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Standard Deviations: Genre, Gender, and the Cartographical Imagination in Popular British Literature, 1830-1880

Taylor R. Kennamer

Graduate Center, City University of New York

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STANDARD DEVIATIONS: GENRE, GENDER, AND THE CARTOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATION IN POPULAR BRITISH LITERATURE, 1830-1880

by

TAYLOR REBECCA KENNAME

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Talia C. Schaffer

Date

Chair of Examining Committee

Mario DiGangi

Date

Executive Officer

Talia C. Schaffer

Anne Humpherys

Richard Kaye

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

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Adviser: Professor Talia C. Schaffer

While cartography is understood to undergird the spatial interventions integral to Victorian reform in areas such as sewerage and housing, little critical attention has been paid to the influence of cartographical discourse in itself, rather than through its concrete products, as a force that fundamentally altered nineteenth-century conceptions of self, other, and environment. Standard Deviations fills that gap, studying the changing parameters of spatial epistemology by monitoring expanding and contracting definitions of bodily deviance across four generic modes historically associated with the nineteenth century: detective, sensation, and domestic fiction, and the household management guide. Altered perceptions of spatial reality and possibility result in altered definitions of deviance, and those definitions in turn manifest in generic innovations. The texts considered here outline a dilemma: the tension between scientific and personal, imaginative mapping practices. As Chapter One shows, Martin Chuzzlewit delineates Charles Dickens’s engagement with the issue of accurate spatial perception, particularly in the urban milieu. For Dickens, mapping is freighted with ethical cargo, so that accuracy of vision is equated with moral sight – the science of cartography – and imaginative modes of mapping suggest ambiguity. Dickens employs detective fiction to discipline his imaginative; thus cartographical discourse and generic conventions develop symbiotically. Chapter Two continues the exploration of deviance within the urban context in Wilkie Collins’s The Woman in White, a meditation on the over-determined status of middle-class female bodies. Collins’s streetwalking character is
illegible because she harbors too many possible identities (wife, servant, prostitute, criminal, victim). Chapters three and four demonstrate the influence of cartographic discourse on the domestic, an area coded by the Victorians as separate, yet highly permeable. Household management guides were verbal maps that employed cartographical strategies in order to subject domestic space to discipline and regulation. Such texts and domestic fiction show the development of a semiotic system based on spatial integrity – a place for everything, and everything in its place – that led to cultural obsession with a particular type of deviance: bad housekeeping.
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Without the critical reading skills and brilliant suggestions of Talia’s dissertation group, this project would be less interesting and approximately the length of a Victorian three-volume novel. I extend my warm gratitude to Mia Chen, Colleen Cusick, Meechal Hoffman, Livia Woods, Miciah Hussey, and Anastasia Valassis. We’ll always have Le Pain Quotidien. Likewise, thanks to my writing partners, Amanda Springs and Lindsey Freer, and to those whose insights, companionship, late-night philosophizing, and positive energy helped along the way: Anne McCarthy, Allyson Foster, Jen Jack Gieseking, Kiran Mascarenhas, and the shining spirit of Diana Colbert, to name only a few.

Funding opportunities from the Graduate Center, including a Chancellor’s Fellowship, a Graduate Teaching Fellowship at Queens College, and various travel grants made my life in this very expensive city less difficult and enabled me to conduct extensive research at the British Library and to develop my own imaginative map while walking many, many miles in contemporary London, without which this project would have been much poorer.

Ultimately, this dissertation traces my growing investment in humanity’s inexhaustible imagination and need for self-expression, so often seen as impolite, deviant, or just plain criminal. Thus I dedicate it to the women who have taught me to live outside the lines: my mother, Rebecca Allen; my late, indomitable grandmother, Lucille Marion Singleton; my sister,
Julie Marion; my dear friends Lauren Sarlo, Pam Bryant, and Melissa Gluck; both Stanwycks; and, last but certainly not least, my partner in life, love, and all things, Danielle Poulin. May we all be imaginative and unruly for many years to come.
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INTRODUCTION
Stopping Up the Strand with a Pair of Gloves: Narratives of Scientific and Imaginative Cartography

In the midst of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41), a novel haunted by the voracious appetite of a London so rapidly gobbling up the countryside that the city cannot be escaped by protagonist Little Nell, Charles Dickens briefly presents a character who, rather than being mastered by the modern metropolis, has mastered it in a singular fashion:

“I enter in this little book the names of the streets that I can’t go down while the shops are open. This dinner to-day closes Long Acre. I bought a pair of boots in Great Queen Street last week, and made that no thoroughfare too. There’s only one avenue to the Strand left open now, and I shall have to stop up that to-night with a pair of gloves. The roads are closing so fast in every direction, that in about a month’s time, unless my aunt sends me a remittance, I shall have to go three or four miles out of town to get over the way.” (67-68)

Dick Swiveller uses his expert knowledge of the city-space to reorganize it in a manner that allows him to continue enjoying the lifestyle to which he is accustomed. Dick draws his own map of London, centered on the possibility of economic exchange. The most striking feature of this navigational method is that in the midst of a novel obsessed with the unstoppable expansion of London, it causes the outward growth of the metropolis not only to stop but to change directions: Dick’s London is actually *contracting*. On the surface this is certainly not a liberating vision of the city, as the blocking up of thoroughfares potentially heralds the end of mobility – a desirable goal for Nell, who only wants her journey to end, but not for Swiveller, whose free circulation is constitutive of his character. It is even embodied in his name: he is physically and morally flexible, swiveling in and out of trouble as he swivels through the streets. Such a map
might stifle the city’s energy by quashing the liberty of its inhabitants. This gloomy destiny does not, however, belong to Dick; despite his lack of ready money, he stays true to his name, continuing to move easily from one area of the city to another, his physical presence connecting diverse elements of this geographically disparate narrative.

Even more significant for a study of Victorian mapping practices is the ideology at work in the passage above. To re-center the city as Dick Swiveller has done, both experiential and abstract, factual knowledge – represented here by familiarity with street names, the number of possible routes to a destination, and the “three or four miles” extra distance Dick may have to travel to cross the street – are necessary, but these types of knowledge must operate in concert with an understanding of the city that is wholly internal, psychological. In the terms of Henri Lefebvre, Dickens articulates the bridging of three distinct levels of space: the perceived, the lived, and the conceived. Personal and abstract space chafe against one another and are reconciled by the recognition that individual perception plays a key role in the structuring of the environment. Such a reorganization is accessible to Swiveller because his own movements give him an understanding of the city that is founded upon motion and change. This tension between personal or imaginative and abstract levels of mapping, between the desire to police boundaries and regulate movement and the paradoxical realization that random motion is inherent both to Dickens’s understanding of the city as an entity and to realistic representation of it, becomes an explicit focus of the later London novels. In relation to Dickens, this may not seem like a radical claim; but the purpose of this project is broader: to illustrate the multifarious ways in which the tensions between objective mapping\(^1\) – the science of cartography – and subjective or

\[^1\text{As I will clarify throughout, while I see objectivity and its resultant methods of control as the goal of the cartographical process, complete objectivity is a fiction. More often I will use the terms pseudo-objective and pseudo-scientific, acknowledging the inherent presence of artistic or ideological selection and fiction in map-making.}\]
imaginative mapping like Dick Swiveller's echo across a variety of Victorian genres, including some of the most popular and influential works of the mid-nineteenth century, from Dickens to Mrs. Beeton.

Mapping was in no way a Victorian invention, but, as the following chapters will illustrate, it was a powerful method of categorization and control during the nineteenth century – and yet, in discussions of the Victorian avidity for categorizing, separating, and classifying, the role of cartography is seldom mentioned, perhaps because the cartographic mode strikes the modern critic as such a naturalized, even transparent, way of organizing one's surroundings. We know that maps are not always accurate or complete, but we still have faith that they will transport us from Point A to Point B. The diffusion of maps became much more widespread during the nineteenth century, as seems only logical, given the increased likelihood of an individual traveling to an area with which she was completely unfamiliar – Gaskell's Mary Barton, for instance, needs a map to navigate Liverpool. The role of the maps produced by the Ordnance Survey (beginning in Scotland in 1747) cannot be overstated. By mid-century, Ordnance maps of each English county, as well as Wales, Scotland, and Ireland had been produced. The burgeoning industry of domestic guidebooks often encouraged the traveler to take along a good map. Rather than being something highly specialized, the map began to change the way in which the average educated person understood not only foreign locales but his or her quotidian surroundings. During Victoria's reign, mapping was not only a practical but a popular matter, used for purposes of entertainment as well as instruction. Maps from prominent

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2. The Ordnance Survey was both a product of and major contributor to the Principle Triangulation of Great Britain, the trigonometric standardization of mapping the kingdom that began in 1784 and was not completed until the 1850s. This process of measurement and standardization was integral to the greatly increased accuracy of nineteenth-century maps.

3. According to my sampling of the Victorian maps of London housed in the British Library and the New York Public Library, upwards of fifty percent are specifically geared toward tourists, or, as they are usually termed, strangers.
publishers were reviewed alongside literary works in the journals of the day; and, appearing with
the serialized versions of popular novels,


The map, and the advertisement for the map, like the article, essay, or advertisement for gloves or hair tonic, was very much a part of the pastiche that greeted consumers of printed materials. Perhaps most popular was the panorama, a spectacular fusion of cartography and illustration that not infrequently graced the pages of, for instance, the Illustrated London News. In a mushrooming urban environment whose growth must often have felt chaotic, Jamieson Ridenhour contends that “the desire to step outside the whole is in large part the reason behind the Victorian passion for panopticons, panoramas, and dioramas” (81). Indeed, in 1852, not content with merely publishing panoramic views, the Illustrated London News published Henry Mayhew’s panoramic account of his view of the metropolis from a hot air balloon. A cousin of the conventional map, the panorama is equally closely related to another popular nineteenth-century entertainment, the magic lantern show. “An important aspect of the panorama’s historical function … was the fact that it was an influential art form actually accessible to the working and middle classes at a time when museums and galleries rarely offered public exhibits” (Agathocleous 90). From its bird's-eye view (similar to, but more vivid than, the typical
cartographical point of view), the panorama, like the magic lantern, unfurls the landscape all at once before the spectator's gaze; but the artist's rendering is necessarily a matter of selection and exaggeration. Here, more clearly than in the conventional map, “fact” – that is, the ideal of scientific objectivity – colludes with fiction. Elements of fantasy are immediately apparent when the eye meets the bold “here be dragons” of a truly antiquated map; but with the advent of progressively sophisticated techniques of measuring and mapping, such fictions seem to disappear, squeezed beyond the borders of the cartographically reified space. A map is a specific, rarefied narrative of the space it presents to the viewer, however; and like any other narrative, the map utilizes recognizable narrative techniques as it seeks “to make visible what was invisible, to simplify spatial information by subjecting it to the abstracting process of mapmaking” (Gilbert, Mapping 7). In order to tell a coherent story about the locale being depicted, certain fictions – think of them as shortcuts – are necessary. Alfonzo Gardiner's How to Draw a Map (1879) advised would-be cartographers that, when drawing a river, “Always begin the source of a river with a fine line, making it wavy, and, as it reaches the coast, increasing in thickness. Take especial care that the rivers do not look like 'wires’” (4; qtd. in Gilbert, Mapping 12). These techniques are present in any map, but become much more apparent when one considers multiple maps – multiple narratives – of the same space, for example, three maps of London: Reynolds's Strangers' Guide through London; exhibiting the alterations and improvements to 1846 (1846); Bacon's Map of London and Stranger's Guide, with Street Directory, Cab Fares, Postal Districts, Distances, Etc. (1865); and Smith and Son's Illustrated Map of London or Strangers' Guide to the Public Buildings, Theatres, Music Halls and all Places of Interest (1867).

James Reynolds's 1846 map illustrates omnibus routes in peach, boundaries of the City of London in pink, parks in green, and water in blue; steamboat piers are indicated by a T shape.
What is most interesting about this sprawling map is the inclusion of the extant railways: the South Western, the Dover, the Greenwich, the Eastern Counties, the Birmingham, and the Blackwall. Each rail line is indicated by a black line of medium thickness that has clearly been drawn over the preexisting map – this, apparently, is how the map was “updated to 1846.” The visually bizarre result is that the railways bisect a host of buildings, many of which had certainly been demolished in order to build said railways. Thus the map presents a narrative view that is neither past nor present, but an asynchronous melding of the two. This feature dramatizes the first major narrative trope that animates mapping, whether cartographical or imaginative: presence/absence. The mapmaker must first choose what features will be present on the map. This seems straightforward; but as Reynolds's map indicates, it often is not. Raynolds's map includes prisons, workhouses, orphan asylums, and charity schools; but other maps omit these less pleasant features of the urban landscape. Also of note is the fact that the western boundary of London as depicted runs through Hyde Park, cutting off in the middle of the Serpentine; while to the northeast, southwest, and southeast, blank spaces open up, the lack of detail attention-grabbing beside the dense welter of the central city. Even in 1846, these areas were not, of course, blanks; but the lack of detail signals their relative unimportance. The map also includes a section on “Cabs and Coaches, with Fares by distance,” lists “Steam Packets which start regularly from London,” and a list of “Sights and Amusements, open daily” with the prices of admission.4

Bacon's map covers a somewhat larger area but closely resembles the Reynolds map in that it is densely packed with virtually indistinguishable buildings. It has a second title inside:

4. The sights include St. Paul’s, Westminster, the Tower, the Monument, the Cosmorama (209 Regent Street), Diorama (Regent’s Park), Electric Telegraph (Paddington), Industrious Fleas (167 Strand), Model of Saint Peter’s, Rome (Saint James's Street), Miss Linwood’s Needlework (Leicester Square), Panorama (Leicester Square), and Soane’s Museum. For my purposes, the presence of the Cosmorama, Diorama, and Panorama are particularly instructive.
Bacon's Map of London with the Railways in Operation and Constructing, Corrected to 1865. As with the Reynolds, “Corrected to 1865” means that new and projected railways have been superimposed upon an earlier map: a black line represents “in operation and constructing”; a dashed, “Sanctioned for 1865.” That there is no distinction between the lines operating and those that are being constructed is particularly important; how is the “Stranger” to know the difference? Again, we have a mingling of present with hypothetical future; measurable fact with fancy. Reflecting the increase in tourism in the years following the two Exhibitions, there is much more detail for the tourist here, in the form of a supplementary booklet, which includes a list of “new streets” (not included on the map, so the list seems of limited utility) and instructions on how best to tour the city (for instance, of Madame Tussaud's the author writes, “Visitors are recommended to go in the evening when the place is lighted up and can be seen in all its magnificence”).

