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TURNING 'THE ANGEL OF THE HOUSE' OUT OF THE HOUSE: PRIVACY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY SENSATION NOVEL

Ashley Crider

Clemson University, alcride@g.clemson.edu

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TURNING 'THE ANGEL OF THE HOUSE' OUT OF THE HOUSE: PRIVACY IN
THE NINETEENTH CENTURY SENSATION NOVEL

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
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In Partial Fulfillment
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Masters of Arts
English

by
Ashley Lauren Crider
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Accepted by:
Dr. Kimberly Manganelli, Committee Chair
Dr. Cameron Bushnell
Dr. Dominic Mastroianni

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores nineteenth-century transatlantic sensation fiction. My examination of George Lippard's *The Quaker City: Or the Monks of Monk Hall* (1845) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* investigates the construction of the Angel of the House in both the domestic and public spheres. I pay particular attention to 'feminine' spaces such as the boudoir, and how the sensation novel represents physical space and commodity culture to comment on female sexual agency and how nineteenth century classes constructed womanhood. In addition to Braddon and Lippard, my thesis explores such American texts as Hannah Craft's *The Bondswoman's Narrative* (circa 1855-1859) and E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*, and such British texts as Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852) and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876)

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my father who always believes in me and to my mother who knows that strong encouragement never over takes hard work. To my sister who read long Victorian novels and constantly complained that she went to hair school so she did not have to read. To my brother who can look at any situation with clarity and logic. And finally to my fiancé who if he ever felt abandoned during the writing process never let me know.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE PAGE	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
I. BOUDOIR STORIES: PRIVACY, POWER, AND CLASS IN THE QUAKER CITY.....	9
II. LADIES IN THE BOUDOIR, MAIDS IN THE HALL: AN EXAMINATION OF PRIVACY IN BRADDON’S LADY AUDLEY’S SECRET AND DICKENS’S BLEAK HOUSE.....	19
III. ‘HOMELESS’ WOMEN: THE BRITISH JEWESS AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN SLAVE	34
CONCLUSION	
MELTING WOMEN: MIXING NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITAIN AND AMERICAN FICTION	50
WORKS CITED	55

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores nineteenth-century transatlantic sensation fiction through an examination of George Lippard's *The Quaker City: Or the Monks of Monk Hall* (1845), Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876), and Hannah Craft's *The Bondswoman's Narrative* (circa 1855-1859), investigates female class structure in terms of the Victorian perception of the private Angel of the House. I pay particular attention to feminine spaces such as the boudoir, and how the sensation novel represents physical space and commodity culture to comment and construct class structure.

I argue that female characters of lower class standing utilize public perceptions of domestic space and commodity culture in order to have ultimate power over female characters of the middle and upper classes. In doing this, lower class servants construct the middle class ideal of the Angel of the House. Elizabeth Langland describes the Angel of the House as the "Victorian wife, the presiding hearth angel of Victorian social myth" (Langland 8). The 'Angel' exudes her shining light of purity and goodness in her good deeds in the domestic space. Langland also connects the middle class Angel of the House to the power of the middle class over the privacy of the domestic space. Langland argues that, "a mid-Victorian man depended on his wife to perform the ideological work of managing the class question and displaying the signs of middle-class status..." (Langland 9). Arguments like Langland's associate the actions of the middle class female character in the sensation genre with a sense of domestic issues only affecting private spaces such as the *boudoir*. However, I argue that the Angel of the house is a model used to control

the behavior of women in the public sphere. The middle class does not construct the Angel of the House privately, like it is so often suggested, but instead it is the lower class that publicly constructs the definition of middle class womanhood.

Take for example female characters in George Lippard's *The Quaker City*. Bess, a low class courtesan, is able to infiltrate the middle class through her manipulation of Mary, the merchant's daughter, to marry a young man named Lorrimer. Bess strips Mary from the comfort of her domestic space taking her to a brothel, where after Lorrimer seduces her, Mary is to become a prostitute like Bess. Bess uses a gilded bridal suite in the brothel to convince Mary that she is in the home of a reputable family. Bess uses middle class commodities to convince Mary that she is doing the right thing and convinces Mary to act on her own agency to leave her house and enter the brothel. While Lady Audley in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* is not being held hostage in a brothel, Braddon does place Lady Audley in a sumptuous boudoir. It is in this inter-sanctum that Lady Audley locks away the secrets of her lower class past. Through infiltration by her maid, Phoebe Marks, and her new stepdaughter, Alicia, Lady Audley's privacy is made public. Lady Audley acted on her own agency to leave her life as lower class Helen Talboys to become Lady Audley, however this agency has a sense of falseness when put in the hands of societal constraints and the role of the servant.

This checking of power by the lower class establishes a code of femininity for the upper middle class of the Angel of the House. This code must be adhered lest class hierarchy order might become detrimental to the upper class female place. The nineteenth-century sensation genre uses plots that twist and turn to captivate the

audience. Often sensational plots are shocking domestic dramas that deal with mistaken identities, affairs outside of marriage, and abandoned or orphaned children. Unlike sentimental fiction, the sensation genre shocks the reader by deconstructing the ideal of womanhood. The 'Angel of the House' in the sentimental novel is a model for nineteenth century middle class female readership to strive to obtain. In the sensation novel, the middle class woman who is in the position of the Angel of the House often fails in meeting the public criteria of female propriety. In this way, sensation authors open the door and let the 'Angel' out of the house allowing the opportunity for critique of nineteenth century womanhood.

Antebellum society structure differs from British society in that American society struggles with the issues of slavery and British society the issue of servitude. Even though slavery and servitude are overwhelmingly different, there is still a reading of how womanhood is defined in terms of the slave novel. In this thesis I will examine how the representation of the convention of the Angel of the House from the genre of sensation constructs a public definition of womanhood in terms of more marginalized characters from Britain in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* and from America Hannah Craft's *The Bondswoman's Narrative*.

In *The Bondswoman's Narrative* we are given the point of view of the slave. Hannah Crafts feelings of power and worth differ tremendously from Esther's servitude in *Bleak House*. Esther is tied to her servitude for want of money and a place to live. Theoretically, however, Esther is free to leave her position as housekeeper at any time. These differences in freedom and bondage between America and Britain must be

addressed. I argue that though these societies are so different in terms of levels of oppression, in the sensation novel, the feminine place in society is held intact by those that are the oppressed in both Britain and America. Furthermore, it is the authors of these novels, though maybe not readily classified as sensation fiction, that also deconstruct the Angel of the House. In *The Bondswoman's Narrative* and *Daniel Deronda* marginalized characters are afforded the same protection and privacy usually reserved for the white middle class Angel of the House.

Upper class females such as Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House*, Lady Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret*, Dora Livingstone in *The Quaker City*, and the Mistress in Hannah Craft's *The Bondswoman's Narrative* are all put into a very public construction of womanhood by the maids, servants, and house slaves that control their lives. This thesis argues that it is not just societal perceptions of class and female purity that regulate and define womanhood and class power in American and British societies and texts. Places that are on the surface private spaces such as *boudoirs*, kitchens, and households all function as public entities in which classes of females in American and British sensation fiction blur the perception of loss and gain of power by central female characters. In chapters one and two I explore American and British texts respectively. In the final chapter, I bring together an American text, *The Bondswoman's Narrative* and a British text *Daniel Deronda* to explore how both countries publically construct a definition of womanhood for racially diverse characters that fall outside of the lines of the typical sensational Angel of the House.

Chapter one focuses on the American sensation text, George Lippard's *The Quaker City* (1845). Female characters that are from the upper middle class antebellum novel are expected to adhere to Angel of the House standards, which are often reinforced by servants. In *The Quaker City* we have such a tension between female agency and purity because the central setting is a brothel in the novel. Exploring characters such as, Bess the courtesan, Mary the Merchants daughter, and Mother Nancy the brothel madam, we are able to construct and deconstruct the antebellum ideal Angel of the House. Lippard's novel argues that too much agency is dangerous because a young girl like Mary will ultimately destroy her most sacred societal constructed gift, her public persona. In addition to the upper middle class young girl, the novel offers an interesting look at the female adulteress and how her public deconstruction of the Angel of the House destroys their lives. In *The Quaker City*, Dora Livingstone, who willingly has an affair with a stranger. The outcome of her life is not a grimy death poor and penniless, but instead she is sent back to society with her husband to live a life of what the reader is left to believe hellish agony. Not only does her husband know of her transgressions, but the reader might imagine that the servants have this knowledge as well, ultimately reconstructing her public identity.

Chapter two explores Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-1853) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) in terms of female agency, class, and purity in the British Sensation Novel. Using a female character's perceived agency and purity allows the critic to completely construct the public ideal of the 'Angel of the House'. Aristocratic female characters, such as Dickens's Lady Dedlock and Braddon's

Lady Audley, consistently try to illustrate their own agency over their womanhood. However, through exploration of both Lady Dedlock and Lady Audley's private chambers and boudoirs I argue that these spaces are not the safe and private spaces that these ladies feel they are. Instead, these museum-like spaces are very public spaces exposing a constructed ideal by the lower class.

