore does not demand (as the less knowing Isola does, however timidly) emancipation; what she doggedly demands, with such catastrophic results, is simply an explicit, unambiguous definition of the rules governing power relations in her marriage, and by extension in marriage in general. (459-460)

Louis's true desire is not, then, that Emily should follow his orders, Herbert suggests—but that she should make believe that no orders ever existed in the first place.[34] In many ways, this makes Louis's retreat into letter-writing even more absurd, as expressing his wish-command-bidding in text strips them of context, tone, and the possibility of rebuttal or explanation when they are deemed too harsh (or delusional). Louis, newly convinced of his tragic lot in life, perhaps believes that expressing himself in text will result in some romantic reconciliation—as if his attempts to pour his heart onto the page will cause Emily to remember her true love for him. But since Emily is increasingly skeptical of both the letter *and* the spirit of the law (especially regarding custody laws in the impending event of their separation), his increasingly imperious missives only exacerbate

[34] Emily spends much of the novel coming to terms with a concept articulated by Coral Lansbury: "Women were called upon to worship their husbands because so few merited rational admiration" (102).

her anger. This, Trollope suggests, is why marriage cannot be stripped to purely legal terms. To do so destroys the possibility for dialogic interaction and lived experience, which he portrays as an essential part of domestic functionality.

In the midst of Louis's bafflement over how to get what he wants without being reduced to saying it (and its tyrannical underpinnings) out loud, Trollope actually presents his audience with an alternative vision of how such a marriage might work: in Miss Jemima Stanbury and her niece Dorothy[35]. Perhaps due entirely to the fact that their relationship is not sexual (and therefore need not be airbrushed with romance[36]), Miss Stanbury is always more than willing to state her autocratic expectations outright, and Dorothy is powerless enough to make no claims for her own agency. Miss Stanbury expects absolute obedience from her servants and her niece, and furthermore, she never tries to hide the fact (as Louis does) that she considers the same level of slavish devotion

[35] Their household consists of an elder Miss Stanbury and a younger Miss Stanbury—the Misses Stanbury. The Mrs. Stanbury, perhaps?

[36] Not the romance of other couples in the novel, certainly—but Trollope frequently uses conventional love language as aunt and niece come to know one another. Heading downstairs to meet Dorothy for the first time, Miss Stanbury is afflicted with very curious sensations: "Then Miss Stanbury went down, almost trembling as she went. The matter to her was one of vital importance. She was going to change the whole tenour of her life for the sake,—as she told herself,—of doing her duty by a relative whom she did not even know. But we may fairly suppose that there had in truth been a feeling beyond that, which taught her to desire to have some one near her to whom she might not only do her duty as guardian, but whom she might also love. She had tried this with her nephew; but her nephew had been too strong for her, too far from her, too unlike to herself… Now, thus late in life, she was going to make another venture, to try an altogether new mode of living,—in order, as she said to herself, that she might be of some use to somebody,—but, no doubt, with a further unexpressed hope in her bosom, that the solitude of her life might be relieved by the companionship of some one whom she might love. She had arrayed herself in a clean cap and her evening gown, and she went down-stairs looking sternly, with a fully-developed idea that she must initiate her new duties by assuming a mastery at once. But inwardly she trembled, and was intensely anxious as to the first appearance of her niece." (73-74)

from both: “Service with her was well requited, and much labour was never exacted. But it was not every young woman who could live with her. A rigidity as to hours, as to religious exercises, and as to dress, was exacted, under which many poor girls altogether broke down” (66). The difference between Dorothy Stanbury and the once-unmarried Emily Rowley, however, is that Dorothy is given fair warning of what will be expected of her once she joins a new household, whereas before her marriage, Emily was promised only affection and protection.

Miss Stanbury calls her demands what they are—absolute requirements of obedience to her wishes, established in deference to the fact that she is the head of her own household. Because she makes these demands explicit (in a way that Louis Trevelyan refuses to do—he expects Emily to guess at his requirements, and is deeply wounded when she requests specific instructions rather than a series of hints about what he truly desires), her niece Dorothy is prepared to meet the standards for what they are: the orders of a tyrant, which, if met, come with certain rewards. Laura Fasick writes that “A single woman's house . . . could become an alternative space, one in which a woman could not only hold authority in her own right, but could also transmit the knowledge that deference to a man should not be a woman's highest value” (78). Jemima Stanbury, having created one such alternative space, is willing to welcome Dorothy inside as long as Dorothy will honor the idiosyncratic rules of the spinster’s household. Here, too, Miss Stanbury is more honest than Louis—she owns that her laws are peculiar to her own experiences and preferences, while Louis insists that his expectations are the universal demands of wider society, a claim that Emily is determined to prove wrong.

Miss Stanbury and Louis Trevelyan are alike in their propensity for issuing edicts via letter—yet there, too, the difference between them is vital. Miss Stanbury's harshest letters come *before* inviting Dorothy to join her household, and become progressively more humane as the relationship alters her desire to have everything her own way. She begins, in fact, to relish the give and take of conversation with Dorothy—and even the alterations in her own desires that come with it. The impingement of another self on her reality is increasingly viewed as the positive result of their domestic arrangement, rather than as the destruction of her authority. Louis, on the other hand, moves in the opposite direction, allowing his missives to slowly obliterate any sense of what daily married life was like with his actual wife, as opposed to the intentionally cruel harridan he invents for himself and his increasingly unrecognizable "memories" of her behavior. Delap, Griffin, and Wills write that "the concept of domestic authority helps us to reconceive the home as an arena of active negotiation, agency and remembering. It should be seen as a site of flux for some central social identities, rather than a realm of constraint and timeless domestic labour" (4). Another reason that Miss Stanbury and her niece have a successful "marriage" is because they both embrace the home as "an arena of active negotiation", and each one is willing to make room for the other when their identities begin to be reshaped in that "site of flux". Dorothy teaches herself to remain silent in some situations, but insists upon the right to speak up, object, and persuade on other topics (such as her brother Hugh, and her refusal to marry Mr. Gibson). Miss Stanbury learns to view her preferences as preferences rather than moral absolutes, and she also learns that when Dorothy has chosen to speak up, there is usually a very good reason to listen. The meek dependent learns to assert her moral authority, and the household tyrant begins to find

pleasure in accommodation and compromise. It is the approach to marriage that the Trevelyans never discover.

Louis seems to believe that putting their marital differences on the page (and taking them out of the parlor) will render them less complex, less fraught, and more easily parsed than in normal conversation. He fails to realize, however, that his own reactions to previous textual artifacts—in the form of the correspondence between Emily and Colonel Osborne—provide ample evidence that this idealistic approach to writing is naïve at best, and willfully delusional at worst. The very presence of letters from Osborne entering the space of his house has frequently angered Louis into silence, or into insults against his wife—even the salutations and normal textual shortcuts contained within them tear at his self-esteem and equilibrium: “He opened Colonel Osborne's note, and read it, and became, as he did so, almost more angry than before. Who was this man that he should dare to address another man's wife as "Dear Emily?" At the moment Trevelyan remembered well enough that he had heard the man so call his wife, that it had been done openly in his presence, and had not given him a thought” (40). That “Dear [name]” is a normal salutation for casual notes between friends is a detail he is willing to overlook for the sake of his invariably hurt pride—and having the evidence of what he has deemed an insult set down on paper means that he can look at it for the purposes of enraging himself again and again. Even Osborne designating Louis himself by the nickname “T.” rather than his full name becomes another reason to hate the man and suspect his wife: “This was intolerable to him. It made him feel that he was to be regarded as second, and this

man to be regarded as first" (41)[37]. With even the most innocuous of casual written practices catapulting Louis into wrath, the reader must wonder whether his decision to communicate via letter for the rest of their marriage is an attempt to solve problems, or to magnify them. This is one of many instances where Trollope showcases the unintended consequences of Louis's purely textual approach to marriage. The narrator suggests that by the point of their final quarrel, any chance of forgiveness on either side has already passed:

> …there was no decided point which, if conceded, would have brought about a reconciliation. Trevelyan asked for general submission, which he regarded as his right, and which in the existing circumstances he thought it necessary to claim, and though Mrs. Trevelyan did not refuse to be submissive she would make no promise on the subject. But the truth was that each desired that the other should acknowledge a fault, and that neither of them would make that acknowledgment. (104)

The mutual desire for the other to "acknowledge a fault" gestures towards Trollope's suggestion that a marriage based on cultural ideals and expected modes of behavior turns relationship into performance, which renders miscommunication into calamity. When a relationship's benefits accrue to its participants (as in the mutual support and affection enjoyed by Miss Stanbury and Dorothy), each one is motivated to heal a rift. In the case of the Trevelyans, however, as they become increasingly fixated on what others think, there is less motivation for reconciliation than for apportioning of blame. Trollope repeatedly refers to happy marriages being called "successful," and love itself being a form of "success"[38]—but the darker implication of that construction is that when a

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[37] In fact, in the same two-line note, Osborne refers to Emily's father as "Sir M.," and to himself as "F.O." (38).

[38] "[Dorothy] too had heard of love, and had been taught to feel that the success or failure of a woman's life depended upon that,—whether she did, or whether she did not, by such gifts as God might have given to her, attract to herself some man strong

marriage begins to encounter difficulty, the result is failure rather than a rough patch. Emily, having married and given birth to a male child, has achieved all the success she is capable of, and necessarily assumes that any flaw must therefore belong to her husband. Louis, however, having been assured of his role as master, is insistent that he should be able to delegate any failure or unhappiness to his wife[39]. That reconciliation might be nearly impossible may very well be the case—but that it is practically guaranteed to fail by dint of the new mode of textual communication is equally so. With so much of the marriage's destruction being based on whether Emily is to receive letters or not, whether the servants will report the existence of those letters to Louis, and his inevitable rage whether he reads the contents or no, his choice of the same medium as the only remaining vestige of their relationship can be read as blatant self-sabotage.

Indeed, the exchange of letters that follow the Trevelyan separation essentially sketches out the shape of a new genre: the epistolary divorce. From the time that their domestic enclave at Curzon Street is abandoned and Emily is sent away, the tensions between the two partners are repeatedly inflamed (and broadcast for everyone else to see) through both the letters they exchange with one another, as well as those sent to and from them to others. Prior to the separation, "things went from bad to worse. Lady Milborough continued to interfere, writing letters to Emily which were full of good sense, but which, as Emily said herself, never really touched the point of dispute" (116). Letters as a form

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enough, and good enough, and loving enough to make straight for her her paths, to bear for her her burdens, to be the father of her children, the staff on which she might lean, and the wall against which she might grow, feeling the sunshine, and sheltered from the wind. She had ever estimated her own value so lowly as to have told herself often that such success could never come in her way." (542)

[39] Curiously, this impasse remains in place even when Emily eventually agrees to accept the blame, Louis having become more comforted by the habit of accusing her of sin than the idea that she might capitulate.

of bombardment and unwelcome advice are hardly likely to work as a last resort—and the fact that Lady Milborough writes them with Louis's approval is certainly no help. In response, Emily, who lets no attempt at chastisement go without a scathing response, reminds her two would-be instructors that letters are more weapon than communication in the easiest of ways: she resumes her once-forbidden correspondence with Colonel Osborne.

> Mrs. Trevelyan, indeed, did a thing which was sure of itself to render any steps taken for a reconciliation ineffectual. In the midst of all this turmoil,—while she and her husband were still living in the same house, but apart because of their absurd quarrel respecting Colonel Osborne, she wrote another letter to that gentleman....of course Mr. Trevelyan had been told of the correspondence. His wife, indeed, had been especially careful that there should be nothing secret about the matter,—that it should be so known in the house that Mr. Trevelyan should be sure to hear of it. And he had heard of it, and been driven almost mad by it. (116-117)

Put a watch on me, her defiant letters seem to say, and I'll *give* your spies something to report! Emily never for a moment considers actual adultery—indeed, she is the only character in the novel who views Osborne as a thoroughly unlikely candidate for such activities, even if she were remotely interested in having a love affair.[40] But since Emily has been repeatedly judged on significations of potential unfaithfulness rather than the actual act, she is more than willing to continue producing them, if such production will add to her husband's supervisory pain. Just as Louis's use of letters (and Lady Milborough) to scold Emily hits her on the raw, however, so too does her attack of these

[40] The narrator is quite firm on this matter. She might appreciate the sympathetic ear, he suggests, but anything else is inconceivable: "Mrs. Trevelyan was certainly not in love with Colonel Osborne. She was not more so now than she had been when her father's friend, purposely dressed for the occasion, had kissed her in the vestry of the church in which she was married, and had given her a blessing, which was then intended to be semi-paternal,—as from an old man to a young woman. She was not in love with him,—never would be, never could be in love with him" (190).

forms strike *him* just where he is most vulnerable. Having believed that reducing Emily to a textual object would render her more manageable, Louis is appalled to discover (as so many other readers of Victorian texts can attest) that he has only made her *more* indecipherable.

Indeed, Emily's refusal to let any insult slide—or even go unanswered—is universally sanctioned by the end of the novel[41], when Louis's insults become the bleatings of a madman, rather than the awkward demands for deference they appear to be in the early days of the conflict. Her demands for clarity and her determination to frame Louis's wavering requests as claims for slavish and soul-destroying obedience may very well gesture towards certain conflicts within Victorian gender ideology and marital law, but they are also calculated to shock and upset not only her husband, but everyone who hears her. In one sense, this is a constant reiteration of her parents' rueful recognizance that Emily "likes her own way" (3). In another, however, the only power left to Emily as her marriage disintegrates is that of shocking and discomfiting those around her, from peacemaking Nora to militantly man-hating Priscilla Stanbury, from scolding Lady Millborough to exasperated Mr. Outhouse.[42] With her household authority taken from her and her fitness as a mother increasingly questioned, Emily's only weapon against her husband is increasingly a weapon against the world. In adopting the defiance of a proudly

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[41] Ironically, the point where every character begins to call him mad and tell Emily to ignore everything he says is also the point where she stops arguing with or refuting his claims, and passively submits to them in the hope of preventing his death.

[42] Christopher Herbert suggests that the difficulty these characters have in placing the blame is a reflection of the destabilization that originated in the Trevelyan townhouse: "Our perplexity is mirrored within the novel by characters like old Lady Milborough or the clergyman Mr. Outhouse, each of whom is drawn into the Trevelyans' fray as a partisan of one or the other combatant and ends by doubting which of the two is in the right after all" (457).

fallen woman yet simultaneously maintaining her innocence, she alters the balance of public moral opinion so thoroughly that even Louis Trevelyan's supporters are increasingly unsure that she has *done* anything wrong, even while they collectively agree that she certainly seems to *act* wrong. Trapped herself in an untenable position (emotionally, financially, and legally, as custody of Louey will prove), Emily then ensures that everyone else gets a taste of that sensation, as every character in the novel is forced to defend her character even while they abominate her conduct and attitude. If her original request for Louis was for him to stop issuing edicts and simply explain what she could possibly do differently, then she eventually turns to asking all of her initial detractors the same question.

Herbert suggests that the vagueness of Louis's requirements and the wavering boundaries he keeps attempting to define and police are exactly where Louis's sense of self is most vulnerable—which means that Emily's choice to continue exposing them for everyone to see is exactly the way to best wound him:

> Trevelyan genuinely loves his wife and wants moreover to be entirely fair in his dealings with her, but he can hardly open his mouth to speak without betraying, all unconsciously, the duplicity so deeply ingrained in the Victorian ideology of marriage.…Trevelyan's speech constantly illustrates in this way the function of the elaborate sign system by which an almost subliminal authoritarian message is couched in polite "companionate" language, meant to be obeyed yet not quite recognized for what it is. (461-462)

Louis wants Emily to be debased, while pretending to be exalted—and she responds by publicizing that dehumanizing request to anyone who will listen. Even as he experiences the sensation of utter humiliation, Louis refuses to accept that such an emotion should ever belong to him, and therefore decides that burden should be his wife's to bear (whether she is actually mortified or not). At the same time, however, his humiliation can

only end if she acts appropriately worshipful towards him—which puts Louis in the strange position of asking her for internal agony and external delight. Though Emily herself is certainly far from completely reasonable, she more than once is able to convince those who have assumed that she is to blame for the separation that the condition of cheerful self-abasement asked of her was insupportable.

The inherently fraught nature of the epistolary divorce becomes even clearer once Emily has been sent out of London. Although there was always something ridiculous about Louis furiously scribbling letters in his study to be "mailed" upstairs to his wife in the same house, the correspondence that passes between them once they are no longer under the same roof becomes even more of a spectacle. Furthermore, where once there were only a few servants to know about the various communiqués being passed back and forth, now there are local mail clerks, local families excited about new subjects for gossip, and the entire village of Nuncombe Putney. Trollope's narrator underlines the inherently public nature of mail in the village through an extensive description of the "wooden-legged man who rode a donkey" (166) who serves as postman, and whose laborious travels through the streets are intimately familiar to every person in the town. Only at the end of the description of his daily rounds does Emily finally receive a letter—the implication being that her letter is as public as the mailman himself:

> … The ladies had finished their breakfast, and were seated together at an open window. As was usual, the letters were given into Priscilla's hands…When [Mrs. Trevelyan's] letter was handed to her, she looked at the address closely and then walked away with it into her own room.
>
> "I think it's from Louis," said Nora, as soon as the door was closed. "If so, he is telling her to come back." (167)

The contrast between Emily's desire to be alone with her letter and the essentially public nature of that missive is evident not only in the well-known mailman who hands the post

through open windows, but in the immediate efforts to divine the contents of the document while it is actually being opened elsewhere. That Nora's guess as to its contents is so utterly wrong only proves what happens to an already strained marriage which is then transmuted into text: it is not only warped through the limiting nature of language, but is also publicly dissected and mischaracterized more readily, thanks to the physical paper signifiers traveling back and forth across the miles. Louis agonizes over the fact that the Colonel's letters might still be able to reach Emily, making her exile insufficient: "He had sent her away into the most remote retirement he could find for her; but the post was open to her" (176-177).[43] And indeed, he is too right—because the letter Emily refuses to open in company comes not from her husband but from Colonel Osborne: "Together with Miss Stanbury's first letter to her sister-in-law a letter had also been delivered to Mrs. Trevelyan. Nora Rowley, as her sister had left the room with this in her hand, had expressed her opinion that it had come from Trevelyan; but it had in truth been written by Colonel Osborne" (185). The slippage that happens in Nora's interpretation of that letter shows yet another danger of Louis determining to have nothing to do with his wife outside of the post—terrified that Osborne will supplant him in his wife's heart, Louis creates the very situation that allows Osborne to at least take his place in the postman's bag.[44] Furthermore, it never occurs to Louis that the openness of

[43] Wendy S. Jones describes the quandary Trevelyan faces as he tries (and fails) to come to terms with the fact that his wife's existence in the world extends beyond his power to control her circumstances: "Trevelyan does not want to control his wife because he fears her faithlessness; he suspects her of infidelity because he cannot control her...Trevelyan is unable to allow his love for his wife to temper his need for mastery, although he knows he ought to do so in order to resolve the quarrel" (149).
[44] Despite how much offense she had taken at his earlier letters, Emily also claims to feel quite offended at her husband's failure as a correspondent once she has been sent away. When Nora discovers that the first letter is not from Louis, but from Osborne,

the mail that he fears (because of his wife's "indelicacy", he claims) similarly leaves her at a disadvantage once Osborne is known to be her alleged lover. She cannot stop the man from writing to her any more than Louis can—whether she wants to or not. Osborne's devious (if vague) motives cannot be divined by postboxes, so he can write to any number of married ladies—and although he believes himself to be rakishly interesting in deciding to continue their semi-illicit correspondence, the narrator drily points out that he can only believe himself to be so by ignoring the facts: "the Colonel went to work, and made inquiries, and ascertained Mrs. Trevelyan's address in Devonshire. When he learned it, he thought that he had done much; though, in truth, there had been no secrecy in the matter. Scores of people knew Mrs. Trevelyan's address besides the newsvendor who supplied her paper, from whose boy Colonel Osborne's servant obtained the information" (187). Louis might worry that his wife remains permeable to Osborne's seditious attentions, but as this passage points out, he has actually made her (and her address) readily available to any number of people. While she lived in Curzon Street, he had some chance of controlling the letters she received, regardless of her anger at his efforts. Once she is removed to the Clock House, however, his power as censor is utterly lost—and hers as recipient of any letters at all is increased.

His response, of course, is to craft another letter. Of course, given that nothing has changed other than the lapse of time since they have lived together, it is a remarkable

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Emily sneers, "Oh dear, no. He is by no means so considerate. I do not suppose I shall hear from him, till he chooses to give some fresh order about myself or my child. He will hardly trouble himself to write to me, unless he takes up some new freak to show me that he is my master" (192-193). In this way, Emily again shows that she knows more about Louis's motives than he does himself—and although she cannot possibly know that Louis has been busy hiring Bozzle to act as his set of eyes on the spot, she senses that the lack of written harangues is more likely a preparation for further violation, rather than the onset of regret and forgiveness.

document, full of pleas for her to consider his own suffering while he lambastes her for causing it. After informing Emily that her conduct is "disgraceful" to her and "disgracing" to himself, calling her disobedience "flagrant," and "perverse," his second paragraph sums up the problems in their marriage with remarkable brevity (although the insights it contains are assuredly accidental):

> But I do not write now for the sake of finding fault with you.… it is my duty to protect both you and myself from further shame; and I wish to tell you what are my intentions with that view. In the first place, I warn you that I keep a watch on you. The doing so is very painful to me, but it is absolutely necessary. You cannot see Colonel Osborne, or write to him, without my knowing it. I pledge you my word that in either case,—that is, if you correspond with him or see him,—I will at once take our boy away from you. I will not allow him to remain, even with a mother, who shall so misconduct herself. (255-256)

She has disgraced him, but he does not wish to find fault; his duty is to protect her, and so he threatens to take her child away.[45] And above all, of course: she cannot receive or send letters without his knowing, and therefore, any attempts at communication should be passed directly into Louis's hands. In *The Paradox of Privacy*, Christina Marsden Gillis writes about the inherently contradictory nature of epistolary genres, suggesting that Samuel Richardson was one of the first authors to locate "in the letter the peculiar ambiguity between private and public" (2). Trollope, years later, creates this same ambiguity in Louis Trevelyan's letters. They are written in a didactic and almost oratory tone, yet their declared purpose is in sending intimate messages to his own wife, not an appreciative audience eager to applaud. Furthermore, Louis's missives are almost invariably passed around, discussed, and dissected—and not merely by Emily. The extraordinarily antagonistic letter of the previous passage is first shared with Lady

[45] Later in the letter, he also threatens to reduce her allowance to the point of starvation, and then to seek a divorce on the grounds of her "proven" adultery.

Milborough by Louis himself—and he is deeply offended when she begs him not to send it:

> Then he handed Lady Milborough the letter, which she read very slowly, and with much care.
> "I don't think I would—would—would—"
> "Would what?" demanded Trevelyan.
> "Don't you think that what you say is a little,—just a little prone to make,—to make the breach perhaps wider?" (258-259)

When he promises to ignore all her advice (just as he has been doing for some time, and with such success), she begs him to reconsider, suggesting "that letter will drive her to despair" (260).[46] The result is that Louis storms out of her house, and promises never to return. Unwilling to admit to himself that such a letter is designed as a barb rather than a balm, he cannot bear for even a close friend to tell him what he already knows. Although reducing Emily to her status on the page has been his method for so long, he deeply resents having the same standard applied to him. In *New Men in Trollope's Novels*, Margaret Markwick argues:

> Trollope [suggests] that men often fail to develop the capacity for putting their own feelings into words, shunning such facility for fear of seeming womanish. Thus not talking about how they feel mistakenly becomes a signifier of manliness. Resisting 'melt[ing] into open ruth', they fail to learn to locate their feelings accurately, which leads them to pursue false trails, with no insight into how they damage that which they most love, nor how to repair it. (154)

Louis, pretending to be the sort of man who helplessly pours his heart onto the page, is furious when confronted with the fact that his attempts at it only make him seem like more of a tyrant than ever. For Emily to point out his hypocrisy is one thing—after all,

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[46] With the remarkable Emily Trevelyan, however, almost every negative emotion is transformed into anger, and an anger she is eager to share: "Trevelyan's letter to his wife fell like a thunderbolt among them at Nuncombe Putney. Mrs. Trevelyan was altogether unable to keep it to herself;—indeed she made no attempt at doing so" (261).

she has made friends with a man he dislikes. For his dear friends to do the same (for Hugh Stanbury is also part of the chorus urging less harshness) is insupportable.