Smith's 1867 map is an interesting contrast: it contains only “Places of Interest,” and is drawn on a much larger scale than the other two, although it is similar in coloring to the Bacon map – perhaps because the two were in competition for the tourist trade? The renderings of buildings invoke three-dimensionality, as if the view were street-level rather than aerial. Other artistic embellishments include boats dotting the Thames and a toy-like Wellington drawn atop his arch. Places detailed include railway stations, theatres, some churches, and other “points of interest.” Some hotels are shown, but the railroad is the only method of transport included.

This brief overview is not intended to be comprehensive, but to illustrate how these three maps tell a story – or rather, stories – of London at mid-century. The emphasis on process – that is, the correct or sanctioned movement of people and goods – is emphasized by all three in the detailed depiction of streets, railways, omnibus routes, cab stands, etc. By limit, I am referring to
the boundaries of the map: that is, *Where is London? What is London?* Across the three maps, the city enlarges, and then contracts. Including presence and absence, these narrative elements remain constant across the genres I will discuss, from architectural plans to the word maps of household management guides to the prose of popular fiction, and embody the major concerns of the cartographical ethos: the preoccupation with the visibility, movement, and boundaries. As many previous critics have observed, in fixing such definite locations, routes, and limits, the map also fixes and defines their transgression; it illustrates deviance. Until a boundary has been established, it cannot be crossed. The general impetus of mapping was, in the nineteenth century, both progressive, in that many of the century's reforms and innovations required mapping as a necessary precursor – consider the Embankment, railroads, new streets, gas works, sewerage – and conservative, as it established a place for everything, and everything in its place (to borrow from the wisdom of household management). As Pamela Gilbert states, “The advent of modern space – gridded, uniform, and standardized – was the ideal of a government that conceived of the subjects acting in that space as structurally equivalent and behaviorally similar” (*Mapping*, xiv). The other side of this, the one that is my focus, is how this standardization also invoked and codified its opposite: ways of using or moving through space coded as deviance.

While a project such as mine necessarily evokes thoughts of Moretti's seminal *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (1998) and *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (2005), my approach is closer to those of Gilbert in *Mapping the Victorian Social Body* or Lynda Nead in *Victorian Babylon*. Unlike Moretti, I am interested neither in locating specific, “true” locations in Victorian fiction or history (Dickens slept here! Hardy's Tess walked there) or establishing relational paradigms between abstract fictional locations (the provinces, the home, etc.). This dissertation expands upon the work of scholars like Nead and Gilbert, as it is confined
by neither a specific location (such as London or the city) nor a specific type of mapping (i.e. for medical purposes). Instead, although I begin with the familiar, well-trodden ground of London, my focus is on the discourse of mapping, particularly in relation to the narrative tropes it employs and the meanings it assigns to certain bodies, locations, types of movement, etc.

Cartography and its negotiation of space as narrative, discourse, and ideology is a concept familiar to geographers and sociologists, but has not yet been fully considered in relation to literature, much less to Victorian popular texts. In the past two decades, explorations of literary spaces in relation to the spatial work of French theorists like Michel de Certeau, Gaston Bachelard, and Henri Lefebvre have begun to dot the critical landscape. Like those before me, my work would not be possible without the work of these theorists. The project was first inspired by Lefebvre's tri-partite division of space into the perceived, conceived, and lived – or, in slightly different terms, the practice of space, the personal or imaginative space, and the social space in which the individual interacts with others and their conceptions of space (The Production of Space, Donald Nicholson-Smith's English translation first published 1991). The work of the map is to collapse these three levels of space into a single, one-dimensional plane; and, as I argue, this collapse – this standardization – was a source of real anxiety for the Victorians. De Certeau's work on spatial practices and tactics has been instrumental in my application of Lefebvre's theory, particularly in his focus on pedestrianism and “Spatial Stories” (see The Practice of Everyday Life, trans. Steven Rendall, 1984), as he posits sites and tactics of resistance to a totalizing view of space. My goal is not, however, the strict application of these theories to Victorian spaces, but rather the further exploration of questions opened up by Bachelard (The Poetics of Space, 1958), De Certeau, and Lefebvre across a range of spaces comprising both those that are generally recognized as being mapped (the city) and those that are not (the home,
the relations of masters and servants). I am not using the term “mapping” as a metaphor, a practice that has become nearly ubiquitous in the twenty-first century, but as the deployment of a specific way of thinking about space rooted in specific narrative tropes.

The present work offers four different but related articulations of the tension between the hegemonic drive of conventional cartography and the imaginative, speculative possibilities of personal maps drawn from pedestrian experience, personal or social desire, or familiarity. My project examines both the pseudo-objective ethos of conventional mapping carried out by the surveyor and cartographer, and how that ethos inherently opens up lacunae, opportunities for competing “maps” or narratives of the mapped space. I evaluate explorations of this phenomenon across a range of genres and spaces, illustrating how efforts to limit, contain, regulate, or fix imaginative mappings (a) produce a wide range of behaviors and practices coded as deviant, and governed by such factors as age, race, and class and (b) consistently fail. Read in this way, it is in their failures that the texts I discuss – many of them among the most popular and influential of the mid-nineteenth century – are most evocative, and most instructive.

Chapter One investigates the ways in which, throughout his career, Charles Dickens portrayed the disharmony between conventional and personal, imaginative mapping not only of London but of the entire world he created. Beginning with *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-44) – highly unusual in that it contains a map, or rather, a plan that Martin *misconstrues* as a map, nearly costing him his life in an Ohio swamp – I trace the way in which Dickens acknowledges both the liberating potential of imaginative mapping, usually gained through long-term experiential knowledge of one's surroundings, and the likelihood of such mapping being used to deviant ends. The chapter offers two case studies: in the first, Jonas Chuzzlewit uses his imaginative map of London and its outlying areas to enable him to (almost) get away with murder; in the second, the
narrative of *Bleak House*’s Lady Dedlock, itself presented as the crime of having a child out of wedlock, is reconstituted not in chronological but in spatial terms: she must literally retrace her steps in order to bring her narrative to a close and allow Inspector Bucket to find her. Both Jonas and Honoria Dedlock move through the city in ways Dickens presents as deviant, and that deviance in turn is presented as a form of criminality. I analyze *Martin Chuzzlewit* as an early, formative detective novel, considering both the ways in which the detective plot allows Dickens to work through his anxieties about competing modes of knowing the city, and how *Martin Chuzzlewit* paved the way for the more sophisticated *Bleak House* (1853). With its obsessive focus on sanitary reform and urban planning, *Bleak House* clearly links the detective story to urban mapping and exploration; and it is through her negotiation of physical and nostalgic space that Lady Dedlock tells her story in her own terms.

Chapter Two continues my focus on the pedestrian habits of Victorian women – specifically middle-class women – through urban space, particularly those spaces coded as ambiguous or mixed-use. My central text is Wilkie Collins's hugely successful *The Woman in White* (1859), arguably the first sensation novel, which I read in conjunction with an 1862 debate in the periodical press on the right and ability of middle-class women to walk in London, alone or chaperoned, without attracting unwanted attention. As letters to the *Times* and Eliza Lynn Linton's essay “Out Walking” illustrate, the inability to fix a clear meaning on certain spaces, particularly outlying areas that are neither suburban nor rural (such as where Anne Catherick first appears to Walter Hartright) and the fashionable West End shopping district, where well-dressed matrons mingled with sophisticated prostitutes in a confusing simultaneity of buying and selling, results in an inability to read the female form. The fetishization of Anne Catherick’s body – she who puts the first sensation in sensation fiction – mimics the mid-Victorian response to real
women's bodies. As I discuss, both Anne's whiteness and her unstable identity (she is illegitimate in every way possible) are contingent not upon a lack of signifiers, but a profusion of possible signifiers; Anne cannot be read because her white garments and ambiguously classed body are hyper-legible. Her body and its movement through textual space hint at a profusion of conflicting narratives, as she literally embodies the social anxieties of the novel's other, equally ambiguous characters.

It is in the second half of this project that the difference of my focus from those of my predecessors becomes most evident, as I move from the street to the middle-class home. Since, in the words of Kay Boardman, “The ideology of domesticity had become so pervasive in the Victorian period that by the 1850s debates about domestic ideology permeated literary and visual representational practices at every level” (150), we should find concerns about the domestic space reflected in conventional mapping – and we do. Nineteenth-century maps of any town- or cityscape – any area at all with residential dwellings – provide demonstrable evidence of the penetration of cartographical practices and effects across the sacred threshold of the domestic, particularly a map like Smith's, geared toward tourists; John Snow’s cholera maps are merely the most famous example, as in order to lend a new narrative to the cholera outbreak he had to map both where and how its victims lived.5 The sewer gas panic is another prime illustration of this phenomenon. The Victorian movement for sanitary reform in Britain, and particularly in London, was first and foremost a movement for mapping, animated by the cartographical goal of presenting a readable, accurate vision of the city in order to render possible the precise insertion

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5. In his detailed analysis of Snow's role in mapping the Broad Street outbreak, Steven Johnson points out that two cartographical techniques set Snow's map apart from earlier maps, including Edmund Cooper's map of the same area: first, Snow reduced the degree of detail presented by the map, making it easier to see the affected houses and the water pumps; and second, he realized he had to calculate not distance but journey time from each house to the Broad Street pump, integral to the acceptance of a water-borne rather than miasma-based theory of disease spread. See The Ghost Map (New York: Riverhead-Penguin, 2006): 193-197.
of new drains, sewers, transportation corridors, etc. Such maps figure a dual spatial intervention, first at the level of the process of selection at work in mapped representation, and later echoed by the concrete intervention designed fundamentally to alter how Londoners experienced the cityscape. In its mid-century heyday, sanitary reform offered a clear narrative of progress understood to terminate in the greater physical and mental health of London and its inhabitants. Extensive mapping, including the careful fixing of points, now more accurate than ever thanks to the standard use of triangulation, was necessary in preparation for sewerage, but sewerage – “the embodiment and exemplar of sanitary progress” – threatened the dissolution of fundamental boundaries as cross-class fecal matter and noxious odors mingled promiscuously below ground level, creating the potential for “social chaos, threatening the ideals of spatial division and social hierarchy in the Victorian urban context” (Allen 25). Like the cholera itself, the sewers, and with them the burdens of human waste and foul gas they carried, crossed the fault lines of social class and eroded the boundaries between public and domestic space. Allen analyzes the evocative prose and lurid, alarmist images furnished to the periodical press by Britons terrorized by the potential of sewer gas to infiltrate the most private domestic areas – particularly bedrooms – and poison those perceived as most vulnerable – women and children – in order to illustrate that the sewer gas scare was animated by anxieties that penetrated to the core of Victorian society. “How could the home truly be private and separate,” she asks in conclusion, “when a single drainpipe linked it to a network of pipes and sewers radiating across London?” (45). As the apotheosis of sanitary reform predicated upon the stability of boundaries and the contained circulation of waste matter, the sewer gestures toward the impossibility of satisfactory regulation of movement and matter.

Important as this realization is, this is not how a discursive network functions, with ideas
and information flowing in only one direction. In other words, it is not simply that maps laid domestic space bare, but that they profoundly influenced how the home was perceived by its inhabitants. Despite the problematization by scholars in recent decades of the antiquated but cherished public/private binary separating Victorian domestic space from the promiscuity of public space, little attention has been paid to the influence of cartography beyond the doors of the home, particularly the middle-class home. As middle-class Victorians believed The Home to be the fundamental building block of their civilization, it is to the discourse of mapping as it was applied to homes both real and ideal – its echoes, ramifications, silences, and stage-whispers – that we must look for confirmation of its power and permeability, even more than to the mapping of external, overtly public spaces. The influence of cartographical discourse on other representations of the domestic, particularly the domestic haven of the middle classes, is in a sense more difficult to locate: the common deployment of mapping as a metaphor tends to render “real” (i.e. practical, conventional) mapping invisible, because it allows the map to hide in plain sight. Along with all of these factors, the growing desire to establish boundaries outside the home in public places contributed to the need to establish and maintain boundaries within the home in order to guarantee its respectability and, indeed, its domesticity. In concert with scholarship of the last thirty years that has problematized the separate spheres ideology articulated in foundational texts like Patmore's “The Angel in the House” and Ruskin's “Of Queen's Gardens,” it is only logical to assert that the increasing vision during the nineteenth century of the public world as a hyper-mapped space couldn't help but spread to the home.

Chapter Three follows the middle-class woman home from what was increasingly coded as a feminine enterprise: the shopping trip. As I contend, the wife or daughter brings with her pedestrian mobility and fantasy, often deployed as she reimagines possible narratives of her
familiar domestic environment. The first half of the chapter considers the competing rhetorics deployed by household management guides during the first half of Victoria's reign, identifying two philosophies: the first, espoused by earlier writers like Sarah Stickney Ellis, envisions the home as a moral haven, a safe space defined by its separation from the world of commerce and industry; while the second, becoming prominent in Mrs. Beeton's *Book of Household Management* (1861), espouses a philosophy contingent upon the precise and correct use and display of bought or made objects within the home. Although contradictory, these two ideologies meld into a highly codified language of display in works like Robert Kerr's *The Gentleman's House; or, How to Plan English Residences, from the Parsonage to the Palace; With Tables of Accommodation, Cost, and a Series of Selected Plans* (1864), with the result that a woman's moral character is measured through her successful decoration and display of household goods. As I argue, architectural manuals and household management guides present verbal, and sometimes visual, maps of the domestic; they employ the same narrative techniques essential to the cartographer. Building upon the work of Marjorie Garson, Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, and Thad Logan, I group these didactic works and domestic fiction under the heading *aspirational maps*. Like the maps of London indicating railroads that have not yet been constructed, they present as reality what is, at best, a possibility, or a fantasy, of middle-class identity. After analyzing the clash of moral and materialistic versions of domesticity in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* (1866), I consider Margaret Oliphant's use of successful and spectacularly failed shopping and domestic display in *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866) and *Phoebe*.

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Junior (1876). Oliphant, perhaps more explicitly than any other author, uses the objects within the home to explore divergent narratives of the domestic space and the competing understandings of “middle-class-ness” contingent upon those narratives.