The power of female agency is given to the upper class women by the lower class females, but not for empowerment purposes. This power is given to the class to reinforce 'Angel of the House' purity standards in society. Both women have ladies maids that reinforce these standards, some which are gentler than others. Lady Dedlock has Hortense, a vindictive French maid, who falls out of favor with our lady. Lady Dedlock does not conform to the decorum of properly choosing a waiting maid, by getting rid of Hortense for the young and pretty Rosa. Hortense's power being usurped by Rosa and Lady Dedlock acting out of emotion and not following social rules causes Hortense to go on a mission to expose the truth she knows about Lady Dedlock.

Lady Audley in Braddon's novel suffers more than Lady Dedlock. Lady Audley favors her ladies maid, Phoebe and treats her kindly. Hortense in *Bleak House* seems villainous, but the reader of *Lady Audley's Secret* Phoebe's blackmail of Lady Audley is most scandalizing. Lady Audley holds the keys to the house and the keys to her boudoir. However, Phoebe Marks is able to come and go at all times under the pretense of servitude. A luxury not afforded to other characters that spend the entirety of the novel trying to unravel Lady Audley's Secrets.

Chapters one and two explore publically defining the Angel of the House in America and Britain separately. Chapter three puts an American text, *The Bondswoman's Narrative* and a British text *Daniel Deronda* side by side. This allows for a more definitive construction of class and womanhood in nineteenth-century America and Britain. Chapters one and two examine a defined class structure of aristocratic, middle, and servant classes and how class standards and societal norms support female purity to wax and wane power of the female character. More specifically these chapters examine how domestic and public spaces directly influence a female character's concept of purity and power. Chapter three will build on the previous arguments by examining characters that fall out of the normative class structure of middle class readership and fall into a category that philosopher Jacques Derrida would describe as the 'other'.

Class lines in texts such as *Bleak House* and *The Quaker City* are more definitely drawn than in *The Bondswoman's Narrative* and *Daniel Deronda*. This last chapter will identify the definition of womanhood and female power in 'others' that are central characters in *The Bondswoman's Narrative* and *Daniel Deronda*. In the *Bondswoman's Narrative* Hannah Crafts and the Mistress, who remains unnamed throughout the *Bondswoman's Narrative*, fall out of social class lines most experienced by the middle class readership of domestic dramas, Hannah as the runaway slave and the Mistress as the tragic mulatto. In *Daniel Deronda* I will examine Mirah Lapidoth, the 'Jewess'. Major characters from both *The Bondswoman's Narrative* and *Daniel Deronda* fall constantly out of line with restrictive social classes and because of this their power and agency are often constructed privately. I argue that what underlies this 'otherness' of these central

characters are the 'homelessness' of Hannah, the Mistress, Mirah and the feminizations of Daniel. There is no physical structure domestically that each character inherently belongs to and because of this it allows for the Angel of the House construction of womanhood to take courses unlike those in normative class structure. Authors like Crafts and Eliot allow for characters such as runaway slaves and Jewesses to be given privacy and protection just like the middle class Angel of the House. Yet Crafts's and Eliot's writings of these characters allow the reader to construct a public image of what it means to be these women.

CHAPTER ONE

BOUDOIR STORIES: POWER, PRIVACY, AND CLASS IN THE QUAKER CITY

In 1845, George Lippard published America's best selling novel *The Quaker City or The Monks of Monk Hall: A Romance of Philadelphia Life, Mystery, and Crime*. Lippard's *The Quaker City* was only surpassed in sales and popularity when Harriett Beecher Stowe's published *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852. Lippard's novel explores the depravity of the upper crust in antebellum Philadelphia. *The Quaker City* is a fast paced sensation novel that examines sex, murder, drug abuse, and various other types of debauchery; exposing a dark underbelly of city life usually cloistered by the moral voices and attitudes of the period. *The Quaker City*'s main plot focuses on the seduction and pollution of a young girl, named Mary. Mary's brother Brynewood is in a race against time and the Devil to save her from defilement and restore to her proper role as an Angel of the House.

While exploring social corruption, George Lippard consistently juxtaposes female sexuality and female agency in order to comment on the level of depravity in Philadelphia life. Lippard explains the antebellum woman in *The Quaker City* writing, "For this is the doctrine we deem it right to hold in regard to woman. Like man she is a combination of animal, with an intellectual nature. Unlike man her animal nature is a *passive* thing, that must be roused ere it will develop itself in action"(85). Lippard's indication of women as only sexual upon provocation by a seducer removes agency from the female in terms of sexual choice. Throughout the novel lines of agency are consistently crossed. Female characters assert themselves both sexually and socially, in

public and in private, putting their virtue at risk. This paper will explore how Lippard employs two major female characters: Bess, the courtesan and Mary, the seduced; in *The Quaker City* to make an overarching social construction of the ‘Angel of the House’ and how female characters utilize private spaces publicly to construct a model of feminine virtue in mid-19th Century Philadelphia.

Shelley Streetby briefly explores antebellum female virtue in her article “Opening Up the Story Paper: George Lippard and the Construction of Class”. Streetby argues, “when female characters are active agents, and even when male readers identify with them, such a representation of female virtue in distress may suggest that sexual desire is inherently evil...”(202). I suggest that a more in depth exploration of female virtue may not portray “sexual desire as inherently evil” for both sexes. Instead, “female virtue in distress” represents 19th century antebellum societal anxiety over the loss of privacy in the domestic sphere and the public construction of womanhood.

The best place to start in exploring this anxiety is through exploring the characters themselves. The first character I will begin with is Bess, the courtesan. Bess began her life as the beautiful, upper middle class and respectable, Emily Walraven. Emily disregards the advice of family and friends and on her own choice becomes involved with a man of a sordid reputation, Paul Western. Emily acts on her own free will in choosing to become involved with Paul Western. She does this outside of the normal societal constraints of match making by mothers, aunts, uncles, and fathers. In acting through her own volition, Emily’s choice in a mate, without careful guidance, creates a deadly chaos within the family structure. Emily must suffer the consequences of her own agency in

constructing her own definition of her womanhood. Because of this, Bess becomes a 'polluted' woman, destined to live the poverty stricken and demoralizing life of a Philadelphia court. To further illustrate how incredibly dangerous Emily Walraven's actions are in choosing a partner without guidance, Lippard destroys the Walraven's entire family, killing Emily's father. The story continues:

One rumor stated that she was now living as the mistress of a wealth planter, who made his residence at times in Philadelphia. Another declared that she had become a common creature of the town, and this—great God, how terrible! — Killed her poor father. The rumor flew round the village today next Sunday old Walraven was dead and buried. They say tat in his dying hour he charged Paul Western with his daughter's shame, and shrieked a father's curse upon his head (Lippard 80).

The consequence of Emily acting on her own agency and pursuing Paul Western is devastating. Emily's defiance of the 'Angel of the House' model leaves her, as Lippard calls it, polluted, living as a 'common' creature of Philadelphia. Emily's pursuit of her own sexual and social interests indicates a rejection of the antebellum ideas of courting and matching young couples. Lippard uses this opportunity to literally kill the patriarch head of the family, sending the strong message that once the female angel of the house is publicly 'polluted' the entire family suffers.

Lippard stays true to the conventions of the sensation novel, layering Emily Walraven's past with her future, thus creating a secret history and identity of the character, Bess in *The Quaker City*. Bess's past identity as Emily Raven is revealed in a

highly dramatic conversation between Mother Nancy, the madam of Monk Hall and Bess, the courtesan. The conversation goes as follows:

“ [Mother Nancy says:] ...you were so different when first I knew you—your *Emily*, you—“ “Emily—“ shrieked the other as she sprung suddenly to her feet—
“ You hag of the devil—call me by that name again, and as God will judge at the last day, I’ll throttle you!” She shook her clenched hand across the table, and her eyes were bloodshot with sudden rage—“Emily!” Your mother called you by that name when a little child—“ She cried with a burst of feeling, most fearful to behold in one so fallen—“ Your father blessed you by that name, the night before you fled from his roof! ‘Emily!’ ... (80)

In a highly ‘sensational’ scene Mother Nancy, exposes Bess, as the lost Emily Walraven to the reader. What is most interesting in this discussion is the emotional charged reaction of Bess when her old name is referred to. Bess must cast off all notions of ever being restored to her old self because her public reputation has been defiled. Her ‘rage’ against the name of ‘Emily’ illuminates her social anxiety. Bess can never hope to be restored to her proper Angel of the House role. Because of her anxiety Bess acts as a false matchmaker to Mary, the merchant’s daughter. Bess encourages Mary to step outside of her public persona as ‘Angel of the House’ and act on her own agency in choosing a match. This serves as a further warning message from Lippard to all young women of readers to never being trusting of strangers who are not properly introduced by the family circle.

We first learn of Mary in the opening of the novel, entitled “The Wager” in which Lorimar boasts to the Monks of Monk hall at an Oyster house that he has a young girl, whom he will trap into defilement through promises of a false marriage. The idea that a young woman of good breeding could be trapped into such a scheme by acting on her own ideas of pursuit of a mate is so shocking to the table of carousers. Mary’s position as a respectable girl is called into question in the following dialogue:

This night, at three o’clock, this innocent girl, the flower of one of the first families in the city, forsaking home and friends, and all that these sweet girls are wont to hold dear, will seek repose in my arms—“ “She can’t be much—“ exclaimed Brynewood, over whose face a look of scornful incredulity had been gathering for some moments past... Gus, I don’t mean to offend you, but I rather think you’ve been humbugged by some ‘slewer’! (Lippard 13)

Brynewood checks Lorrimer, suggesting that he has been deceived by a ‘slewer’ a slang word that might translate into the more modern slang term of ‘slut’. The idea of a proper ‘Angel’ forsaking home and friends is so inconceivable to the table, that the only natural reaction is that the woman must not be respectable. Lippard is toying a bit with the construction of the ‘Angel of the House’ because Mary is actually a respectable middle class woman.