The most scornful critic of Louis's self-delusion, however, remains Trollope's narrator—who always invites the audience to join him in scoffing at such feeble attempts at dissimulation. Even before Lady Milborough sees the letter, this omnipresent judge expresses exasperation:

> When he had finished this he read it twice, and believed that he had written, if not an affectionate, at any rate a considerate letter. He had no bounds to the pity which he felt for himself in reference to the injury which was being done to him, and he thought that the offers which he was making, both in respect to his child and the money, were such as to entitle him to his wife's warmest gratitude. He hardly recognised the force of the language which he used when he told her that her conduct was disgraceful, and that she had disgraced his name. He was quite unable to look at the whole question between him and his wife from her point of view. (257)

Louis, according to Markwick's standard, is only a "New man" when it comes to himself. His heart bleeds for his own troubles, he longs to comfort his own hurts, and he would eagerly reach out a tender hand of friendship and equality if his other hand would be the one to receive it. In this way, he becomes increasingly less interested in the information he gets from the outside world—from Bozzle, Lady Milborough, Stanbury, and Emily alike. His own mind is the only place he finds his ideas unconditionally seconded, and rather than count on dubious facts (he is frequently misinformed regarding Emily's perceived guilt *and* innocence), he prefers to base all his ideas on the assumptions he already holds. This is the effect of the epistolary un-romance—in writing the letters he becomes passionately fond of, Louis is more interested in presenting an image and idea of himself as the wounded lover than he is in actual communication, let alone reconciliation. Emily, forever trying to convince her husband that he is acting illogically,

is only telling him what he sometimes appears to suspect yet deny about himself. To deal with his wife as she really is would destroy Louis's continually growing delusions—and so, Q.E.D., he must not see his wife.

In fact, his efforts not to see his wife grow exponentially throughout the novel. Early in the conflict, he restricts himself to hiding in his study and perhaps skipping luncheon with Emily and Nora. That quickly turns into remaining in the house, but avoiding them both—which of course leads to setting up separate establishments in different cities. That might seem the furthest apart they could get, short of the divorce he keeps threatening—but as Louis's alienation increases, even strained and insulting letters become too direct a form of contact to bear. As a result, they are both reduced to using proxies as observers of the other—and if reducing a marriage to text is impossible, then relying on the secondhand reports and interpretations of *others* is even more of a mockery of the domestic intimacy neither of them could ultimately stand. In a sense, each one is reduced to the hypothetical roles of "husband" and "wife," with no consideration taken of the individual inhabiting either role. Louis increasingly does not think of Emily as herself, but as a stubborn actress refusing to convincingly perform her assigned part—and vice versa. The problem with such a model of marriage, Trollope points out, is that it is in the moments when a partner's individuality cannot be ignored that true intimacy begins to form. As Emily and Louis Trevelyan refuse to acknowledge the role that individual instincts and backgrounds might have on any given debate, Trollope depicts Miss Stanbury and Dorothy as a pair who choose to push past the difficulties that incompatibility might engender. Miss Stanbury, having let it be known that she is master

in her own house, learns very quickly that there are certain elements of mastery she will have to abandon:

> Dorothy…said that she had no objection to going to church every day when there was not too much to do.
> "There never need be too much to do to attend the Lord's house," said Miss Stanbury, somewhat angrily.
> "Only if you've got to make the beds," said Dorothy.
> "My dear, I beg your pardon," said Miss Stanbury. "I beg your pardon, heartily. I'm a thoughtless old woman, I know. Never mind. Now, we'll go in." (77-78)

Miss Stanbury's immediate repentance does not signal a resolution to attempt complaisance, as her continually stormy relationship with Dorothy shows. Yet it is the first of many times when her expectation of being obeyed and agreed with is fundamentally altered by Dorothy's honesty about her past—an honesty which is never found between the Trevelyans. Dorothy's ability to endure anything except condemnation of her brother Hugh is another point where Miss Stanbury weighs her companionship and love to be worth the cost of letting some rants go unranted, and Trollope then proceeds to show that Dorothy is made increasingly bold, and Miss Stanbury increasingly benevolent through the process of their relationship.

In some ways, the impermanence of their non-marriage seems to bolster their connection, while the permanence of the Trevelyan marriage has the opposite effect—knowing they cannot escape the relationship makes Emily and Louis less invested in healing and prolonging their marriage. The lack of an endpoint short of death gives them both a false sense of security, rather than acting as a defense against their worst behavior. In Miss Stanbury, we see an autocrat who initially uses her power to send Dorothy away as a threat against her niece's sense of security—but that same threat eventually transforms itself into a motivation to amend her *own* behavior, in the interest of keeping

Dorothy nearby. Miss Stanbury finds that the once-abstract concepts of "my niece" (who shall obey me), "my money" (that she will never get), "my house" (where she will follow my rules or be evicted), and "my rules" (unalterable) are subtly transformed into "dear Dorothy," "Dorothy's future," "Dorothy's place," and "our way."[47] Their growing together is consistently paralleled by the Trevelyans's growing apart, and just as Louis's cry of "my wife" becomes increasingly hysterical, so too does his need for Bozzle to watch over her result in his understanding *of* her becoming irrevocably tied to the detective and his methods, rather than to Emily's actual conduct or personality. The physical distance between the couple is matched by the psychic displacement Louis chooses and Emily is reduced to through his choice, in the position of spouse being successively replaced first by close friends and confidants, later by the wooden-legged postman, then Bozzle, and eventually an irritated virtual stranger, in the figure of Mr. Glascock. With the "wife" function performed by increasingly alien (and alienating, as can be seen in Louis's responses to them) figures, the marital rift takes on outsize emotional proportions—and Emily's early "insufficiency" is thereafter consistently mimicked by her laughably inappropriate proxies.

Louis, for his part, seems to recognize that hiring Bozzle somehow slots Bozzle into the Emily-shaped hole in his life—which is one of the reasons he is so often repulsed by the detective, apart from his distinct class markers. (Whether this is because he finds Bozzle as Emily obscene or because his disgust for his wife taints the otherwise innocent Bozzle seems to depend on the whims of Louis's variable moods.) The first sign that

[47] Even "my worthless radical nephew who I refuse to ever see again" becomes "Hugh, who is invited to stay with his aunt for Dorothy's wedding", showing that Dorothy's effect on her aunt extends far beyond the relationship between the two of them.

Bozzle represents Louis being even further away from Emily than previously comes when Bozzle chooses to report not merely on Emily's movements and guests, but on her letters as well: "But there's the fact. The lady, she has wrote another letter; and the Colonel,—why, he has received it. There ain't nothing wrong about the post-office. If I was to say what was inside of that billydou,—why, then I should be proving what I didn't know; and when it came to standing up in court, I shouldn't be able to hold my own. But as for the letter, the lady wrote it, and the Colonel,—he received it" (250). In absorbing Louis's obsession with letters and in conveying the only information about Emily that Louis is willing to hear, Bozzle is essentially inserted into the middle of their marriage.[48] He is Louis's new domestic and moral[49] authority, he reports on the daily household activities to the eager master of the house, and he performs the sort of servile obedience Louis has so long been craving without a qualm. Just as Bozzle is happy to perform these wifely duties (for a fee), however, so too does he provide the ominous omnipresence and surveillance over Emily that Louis no longer feels capable of—and certainly with more self-possession than Louis had ever been able to command. As Anthea Trodd suggests, "Bozzle is a prime example of the sensationalist policeman who...constructs vicious hypotheses from normal appearances" (452). Bozzle, knowing the sort of text Louis

[48] Bozzle's new role in mediating all information Louis gets about his wife is complicated by the fact that not only is he in a position he does not belong, but that he is nowhere near as omniscient and incisive as he claims. As R.D. McMaster points out, "Like the others in the book, even Bozzle, the professional fact-hunter, gets his facts wrong, makes the wrong interpretation and assists in the downward spiral to distrust and disintegration" (20). Louis's insistence on getting his information second-hand is inherently destructive, but his choice to glean that information from a dubious source only adds to his perplexity.

[49] "Then he had put himself into the hands of Mr. Bozzle, and Mr. Bozzle had taught him that women very often do go astray. Mr. Bozzle's idea of female virtue was not high, and he had opportunities of implanting his idea on his client's mind" (362-363).

wants to read in his wife's behavior, is more than willing to concoct it on his employer's behalf. At the same time, however, even Bozzle is eventually softened by Emily's conduct in a way that Louis himself never is—in part, because he sees how unremarkable her daily conduct proves to be, whatever his reports to Louis might suggest. Bozzle is transformed from the gleefully suspicious businessman who assumes Emily to be a reasonably enterprising adulteress into the somber family man who hates the idea of parting her from her child. Trodd describes him as a willing accomplice who "exuberantly kidnaps Trevelyan's son" (453), but the novel describes him as undeniably ambivalent about the seriousness of removing a young child from his mother. Although he continues to persuade Louis of Emily's perfidy for the sake of his income, Mr. Bozzle understands the tempering effects of marriage in ways that Louis never will: "The truth was that Mrs. Bozzle was opposed to the proposed separation of the mother and the child, and that Bozzle was a man who listened to the words of his wife" (554).

As for Emily, she does not have the opportunity to hire a parallel detective—both because she can hardly use Louis's money to do so, and because she initially has very little interest in what he is doing with his miserable life. If he is determined to be absurd and self-pitying, she would rather know nothing about it. As Louis's derangement grows during their separation, however, she begins to be deluged with reports of his madness, his strange movements, and the fact that all of his friends have lost faith in him. Emily has no need to hire a detective, because her entire acquaintance rushes to fill that position on her behalf. Furthermore, once Louis (through Bozzle) has gone to extraordinary yet legal lengths to kidnap their child back into his paternal possession, Emily learns that individuals throughout all of Europe are suddenly willing to report back on Louis's

mental state and movements.[50] Hugh Stanbury and Mr. Glascock, previously depicted as Louis's old friends and traveling companions, readily become informers, divulging his addresses and movements whenever they can find them out. When Louis thinks himself and Louey safe at Willesden, he is not merely beset by Sir Marmaduke in the role of outraged father—he is even betrayed by an otherwise loyal domestic:

> "Mrs. Fuller," said Trevelyan, marching up towards her, "I will not have this, and I desire that you will retire from my room."
>
> But Mrs. Fuller escaped round the table, and would not be banished. She got round the table, and came closely opposite to Sir Marmaduke. "I don't want to say nothing out of my place, sir," said she, "but something ought to be done. He ain't fit to be left to hisself,—not alone,—not as he is at present. He ain't, indeed, and I wouldn't be doing my duty if I didn't say so. He has them sweats at night as'd be enough to kill any man; and he eats nothing, and he don't do nothing; and as for that poor little boy as is now in my own bed upstairs, if it wasn't that I and my Bessy is fond of children, I don't know what would become of that boy." (651)

Louis's final retreat into Italy is characterized by his increased persecution mania—and yet, in the structure of the novel, everyone *is* after him, if not exactly out to get him. Louis, who first used servants and hired help to maintain constant surveillance over his wife, becomes the center of everyone's attention—the result he has been seemingly so desirous of for so long, but which proves to be such a disappointment to him. Trollope seems to predate D.A. Miller here, in suggesting that though the domestic and social realms are inherently panoptical, any attempt to explicitly claim or manipulate the power of that collective scrutiny is destined to be treated with suspicion, and the communal apparatus will then be turned on whoever has attempted to exploit its function. Just as he

[50] Coral Lansbury suggests that the only thing worse than Trevelyan's pathological fear of society is his subsequent withdrawal from it: "Nobody can exist without society in Trollope's novels. Those who fail are condemned to solitude: they take their own lives or are driven into exile, and exile and death carry the same penalty. Success and failure are always resolved in social rather than in individual terms" (81).

has tried to read his wife's behavior like a trustworthy text of her selfhood, so too are the novel's other characters reduced to doing the same with his behavior. As John Tosh has pointed out, "…domestic circumstances were the most visible and reliable guide to a man's level of income (and thus his success in work), as well as being a mirror of his moral character" (24). Given that Louis's financial status is never in doubt, all the evidence of his new lifestyle must be read as evidence of the man he has become—and the collective information his new setting provides is far from reassuring. Critics have written about his sad affected exoticism of dress and manner in the house at Casalunga—and yet even the native Italians he attempts to mimic become a part of the watch over him[51], and eager witnesses against him:

> Then [Mr. Glascock] got into some discourse with the landlord about the strange gentleman at Casalunga. Trevelyan was beginning to become the subject of gossip in the town, and people were saying that the stranger was very strange indeed. The landlord thought that if the Signore had any friends at all, it would be well that such friends should come and look after him. Mr. Glascock asked if Mr. Trevelyan was ill. It was not only that the Signore was out of health,—so the landlord heard,—but that he was also somewhat— And then the landlord touched his head. He eat nothing, and went nowhere, and spoke to no one; and the people at the hospital to which Casalunga belonged were beginning to be uneasy about their tenant. (802-803)

When rural Italian peasants begin to fear the strangeness of a visiting Englishman, Trollope seems to suggest, there is evidence that something is seriously wrong.[52] And in

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[51] Jenny Bourne Taylor suggests that Trevelyan can even be read as a rebuttal to the century's madwomen in the attics, claiming that the novel "turns the plot of the mad wife...inside out by extending and adapting the central sensational device of emerging insanity" (96).

[52] Of course, as Louis realizes, even his all-too-British friends are of a similar mind. Christopher Lane suggests that such suspicion of antisocial behavior was on the rise in the nineteenth century: "…misanthropes—once prized for their integrity and disdain for humanity's worst excesses—came to appear immoral, degenerate, and even quasi-criminal...the evolution of this judgment in the nineteenth century highlights the changing role of communities in deciding who belongs, who doesn't, and why" (xix).

the end, even poor little Louey ends up testifying against his father—though more in his silence than in words. The previously happy and outgoing child has been transformed into a terrified and wary creature. Louis claims that the sufferings of being hounded out of England have caused him irreparable agonies, but Louey seems the more likely victim of being uprooted and torn away from everything he had ever known. Markwick points out the insight into child development that Trollope displays in this shift, writing: "The Trevelyans part when Louey is about ten months old, and for the next three months he lives with his mother in the country and then in London with her aunt and uncle, until he is abducted by his father and taken to Italy. Six months later a bewildered and withdrawn Louey is returned to his mother's custody. Trollope shows us, in painful detail, the effect on a small child of so many separations and losses" (105). Louis, however, takes even the alienation of his toddler son as a betrayal, and resents it almost as much as the interference of everyone else in his affairs—no matter that their descent upon his retreat is primarily in the interest of saving his life.

In the end, as with any true romance, Louis Trevelyan gets exactly what his heart desires. His wife and child live with him under the same roof, back home in England. His wife's days are spent watching over him, mopping his brow, and trying to attend to his every wish. She confesses to the adultery she did not commit and begs his pardon, and prevents her wrathful relations from extracting any meaningful vengeance. Nora, invited by Louis to stay with the Trevelyans in the hopes that she might find a husband, is preparing for her wedding, and no one dares to contradict him, out of fear that such a trial might cause him pain. In the midst of this happy ending, everyone is miserable, and he dies of a broken heart and mind—master of all he surveys, and as feeble as an infant. If

this is what it takes to truly reign over a household as absolute master, the novel suggests, then perhaps it would be better to merely let a strong-willed wife to have an occasional coze with one of her father's lecherously avuncular friends.

Ultimately, Trollope shows that the reduction of any person into a textual artifact is to eviscerate the reality of human experience and interaction—a rather unique claim to be made by a novelist. Trollope is not, however, indicting his own work, but rather proposes that the audience of such work who might try to imitate his authorial methodology are undermining their own desires for the sake of narrative coherency and reliable plotting. Louis Trevelyan's attempts to act as the benevolent yet omnipotent narrator of his own life *destroys* that life. Trollope claimed to write his novels as moral guidelines for living, but he wanted his audience to aspire to happy and useful lives—not life as bounded by the inherent restrictions of text.

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Chapter Three: Reforming/Revising the Rake in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Embedded within the narrative of Anne Brontë's novel *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is the transcript of a diary—a diary that spans years, first capturing the experiences of a young debutante's first London Season and whirlwind courtship, then a new wife's rocky adjustment to domestic life on a landed estate, and finally a gradual descent into marital hell. Many critics have wondered about, doubted, and exalted Brontë's use of the inserted diary within the novel. Critics in Brontë's own day viewed its insertion as the mistake of a novice writer. Amanda Claybaugh suggests that Brontë uses the rhetorical device of the diary as a way to experiment with form, writing that "in the middle of *Tenant*'s inset diary, we can see Anne Brontë experimenting to find forms capable of containing everyday life" (109). Garrett Stewart suggests that the implausibility of the diary's inclusion in a series of letters to Gilbert Markham's friend Halford is a way for Brontë to comment on her novel-reading audience's complicity as voyeurs, pointing out that transmittal of the diary would require "Herculean labors of transcription, weeks on end of lengthy letters to London in recompense for a spontaneous oral narrative long ago delivered by the recipient—and of which we know nothing" (95). Gwen Hyman suggests that the diary is "an unflinching recording of Arthur [Huntingdon]'s career. . . . his transformation from an attractive, high-spirited young lover to an abusive husband who offers to auction his wife off to the highest bidder, flaunts his affairs with his friend's wife and with a low-born faux governess, burns his wife's paintings, gives his toddler son a taste for alcohol-fueled bacchanalias, and finally (back in the pages of Markham's narrative) dies a slow and horrible death of dissolution" (56).

I would like to offer an alternative reading. Only through the medium of the diary can we see how the experiences of domesticity reshape Helen Graham, flirty debutante, into Helen Huntingdon, fugitive wife and kidnapper of her own son. If the novel instead featured scenes of Helen narrating her history to Gilbert Markham, her recounting of Arthur's courtship would have been told in retrospect, every incident imbued with the rueful certainty that her early hopes for love and domestic bliss would be quickly dashed. Yet by using the diary format to offer a series of *in media res* glimpses of Helen Graham's point of view prior to marriage, and then Helen Huntingdon's progressively grimmer impressions of marriage as the years pass, Brontë is able to show—in excruciating detail—how domestic poison can overwhelm and destroy a union that began as a love match. The ongoing, daily misery of Helen's domestic experiences, and her continual attempts to shape new reactions to or remedies for those experiences, are uniquely captured within the diary's temporally structured form. Laurie Langbauer writes that "The opacity of the everyday, then, is crucial: it reflects the poststructural recognition that all anyone can do is gesture to the real; subjects can't experience it unmediated and untransformed by expectation, by representation, by their own attention to it" (20). I would argue that the narrative use of the diary is Brontë's attempt to portray the everyday, because of its ability to portray the constantly changing mindset of a character experiencing ongoing pressures.

One of the underlying themes of the novel, after all, is that you can never really know someone until you have seen them at home. This is true of Helen just as it is for Arthur—both husband and wife are destined to be deeply disillusioned as they descend from wedded bliss to discontent, intrigue, and finally enmity. Helen is able to convince

herself that Arthur is a high-spirited man of honor who will be steadied by marriage and family during their courtship, when she can only see him for fifteen minute intervals supervised by chaperones—but it takes the grinding misery of years spent trapped in a house with a spiteful alcoholic libertine for her to accept that her original suitor had been a mirage.

From Arthur's perspective (as Brontë's device of the diary makes excruciatingly clear), he had courted a hot-blooded society flirt, who boldly made her preference for him plain even after she had been repeatedly warned about his well-known fondness for horseflesh, hard drinking, and woman (plural). When he finds himself married to a devoutly moralizing matron who expects him to be "sanctified" by her domestic virtues, he is understandably confused. Just as Helen takes years to understand who Arthur really is, so too does Arthur spend years dumbstruck by Helen's domestic practices and proclivities, her beliefs about child-rearing, and her evangelical zeal.

The complete incompatibility of their beliefs about best domestic practices makes up the majority of Helen's diary, the central narrative document of the novel. Helen also suggests that it is this domestic mismatch that finally forces her to escape Grassdale—and her marriage—with their son illegally in tow. She does not resort to leaving because she does not love her husband, but because of the way he runs his house. Helen offers to stay if he can simply compromise on details of domestic management—but his refusal steels her resolve.

It is worth noting that, unlike the closer quarters of the Trevelyans in *He Knew He Was Right*, Grassdale Manor is a palatial country estate—and yet Helen and Arthur both experience intense claustrophobia within the manor house whenever the other is present.

Despite the grand scale of the house and the great number of expansive rooms within it, Helen and Arthur are always getting in one another's way. She overhears snatches of his conversations or muttered remarks (and slurs against her) wherever she goes in the house, and there is no room where she can retreat to be safe from his drunken carousing with his friends. For his part, Arthur resorts to conducting at least one of his illicit affairs out-of-doors because of his wife's omnipresence inside the manor, but even outside he keeps tripping over his hated wife as his mistress hides within the shrubbery. His frequent months-long retreats to London are not only a matter of fashion, but double as his chosen method for removing himself entirely from his wife's domestic demands.

Ultimately, although Helen is the one who flees their home, the source of their greatest conflict is that each one feels the other is intruding on forms of gendered domestic authority that are inviolate. Arthur feels that his wife's role is to keep the manor running according to his requirements—and whether he wants the manor to serve as a hunting lodge, an alcoholic's paradise, or even a comfortable spot to conduct his extramarital love affairs, as Lord of that Manor, it is his decision to make.

For Helen, her legal and financial powerlessness force her to accept most of Arthur's violations of her most sacred domestic fantasies. He is not her friend or intellectual equal, and he thinks all religion is rank hypocrisy. He is cruel to their servants and their animals. He repels all her efforts to "reform" him, and instead doubles down on his already alarming amount of rakish behavior. He throws books (hitting her in the process), breaks furniture in drunken wrestling matches, insults her to her face and behind her back, tells all his friends they are welcome to bed her and then accuses her of being a whore, and generally does his level best to make her life a neverending misery.

Yet Helen, feeling that his actions are wrong, still remains convinced that he has the *right* to behave in such a way—it is his house. As Jessica Gerard points out, the role of a mistress of a house like Grassdale is shaped by the cultural expectations placed on such estates: "The mansion was the family seat, the home of past and future generations of the dynasty. The current owner was merely a life tenant, obligated to pass the house on intact, preserving all the valuable furnishings and works of art accumulated over decades or centuries. A landowner's bride entered the household in which her husband had grown up, with its own long-established routines and customs" (176). The only area where Helen firmly believes in her own domestic authority is when it comes to the raising of their son, Arthur Jr., and it is when Huntingdon begins to encroach on her authority in childrearing that Helen becomes convinced he has gone too far. His treatment of their son spurs her into action where the previous indignities never could. Judith Flanders points out that Helen is not alone in her belief that she should be the primary pedagogue in their young son's moral and mental development, writing that "Mothers were the teachers in most houses, of their daughters for their entire school career, and their sons usually to the age of seven" (86). Arthur Sr.'s interference with Arthur Jr.'s education while the boy is still so young –causing him to doubt his mother's own authority, directly contradicting the lessons that the boy has learned at his mother's knee and Bible[53]—is the only form of domestic interference that could inspire Helen to abandon her marriage.