Although the complex system of display, and thus the necessary presence of a spectator to appreciate that display, that was part and parcel of mid-Victorian domesticity reveals the incursion of the public world into the private, fears surrounding the threat of domestic exposure were most habitually attached to the bodies of servants. It is thus to the spatial narratives created by and about servants that the final chapter is devoted. Returning to the works of Kerr, Beeton, and Eliza Warren, I consider the portrayal in these didactic texts of the servant as a potential spy and subversive within the middle-class enclave. The servant, no matter how obedient, potentially brings a promiscuous, working-class world into her employers' home. The remainder of the chapter focuses on Ellen Wood's hugely popular East Lynne (1860). Although this novel is typically remembered as a maternal melodrama, I argue that it is primarily concerned with the protection, regulation, and control of the titular estate; the plot proceeds through a series of eruptions of the public world into the private sphere, problematizing familial and class relations. Wood pays unusual attention to three servant characters – the good servant, the bad servant, and the fallen aristocratic ex-wife in disguise as the governess – and charts their perceived trustworthiness vis-a-vis their access to and degree of mobility within the house itself. Thus the chapter considers the different spatial narratives made available to servants due to their alternative relationships to middle-class houses and families, and the inherent threat those narratives pose to the stability of middle-class identity and domesticity. As with the competing narratives of urban spaces I identify in the first half of the dissertation, acknowledging the presence of multiple narratives of the domestic means that there is no reassuring, totalizing
master narrative.

In its reconsideration of cartography as a narrative technique, this dissertation fills a gap in the constantly changing landscape of nineteenth-century studies, suggesting a way of thinking through mapping as an ideology rather than as a specific practice that pertains only to the fixing of points and measuring of distances or simply as an abstract concept, a metaphor. In showing that the discourse of mapping applies equally to public and private, social and personal spaces, my work opens a path to the examination of cartography as it permeates Victorian textual practices as well as Victorian homes and cities.
CHAPTER ONE
Detecting Genre: Imaginative Cartography and Narrative Perspective in *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Bleak House*

I. Introduction

Much like the swarms of tourists who pound the pavements and cobblestones of twenty-first-century London each year, traversing the city’s labyrinthine byways on any of the numerous popular “Dickensian London” walking tours in order psychically to transpose themselves onto the plane of the Victorian metropolis, those who traveled to visit the author during his lifetime participated in a process of imaginative remapping that placed the great man himself at the center of their spatial reality. Like so many other texts, this map was one Charles Dickens authored:

Blanchard Jerrold describes the meticulous care with which Dickens arranged the projected visits of his friends down to the last detail, planning for every contingency, and even volunteering “to secure the proper seat in the _malle poste_ at Boulogne. The coming, the visit, the return, the hour of arrival in London, are all mapped out” (7). Beyond this, Jerrold relates, Dickens characteristically strove to “enliven every mile-stone with a point of humor or a happy suggestion of pleasure to come out of the excursion” (7). Thus Dickens established himself as a tour guide in absentia, one who could move easily between the unromantic matter of fact – canny Dickens could identify the “proper seat” in the conveyance, information unavailable to the uninitiated – and the romance of the humorous or fantastical. By doing so, he melds two levels of discourse and fundamentally reshapes the terrain over which his guests will travel; he places himself at the center of the new map, as the traveler will be reminded at every step of the way.

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7. The lucrative niche of London tourism generated by the desire to follow in Dickens’s footsteps is thriving as of 2013, with an upswell of interest generated by the author’s 2012 centennial. To name just a few of the hundreds of walking tours returned by any internet search, the popular London Walks offers at least one “Dickens’s London” tour per week, led by a costumed guide; Richard Jones, author of *Walking Dickensian London* (London: New Holland, 2004), itself a collection of twenty-five Dickens-related perambulations, leads daily walks; *Time Out London* suggests a self-guided Dickens-themed pub crawl; and even the Dickens Museum offers a weekly walk for £8.
that this is a journey toward Dickens, with its points of interest and horizon of expectations (the “suggestion of pleasure”) predetermined by the eminent writer.

Surely very few, if any, well-read and idiosyncratic individuals among the twenty-first-century tourist horde remember Charles Dickens primarily as the author of *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-1844), a novel long regarded as a problematic node within Dickens’s textual network. And yet a provocatively similar incident to the one described above occurs in the novel. While Dickens employed his insider knowledge to smooth the way for his visitors, and *The Old Curiosity Shop*’s Dick Swiveler uses his to avoid his creditors, Jonas Chuzzlewit remaps the cityscape for the less lofty aim of playing a trick on his country cousins, thus participating in a time-honored tradition by pitting his canny metropolitanism against their presupposed rural ignorance. “This joke was of a practical nature,” the narrator explains, “and its humour lay in taking a hackney-coach to the extreme limits of possibility for a shilling. Happily it brought them to the place where Mr Jonas dwelt, or the young ladies might have rather missed the point and cream of the jest” (175). Like Dickens’s, this is an extremely personal cartographical exercise. The limit of Jonas’s map of possibilities not only physically delineates his stinginess, but literally relocates the periphery as he re-centers the map around himself; he is both the author or cartographer of the joke and its endpoint, the punch-line. Indeed, the joke perfectly marks out the boundaries of Jonas’s thoroughly unsympathetic character, as it emphasizes his perversity and meanness, and the narrowness of his horizons: his house sits at the “extreme limits of possibility.” Dickens is having a joke at Jonas’s expense, yet Jonas, like the author, retains the power to intervene in his spatial environment by reorganizing it.

This incident is important both to the plot of *Martin Chuzzlewit* and as a genetic marker linking the work to *Bleak House*, its closest relative among Dickens’s more successful novels.
Though often overlooked, the family resemblance is a strong one, crucial to understanding the earlier novel’s role in the development of Dickens’s thinking about mapping, criminality, and the detective genre. As this chapter will demonstrate, imaginative cartography such as that practiced by Jonas is not only the central point of philosophical inquiry in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, but is the issue that motivated both Dickens’s first and his greatest forays into detective fiction. Anxiety about personal spatial manipulation, rewritten as a crime, is the problem that must be detected and solved in both *Chuzzlewit* and *Bleak House*; and the most talented practitioners of the art of reimagining are the texts’ criminals. As I have already discussed in my preface, such activity is not inherently criminal. Personal mapping of public, urban space incorporates the features of traditional cartography in a way that writes against or over the conventional map, offering an intimate corrective to its impersonal features, particularly its static, limiting perspective. As Dickens practices it, this valorization of imaginative geography is part of a compelling mode of representational realism, what Julian Wolfreys defines as “reality + x” (8) and Robert Alter terms “experiential realism,” which is “a searching response to the felt new reality of the European city” in the nineteenth century (xi). Patrick Parrinder goes even further, suggesting that, unlike the ancient city with its demarcating wall, the modern city has no structure other than the purely symbolic (408). In the urban world perceived by Dickens the streetwalker, cartography presents not a transparently legible vision of space, but a partial narrative; experience and imaginative power supply the crucial missing elements. However, as my reading of the crimes committed by Jonas Chuzzlewit and *Bleak House*’s Lady Dedlock will show, while experiential knowledge of the city gained on the ground through pedestrianism is essential to the ability to draw one’s personal map of the city and to author one’s own narrative, the mechanisms of detective fiction use that same knowledge as evidence of criminality. In other words, the knowledge that allows a
character to author his or her own narrative reality is the same knowledge that allows the
detective plot to rewrite those characters as criminals and to punish them accordingly.

The first, potentially liberating aspect of this spatial dialectic permeates the description of
Todgers’s boarding house, a location central both to the plot of Martin Chuzzlewit and to the
City of London. Seeking Todgers’s, the “stranger” is bested by the “labyrinth” in which it is
situated; “Nobody had ever found Todgers’s on a verbal direction, though given within a
minute’s walk of it” (131). To reach it, one needs a streetwise guide like Jonas. As I suggested in
the preface to this project, the chaotic movement, the building-up and tearing-down,
characteristic of the modern city summons up the desire for its own regulation and control, as it
suggests an “inability to make meaning” (Moore 338), a particular threat to the outsider. Without
a guide, Todgers’s suggests this state of meaninglessness, expressed not in terms of narrative but
gibberish. For Ben Moore, gibberish is the most fitting medium for urban self-expression, as it
“enact[s the] collapse of interpretability, becomes a threshold text, a site where the excess of
nonsense over sense overwhelms comprehension”; this is a nebulous area “positioned on the
edge of language, the region where structure meets chaos; this is the place where transformations
occur” (340). Navigating the Victorian city requires a specialized way of knowing that
synthesizes, in Henri Lefebvre’s terms, abstract, experienced, and fantasized versions of London
space. While critics like Lyn Pykett have argued that Dickens’s streetwalker shares a genealogy
with the flaneur of Baudelaire and Benjamin, “a spectator [who] served to present the city to the
literate classes as a spectacle for their consumption” (Charles Dickens 30), the skill-set necessary
to penetrate to the heart of a quintessentially urban location like Todgers’s is clearly much more
active than simple spectatorship; it is itself an intervention, a reorganization of space.8

8. Todgers’s also mimics traditional cartography in order to defy it, as the roof of the boarding house offers the sort
of panoramic, hierarchical view of London beloved of cartographers; here, however, it turns out to be such
At the same time, however, the example of Jonas Chuzzlewit illustrates the ominous ease with which such mastery and manipulation of space can be exploited for purposes of trickery, or worse, criminal behavior. The city lends itself to such exploitation: “just as the gothic villains exploit the complexity of their houses, so the city can be used as a means of asserting control over others who are ignorant of its layout” (Smith 42). Indeed, Jonas turns out to be precisely such a villain. As tour guide and penny-pincher, Jonas is shown to possess an abundance of the experiential knowledge that will allow him to manipulate the urban geography, bending it to the service of a homicidal plan to eliminate his business partner. As the foregoing illustrates, whimsical deployments of the imaginative mapping rooted in the kind of spatial mastery that comes only from practical insider knowledge are insufficient to dispel the taint of potential criminality that inheres in the chaos of unregulated reimagination of the city. If personal mastery of this urban chaos should be celebrated in the name of imaginative freedom, then it also harbors its own threat of crime and anarchy; if “the city has meaning as unexpected event which takes place constantly,” that event might well turn out to be a crime (Wolfreys 5).

It is no surprise to find Dickens grappling with these complex spatial issues in the early years of Victoria’s reign, an era obsessed both with cartographical precision and the dissemination of the resulting maps to a wide, popular audience. Indeed, understanding this process is crucial to understanding both Martin Chuzzlewit, one of Dickens’s most misunderstood novels, and Dickens’s career-long engagement with the detective genre. Without the rigorous formalization of space ongoing in the 1840s, there would be no Martin Chuzzlewit; and as this case-study of the villainous Jonas’s cartographically-based criminality will

confusing welter of unfamiliar and estranged images that the dizzied viewer risks toppling to the street head-first. Lauren Goodlad makes a similar observation of Bleak House when she states that what the novel “figures are not the docile objects of panoptical discipline, but the unfed, unwashed, untreated, unschooled, and (morally, physically) dangerous bodies of Dickens’s quasi-sociological imagination” (535).
demonstrate, without *Martin Chuzzlewit* there would be no *Bleak House*, the text that represents the apotheosis of Dickens’s need to detect and purify the most heinous criminal and greatest victim of his detective fictions, the city itself.

The problem of *Martin Chuzzlewit* is, first and foremost, the problem of genre, owing largely to what one might sympathetically term its diffuse plotting. It is a fiction containing a detective, but it’s not precisely what Dickens’s savvy readers or unwary characters recognize as *detective fiction*. The skeletal elements that would, during the ensuing decade, come to be accepted as constituent of detective fiction – a crime, a criminal, and a detective – are all present, but narratologically scrambled, their order becoming clear only in retrospect and with knowledge of the text’s generic progeny, from *Bleak House* to Agatha Christie. By insisting that we read *Martin Chuzzlewit* as an early, seminal detective fiction, I harbor no lofty aspiration of mining the novel as a hidden gem. However, such an act of generic recuperation both restores the text to its rightful position among the author’s works by emphasizing previously obfuscated links to Dickens’s later novels and, crucially, illustrates that Dickens’s fascination with and recourse to the detective plot is born of and imbricated in his anxieties about spatial and imaginative conceptualization of the city. Indeed, *Martin Chuzzlewit* is particularly valuable *because* of its flaws, as the fissures in its plotting allow us a rare glimpse of a Dickens struggling mightily to overcome his own profound unease with the development of the modern metropolis and the modern cosmopolitan individual.

II. Making the Map

As many of the reform movements of the Victorian Era – most notably the inception of parish-based poor laws, sanitation reform centered around the construction of new, efficient sewers, and the Contagious Diseases Acts designed to curtail the spread of sexually-transmitted
diseases by curtailing the bodily movement of prostitutes—illustrate, with the cartographical formalization of space, deviation from prescribed routes—of moving, being, knowing—becomes recognized and codified; that is to say, it becomes criminalized. This spatial transgression is the foundational narrative of Dickens’s detective fiction, a body of work in which the author wrestles as never before with the ramifications of this new spatial reality. In the words of Michelle Allen, “What reform demanded was a fundamental reconfiguration and, hence, respatialization of the city” on physical, social, and symbolic levels (18). Thus the origin of the Dickensian detective story is doubly revealing, as the philosophical and social crime of spatial and imaginative transgression is transposed onto the plane of illegality. When deviant movement becomes a crime in the legalistic sense, and its perpetrator a criminal, the body of the criminal can be detected, apprehended, and subjected to punitive measures (although not necessarily in that order), cleansing the urban body of contaminants and restoring healthy circulation to the system.9

Rewriting the criteria of criminality in this way demanded a concomitant rewriting of narrative elements in order adequately to represent this new class of criminal. It is no surprise, then, that the generic conventions of detective fiction developed simultaneously with the emergence both of what we recognize as the modern city and of modern strategies for the representation of that city. For this reason Wolfreys identifies the first six decades of the nineteenth century as producing a unique type of narrative of the city, “a map of unknowability, a map which, to paraphrase Jean Baudrillard, precedes the territory” (16). Wolfreys also means that the mid-nineteenth-century city was unknowable because its primary characteristic was a

being-in-progress, a becoming – that is, a state of semi-permanent instability, flux, constant movement, which, he asserts, is one of the features that sets the nineteenth-century city apart from the eighteenth-century city.

Critics beginning with Dickens’s contemporaries have noted the mutual dependence between the author’s own imaginative freedom and the city. I wish to stress that the city Dickens required was the one Wolfreys describes, the chaotic, unstable city. This chaos is what Walter Bagehot refers to as the newspaper-like quality of the author’s London, commenting, “Everything is there and everything is disconnected” (qtd. in Pykett, Charles Dickens 10). While the powerful appeal and cultural permeability of his works allowed them to play a significant role in the conceptualization of Victorian London, so that in a sense the city relied upon Dickens (and continues to do so), he also relied upon it to furnish a productive working environment. In 1846 from Lausanne, where he was attempting to work on Dombey and Son, Dickens wrote to his friend John Forster about a difficulty that was plaguing his writing process. “The absence of accessible streets continues to worry me … in a most singular manner,” he fretted; “It is quite a little mental phenomenon” (qtd. in Pykett, Charles Dickens 27).