Before Mary has left to meet with Lorrimer for their secret wedding all descriptions of Mary have included words such as ‘innocent’ and ‘angel’ and ‘pure’ by both Bess and Lorrimer. However, as soon as Mary enters into the domestic space of Monk Hall, Lippard begins to sexualize her. We glimpse Mary in the bridal boudoir:

With a heaving bosom, and a flashing eye, Mary slowly reached forth her fair and delicate right hand. Lorrimer grasped the trembling fingers within his own, and winding his unoccupied arm around her waist he suffered her head, with all its shower of glossy tresses, to fall gently on his shoulders. A blush, warm and sudden came over her face. He impressed on long and lingering kiss upon her lips. (91).

Mary's 'heaving bosom' and 'trembling fingers' are signifiers of female sexuality. This scene in the bridal boudoir also encapsulates the sexual tension between Mary and Lorrimer, indicating a want of sexual conduct from Mary. Seemingly it is the sexual passion of Mary wanting to be with Lorrimer that has led her to follow Lorrimer on her own accord. However, as the seduction of Mary continues we learn that Lorrimer has lured her with more than just wanton sexual advances.

In the chapter entitled "The Crime without A Name" the reader is aware of the true intentions of Lorrimer. Lippard writes, "It was the purpose of this, libertine to dishonor the stainless girl, before he left her presence. Before day break she would be a polluted thing, whose name and virtue and soul, would be blasted forever." (109) Before the audience has seen Mary as a woman constructing her own identity to pursue her desire for Lorrimer. However in the pages that pass in this scene of the novel, a grave 'outrage' is committed against Mary. Lippard composes his seduction scene by tapping into the anxiety of female virtue, sexuality, and agency of the 19th century audience

Brynewood, who is revealed to the reader to be Mary's brother, interrupts the fake marriage rites. His shock and indignation causes Lorrimer to remove Mary from the

ceremony, back to bridal boudoir and to look Brynewood away in one of the several jail-like rooms of Monk Hall. Lorrimer goes to the bridal boudoir under the pretenses of comforting Mary, with the real object of seducing her. He first lies to Mary, telling her that her brother was initially shocked to see the pair together, but has warmed to the idea and will speak to her father on their behalf. Mary believing the lies of the seducer, Lorrimer, does not waiver in her love for the man. Mary has chosen her love, and being of a good middle class constitution will be hard pressed to abandon it or see through his deception. Lorrimer, determined to seduce the woman with or without the sham marriage pontificates on his victim saying, “I have deeper means, than these I employ neither force, nor threats, nor fraud, nor violence! My victim is the instrument of her own ruin—without one rude grasp from my hand, without one threatening word, she swims willingly to my arms!” (109) Lorrimer places the sexuality of Mary into her own hands, believing that because she has acted on her own agency, she will be the ‘instrument of her own ruin’, however he does not count on how difficult it will be for Mary to release her body on her own accord. Up until this scene, Mary has come willingly to Lorrimer. She has cast aside the normal conventions for courting, not using the wise advice of parents and relatives to set up matches but instead has taken to the streets alone and without proper chaperone to find her mate. However, she has not physically given away her body.

Lorrimer holds Mary as she swoons, placing his hands about her waist, and kissing her neck softly. Additionally, he whispers sweet nothings of domestic bliss in her ear even going so far as to mention what their future children will be like. Mary is fading fast over to Lorrimer’s plan for seduction. However, when Mary realizes the physical act

that is about to take place she panics and begs Lorrimer, “You will not harm me. Oh, save me, save me from yourself!” (133). Alas, Mary’s pleas and cries are not answered and Lorrimer devours her saying, ““Mary—you—are –mine!’(134). Lippard ends this very charged scene lamenting, “ *One unpardonable* crime, that crime will be known as the foul wrong, accomplished in the gaudy Rose Chamber of Monk-hall, by the wretch, who now stood trembling in the darkness of the place, whole his victim lay senseless at his feet.”(135). Mary, who up until this point is described as a young girl acting as her own free agent, has now become the victim of the atrocity of rape, what Lippard rightfully calls the ‘*unpardonable crime*’. Her attempt to construct her own identity and go against the societal construction of ‘The Angel of the House’ has ruined Mary. Lorrimer might be to blame in the seduction of Mary, but it is really the lower class Bess who has constructed Mary’s new identity.

In her article, “The Invisible Hand Made Visible: ‘The Birth Mark’ “, Cindy Weinstein explores Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story, “The Birth Mark”. “The Birth Mark” is about a man, who thinks his wife is perfection, except the one birthmark that she possesses in the shape of the hand on her cheek. He spends the length of the story trying to erase his wife’s birth mark through science and experiment, Weinstein argues that because the husband had invited the wife into the public sphere of the male realm of science, through time spent in the laboratory, he has upset the domestic sphere (Weinstein 52). Because of these problematic intrusions, the result for the family can only be deadly. As the wife swallows the last elixir, she confesses she is dying from the treatment. Hawthorne in his puritan style of writing differs immensely from the frank

and sometimes-grotesque nature of Lippard. However, both authors weave and impose societal standards and the consequences of any deviation from the proposed traditions of male public spaces and female domestic spaces. Weinstein's arguments concerning "The Birth Mark" and nineteenth century social constructions focus on female as private and male as public. However, reputation is connected publically. Bess and Mary are defined as women in the public sphere, not the private. If the 'Angel of the House' was not constructed publically the endings of these characters might indeed be much different.

During the course of the novel, Bess decides to release the remaining female victims of Monk Hall. Perhaps, it is because of this sacrifice, Lippard gives Bess the 'kindness' of killing her. We see snapshot of the ending of Bess's story in a local gossip magazine:

The dead body of a woman was found on last Thursday, in the graveyard of L-----
- in this state. The corpse when discovered was lying beside the grave of Mr.
Walraven, once a highly respectable citizen of the town, but now some years
deceased. The unknown female was dressed in deep black, her hair was very dark,
and her face restrained some tokens of former beauty. Having no friends to claim
her corpse, she was buried in the graveyard of the county poorhouse. (571)

Bess can never be restored to her former self, even if she has drug her dying body to the grave of her father. She has been too far polluted ever function in 'proper' 19th century society. To pour salt on the wound, Bess is giving a paupers burial, further excursing her publically from the middle class community in both life and death.

In the final paragraph of the novel we learn Mary's fate after the 'outrage' committed against her. Mary has been reunited with her brother, Brynewood, who has killed Lorrimer in retribution for Mary's virginity. Yet, we find Mary outfitted in black mourning the loss of Lorrimer. Lorrimer, the man who raped and assaulted her, is being exulted by Mary as her lost husband. Lippard gives Mary the last line of the novel, "A single word burst from her lips, and a single word, uttered in a whisper, like the sigh of a broke heart—Lorraine." (575). Mary can never recover completely from her 'outrage' and is doomed to forever live the life of an un-pure widow. While Lippard suggests Mary mourns her lost 'lover', perhaps really she mourns her reinstatement as the 'Angel of the House'.

CHAPTER TWO

LADIES IN THE BOUDOIR, MAIDS IN THE HALL: AN EXAMINATION OF POWER AND PURITY IN BRADDON'S LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET AND DICKENS'S BLEAK HOUSE

She lifted a heavy green cloth curtain which hung across a doorway, and led the astonished countryman into a fairy-like boudoir, and thence to a dressing-room, in which the open doors of a wardrobe and a heap of dresses flung about a sofa show that it still remained exactly as its occupant had left it. *Lady Audley's Secret*

In Braddon's 1862 sensation novel, *Lady Audley's Secret*, the lady's maid, Phoebe Marks, leads her cousin, Luke, into Lady Audley's boudoir while the Lady is out dining with friends. The "fairy-like boudoir" elicits an erotic gaze from Luke Marks as he beholds the sensual dressing room. Luke reacts like a voyeur as he beholds all of the treasures of Lucy Audley. Many critics of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) have noted that the boudoir in this instance functions as a sort of male erotic peepshow. With the gazing male at the forefront, Phoebe Marks slips quietly into the corner. Phoebe has lifted back the "heavy green cloth," allowing Luke full access to all of her Lady's baubles, jewels, paintings, and dresses. Phoebe allowing Luke into the boudoir is not just an exposé of the erotic items of the boudoir. The items of Lady Audley's boudoir function as something much more than erotic: they hold the power of the Lady of the house. When Lady Audley is not out dining, she is spending her hours within the walls of her boudoir. She draws strength from the items that inhabit her gilded

cage, but is this strength and power superficial? I argue that by examining Victorian gender roles in the *Lady Audley's Secret's* domestic and public spheres we first seemingly discover how aristocratic ladies such as Lady Audley become so powerful. However, when we carefully deconstruct the domestic space of the boudoir we uncover power struggles between the classes of females. In *Lady Audley's Secret* male characters do promulgate female oppression, but it is only after the males have been given access to the boudoir space, content, and secrets by female characters that the Angel of the House loses her power.