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[53] Elizabeth Gargano describes the tension underlying this violation, a cultural shift that Bronte explores throughout the novel: "To an extent, the Victorians desired to enshrine childhood in an idealized domestic space, arguing that the lessons of home were all that children needed. Yet the urgency of school reform and industrial progress moved Victorians to push children into the institutionalized space of standardized schools and standardized pedagogy" (87). The novel is filled with various characters second-guessing Helen's parenting choices when it comes to Arthur Jr.'s development and character.

Furthermore, it is Arthur's project of teaching their toddler son to drink and swear that coincides with Brontë's use of Gothic imagery to describe the manor—a space where Helen is trapped, beset, and powerless. Brontë offers the radical notion that unnerved so many of her readers—that marriage itself could turn even the most well-appointed and tasteful ancestral home into the uncanny space of Gothic entrapment. Laura C. Berry suggests that "*Wildfell Hall*, set in the years before the passage of the Infant Custody Act, in one sense tells the story of what happens when paternal rights interfere with a sanctified notion of motherhood" (39). Much like Emily Trevelyan in *He Knew He Was Right*, Helen begins to realize that the destructive nature of a mismatch in marriage turns from absurd to unendurable when the welfare of a child is turned into the site of domestic contest. Young Louey Trevelyan's development is distinctly altered and impeded by his father's belief that his own authority makes a mother's role unimportant (if not dangerous)—and Helen is determined that her own son will not be forced to suffer the same disfiguring effects. Helen's diary is full of her attempts to resign herself to her fate of living with her husband no matter what the cost, but that calculation abruptly changes when she begins to see the costs being paid by her son instead of herself. She can handle entrapment in the house on her own behalf, but she demands freedom for her child.

Helen is not locked in dungeon or tower, and there are no physical chains holding her within the prison of her marriage. Arthur's brutality is never specifically aimed at her physically, and although the locking of her bedroom door is a distinct commentary on her sexual agency, there is no evidence that Arthur ever intends to take his marital rights by force. Even the manor, rather than a desolate and freezing medieval castle, is instead a

comfortably appointed country house full of light, warmth, and well-cooked food. The lack of all physical Gothic elements, therefore, shows marriage itself to be the prison. She is chained to his name and his home because, as he points out, to leave would humiliate both of them. Her lack of personhood under law means that when her husband takes away all the money she has saved and burns her paintings, he is acting within his rights to do so. *He* owns the art supplies, the paintings she has made, and even the pages and ink of her personal diary. Brontë deliberately mimics the Gothic narrative of the trapped heroine to make a cultural point: any institution legally capable of mimicking Gothic villainy without borrowing any of its physical trappings is inherently poisonous. As Laura C. Berry writes, "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* suggests that violence and cruelty are an inescapable part of coupling, and critics have often pointed out the clarity with which Anne Brontë seems to understand the brutalities of marriage" (43). If a proper Gothic heroine can be kidnapped and hidden away in a dark dungeon somewhere, then Brontë insists that marriage is capable of being a similar form of oubliette—and that anyone who denies that fact is entrenched in self-delusion.

In fact, Brontë uses the Huntingdon marriage to play with several genres that would have been familiar to her readers by the 1840s. Read through the Gothic lens, Arthur Huntingdon is easily viewed as yet another looming lord of the castle who entraps his deceived bride in a prison of her own making. In the context of a domestic novel, Arthur Huntingdon borders on cartoonishly evil. In the context of a social problem novel, he can be read as a commentary on the evils of aristocratic privilege and the dangers of alcoholism. Through the lens of the silver-fork novel, he is instead a familiar and well-loved figure--the unrepentant rake, the pride of London, and the source of hilarious social

commentary[54]. The silver-fork genre is riddled with characters just like him[55], and the readers of those texts are well-aware that their response should be amusement and familiarity, not disgust[56].

By heaping these conventions together, Brontë forces us to look more closely at how these narratives function, as well as what they can tell us about fictional narratives of the marital home. If Helen Huntingdon finds herself positioned as the mistress of Grassdale Manor which functions both as an elegant setpiece primed for hilarious misunderstandings (for her husband and his social set) as well as her own Gothic prison, then how do nineteenth-century claims about domestic space come into play? Is Helen at the mercy of personal cruelty from a man who despises her or does she suffer from the familiar and identifiable trauma of an addict's helpless downward spiral? Brontë's juxtaposition of these narrative frameworks allows her to explore her culture's "truths" about marriage from multiple perspectives, and the result is a novel that asks why there were so many narrative excuses and justifications for Arthur Huntingdon's behavior, and so few available to his wife.

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[54] Tamara S. Wagner explores the social function of the silver fork novel during its heyday, arguing that it serves as a foil for other genres that lasted longer and garnered more fame: “Given the extent of the interpenetration of social-problems and silver-fork fiction, it is hardly surprising that they formed competing narrative modes in otherwise very different novels of the time.” (48)

[55] Winifred Hughes (1992) describes the type and his popularity: “The insouciant Regency exclusives, mythologized in the fiction of the period, offered a seductive model of license rather than self-restraint, openly flaunting their collective contempt for the proto-Victorian virtues associated with domesticity, utility and the middle-class work ethic” (330). As domestic ideology took over more of the public discourse, the pleasures of reading about the rake became more obvious.

[56] Louis Cazamian writes that the social novel and the silver-fork novel were conscious opposites, designed for the changing tastes of the reading public: “endless perfumed descriptions of drawing-room manners whetted a public appetite for ‘rude, rough human nature’ which the social novel satisfied with its realistic content” (40).

Another genre Brontë gestures toward is one that we associate more with the 21st century—the reboot. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Brontë revisits a small subplot from her first novel to explore domesticity's dangers. The eponymous governess heroine of Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* deplores many of the hateful habits her various intractable pupils portray, but one of the most pointed episodes is that of Miss Rosalie Murray, whose thoughtlessly cruel flirtatiousness is frequently portrayed as one of her worst failings. Agnes describes Miss Murray's horrible habit of walking through the fields, reading fashionable novels, not to enjoy either the books or the fields themselves, but so that she can orchestrate meetings with a man obsessed with her beauty. When Miss Murray later marries an alcoholic rake—at her mother's behest, of course[57]—and descends into petulant unhappiness, Miss Grey can hardly help but suggest that such reading material was partially responsible, and thoroughly to be reviled by any thinking or feeling adult.

Once Rosalie Murray becomes Lady Ashby, as her mother and her fashionable novels have urged her to do for so long (the novels, perhaps, less sincerely than Mrs. Murray), she quickly becomes aware that she is by no means as blessed by good fortune as she had always assumed. Her lot is an early version of Helen Huntingdon's eventual realization that marrying a rake rarely leads to domestic felicity:

> 'I thought he adored me, and would let me have my own way: he did pretend to do so at first, but now he does not care a bit about me. ...he will do as he pleases, and I must be a prisoner and a slave.... And then he must needs have me down in the country, to lead the life of a nun, lest I should dishonour him or bring him to ruin; as if he had not been ten times worse every way, with his betting-book, and

[57] 'Is it really so, Miss Murray? and does your mamma know it, and yet wish you to marry him?'
'To be sure, she does! She knows more against him than I do, I believe: she keeps it from me lest I should be discouraged; not knowing how little I care about such things. For it's no great matter, really: he'll be all right when he's married, as mamma says; and reformed rakes make the best husbands, *everybody* knows.' (114)

> his gaming-table, and his opera-girls, and his Lady This and Mrs. That—yes, and his bottles of wine, and glasses of brandy-and-water too!" (179)

Lady Ashby's unhappiness is only given a brief glimpse within the novel, and is portrayed as well-deserved by an arrant flirt and selfish minx, before Agnes heads off to discover a happy life based on her own moral superiority. Yet it is easy to see that if Lady Ashby were gifted with religious scruples and a tenderer heart, she could easily be recast as Helen Huntingdon. Even more telling, however, is that the advice Agnes gives to Rosalie Ashby—advice Rosalie rejects as impracticable—is the same course of action that Helen attempts, and finds useless in her own novel. Agnes suggests that Rosalie should attempt "by gentle reasoning, by kindness, example, and persuasion, to try to ameliorate her husband;" (179-180), a series of accepted rake-reforming strategies which Helen Huntingdon herself tries so hard to employ in her own marriage to Arthur, and with such little effect. Agnes's next suggestion is that "when she had done all she could, if she still found him incorrigible, to endeavour to abstract herself from him—to wrap herself up in her own integrity, and trouble herself as little about him as possible" (180). Readers of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* will, of course, recognize this strategy from Helen's story as well, and yet the later novel makes it clear that the attempt to "wrap herself up in her own integrity" is functionally impossible in the shared domestic space of the home, where the mistress of a house is not expected to spend her days in solitude and abstraction from her husband's daily needs. As Marianne Thormählen points out, Helen "is forced to realize how helpless even the most resilient woman is when her efforts to create a good home run counter to the inclinations of her husband" (312). Helen also learns that she might be able to save some remnant of her integrity and mental stability by cocooning herself away from Arthur's toxic influence, but that no such method is

sufficient for protecting their son from his power. Agnes's well-intentioned advice for Rosalie to "seek consolation in doing her duty to God and man, to put her trust in Heaven, and solace herself with the care and nurture of her little daughter" (180) is shown to be essentially impossible in Helen's subsequent experience.[58]

In the context of *Agnes Grey*, the impossibility of this advice ever working is rooted in Lady Ashby herself—especially given that her response is the puzzled (yet realistic) response: "'But I can't devote myself entirely to a child,' said she; 'it may die—which is not at all improbable'" (180). It is fascinating to consider, however, that when the much more intelligent and well-meaning Helen Huntingdon endeavors to put the same principles into practice, they are worse than useless, and in fact frequently make her home a site of more conflict than before. But is it really fair to compare Helen Huntingdon with Rosalie Ashby? In some ways, perhaps not—Helen Graham is never portrayed as using her beauty to torment men as a form of sadistic play, or as abusing a miserable and powerless governess. Yet, much like Rosalie Ashby, Helen appears to be little more than a stereotype herself during the accounts of her glamorous London Season, where her diary's entries begin. Between her flirting, dancing, portfolio of watercolors, and even her occasional religious aphorisms, Helen may believe she is showing her true self, but Arthur Huntingdon sees only a slightly prettier version of every other girl on the marriage market. At the very beginning of her diary's narrative, the young and naïve Helen sounds as dizzy and adolescent as Lydia and Kitty Bennet ever were, writing about

[58] Lacroix and Nussbaum suggest that this sort of consciousness-raising narrative was increasingly common during this time: "If there could be said to be one goal of the novel in this period, it was to open the eyes of the law to women's lives by means of artfully packaged vicarious experience. Novels reveal women's powerlessness-- but they also show the many forms of agency and resistance available to women, even in constrained circumstances." (5)

her "…new-sprung distaste for country life. All my former occupations seem so tedious and dull, my former amusements so insipid and unprofitable. I cannot enjoy my music, because there is no one to hear it. I cannot enjoy my walks, because there is no one to meet. I cannot enjoy my books, because they have not power to arrest my attention: my head is so haunted with the recollections of the last few weeks, that I cannot attend to them" (123). Her giddy enjoyment of the entertainments of the Season (including her scornful rejection of her suitor Mr. Boarham based more on his social awkwardness than her lack of love for him) makes her slightly ashamed of herself, but has no effect on her longing for more dancing and flirtation—which she makes all too plain to Arthur Huntingdon. He continually takes pleasure in testing, breaking and laughing at her boundaries, both in terms of behavior and physical intimacy. She speaks repeatedly of his stealthily "pressing" her hand, often with "more of conscious power than tenderness in his demeanour" (138), and usually refusing to let it go when she tries to withdraw, as when she becomes agitated and writes that she "made a desperate effort to free my hand from his grasp" (148). He also continually escalates these incidences of physical contact, moving from grabbing her hands to kissing her, restricting her movement by pinning down her dress and refusing to let her up ("I made an effort to rise, but he was kneeling on my dress" (158)), and clutching her in embraces she initially tries to escape ("the instant he released my hand he had the audacity to put his arm round my neck, and kiss me" (148)). Arthur Huntingdon has no reason to take Helen's request for "better" behavior as genuine—he views such requests as mere coquettishness, the conventional methodology for flirtatious young women to get what they want out of intimate relationships. Even Arthur's proposal of marriage is followed by a gesture of affection

tinged with unusual violence and an insistence on interpreting her lack of reaction as encouragement: "'…I love you to distraction!—Now, tell me if that intelligence gives you any pleasure. Silence again? That means yes. Then let me add, that I cannot live without you, and if you answer No to this last question, you will drive me mad.—Will you bestow yourself upon me?—you will!' he cried, nearly squeezing me to death in his arms. 'No, no!' I exclaimed, struggling to free myself from him—'you must ask my uncle and aunt'" (159). This, all prior to their engagement, let alone their marriage, forms a pattern that he recognizes, even if she does not—the status quo of their relationship will be one where he always has his own way, laughs at her attempts to disagree or resist, and she will always forgive him after the fact as long as he promises his love in the end. This is the model of courtship and of marriage that he views as absolutely normal, and Helen's insistence at a later point that she never understood that to be the case is viewed by Arthur as patently disingenuous. With Helen blending so seamlessly into the archetypes of the silver-fork novel prior to her marriage (just like Rosalie Ashby in *Agnes Grey*), the idea that she might abruptly demand the opposite from her husband as what she learned to expect from him while still her lover is as shocking to Arthur Huntingdon as his own behavior was to Brontë's Victorian audience. Brontë does not choose to portray Helen in the early pages of her diary as a figure of moral authority during her time as a debutante, but instead as one as vapid as Arthur herself.

Furthermore, the religiosity which will so characterize Helen once the honeymoon is over is hardly mentioned by her during their courtship—and even when she begins to mention it after his proposal of marriage, he makes it clear that he considers it a game to

be played to appease her aunt, rather than a legitimate issue to consider before their marriage:

> 'She wishes me to—to marry none but a really good man.'
> 'What, a man of "decided piety"?—ahem!—Well, come, I'll manage that too! It's Sunday to-day, isn't it? I'll go to church morning, afternoon, and evening, and comport myself in such a godly sort that she shall regard me with admiration and sisterly love, as a brand plucked from the burning. I'll come home sighing like a furnace, and full of the savour and unction of dear Mr. Blatant's discourse—'
> 'Mr. Leighton,' said I, dryly.
> 'Is Mr. Leighton a "sweet preacher," Helen—a "dear, delightful, heavenly-minded man"?'
> 'He is a good man, Mr. Huntingdon. I wish I could say half as much for you.'
> 'Oh, I forgot, you are a saint, too. (163)

His sarcastic little "ahem!" and his promise to "manage that" by seeming to be filled with "savour and unction" clearly indicate his thoughts on religion: it is a social formality, a performance, and a bit of perfunctory hypocrisy. Even his arch "Oh, I forgot, you are a saint, too" is a reminder that he doesn't believe for a moment that this is *Helen's* requirement— he assumes that this is all to be effected for the sake of her aunt's consent, so that the two of them can do as they wish without interference. Furthermore, she too sends him a clear message, at the end of the passage, when she responds to his clear sarcasm and lack of interest in her faith with submission to his wishes and happiness in taking his arm. Her strident stance of "I'll have nothing at all to do with you if you talk in that way any more" (163) is a boundary she consistently refuses to enforce, which tells him all he needs to know. Like Brontë's earlier creation found in *Agnes Grey*, Lord Ashby, Arthur Huntingdon feels confident that he has the right to do whatever he likes, with little risk of repercussions. Furthermore, by describing this part of the couple's history through Helen's diary, Brontë shows us the relational context that went before their marriage—Helen does not recount their early encounters with regret, because those

passages were written in a time before she dreamed that future regret would even be possible. The young woman in love looks forward to a happy domestic future with absolute confidence, despite the abundance of evidence that her vision of domestic bliss and Arthur's are utterly at odds. Her aunt, who knows much more about the experience of living for decades with one's spouse, tries to warn Helen that living with a rake is a vastly different thing from being singled out by him while he dabbles in wooing. But Helen, caught up in the raptures of young love, is uninterested in her aunt's experiences. In this way, the early sections of Helen's diary are uniquely poignant to the audience who already knows that her marriage to Arthur is going to leave her cold and strange, utterly alien to her conventional country neighbors, a forbidding yet easily alarmed figure of mystery. Before we even read the details of her imminent domestic education, we know that the results will be grim.

Of course, Helen's earlier willingness to participate in conventional courting customs is not remotely a reason to argue that she should expect her horrific treatment once she has become Mrs. Huntingdon. Brontë's comparison of her two states of mind, however, is illustrative of the difference between the comforts of fictional heterosexuality and the lived reality Helen finally encounters once she is relocated to Arthur's home. Readers of fashionable novels could laugh at the casual cruelty and outrageous conduct of rakish men because those narratives are almost aggressively false-- they are caricatures of well-worn types, and audiences of the genre preferred books where such types were presented in abundance[59]. The fact that Helen's ability to enjoy that world is destroyed

[59] Adburgham suggest that these novels were less about such characters themselves, and more about the lavish worlds they inhabited: "Horse racing, betting and gambling of every description, mistresses maintained in conspicuous style, resplendent

once she lives in Arthur's manor is not merely part of Brontë's scorn for the silver-fork genre, but it is also an important element of the novel's critique of domesticity. How many newlywed brides had been taught the precepts of domesticity and marriage in the context of outrageous fictions, only to discover once ensconced in a husband's house that the daily reality was much more grim? The Helen who first fell in love with Arthur because of how exciting he was quickly discovers that horror, humiliation, and fury are equally "exciting" from his point of view but far less pleasurable from hers. Her idea that his earlier conduct will be tempered by their domestic circumstances is as comforting a fiction, Brontë suggests, as the silver-fork novels themselves-- amusing, popular, and very far distant from everyday life.

As for Arthur, Brontë makes it clear that he assumes Helen to be the same as all the other young ladies of his acquaintance, a rich and pretty girl who wants a handsome husband with a good estate, wants to have fun, and is willing to submit to a few meaningless rituals (permission from guardians, culturally mandated religious beliefs) to get what she wants, all while obeying *his* every whim. As Gwen Hyman points, out, he never pretends to be anything he isn't: "He makes no effort to disguise his partying from her—indeed, he seems to see it as a marker of the manly virility of his bachelor years" (57). Helen's later insistence that the increasingly debauched and cruel Arthur she comes to know is somehow changed or different than the man she married is the novel's initial and central self-delusion. By introducing us to the eventually-estranged couple through the lens of the days of their greatest happiness, Brontë is able to show just how much of

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accoutrements to elegant carriages, stables of beautifully groomed horses, elaborate entertaining, fine wines and costly clothes...it was all part of the glittering unreality of a period when London society seems almost to have engaged in a dance of death." (112)

their domestic misery is clearly forecast by their mutual misunderstandings of the other's character. From the perspective of a man in Arthur's narrative position, he will have fulfilled his part of their marital bargain once Helen has his name, his child, and is established as mistress of his estate. Once those landmarks are achieved, the rest of their fashionable marriage would typically include both of them conducting fashionable affairs with various members of their social set, complaining about boredom with their fashionable friends, and attempting to amuse themselves as best they can.

After all, given that Arthur clearly believes he is marrying a prettier and slightly coyer version of Annabella Wilmot, we must imagine his growing astonishment to discover that he has accidentally married a moralist. Marianne Thormählen suggests otherwise, writing that:

> Before they are even married, however, Helen has already realized that her Arthur's jocularity can be gross and cruel, and that it is not balanced by even an occasional hint of gravity. Her qualms...soon prove justified: throughout the years of their disintegrating marriage, the girl whose 'serious part' was always much in evidence becomes hardened and embittered while her husband carries on laughing--often in delight at tormenting her and always during his orgies... (831-832)

To suggest that Helen's "serious part" was always in evidence *to Arthur*, however, would require ignoring the fact that he always takes her bouts of "seriousness" as a joke, and treats them accordingly. His assumption that their marriage will involve an extension of the same dynamic is hardly unreasonable, and his belief that their version of domestic harmony will depend on his terrible behavior being treated as commonplace and eminently forgivable is easily seen in the narrative of their courtship. He sometimes finds it adorable when she is angry—the way he would enjoy a dog doing tricks, perhaps—but never worthy of consideration or a change in his behavior. Helen's seriousness is

certainly always evident to the reading audience—but then again, Brontë's layered narrative means that that audience (meeting the pensive and frowning Helen Graham first in the novel, long before the gay Helen Huntingdon comes along) already knows there is a sad and broken ending to her first marriage, and so the revelation of her gravity is hardly a surprise. To Arthur the dashing rake, however, it evidently comes as quite a shock. This is one reason why the embedded diary narrative is so essential to Brontë's criticism of domestic practices. It is much easier to damn Arthur Huntingdon as a monster who has treated his wife unconscionably when the first introduction of Helen "Graham" is colored by her poverty, her isolation, and her frantic worry for her son's well-being as they both live in the blighted setting of Wildfell Hall. The insertion of the diary into the middle of the novel allows the revelation of her past life as a flirt, a social butterfly, and a naïf who makes every excuse for Arthur's abhorrent behavior to come as an unwelcome surprise in the midst of a story which had heretofore treated her virtue and victimhood as absolute.

Furthermore, as their marital conflicts begin to happen with increasing regularity, the novel shows Arthur trying to perform the model of a Regency-era husband to the best of his ability, only to react with bafflement when Helen refuses to play her part.[60] His debauchery, after all, is par for the course, as Winifred Hughes explains in her description of the regency-era gentleman: "Their major occupation was the untrammeled pursuit of pleasure in its accepted forms of gaming, gourmandizing, flirting and waltzing, tireless if

[60] Rebecca Mitchell writes that "Realist novels depict characters who recognize on some level the ultimate unknowability of another character, and more often they depict those who plow ahead assuming (erroneously) that in fact they do know exactly what the other is thinking and who the other is" (xi). Arthur Huntingdon is often certain that he knows exactly who Helen is, no matter how many times this assumption fails him.

nocturnal activities which kept them awake past daybreak and invisible until the modish hour of three o'clock in the afternoon" (332). While Brontë's Victorian audience almost universally read Arthur's behavior as a horrifying list of unforgivable sins, context demands that we read his history as one inflected by the expectations of his time and place--and his time and place are not the 1840s of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*'s publication, but the 1820s of the pre-Reform years, when his conduct would have been viewed as utterly unremarkable. Helen is often hurt and furious that he uses their country manor, Grassdale, as a base of operations rather than a domestic haven, but as Hughes goes on to point out, a gentleman of that era would have had no reason to believe in the mythic power of the homespace that became so popular closer to mid-century: "The rhythm of their lives was determined by the brief but intense London Season held during the session of Parliament, originally from May to July, and counterpointed by the autumnal house parties and shooting parties on the country estates" (332).