The complaint strikes at the heart of the paradox around which Dickens’s mature city fiction revolves, a “little mental phenomenon” that haunts both composition and context of novels such as Martin Chuzzlewit. As if with an eye to posterity, Dickens confirms his status as authentically urban by insisting that his imagination languishes without metropolitan stimulus. This dilemma migrates from Switzerland to animate the pages of much of Dickens’s work, subsuming as it does a constellation of issues such as accurate perspective, healthy movement, personal freedom, and the regulation of movement. “‘These streets!’” writes Bleak House’s despairing Lady Dedlock, echoing the sentiments of her creator (21). While Dickens thrived on
the city, it also made him uneasy; his inchoate modern city harbors inherent questions that animate the author’s works: How unrestricted should reimagination of the metropolis, with the movement it allows, be? To what extent is regulation possible — or desirable? To whom should access be allowed? Mapping functioned to establish and mark a multitude of boundaries: city limits, parishes, cleanliness and filth, health and sickness, poverty and plenty. Mapping codified the acceptable locations of a wide range of behaviors associated with every aspect of human existence, from birth to death (quite literally, in its inclusion of maternity hospitals and burial grounds); and by so doing, also physically and conceptually located unacceptable behaviors. The detective story offers a possible solution to this constellation of inquiries: when deviance, embodied in the criminal, is apprehended, the effect is designed to be reassuring, comforting, and conservative. And yet for Dickens the streetwalker, the potential curtailing of individual movement and imaginative agency remains troubling, as Martin Chuzzlewit shows.

As an illustration of this, let us return to Jonas Chuzzlewit. In a counterpoint to the mapping deployed in his earlier joke and a bookend to his physical activity within the novel, when Jonas decides to murder his business partner, he reconceptualizes his mental map by placing his crime at its center. As he travels back to London he becomes disoriented — or rather, reoriented — because he measures the time that has elapsed since the murder and the distance he has traveled “by the rapid hurry of his guilty thoughts,” deciding that he is “comparatively safe” only hours after the murder “because it had not been discovered yet” (681-682). Here Jonas miscalculates. Although the narrative has already shown him to possess a well of spatial knowledge of the city rooted in specificity and experience, he goes too far in his imaginative geography. He errs because he allows his fear-based fantasizing to usurp his external spatial reality. This is the error that leads directly to his detection and capture, in a shorthand version of
the narrative of spatial detection to which Dickens returns in much richer detail with *Bleak House*. The acquired skills that allow Jonas to commit the crime of murder are the same skills whose deployment by Nadgett, the novel’s shady detective figure, makes possible the detection of the crime and punishment of the offender. What Jonas doesn’t realize is that, as a bona fide criminal, he has entered the realm of the detective plot and is now living within Nadgett’s imaginative version of the city rather than his own.

Like *Bleak House*’s Inspector Bucket, Nadgett is a thoroughly urban character, marked by his boundless urban knowledge. While in the later novel the homeless crossing-sweep Jo thinks Bucket is “everywhere, and cognizant of everything” (722), and the narrator allows, “Mr Bucket pervades a vast number of houses, and strolls about an infinity of streets” (803), Nadgett moves through the pages of *Martin Chuzzlewit* almost undetected. Demonstrating another firm feature of detective fiction in a nascent state, Dickens deflects attention from Nadgett, effacing his detecting role. If anything, this renders Nadgett the more intimidating of the two detective figures.

Because of their expert knowledge of the city, both Nadgett and Bucket are able to behave like the city: mysterious, knowing, and not confined to a single location. Both Bucket and Nadgett model the features Audrey Jaffe identifies as belonging to omniscience, “knowledge, mobility, and authority” of a type that “can come into being only in contrast to limitation” (12); however, as *Martin Chuzzlewit* leaves Nadgett to his own devices, seemingly forgotten for the space of many chapters, he could quite literally be anywhere.

The novel’s other characters tacitly acknowledge the other side of the Nadgett coin when they assume that the unseen Nadgett is nowhere, and consequently of no importance. This is Jonas’s fatal mistake, and through it he participates in what D.A. Miller identifies as one of the
fundamental and enduring sites of ideology within the detective narrative: “the perception of everyday life as fundamentally ‘outside’ the network of policing power” (37).  

So far, so good: Martin Chuzzlewit seems to show the requisite features of detective fiction. And yet as soon as we pose a simple question – What is Jonas’s crime? In other words, what does the detective actually detect? – we run aground on the rocky shore of indeterminate plotting. While Jonas bludgeons Tigg Montague to death, this is not the answer to the above question. To begin with, there is the nature of Jonas’s criminality, a characteristic Dickens attributes to him prior to the commission of the crime. In a novel populated by an unusually high percentage of petty criminals, it is perhaps unsurprising that the suggestion of criminality clings to Jonas throughout the text. On the other hand, the novel’s indictment of Jonas as a criminal before he has actually committed his crime represents a manipulation of the narrative arc, a reordering of its constituent elements foreign to detective fiction. After his father falls into a fit, Jonas whispers to his future father-in-law, “‘It was a mercy you were present when he was taken ill. Some one might have said it was my doing ... You mustn’t go away, Pecksniff. Now it’s come to this, I wouldn’t be without a witness for a thousand pound’” (296). What in a conventional work of detective fiction would be simple, if rather heavy-handed, foreshadowing is more meaningful here. While Dickens’s intention is to include Jonas within the criminal class by establishing his nature as morally, if not legally, criminal, the suggestion of patricide also turns Jonas into a murderer in the reader’s mind. The murder itself becomes almost incidental; the reader already knows that Jonas is guilty. That the crime in question is patricide, carrying its

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10. After Jonas commits his crime, he races directly back to his London home, only to find that once he is there, his sense of safety turns into acute paranoia. In the Victorian cult of domesticity, the sanctity of home depended upon its exclusiveness: if the “hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold it ceases to be a home; it is then only a part of the outer world which you have roofed over and lighted a fire in” (Moore 20). Jonas violates this stricture by bringing the memory of murder home with him, illustrating the ease with which both cartographical and detective discourses can penetrate the flimsy home barrier. In Miller’s terms, he causes his quotidian existence to become an object of police interest.
connotative freight of utter moral bankruptcy and depravity, is doubly significant. Perhaps Jonas has not killed his father; but from this point the reader recognizes him as capable of any act, no matter how gross. This is in keeping with the end to which Dickens continually employs the apparatus of the detective narrative, as a vehicle for the revelation of essential truths about human nature.

In a sense, it is as if Dickens is telling his reader that Jonas’s crime is the *ability* to commit a crime, an ability contingent upon his real and imaginative mastery of urban space. As early as *Martin Chuzzlewit*, then, we discover the three impulses that are constant in Dickens’s urban fictions: first, the desire to demonstrate proficiency in conventional cartographical methods; second, the representation of the inadequacies of such mapping, coupled with a mapping ethos that valorizes subjective experience and perspective; and finally, the suggestion that unconventional mapping may foreclose its own possibilities by allowing freedoms that exacerbate the need for regulation. Jonas Chuzzlewit’s villainy doubly underscores the dialectic uniting spatial manipulation and surveillance, in a chicken-or-the-egg relationship of obfuscated causality and consequence. Obviously, because Jonas is moving through London in a way that strikes others as suspicious, he causes himself to come under scrutiny; but only Nadgett, who wields an even more advanced level of urban understanding than Jonas, and who moves through the pages of the text in a way that even the narrator finds indecipherable, can carry out such surveillance. Nadgett and Bucket “represent the other, non-labyrinthine, side of the city – its revelatory aspect, which is charted in police records and controlled by an efficient system with knowledge catalogued and at its fingertips” (Smith 106-107). Thus while in *Martin Chuzzlewit* Dickens uses Jonas and Nadgett to demonstrate the widely differing ends to which specialized
knowledge of metropolitan space can be employed, their functions – criminal and detective – are united by the element of criminality. Both figures are necessary to the detective story.

A common feature of early detective fictions is the sensed danger of the detective being tarred with the criminal’s brush. The detective must ask indelicate questions and retrace the criminal’s steps, not only contemplating criminal acts but physically moving through the criminal underworld. Nadgett exemplifies this. A shady, amorphous figure, he is not a policeman but a private investigator in the employ of a petty criminal (Tigg Montague, the murder victim). Although the text makes it plain that Nadgett suspects Jonas’s intentions toward Montague, he takes no extraordinary measures to warn his employer, casting an uncertain moral light on the detective. When he at last apprehends Jonas, the murderer feels a special sense of personal injury at being held at Nadgett’s mercy: “This man, of all men in the world, a spy upon him; this man, changing his identity: casting off his shrinking, purblind, unobservant character, and spring up into a watchful enemy! The dead man might have come out of his grave, and not confounded and appalled him so” (736-737). Jonas tacitly acknowledges that he and Nadgett have much in common, as the techniques he lists are exactly the same as those by which he committed murder; Jonas comes very near to admitting he has been bested at his own game by someone whose interests may be little more moral than his own. Thus the characterization of Nadgett demonstrates Dickens’s continued anxiety about both the use and curtailment of personal movement and imagination, even as it gestures toward the possibility of using these abilities to a positive, law-abiding end.

11. The working-class Inspector Bucket is fastidiously circumspect in his inquiries, stressing that he asks nothing from motives of curiosity; while bourgeois Robert Audley in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s Lady Audley’s Secret is so horrified by the detective role foisted upon him by necessity that he nearly abandons the pursuit altogether. Surely it is no coincidence that the proto-detective figures in many sensation novels are servants, suggesting a strong class-bases component to the role.
As the foregoing example of his father’s illness illustrates, Jonas Chuzzlewit is acutely aware of the function of surveillance as a Foucauldian tool of power and disciplinary control. His desperation to secure Pecksniff as a witness foreshadows both the trial he will be desperate to avoid and the lengths to which he will go in his endeavors to avoid the detection he now courts. As he tells Pecksniff, he wants to be seen to be doing the right thing concerning his father’s illness; without a recording observer, his filial piety cannot be proven, and so it ceases to exist. This makes sense, as Jonas is a performer, acting his role for the benefit of an audience, not from the impetus of affection or internalized notions of duty. As this belief in the power of surveillance shows, he takes it for granted that the physical environment he inhabits is one that has been scrutinized, formalized, and normalized. Even the joke he plays on the unsuspecting cab driver earlier in the text is rooted in this spatial understanding: the organic urban space has been broken down into regular, predictable units of measure, allowing Jonas to determine the location of “the extreme limit of possibility.” As Jonas knows, it is surveillance that makes it possible to transform indefinite space into discrete units; although etymologically distinct, the similar sounds of the words surveillance and survey indicate the close affinity between the two activities, both of which are integral to mapmaking.

Paradoxically, it is Jonas’s faith in the mechanism of surveillance that leads to his downfall. As Jonas heads out of London on a journey that will culminate in the murder of his erstwhile partner in business and fraud, Dickens again reminds the reader that Jonas is hyper-aware of his own visibility. With the lamps in his carriage extinguished so that he can shield himself while looking out on the stormy evening, the would-be criminal feels the scrutiny of the people who are keeping a wary eye on the threatening weather, “so that groups of watchful faces seemed to be looking out upon the night and them, from almost every house they passed” (605).
Again, the problem is a generic one: like his writer and his reader, Jonas has not been adequately apprised of the parameters of the detective story. While “the guilty … internalize detection. Adhering to a doctrine of self-denial, they rigorously police themselves, and through such scrutiny they keep the flawed self – the criminal – in check” (Thoms 153), Jonas fails to consider the possibility that, vis-a-vis the mechanism of the detective plot, such detection can also be externalized. The face of London in the process of emerging as Dickens penned *Martin Chuzzlewit* was admirably suited to this type of observation, as “surveillance could be achieved on a larger scale by means of urban reconstruction: the clearance of slums, the creation of wide-open streets, and the construction of model dwellings” (Allen 40). For Peter Brooks, surveillance and realism go hand in hand, as realism makes “sight paramount – makes it the dominant sense in our understanding of and relation to the world” (3). Obsessed with the idea that everyone is looking at him and he is looking back, Jonas fails to account for the presence of one specific someone, the detective, unseen by him but capable of seeing all.

With my focus on the salient detective fiction elements of the novel, I do not wish to argue that *Martin Chuzzlewit* is anything other than what it has long been considered to be. It is sprawling and disjointed, thematically and geographically, with a convoluted plot that – rather than being foreshadowed and skillfully revealed inch by inch, as is the case in *Bleak House*, so that the reader feels that she is in on the joke – assaults the unwary reader in a series of guerilla attacks that curtail any affective responses to the series of events that together constitute the novel’s denouement: Jonas’s apprehension, the Chuzzlewit family’s reunion, Pecksniff’s social pillorying, and younger Martin’s happily-ever-after as a successful architect. *Martin Chuzzlewit* is a novel rife with notable quirks and inconsistencies; and it is precisely these inconsistencies that reveal the important work its creator was laboring to accomplish. Adam Grener’s recent
work on coincidence in the text is tremendously helpful in this regard. His argument that the startling number of coincidences in the novel (he counts twenty-one) is not antithetical to realism, but rather part of Dickens’s project to show the “burgeoning Victorian social milieu and … the behaviors produced by that milieu’s complexity and opacity” (324) applies equally well to my reading of some of the more confounding aspects of the novel as a detective fiction. Grener’s focus is on social space, and as such he views these coincidental encounters as an expression of the fragmentation of the social fabric, a representation of the “discrepancy between an individual’s sense of self-sufficiency and concrete webs of social connection” (325). Grener downplays the importance of physical space, despite the fact that each of the coincidences he analyzes involves the unexpected presence of two or more characters in the same place at the same time, a specific kind of coincidence vital to the plotting of much detective fiction. These meetings are only possible because the characters are inhabiting the same social and physical space or, more significantly, they are inhabiting a physical space that is being disciplined to conform to the norms of cartographical representation, an important aspect of mid-nineteenth-century historical development that profoundly informs the twenty-first-century reader’s perception of what counts as realistic representation. While the characters perceive themselves as “atomized individuals” (328), each inhabiting his or her own perceived/imagined reality, they are actually living in a reality in which space behaves in a uniform, predictable way.