Lucy Audley reigns over the domestic space of Audley Court. As head 'housekeeper' Lucy Audley's direction influences spaces such as the kitchen, the dining room, and guest rooms: places which allow her to display her power over all classes and gender types. However, it is in Lucy Audley's boudoir where we can examine Lucy Audley in both public and private ways. Lady Audley's boudoir is rich and elegant, filled with jewels, dressing spaces, a painting easel, and an ante chamber that exquisite paintings.

Nicole Reynolds argues that the Sensation novel uses the boudoir as a female space in a way that allows response to female issues. Reynolds argues that *Lady Audley's Secret* "uses the boudoir to comment upon the relationship between women and property in a commodity driven culture."(104). Reynolds's idea of the boudoir and its function as repressive is an interesting layer in the study of Lucy Audley. Reynolds is constantly reiterating that the boudoir functions as a way to examine female power, however, she rarely looks at any of the supporting female characters in *Lady Audley's secret*. Reynolds

focuses more on Robert, George and Luke, and seems to forget the female characters Alicia and Phoebe along the way. This is disconcerting because she seems to fall into the same trap that she complains about her contemporary critics. Reynolds has unconsciously forgotten the women in the margins.

Take for example an argument presented by Reynolds concerning the secret passageway into the Lucy's boudoir. Reynolds says, "A secret passageway connects Lady Audley's sumptuous rooms to a long-unused nursery: a suggestive wink towards the Lady's abandoned child and to her present childless marriage"(119). Reynolds observation is interesting, but it seems that she forgets an even deeper meaning behind the nursery, that it at one time belonged to Alicia, Lady Audley's stepdaughter who is only a year younger than Lucy Audley. In the case of the nursery it seems that it is more a usurping of Alicia's territory. Lady Audley does have her boudoir filled with trinkets, and rules the household with a firm superiority over Alicia. However, the old nursery secret passage might function as Alicia really being the controller of Audley Court, because she holds access to the boudoir and its contents, even if Lady Audley 'double locks' the antechamber door. Keys in the boudoir as well as in other spaces both public and private are central to power in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Lady Audley puts her faith and power into the careful guarding of keys that hide the commodities and secrets contained in the boudoir.

Lady Audley's boudoir is almost museum like, and the collection of 'stuff' she has amassed seems to have deeper implications in terms of the role that Lady Audley is bound by society to 'perform'. Deconstructing not just the space of the boudoir as

Reynolds suggests, but the items contained within the chambers forces the space to become a non-erotic area. On the surface Lady Audley's collection seems a mere performance dictated by Victorian ritual of the 'Angel of the House,' but the treasures and trinkets of Lady Audley's seem to give her freedom that goes against Victorian ideals. One item that seems the most telling is the portrait in Lady Audley's boudoir's antechamber. A natural pair to Lady Audley's portrait seems to be Lady Dedlock portrait in Dickens's 1853 *Bleak House*. Both Lady Audley and Lady Dedlock are in similar marriage situations and both are hiding terrible secrets in their past.

Talairach-Vielmas examines Lady Dedlock of *Bleak House* and Lady Audley of *Lady Audley's Secret*. Vielmas argues that the pictures of the women "expose[s] the women's guilt in black characters, ingraining the female characters in a visual culture where the mass-produced images of the wax-doll beauties are turned into incriminating clues" (118). Vielmas explores Lady Dedlock's appearance in the portrait at Chesney Wold and then on the copper plate that Mr. Weevle has of her. We see Lady Dedlock as drifting from the domestic sphere to the public sphere through visual media. Vielmas argues that this move from the private to public criminalizes Lady Dedlock because it "exposes her to forensic scrutiny" from Bucket (119). Lady Dedlock's appearance in pictures acts as a sort of "mugshot" allowing her description to be easily assessed. Vielmas raises an interesting point. His discourse reinforces the idea that the consumer nature of the boudoir can lead to danger for the female role if museum like objects escape the domestic sphere and become public. However, it is important to remember that this publicity has happened not because the women wish to share their trinkets, but because

society dictates that the antechamber of the boudoir should act as a museum where voyeurs can visit to learn more about the female head of household.

This idea is reinforced in *Bleak House* when the housekeeper allows the young lawyers to visit the household and view the portrait while the Lady has gone from the Chesney Wold. Furthermore, it should be stated that we have a man's gaze that eroticizes the portrait of Lady Dedlock, but it is through the vehicle of the female housekeeper that allows them access to her portrait.

I am more inclined to agree with Krista Lysack's viewpoint of consumerism as disorder in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Lysack focuses on "how *Lady Audley's Secret* inscribes the disorderly woman shopper and her compulsive acquisition as a site of mid-Victorian anxiety, anxiety over the ways in which consumer practice and commodities were altering the bourgeois domestic subject's relationship to a world of consumer goods"(47). Lysack raises the idea that *Lady Audley's Secret* does not critique consumerism but rather explores how "the self is formed through consumer goods" (47). Lysack looks at the shift in how women shopped in Victorian England and explores how the department store led to viewing women and consumerism differently. Lysack hints at a sort of tantalizing "overload of the senses" that is almost erotic, with the woman being surrounded by items to consume (52).

After providing the cultural context for consumerism, Lysack digs into Lady Audley's shopping obsession and argues that Lady Audley does this in order to fashion[ing] herself as an upper class woman" and that this amount[-s] to a form of consumer

enabled fraud.” She goes on to further say that “The clothing, accessories, and commodity goods with which she surrounds herself and with which she is repeatedly associated not only conceal her identities as middle class Helen Maldon...but also, and more important, secure her class performance as Lady Audley”.(60). Lysack’s idea of the trinkets that Lady Audley collects as a performance is intriguing and she furthers her argument by saying that this “gloss” puts Lady Audley in a position to bring scandal to Audley Court. Following this idea we again see a similarity with Lucy Audley to Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House*. Lady Dedlock is the height of fashion in London society and is seen as a trendsetter. But, this trendsetting comes at a price, as we are told she is “hotly pursued by the fashionable intelligence” and they know her every move

As Lady Audley and Lady Dedlock shift from the domestic sphere from the public sphere we begin to uncover even more ideas of female power. When exploring the public sphere it seems fruitful to turn our attention to the etiquette of the middle class, explore gender roles in Victorian England and how gender influenced reasons for Victorian Women to enter the public sphere. Elizabeth Langland uses the middle class etiquette book as a frame to reconstruct the “construction of the middle class.” Langland examines how women were indoctrinated into their gender roles, emphasizing the importance of the home in reconstruction gender roles referring to it as the Victorian woman’s “sanctum and sanctuary” (41). Langland argues that the middle class distinguished itself from the lower class by using the home as a performance ritual and that the home and charity work were used to mediate class differences (56).

Charity allowed women to move into the public sphere. The idea of visiting as reinforcing social boundaries between classes might be an interesting discussion when exploring Lady Audley's lying about visiting her sick teacher, and it leading to her being found out by Robert Audley. Lady Audley is following the angel 'model' but she is doing it in a devious way. Robert is able to track down her former employer due to this misuse of charity work and discovers Lady Audley's real name, Helen Talboys pasted over with Lucy Graham on the hat box in her former teachers home. Robert's investigation is clever in unearthing Lucy's past, but it would not have been possible without the assistance of the female teachers who lead him to the hatbox.

Lady Audley does travel freely in the public sphere, taking the train from Audley Court to London on several occasions. Lady Audley takes care in guarding her boudoir by placing it under careful lock and key. However, the keys that control the locks seem to fail Lady Audley several times, and perhaps this is because she moves freely in the public sphere. Closer inspection of the way that Braddon uses keys and locks problematizes how powerful being the controller of the domestic domain really makes Lady Audley. On the surface it seems that Lady Audley is able to control the running of Audley Court, gather fabulous jewels and artwork for her boudoir, but there are also times when the faith she places in her locks and keys fail her. Whenever Lady Dedlock leaves the domestic sphere it leaves her position as head female in vulnerability. The female characters of *Lady Audley's Secret* seem to pounce on this opportunity to usurp Lady Audley's power.

The boudoir has been read as an eroticized space from the perspective of men. However, critics seem to be neglecting that in the case of this novel, this space is infiltrated only by the assistance of another female. There seems to be a need to add the dynamic of the female to female relationship to the critical conversation of the boudoir and *Lady Audley's Secret*. Returning to the use of keys and locks to guard her treasure trove in the boudoir, we can examine how the other female characters hone in on Lady Audley's territory. But why are the keys so important?

Almost immediately in the *Lady Audley's Secret* we can decode the power Braddon infuses into keys and locks. In the first chapter titled "Lucy" we are first introduced to Alicia's dissatisfaction for her step mother through the device of keys. The keys function in an important way because they first seem to represent the power Lady Audley wields in Audley Court. The narrator tells us "for Miss Alicia had reigned supreme in her father's house since her earliest childhood, and had carried the keys, jingled them in the pockets of her silk aprons..." (10). Before Lady Audley's arrival Alicia had great power over the house through her possession of the keys. We are then told that "Miss Alicia's Day was over" and that "now, when she asked anything of the housekeeper, the housekeeper would tell her that she would speak to my lady, or she would consult my lady, and if my lady pleased it should be done." (10). This transference of keys to Lady Audley and Alicia's disdain for the loss of the keys illustrates the sought after power of position of woman of the house. The keeper of the keys is allowed to have power over the possession inside the house, the food in the house, and who can enter and leave what rooms and areas of the house, including the boudoir. The key seems to

function doubly here ensuring not only the power to withhold goods, but as power as head of the household. As keeper of the keys Lady Audley is clearly the controller of Audley Court.