This description is especially useful for two reasons: firstly, it shows that Arthur's constant journeys up to London's fashionable whirl are not merely a personal whim (as Helen often suspects, and later accuses), but are instead his obedience to the social round which he belongs to and the activities it demands of him, during a time when refusal to participate in those practices could have seriously damaged his family's standing in wider society. Lord Lowborough has been made into an oddity and a joke because of his attempts to abstain from his previous pursuits like drinking and gambling, and Huntingdon knows that taking a similar position could be potentially disastrous for him. Secondly, it illustrates that his participation in a flurry of debauchery is not merely evidence of his own degraded character, but of a *culture's* degraded character—one as

exemplified by the fashionable novels, and abhorred by Anne Brontë (and her mid-Victorian, middle-class audience). Arthur's problem is not that he is outrageous and beyond the pale, but that he is entirely too *typical*—just another example of a ubiquitous type[61]. As Gwen Hyman suggests, his downfall in some ways predicts the coming[62] downfall of an entire class of person and character:

> This startlingly explicit novel is a troubled and troubling anatomy of upper-crust gentlemanly drunkenness, obsessed with issues of control and productivity, of appetites and class, as they play out across the body of its prime sot, the wealthy playboy Arthur Huntingdon. Brontë's subject here is the gentleman unable to deny himself any of the pleasures of the table, the gentleman who never abstains from yet another glass, even as he suffers the ravaging consequences of his indulgences in body and mind. (54)

His behavior is all-too typical—it is *Helen's* that raises eyebrows amongst their entire social circle, as becomes increasingly apparent when his coterie comes to Grassdale, Huntingdon's lavish estate.

First, of course, is Arthur's confusion—and his constant efforts to find in Helen's reactions anything he recognizes as reasonable. Her horror, judgment, and attempts to "fix" him by quoting key scripture passages might have seemed eminently reasonable to

[61] Alison Adburgham (1983) writes that "In the language of the Regency, "the world" meant the world of fashionable society, of privilege and politics, rank and talent. It was an amoral world, fenced around with strict codes that were instinctively understood but never spelled out" (5). Much of the conflict between Helen and Arthur comes from the fact that he expects her to be fluent in and obedient to these codes, but she does not recognize their authority.

[62] "Coming" during the early years of the Huntingdon marriage in the 1820s, and then all but accomplished by the time Helen meets Gilbert Markham—and essentially universal by the 1848 publication of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* itself.

the early Victorian audience of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, but they would have seemed ludicrously naïve in the context of the Regency era when the Huntingdon marriage originated--so much so that such behavior would more likely be the subject of ridicule rather than admiration or aspiration. In *The Governess* by The Countess of Blessington, there are several examples of how a fashionable wife is expected to react when she discovers her husband has been acting in an infamous manner. One of the novel's outraged wives adopts a calm and businesslike manner, bartering her silence about her husband's misdeeds for extra pin-money and a down-payment on her gambling debts. Another wife creates dramatic scenes for her houseguests, screaming and weeping for her enraptured audience, and then punishing innocent servants for her husband's misbehavior: "Vain were his efforts to appease the fury of the jealous wife, who persisted in accusing her husband and Clara of the most improper conduct…It was piteous to behold Mr. Williamson with flushed face and downcast eyes, listening in silence to the torrent of invectives that flowed from the lips of his enraged wife" (172-73). Blessington makes it clear that the household's inhabitants (including the couple's jaded children) view scenes like this one as not just commonplace, but as the sort of daily entertainment they have come to expect.

That "torrent of invectives" and the dramatic sobbing is so commonplace, in fact, that Arthur clearly expects nothing else after his first public attempt to woo Annabella Lowborough (previously Wilmot) right in front of his wife:

> Arthur approached me, smiling with the utmost assurance.
> 'Are you very angry, Helen?' murmured he.
> 'This is no jest, Arthur,' said I, seriously, but as calmly as I could—'unless you think it a jest to lose my affection for ever.'

> 'What! so bitter?' he exclaimed, laughingly, clasping my hand between both his; but I snatched it away, in indignation—almost in disgust, for he was obviously affected with wine.
> 'Then I must go down on my knees,' said he; and kneeling before me, with clasped hands, uplifted in mock humiliation, he continued imploringly—'Forgive me, Helen—dear Helen, forgive me, and I'll never do it again!' and, burying his face in his handkerchief, he affected to sob aloud. (222)

In Arthur's world, attempting to land a conquest (even in the form of another married woman) in front of one's spouse is a bit gauche, but hardly unexpected—and, as is made evident by his mocking theatrical sobbing, he has trouble taking Helen's anger seriously. He smiles, exclaims "laughingly," and mockingly prostrates himself before her-- a less than sincere rendition of Mr. Williamson's response to his own wife, perhaps, but then again, Arthur has no reason to expect that Helen has any desire or right to expect his sincerity. After all, she was warned by her own aunt and uncle before their marriage that he was "wildish" (128), "banded with a set of loose, profligate young men...whose chief delight is to wallow in vice" (142), and well known for flaunting an infamous "intrigue with a married lady—Lady who was it?" (141). As far as he is concerned, she knew who she was agreeing to marry—and what sort of life they would lead together. His earlier mockery of her religion, her family, and even her feelings passed largely unremarked upon, and so Arthur has every right to expect that his wife will accept marital mockery with the same amount of equanimity. As Winifred Hughes points out, "The insouciant Regency exclusives, mythologized in the fiction of the period, offered a seductive model of license rather than self-restraint, openly flaunting their collective contempt for the proto-Victorian virtues associated with domesticity, utility and the middle-class work ethic" (330). Arthur is increasingly willing, as the novel proceeds, to showcase his contempt for his proto-Victorian wife and all her irritating virtues.

Furthermore, Helen's refusal to play her part proves increasingly frustrating to Arthur. The passage cited in the above paragraph is continued by his undiminished hilarity at the thought that his wife has had the temerity to be so amusingly cross with him:

> 'It is all nonsense, Helen—a jest, a mere nothing—not worth a thought. Will you never learn,' he continued more boldly, 'that you have nothing to fear from me? that I love you wholly and entirely?—or if,' he added with a lurking smile, 'I ever give a thought to another, you may well spare it, for those fancies are here and gone like a flash of lightning, while my love for you burns on steadily, and for ever, like the sun. You little exorbitant tyrant, will not that—?' (223)

The very concept of monogamy is inherently tyrannous (and Helen a tyrant, for suggesting it), and her unsmiling responses turn his jollity into perplexity, as Helen writes that he "looked up astonished at my warmth" (223), claims he is not to blame "with more of sulkiness than contrition" (223), and wraps it all up with a final performance of what he thinks she wants, "gently taking my hand, and looking up with an innocent smile" (225). Indeed, a collation of his many uneven responses to her various moments of anger read more like an actor wondering why his scene partner refuses to say the right lines than anything else. This is an extremely important element of the novel that has rarely been examined fully, partially because it is usually considered to be another part of Arthur's cruelty to his wife. His puzzlement at her refusal and inability to follow through on the cultural customs he considers to be so essential to conventional marriage of that period offers useful insight into the critique of marriage Brontë explores throughout the novel. Arthur Huntingdon is honestly unnerved by his wife's insistence that he should take her subjectivity into account before he acts on his own behalf-- and it is worth remembering that although Gilbert Markham may end the novel by marriage to Helen himself, he too spends the first third of the text struggling with the same concept. When

he offers her opinion and she refuses to defer to it, for example, Markham indulges in fits of pique just like Huntingdon. In other words, Huntingdon's status as villain is far less clear-cut than some readers would immediately believe. His behavior would have been a fine joke to readers of the fashionable novel because the genre portrayed the follies of the rich as ludicrous, not because the cruelty itself was absent-- and the readers of the Victorian novel are able to forgive Markham's violence and self-centeredness because he is eventually redeemed by love. By contrasting these two characters, however, Brontë points out that the very ability of an audience to withhold their judgment of a character's actions until generic conventions make it clear what an "appropriate" response should be is an inherent flaw in fictional portrayals of marriage. How can we call a husband cruel for the actions that a previous generation called merely foolish or entertaining? A true sadist would respond to Helen's horror with pleasure, not bafflement.

Even in the case of Helen's famously locked bedroom door that proved so powerful to critics for so long, focus has been so squarely centered on the boldness of her statement (Arthur's exclusion from her bedchamber) that very little attention has been paid to Arthur's mystified reaction *to* that door:

> Without another word I left the room and locked myself up in my own chamber. In about half an hour he came to the door, and first he tried the handle, then he knocked.
> 'Won't you let me in, Helen?' said he. 'No; you have displeased me,' I replied, 'and I don't want to see your face or hear your voice again till the morning.'
> He paused a moment as if dumfounded or uncertain how to answer such a speech, and then turned and walked away. (199)

Arthur, even with his persuasive nature and joking replies to everything, has no response to such behavior—because it is so alien to everything he knows. He seems to view shouting arguments as another thing the two of them can do together as a couple—and so

Helen's withdrawal from the scene of battle breaks what he perceives to be the social contract. Helen's abandonment of her earlier courtship conduct makes her into a cipher Arthur has no hope of reading.

In many ways, Anne Brontë illustrates here how troubling the mid-century sanctification of domestic practices can be, in that they attempt to erase previous models of negotiation and shared authority over domestic practices that was considered so commonplace in earlier eras. Elizabeth Langland argues that Anne Brontë was much less impressed by the power of romantic love than either of her sisters, whose novels often tell of passion overcoming social constraints and limitations, writing that "in sharp contrast to . . . her sisters, these conditions [of gender inequality] produced in Anne a lively distrust of romantic posturings and a predilection for a clear-sighted realism" (2). Helen Graham, at the beginning of her diary, believes that love will conquer all obstacles and ensure a happy ending for herself and her sweetheart. Helen Huntingdon, after only a short time, realizes the cruel naivety of her earlier viewpoint.

That Arthur persists in viewing her moral stances as sheer perversity for the sake of dramatic effect can therefore be read as his inability to figure out what her motives can possibly be, rather than sheer cruelty (which will come, but later in their marriage, and in different forms). After a trip to London presumably filled with the "orgies" he once described to her as a regular feature of his social life, her desolate reaction fills him with irritation: "I delivered myself up to silent weeping. But Arthur was not asleep: at the first slight sob, he raised his head and looked round, impatiently exclaiming, 'What are you crying for, Helen? What the deuce is the matter now?'" (245). Helen has already switched narrative modes to one where casual discussions of his debauched behavior is a

violation of their home, their family, and their marriage. Arthur, however, still views this scene in their drawing room as her own violation of norms. He has returned to Grassdale to recover from the ravages of his life in town, and his wife's job is to help him do so, not berate and irritate him during his recuperation. Furthermore, her insistence that he not only should cease telling her about his exploits, but that he should stop engaging in them altogether, is a demand that he repeatedly characterizes as absurd. He cannot believe she is sincere, but neither can he ascertain her motives for behaving in such a way.

Grief itself is an emotion he finds particularly puzzling—after all, in the world of the fashionable novel, even death means a joke, an inheritance, or freedom[63] from a round of dull social obligations, not a source of unhappiness:

> My poor father died last week: Arthur was vexed to hear of it, because he saw that I was shocked and grieved, and he feared the circumstance would mar his comfort. When I spoke of ordering my mourning, he exclaimed,—'Oh, I hate black! But, however, I suppose you must wear it awhile, for form's sake; but I hope, Helen, you won't think it your bounden duty to compose your face and manners into conformity with your funereal garb. Why should you sigh and groan, and I be made uncomfortable, because an old gentleman in —shire, a perfect stranger to us both, has thought proper to drink himself to death? There, now, I declare you're crying! Well, it must be affectation.' (256)

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[63] As can be seen when Hattersley happily discusses his father's future death, describing "the great things he intended to do in the horse-jockey line, when his old governor thought proper to quit the stage. 'Not that I wish him to close his accounts,' added he: 'the old Trojan is welcome to keep his books open as long as he pleases for me.'
'I hope so, indeed, Mr. Hattersley.'
'Oh, yes! It's only my way of talking. The event must come some time, and so I look to the bright side of it: that's the right plan—isn't it, Mrs. H.?'" (275)

His conclusion that “Well, it must be affectation” is his assumption he makes about everything Helen does from the beginning to the end of their marriage, just as his capitulation that he supposes she must wear black "for form's sake" summarizes his perception of everything she calls "duty". Arthur has no reason to believe that society will soon follow Helen's example when it comes to mourning as a display of "genuine" emotion rather than a tiresome round of social duties, so he continues to assume that it is more likely for her to have hidden motives behind her weeping than to believe that she means it. Even once they have truly begun to hate one another, he still makes attempts to figure out her (in his opinion) bizarre reactions to various stimuli: “I believe he was much disappointed that I did not feel his offensive sayings more acutely, for when he had said anything particularly well calculated to hurt my feelings, he would stare me searchingly in the face, and then grumble against my ‘marble heart’ or my ‘brutal insensibility.’ If I had bitterly wept and deplored his lost affection, he would, perhaps, have condescended to pity me, and taken me into favour for a while” (308-309). His need to stare her “searchingly in the face” is a further extension of his dumbfounded silence outside her locked bedroom door—an attempt to discern her motives, as alien as they are to him. In his constant attempts to be the man she married, he simply cannot understand why she persists in demanding that he should somehow become somebody else. Arthur does not understand that Helen as a character is representative of a narrative shift taking place in the 1830s and 40s. As Edward Copeland points out, "The political combination of aristocratic and middle-class power that emerged during the Reform years caused a major reassessment of the role of the titled heroine, her self-presentation, her language, her social identity, indeed her function in a novel. The heroine's glittering raiment of

privilege would have to be shed for more modest weeds of respectability, for the sober colours of her new middle-class allies" (146). This is, in essence, what happens to Helen Huntingdon, who despite her wealth, power, and self-determination, ends the novel not as its protagonist but as the narrator's wife, the devoted mother, and the inspirational figure for women of the 1840s to consider when they surveyed their homes, husbands, and children as moral responsibilities. Helen's diary suggests to her audience that she has always felt mid-century beliefs about domesticity to be her calling, regardless of the self she presents to Arthur in the ballroom. It is only once she is permanently placed in Arthur's home that she begins to understand that her own view is wildly out of touch with everyone she meets. At first, she considers the fact that her expectations of marriage differ from Arthur's as a problem within their union alone. As she gets to know his cohort, however, she must face the dawning realization that Arthur is not an outlier of debauchery, but that she is considered to be the peculiar one because of her lack of attention to social forms. Once she stops caring about Arthur's thoughts on her behavior and conduct, Helen discovers that everyone else at Grassdale also expects her to be a typical Regency hostess[64], rather than the stern and disapproving Victorian wife she is

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[64] In her article "When a House is Not a Home: elite English women and the eighteenth-century country house", Judith Lewis presents the following account of Lady Boringdon, a woman who became the mistress of a country house about ten years before Helen Huntingdon did the same in fiction: "The difficulties of social isolation and new responsibilities could well have been compounded by the general lack of autonomy Lady Boringdon experienced as the chatelaine of Saltram. During the course of her years at Saltram she frequently mentioned the large parties of guests arriving and departing, all of whom were, at least initially, complete strangers to Fanny. Some she learned to like, while other guests tried her patience. Many guests simply announced themselves, while others were invited, occasionally leading to the presence of an unlikely and undesirable collection of people simultaneously being housed, fed, and entertained at Saltram. Although Lady Boringdon initially knew none of her husband's connections beyond his sister, she was not allowed to invite anyone without his prior approval. He was very

trying to become. In Matthew Whiting Rosa's seminal work on the silver-fork genre, he claims that shallowness is an essential requirement within the genre: "The men and women in the fashionable novels who might once have danced at the same balls as Becky Sharp, or nodded from a club-window as Jos Sedley waddled painfully by on his way to a curry, are mere phantoms compared to the sharp realism of Thackeray's creatures. They are not human beings first and pose and pretense second, but pose and pretense completely" (13). In light of that fact, then, Helen's very depth of feeling, thought, and beliefs is what makes her a puzzle to those around her—and the insistence that she cannot really mean the things she says, and therefore she must be playing a different sort of game, is merely the result of the circle's collective beliefs. Carol A. Senf points out that

> Brontë's novel could most accurately be described as the portrait of an age rather than of one individual, and the characters she paints represent almost every kind of individual who might have inhabited the English countryside during the third decade of the nineteenth century: aristocrats like Lord Lowborough, members of the gentry like Huntingdon and Hargrave, commercial newcomers like Ralph Hattersley, and servants like the kindly Benson, who befriends Helen in her distress. Likewise Tenant presents a wide variety of women-- young married women like Milicent Hattersley, spinsters like Mary Millward, heiresses like Annabella Wilmot, impoverished women of the gentry like Esther Hargrave, and servants like Rachel. (450)

Given that Brontë is portraying types whose stereotypical characteristics outweigh their individuality, then, Helen's emphasis on her own individuality results in bafflement all around.

Firstly, she fails entirely in the role of Regency hostess. Helen acts as if having her husband's friends down to visit their estate is an imposition, whereas the culture she

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pleased with himself in 1810 for giving her permission to invite her brother to Saltram. . . . So there is a real question of how much autonomy, if any, married noblewomen had over their own movements, as well as the movements of others into and out of their houses" (358). The historical Lady Boringdon submitted to the requirements that the fictional Helen rejects as insupportable.

inhabits calls it a requirement. In her essay "The Chatelaine: Women of the Victorian Landed Classes and the Country House," Jessica Gerard points out that a manor house (like Grassdale in this novel) was not ever seen as a purely private residence: "Unlike the housewife in lower ranks, the landowner's wife could not regard the family's home as her own space, a territory over which she had complete personal control" (176). Helen's determination to view the visits of longterm houseguests as an imposition is an early signal that she is increasingly out of touch with her cultural setting and its demands. As Hazlitt once bemoaned and Rosa explains, "an exclusive preoccupation with verisimilitude became the distinguishing mark of the fashionable novel. Social etiquette at the ball, the dinner, the hunt, the club, and the opera; conversation which seldom extended beyond the shallow conventionalities of polite discourse; and a zealous attention to the details of food and clothing supplied the material for hundreds of novels by dozens of novelists" (8). Helen, however, is increasingly repulsed by the social world she once relished, and resents the unspoken requirement that she limit her field of vision to mere "social etiquette" and "shallow conventionalities". Furthermore, she fails to notice that the drunken antics of Arthur and his bosom friends are par for the course in terms of their social realm[65], rather than a horrifying breach of manners. After one of the earliest drunken dinners held at Grassdale, Helen's claim that "my heart failed me at the

[65] Elizabeth Langland points out that the depiction of these scenes is one of Brontë's social critiques as well as a representation of silver-fork debauchery: "Such indulgence, which Brontë consistently identifies with a male lack of self-restraint, manifests itself on other levels throughout the novel. We recognise it in the dissolute habits and drunken brawls of Huntingdon's friends. We see it in their abuse of their pets and their wives. More problematic in terms of Helen's ultimate fate, we find this same lack of restraint in Gilbert Markham. His unprovoked attack on Frederick Lawrence is both irrational and violent. Whatever insult Gilbert imagines he has suffered, his murderous assault seems the act of a madman. (133)

riotous uproar of their approach" (262) only shows that she is shocked by what Annabella Lowborough clearly finds irritating but typical, as is shown by her response of "'I shall take no part in your rude sports!' replied the lady coldly drawing back. 'I wonder you can expect it'" (265) when her husband asks for help as he is being wrestled to the ground in the hopes of the men forcing him to drink.

Both Annabella and Walter Hargrave, moreover, are continually stymied by Helen's stern disapproval of adulterous affairs. They both view brief affairs of the heart as one of the benefits of marriage, a fun game that only married women can play, and Helen's disagreement leaves them both exceedingly puzzled. As Alison Adburgham writes,

> Marriage altered everything for a girl. Once she had born an heir and perhaps one or two other children, she could indulge in delicate *amities amoureuses*... Generally speaking, aristocratic husbands closed their eyes...as likely as not they were busy with their own affairs. In the great houses, the very size of them made it possible for husband and wife to lead their own lives while at the same time being seen cordially together on all public and social occasions. (118)

With Helen having married into residence at one such great house, both Annabella and Hargrave find it exceedingly disingenuous that Helen declines to play the game. Annabella, ready to play the saucy rival and tease Helen over the shift in Huntingdon's affections, repeatedly tries to banter with her, and finds Helen's actual anger to be offputting and strange[66]. After one of Annabella's unending monologues, driven by "malicious pertinacity" (298), Helen finally becomes exasperated enough to pass her a

[66] Annabella even tries to reassure Helen that it is all for the best, laying a comforting hand on her shoulder as she promises to take care of Arthur—a gesture Helen decidedly does not appreciate:" I took her hand and violently dashed it from me, with an expression of abhorrence and indignation that could not be suppressed. Startled, almost appalled, by this sudden outbreak, she recoiled in silence" (303). It is worth noting that Annabella is the one who is appalled by such a reaction—which must certainly seem almost ridiculously over the top to her.

scathing note: ‘I am too well acquainted with your character and conduct to feel any real friendship for you, and as I am without your talent for dissimulation, I cannot assume the appearance of it. I must, therefore, beg that hereafter all familiar intercourse may cease between us;...’ Upon perusing this she turned scarlet, and bit her lip” (298-299). When Annabella tries to tell Helen that she is doing her a favor by becoming her husband's new lover, Brontë is merely telling a plain truth about the era of the 1820s, when extra and intra-marital affairs were widely considered to be one of the upsides of marriage among the upper classes.

While Helen is shocked by the licentiousness of her husband and his guests, they are well within their rights to be shocked by her inability to perform the role of hostess appropriately. As Jessica Gerard points out, "Landowners' wives were expected to serve their families as hostesses...Chatelaines organized the transportation, accommodation, feeding and amusing of guests. A housekeeper could not be expected to know the intricacies of precedence, personalities and attachments which dictated the allocation of rooms and seats at the dinner table. In the smart set, particular skill was required to place adulterous lovers in adjacent bedrooms" (188). Helen's refusal to engage in romance outside of her own marriage is one thing, but her refusal to facilitate the affairs of her guests borders on a breach of hospitality--even when her own husband is involved. Annabella's shock whenever she speaks to Helen is not based on the idea that Helen knows about her affair with Helen's husband, but is instead rooted in Annabella's inability to understand why Helen would mind.

Annabella is a cautionary example like *Agnes Grey*’s Rosalie Murray—an empty-headed flirt who finds male attention essential to her happiness, and the idea of chastity to

be either ludicrous or punishing. As Elizabeth Langland points out, Brontë created characters like these not merely to stand in as minor villains, but to expose the dangers of creating a world where such behavior was not only expected, but encouraged: "One powerless governess could do little to counteract the influence of a society bent on producing women whose minds were wholly occupied with details of costume, coquetry, and conquest....ruled by vanity, vulnerable alike to their own weaknesses and to their parents' ambitions for their financially advantageous marriages" (25). If Rosalie Murray was portrayed as duped into marriage with a controlling libertine of a husband, then Annabella Lowborough herself, unlikable as Helen may find her, was essentially sold in marriage to a suicidal alcoholic at her family's behest[67]—and while Lord Lowborough is presented as less horrible than the rest of his friends, he is nevertheless faithful to the social round Annabella is used to, and one she finds easiest to navigate through the display of her charm and the manipulation of the men surrounding her. Annabella may be hateful and empty, the novel suggests, but she has only become so because the world where she lives demands it of her.

Just as Annabella cannot believe Helen isn't slightly grateful to have Arthur's attention occupied with something other than mocking and belittling his own wife, Walter Hargrave is similarly dubious about Helen's claims that she wants him to leave her alone. Every time that he offers Helen his "protection" and love in the novel, her unequivocal refusals and scandalized rejoinders throw him off his stride. Helen has

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[67] Laura C. Berry reminds us that unhappy marriages are the norm within the Regency culture of Grassdale Manor: "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* offers not just one couple in its effort to demonstrate the lurid brutalities of marriage, but pair after pair of ill-suited (we might as well say violently opposed) mates" (32). Helen's belief that marriage should be a source of companionship and mutual consolation is one of her more anachronistic attitudes.

difficulty in conveying to him that suggestions of infidelity are not merely unwelcome, but deeply offensive: "This was spoken in a low, earnest, melting tone, as he bent over me. I now raised my head; and steadily confronting his gaze, I answered calmly, 'Mr. Hargrave, do you mean to insult me?' He was not prepared for this. He paused a moment to recover the shock; then, drawing himself up and removing his hand from my chair, he answered, with proud sadness,—'That was not my intention.' "(304) Brontë speaks to an audience who would be as horrified as Helen herself is, but she speaks about a culture where Mr. Hargrave's offer of protection and affection would be seen as a potentially sincere response to her husband's ongoing cruelty. When Gilbert Markham thrashes Mr. Graham in the mistaken belief that Helen's brother is her euphemistic "protector," he does so several years after Mr. Hargraves' offer, and during the time of transition when those offers were becoming increasingly unseemly.