Specifically, mapped representation of the city creates a space that is organized according to recognizable features such as streets, points of interest, railroads, bodies of water, and boundary lines – features that appertain to the so-called objective geographical reality – and posits a class of inhabitants who behave in keeping with their respect for those features. As Pamela Gilbert puts it, “The advent of modern space – gridded, uniform, and standardized – was
the ideal of a government that conceived of the subjects acting in that space as structurally equivalent and behaviorally similar” (xiv). The map strives to limit, or at least to identify, random, unpredictable movement, thus shaping a space conducive to the methods of detection that become familiar in the detective novel. As Efraim Sicher summarizes, “Observation and surveillance are keys to knowledge … and therefore control in the city, where there are no neighbors or community to keep watch (as Chadwick stressed in his 1829 Benthamite pamphlet ‘Preventive Police’)” (317). While the typical argument rehearses the idea that the dense population of an urban center gave rise to the need for an organized police force and innovative policing methods, it is also true that the cartographically recognizable, [re]organized city fosters an environment in which police control becomes possible. It is this radically altered socio-spatial environment that allows Nadgett to deceive Jonas “by making it appear as if his continual proximity to him is coincidental rather than intentional. The fact that characters such as Nadgett can self-consciously deploy the category of coincidence demonstrates the degree to which social connections are illegible in the social space of the novel” (Greener 329). That is to say, this is also an environment in which detective fiction becomes possible and, more interestingly, an environment in which the detection of crime can be the detection of the city itself.

As in the narrative of Jonas’s criminal adventure, the primary conflict is between a highly personalized conception of one’s lived environment, and an external order imposed on that environment by a higher authority (the cartographer, the author). In the same vein as Julian Wolfreys, Greener contends that “What distinguishes realism as a literary mode is not its direct

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12. The involvement of Edwin Chadwick, commissioner of both the Metropolitan Commission of Sewers and the General Board of Health and infamous proponent of sanitary reform, in the discourse surrounding the inception of a public police force, strengthens my emphasis on the tight connection between the spatial interventions of cartography and reform at mid-century and the development of the Dickensian detective novel. For more on Dickens’s fraught relationship to Chadwick, see Socrates Litsios, “Charles Dickens and the Movement for Sanitary Reform,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 46.2 (Spring 2003): 183-199.
correspondence to the material of reality, but rather the way it organizes that material in order to disclose its salient features” (339); and the salient features of the realistic mode as Dickens practices it are the features necessary to the development of the detective genre.

III. Reading the Map

Although it is Nadgett who solves the mystery of Jonas’s crime, Dickens leaves the interpretation of events to the novel’s eponymous hero, or at least to one of them, Martin the younger. This choice initially seems dubious, given Martin’s response. He listens “amazed,” “shocked,” and “confounded” as his friend John Westlock recounts the tale of the murder Jonas has committed (696). However, it is Martin’s interpretation, and the map-reading method he employs to understand what has transpired, in which the real key to the puzzle is located; and the puzzle here is not merely Jonas’s crime, but the plotting and structural integrity of the novel as a whole. Well may Martin be stupefied despite firsthand experience of his cousin’s violent, greedy impulses: throughout the novel he has shown himself to be a poor reader of characters, situations, and spaces, proving that he is no more literate in faces and intentions than he is in cartography. Embodied in Martin’s illiteracy is the notion that the narrative presented by a novel (particularly but not exclusively a detective novel, as this one turns out to be) and the narrative presented by the mapped representation of a space are not so very different.

By the time he sits listening to Westlock’s tale, young Martin’s illiteracy has nearly cost him his life and that of his faithful companion Mark Tapley. The disaster hinges upon Martin’s naïve misconstruction of another narrative: that hidden in the plan of Eden, a settlement in the midwestern United States. Because he performs an egregious misreading of the plan on view in

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13. In this early detective fiction, the detective has not yet assumed the master-of-ceremonies style of revelation we see prefigured in Bucket and fully articulated in later fictional detectives, from Sherlock Holmes to Hercule Poirot. While Nadgett has been instrumental in the detection and reassembling of Jonas’s criminal career, his ambiguous social and class position unfits him as an interpreter of what is presented as a private family matter. (While Christie’s Poirot labors under the same disqualifications, he doesn’t let them stop him from claiming the spotlight.)
the offices of unscrupulous land speculators, Martin decides to stake his fortune and his future on this promised land.

Martin’s misreading begins with a semantic slippage imbedded at the core of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, which is the confusion of the possible/imagined with the actual/objective, here expressed semantically as the taking of the *plan* for the *map*. Eager to find an arena in which he can exercise his talent as an architect, Martin asks if there is a “reasonable opening” for him in Eden, and is told to “‘see the agent, see the agent, see the maps, and plans, sir; and conclude to go or stay, according to the natur’ of the settlement’” (334). Intent on making a profit, the General uses the terms *map* and *plan* interchangeably, and Martin glibly accepts the possible – the plan – as actual, a misreading uncannily similar to the one that leads to Jonas’s capture. Thus he gazes upon the splendid map/plan and sees “A flourishing city … ! An architectural city! There were banks, churches, cathedrals, market-places, factories, hotels, stores, mansions, wharves; an exchange, a theatre; public buildings of all kinds, down to the office of the Eden Stinger, a daily journal; all faithfully depicted in the view before them” (340). Like a good mid-century Victorian, Martin has so completely accepted the truth-value of the map that he fails to understand what sort of document he is actually reading. Rather than being a faithful depiction of some objective reality (if such a thing is possible), Martin is confronted with nothing more than the pen and ink manifestation of a dream/scheme, certainly not a revelation of “the natur’ of the settlement.”

Not only Martin’s natural buoyancy of temperament, but his chosen profession as an architect and his previous tutelage at the hands of Mr. Pecksniff, lead him to ignore the caution offered by the land agent, who admits, “‘Well! it ain’t all built … Not quite’” (341). Martin mentally appends a “yet” to the end of the agent’s statement, a mental somersault that allows him
to read the plan of Eden simultaneously as a map – a depiction of the real – and as an architectural plan, a document drawn up in good faith under the expectation that the possible will become actual. If Martin were a more adept reader, his time spent in the domain of Pecksniffery might have taught him to distinguish between two types of plans, as Pecksniff’s home is crammed full of architectural plans of every sort whose only purpose is to exist as plans and provide the unstable credibility Pecksniff needs to pass himself off as a practicing architect. The dilemma of how to evaluate maps or plans of all sorts, how to distinguish the false from the honest and well-intentioned, and whether the possibility of rehabilitation for false plans and planners exists, constitutes the thematic heart of Martin Chuzzlewit. Exemplified by the falsity of Jonas and Pecksniff at home and the corresponding falsity of the American speculators – and indeed, in Dickens’s view, the falsity of the plan of a United States built upon liberty and equality, and the reality Martin and Mark perceive of a nation built instead upon bigotry and exploitation – this theme works to unify a text whose disparate settings and competing subplots otherwise threaten to pull it asunder.

As is often the case in more mundane circumstances, Martin’s misreading of the map causes him to become lost. For Martin, being lost is both a physical and spiritual state, and only by reading more perceptively can he save himself and Mark and become a fit moral opponent to the Jonases of the world. Phrased differently, only through the consequences of Martin’s misreading does he receive the opportunity to become literate. Because he misreads the map, Martin realizes that he has misread his situation and his own character, and in the expected Dickensian manner, these realizations lead to deepened self-awareness and a concomitantly enhanced ability to evaluate the virtues and vices of others. To say that Dickens was preoccupied with discourses of mapping throughout his writing career is only to state the obvious – this
Despite the fact that literal maps appear very seldom in his body of work, and even less frequently in his novels. *Martin Chuzzlewit*, then, is an unusual case; and thus it is fitting that Dickens uses this novel as the vehicle for his most explicit articulation of his take on the seductive power and potential danger of maps and mapping. Martin’s naïveté and Jonas’s machinations, like two sides of one coin, participate in the same ideology of spatial representation, one that places real faith in the practicability of the plan or schematic design, and the potential for imaginatively manipulating that representation for one’s own ends. While Martin’s error is to take the plan of Eden as a map, the text suggests that he is right to believe that Eden, if it existed, could be represented fully and accurately by such a map. Ideally, then, the map as a form should be a transparent medium for the transmission of spatial knowledge. That Dickens valorizes such an understanding is underscored by his savaging of Pecksniff and the American speculators, whose chief offense is that they have violated the code, one which is the basis not only of cartographical authority but of traditional novelistic realism.

Thus *Martin Chuzzlewit* the novel participates in Martin Chuzzlewit’s naïve belief in the possibility of transparent spatial representation, even as – or rather precisely because – it teaches Martin to be wary when deciding to whom or what to accord this privileged authority. That is to say, the lesson Dickens wants Martin to learn is how to discriminate and exercise caution when evaluating the truth value of a narrative plan, be it cartographical, architectural, or psychological. He is certainly not taught to refute such truth value altogether. Here, then, one might surmise, is the idealistically scientific Dickens, the sanitary reformer, the scrupulous observer, the careful mapper of London minutiae. The understanding of scientific versus imaginative mapping that Martin gains from his harrowing experience in Eden looks forward to the techniques Dickens will later bring to bear on London, in *Martin Chuzzlewit* and even more pointedly in his later
novels, particularly *Bleak House*. Martin must come to grips with his lived reality as a mappable space:

Dickens’s project, then, much like the sanitary mapping project, was to abolish the perceived mythic spaces of London – that is, a London of tightly contained and class-distinct areas – in favor of a realist understanding of London as a lived space of heterogeneity and conflict. The demystification is not simply celebratory, however; it is a preparatory step to bringing London into line with the conceived space of mappers and medics – in this case, an idealized vision of the London in which the disorder which disrupts boundaries is abolished and all areas become homogenously bourgeois. (Gilbert, *Mapping* 136).

The cartographical skills and ability to discern truth-value he has acquired abroad, along with his textual position outside the detective plot, make Martin a fit interpreter for the narrative that spatially-savvy Nadgett has pieced together.

Indeed, Martin’s response to the tale of his cousin Jonas’s misdeeds emphasizes the congruence of the reading practices associated with the supposedly simple act of reading a map and the purportedly more sophisticated reading of events and character in which Martin must engage in order to save himself from a fate worse than the swamp. In order to make sense of the knowledge that his cousin bribed a chemist to obtain poison, Martin must dismantle John Westlock’s words and reassemble them in order to render them legible. Dickens writes, “[I]t was some time before he could reduce [Westlock’s story] to any order in his mind, or could

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14. In *Bleak House*, it is even more obvious than in *Martin Chuzzlewit* that the detective novel is not just a detective novel, but a plotting strategy harnessed to greater existential concerns. To quote Lauren Goodlad, “However much the death of a blackmailing lawyer, and the arrest of a foreign lady’s maid with a murderous axe to grind may first titillate and then satisfy, the novel never ceases to identify it’s *raison d’etre* in the far more complicated sanitary plot” (534).
sufficiently comprehend the bearing of one part upon another, to take in all the details at one view. When he at length had the whole narrative clearly before him, John Westlock went on” (696). Martin organizes Westlock’s information visually; he turns it into a map, and reads it using the skills inculcated in him by the Eden disaster. Here he employs the tactics common to both cartographers and writers of realism, understanding the narrative’s contents by limiting its scope (reducing it to order). A change in perspective – reordering the events so that he can obtain a birds-eye view, the typical vantage point offered by cartography – allows Martin to make sense of the narrative. That Dickens chooses to describe Martin’s cognitive functions using explicitly visual language serves to emphasize the centrality of the Eden map both to Martin Chuzzlewit’s development as a character and Martin Chuzzlewit’s development as a novel.

If Martin’s death-defying experience trains him to become a fluent reader, Jonas’s trajectory is the reverse: initially equipped with the knowledge and physical skills necessary both to read and to manipulate the metropolitan space, Jonas’s narrow focus on his own agenda blinds him to the other narratives unfolding around him, and by the novel’s end, his state is one of base illiteracy. It is Jonas’s misreading of his own story that precipitates his downfall. Although Jonas is hyper-sensitive to his own characterization as incipient and later full-fledged criminal, and exhibits a degree of paranoia that makes his fear of observation quite plain, he loses the plot – literally – when he fails to account for the possibility that he has a professional detective on his trail. He can scarcely be blamed. The genre and its characters remain in embryo here. In Martin Chuzzlewit, the detective plot is less a carefully woven thread extending throughout the twists and turns of the novel than it is a rather desperate last-ditch effort to sew up the holes in the social and narrative fabric opened by the author’s exploration of philosophical and practical ramifications of life in a formalized, rigidly mapped environment. Nowhere is this more evident
than in the bizarrely anticlimactic revelation scene, when a host of Jonas’s family members, including both Martin Chuzzlewits, assemble along with Nadgett to recount the tale of Jonas’s treachery and finally publish his crimes. Conscious that doom is closing in, Jonas awaits its arrival with an anxiety shared by the reader. Martin Chuzzlewit the elder arrives, followed by a coterie of assorted minor characters and Martin the younger. Nadgett, the reader learns, is present, but he remains lurking in an ante-room. Finally, the climactic moment arrives, and Jonas is denounced ... as a would-be poisoner. The crime to be published is the purchase of poison he intended to use on his ailing father; but cowardice, perhaps mingled with a few scanty scruples, prevented him. At this point, Nadgett demurely communicates, almost as an afterthought, that Jonas has actually murdered Montague – but again, the text has already branded Jonas as a criminal, so the details, rather than being relished as they are in later detective fictions, are superfluous. Adding a final layer to the unsatisfying nature of this conclusion, Jonas succeeds in poisoning himself to escape prosecution – but only after having once failed through sheer cowardice.

The strangeness of this whole scene reveals the tying up of the detective story for exactly what it is, Dickens’s effort to provide a sense of narrative coherence to a novel whose plot developments were actuated by the author’s own spatial anxieties rather than by any careful outlining or conventional storytelling. He solves the problem of inappropriate circulation in the urban sphere and the potentially unlimited personal license of imaginative geography to which that circulation leads by rewriting it as the narrative of a crime (even if that crime is not quite committed). Murder, unlike spatial and imaginative transgression, has the benefit of being easily identifiable and punishable; and as a comparison of Jonas and Nadgett shows, imaginative geography creates the conditions favorable to the commission of a crime, but subsequently also
creates the conditions necessary for the detection of the crime and apprehension of the criminal, provided the detective is a good one. As a figure representing both authorial agency and readerly satisfaction, the detective must possess both experiential/imaginative knowledge of the city and excellent reading comprehension skills in order to piece together the information gathered according to appropriate generic conventions. Otherwise he risks having control of the narrative wrested away from him by the very criminal his task is to apprehend. The splitting of the detective role between Nudgett as investigator and Martin as reader plainly illustrates that a cartographical trial-by-fire like Martin’s is necessary to the interpretation of the story, thus revealing the spatial dimension of Dickens’s detective fiction in a way that is obfuscated in *Bleak House* largely due to the more sophisticated literary techniques the author brought to bear on the later work. When we understand the issues through which Dickens was striving to work in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and the techniques he struggled to employ, not only does the earlier novel fit much more logically into Dickens’s oeuvre, but it reveals itself as an embryonic *Bleak House*.