However, when Lady Audley is removed from the domestic sphere of Audley court her power over the domestic key is quickly thwarted. When Lady Audley hears that George Tallboys is coming with her nephew Robert to visit Audley Court, Lady Audley invents an excuse for her and her husband to go to London. Lady Audley uses the ruse that her old teacher is dying and she must pay her a visit. The reader is not yet sure why Lady Audley is avoiding George and Robert, but it is certain that she is avoiding them and is trying to hide some sort of secret from them. Again Lady Audley relies on the power of her key to ensure her secrets are safe. Braddon tells us as Lady Audley and Sir Michael prepare for their journey, “Even in her [Lady Audley] haste she paused deliberately at the door of this room, double locked it, and dropped the key into her pocket. This door, once locked, cut off all access to my lady’s apartment.(62)” Lady Audley stares into this area before she leaves looking into the room with the oil paintings, which we are to assume include the newly commissioned portrait of herself. For reasons yet known to the reader, Lady Audley seems to have anxiety about anyone seeing her new portrait. For now, Lady Audley has a false sense of security that she has “cut off all access” with the power of her key. Futhermore, Lady Audley has applied all of the strength of her power by “double lock[ing]” the key (62).

George and Robert do arrive at Audley Court and ask Alicia if they can see the house. They learn from Phoebe that it will not be possible to see Lady Audley’s chamber

of portraits because as Phoebe explains “the door of the ante-room is locked, and I fancy that my lady has taken the key to London.”(63) Alicia becomes angry as Lady Audley’s usurpation of Alicia’s power in the house is thrown once again in her face saying ““It is very provoking, for the best pictures in the house are in the ante-chamber””(69). Again we get an illustrating of the dominating force Lady Audley is in the household as she is keeper of the “best pictures in the house” and presumably the most valuable items in the house. We also see the power the key holding female has over the other females in the house. However, the power Lady Audley possesses over her domain through the use of her key is quickly thwarted. After some thought Alicia remembers the secret passage that allows access to the Lady’s chamber. Alicia’s first forgetfulness of the secret passage reinforces the idea that Lady Audley is truly more powerful than Alicia. Alicia is unable to quickly bypass the power of Lady Audley. But, even Lady Audley’s dominance over Alicia is a façade since Alicia is able to use her knowledge of the domain of Audley Court over Lady Audley’s power of control of the domain. Alicia helps the men, George and Robert to usurp the lady of the house’s power.

George and Robert make their way through the passage in the floor and into the Lady’s boudoir, no doubt reminiscent of male wanton disregard for the female space. The men have thwarted the symbolic power Lady Audley’s lock and key had before afforded her. While it is a female, Alicia, that allows the men to violate the security of the lock, it still remains that it is two men, George and Richard, who climb through the passage destroying the safety and sanctity of the female boudoir. It is clear that Lady Audley’s power as woman of the house is now being viewed as strictly performative by the

masculine by the masculine Richard and George bypass Lucy Audley's attempts at security. Once inside the room through the aide of Alicia, Richard and George are able to freely gaze at one of Lady Audley's precious items, her portrait. This leads George to the awful discovery that Lucy Graham Audley is the former Helen Talboys, his presumed dead wife.

Lynette Felber uses this scene to focus on both the literal and metaphorical portrait in her article "The Literary Portrait as Centerfold: Fetishism in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*". In the literal sense of the portrait of Lady Audley in the antechamber Felber rejects the approach of the male gaze and instead examines the portrait as a vehicle for the female gaze. Felber furthers this idea of the female gaze by viewing the actual text of *Lady Audley's Secret*'s as what she terms a "visual" portrait. Felber argues that "Braddon's presentation of the portrait comprises a multivalent critique; it protests the power and authority of the male gaze; it anatomizes fetishistic desire; and it raises questions about the construction of women and their sexuality in Victorian society. While titillating, and perhaps even satisfying male gazers, Braddon's portrait also functions to screen a more profound feminist statement about Victorian patriarchy's relation to women and heterosexuality." (473). However, like Reynolds's argument, Felber also forgets to include the women in the margins and focuses on the male gazers more prominently than the female gazers. Felber does expose ways in which Braddon might have used the male gaze as a distraction to deliver a more meaningful feminist message to women. In addition to this Felber offers an intriguing view of Lucy Audley causing the reader to question if we ever know who Lucy Audley is at all,

because we always see her through the eyes of a male because we can “never penetrate Lucy’s consciousness, the presentation of what Lucy sees...is highly speculative”(482). The never understanding “Lucy’s consciousness” indicates that the boudoir is repressive to the female reader on the metaphoric level. However, on the literal level the boudoir function seems to carry on this repression.

For instance, returning to the scene of Lady Audley leaving the domestic sphere that started this paper, we can uncover the power of the marginal female servant. Lady Audley and Sir Michael have gone out for the evening to a dinner party. Lady Audley’s handmaid, Phoebe Marks invites her brutish boyfriend, Luke Marks into the Lady’s boudoir to let him admire the paintings and fine living style of Lady Audley. Phoebe tells Luke, “I wish I could show you the jewels, Luke’,” said the girl; ‘but I can’t, for she always keeps the keys herself; that’s the case on the dressing-table there.’”(33). Phoebe’s statement “she always keeps the keys herself” emphasizes Lady Audley’s control over items of extreme monetary value in Audley Court. However, a paragraph down Phoebe exclaims “I declare!” she exclaimed, “my lady has left her keys in her pocket for once in a way.”(33). Lady Audley’s carelessness with her power has left her vulnerable. Phoebe and Luke proceed to look through the jewelry case and uncover one of Lady Audley’s deepest secrets that have been kept under lock and key. Phoebe pulls out a baby’s shoe and lock of hair wrapped in a piece of paper. Phoebe realizes immediately that she has in her possession something that could ruin Lady Audley’s power in Audley court and even takes the trouble to point this out to Luke. It is Phoebe that facilitates the later blackmail of Lady Audley, even if it is Luke that brutishly holds Phoebe to the blackmail.

The secret that Phoebe and Luke uncover about Lady Audley could destroy the image of Lady Audley's purity; a most important item that should be kept in complete tact according to Victorian standards of 'the Angel of the House'. Lady Audley's abandonment of the boudoir has left her vulnerable and sets off the course of ruin that follows. Even more curious is the people that have first jeopardized Lady Audley's power are of the servant class, who are in constant surveillance of Lady Audley. Braddon seems to be making the statement that the power the lady of the house has is superficial at best. The implications that the servants hold power over the middle class female through knowledge of their every movement are very frightening in terms of Lady Audley's position. In this case the boudoir, even though it houses the expensive treasures of the house is seeming to look more like a gilded cage in which the servants act as jailers.

Brain McCuskey argues that in order to quell this anxiety of servant spilling all he/she knew of the one they served the Middle Class turned to handbooks for their servants such as *The Lady's Maid*(1877) to warn the servants what to turn a blind eye to. McCuskey points out that these manuals had a huge fallacy because "in warning servants what not to observe, the manuals acknowledge and articulate precisely the guilty secrets—alcoholism, illness, adultery, domestic violence—the middle-class household were so determined to suppress" (McCuskey 360). It seems in the case of Lady Audley, Phoebe Marks needed no manual to understand what was required to keep Lady Audley's reputation in tact. Phoebe Marks uses the domestic surveillance to her advantage and escapes the oppression of the middle class household hierarchy. She uses the blackmail money to open her own public house, becoming her own boss. It is no wonder that it is

Lady Audley that burns the Castle Inn to the ground in an attempt to murder Richard Audley. The burning of the Castle Inn shows that a servant who threatens to tell for gains will receive their just reward, a ruined livelihood. Phoebe Marks is not only out of a profession at the Castle Inn, but she is also unable to return to her former position, the revelation of the Lady's secrets makes sure of this.

The burning of the Castle Inn brings up the issue of Lady Audley trying to murder Robert. At first glance, this function in the public sphere seems completely thwarted by only the male. However, further inspection indicates, that once again it is the female relationship that spurs Lady Audley's attempt at murder. Lady Audley has become distraught over the fact that Robert knows all of the secrets that could ruin her. Lady Audley plots Robert's murder while he is staying at the Castle Inn. Lady Audley decides to lock a sleeping Robert in his room at and set fire to the building. The scene is set:

She stopped and locked at the number on the door. The key was in the lock, and her hand dropped upon it as if unconsciously. There she suddenly began to tremble again, as she had a trembled a few before at the striking of the clock. She stood for a few moments trembling thus, with her hand still upon the key; then a horrible expression came over her face, and she turned the key in the lock; she turned it twice, double locking the door. (318)

Lady Audley "trembles" as she realizes the power the key affords her. She has the ability to control life or death for Robert Audley, the most incredible power anyone can hold over another human. Lady Audley is possessed by the power of her key and like before

she uses all of the strength she has by “double locking the door” (318). The next day Lady Audley waits anxiously for news of the death of Robert. But low and behold the symbolic power the key affords her has once again failed her, as Robert Audley comes to Audley Court very much alive. Robert explains, “I escaped by a most providential circumstance...I did not sleep in the room which had been prepared for me. The place seemed wretchedly damp and chilly...”(339). Lady Audley learns in this instance that the power she thinks she possesses is non-existent. However, Robert takes too much credit on the thwarting of Lady Audley’s murderous plot. Again we have women on the margins setting up the power. To begin with Lady Audley is only afforded the opportunity to murder Robert because of Phoebe Marks. She has used Phoebe’s need for rent money as an excuse to take a nighttime excursion to the Castle Inn.