It is Hargrave himself, however, who has previously pointed something out to Helen—something which actually precipitates her decision to flee. In one of his most honest moments, Hargrave admits: "'I don't know how to talk to you, Mrs. Huntingdon'" (317). His reasoning, however, is the claim that she must be half-angel, to have managed to be married a few years without having taken a lover yet. When Helen disagrees, calling herself "a mere ordinary mortal" (p), Hargrave points out that Helen, amidst the society she frequents, is anything but ordinary: "'No, *I* am the ordinary mortal, I maintain,' replied Mr. Hargrave. 'I will not allow myself to be worse than my fellows; but you, Madam—I equally maintain there is nobody like you'" (317-318). That is the depressing truth which Helen must ultimately confront, and which leads to her departure from Grassdale—Mr. Hargrave is no worse than his fellows, because they are all exactly

alike in their desperate hunt for pleasure as an alternative to boredom. As a group, they view her home not as a domestic sanctuary, but as their own little playground of vice—and her attempts to circumvent that goal certainly does not endear her to them. Helen overhears a discussion about her efforts to keep her house relatively civilized:

> 'So, I suppose we've seen the last of our merry carousals in this house,' said Mr. Hattersley; 'I thought his good-fellowship wouldn't last long. But,' added he, laughing, 'I didn't expect it would meet its end this way. I rather thought our pretty hostess would be setting up her porcupine quills, and threatening to turn us out of the house if we didn't mind our manners.'
> 'You didn't foresee this, then?' answered Grimsby, with a guttural chuckle. 'But he'll change again when he's sick of her. If we come here a year or two hence, we shall have all our own way, you'll see.' (284)

In the Regency world of Grassdale, Helen's lack of amusement at drunken brawls and attempts to make her toddler child an alcoholic before his permanent teeth grow in are as inhospitable as porcupine quills. Furthermore, she later learns that the conduct that drives her to despair is actually an example of Arthur being on his best behavior—both Hargrave and Hattersley inform her that his conduct outside his home is beyond her wildest (and most miserable) imaginings.

Little wonder, then, that all of Helen's hopes, having been crushed within Grassdale's domestic environment, soon become revived by the thought of escaping it.[68] Knowing that her secret plan to flee to her childhood home is being arranged by her brother, Helen tells her diary "the atmosphere of Grassdale seemed to stifle me, and I could only live by thinking of Wildfell Hall" (368). Having planned on living a life dedicated to the domestic sphere, Helen finds herself invigorated by turning her attention

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[68] Elizabeth Langland writes that "Anne Brontë's Helen attempts to fulfill the role of redemptive angel and fails miserably because her author refuses the consolatory notion that rooted, evil tendencies can be eradicated by the influence of an angelic young lady" (53). Helen cannot serve as the Angel in the House when the House in question is essentially Hell.

to the economic world that women were supposed to remain separate from at any cost—planning how to sell her paintings, hide travel money from Arthur's knowledge, and bribing servants to keep her flight secret. Davidoff and Hall write that the general belief of the nineteenth century was that "Woman had been created for man, indeed for one man, and there was a necessary inference from this that *home* was 'the proper scene of woman's action and influence'" (115). In Helen's diary, however, Brontë has created a text that illustrates what can happen when a wife who tried to play her assigned role in that "proper scene of woman's action and influence" is rebuffed, humiliated, silenced, and contradicted at every turn. Her first introduction to Grassdale had been one of dawning regret tempered by duty: "I am married now, and settled down as Mrs. Huntingdon of Grassdale Manor. I have had eight weeks' experience of matrimony. . . . Arthur is not what I thought him at first, and if I had known him in the beginning as thoroughly as I do now, I probably never should have loved him, and if I loved him first, and then made the discovery, I fear I should have thought it my duty not to have married him" (191). By the end of the document, Helen's original reservations about her discoveries of dawning discord in her new marital home has turned into outright loathing, as her final view of the manor makes clear: "What trembling joy it was when the little wicket closed behind us, as we issued from the park! Then, for one moment, I paused, to inhale one draught of that cool, bracing air, and venture one look back upon the house. All was dark and still: no light glimmered in the windows, no wreath of smoke obscured the stars that sparkled above it in the frosty sky" (373). The site that she had expected would become her glowing hearth and home is dark and cold, no more than "the scene of

so much guilt and misery" (373). Her domestic hopes have been snuffed out, but Brontë treats that change as one of hope and healing more than loss.

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Chapter Four: "A house that seemed to wear… a cap of iron": Enclosure and Entrapment in *The Egoist*

In the fourth chapter of George Meredith's *The Egoist*, the novel's social circle begins to celebrate the news that their recently-jilted scion, Sir Willoughby Patterne, is yet again on the brink of matrimony. Meredith describes the dissemination of this information in a way that implies the very landscape of the county is taking an interest in the forthcoming nuptials: "Hints were dropping about the neighbourhood; the hedgeways twittered, the tree-tops cawed" (28). This is followed by the local cadre of well-to-do-widows discussing the impending match, his failure to secure his previous fiancée, Constantia Durham, for good, as well as the necessity for him to finally have an appropriate wife to act as hostess for his palatial estate, Patterne Hall. Mrs. Mounstuart Jenkinson, the leader of this corps of hostesses, is, as Meredith says, "loud on the subject," summing up his new bride-to-be with impeccable economy: "The very girl to settle down and entertain when she does think of settling. Eighteen, perfect manners; you need not ask if a beauty. Sir Willoughby will have his dues" (28). In an interesting piece of foreshadowing, Meredith terms this local desire for him to marry in these terms: "…one of the chief points of requisition in relation to Patterne--a Lady Willoughby who would entertain well and animate the deadness of the Hall…" (21). As obvious as the warnings are in the potential lady being "requisitioned," so too is the notion that she is here termed "Lady Willoughby" instead of "Lady Patterne," as she would actually be named. The casual use of "Lady Willoughby" is an early sign that her role will require total absorption into Willoughby's self.

Furthermore, the collective relief that his new bride will “animate the deadness of the Hall” offers a troubling clue to the rest of the novel’s plot. Clara, chosen by Willoughby to become his wife because she is young and healthy, is almost immediately repelled by the “deadness of the Hall” that she discovers upon her arrival. During the short course of her stay there, she begins to feel her very life force being sapped from her by Willoughby and the Hall itself. She soon begins to refer to Willoughby as a vampire who is feasting on her, draining her vitality away. The freezing stasis of the Hall, where Willoughby’s will and whim are the only law, where the only people permitted to remain beneath his protection are those who sacrifice their lives to his vanity, is experienced by Clara Middleton as her own looming death. Willoughby himself eagerly anticipates her imminent extinction—he relishes the thought of her essential self being sacrificed for his pleasure. The hedgeways may twitter and the tree-tops may caw, but the Hall itself is a tomb, and the majority of the novel consists of Clara’s increasingly desperate attempts to escape from it. Her attempts to animate the deadness of the Hall runs counter to Willougby’s actual desire for the Hall, because the instances where Clara behaves in her liveliest manner are the ones that make him most nervous. He is happiest, in fact, when she is frozen, still, and silent. He forces a kiss on her unwilling lips in one scene, and exults in her inability to return it: “Sir Willoughby was enraptured with her. Even so purely coldly, statue-like, Dian-like, would he have prescribed his bride's reception of his caress” (50). Her despair inspires an ongoing state of lassitude and enervation in her, and when she mentions it as an attempt to preface her request to be free of their engagement, Willoughby instead suggests that her inert and unconscious form would be his ideal ornament for Patterne Hall:

"Ah!" She compressed her lips. The yawn would come. "I am sleepier here than anywhere."

"Ours, my Clara, is the finest air of the kingdom. It has the effect of sea-air."

"But if I am always asleep here?"

"We shall have to make a public exhibition of the Beauty." (84)

His response, Meredith's narrator informs us, "defeated her". The more that Clara begins to understand that Willoughby desires her to be a silent ornament[69] rather than a friend or helpmeet, the more she experiences Patterned Hall as a prison and a dungeon: "she deemed herself a person entrapped. In a dream somehow she had committed herself to a life-long imprisonment; and, oh terror! not in a quiet dungeon; the barren walls closed round her, talked, called for ardour, expected admiration." (79) The ardor demanded of her, however, is stasis and passivity, that which Willoughby loves most in the women around him.[70] Jenni Calder writes that "When in 1870 women were enabled to own money and property in their own names it became more difficult to regard women themselves as property, though in most respects they continued to have little independent

[69] Jessica Gerard points out that for most women cast in the role of lady of the manor, this position would have been recognizable: "Landowners' womenfolk residing in the ancestral mansion had less scope for home-making and home-decorating than middle-class wives, as much of the expensive decor and furnishings had been specially designed for each room, or accumulated over generations. Vast, formal staterooms, with their portraits and heirloom furniture, and atmosphere of chilly grandeur, were designed to impress visitors, not to promote domestic bliss. A new wife had little jurisdiction over the public rooms, except for her own drawing room" (184).

[70] This is not just something he demands of Clara, but of his sisters: "Clara wondered whether inclination or Sir Willoughby had disciplined their individuality out of them and made them his shadows, his echoes. She gazed from them to him, and feared him. But as yet she had not experienced the power in him which could threaten and wrestle to subject the members of his household to the state of satellites" (64), and even of Laetitia Dale, who is often summoned to the Hall so that Willoughby can display her as a willing sacrifice, the woman whose youth had been sapped away in devotion to him. He boasts of her frailty as one of his accomplishments and the ornaments of the Hall: "Miss Dale, you will hear from my aunt Eleanor, declines, on the plea of indifferent health. She is rather a morbid person, with all her really estimable qualities."

existence. As long as they could be persuaded to believe that marriage was their major occupation in life, and as long as there were men who could afford to buy wives, either with money or with social status, ideally with both, it would be possible for men such as Sir Willoughby Patterne in Meredith's *The Egoist* to consider their destined brides as precious items of furniture, tributes to their own good taste" (181). Clara, kept ignorant by her father's neglect, has no notion about her ability to own property, but she discovers herself to have quite strong feelings about her imminent destiny of *becoming* property. She begins to become aware that Willoughby is introducing her to Patterne Hall not as the future mistress and chatelaine of the house, but as a new ornament for display within the manor.

Given her increased loathing for the environment of the Hall, Clara is therefore horrified as she begins to realize that she is always figured as a partner for Patterne Hall itself. In an incisive critique of domestic ideology, Meredith unpacks the implications of women being "destined" for the life of the home by crafting a narrative wherein Clara Middleton slowly realizes she is betrothed *to* a home rather than a man. Willoughby does not want Clara, herself, for *him*self. He wants what Clara represents—youth, beauty, and fecundity for the sake of an heir—but has no interest in the person whose body wears those attributes. Furthermore, Willoughby's desperation to marry Clara is not based on his own yearnings for a romantic partner, but instead because he knows the county set expect Patterne Hall to have an appropriate mistress. Even Willoughby's desire for her is always routed through the Hall's needs: "She affected him like an outlook on the great Patterne estate after an absence, when his welcoming flag wept for pride above Patterne Hall!" (186). His longing for Clara is irrevocably tied to his status as lord of the Hall, just

as the rest of his relationships within the novel (with Vernon, with Crossjay, even with his former coachman Flitch) are predicated on how their various behavior might reflect on the reputation of the *Hall*, rather than Willoughby himself. His most strident refusals to let her go are consistently linked to the Hall's status as showcase and set piece, rather than any concern about their future marriage and family.

Clara sometimes begins to become unsure whether the pressure being placed upon her is coming from Willoughby or Patterne Hall itself: "She passively yielded to the man in his form of attentive courtier; his mansion, estate, and wealth overwhelmed her. They suggested the price to be paid. Yet she recollected that on her last departure through the park she had been proud of the rolling green and spreading trees" (51-52). The estate that had impressed her on her first visit ("a flying visit", Meredith calls it, implying that it was just brief enough to prevent Clara from learning anything about how the Hall and its inhabitants operated) becomes another way in which Willoughby is "smothering" her with the Hall's grandeur which so effectively hides the cramped nature of her future existence within it. She also blames the estate itself for her growing dread of her fiancé: "She had not come to him to-day with this feeling of sullen antagonism; she had caught it here" (52). For Clara, seeing Willoughby for who he is when he is at home is what extinguishes her affection for him and her desire to become his wife. While Willoughby thinks the lavish nature of his estate is impressing her, it is actually making her more desirous of escape. Clara's attempts to resign herself to their marriage is matched by her growing dread of the house itself, as Patterne Hall increasingly registers as the locus of the married future she cannot bear to face. As she moves through its rooms trying to avoid Willoughby, to evade his voice and glance, and to withdraw from his constant

surveillance, Clara is horrified to perceive that the "modern" marriage she has been promised bears such a striking resemblance to self-erasure and waking death—or, in one of her terrors, being buried alive: "To be fixed at the mouth of a mine, and to have to descend it daily, and not to discover great opulence below; on the contrary, to be chilled in subterranean sunlessness, without any substantial quality that she could grasp, only the mystery of the inefficient tallow-light in those caverns of the complacent-talking man: this appeared to her too extreme a probation for two or three weeks. How of a lifetime of it!" (48). Clara, on the verge of her marriage and while walking through the richly furnished rooms of an expansive estate, feels increasingly claustrophobic and ensnared. As Jami Bartlett has pointed out, "The entire plot of The Egoist hangs on its heroine's dawning realization of her entrapment at a country house; the "struggling outer world" pressurizes the text, but it is never explicitly mentioned or described" (556). Meredith wants his audience to revel in the irony—the house's size is not constant, because the "poison" that Clara feels running through Patterne Hall is actually Willoughby's vision of domesticity. Mrs. Mountstuart, one of the county set, predicted that Willoughby was finally ready for marriage, claiming "At thirty-one or thirty-two he is ripe for his command, because he knows how to bend" (28). Meredith shows us, however, that Mrs. Mountstuart is definitively wrong, because bending is just what Willoughby refuses to ever do. Meredith makes it clear that what Clara wants from marriage is "comradeship, a living and frank exchange of the best in both" (48), but that Willoughby is repelled by the idea of marriage (or domesticity) as a process of give-and-take: "Are they not of nature warriors, like men?—men's mates to bear them heroes instead of puppets? But the devouring male Egoist prefers them as inanimate overwrought polished pure metal

precious vessels, fresh from the hands of the artificer, for him to walk away with hugging, call all his own, drink of, and fill and drink of, and forget that he stole them" (93). Clara wants a friend, while Willoughby wants the puppet, the "inanimate overwrought polished pure metal precious vessels" to be filled up with himself, drunk by himself, and displayed for his glory.

Clara, initially unaware that her role at Patterne Hall is intended to be one of such ongoing display, is initially stunned to find herself suddenly placed under a level of domestic surveillance that makes her every movement, sigh, and eyelid tremble[71] the subject of Willoughby's concern. She is not permitted to walk through the house without Willoughby accompanying her to make sure her reactions to the setting are appropriate. When Crossjay attempts to bring her a bouquet of wildflowers, the household servants attempt to throw them away, except that Clara manages to stop them in time before they treat her gift as garbage: "These vulgar weeds were about to be dismissed to the dustheap by the great officials of the household; but as it happened that Miss Middleton had seen them from the window in Crossjay's hands, the discovery was made that they were indeed his presentation-bouquet, and a footman received orders to place them before her" (64).

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[71] Willoughby tells Laetitia Dale: "I am, I confess, a poltroon in my affections; I dread changes. The shadow of the tenth of an inch in the customary elevation of an eyelid!—to give you an idea of my susceptibility" (115). His susceptibility is taxed quite heavily by Clara, and her recalcitrant eyelids. One of his first moments of realizing she is beginning to dislike him happens when, while meeting his gaze, she deliberately and ostentatiously closes her eyes to get away from him and deliver a rebuke to him: "Clara let her eyes rest on his and, without turning or dropping, shut them. The effect was discomforting to him. He was very sensitive to the intentions of eyes and tones; which was one secret of his rigid grasp of the dwellers in his household. They were taught that they had to render agreement under sharp scrutiny. Studious eyes, devoid of warmth, devoid of the shyness of sex, that suddenly closed on their look, signified a want of comprehension of some kind, it might be hostility of understanding. Was it possible he did not possess her utterly?" (64)

She leaves on secret missions to post letters in a village at a distance from the Hall instead of sending them there, knowing that her actions are so closely tracked. When Clara goes out for a walk one morning during a rainstorm, Patterne Hall is made to resemble a council of war:

> Clara was now sought for. The lord of the house desired her presence impatiently, and had to wait. She was in none of the lower rooms. Barclay, her maid, upon interrogation, declared she was in none of the upper. Willoughby turned sharp on De Craye: he was there.
>
> The ladies Eleanor and Isabel and Miss Dale were consulted. They had nothing to say about Clara's movements, more than that they could not understand her exceeding restlessness. The idea of her being out of doors grew serious; heaven was black, hard thunder rolled, and lightning flushed the battering rain. Men bearing umbrellas, shawls, and cloaks were dispatched on a circuit of the park. De Craye said: "I'll be one."
>
> "No," cried Willoughby, starting to interrupt him, "I can't allow it."
>
> [De Craye] stepped to the umbrella-stand. There was then a general question whether Clara had taken her umbrella. Barclay said she had. The fact indicated a wider stroll than round inside the park: Crossjay was likewise absent. De Craye nodded to himself.
>
> Willoughby struck a rattling blow on the barometer. (213)

With servants sent to scour the house for her, Willoughby's acolytes frantically trying to suss out her motives, and important "clues" such as the absence of her umbrella, Clara's unexpected walk—a deviation from the Hall's normal routine—is a matter of such desperation that Willoughby himself engages in fisticuffs with the barometer, the hapless instrument apparently made to blame for the existence of the rainstorm to which its dials attest. Clara's determination to flee Patterne Hall is always paired with the collective community of Patterne Hall (as led by Willoughby) determining that she shall not escape, because this is a domesticity that does not countenance refusals of its terms.

Willoughby himself, however, is not the villain, according to either Clara or Meredith. Similar to Louis Trevelyan, Willoughby simply cannot face the enormity of his desires—largely because his desires are exactly what he has been taught are, in fact, his

due. The difference between Willoughby and other men is not that his desires are so strange, but that he has the wealth and status to make his desires into reality. Where another landowner might feel guilt at the thought of ruining Crossjay's future for the sake of his own vanity, or condemning Laetitia to a lifetime of poverty and public humiliation, Willoughby has been so well insulated from the effects of his egoism that it is not until he attempts to marry that an inkling of his status as an autocrat begins to occur to him. Willoughby's ideal form of domesticity is exposed to be a tyrannical dystopia where all other people serve as puppets for his own impulses, opinions beyond his own are verboten, and a wife is essentially an ornament to showcase as a testament to his own superiority. He is most appeased in the novel when the characters around him willingly yield to his constant stage managing of his home space, both in Patterne Hall itself and in the village which surrounds it—his maiden aunts enter and exit rooms at his unspoken command, Clara's father placidly withdraws to the library whenever Willoughby hints that it would be best, and Laetitia Dale and her ailing father retreat to their cottage on the Hall's grounds when Willoughby has had enough of them. Willoughby does not merely desire his home to be a place of respite and taste, but he wants to dictate the terms and participants of its rhythms and tableaus.[72] Willoughby may tell Clara that she will be mistress of Patterne Hall, but his refusal to yield even an insignificant amount of authority over the manor's management suggests that he has no intention of stepping

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[72] Christopher Herbert argues that this desire for absolute control is characteristic of many men depicted within the nineteenth-century novel: "Far from giving only a faint or timid picture of the pernicious side of married life, Victorian writers place this side in the foreground and constantly seem to locate the heart of contemporary marital problems in the tendency of men to seize tyrannical power over women. Thus we have the seemingly anomalous situation of a Victorian middle class whose official ideology of marriage insists upon "the enforcement of patriarchy and obedience," but whose popular literature steadily equates this pattern with sadism" (450).

down from those duties following their marriage. Clara finds herself marveling at how easily all the other inhabitants of Patterne Hall yield to his often contradictory desires and orders: “Clara wondered whether inclination or Sir Willoughby had disciplined their individuality out of them and made them his shadows, his echoes. She gazed from them to him, and feared him. But as yet she had not experienced the power in him which could threaten and wrestle to subject the members of his household to the state of satellites” (64). Yet Meredith does not propose that Willoughby is unique or aberrant in possessing this desire, only that his insistence on taking it to such lengths is what makes it visible to Clara in the first place. Instead, he suggests that Willoughby is only longing for that which he has been promised, and that which all Englishmen have come to expect from marriage and home. By the time of the novel’s publication in 1879, the narrative about marriage had shifted away from earlier, more explicit calls for wifely submission and abasement; but Meredith points out that the reluctance to make those claims overt did not mean their absence, and instead only made them more subtle—and to Clara, more poisonous.

Clara’s agonizingly slow flight from Willoughby is, after all, not a refusal to obey him: as she repeatedly points out, she is happy to follow orders. She accepts his offer of marriage expecting to play hostess, to perform the role of proxy mother to his ward, and to spend her days attending to his needs. Unlike Emily Trevelyan, Clara even prefers being told what to do, having been raised by her widower father to believe herself incapable of knowing her own mind or making her own decisions. Clara’s growing dread comes instead from the realization that no amount of submission will ever suffice, because what Willoughby really desires is total absorption of her self into his will.

Clara's willingness to restrict her life to conventional domestic duties is not sufficient for Willoughby, because he cannot trust her to perform those duties as he imagines a fictional wife should, rather than as Clara herself. He unknowingly desires an appendage instead of a wife—not so different, Meredith suggests, from the practices of other countries which the English viewed as so barbaric. Having begun *The Egoist* with a revised version of his essay, "On the Idea of Comedy and of the Uses of the Comic Spirit," where he suggests that comedy can only exist in a culture civilized enough for men to "consent to talk on equal terms with their women, and to listen to them", Meredith proceeds to suggest that his own culture frequently fails to live up to such a standard. As Jonathan Smith suggests, "The novel's imagery of battle and hunt, of Willougby's despotism and tyranny, of women as slaves who are imprisoned and caged, is thus not merely metaphorical but a statement about the actual relationship between men and women. Beneath his civilized veneer Willoughby recasts this aggression in a form that is nonetheless potently violent" (64). The characters within the novel repeatedly turn the topic of sati into a joke, but Clara is increasingly horrified by those references, both because of the callousness they imply, and because of her new recognition that Willoughby's demand that she "burn for him" is metaphorical, but not remotely in jest. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, discussing the imperialist narratives about what sati meant in the context of colonial oppression in India, points out that "the subjectivity of the woman who commits sati remains a crucial issue; female subjectivity has in its turn hinged on the questions: Was the sati voluntary? Or was the woman forced upon the pyre? These stark alternatives . . . still retain their force when played into the series of oppositions that categorize the problematic of tradition versus modernity" (18). Willoughby's friends and

neighbors titter over sati jokes while watching Willoughby contradict, humiliate, and silence Constantia Durham, Clara Middleton, and Laetitia Dale on a continuing basis. V.S. Pritchett writes: "With his foreign eye, [Meredith] looks at England and finds that egoism is the dominant sickness of English society. Self-interest, self-complacency, self-love, self-righteousness are the characteristics of the Victorian islanders" (99). Yet for those who view Willoughby at a distance, these qualities are easily dismissed as foibles, or even jokes. Only the women who are admitted into his domestic scenes discover that his demands for total self-abasement and compliance are utterly serious. He has his part to play, and they have theirs, and any deviation from his own domestic script is grounds for expulsion.