IV. “‘These streets!’”¹⁵: Imaginative Cartography and the Crimes of Lady Dedlock

Unlike *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Bleak House* has, dating from its serialization, garnered a justified reputation as a mature, richly plotted detective novel. However, while the previous section of this chapter illustrated the ways in which *Martin Chuzzlewit* participates in the construction of what readers now recognize as the conventional detective narrative, the remainder of the chapter will analyze the features of *Bleak House* that bear a striking resemblance to *Chuzzlewit*. My goal here is not only to strengthen my contention that *Martin Chuzzlewit* should be read primarily as a detective story, but to demonstrate that Dickens’s forays into the developing detective genre were animated by the same concerns about the ethical use of space – particularly the urban space of pedestrianism and imaginative mapping –

¹⁵ *Bleak House*, 910
throughout his career. The spatial dimension of Dickens’s detective fiction is something critics have long acknowledged with respect to *Bleak House*, a novel that “teaches us how to decode [the] city world and navigate through its darker streets.” It “trains us in keen and swift observation, careful judgment, and thoughtful commitment” (Baumgarten 228) while “engaging in semantic and, to a degree, semiotic problems of order and coherence” (Polloczek 463). The chief difference in the more mature novel is that, while in *Chuzzlewit* Dickens uses the detective plot to discipline the chaos of imaginative mapping, in *Bleak House* his goal is to merge personal and abstract cartography into an organic, ethical whole that will depict a correspondingly rational, moral city.

Like *Chuzzlewit*, *Bleak House* is a novel crammed with crimes, although here they are rooted in social neglect and abusive systems of power, like the Court of Chancery, rather than in simple petty villainy at the personal level; and as Elana Gomel writes, “Among the power systems that mold the subject, the most tangible is the city itself ... The city is a machine of power made of flesh and stone” (300). Thus *Bleak House* is thoroughly imbricated in the humanitarian, religious, and scientific aspects of sanitary reform, and much of the novel’s work is to ‘detect’ the proper relations among the text’s seemingly disparate but ultimately connected cast of characters. My intent is not arbitrarily to cut the detective plot from its surrounding social and polemical fabric, but instead to demonstrate how Dickens’s concerns about spatial intervention and regulation are translated onto the plane of the detective narrative, where they become crimes that can be solved, perpetrated by criminals that can be punished, as in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. To that end, my analysis will focus on Lady Dedlock, the text’s most eagerly detected criminal. After exploring how the detective plot reorganizes the elements of Honoria Dedlock’s story to make her conform to its parameters – how it makes her a criminal – I will
concentrate on the pedestrian journey leading up to her death, as I argue that it is here that Dickens works hardest to make Lady Dedlock’s imaginative mapping conform to the dictates of detective fiction and the cartographical project; unsurprisingly, this is also the section in the novel in which the fractures between these two discourses are most visible.

By legalistic standards, the assertion that Dickens defines Lady Dedlock as a criminal suggests a willful contortion of textual events. Part of the tragedy of her death in the penultimate chapter, after all, is that Honoria Dedlock has been cleared of all blame surrounding the murder of Tulkinghorn, the unsettlingly perceptive lawyer whose murder is the novel’s blatant legal crime, and the event that brings Inspector Bucket onto the scene. (In fact, while Bucket’s intense interest in “my lady” suggests that she is a suspect in the lawyer’s death, she is never formally named as such.) Lady Dedlock’s maid Hortense pulled the trigger for personal reasons, not out of any sense of loyalty to her mistress, but because Tulkinghorn did not pay her in the fashion she felt she deserved for providing him information about her employer. The smoothly-moving machinery of the detective story, not jerking and creaking as it does in *Chuzzlewit*, serves to deflect the unwary reader’s gaze from the philosophical and social crime embedded at the heart of the novel, the crime embodied in illegitimate Esther Summerson and whose punishment is Lady Dedlock’s death. Yet when we ask of Inspector Bucket the same question we posed of Nadgett – *what does the detective detect?* – it becomes apparent that the matter of crime-solving in *Bleak House* is not so simple after all. As a functionary of the policing system, Bucket should disappear from the scene when his function has been carried out; yet he remains after Hortense’s arrest, illustrating that in this novel as in *Chuzzlewit*, the crime that is punishable by law is not the crime felt by Charles Dickens to be the most unsettling or in need of a solution. The emotional climax of the novel, the most demanding exercise of Bucket’s faculties comes after
this, with the night-long pursuit of Lady Dedlock by Bucket and Esther through the streets of London and its suburbs. If this is the inspector’s real act of detection, its solution is the discovery of Lady Dedlock’s body on the ground beside her lover’s grave.¹⁶

When Lauren Goodlad writes, “To recognize the profound relation between *Bleak House* and the sanitary movement, it is necessary to revisit the latter’s tortuous and ultimately anticlimactic history” (527), she might just as easily be describing the course of the novel’s embedded detective narrative. Here is an echo of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and the way in which Dickens used the detective plot to solve other, non-criminal problems. While the death of the narrator’s mother is a highly dramatic conclusion, as a resolution to the detective plot, it is both unsatisfying and anticlimactic. Esther has already learned of her parentage; no additional crime has been committed; and, for all his vaunted abilities, Bucket proves nothing but that he can find a corpse.

The presentation of these events as a resolution, and of the resolution as the end of a literalized journey through London’s streets, is in keeping with Dickens’s real interests. Since the goal of the cartographical exercise is to delineate boundaries, prescribe appropriate movement within those boundaries, and enforce that movement, to a great extent the sanitary movement in Britain is a microcosm of the more generalized cartographical frenzy that swept mid-century Victorian society; and, as I have insisted, it is this cartographically-based experience of reality that makes the modern detective story possible. While many scholars, like Goodlad, have examined the relationship between sanitation reform and *Bleak House*, few have looked in a sustained way at the relationship of cartography to the novel outside of its preparatory function – the ground must be surveyed, the streets and waterways measured, before sewers can be laid – or

¹⁶. For a consideration of the accuracy of Dickens’s portrait of a mid-century police investigator, see Linda Strahan, “There’s a Hole in the (Inspector) Bucket: The Victorian Police in Fact and Fiction,” *Clues* 23.3 (Spring 2005): 57-62.
as a helpful adjunct to realism: Dickens’s specific, map-like knowledge of the city adds both authority and zest to his rendering of the metropolis. However, as my reading of *Martin Chuzzlewit* indicates, we must re-evaluate the significance of cartography to *Bleak House* in order to understand how and why Dickens uses the detective plot. By suggesting that we focus on the relationship between mapping and the novel, I am suggesting that we widen our lens and look not at the effect (i.e. sanitation or the detective story) but at the *cause*. By yoking professional and personal narratives of urban space, Dickens struggles to achieve a representation of the city that is both accurate and ethical.

Writing of Dickens as novelist and sanitary reformer, Goodlad argues that “it would be a mistake to infer … that Dickens had become a staunch proponent of the state’s duty not only (negatively) to prevent wrong, but also (positively) to intervene in the lives of individuals and communities” (526). In *Bleak House*, it is even more clearly the case than in *Martin Chuzzlewit* that it is the lived reality of a controlled, minutely described, even mechanized city – the mapped city – that calls the detective genre into being. Only in a realm in which boundaries (social, spatial, ideological) are clearly delineated can their transgression become a matter of public and narrative record. Like the city itself, the novel and the bodies of its characters require the disciplining force of the police in order to impart coherence to their narratives; only through the detective plot can *Bleak House* attain any degree of closure. While, as many critics have recognized, Dickens attempts to use the detective plot to solve the social and spatial crises of urban reform, this authorial maneuver toward “ideological synthesis” (Goodlad 528) can never be fully effective, because the extent to which such prescriptive and punitive regulation of individual movement – of individual agency and identity – is possible or desirable remains a mystery to the author himself. In the detective plot and beyond, “the novel voices an even more
unsettling fear, that the methodology and ideology of reform in some sense merely reproduce and reinforce the social structures that sustain England's pathological condition” (Schwarzbach 96).

Understanding this dialectic is fundamental to understanding the vexed nature of criminality in the text. As Bucket’s persistent interest reveals, it is Lady Dedlock, simultaneously criminalized and victimized, who is at the center of the sprawling novel. While Jonas Chuzzlewit is presented as a mean, penny-pinching ruffian from the reader’s first glimpse of him, the case is quite different with Lady Honoria Dedlock. As the bejeweled, privileged wife of a baronet, Lady Dedlock – “bored to death” by her existence (21) – is a sympathetic character, perhaps because her suppressed feelings participate so authentically in the narratives of more obvious human misery surrounding her. She is the quiet, melancholy nexus from which trouble emanates, an isolated figure languishing in the continuous rain and stagnant mud of mausoleum-like Chesney Wold, the outward stillness of her position belying the chaos that swirls around her. Much as is the case with Jonas Chuzzlewit, the criminal initially apprehended for the crime he didn’t commit, Lady Dedlock’s legal status is unimportant: she will be convicted not by a judge and jury, but by the narrative. The text sets up a syllogism: Inspector Bucket pursues criminals; Inspector Bucket pursues Lady Dedlock; Lady Dedlock, then, must be a criminal. But the nature of her crime is problematic, and contingent, as I will argue, upon a very particular reading of her narrative, which is itself a product of the epistemology of the city as a cartographically defined entity.

Unlike Jonas, Lady Dedlock has neither killed nor attempted to kill anyone. In a legal sense, she is blameless. Like the ambiguously classed women shopping or awaiting an omnibus
on Oxford Street, Lady Dedlock’s ‘crime’ is that of (potentially) deviant movement. Dickens’s heavy-handed foreshadowing, a technique used not to provoke suspense but to heighten affect, reveals the elements of her story relatively early within the novel: as a young woman, Honoria engaged in a sexual relationship with the rakish Captain Hawdon, a.k.a. Nemo, and their liaison resulted in the birth of a daughter Honoria believed to be stillborn, Esther Summerson. These are the scanty facts.

Yet the novel offers no straightforward retelling. Dickens instead devotes, by my calculation, at least three fifths of the 900-page text to reassembling this seemingly simple narrative. The vehicle he employs is the detective plot, but, as I contend, this genre is only one narrative possibility at his disposal, and Lady Dedlock’s story and character are a subject of constant contention. She does not easily fit into the role of fallen-woman-cum-criminal, but constantly threatens to exceed the boundaries prescribed for her or to take control of her story.

The nature of Lady Dedlock’s crime is the best shorthand illustration of what I mean. While Hortense commits a violent homicide and Lady Dedlock becomes the mother of an illegitimate child, Hortense is allowed to live, while Lady Dedlock perishes in the novel’s penultimate chapter. From a moralistic standpoint, it seems that Lady Dedlock’s crime has been adjudged more severe. And yet it is the genre of the detective story that constructs Lady Dedlock’s past as criminal. In an inversion of plot familiar to anyone who has ever read a mystery novel, it is not the crime that establishes the need for detection, but the detection that creates the commission of a crime. Both novels discussed in this chapter illustrate the complicated ideological work being carried out in Dickens’s detective fictions. That the philosophical and social quandary at the heart of each mystery is embedded in the formalized

17. For more on gender, identity, and urban pedestrianism, see the following chapter.
spatial realm of cartography becomes clear when we examine the ways in which the mysteries are solved and the criminals punished.

Lady Dedlock’s crime is, like Jonas Chuzzlewit’s, the act of inappropriate spatial manipulation. In *Bleak House*, this is the fundamental action of her character, and one she repeats on three important occasions. First, there is the initiatory gesture of young, respectable Honoria’s affair with the dissolute Hawdon; then, years later with her marriage to Sir Leicester, there is the exaltation of the fallen woman to the baronet’s drawing room; and finally, there is Lady Dedlock’s flight from her aristocratic home to London’s worst slum, a dramatic enactment of her reversed fortunes. Each of these acts is a violation of class and gender norms, and each is figured in the text as both a spatial transgression and a criminal act. The point I wish to make is that this spatialization of social issues hinges upon a concurrent spatialization of narrative time, and that both of these maneuvers are essential to the presentation of Lady Dedlock’s character and to the detective plot as a whole.

V. Narrative Space, Cartographical Time, and the Megalosaurus in the Room

The collapsing of terms I have identified above as foundational to the novel exemplifies what Robert E. Lougy means when he writes, “*Bleak House* is a novel obsessed with the possible failure or collapse of barricades or gates, haunted by the fear that what does not belong might somehow find a way in, that the unnamed, the non-thing, might find its way into the realm of the named and acknowledged” (480). From the endless rain in Lincolnshire to the filth of Tom-all-Alone’s to the malaise of Chancery to the measles, the text abounds with innumerable examples of this phenomenon; and it is this fear that governs the constant surveillance of Lady Dedlock, an activity in which not only Tulkinghorn and the beau monde are active participants, but in which the reader is implicated. Practically from her first introduction, Lady Dedlock’s character harbors
the possibility of becoming that which she is not – of exceeding her own boundaries. She transgresses boundaries of class, place, chronology, character, and genre, to give only a partial list. In his discussion of filth and abjection, Lougy explains the process at work: “that which has been repressed, hidden, or buried somehow emerges and, by doing so, threatens to collapse or disturb those categories or distinctions that enable society to bestow order and coherence on the world” (480). The elements that exceed boundaries become taboo, linked by the visceral elements of filth, death, and sex; thus the brilliant, fashionable Lady Dedlock, with her haute couture and priceless jewels, is associated with Nemo’s corpse and Jo’s unwanted presence (Lougy 483). Following the theoretical model articulated by Julia Kristeva, Lougy defines filth not as an individual quality but as a state of being, as matter out of place. The corpse, the ghostly figure of Jo, Lady Dedlock in her drawing room: all are liminal figures, transgressors not only of the quotidian boundaries of social custom, but of the all-important boundary separating matter from filth and life from death. Lady Dedlock, perfectly poised though she is, harbors the inherent threat of transgression, of crime; this in turn summons the near-constant surveillance to which she is subjected.