In this case, we see Lady Audley using the servant’s power to her advantage. Both Lady Audley and Phoebe Marks seem to be at a standstill in terms of power, but it is still a female servant who takes Lady Audley’s power. The woman who moves Robert to safety is responsible for thwarting Lady Audley’s murderous plot, not Robert. Braddon seems to emasculate Robert, causing him to always be ‘saved’ by the female characters that lead him to discover Lady Audley’s secrets. Robert really is as powerless as the boudoir inhabiting Lady Audley.

Through examination of the function of the boudoir in *Lady Audley’s Secret* we can begin to understand that the eroticism of the boudoir thwarts the male’s attempt to impose patriarchal image on the female ‘Angel’ of the house. Understanding how female characters such as Lady Audley operate inside and outside of the domestic sphere

exposes that it is really the female-to-female relationship that seeks to ensure that conformity to the rules of 'Angel' of the house is adhered to. The sensation novel genre builds on the anxiety of surveillance by servants to expose to the novel reading housewife, a cautionary tale of blackmailing servants. This surveillance is most disturbing to the upper middle class construction of female purity that makes up social identity.

CHAPTER THREE

HOMELESS WOMEN: THE BRITISH JEWESS AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN

SLAVE

“ ‘We should be very jealous of any one who took the task from us,’ said Mrs. Meyrick.

“ ‘She will stay under my roof: there is Hans’s old room for her.’ ‘

Will she be content to wait?’ said Deronda, anxiously.

‘No trouble there! It is not in her nature to run into planning and devising: only to submit.’ –*Daniel Deronda*

Previous chapters in the thesis concentrate attentions towards the struggle between the upper middle class and the lower class describing how the construction of the middle class ideal of Angel of the House becomes a tool for class power. Class structure is rather neatly ordered in terms of female propriety in the previously explored novels. However, in both America and Britain during the nineteenth century there were groups that were outside of normative social structure, groups that are glossed over or are mere caricatures of stereotypes in sensation fiction and realistic fiction; the African American Slave and the English Jewess. Major characters from both *The Bondswoman’s Narrative* and *Daniel Deronda* fall out of line with restrictive social classes. Because of these outliers being brought front and center purity is constantly put in a precarious position. I argue that what underlies this ‘otherness’ of these central characters is their perceived ‘homelessness’.

There is no physical structure domestically or publically that each character inherently belongs to and because of this it allows for female power and purity to take courses unlike those in normative class structure. Female characters that might be considered liminal in other texts take center stage in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1873) and Hannah Craft's *The Bondswoman's Narrative* (1853?). *Daniel Deronda* gives us the wandering Jewess, Mirah Cohen. Hannah Crafts gives us the runaway slave in Hannah and the tragic mulatto figure in the Mistress.

While certainly these characters find places to lay their heads each night, in both the American and the British text the Jewess and the slave are not permanently connected to a structured home. Because of this 'homelessness', I argue that the Jewess and the slave, who are already powerless in nineteenth century society, have no control over their physical purity because they have no home to protect them. Because of their homelessness these characters have a shared anxiety that makes protecting one's purity of utmost importance, even if death might be the only alternative.

Daniel Deronda has much connection to American Sensation fiction. Throughout *Daniel Deronda* Elliot references slave bondage in America, the Civil war, and the Quakers among other things American. Elliott's attention to the Jewess, a woman without home and situation, is admittedly different than the struggle of the runaway slave in Hannah Crafts, however the anxiety Mirah feels to protect her power over herself and her purity is similar to Hannah and her Mistresses struggle. Truly it must be said that Hannah Craft and the Mistress struggle much more physically and more grotesquely because of the depravities of slavery. However, even though the struggle for preservation of personal

power is markedly different in terms of brutality, the concepts of being on the fringe of society and figuring out how to preserve the self is markedly similar as I intend to argue in this chapter.

Differences and similarities aside when writing about *The Bondswoman's Narrative*, I must temper my argument and make an upfront acknowledgement about the current debate concerning the author of *The Bondswoman's Narrative*. We do not know who Hannah Crafts was. Henry Louis Gates suggests that overwhelming evidence points to Hannah as being an African American Bondswoman who wrote this novel. However critics such as Celeste- Marie Bernier and Judie Newman suggest that there is not much evidence to prove rather Hannah was black or white, free or slave. I say this to give some background to the text, but my argument will deal mainly with the characters of the novel and in my argument I will live under the veil of Roland Barthe and declare the author 'dead' in terms of exploration of the text.

Despite arguments as to who Hannah Crafts is, there is a rather strong argument academically that *The Bondswoman's Narrative* does indeed pattern itself after Dickens's *Bleak House* and Gate's spends some time at the end of the novel exploring the connections between the two novels in an afterward after *The Bondswoman's Text* speculating that the likely library of John Wheeler's would have most probably had a copy of *Bleak House*. It is my speculation and argument that Wheeler might have had a copy of *Bleak House*, but most certainly must also have had a copy of Lippard's *The Quaker City* seeing as it was a very popular American novel predating *Bleak House*. At any rate, when we apply the fact that transatlantic sensation serials were traded between

England and America it is not so unnatural of an idea to accept that author's are most always readers and influences would be felt by both continents in terms of form, content, and even social ideas, even if there are marked differences between British and American texts. In the case of *Daniel Deronda* and *The Bondswoman's Narrative* a natural marriage is indeed made, perhaps not in brutality, but more in an anxiety of what being a woman in nineteenth century England or America should have been in terms of living according to accustomed societal standards. Both *Daniel Deronda* and *The Bondswoman's Narrative* emulate the ideals of such novels as *Bleak House* or *The Quaker City* in terms of sensational conventions, but where these texts differ from other texts and intersect with each other is centralizing the focus of the main characters starting with how they are introduced to the reader.

Mirah Cohen is introduced to the reader as a 'bewildered' woman about to drown herself in the river as our hero, Daniel Deronda, is paddling a canoe. Elliot describes Mirah as, "...a girl hardly more than eighteen, of low slim figure, with most delicate little face, her dark curls pushed behind her ears under a large black hat, a long woolen cloak over her shoulders. Her hands were hanging down clasped before her, and her eyes were fixed on the river with a look of immovable, statue-like despair" (159). We have no indication that the woman in question is a Jewess or even foreign to England in this description, but rather as the reader we get the sense of a typical dark and erotic sensation heroine. But then Daniel seems to enforce a sort of exoticism about Mirah as he reiterates her mesmerizing pain and beauty saying, " ' I should not have forgotten the look of misery if she had been ugly and vulgar,' he said to himself." (159)

After Daniel realizes that the young woman intends to kill herself, he swiftly springs into action and pleads with Mirah to allow him to help her telling her melodramatically that he would ‘die’ to help her. Mirah immediately begins to exhibit her anxiety of being an outsider in England makes clear her homelessness, “ ‘I have no where to go---nobody belonging to me in all this land’ ” (162). Ridden with anxiety, young Mirah does deposit herself into the hands of this stranger, on the belief that he looks to be ‘good’, her bewilderment perhaps tempering her need to worry about her purity. Elliot uses suicidal madness and Daniel’s heroic reputation to temper Mirah’s behavior to the reader.

The reader gets a much different introduction to the slave girl, Hannah in *The Bondswoman’s Narrative*. We learn about Hannah from her own first person narrative as she recounts her childhood. Hannah immediately throws the reader into her solitude, very similar to Esther’s introduction in *Bleak House*. Hannah says:

“I was not brought up by anybody in particular that I know of...Of my relatives I knew nothing. No one ever spoke of my father or mother, but I soon learned what a curse was attached to my race, soon learned that the African blood in my veins would forever exclude me from the higher walks of life.”(5-6)

Craft’s offers little sentimentalism in demonstrating Hannah’s exclusion from society and point blank offers “African blood” as the reason for Hannah’s difference from others.