Never satisfied with playing his own part alone, however, Willoughby proceeds to perform everyone else's, especially when none of them are living up to the standard of his own impossible requirements and expectations. Richard C. Stevenson suggests that "Meredith's depiction of his egoist-patriarch's ill-fated desire to "control and direct" a stable definition of his own identity points in a modern--even postmodern--direction with the questions it raises about the provisionality of subjectivity...Meredith focuses relentlessly on the process of exposure through which Willoughby Patterne's initially serene sense of self is destabilized" (88). That process of exposure is not only about Willoughby's lack of self-sufficiency, however, but also his attempts to remedy that lack through co-opting the rest of the novel's cast of characters and proceeding to speak on their behalf, perform the behaviors they prove incapable of, and applaud at the end result

he is so pleased with himself for producing.[73] Even before he has met Clara, Meredith describes Willoughby's public face as a series of carefully staged performances: "…he had to continue tripping, dancing, exactly balancing himself, head to right, head to left, addressing his idolaters in phrases of perfect choiceness" (14). As Willoughby begins to realize that his second attempt at completing the marital tableau of his fantasies is yet again on the verge of crumbling, he becomes even more invested in the performance, rather than the relationship.

Willoughby, though often ridiculous, is Meredith's attempt at demonstrating what an ideal British husband thought he was supposed to become—insular, self-assured to the point of delusion, worshipping women while despising them, and certain that every element of domestic bliss can be better performed by himself than anyone else. Clara's very attempts to begin stepping into her future role of "Mistress of Patterne Hall" are always undermined by Willoughby's attempts to perform them better and show her up. When she speaks with his friends and neighbors, he worries she is doing it wrong, in a way that will not reflect well on him, and he takes over the conversation to render her silent. When she attempts to befriend Vernon Whitford[74] (who, incidentally, Willoughby threatens to cut off if he ever moves away—implying that she should try to get to know him) and express admiration for his work ethic and love of travel, Willoughby calls him dull and shortsighted and shuts down the conversation. When she walks the grounds of

[73] "Consider him indulgently: the Egoist is the Son of Himself. He is likewise the Father. And the son loves the father, the father the son; they reciprocate affection through the closest of ties…" (324)

[74] Vernon's prime usefulness to Willoughby is, of course, tied to the Hall itself, and Vernon's ability to lend it a quality Willoughby could never provide: "Furthermore, he liked his cousin to date his own controversial writings, on classical subjects, from Patterne Hall. It caused his house to shine in a foreign field; proved the service of scholarship by giving it a flavour of a bookish aristocracy" (73).

the estate, Willoughby asks her why she wants to escape (forecasting the time when her walks across the ground *do* become attempts at escaping). Even when she endeavors to practice future motherhood by building a relationship with Crossjay, Willoughby's irrepressible ward, Willoughby can only seethe that the child likes her better than his guardian, tell Clara that he knows better than she about what children need (a fact that the narrator himself disputes), and even physically punish the boy for developing loyalty and fondness for her. When he first begins to notice that Crossjay prefers Clara to himself, Meredith writes that "…he deduced the boy's perception of a differing between himself and his bride, and a transfer of Crossjay's allegiance from him to her. She shone; she had the gift of female beauty; the boy was attracted to it. That boy must be made to feel his treason" (241). Crossjay does become increasingly wary of Willoughby, since his guardian is incapable of completely repressing his new animosity, and when Crossjay eventually lies to protect Clara from Willoughby's surveillance, punishment is swift. First the comeuppance comes through violence masked as play:

> Willoughby addressed [Colonel De Craye], still clutching Crossjay and treating his tugs to get loose as an invitation to caresses. But the foil barely concealed his livid perturbation.
>
> "Stay by me, sir," he said at last sharply to Crossjay, and Clara touched the boy's shoulder in admonishment of him.
>
> She turned to the colonel as they stepped into the hall: "I have not thanked you, Colonel De Craye." She dropped her voice to its lowest: "A letter in my handwriting in the laboratory."
>
> Crossjay cried aloud with pain.
>
> "I have you!" Willoughby rallied him with a laugh not unlike the squeak of his victim.
>
> "You squeeze awfully hard, sir."
>
> "Why, you milksop!" (234)

Willoughby then uses evidence of this lie as a pretext for banishing Crossjay from his house—not because of the dishonesty, but because it proves that Crossjay loves Clara

better than him.[75] That, of course, is the ultimate crime a child could commit, and one worth destroying his education and future prospects. He also uses Crossjay as part of his surveillance apparatus in keeping track of Clara's movements, a reversal of what Clara believes her role as surrogate mother/sister should be—someone who monitors Crossjay's behavior, education, morals, and future career. While Clara attempts to build this relationship with Crossjay (and successfully—Crossjay apologizes to her for his previous disrespect for his tutor, Vernon Whitford, and attempts to pay more attention to his studies in deference to Clara's wishes), Willoughby instead tries to keep the two of them separate. He also "pumps" Crossjay for information about Clara's actions, in a repeated series of interrogation scenes where the boy is blamed for not knowing more.

Even when his friends and neighbors try to form an acquaintance with Clara—treating her as Patterne's future hostess, the role Willoughby has seemingly chosen her for—he steps in to stage manage and edit the results. When Mrs. Mountstuart attempts to compliment Clara's beauty and arch manner by designating her a "dainty rogue," Willoughby's discomfort with that appellation lasts for the rest of the novel: "Sir Willoughby nodded, unilluminated. There was nothing of rogue in himself, so there could be nothing of it in his bride. Elfishness, tricksiness, freakishness, were antipathetic to his nature; and he argued that it was impossible he should have chosen for his complement a person deserving the title" (38). Willoughby demands the right to play the part of Clara

[75] In a sense, Crossjay and Clara's friendship exposes Willoughby to one of the flaws in his plan of collecting people as types—beautiful bride, son of a war hero, scholar to keep on hand in case of PR emergency. Even if they perform stasis around Willoughby, as Vernon does, keeping them in the same house runs the risk that they will develop bonds and intimacies that exclude Willoughby himself. Claire Wintle writes: "In entering a collection, an object is made newly meaningful in relation to the other objects that come to surround it and is reinvented by the interpretations bestowed upon it by its new owner" (279). Willoughby sees this effect in Patterne Hall's inhabitants.

Middleton (and eventually, he plans, Clara Patterne) whenever her own performance ceases to please him—and therefore her tendency to contain emotions and instincts which directly contradict his own is unacceptable, and must be eradicated. If his worthiness is measured and defined by his choice of bride, then she must be perfect to echo his perfection—and, given that the only person as perfect as Willoughby is Willoughby, he has no choice but to perform Clara's part on her behalf.

Richard Stevenson suggests that this is an essential reason for Clara's increasing distaste for her betrothed. In discussing one scene where Clara repeatedly responds to Willoughby's performance with deflating and prosaic disagreements, only for him to ignore her completely, he writes: "One of Meredith's most effective touches in this scene as well as in others is to show the content of Clara's statements apparently escaping Willoughby who, always desiring to be the monologist, listens only to the sound of his own voice...Clara, with her critical faculties awakening, is shown by contrast to be increasingly alert to all that Willoughby says" (103). The refusal to accommodate any worldview or perspective outside of the one already held is what destroys Willoughby's relationship with Clara, damages his relationship with most of the novel's other characters, and results in him being forced into an alliance (his eventual forced marriage to Laetitia) where his power is radically diminished. In attempting to pursue his perfect domestic vision, Willoughby's ideals and refusal to let himself be altered by reality or other people destroy the possibility of intimacy and connectedness. His passion as a monologist prevents the existence of dialogue—the only method, as Meredith shows in Clara's relationship with every other character in the novel—that permits independent spirits to discover mutuality and affection.

Clara begins her attempts at escape in conflict with Vernon Whitford, Laetitia Durham, and Mrs. Mountstuart. Throughout the novel, however, and during moments of conversation when Willoughby is absent, Clara's partners in these social pairings progressively incorporate her viewpoint into their own, and allow new understandings of her circumstances to affect their behavior and choices. As a result, each one is changed—and Meredith unequivocally portrays those changes as beneficial for everyone involved. Vernon becomes bolder, Laetitia becomes more clear-eyed and honest, and Mrs. Mountstuart transitions from observer of the drama to participant. Through the dialogue Clara constantly craves but can never find with her fiancé, these characters all become capable of the action that Willoughby had previously forbidden them from pursuing. All three are initially scandalized that Clara would even think of escaping from Willoughby, and attempt to dissuade her from making such a step. Their initial reaction to her desire for freedom, however, is tempered by their ongoing realization that her reasons for wanting to flee are more valid than they may have seemed at first. Kent Puckett, writing about the role that scandal plays in the nineteenth-century novel, writes that "While it inculcates an understanding of normative behavior in its audience, scandal also provides the opportunity to formulate questions, discuss previously unimagined possibilities, and forge new alliances" (4-5). Vernon Whitford, Laetitia Dale, and Mrs. Mountstuart all begin to ask the question—what if Constantia Durham was a sensible person, rather than a jilt? They begin to approach conversations with Clara not with the goal of persuading her to stay, but with the possibility in mind that they might be able to aid her in her escape. Even Laetitia Dale, initially the most partisan member of Willoughby's extended support group, finds herself instead swayed to Clara's point of view. Walter F. Wright

writes that “the scenes in which they talk together are studies in the reverence of one mind for the sacredness of another” (74). Through her willingness to engage in frank and open dialogue with those characters who want least to hear her side of the story, Clara manages to create a network of allies[76] in the bosom of Willoughby’s most loyal vassals.

That she is able to do so is a source of existential crisis for Willoughby, who is unable to understand how Clara creates relationships where other people get a chance to voice their opinions and ideas. First of all, he cannot understand why anyone listens to Clara at all, since he has already decided she is fundamentally incapable of speaking without misrepresenting her true feelings (i.e., those feelings which align perfectly with his own). Randall Craig suggests that Willoughby’s “fear of vocal power accounts for the prejudice of Patterne Hall that, specifically for women, to speak is to lie” (903). Even when Clara is merely reporting on what she considers to be normal household details—such as Vernon Whitford’s plan to leave the Hall for London, Willoughby all but calls her a liar: “ "Leaves the Hall!" exclaimed Willoughby. "I have not heard a word of it.”” (71). Of course, in this case, he is the liar—he has been told several times, and ignored all of them. But his default assumption is that anything Clara says is a falsehood, and therefore not to be trusted. He claims to long for conversation and sociability, but Willoughby’s view of polyvocality is a mockery of multiplicity, because it consists only of his own voice playing every part with different inflections according to different settings and scenes. Walter F. White suggests that this performance is less of a problem

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[76] And she does it remarkably quickly—as Judith Wilt points out, the novel is “Set mainly on one remote country estate, occupying only a few days of the busy world's time, its one action simply a young woman's change of mind over marrying the county's most eligible bachelor, The Egoist seems to promise a dull business. Precisely for this reason we can see here better than in any of Meredith's novels the nature of the new kind of action Meredith wanted to introduce into the novel, the action of mind” (147).

during Willoughby's standardized courtship of Clara: "He has no problem in wooing, for he has a stereotyped picture of a doll-like, ornamental wife. With Dr. Middleton, he can speak of woman's whims, and each time Clara tries to talk seriously with him he crudely forces her back into his pattern." (72) It is only in observing the daily rhythms of Patterne Hall that Clara begins to realize that the formalities of their courtship are to be followed by the even more restrictive formality of Willoughby's autocratic domestic vision.

Such an ambitious project needs other bodies than just the two of them, of course—Willoughby craves puppets through which he can speak, and even trains them to enjoy the performance, as he has with his aunts Isabel and Eleanor. Notable mostly for their ability to take unspoken cues from Willoughby and obey his desires, these two maiden aunts are characterized by pliability rather than personality: "The ladies Eleanor and Isabel were sitting with Miss Dale, all three at work on embroideries. He had merely to look at Miss Eleanor. She rose. She looked at Miss Isabel, and rattled her chatelaine to account for her departure. After a decent interval Miss Isabel glided out. Such was the perfect discipline of the household" (112). They not only obey his desires, they know well enough to do so without seeming to obey, thereby allowing Willoughby to simultaneously exert tyranny while pretending to be eternally complaisant. Clara begins to become aware of the unspoken law of Patterne Hall as her own attempts to disagree with him are treated as grave heresies[77], and not only by Willoughby himself: "She had noticed an irascible sensitiveness in him alert against a shadow of disagreement; and as

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[77] Carolyn Williams describes the smooth surface of the Hall's environment: "At Patterne Hall nothing violent, nothing sordid or unseemly, nothing that does not "mirror" the young lord Willoughby is allowed to happen. Seismic shifts may slowly take place under the surface of social life, invisibly, while animated, witty conversation covers them and innuendo communicates prohibited meaning" (60). Clara's initial mistake is that she tries to change her mind openly, rather than covertly.

he was kind when perfectly appeased, the sop was offered by him for submission. She noticed that even Mr. Whitford forbore to alarm the sentiment of authority in his cousin. If he did not breathe Sir Willoughby, like the ladies Eleanor and Isabel, he would either acquiesce in a syllable or be silent. He never strongly dissented." (67). He need not even speak, as in the previous passage—at other times, though he speaks, the words are only incidental to his command: "Ejaculating, "Porcelain!" he uncrossed his legs; a signal for the ladies Eleanor and Isabel to retire" (196). He will not countenance their having selves or desires other than those he has assigned to them, and so anyone conscripted into his pageantry must be hollowed out upon pain of expulsion. Vernon's desire to get gainful employment elsewhere can only happen at the expense of being cut off from Willoughby, and, therefore Crossjay, forever. Crossjay himself can pursue his dreams of growing up and joining the military if he wishes, but if he even acknowledges the possession of a desire that runs counter to Willoughby's plans for him, he, too, will be cut off—and therefore rendered financially incapable of achieving the career he desires. Laetitia is allowed to worship Willoughby from afar, but she shouldn't get any ideas about actually marrying him *or* anyone else, because he needs her as a prop to remind whatever woman he actually marries that he has a permanent back-up, a jealousy prod, a devotee willing to step in at a moment's notice. This expectation is not even implied, but uttered, as Joseph Moses points out, writing: "The scene is an outrage, as is the request it carries that Laetitia accept vows of chastity in order to offer Willoughby an incidental gratification, to augment and fill out his sense of well-being. Such colossal and insatiable narcissism that would eagerly sacrifice her life to a symbol of maidenly constancy is beyond the comprehension of Laetitia..." (173). Beyond her comprehension, perhaps—but not,

initially, her compliance. Laetitia submits to this positioning for most of the novel. She has already sacrificed her health and youth on Willoughby's altar, so she considers that she has little left to lose.

In several ways, Laetitia's presence at Patterne Hall (and on the grounds, living with her father at Ivy Cottage) is one of Willoughby's greatest mistakes. He prefers to have her near, and unmarried, so that she can serve as an example of "constancy" to Clara. However, in doing so, Laetitia shows Clara that what she fears is true: constancy to Willoughby is the same as living death.[78] Willoughby gloats over Laetitia's faded cheek and crushed spirit to Clara, reassuring his fiancée that she has no need to be jealous of Laetitia's role in his life, because she is so faded in comparison to Clara's freshness. If Clara was at all inclined to believe that Willoughby's demands for fealty are mere rhetoric, then Laetitia serves as a counterpoint: an example that he considers no amount of sacrifice to be more than he deserves. Laetitia, once predicted to become Lady Patterne, has been relegated to an outbuilding, as if, despite her maidenhood, she has been relegated to the Dower House[79] of the Victorian widow. Famous for the poems she once wrote for Willoughby, even her pen is silenced—on the day she finds out his promise to "speak to her father" (nineteenth-century code for making a proposal of marriage) was later revised into a discussion of tenancy rights, Meredith describes her hopelessness and attendant silencing: "she quietly gave a wrench to the neck of the young

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[78] Gillian Beer writes of Clara's dawning horror: "Clara who has been swept off her feet by Willoughby's romantic whirlwind courtship begins to realise that whirlwind courtships may be a form of aggression and a prelude to annihilation. She comes to understand (all unwillingly) that Sir Willoughby's ideal of marriage is not partnership but absorption" (128).

[79] Judith Lewis describes the ritual that Laetitia's placement echoes: "Widows delicately retreated to a modest dower house, so the family seat could be properly occupied by the heir." (338-339)

hope in her breast. At night her diary received the line: "This day I was a fool. To-morrow?" To-morrow and many days afterwards there were dashes instead of words" (25). Laetitia is described as "patiently starving", with "hollowed cheeks", her bosom a "tomb", her heart "beneath a frost". Willoughby tells Clara he is distraught at the thought of her becoming a widow and then learning to love again, repeatedly pressuring her to amend her imminent vow of "Till death do us part" according to his preference: "Consent; gratify me; swear it. Say: 'Beyond death.' Whisper it. I ask for nothing more. Women think the husband's grave breaks the bond, cuts the tie, sets them loose. They wed the flesh—pah! What I call on you for is nobility: the transcendent nobility of faithfulness beyond death" (44). While he monologues about his own death, however, Clara begins to realize that he is actually asking for her to die at the beginning of their marriage—making her vow into "When death does us join." Laetitia, no heiress, and trained from youth to be one of Willoughby's acolytes, has become resigned to this death-in-life as her only option, no matter how painful.

Clara, however, finds it impossible to come to a similar conclusion, especially as Meredith makes it increasingly explicit that this metaphorical self-sacrifice entails monumental psychic violence. As Sophie Gilmartin has pointed out, the novel is not only filled with explicit demands for Clara to abdicate her right to self-governance, but those demands are frequently framed as a form of sati, the Indian practice of widows being burned alive on the funeral pyres of their husbands: "Willoughby, as an English gentleman who covets his reputation in the county as a model of civilization and enlightened thought, can hardly ask Clara to burn on his funeral pyre. Yet as the references to sati gain momentum in the novel, Clara seems to register that spiritually at

least he requires that sacrifice of her. This sacrifice is the immolation of her social self, of all her interests which lie outside Willoughby. Her fiancé desires that Clara reject the world in life as well, that she live with him on his estate bound up in his identity, caring nothing for the outside world" (153-154). Gilmartin compares this requirement to the extensive and exceedingly complex rules for Victorian widows to wear restrictive and smothering "mourning weeds," suggesting that even while the Victorians were claiming to be scandalized by the brutality of such "inhuman" and "savage" practices, the expectations placed upon English women at home were often rooted in the same instinct of mastery and annihilation of the wife's self. The concept of gentlemen being drawn to the concept of sati is even used as a joke during dinner conversation. Mrs. Mounstuart and Clara discuss the incident as an example of casual gaucherie:

> "Mr. Capes was breathing after a paean to his friend, the Governor—I think—of one of the presidencies, to say to the lady beside him: 'He was a wonderful administrator and great logician; he married an Anglo-Indian widow, and soon after published a pamphlet in favour of Suttee.'"
> "And what did the lady say?"
> "She said: 'Oh.'"
> "Hark at her! And was it heard?"
> "Mr. Capes granted the widow, but declared he had never seen the pamphlet in favour of Suttee, and disbelieved in it. He insisted that it was to be named Sati. He was vehement." (290)

Not only does Meredith here work in yet another reference to sati as a frequent topic of discussion—he also emphasizes the unremarkable nature of that conversation, and the entire lack of horror surrounding it. The woman invited to participate in the discussion merely answers with an enigmatic "Oh," and "Hark at her!" is the response, though we cannot say with certainty whether this is a sign of Mrs. Mountsuart being impressed at either her daring or her passivity. Meanwhile, Mr. Capes the insufferable pedant does not seem upset by the slur against the gentleman he admires, nor does he seem to understand

that accusing a man of being pro-sati is an insult in the first place. His “vehemence” is not against the concept of sati, but about the importance of spelling it correctly. In this snapshot of a moment of dinner banter, Meredith speaks volumes about the kind of culture that is willing to condemn another country based on its allegedly barbaric practices, and then proceeds turns those practices into fodder for grammar lectures and slyly whispered jokes. Who, Meredith asks, are the barbarians?

Just like the “wonderful and great logician” of Mr. Capes’ acquaintance, Willoughby is consistently perplexed by Clara’s reluctance to evacuate her consciousness and desires so that he might fill her up with his own—and, ironically, imputes that unwillingness to the egoism he so fully embodies: “She would not burn the world for him; she would not, though a purer poetry is little imaginable, reduce herself to ashes, or incense, or essence, in honour of him, and so, by love's transmutation, literally be the man she was to marry. She preferred to be herself, with the egoism of women” (41). Instead of their imminent wedding signaling new life, fertility, and pleasure, Clara begins to view it as the inevitable death of her very self. She even eventually describes the possibility of union with a man like Willoughby as a form of vampirism, bemoaning the fact that “...men who are Egoists have good women for their victims; women on whose devoted constancy they feed; they drink it like blood” (133). Gilmartin writes “Marriage becomes associated with mourning and death here when Clara begins to see her marriage with Willougby as a kind of sati or possible immolation of herself.[80] Because Willougby demands that both her legal and spiritual identity become one with him, Clara sees that

[80] Nancy Rose Marshall points out the rhetorical context of cremation: “In contrast to putrefaction, cremation was promoted as purifying, its procedures inoffensive and its artifacts inert” (465). Since an inert artifact is exactly what Willoughby has decided Patterne Hall needs, it is little wonder that he approves of this solution.

this unhappy marriage could be for her a living sati, a period of mourning for her dead self which has become one flesh and forced into one personality with a man from whom she feels alien and repelled" (154). In invoking the sati imagery, Meredith yet again questions the alleged "civilization" of his culture, asking if such violent impulses are any less savage for being unspoken and relegated to the life of the mind.

Furthermore, he implicates Clara's father the absentminded scholar in his indictment of Willoughby's demands. As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan suggests, one of the cultural questions about sati was whether the widow who performed the ritual was performing it of her own free will, or under duress from other members of her family. In Dr. Middleton, Meredith creates a character who is frequently exasperated that his daughter is suddenly objecting to Willoughby's plans for her, which align so exactly with Dr. Middleton's own views on matrimony. Jenni Calder writes, "She will be static, at home; Sir Willoughby pictures her awaiting his return from masculine pursuits; it is the classic Victorian male image of the wife. Closely linked with this is the image of possession, of enslavement, which recurs varied and insistent throughout" (184). Yet what Clara discovers in her attempts to escape that enslavement is that her father is positively anticipating it.[81] He views the imminent marriage with relief, believing that "A husband was her proper custodian, justly relieving a father" (156). He is surprised that Clara's feelings are hurt when he says: ""I was telling Miss Dale that the signal for your subjection is my enfranchisement," he said to her, sighing and smiling. "We know the date. The date of an event to come certifies to it as a fact to be counted on." "Are you anxious to lose me?" Clara faltered." (156). That his own freedom will come at the cost

[81] "She was unable to guess whether she would have in him an ally or a judge. The latter, she feared." (120)

of her own misery is unimportant to him. Unlike Emily Trevelyan's father, he will not be horrified to hear that Willoughby is demanding obedience of Clara—he rather thinks it is called for, remembering his own late wife as "an amiable woman, of the poetical temperament nevertheless, too enthusiastic, imaginative, impulsive, for the repose of a sober scholar; an admirable woman, still, as you see, a woman, a fire-work" (156). If Clara's erasure is what it takes to secure his scholarly repose, then Dr. Middleton considers the exchange quite fair. More than fair on his side, because while Willoughby merely gets a wife, Dr. Middleton is treated to the delights of Patterne Hall that are not to be offered to Clara herself—the well-stocked library and the exquisite wine cellar: "A fresh decanter was placed before the doctor. He said: "I have but a girl to give!" He was melted. Sir Willoughby replied: "I take her for the highest prize this world affords." "I have beaten some small stock of Latin into her head, and a note of Greek. She contains a savour of the classics. I hoped once . . . But she is a girl" (161). In one scene where Clara begs him for help, he literally raises his voice and talks over her pleas, so desperate is he to have her removed from his care. In her study of courtship rituals amongst the Victorians, Jennifer Phegley points out that affianced young women were supposed to be praised, if they found decided to call off a marriage due to incompatibility: "A woman who discovers "incompatible habits, ungentlemanly actions, anything tending to diminish that respect for the lover which should be felt for the husband; inconstancy, ill-governed temper" is determined to have "sufficient reasons for terminating an engagement"" (58). Yet Dr. Middleton is deeply wounded that Clara would even consider inconveniencing him for the sake of something as insignificant as her own well-being for the rest of her life. He has approved the match, and the match has been made. He is uninterested in

whether or not her experiences at Patterne Hall have revealed anything about Willoughby's character or cruelty—much like another fictional father who would have been well-known to Victorian audiences: the rich mandarin of the well-known Willow Pattern china.