Much of the weighty body of criticism on *Bleak House* reiterates the characteristic movement of the text: whether the focus is Esther’s unstable narrative voice, Bucket’s relentless detection, Jo’s contagiousness, Krook’s viral illiteracy, or even Tulkinghorn’s voracious appetite for secrets, the deflection of critical attention from Lady Dedlock herself participates in the cringing, circuitous ethos of the novel, bringing scrutiny to bear upon this central character chiefly in its obvious and obsessive effort to overlook her. This is not antithetical to surveillance, as it might first seem, because the effort to deflect attention from Lady Dedlock is

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18. Bucket, of course, practices another kind of “overlooking” on his frantic nighttime journey with Esther, as he is able to mount the coach box and determine which way Lady Dedlock has fled.
so laborious as to have the opposite effect. It is Dickens’s masterful way of showing rather than
telling that she has a secret. While critical participation in this ‘overlooking’ sharply curtails
Lady Dedlock’s agency as an active subject, viewing her importance instead as relational (to
Esther, to Hawdon, to Sir Leicester, to Rosa, even to Guppy), by refusing to locate her
specifically in narratological terms – by dislocating her, so to speak, from her narrative
antecedents – both novel and criticism transform Lady Dedlock into a free-floating signifier,
fleeting and pervasive. Like the megalosaurus from the novel’s opening paragraph, Lady
Dedlock has been there all the time, even when her ‘true’ nature has been concealed from view.

The other side of this coin is the constant scrutiny brought to bear upon Lady Dedlock by
some of the novel’s characters (Bucket, Tulkinghorn, and the cadre of servants and functionaries
who surround a baronet’s wife). As with Chuzzlewit, in this text a character is guilty until
proven innocent: the “presumption of guilt operates apart from obvious evidence of crime”
(Thoms 150). The surveillance that clings to Lady Dedlock from the reader’s first introduction to
her suggests that she is tainted; in another reversal, the text presupposes that, because the quasi-
omniscient narrator monitors her so closely, Honoria must have something to hide. For critics
like Thoms, this is a function of Bleak House’s primary purpose as a social problem novel, a text
invested not in the guilt or innocence of individuals but in “humankind’s innate depravity” (150).
In legal terms, Lady Dedlock may be innocent and Hortense guilty, but either way, society is
indicted. That is to say, what the detective is detecting is the corrupt state of modern society. I
don’t disagree, but though the intense surveillance Thoms recognizes may be, to an extent, the
self-policing of a guilt-ridden society, a strictly moralistic interpretation obfuscates the concrete
spatial interventions and the cartographical epistemology that render such surveillance feasible.

While Jonas conceives of himself as a would-be criminal, Bleak House’s opening chapter
suggests that Lady Dedlock participates in the world’s opinion of her as nothing more alarming than a fashionable figurehead and, because she is secure in her position, takes that surveillance for granted:

She supposes herself to be an inscrutable Being, quite out of the reach and ken of ordinary mortals – seeing herself in her glass, where indeed she looks so. Yet, every dim little star revolving about her, from her maid to the manager of the Italian Opera, knows her weaknesses, prejudices, follies, haughtinesses, and caprices; and lives upon as accurate a calculation and as nice a measure of her moral nature, as her dress-maker takes of her physical proportions. Is a new dress, a new custom, a new singer, a new dancer, a new form of jewellery, a new dwarf or giant, a new chapel, a new anything, to be set up? There are deferential people, in a dozen callings, whom my Lady Dedlock suspects of nothing but prostration before her, who can tell you how to manage her as if she were a baby; who do nothing but nurse her all their lives; who, humbly affecting to follow with profound subservience, lead her and her whole troop after them … Therefore, while Mr Tulkinghorn may not know what is passing in the Dedlock mind at present, it is very possible that he may. (24-25)

It is not that Lady Dedlock is unaware of her exalted position as the object of intense observation – as one of the ‘Galaxy of British Beauties,’ how could she be? – but that she conceives of herself as illegible, uninterpretable. And yet, we are told, Tulkinghorn may be working away as an interpreter all the time, not so far afield from the dressmakers or hairdressers schooled in reading every expression that flits across her ladyship’s countenance. Lady Dedlock’s belief in her illegibility has two important implications: the first is that she does not
yet fear Tulkinghorn’s reading and exposure of her guilt because she has not yet experienced that guilt; the second is that what she perceives as the inability of others to interpret her actions and make sense of her narrative is more properly a reflection of her own illiteracy. She cannot read her own story because she lacks the vital information – the knowledge of Esther’s existence – that will make such a reading possible. Here already we see a detective mode (surveillance) made possible by cartographical technologies, and with it the re-ordering of narrative elements necessary to establish Lady Dedlock’s criminality. An event – Honoria’s affair with Hawdon – has occurred, but that event is not a crime until the detective story represents it as one.

*Bleak House* works as a detective story because chronology is abolished. The mysteries are mysterious because the text presents crucial bits of information out of the order that makes them cohere into a narrative; it is the detective’s job to reassemble them, to elucidate cause and effect and to make meaning. Only after this has been accomplished can we make straightforward statements such as *Honoria and Hawdon had a sexual relationship that resulted in Esther’s birth* or *Hortense killed Tulkinghorn*. As the novel opens, the present is almost completely severed from the past; Bucket’s job is to stitch past and present together in accordance with the standards of contemporary reality – the standards of the detective story. This is an expected feature in any detective story, but unusually Dickens provides his readers with nearly all the information needed to solve the text’s mysteries before he gives them to his police inspector. This emphasizes the crucial import of the reordering itself, particularly to the narrative of Esther’s parentage and birth, the novel’s central mystery. In this as much as in his specific engagement with sanitary reform, Dickens represents a feature of historical reality in nineteenth-century London: the perception of a definitive break between the recent past and the lived present, due in large part to the popularization of the cartographical mode of representation and knowledge.
As Emily Heady argues in her extended analysis of the novel’s initial paragraph, which Dickens refuses to endow with a main verb, the text “both thematizes and critiques London’s temporally troublesome progress, its repetitious mucking toward nothing in particular, with a series of temporally ambiguous images that show the past in conversation with the present” (317); “Dickens, then, uses his familiar critiques of utilitarian and traditionalist ideologies to attack the mother of all Victorian metanarratives: the narrative of progress” (315). The recognition that harnessing progress to chronology, the teleological narrative of the bettering of society, is problematic in this novel is a necessary element of my own analysis, as it explains why Lady Dedlock’s story is that of a schizophrenic dialog between past and present. Her plot frustrates the concept of linear narrative, because her past cannot exist – it cannot have meaning – without her present. As Lougy writes, “Lady Dedlock is situated at the site of birth, not so much the actual birth of Esther, an unrecoverable event buried deep in the midst of multiple layers of narratives, but rather at that point in the novel when mother and daughter become fully aware of each other’s existence” (490); the most meaningful event in Lady Dedlock’s life should be shrouded in the past but instead is emphatically present. This is because the advent of hyper-mapped space has occurred after Honoria’s fling with Captain Hawdon and Esther’s conception, severing the lived reality of the past from the experiential present even as it furnishes the means to unite them conceptually.

Again like the megalosaurus cluttering up Holborn Hill in the novel’s opening paragraph, Lady Dedlock’s past is literally prehistoric. The London of the novel’s present does not behave like the London of Honoria’s youth. A liaison like the cross-class, cross-space relationship of Honoria and Hawdon is no longer possible in an environment – in an epistemology – in which not even Jo the crossing-sweep is able to remain anonymous or go off the grid. Hawdon’s chosen
pseudonym makes this plain: as No One, Nemo is very much someone. As part of the process of rampant cartographical inscription, young Honoria’s past behavior is now encoded according to the standards of modern cartographical space and its genre par excellence, the detective story: by choosing to narrate her in this way, the text (re)creates her past, turning it into the fallen-woman narrative. That is to say, it is not due to mere happenstance that Lady Dedlock discovers the existence of the daughter she believed to be stillborn when she does, in the present-day of *Bleak House*, rather than during Esther’s childhood; it is because her reality has been transformed by the revolution in spatial perception undergone by British society and reflected by spatially-minded writers like the canny Dickens. Indeed, both *Bleak House* and Bleak House mimetically suggest the state of early-1850s London. They are spaces that are irregular, difficult to map and to know, not planned according to any coherent architectural or cartographical scheme. While both are ultimately knowable through experience and the application of disciplinary mechanisms (the author’s pen, the police force, Esther’s basket of housekeeping keys, and the social-scientific logic underlying all three), they nevertheless hint at unexplored nooks and crannies, excesses of meaning that cannot be written, detected, or dusted away. The urban chronotope of Bleak House maps out the social and psychic divisions of urban experience,” Gomel notes. “But if the novel is a map of the city, it is a map that is congruent with its object” (300).

Thus spatial reality becomes narrative reality, and as such governs not only place but time. “If the suspense of the first reading is a product of the temporal deployment of the plot, retrospective moments create a spatial dimension with its own aesthetic value. By looking back on what we have read, we command the perspective of the crow, described (ch. 10) skimming over the leaden sky one afternoon as day closes in,” notes David Paroissien. “From that elevated point one can see Cook’s Court, Chancery Lane, and Lincoln’s Inn Garden in a single glance
revealing the contiguity and connectedness of seemingly unrelated places” (292). The time of the past cannot be reconstituted, but the connections between the novel’s disparate settings can. If it is Bucket’s pursuit of Lady Dedlock that turns her into a criminal – a stock character in the detective plot – it is her flight that allows her to assert her identity by articulating the narrative of herself that she wishes to transmit. Unlike Jonas Chuzzlewit, who mentally remaps his experiential reality to conform to the needs of his criminal pursuits, when Lady Dedlock discovers her daughter’s existence, she is made aware that her reality has been changed: by the progress of time, by cartographical-scientific intervention, and, most of all, by the detective plot. When Lady Dedlock discovers Esther, she discovers a new version of reality that has made her a criminal and a fallen woman; this is an illustration of Elana Gomel’s assertion that the “chronotope is to the fictional world of the text what Einstein’s space/time continuum is to our world: the condition of its intelligibility” (Gomel 299); for Lady Dedlock’s narrative to have meaning within the larger context of the Bleak House narrative, their dissonant interpretations of space-time must be reconciled. Once narrative time has been transposed onto the plane of narrative space, and Honoria’s relationship with Hawdon reconfigured as an illicit journey from upper-class respectability to squalid poverty in Tom-all-Alone’s, the same process can be applied to her ‘criminal act.’ Lady Dedlock’s crime, from its initiatory gesture of cross-class sexual contact to its termination in the cemetery, is embodied in her solitary figure and literalized by its reduction to the simple, highly visible act of moving in an inappropriate manner through an inappropriate area of urban space. Only when all the terms are collapsed in this way can the mystery at the core of Bleak House be solved by the discovery of Lady Dedlock’s corpse and its return to its proper, i.e. class-bound and private, physical location in the Dedlock family tomb.
The malleability of place in *Bleak House* is not separate from, but part and parcel of, the process of mapping, an inevitable consequence. Baumgarten notes,

For Dickens, geographical place has a dynamic quality. Even naming a location does not forestall indeterminacy: Dickens anticipates, as it were, Heisenberg’s intuition that the act of measurement changes the observed situation — Bleak House, for instance, turns into its opposite in the course of the novel that starts by de-realizing London. As place is destabilized, time may warp too, and the spatio-temporal instability becomes a feature of character identity, a sociological reality, a psychic condition, and a moral destiny ... The experience of Dickens’s London defies mapping ... precisely when such coding becomes necessary. (224)

The use of a physical journey in order to reveal a pre-existing connection among characters – to reconnect the spaces on the map – is the most prevalent trope in *Bleak House*, a clear reflection of the novel’s spatial logic. As in Chuzzlewit, the primary condition of the Dickensian city is movement. “In contrast to the negative judgment of the city (“God made the country, man made the town”), Dickens represents the city as the default modern condition but not as a given: his city is in process of transformation, in its splendor and misery and the range in between — and thus as the condition for the new complex experience of his era. Dickens’s city is in constant motion, as are his protagonists” (Baumgarten 219-220).

Dickens assembles a frenetic cast of characters and uses each to scaffold examples of proper or improper movement into the text. Esther, that beacon of health and light, is a prodigious walker. She is not only a continuous blur of motion as she travels between London and Bleak House, but she scurries among London’s different neighborhoods on errands of comfort and utility, as when she “trot[s] about” with Richard “all day long, buying a variety of
things” (392) to kit him out for one of his failed forays into the professional world. Lady Dedlock ricochets from Lincolnshire to Paris to London, while the Bleak House family remains in perpetual motion as its members travel to London and to Boythorn’s estate. This journey motif crosses the boundaries of class: Colonel George routinely walks miles to visit friends, and travels from the industrial north to Lincolnshire to see his family, while Jenny, the wife of an itinerant laborer, turns up repeatedly both in Lincolnshire and London. The aforementioned are examples of class- and gender-appropriate travel. On the darker end of the spectrum, there is Jo, the abject crossing-sweeper whose very existence is criminalized, always “a moving and a moving on” (308) until his presence spreads smallpox among the Bleak House family in a more brutally literal version of Lady Dedlock’s own story.

Fittingly, only Jo’s journeying receives anything approaching the amount of attention paid to Lady Dedlock’s movements, because both are codified as deviant. Like John Snow with his cholera maps, Dickens devotes himself to retracing every step taken by Lady Dedock, from the moment her body became contaminated by unregulated circulation, through the spread of the disease to her illegitimate daughter and the others affected by her acts, to her death. As Bucket retraces the route she has taken after fleeing from her home, he simultaneously retraces each ‘step’ she has taken on her long fall from grace. The physical movements of her body constitute the recuperated narrative of her previously obscured crime. This is in keeping with the tenor of the text, which is like a marathon game of Risk, with Dickens the commanding general who remains constantly aware of the position of every piece on the massive game board. In this universe, Lady Dedlock can reassert authorship of the identity that has been colonized by the detective genre only by physically returning to the scene of the crime, even though the pilgrimage must end in her death.
VI. Pedestrianism and Narrative Agency

Once Honoria’s past has been retold in terms of criminal activity, she emerges as a criminal character; but the transition is not an easy one. Lady Dedlock’s fate can only provide the poignant, cathartic resolution the novel requires if she remains sympathetic even while the text dictates that she be harshly punished. This creates tension between the emotional core and detective plot of *Bleak House*, illustrated by Dickens’s characterization of Inspector Bucket. The eerie way in which Tulkinghorn’s character merges into Bucket’s, as they carry out the same functions of observation and divulgence, is only one of the red flags that should be visible to readers who want to cast Bucket as the hero of *Bleak House*. Again, the narrative maneuvering is simple but ingenious. Because Bucket determines that Tulkinghorn’s murder was connected to his information-gathering about Lady Dedlock, the police investigation of the lawyer’s death is subsumed by Bucket’s curiosity about Honoria in a way that feels organic. Bucket is no longer strictly investigating a crime punishable under the law, but is complicit in Tulkinghorn’s sinister surveillance. Quite clearly, “Dickens does not fail to point toward the ways in which Bucket, well-intentioned though he may be, acts as agent for the very political and social institutions the novel so forcefully attacks” (Schwarzbach 99).