While Eliot tempers Mirah’s revelation as being of Jewish decent with heavy descriptions that make her more or less ‘English’, Craft’s immediately situates her main character in Hannah as an outlier in society. Mirah tells us that she is looking for a lost mother and brother, while Hannah confesses, “No one ever spoke of my father and mother”. The act

of cutting all familial ties immediately, unfortunately makes Hannah at first to the reader seem inhuman, belonging to know one but the plantation as if she exists just for slavery. Even Dickens's Esther knew she had a mother, even if she was shrouded in mystery. This illuminates one of the 'disconnects' that are difficult to overcome when melting British sensation fiction with American sensation fiction. In my readings it seems that slaves, even when main characters, are often so brutalized and marginalized that it becomes difficult to place African American slaves next to the British servant. This is why when we explore transatlantic connections between the Jewess and the slave, I suggest that we will be more successful when we look not at Hannah, but at her mulatto Mistress.¹

The Mistress comes to the De Vincent's plantation to marry Hannah's master. Hannah describes her new Mistress as, "a small brown woman, with a profusion of wavy curly hair, large bright eyes, and delicate features with the exception of her lips which were too large, full, and red." (27). Immediately the reader notices the features of the mulatto woman so often described in Antebellum literature, wrapped in Craft's foreshadowing gothic with Hannah "fancy[ing] she was haunted by a shadow or a phantom". It is shortly revealed that the Mistress is indeed a mulatto woman and is being blackmailed by Mr. Trappe, a lawyer who makes a living tracing 'black blood' in women and extorting money from them. Brian McCuskey argues that in nineteenth century novels, "Blackmail and gossip are only a threat to those members of society who have social status and reputation to lose; to experience, however vicariously, the sensation of that threat is also to be assured of one's own standing" (McCuskey 362).

¹ The Mistress in *The Bondswoman's Narrative* is never formally named so I will use The Mistress as a proper noun and name to refer to her.

However, I would argue that both *Daniel Deronda* and *The Bondswoman's Narrative* social status and reputation are not of consequence to societal fringe characters such as Mirah and the Mistress. Instead, blackmail and gossip threaten Mirah and the Mistress on a level of personal power over each characters agency and purity. Especially when we consider the reasons that both women are feel forced to take control over their own mobility.

For example, Trappe is not just interested in the money in the case of the Mistress, he constantly reiterates the word 'possess' in conversation with her. Whenever Trappe uses the word posses, Craft's describes the Mistress's eyes as "flaming" indicating a threat on the Mistress's purity and power (41). The threat of being defiled and losing control over her purity, throws the Mistress into a bewilderment, not unlike Mirah's causing her to decide to act on her own agency to protect herself. Before Trappe can expose her, Hannah and the Mistress plot to runaway to freedom, the Mistress to save herself and Hannah because of a self proclaimed spirit of devotion. The Mistress and Mirah are especially connected in their reasons to runaway and preserve their own personal power over their purity.

We learn from Mirah during her first interview with Mrs. Meyrick that she has fled her father because of fear for keeping her personal purity intact. Her father who has gotten into debt and been locked in prison bids her to go to a nobleman and speak with him for help. Mirah tells us that she immediately detests the man as he "kisses her hand" and lingers a little too long. Her father persists that she should pursue a relationship with the Count finally pushing Mirah to act on her own agency and runaway. Most moving in

understanding Mirah's will to act on her own agency and take her destiny into her own hands is her reasoning when she says, "and I had it firmly in my mind that a nobleman and one who was not a Jew could have no love for me that was not half contempt" (186). The drops of Jewish blood in Mirah makes her contemptible in her own estimation to anyone who is not of the same race as she, not unlike the Mistress whose newly wedded husband nearly loses his mind when he finds out that his new bride had drops of African blood in her. Even more ironic in both characters is their perception of their own racial identities has little to do with societal perception of the two tragic women.

Jewish identity and Mirah's anxiety over the perception of who she is, before she is 'found' by Daniel she is even more liminal by the fact that she is a Jew and she was an actress. In an interesting conversation with Mrs. Meyrick Mirah explains her knowledge of Judaism, saying, " 'In that way I have come to know a little of our religion, and the history of our people, besides piecing together what I read in plays and other books about Jews and Jewesses, because I was sure that my mother obeyed her religion.'" (182). Mirah has not been raised as a Jewess, but rather an actress and her knowledge of Judaism is not that much different that Mrs. Meyrick's the kind lady who takes her in for Daniel in her time of need. Her knowledge of her religion is tied tightly with consumerism and voyeurism in terms of books and acted plays. The same is evident with the Mistress in *The Bondswoman's Narrative* she was raised her entire life as an adopted white child of a wealthy man and woman and never thought of her identity as a 'slave' in any respect. Suddenly, the Mistress is thrust into the throes of dealing with her new marginal identity that is deadly different then before. Both characters , because of their

new socially imposed racial identity and with no ties to their past family restriction on their agency, are now faced with the task of safe guarding their own personal purity that before was safeguarded (while sometimes corruptly) by a supposed class standard. This threat against their purity is very real and comes in the worst form of suppression of their own agency and that is the act of being sold away.

With general historic knowledge of slavery in the United States, it takes no stretch of the imagination to think of Hannah or her Mistress, could and would be sold into slavery. Since the Mistress is young and attractive unfortunately it is not far fetched to believe that she could be sold into some sexually exploitive situation, be it a brothel or to a cruel master. However, what binds Mirah with the Mistress in this case is the fact that Mirah could also have been sold into this sort of industry in England because of her exotic Jewish heritage as well. Pious Mirah even alludes to this to Mrs. Meyrick saying, "...I overheard a gentleman say, 'Oh, he is one of those clever Jews—a rascal, I shouldn't wonder. There's no race like them for cunning in the men and beauty in the women. I wonder what market he means that daughter for.'"(183) Not only can the American slave or mulatto woman be sold into sexual slavery, but also the European Jewess can suffer this same fate. I argue that this acts on the anxiety of the female reader but American and European. The idea that one can uncover a lineage of a certain blood and it could threaten the female choice to decide possession of her own physical body and agency is just one of the small threats to perceived female power to the readership of the sensation novel.

Both Mirah and the Mistress's lack of connection to a physical home often overshadow lineage and identity's influence on purity and power. This causes anxiety for not just Mirah and the Mistress but to male characters as well. Take for instance Daniel's anxiety of connecting Mirah to a home above society's viewpoint of the proper home for a Jewess. Daniel thinking, "But to take her to any other shelter than a home already known to him was not to be contemplated: he was full of fears about the issue of the adventure which had brought on him a responsibility all the heavier for the strong and agitating impression this childlike creature had made on him." (165). Interestingly Daniel takes Mirah to the Meyrick's home outside of the British social circle. He reasons that he "could not go with her among strangers, and in her nervous state I should dread taking her into a house full of servants." (169) Brain McCuskey argues that, "the Victorian complaint about peeping and prying servants both fixes the middle-class family as the center of servants' attention and affirms middle-class secrets as worth possessing."(McCuskey 362) In this case I think it not only 'affirms' the middle class status as something to possess, but in some ways weakens McCuskey's earlier argument about blackmail because really Daniel will lose little if his reputation suffers while Mirah stands to lose a lot, even if she is not of Middle Class status because of her being a Jewess.

Take for instance the conversation between Grandcourt and Gwendolen, "In Daniel Deronda write about what Grandcourt tells Gwendolyn

" 'It's very indecent of Deronda to go about praising that girl,' said Grandcourt in a tone of indifference. 'Indecent!' exclaimed Gwendolyn, reddening and looking

at him again, overcome by startled wonder, unable to reflect on the probably falsity of the phrase—‘to go about praising.’ ‘Yes; and especially when she is patronized by Lady Mallinger. He ought to hold his tongue about her. Men can see what is his relation to her” (673).

Just encouragement and association from Daniel leads Mirah into a precarious situation in terms of her purity and her reputation, despite her social standing. Praise of the Jewess automatically links Daniel with inappropriate sexual contact and ruins Mirah.

Additionally, Daniel’s removal of Mirah’s own agency by speaking of her freely puts her reputation into Daniel’s hands and not her own. However, in the case of *The Bondswoman’s Narrative*, gossip from the mouths of the aristocracy is of little consequence to characters such as Hannah and the Mistress. As Haslam says, “In Crafts’s version, the purity of the home – and subsequently the stability of the family and metaphorically of the nation – is of course corrupted by slavery.” (Haslam 29) As Haslam plainly appropriately puts it that there horrors of slavery always trumps other struggles for preservation of purity. However, brutality aside when it comes to attaching your purity and power to a home to prevent Jewess or slave ‘homelessness’ it is quite difficult to do when culturally you are always excluded.

The house that Mirah is taken to at Chelsea is described as museum like and is wrapped up in a culture that Mirah does not understand and is excluded from. Eliot describes the walls of the house as containing “a world history in scenes” made up of portraits and engravings, but the history is not that of the ‘world’ but as the reader continues on it is the history of the Myerick’s filled with the memories of their family

memories connecting the intrinsically to the home. Mirah cannot be a part of this history, no more than the Mistress could ever truly attach herself to the plantation master's wife's role.

In *Daniel Deronda*, Daniel seems on the surface to be the true hero of the novel, rescuing several people, male and female sometimes to the detriment of himself. Daniel also concerns himself in helping Mirah in keeping her purity in tact like in the following:

“But what was to be done with Mirah? She needed shelter and protection in the fullest sense, and all his chivalrous sentiment roused itself to insist that the sooner and the more fully he could engage for her the interest of others besides himself, the better he should fulfill her claims on him.” (177)

Daniel's pondering of protection in the 'fullest sense' seems to vaguely reference a masculine need to protect Mirah's feminine virtue. Conversely, Vigdermen argues that the central female character of *Daniel Deronda* is Daniel himself, citing the similarities between Gwendolyn and Daniel as a “complicated class and gender story” typical of sensational heroines (Vigdermen). Vigdermen succinctly summarizes Deronda's story: “... he is brought up in ignorance of who his mother is, as the "nephew" of an English baronet. He becomes involved with a Jewish community as part of his search for Mirah's family after he saves her from drowning. Mirah and her brother Mordecai gradually draw him toward his destiny. The revelation late in the novel that he is himself Jewish confirms that destiny, and, having been until then unable to choose a path in life, he sees that his road lies in the East, in the great project to create a land for his people in Palestine.” (Vigdermen) If we apply Vigdermen's reading of Daniel after the revelation that Daniel

himself is a Jew and therefore has become marginalized I believe it can be safely argued that Daniel becomes tragically similar to the Mistress in *The Bondswoman's Narrative*, in that revelations about their past heritage blindsides both characters and then dictate the fate of the rest of their stories.