It has long been noted that Sir Willoughby Patterne's very name is one of Meredith's perplexing little jokes—a reference to the ubiquitous Willow Pattern style of china, so well-known that it had become a symbol of staid middle-class domesticity[82] by the time of *The Egoist*'s publication. By the time Meredith began writing *The Egoist*, ubiquity of the design guaranteed that his baronet's name would invoke not only the familiar pattern, but also the alleged "Chinese legend" that had inspired it. In Deborah Cohen's study, Household Gods, she points out the ubiquity of the pattern: "To sell blue-and-white toiletware, Heal's offered a brochure decorated with pagodas in a Chinese motif. The 'Legend of the Willow Pattern' recounted the tragic fable of Koong-Shee, who died after running away with her lover, thereby conferring an aura of romance upon the oriental-inspired jars and make-up pots decorated with the doomed couple" (60). And yet the legend, despite all the marketing materials written about its romance, was not remotely Chinese. A British porcelain factory made up the pattern themselves, and then the legend was made up after the fact, a sort of "easter egg" of narrative for anyone who

[82] Richard Mayo wrote of the pattern's ubiquity and cultural omnipresence that "The blue Willow Pattern, named for the willow tree which figured in its center, is undoubtedly the most popular single design ever to be employed on English earthenware. The pattern originated about 1780 at the Caughley porcelain factory in Shropshire, where it was adapted from conventional forms on Chinese porcelain. It was widely copied by other manufacturers of English china, and soon attained an extraordinary popularity. According to a writer in 1849, "the sale of the common blue plate, known as the 'willow-pattern' exceeds that of all the others put together" "(71).

purchased dishes featuring the design. Richard Mayo describes the basic story of the pattern:

> The Willow story is variously told, but practically all versions agree in outline. According to most of these the rich and influential mandarin who inhabited the stately mansion depicted on the right in the design was a widower possessed of a lovely daughter named Koong-see. He intended to marry his daughter to a wealthy suitor of high degree, but the maiden opposed her parent's wish. She had chosen for her lover a poor and honorable man serving as her father's secretary and had exchanged vows with him in clandestine meetings under the blossoming trees of the Willow Pattern. Suspecting his daughter's defection, the mandarin imprisoned her in a pavilion in his garden, and commanded her to marry the husband of his choice when the peach tree should be in blossom. Here Koong-see pined for her freedom, and prayed that she might find release. Her chosen lover found means to communicate with her, invaded her prison, and carried her off, while her father feted the promised bridegroom in the banquet hall. The lovers were hotly pursued by the mandarin (in some versions by Ta-jin, the rejected suitor), but they escaped over the Willow bridge. After further adventures the gods turned them into birds in token of their fidelity. (72-73)

Mayo's description of "further adventures" is a striking piece of euphemistic understatement—the secretary is hunted down and killed by Ta-Jin, and Koong-See, terrified of being taken, immolates herself in her lover's house. That their violent deaths are prerequisites for the lovely birds flying over the Chinese tableau painted on every Willow Pattern plate and cup has been oddly downplayed in previous discussions of the trope's use—and that Koong-See burns herself alive even as Clara is being urged to participate in psychic sati suggests that Meredith intended much closer attention to be paid to the design's backstory than audiences have previously offered. The very picturesque nature of the Willow Pattern is only a decorative sheen over a story of women being traded as commodities and the requirement to either marry a hated monster or resort to being burned alive—the two choices that Clara finds united in her planned marriage to Willoughby. As Gilmartin points out,

> …the most frequent adjectives used in British journals and in the Parliamentary reports to describe sati are "primitive" and "barbarous." I would argue that some of the writers I have been discussing who use sati as a metaphor for British mourning or wedding rituals are, however jocosely, pointing a finger back in upon their own culture. They are looking at how some of the most common and celebrated rituals of British society can look surprisingly barbarous and primitive from certain perspectives and particularly from the aspect of women's role in these rituals. This is not to say that these writers are *equating* sati with British rituals of mourning or marriage, but that they use the colonial metaphor partly to look at their own society's complacency when describing an alien culture and the hypocrisy surrounding mourning and wedding rituals for women, these being two important rites of passage in the woman's life. (155)

That Victorians could happily eat their seedcake off these plates, Meredith seems to suggest, only indicts the deeply inconsistent beliefs and practices of his culture further—and conjoining this legend with the almost aggressively conventional marriage plot of Willoughby and Clara makes the correspondences even more obvious. Dr. Middleton does not look much like the cruel mandarin at first glance, but the novel offers us a different view of the absentminded scholar—one where his absentmindedness is half performance, half intentional neglect, and where his refusal to listen to his daughter (knowing what she is going to ask) is essentially no different from the mandarin who hears the request and denies it.[83] Dr. Middleton's classical bon mots are both signs of his scholarly pursuits, but also of his perspective—he happily muses on Clara's imminent marriage by comforting himself with these words: "Let the girl be Cicero's Tullia: well, she dies!" (156). That Meredith summons up these concepts while he portrays Willoughby as reluctant to let Clara escape because "If he retained a hold on her, he could undoubtedly apply the scourge at leisure" (185) indicates that his invocation of

[83] Clara marvels at his complicity: "Willoughby has entangled papa. He schemes incessantly to keep me entangled. I fly from his cunning as much as from anything. I dread it. I have told you that I am more to blame than he, but I must accuse him. And wedding-presents! and congratulations! And to be his guest!" (225)

ugly orientalist beliefs and attitudes is far from haphazard. The difference between these practices, he suggests, is only one of degree, for they are ultimately rooted in remarkably similar (if not identical) types of consolidated power.

Unfortunately for Willoughby's baser impulses, part of his desire for having Clara by his side is that he literally wants her physically by his side. Willoughby is never portrayed as enjoying Clara's beauty in an erotic fashion, and in fact he only ever thinks about her aesthetic appeal in terms of how it will make him look better, and make the world envy him more. This means, however, that unless he is willing to lock himself up without company, Clara is inevitably going to have contact with the outside world he claims to hate. As Jenni Calder points out, "Clara as an *objet d'art* is one of the central images. She will ornament Sir Willoughby's house and his life" (184). Willoughby can only display his prize, however, by bringing her out wherever he goes. Ultimately, it is through such social contact (rather than Clara's multiple attempts to run away as far as she can) that allow her to escape. Even as Willoughby proves himself unwilling and incapable when it comes to engaging in honest dialogue with her, several other characters prove to be enthusiastic about the possibility of forging connection. Clara's point of view also undergoes changes. Influenced by the very legend of Constantia Durham, interactions with Laetitia and Mrs. Mountstuart, and the grim specter of Miss Eleanor and Miss Isabel, Clara begins to view her ability to build and shape relationships (with anyone but Willoughby) as a more viable form of escape than flight. In the absence of Willoughby's interest in mutuality, Clara turns her focus from matrimony to the larger social network of Patterne Hall—exactly what the mistress of the Hall should be doing, if Willoughby wasn't constantly interrupting. Clara's multiple unsanctioned and

unaccompanied walks allow her to recruit Horace De Craye and Vernon Whitford to her side, while her quiet conversations amongst the women at social events give new perspective to Laetitia Dale, Mrs. Mountstuart, and Mrs. Busshe.

Willoughby's neighbors (and vassals?) begin to turn to Clara for her reaction to social scenes, begin to consider the Hall itself according to Clara's perspective, and even begin to doubt their own approval of Willoughby's conduct in light of Clara's increasing antagonism. In *He Knew He Was Right*, all of Louis Trevelyan's friends and allies slowly turn against him as his nonsensical demands of his bride become increasingly common knowledge. In *The Egoist*, the communal feeling that Willoughby's inherent egoism is perfectly natural begins to morph into collective shock at his conduct. Willoughby tries to keep Clara away from anyone who might sympathize with her side of the story—but as the number of people in that category expands, he has to choose between exercising his power and performing his role as the neighborhood feudal lord. Since losing either is insupportable to him, Clara's subversion of his domestic mastery begins to take hold of the public imagination. She cannot act as hostage and hostess simultaneously[84], and Willoughby's determination for her to feel the weight of both roles leads to his frantic disintegration in the novel's second half.

The collective re-evaluation of Willoughby's character is matched by the ongoing rehabilitation of Constantia Durham by everyone who had previously damned her so

[84] Judith Flanders points out that cultural requirements meant that a woman in Clara's position could not simply stay home, or remain hidden out of sight: "There were numerous situations in which calling was obligatory: the day after a dinner party, an evening party, or any other sort of entertainment; if there was illness in the house; after a death. It was expected that cards only would be left in a house of illness or death, but neglecting to call altogether was an oversight that could not be forgiven" (318). For Clara to disappear within the Hall would be insupportable for Willoughby, even though her behavior at public gatherings continues to undermine his reputation.

thoroughly. As Clara Middleton herself eventually comes to realize, to view Constantia Durham as merely her predecessor is a mistake—and so, too, for the reader who assumes her pun-laden name is the extent of her importance in the narrative. The fact that the "jilt" who ran away from her engagement to Willoughby is named for constancy and endurance seems amusing at first, but as Clara becomes increasingly desperate to escape just like Miss Durham has, the joke begins to shift into a textual acknowledgment that it is impossible to be constant in reference to a man who is so inconstant as to base his self-definition on people outside of himself, and that no woman can endure the possibility of a life spent attempting (and inevitably failing) to live up to Willoughby's ludicrous requirements. When Clara's eyes are newly opened, she thinks that she might be able to stand it, if she might be allowed to keep even a little personal freedom hidden away from Willoughby's view—but her description of that possibility is tellingly grim:

> She asked for some little, only some little, free play of mind in a house that seemed to wear, as it were, a cap of iron. Sir Willoughby not merely ruled, he throned, he inspired: and how? She had noticed an irascible sensitiveness in him alert against a shadow of disagreement; and as he was kind when perfectly appeased, the sop was offered by him for submission. She noticed that even Mr. Whitford forbore to alarm the sentiment of authority in his cousin. If he did not breathe Sir Willoughby, like the ladies Eleanor and Isabel, he would either acquiesce in a syllable or he silent. He never strongly dissented. The habit of the house, with its iron cap, was on him, as it was on the servants, and would be, oh, shudders of the shipwrecked that see their end in drowning! on the wife. (67)

Just as Miss Durham had once "…seemed personally wounded, and had a face of crimson" (9) after seeing Willoughby callously cut Lieutenant Patterne for failing to live up to his impossible expectations, so too does Clara begin to feel increasingly humiliated and injured as Willoughby's faults become evident to her. Where once she saw Constantia as a cautionary example of how not to behave, Clara begins to view her escape as aspirational.

Kent Puckett has argued that breaches of social etiquette are essential to the nineteenth-century novel, claiming that, "[b]ecause etiquette aims not at any fixed point but rather at the necessarily unfixed forms of a fashion system always already in motion, all that once seemed solid about being good threatens to melt into air. As a result, embarrassment, that most social of feelings, becomes a figure for the period's many social anxieties and takes on a crucial role in the nineteenth-century novel. (11) Clara's initial belief that Constantia has been guilty of the "bad form" Puckett explores slowly shifts into certainty that the bad form lies entirely with Willoughby's intractability, and that Constantia had escaped to save herself from destruction. Clara's multiple scenes of feeling embarrassed on Willoughby's behalf ("He bowed gallantly; and so blindly fatuous did he appear to her, that she could hardly believe him guilty of uttering the words she had heard from him, and kept her eyes on him vacantly till she came to a sudden full stop in the thoughts directing her gaze" (82)) are matched by scenes where she attempts to persuade herself to give up and give in to him. She is embarrassed by her inability to fulfill her promise to marry him, but equally horrified by the potential humiliation of being honest about her desire to escape: "She might call the man she wrenched her hand from, Egoist; jilt, the world would call her" (83). Puckett suggests that one of the reasons "bad form" is such a constant within novels like *The Egoist* is because the truth of what *is* good or bad form is often only available after the fact. Clara's progression from casual opposite of Constantia to her would-be acolyte and imitator is always matched by her increasing knowledge of Willoughby's tendencies: "…she became less well able to bear what she had merely noted in observation before; his view of scholarship; his manner toward Mr. Vernon Whitford, of whom her father spoke

warmly; the rumour concerning his treatment of a Miss Dale. And the country tale of Constantia Durham sang itself to her in a new key" (41). Where she had previously viewed Constantia as the one who erred, Clara is increasingly convinced that Willoughby's former fiancée had undertaken the only possible action after beginning to see Willoughby's true nature—and her evaluation of who has made the mistake of "bad form" shifts from the lady to the baronet. In some ways, here too Meredith suggests that his culture's fondness for labeling anyone as "jilt" is always only half of a story.

What's more, Clara's increasing influence with the wider society outside Patterne Hall means that once the "county tale of Constantia Durham" begins singing itself to Clara in a new key, so too does Clara begin singing it differently herself—and her listeners begin to hum along. Characters begin re-remembering incidents from Constantia's time with them in a new light—and, simultaneously, become more receptive to Clara's increasingly frantic efforts to escape Willoughby's matrimonial snare.

Clara's ability to begin retelling that story (at least on her own behalf, although Lady Busshe seems increasingly convinced that Constantia might be retroactively pardoned) amongst at least the women of her acquaintance supports Puckett's assertion that social errors only remain errors until an alternative view of the same actions offers a new interpretation of motive and inspiration. When Clara initially begins sending out signals that she wishes to end her engagement, women like Laetitia Dale and Mrs. Mounstuart make it clear that any decision to do so will result in her being considered as mad as Constantia, a reprehensible example of feminine faithlessness, and a shortsighted fool who was willing to give up becoming Lady Patterne for the sake of a few wedding jitters. As Sharon Marcus has pointed out, feminine friendships are almost always used

narratively in the nineteenth-century novel to bolster marriage, and as a necessary preface to marital success. She writes: "Historians and literary critics viewed female friendship either as an education in chaste passivity or as a rebellion against marriage and men. But Victorian narratives took a wider view of female friendships, and in fact considered them crucial to realizing marriages between men and women" (18). Mrs. Mounstuart spends much of the novel trying to persuade Clara to forget about her qualms, and even uses the promise of her friendship, influence, and intimacy as a way of counterbalancing Willoughby's "faults": ""A friend of my own sex, and young, and a close neighbour, is just what I would have prayed for. And I'll excuse you, my dear, for not being so anxious about the friendship of an old woman. But I shall be of use to you, you will find. In the first place, I never tap for secrets. In the second, I keep them. Thirdly, I have some power. And fourth, every young married woman has need of a friend like me. Yes, and Lady Patterne heading all the county will be the stronger for my backing"" (291). The implication here is that Clara's marriage to Willoughby is a prerequisite for these benefits—and Mrs. Mounstuart initially has no interest in helping to prevent the role of Lady Patterne remain unfilled. Yet she eventually begins to relish Willoughby's inability to understand Clara's resentment—and Mrs. Mountstuart's desire to see them married transmutes into a desire to simply be a spectator during Clara's attempts to slip free.

Even Laetitia Dale, who actively fights against her own material[85] self-interest in attempting to persuade Clara to go through with the marriage, cannot help but advocate

[85] It is often noted within the book that Laetitia is not simply an old maid, but a dangerously poor old maid with an invalid father, both of whom are on the verge of penury. Her subservience to Willoughby is framed as adulation, but is equally an acknowledgment that she and her father only live on his grounds on sufferance, and that his displeasure would lead to eviction. Compound this with Willoughby's willingness (at times, even eagerness) to banish them at Clara's slightest whim, and Laetitia's endorsement of his every desire seems less contradictory than utterly necessary.

for its realization and initially recoil in horror from Clara's admission of reluctance to go through with it:

> In another and higher tone Laetitia said, "What?" and she looked round on her companion; she looked in the doubt that is open to conviction by a narrow aperture, and slowly and painfully yields access. Clara saw the vacancy of her expression gradually filling with woefulness.
>
> "I have begged him to release me from my engagement, Miss Dale."
>
> "Sir Willoughby?"
>
> "It is incredible to you. He refuses. You see I have no influence."
>
> "Miss Middleton, it is terrible!"
>
> "To be dragged to the marriage service against one's will? Yes."
>
> "Oh! Miss Middleton!"
>
> "Do you not think so?"
>
> "That cannot be your meaning." (128)

Laetitia indeed spends much of the novel trying to understand Clara. As Marcus writes, "The power of men to define women's lives and the centrality of men in women's lives were both real and important aspects of Victorian society" (22), and Laetitia has spent her entire life defining herself according to Willoughby's whims even without a betrothal. Yet it is through her interactions with Clara—the "living and frank exchange" that Clara seeks out with everyone she meets—that Laetitia's opinion on the matter is gradually altered. First, she begins to notice Willoughby's lack of confidence in Clara, and while she feels his pain acutely, it is one of the first instances that Laetitia is able to see anything behind Willoughby's mask of self-satisfaction and complacency: "Laetitia grieved for him. Sun-rays on a pest-stricken city, she thought, were like the smile of his face. She believed that he deeply loved Clara, and had learned more of her alienation" (210). Her desire for Clara to submit to the marriage shifts from being founded in Clara needing to keep her word to Clara needing to avoid hurting Willoughby further. As she becomes aware of these tensions, however, her displeasure over the impending breach is less and less focused on Willoughby's well-being. "To know anything about bad form,"

Puckett writes, "…is to know the feeling that comes with it, a sinking feeling that appears with telling regularity in the pages of the nineteenth-century novel" (14). Meredith often blesses Laetitia with that sinking feeling, especially when, in Willoughby's presence, Clara's reasons for wanting to leave become increasingly evident:

> Sir Willoughby offered Miss Dale half a minute that she might in gentle feminine fashion acquiesce in the implied reproof of Dr. Middleton's behaviour to him during the drive to Mrs. Mountstuart's. She did not.
>
> Her heart was accusing Clara of having done it a wrong and a hurt. For while he talked he seemed to her to justify Clara's feelings and her conduct: and her own reawakened sensations of injury came to the surface a moment to look at him, affirming that they pardoned him, and pitied, but hardly wondered. (258)

That Laetitia has begun to blame Clara for hurting *Laetitia's* own heart rather than *Willoughby's* is an indication of just how much Clara's perspective has transformed her own—as well as a premonition of the self-assured Laetitia of the novel's end, who will demand Willoughby's compliance and submission as a condition of marriage, rather than his previous attempts to extract such promises from other would-be brides.

Perversely, even as Willoughby is increasingly insistent that the marriage will take place whether Clara wants it or not, it is the trappings of impending marriage that bolster her resolution to refuse. Multiple times within the narrative, Meredith uses the specters of the accumulated wedding gifts as goads for Clara, as well as reminders to his audience that the man named for the Willow Pattern views his bride as, ultimately, a decorative object rather than a partner in life. Colonel de Cray's shattered gift of a porcelain vase, Lady Busshe's porcelain china set, and Lady Mounstuart's as-yet-unpurchased gift (because Clara refuses to tell her what sort of present she would like) are all obsessively discussed, lamented, and considered symbolically as evidence that the marriage is a failure before it has even begun. As Jill Rappoport has argued, "...gifts

throughout nineteenth-century literature and culture set the terms for kinship, threaten heroines with obligations they cannot repay, and create conditions for bribes" (3). Clara is not only increasingly aware of the meaning attached to each of these gifts, she is also progressively more terrified at the sense that she herself is a gift—a trifle of her father's which, once gifted to another man, can never be taken back again. That this sense is so pervasive in a novel coming so late in the century may seem peculiar—the laws have changed, and are on the verge of changing further. With 1883 only a few years away, Clara can look forward to both the ability to divorce without an act of Parliament as well as the possibility of owning her own property should she remain married. Yet Meredith, in describing her repeatedly as a creature at bay, suggests that the change in legal possibilities for married women has not necessarily altered the expectations placed upon women at the moment of marriage. Willoughby, styling himself as an amateur scientist and empiricist, may figure himself as the pinnacle of progress and forward-thinking, but Meredith insists that these are trappings only. Jonathan Smith points out that for all of Willoughby's attempts to embrace modernity, he only ever uses scientific advances as excuses for recidivism to a more brutal viewpoint: "...Willougby appropriates sexual selection as a compliment to himself, a confirmation of his superiority. Indeed, Willoughby quickly moves away from the notion of being complimented by the fair one's choice, with its implication of female autonomy and of the potential revocation of the compliment, to the notion that Clara has been selected *for* him, given *to* him as a reward for and an acknowledgement of his own fitness..." (66). Her beauty is only admirable because it belongs to him, as Clara becomes increasingly aware—and the less human she

acts, the happier he is with her. When Clara is silent or still, Willoughby loves her best—but when she speaks, walks, or smiles, he tends to flinch.

In one scene where Clara's revulsion towards him first begins to overwhelm her attempts at equanimity, Willoughby's dialogue almost entirely consists of calling her ""My dearest Clara! my bride!"" (49) and other such appellations, all of which focus more on his covetous love of ownership than his delight in Clara. Even when he forces a kiss on her unwillingly, he is more pleased by her statue-like endurance of the embrace than by the kiss itself: "Sir Willoughby was enraptured with her. Even so purely coldly, statue-like, Dian-like, would he have prescribed his bride's reception of his caress" (50). Mrs. Mountstuart's decision to name Clara a "rogue in porcelain" was horrifying to Willoughby because of the rogue[86], but Meredith depicts him time and again as pleased to consider her as a trifle made of porcelain. Immediately following Willoughby's approval of her frozen disgust, Clara wonders "By what strange right was it that she was treated as a possession?" (51). Clara may live in a time when men such as Willoughby found such a question absurd owing to their obvious superiority over the entire empire and world, but Meredith points out that she is more fortunate than Koong-see, in that her perspective is slowly acquiring more adherents the more she resists. Clara, less and less willing to live as the frozen statue of Willoughby's dreams that he might display in the showcase of his perfectly regulated home, begins to make her struggles known. In so doing, she shifts public opinion in her favor, and the discussion of wedding gifts becomes

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[86] "…if you looked on Clara as a delicately inimitable porcelain beauty, the suspicion of a delicately inimitable ripple over her features touched a thought of innocent roguery, wildwood roguery; the likeness to the costly and lovely substance appeared to admit a fitness in the dubious epithet. He detested but was haunted by the phrase." (75)

the site where this shift is increasingly visible to not only the reader, but Willoughby himself.