In Daniel's case, even he becomes ostracized by his peers when his dear Cambridge friend lambasts him saying, "Deronda is getting perfectly preposterous about those Jews," said Hans with disgust, rising and setting his chair away with a bang. "He wants to do everything to encourage Mirah in her prejudices." (495) Hans is pulling Daniel's association from the aristocracy, which was so much before, apart of the conversation of other characters as they constructed Daniel's identity.

Mirah and Daniel become one as a representation of the liminal Jew in the construct of British society. True to sensational convention Eliot ends her narrative with the Jewish marriage of Daniel and Mirah, who both wish to set out for the 'East' as soon as they are married. Daniel and Mirah do make the choice to leave England for Israel for spiritual reasons, but might it not be more for reasons of a search for a home with less social anxiety? It is true that both Daniel and Mirah, if they choose to stay in England would be marginalized in the broader terms of social order because of being Jewish and leaving for Israel is one way of avoiding being marginalized. Most interestingly is the gift given to the duo by Sir Hugo and Lady Mallinger, representatives of the aristocracy, they "had taken the trouble to provide complete equipment for Eastern travel..." ensuring that the newlywed Jews wish to travel to Israel is not hindered (694). Sir Hugo did wish Daniel to marry Gwendoln instead of Mirah, because Sir Hugo spends the life of Daniel

trying to mold him to an English aristocratic, pushing Cambridge and politics perhaps to unconsciously 'overcome' his knowledge of Daniel's heritage. The gift of the equipment function has to do with how important social standing is to Sir Hugo as an aristocrat. Sir Hugo understands that Deronda's choice to embrace himself as a Jew marginalizes Daniel. He is no longer the ward of Hugo or his budding politician. Hugo facilitating a swift move from England for the Derondas' may be in the interest and request of Daniel. In Israel, perhaps Deronda and Mirah can overcome their homelessness.

Mirah and Daniel are not the only ones that free the oppressive state for a hope of a life in a new place with dreams of acceptance. Unfortunately, for the Mistress in *The Bondswoman's Narrative* the only way to freedom is through death and a painful one at that. When Mr. Trappe captures the Mistress and Hannah for the final time he is arranging a private sale of the Mistress, which will most certainly be for sexual purposes. The finality of her fate and total loss of control over her own purity is the final blow to the Mistress and her life ends violently with a brain aneurism. Certain defilement and bondage triggers this end to her life. Hannah, however, does manage to escape from Trappe and more urgently than Daniel and Mirah realizes that, "it [is] impossible to feel anything like a sense of security while remaining in a slave-state". (236). Mirah and Daniel can exist, though marginally, in England, but Hannah sexual peril, hardship, and death are certainties if she remains in her position as a slave. Hannah's mounting anxiety of the 'slave-state' forces her to continue to strive and make her final escape. In the final chapter entitled "In Freedom" we see a happy Hannah reunited with the mother she never knew of before. Hannah's 'homelessness' is now over, she does not need to worry about

her purity being jeopardized in the slave state. Like Mirah and Deronda, Hannah is no longer on the outside and is ready to live in her very own society.

CONCLUSION

MELTING WOMEN: MIXING NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITISH AND AMERICAN FICTION

I chose to begin this thesis by first exploring George Lippard's *The Quaker City* (1845) for two reasons. The first reason for this choice is simplistic. The novel fit into the chronological timeline of works first. When I pondered this I realized that my perception of sensation fiction of having roots in England first and then spreading to America was very off base. Anxieties felt by Mary and Bess in *The Quaker City* about their own perceived constructed female identity could easily be traced into Dickens's *Bleak House* and Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, even if the latter two were from across the ocean. Similarities of putting everyone into a certain place both socially and economically seemed to come through in these authors. Even when the intention of the author might have been to expose the plight of the unprotected or poor certain expectations of proper actions of the players in these class structures at times undermined the message, especially in the cases of Dickens and Lippard.

Perhaps most notably is in the character of Mary in Lippard's *The Quaker City*. Lippard seeks to expose the horror and repercussions of rape. But, as I earlier pointed out once the defilement takes place the author never relents and allows the 'polluted' to reclaim her own personal identity, as we hear the last words from Bess of 'Lorraine' her fallen rapist's name on her lips. The construction of the Angel of the House has been publically corrupted. Not much is different for Lady Audley. She must go to the madhouse after her 'crimes' have been discovered, never mind the circumstances that

surrounded her empty and failing plots against the plotting males around her. We can argue that it is Lady Audley that truly gets her freedom in the end through the madhouse. She never has to live within the structure of patriarchal society that she fought so hard to usurp power over in the first place.

We can easily find the blending of the middle classes between Britain and America. However, our most compelling examination of how class structures influence the construction of the middle class ideal of Angel of the House is when we fully examine the most powerless in society and the most on the fringes the ethnic slave. In *Daniel Deronda* it is often commented that the Jews suffer more than anyone ever could and Eliot does make a concerted effort to always follow this with some tidbit of the African American slave or the American Civil War. Her genius connects the Jewess with other oppressed peoples with subtle attentions, though an abolitionist might have argued too subtly. Eliot does this through Mirah, a character close enough to the white middle class reader in thoughts and actions to connect.

In readings of not only *The Bondswoman's Narrative*, but Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* there is so much brutality and open sexual mischief that I choose to classify these as sensational, rather than sentimental. Women being raped by their masters or sold naked on the auction block having their teeth and breasts examined hardly compare to Mirah in terms of propriety. Mirah is never defiled against her will to the reader as American texts concerning slavery are. However, we must also consider Lippard's middle class woman. His brutal expose of Philadelphia brothel life that includes only white women in peril

who do get defiled, murder people, and in the case of Dora Livingstone willingly participate in extramarital sexual affairs. Dora Livingstone is not punished by Lippard publicly, even though her husband finds out her infidelity, she quietly sinks back into her upper class life, presumably as happily ever after as she could have ever hoped for. There is something here in the class consideration, it is more important for a female character of lower class in the American text to preserve her personal identity because sometimes that is all they have control over.

Another important point to consider when reviewing both British and American sensation fiction is how novels discuss these female characters in terms of public and private spaces. The middle class British woman, like the middle class white American woman, textually lives similar lives both publically and privately. Gwendolen's public persona in *Daniel Deronda* focused her attention in living up to the expectations of what it meant to be Heinley Grandcourt's wife. Gwendolen is anxiety ridden throughout public parties that she will do something to disgrace Grandcourt. While it is true that part of her anxiety is from a lust for Daniel, there is a sense in Gwendolen that she will suffer much rebuke from Grandcourt if her public appearance is not that of the perfect Angle of the House. But, it is not just Gwendolen whose image in public spaces differs from actions in the private sphere. Take for example, Capitola Black in E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*.

Capitola Black is praised as a defiant tomboy rebel who beats to the sound of her own drum. Capitola supposedly bucks the convention of the middle class white American woman in the nineteenth century. However, closer inspection of Capitola reveals the

same insatiable thirst for building a menagerie of items to build up around herself privately in order to fit into the public sphere like such British characters such as; Gwendolen, Grandcourt, Lady Deadlock, and Lady Audley. Southworth does this by catalogue the items in Capitola's *boudoir* space illustrating Cap's newfound status. Cap is different from Lady Audley, Lady Dedlock, and Gwendolen Grandcourt in that because of her history as an 'orphan' we are led to believe, but she is truly of 'rich' blood and is therefore entitled to these sorts of baubles. Lady Audley and Lady Dedlock, must lose all of their riches because they are only titled by good marriages, not because of their birth. Rather the publicly constructed identities of these women in seemingly private spaces corrupts their Angel images, so these ladies must be taken out of their position. In the case of the American text the *boudoir* area is used not as social building and domestic bondage, but as an eroticized space of bondage for the slave women.

In *The Bondswoman's Narrative* the boudoir at Mr. Trappe's house becomes a prison, and a place for Trappe to broker a sale of the two women. The private space of the *boudoir* becomes a public entity, acting like a store in which the women are on display. This is precisely what connects the melting of British and American sensation with British and American realist texts. There is no true private for the slave women, no matter her skin tone, because the slave woman is publically traded, sold, and brutalized as a commodity. The slave woman in this instance is afforded the same public construction as the white middle class British woman, who cannot escape her constructed identity. Slaves and Jewesses become publically constructed 'Angels' just like the middle class heroine in the British construction.

The truth is that it is complicated blending American and British texts in the nineteenth century because of the slave system in the United States. This does not by any means assert that servants in Britain did not suffer the plight of the poor. The circumstances are different. However, we must strive to blend our exploration of American and British texts because each nation's writers whether intentionally or unintentionally expose each other. This exposure helps us to more accurately construct the nineteenth century Angel of the House.

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