One gift that leads to endless contention is Colonel De Craye's porcelain vase, shattered before he has a chance to bestow it on the happy couple. As Clara is walking along the road, De Craye is riding in a carriage driven by Flitch, Willoughby's former and now exiled employee.[87] The sight of Clara walking spooks Flitch, who overturns the vehicle, resulting in De Craye and the vase being thrown out, and while De Craye survives, the vase does not. This unfortunate accident becomes, however, not a mere irritation to Willoughby, but a source of ongoing anger and rebuke against Clara—both because she takes Flitch's part, and tries to convince Willoughby to rehire him, and also because Willoughby lays the blame for the breakage squarely on her shoulders. He takes her decision to walk alone as both a humiliation for him, and a sign that she needs to be better controlled: "Her conduct, and foremost, if not chiefly, her having been discovered, positively met by his friend Horace, walking on the high-road without companion or attendant, increased a sense of pain so very unusual with him that he had cause to be indignant" (140). The breakage of a vase becomes an emblem to him of her refusal to perform the role he asks of her. Simultaneously, however, it becomes a sign to Clara, De Craye, and others that Willoughby's love of control leads him into inconsistency and

[87] Flitch's exile takes on new meaning as Clara's escape attempts become more frequent—because Willoughby has banned him from the grounds of Patterne Hall, Flitch has to find work elsewhere. Because Flitch now works on the cash nexus instead of for the sake of feudal fealty, he is able to give rides to Clara as she travels to destinations where Willoughby would have her banned. If Flitch had been admitted back into Willoughby's service, Willoughby's ability to control Clara would have been firmer—and yet he is the one who refused her request to rehire Flitch for the sake of the poor Flitch family.

ridiculousness. After first blaming De Craye for failing to safeguard the vase properly ("Wasn't it packed in a box?" (141)[88]), he quickly shifts the blame to Clara:

> "You see what may happen," he said to Clara.
> "As far as I am in fault I regret it," she answered.
> "Flitch says the accident occurred through his driving up the bank to save you from the wheels."
> "Flitch may go and whisper that down the neck of his empty whisky-flask," said Horace De Craye. "And then let him cork it."
> "The consequence is that we have a porcelain vase broken. You should not walk on the road alone, Clara. You ought to have a companion, always. It is the rule here."
> "I had left Miss Dale at the cottage."
> "You ought to have had the dogs."
> "Would they have been any protection to the vase?"
> Horace De Craye crowed cordially. (141)

The smashed vase thereafter is a symbol of Clara's independence, her willingness to answer back rather than humbly repent according to his Willoughby's wishes, and her tendency to show him up as absurdly unreasonable in front of other people. It also becomes associated with the "rogue in porcelain" nickname that troubles Willoughby so much, to the extent that a discussion of one often turns into a discussion of the other. The smashing of the vase is also the beginning of cracks in Willoughby's own façade—De Craye crows at him as Clara scores conversational points, and Mrs. Mountstuart quickly learns to listen eagerly whenever the vase is mentioned, because it disconcerts Willoughby so profoundly. His outsize angst over the vase leads to more and more characters turning their judgmental and speculative gazes from Clara to Willoughby himself.

In many ways, these various uses of the porcelain theme not only remind Meredith's audience of the omnipresent Willow Pattern trope throughout the novel, but

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[88] As Clara herself should be, perhaps.

also of the “chinamania” so prevalent at this point in the century. Anne Anderson argues that the obsessive collection of china during this time was ultimately an obsession with the self: “The pursuit of new types of goods in the context of the Aesthetic movement, notably artistic goods, especially china, denotes new social and cultural purposes. The art-object promised the satisfaction of a variety of desires. Moreover the aesthete was willing to be dominated by an object, to see in it the "mirror of his desires." Objects, such as teapots, were considered not merely useful, but also a valuable indication of who aesthetes were; they were for self-identity or embodied the "desired self," Kingsley's "conceited dream of self-culture"” (243). Although Willoughby may not read as a typical aesthete, he himself aligns himself with the “chinamania” fad, asserting his authority as a collector and expert on china: ““…I profess to be a connoisseur," he said. "I am poor in Old Saxony, as you know; I can match the country in Sèvres, and my inheritance of China will not easily be matched in the country"” (307). The broken vase, then, is not merely an affront to his control over Clara’s movements throughout the countryside, but an affront to his role as collector and arbiter of taste. If the vase had been beautiful, Willoughby would have acquired a new treasure. If it had been hideous, he could have mocked it as gauche and De Craye as lacking an artistic eye, another pleasure of the china collector’s habits.[89] As a pile of shards, however, the vase can only represent Clara’s ungovernable tendencies—and every discussion about the loss of the gift becomes both a reminder that she ignores his strictures, as well as a reminder that the

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[89] “What--bemused observers asked themselves, surveying the bustling trade--could explain Britons' newfound penchant for the antique? One likely culprit was that Victorian whipping-boy: manufacture. As the antiques trade boomed, its success seemed, at least in part, to stem from dissatisfaction with modern products. Manufacturers, their critics charged, had little to offer discriminating palettes [sic].” (Cohen 153)

“rogue in porcelain” designation is increasingly evident to the entire community. As Deborah Cohen points out, the concept of a house’s decoration falling under a wife’s command does not rise in prevalence until the very end of the century—and even then, it takes several more decades before the right of a woman to design and adorn interior space is assumed. She writes: “For men who wished to demonstrate their refinement, the home became a showplace. It was not uncommon for a visitor, upon calling for the first time on an acquaintance, to be conducted through the premises by the man of the house, who directed his guest's attention to the improvements he had made” (98). Willoughby’s eccentricity, then, is not in his fixation on these decorative objects, but in his insistence that his bride should be one of them.

Indeed, although Clara is the character whose appearance and arrangement he pursues the most fiercely, he is equally determined to do the same to every character he can control. He likes the idea of Crossjay being reworked as an heir made in his image, and ignores every suggestion from others that might suggest a healthier future for the child. (Similarly, he previously refused Crossjay’s father entrance to Patterne Hall because his exterior did not match Willoughby’s conception of what a war hero should look like.) He prefers Laetitia to remain eternally in place as his devotee, and he does his best to make it impossible for her to vacate the position. Even when the possibility arises that she must leave for Clara’s sake, he tries to simply arrange her and Vernon as a pairing and shove them into another tableau, like two ill-matched figurines he has decided must somehow be made to suit. He even feels implacable anger at moments when Clara looks beautiful if the beauty is flourishing in settings he does not approve of: “His offended temper broke away from the image of Clara, revealing her as he had seen

her in the morning beside Horace De Craye, distressingly sweet; sweet with the breezy radiance of an English soft-breathing day; sweet with sharpness of young sap. Her eyes, her lips, her fluttering dress that played happy mother across her bosom, giving peeps of the veiled twins; and her laughter, her slim figure, peerless carriage, all her terrible sweetness touched his wound to the smarting quick" (162). Her beauty that pleases him when she is by his side crushes him when others are allowed to enjoy it. Even Crossjay's schoolboy crush inspires Willoughby's anger, because for others to notice Clara's beauty means that he does not totally possess it himself. During one conversation where Willoughby asks the boy about his studies, Crossjay begins to notice a certain pattern: "Crossjay made the discovery that if he abstained from alluding to Miss Middleton's beauty he might water his dusty path with her name nearly as much as he liked. Mention of her beauty incurred a reprimand" (249). Even the offhand conversation of a child must be regulated for Willoughby to feel himself as truly master.

It is ultimately that craving for mastery, however, that provides Clara with the leverage to escape Koong-see's unfortunate fate—and Meredith uses the Willow Pattern imagery to indicate that Clara is no longer alone in her belief that Willoughby's vision of domestic bliss is based on a despot's view of the world. In the same conversation where Willoughby calls himself a connoisseur of china in order to compliment Lady Busshe on the china service she has given to the couple as a wedding gift, Lady Busshe accepts the compliment while calling the wedding into doubt. After Clara fails to react with sorrow over De Craye's broken vase and expresses no interest in the gifted china service ("Clara's look of a sedate resolution to preserve silence on the topic of the nuptial gifts

made a diversion imperative" (307)[90]), the awkward moment is transformed into a moment of revelation:

> …the lady visitors fixed their eyes in united sympathy upon Clara: recovering from which, after a contemplation of marble, Lady Busshe emphasized, "No, you do not love porcelain, it is evident, Miss Middleton."
> "I am glad to be assured of it," said Lady Culmer.
> "Oh, I know that face: I know that look," Lady Busshe affected to remark rallyingly: "it is not the first time I have seen it."
> Sir Willoughby smarted to his marrow. "We will rout these fancies of an overscrupulous generosity, my dear Lady Busshe."
> Her unwonted breach of delicacy in speaking publicly of her present, and the vulgar persistency of her sticking to the theme, very much perplexed him. And if he mistook her not, she had just alluded to the demoniacal Constantia Durham. (308)

The "marble" viewed by the ladies is Clara's blank expression—and although Willoughby has previously noted that it is remarkably similar to the one worn by Constantia before her elopement with another man, this is the first time that the probability of Clara doing the same crops up in public discussion. Lady Busshe's increasing boldness in pointing out this possibility signals the erosion of Willoughby's authority and reputation—and, as Jill Rappoport has suggested, the fact that she does this through a discussion of her own extravagant gift should not surprise us: "...we should understand Victorian women's giving as a subversive way to direct social networks and establish civic authority that otherwise remained beyond their reach. As material possessions acquired new moral, social, and national meanings for the Victorians, women found ways to shape and benefit from those meanings" (6). Lady Busshe uses the pretext of her gift as a method of undermining Willoughby's social power. Furthermore, she

[90] Jill Rappoport has written that the exchange of gifts within the Victorian novel is often a site of hidden tensions and economic negotiation: "Despite their voluntary appearance, gifts require that we look beyond the donation side of the equation to assess the process of acceptance as well as the material or symbolic payback" (7).

suggests that the defection of a second bride might not only damage his reputation, but has the possibility of helping to heal that of Constantia Durham, whose flight would begin to look less scandalous if her reluctance to become Lady Patterne is proved judicious in the end. Mrs. Mounstuart is aware of this tension when she carefully warns Willoughby of the rapidly shifting narrative the next day:

> "…'I shall have that porcelain back,' says Lady Busshe to me, when we were shaking hands last night: 'I think,' says she, 'it should have been the Willow Pattern.' And she really said: 'He's in for being jilted a second time!'"
>
> Sir Willoughby restrained a bound of his body that would have sent him up some feet into the air. He felt his skull thundered at within.
>
> "Rather than that it should fan upon her!" ejaculated he, correcting his resemblance to the high-caste culprit as soon as it recurred to him. (286)

Willoughby is thereafter haunted by what he terms Lady Busshe's "owl's hoot of "Willow Pattern"" (288), and his attempt to "[correct] his resemblance to the high-caste culprit" only assures us that he knows the story all too well. Willoughby does not want to "correct his resemblance" by ceasing to act the tyrant and engaging in true dialogue with Clara, but the only other options are hateful to him. Jenni Calder has written that "Meredith makes it quite explicit that the superbly polite and well-bred Sir Willoughby's view of Clara is as an oriental slave. The suggestions of the harem are obvious" (183), and this is the point in the novel's narrative where that framing is becoming increasingly apparent to his social circle and former admirers. Willoughby's subsequent attempts to save face, however, are simultaneously ridiculous and cruel, because his assumption that he should be granted the right to rearrange the lives and hearts of those around him at will only ratifies Lady Busshe's labeling him as the tyrant lord in the first place. Gillian Beer's classic work on Meredith argues that "The tragic episodes in his novels are the appalled reversal of comedy" (110), and this novel's drawn-out end is replete with

enough to amuse and appall any audience. In order to seem less of a tyrant, Willoughby tries to force the hands of Clara *and* Laetitia, working at blackmailing Clara for her hand while risking Laetitia's devastation as a safety net.

Fortunately for both women, such a plan is only constructed by Meredith so that his audience can watch its glorious deconstruction. As Beer points out, "[t]hroughout his work Meredith draws attention to his use of the modes of comedy and tragedy and insists on their interpenetration. The effectiveness of the novel as a form lies in large measure in its power to mingle the comic and tragic and to demonstrate to us the inextricably mixed quality of life" (108). Willoughby's actions might be hideous, Meredith suggests, but to watch them fail so miserably and so publicly at least allows us to hold out hope that such conduct might occasionally fail. That it contains even the potential of succeeding, however, is Meredith's less comic warning. There are several men in this novel who view marriage as a fundamentally equal relationship between partners and an opportunity to have one's self be altered for the better through the intervention of another mind and spirit—but as long as there are eligible young men like Willoughby and fathers like Dr. Middleton hewing to an older model of marriage as exchange and absolute domination, women like Clara are at risk of having their pleasant but vague dreams of love and family reduced to the pseudo-Gothic nightmares Clara experiences during the term of her ill-fated engagement. The rhetoric of modernity, Meredith points out, is useless if the hidden brutalities of Victorian marriage customs still hold rhetorical sway, while men like Willoughby compare their superficially elegant lives with the so-called "brutes" of other nations in order to deceive themselves into a complacent sense of superiority. The novel's end comes with a certain assurance that Sir Willoughby Patterne has, ultimately, been

given "his dues," as Mrs. Mounstuart predicted early on—but the communal understanding of what he deserves has undergone a radical shift throughout the course of the narrative.

Willoughby doesn't take marriage seriously enough—as Jessica Gerard points out, it was normal for the heir to a great estate to invite his fiancée for an extended visit to see how they would deal with daily life together. Willoughby, however, doesn't care about daily life—Clara seeing Vernon and Crossjay over the breakfast table, walking with Laetitia, tea with Mrs. Mountstuart, ministering to the parish poor, entertaining Colonel De Craye when he came for visits—all of these are the proper and correct duties for Patterne Hall's mistress, and all activities that Clara attempts in good faith. But Willoughby Patterne is more interested in how his marriage will look from the outside than how he can best live inside of it.

He wants to entertain, but he becomes the entertainment—the Hall becomes a lodestone, as all the novel's characters are irresistibly drawn closer in anticipation of Willoughby's imminent comeuppance. More interested in what others will think than anything Clara thinks or says, Willoughby is ultimately undone by what is overheard—his contradictory promises to multiple women, his lies and self-justifications uttered throughout the rooms and grounds of Patterne Hall, in front of hearers seen and unseen. Determined to have the final word as master, all of his final words, self-contradictory as they are, create the means of Clara's escape into marriage with Vernon (the mandarin's daughter and the secretary, flit away to mountain heights), and Laetitia's escape from poverty into Patterne Hall proper as Willoughby's wife. Furthermore, Laetitia, the scales having fallen from her eyes, only consents to marry Willoughby on the condition that he

give her total control over Patterne Hall, since he has proved himself so incapable of interpersonal domestic management. Those he has banished from the Hall are to be welcomed back under Laetitia's flag, those who Willoughby had vowed to cut off financially have their access to the Patterne coffers restored with Laetitia's handwriting in the ledger book. Willoughby promises that Laetitia will be "mine, as the lady of my life and house" (419), and his final moment of defeat is when he is forced to promise "You are mistress of my house, Laetitia" (421). Once he has made his vow that she will be given the domestic authority that Clara was never allowed (and he has made this vow in front of witnesses, so that it cannot be rescinded), Laetitia is willing to risk marriage to Sir Willoughby Patterne—and he, generous as ever, consents to marry "the bride of his youth" (30), the "old maid" who is two years his junior.

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Chapter Five: The Contest is Ended
Conclusion

Where does a woman go, once she has fled the domestic hearth of conventional married life? In the case of these three novels, the answer boils down to: anywhere but here. At the end of *He Knew He Was Right*, Emily Trevelyan happily lives the rest of her life as a rich widow, in a spot that others might consider almost gruesome—the rural cottage where her raving, mentally ill husband died: ". . . all that had been his, was now hers. He had once suggested what she should do, were she ever to be married again; and she felt that of such a career there could be no possibility. Anything but that!" Left alone with her son, given the freedom to preserve any social connections she would like to keep while abandoning those she finds dull, she is given the power and self-assurance that had never been hers while her husband was still alive, and a household whose management she controls absolutely.

Although *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* actually ends with Helen Huntingdon remarried as Helen Markham, her *first* destination after escaping from Grassdale Manor is Wildfell Hall itself, where she revels in being inhospitable and unconventional—thereby embodying the opposites of her most pressing concerns as Arthur Huntingdon's society wife. When Gilbert Markham visits her at Wildfell Hall, he is scandalized by her obvious irritation with his presence there, her refusal to stop working to entertain his company, and her complacency about her new home's unconventionality, with rooms shut up, furniture covered in dust-coverings, and a single servant waiting on mother and son. Expecting to be entertained in a parlor, Markham is piqued to find that even sitting down is not easily accomplished in Helen's favored room: "And disengaging a couple of chairs from the artistical lumber that usurped them, she bid us be seated, and resumed her

place beside the easel—not facing it exactly, but now and then glancing at the picture upon it while she conversed, and giving it an occasional touch with her brush, as if she found it impossible to wean her attention entirely from her occupation to fix it upon her guests" (42). After years of hypervigilance caused by her husband's erratic behavior and demands, Helen Huntingdon's new life is characterized by her ability to ignore and rebuke unwanted guests who intrude on her space[91]—even when one of the guests is the man who ends up becoming her second husband.

The Egoist's Clara Middleton goes the furthest of them all—decamping from the rigidly monitored conventionalities of Patterne Hall for her long-awaited retreat to the Alps. Her father unwillingly trails along with her as she heads for the hills, "[speaking] of his doom to lead his daughter over the Alps and Alpine lakes for the Summer months" (422), and telling Colonel De Craye that his destination with his daughter is "The Lake of Constance, I am told" (423). Although Meredith declines to make her mission there too explicit, the other characters marvel that Clara Middleton will be marrying Willoughby's cousin Vernon Whitford, and the novel's description of Willoughby's marriage to Laetitia Dale as taking place "upon the season when two lovers met between the Swiss and Tyrol Alps over the Lake of Constance" (425). Having been lectured at such length about how selfish she was for preferring to think her own thoughts, and how disobedient she has been in her determination to heedlessly walk around the countryside, Clara proceeds to marry a freethinking intellectual whose favorite pastime is hiking.

Each one of these characters, having entered these homes in the anticipation of future domestic bliss, eventually views her escape as a form of salvation and rescue from

[91] During the same scene, her brother Frederick stops by Wildfell Hall—and Helen goes outside to make him go away.

torment. Domesticity, sold to an entire culture as the only happy ending and a balm for any soul, is instead revealed to be a paradox based on obfuscation and sequestration. Dara Rossman Regaignon points out that the wife and mother's central position within the home is fundamentally based on mutually exclusive claims: "“Maternal influence” described the power of those without authority, legal standing, or guardianship over their children but whose influence was imagined to be all-powerful, determining the moral compass and habits of the adult to come" (33). Asked to train her entire life for the position but to never acknowledge her invisible and silent efforts, the wife's place in the home is that of the General Manager expected to play the part of Trainee whenever her husband offers his inexpert but authoritative advice. Furthermore, if any of his advice is objectively wrong, subjectively humiliating, or destined to result in even more labor and domestic strife, her role is to accept that word as law while maintaining perfect equanimity. After all, as Caroline Austin-Bolt points out, the housewife's training is as much about her unflappable pleasantness as her necessary (and necessarily unacknowledged) omniscience: "As happiness became de-emphasized as a political aim and increasingly emphasiszed in the domestic sphere, pedagogy aimed at educating and thus guiding domestic women's moral choices recontextualized happiness as a gendered social responsibility—that is, an habitual part of the performance of domestic women" (191). Designating happiness as mandatory, habitual, and performative (the rest of the family is always watching!), even domesticity's How-To guides conspired against the home environment.

Yet the men in these novels do not begin as sadists or taskmasters, and they are as flustered by their marital (and pre-marital) breakdowns as anyone else. David Skilton

writes that Victorian “manhood” is not merely a matter of class, career, or financial stability, but that it “is achieved by reaching a state in which a character fits without effort into his family and the society of men and women, and, importantly, into the masculine institutions of his fellows” (130). The men in these novels are continually shocked by the sheer amount of effort their domestic lives suddenly require, in contradiction to all of their plans and expectations. Their shock is not because these women are particularly troublesome, however, but because these women are people, a revelation that causes considerable consternation in every text. Women who trust their own experiences, moral codes, and maternal instincts are supposed to make the best sorts of wives according to domestic manuals, but Louis Trevelyan, Arthur Huntingdon, and Willoughby Patterne find women abiding by their own internal standards to be uncomfortably and unexpectedly eager to participate in collaborative domesticity, rather than simply waiting for instruction.

Early in *The Egoist*, there is a scene where Willoughby’s humiliation of being jilted by his first fiancée Constantia Durham is known throughout his social circle, yet he is determined to act as if everything is fine, as if he has not even noticed the breach. Another character marvels at the strangeness of his affect: “he . . . talked and laughed in a way that reminded her of a hunting gentleman she had seen once rising to his feet, staggering from an ugly fall across hedge and fence into one of the lanes of her short winter walks. "All's well, all sound, never better, only a scratch!" the gentleman had said, as he reeled and pressed a bleeding head.” (19) Just like Willoughby in this scene, the couples in these novels stagger, stunned, through the halls and parlors of their homes, unable to comprehend the complexity and intractability of their domestic woes.

The nineteenth-century model of companionate marriage meant that spouses were expected to enjoy spending time together, and to feel mutual respect for one another—enough to last them a lifetime! Yet the Victorian model of domesticity—allegedly based on companionate principles—nevertheless undermines those same principles because of fundamental elements written into its operating system. Spouses who are supposed to long to spend the rest of their lives together live in houses that are designed to keep them apart, and governed by cultural codes that separate them even further. Tara Puri describes the barriers erected between husbands and wives in both their physical and ideological terms: ““In spatial terms, the cultural privileging of the male head of the house translated into the largest proportion of space being allocated to him, and so the public rooms were both the biggest and the most conveniently placed in the house. The women's rooms, on the other hand, were usually placed at the back of the house, or on the side of the garden, away from the street and the potentially intrusive gaze of strangers. The lady of the house would normally have a separate morning room, a drawing room or a parlour, and a boudoir" (504). The atomization and separation that are intended to showcase the luxuriousness of a Victorian home as a form of comfort and display too easily become estrangement and factionalism when the normal stresses of marriage and family life enter the semi-detached London townhouse or the elegant country estate.

As the authors of these novels show, the stakes at home were simply too high. Masculinity and femininity were defined by the state of the home, class was defined by the state of the home, the British empire was defined by the state of the home, an individual's moral and religious destiny was defined by the state of the home, a child's emotional and mental development was determined by the state of the home—and in the

face of these impossibly high demands, the homes themselves destabilized all these identities, just as these identities in turn destabilized the meaning of home. When Louis Trevelyan tells his wife Emily that she should tell Colonel Osborne she is "not at home" when the other man attempts to make any social visits, Louis speaks more truly than he knows—because Emily, like all the other main characters in these texts, never feels herself to truly be "at home" as long as she lives in a house where her performance of domestic bliss is so relentlessly scrutinized and second-guessed. Each of these homes becomes irrevocably *unheimlich*—both "unhomely" and uncanny at once. The Trevelyan house is ultimately shuttered by a raving madman who calls the truth a lie. Grassdale Manor is depicted as a Gothic nightmare of entrapment and psychological warfare. Patterne Hall's owner happily demands psychic self-immolation and compliance to his most contradictory of wishes. Yet in each instance, the cause of all the suffering is based on mutual attempts at by-the-book domesticity, disasters growing out of the cultural soil of what "everyone knows" to be true. Although three fleeing heroines may seem unusual at first, the project of these authors is not to make us marvel at their panicked trajectories away from domestic scenes. Instead, they urge us to marvel at another anomaly: the fact that such a flight path was the exception rather than the norm.

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