Thoms situates the detective in terms of narrative agency, proclaiming, “The investigator’s authorial role as one who pieces together and hence ‘writes’ the story of the crime is a motif common to both the criticism and practice of detective fiction. Even the earliest masters of the form conceive of the detective’s work as the definition of an intelligible narrative”

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19. I agree with Goodlad’s assessment that what Dickens aims for is “a suitably English relation between the individual and the society: one that is (among other desiderata) stable but democratic, rational but compassionate, authoritative but liberal” (528). Bucket himself is neither a hero nor a villain; more than characteristics, he can be said to possess functions. For Goodlad, the mitigating factor distinguishing Bucket from Tulkinghorn, who represents the “latent instrumentality” of “modern expertise ... at its most dangerously inhuman” (539) is charisma. In other words, if Bucket is a functionary, Tulkinghorn is an agency.
(148). As an exponent of legible, cartographical space, the detective embodies this authorial and disciplinary function; but Thoms only hints at the degree to which this “definition” is not an authoring but a rewriting, or writing over, a preexistent narrative. In these terms, and particularly in *Bleak House*, detection is the cannibalizing of someone else’s narrative in accord with “the insatiable demand for stories that motivates the novel’s many inquisitive characters” (149). This is germane to Lady Dedlock, whose personal identity dissipates when she becomes the central node in the detective plot – that is, when she becomes a character in someone else’s (Bucket’s, Tulkinghorn’s, the author’s, the reader’s) story. As I have suggested, Dickens’s objection to Edwin Chadwick’s version of sanitary reform – that “In Chadwick’s singular imagination, the notion of the social body lost its personal undertones, prompting technological and bureaucratic solutions” (Goodlad 531) – is the problem with his characterization of Inspector Bucket. The larger existential quandary surrounding the detective figure in Dickens interrogates the mechanism necessary to any form of social or spatial control: it assumes that spaces are uniform, and that the bodies that inhabit them (should) move in uniform ways. Only beginning with this supposition can these “technological and bureaucratic solutions” be proposed, let alone enacted.

Such a solution is not appropriate to Lady Dedlock’s situation; and here is where the rewriting and reorganization inherent to the detective plot do violence to her characterization. Although Honoria has a child out of wedlock, the text carefully obscures Esther’s parentage, and thus Lady Dedlock’s history, for much of the novel. As the very term *social evil* implies, an essential aspect of this identity category is the recognition of the quality (“evil”) by society. The detective plot apparently forces Honoria into this category. At novel’s end, Lady Dedlock, her remains secreted in the Dedlock family vault, is very much the fallen women. The obvious message is a conservative one: if a woman falls, then she is a criminal, and must be punished for
her crime. However, her strange case invites us to reconsider the relationship linking the terms of this syllogism to one another, particularly when it comes to the chronological dimension of causality. There are two ways to read Lady Dedlock’s death. Either the realization of an essential truth about herself kills her (that is, it engenders the desire to die, and Lady Dedlock then subjects herself to physical conditions that will kill her, in a species of prettily attenuated suicide), or the streets themselves kill her by literally making her a streetwalker and thus a social evil. Her death on the ground in an overcrowded, poorly maintained cemetery in the darkest, filthiest, most obscure slum in London, befits the most abject and forlorn of prostitutes.

Sally Ledger points out the “melodramatic antecedents” notably common to many of the female characters in *Bleak House*; reading Lady Dedlock as “the archetypal fallen woman” (595), she notes, “Lady Dedlock, the Lady of the Manor, merges, towards the novel’s close, with the prostitute who drowns herself in the Thames: the ‘doubling’ of aristocratic lady and forsaken prostitute is carefully staged” (595). Focusing on this staginess – one can almost hear the scenery creak and smell the greasepaint – Ledger engages in a close-reading of the scene in which Esther finds the body of her mother, the body she thinks belongs to the unfortunate Jenny: “Both Jenny, the bricklayer’s wife, and Lady Dedlock, the wife of a Baronet, have lost their babies: the one to poverty and disease, the other to the moral codes of social propriety. Their equality in victimhood is dramatically expressed in the above scene, Dickens engaging here and throughout the novel in a cross-class account of women’s oppression” (595).

This doubling offers another potential explanation for Lady Dedlock’s assumption of the ragged disguise: she and the bricklayer’s wife have, literally as well as figuratively, switched places – despite her poverty, Jenny is, presumably, a lawful wife, while Honoria Dedlock is anathema. For Huguet, despite what she sees as Lady Dedlock’s “orchestrat[ion of] her own
cruel self-humiliation by twice donning a social inferior’s garb” (24), the gesture of disguise is meaningless, a merely cosmetic costume change possessing “no enduring moral significance.” Responding much like an emotive Victorian reader – or much like the novel’s demi-omniscient narrator – Huguet decides, “Whatever dress she puts on, Lady Dedlock is a lady and no imposter … the novel closes on a groundbreaking conception of true legitimacy” when Honoria is interred in the Dedlock family mausoleum. In this reading, not only Lady Dedlock’s flight, but her death and criminalization by the detective narrative, ultimately lack significance, as she is posthumously returned to her elevated social station, restoring the pre-existing equilibrium.

I want to focus, however, on Lady Dedlock’s decision to flee her privileged life as an assertion of narrative control. For Jonas Chuzzlewit as for the typical criminal, the events leading to his capture and death herald a loss of narrative and imaginative control. For Honoria Dedlock, while the discovery of her criminal past turns her personal narrative into fodder for the detective-story mill, her decision to embrace and assert that identity allows her (briefly) to regain control of her narrative. Even the choice of a melodramatic role is integral to the process of recuperation and reconnection, as Lady Dedlock has chosen to revert to an older genre than detective fiction, one that would have been popular in her lost youth. The dissonance between the two roles of melodramatic heroine and criminal is subtle, thanks to the generalized acceptance of the criminalization of certain feminine modes of movement through the urban landscape, particularly that of streetwalking; but it is undeniably present, as indicated by Lady Dedlock’s ability to thwart Inspector Bucket’s pursuit.

Honoria’s street-walking is not merely circumstantial, as it would be for a poor woman who has nowhere to go and no way to earn her living, but necessitated by the demands of the novel’s narrative and spatial economy. In other words, while Honoria Dedlock may ultimately
resemble the whore-with-a-heart-of-gold archetype, she walks the street not to ply her trade but in response to an internal impetus that is itself rooted in a societal and narrative convention, as if she must carry out her ill-fated flight in order to recognize herself and so that others may also recognize her. Her own words make this explicit. It is not shame, guilt, or bodily weakness that kills her, but “These streets!” Two narratives of female pedestrianism converge in her narrative: the experience of urban walking creates in Lady Dedlock an altered state of consciousness that leads her to recognize an essential truth (her condition as social evil) even as it simultaneously creates that condition (a bejewelled Lady Dedlock in her drawing room at Chesney Wold is not a social evil).

By taking to the streets, Lady Dedlock participates in an active assertion rather than a passive acceptance of narrative identity. By leaving her home and plunging into the promiscuity of the city streets, she participates in a trope commonly employed by Dickens, what Patrick Parrinder calls “a reconstitution of identity” typically associated with “a rise or fall in fortune [as] the medium of transformation. Such transformations are often associated with entering the city, such as when Pip goes to London to begin life as a gentleman.” This comparison acknowledges both the importance of the city and the physical journey to Lady Dedlock’s narrative development. As her physical activity initiated her story in the time before Esther’s birth, so it allows her to regain control of it. Throughout the novel, Lady Dedlock’s infrequent bursts of irrepressible emotion are associated with walking, as if that emotion demands some type of physical expression. In the carriage, when Sir Leicester reads Tulkinghorn’s first

20. That Lady Dedlock’s death is suicidal, but not precisely suicide, is an important distinction. “Committing suicide would in fact have made her legally guilty, in terms of a felony committed against her self,” notes Dieter Paul Polloczek. He, too, identifies a transformative power in the manner of her death, noting that it “translates unnatural [legal] death [before the law and in Chancery] into redemptive death, she can be said to displace the semantics of two legal fictions that figure forth meanings of her various deaths ... [S]he ultimately chooses not to leave the manipulation of legal fictions to the lawyers” (Polloczek 468).
ominous message (“I have something to tell her on her return, in reference to the person who copied the affidavit in the Chancery suit, which so powerfully stimulated her curiosity. I have seen him”) to his wife, she responds, “I should like to walk a little” (183-184) – she even repeats it, adamantly. Esther is prone to the same restlessness, relentlessly battling down her urge to walk rather than ride through the bitter cold night as she accompanies Inspector Bucket in pursuit of her mother, suggesting something like a genealogy of pedestrianism. Indeed, for Lady Dedlock as for other female pedestrians in fiction contemporary to *Bleak House*, the performance of public streetwalking is the crucible through which her identity is formed and expressed. Because of the spatio-temporal ethos of the novel, Lady Dedlock’s best mode of articulating her story is through articulate movement.

As she writes over the detective story Honoria Dedlock mimics Dickens the popular author, manipulating the tropes of melodrama, even as she wrests control away from her creator and reorients her narrative, expressing her private sense of her identity. The relationship between her compulsive walking and her reorganization of her own narrative becomes clear; and we see that Lady Dedlock’s pedestrian activity is not an accessory to, but an integral part of, her self-expression. It is through her walking of the city, an act whose pilgrimage-like qualities are often overshadowed by emphasis on the legend of Chesney Wold’s Ghost Walk, that Lady Dedlock can unite the severed elements of herself – the prehistoric and the modern – and reform a coherent, complete identity. Perhaps paradoxically, by doing this, Lady Dedlock rewrites her early youth in the terms she has osmotically absorbed in the rigidly structured, predictable, organized and scrutinized space of her adulthood: she is not retelling but *creating* a personal narrative that mimics and reiterates the conventions of the fallen-woman narrative.
Honoria’s flight from her home to Tom-all-Alone’s is a product of her imaginative mapping of the city and, with it, her own story. By travelling toward the burial ground where Nemo’s remains are housed, Lady Dedlock is simultaneously moving into the past, to the origin of her relationship with Esther’s father, and into the future she has chosen for herself as a fitting end to her tale. Her understanding of the geographical, atemporal nature of her environment is illustrated by an incident that takes place shortly before the end of her journey. When Honoria gives her watch to Jenny’s husband as payment for services rendered, she in essence gives away both her past and her future. While this obviously foreshadows her death, it is also a potentially freeing gesture. It severs her reality simultaneously from a past that has been re-articulated by the narrative in terms foreign to her, and any iterations of a potential future alternative to the one she has embraced. Like the long walk and the assumption of Jenny’s clothing, it is an assertion of narrative identity that chafes against the constraints of the detective plot.

The journey, as the climax of the novel and the path to resolution of all that remains mysterious, reveals Dickens’s most obvious effort to integrate imaginative cartography, as embodied in Lady Dedlock, with scientific cartography, as personified by Bucket (the exponent of the detective and policing function). The author almost succeeds in rendering the two maps identical: as I have said, Lady Dedlock’s return to the scene of her ‘crime’ is a literalization of the entire detective plot on the spatial plane. However, not only does Lady Dedlock craft her death scene as a melodramatic denouement rather than as the capture of a criminal, but she eludes Bucket’s grasp and is able to assert control over her own fate. He finds her, but not before she has succeeded in carrying out her intention of ending her own life in order to keep the honor of her husband and illegitimate daughter from ignominy – to save them from the Inspector Buckets of the world. The fact that the streets kill her shows both the crucial role of her
movement through these spaces to the plot of the novel and the importance of the cityscape to her story; pacing indefatigably in her boudoir, Lady Dedlock is both innocuous and perfectly healthy. Only the narration of these events through Esther’s gaze, with the accompanying coloration of intense emotion, allows these events to be presented as a cathartic resolution rather than as what they really are: a failure of the detective plot.

The text tacitly acknowledges the failure of the detective plot to bring narrative closure and coherence to its urban environment by abruptly dislocating its characters immediately after Bucket and Esther stumble upon Lady Dedlock’s body. Schwarzbach writes,

At the end Dickens removes the main protagonists to "a rustic cottage of dolls' rooms" in "a rich and smiling country" off in Yorkshire, complete with a verandah overgrown with scented vines and with a view of a nearby "cheerful town" (chap. 64, p. 856). The stock elements of what Ruskin condescendingly but accurately called Dickens's "Cockney" version of the English countryside—as inaccurate a fantasy as could be imagined—represent a retreat from the city and its contagion and from any attempt to address its overwhelming symptoms. The novel achieves a surface confidence in closure but only at the cost of engagement with the urban actuality it has so powerfully and negatively dramatized. (101)

Thus what the end of *Bleak House* maps is not the inevitable triumph of the rational, legible, scientifically-mapped metropolis – the London of the detective plot and sanitation reform – over imaginative cartography, but the same dilemma that animates *Martin Chuzzlewit*: how to reconcile these two forms of spatial perception and organization in a way that is both accurate and ethical.\(^1\) While Charles Dickens harnessed the embryonic genre of detective fiction to these

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\(^1\) The lack of closure in *Bleak House* is a subject of frequent critical commentary. Writing of the role of equity in the text, Dieter Paul Polloczek identifies the same ethical dilemma and inherent distrust I see in Dickens’s attempt to
pervasive issues, using the genre that is par excellence a product of the modern city in order to
detect the body of that city itself and to produce two detective novels – one brilliant, and one
brilliantly flawed – in the process, he was certainly not the only mid-Victorian author to grapple
with spatial dilemmas inherent to the cartographical mode of knowing the metropolis. Neither is
detective fiction the only or the most logical form into which to channel these concerns.
Accordingly, my next chapter turns toward sensation fiction, the literary genre that is most
emphatically a product of quotidian realities and anxieties in 1850s Britain, and specifically to
the spatial controversy I identify at the foundation of the genre, a controversy that quite literally
comes on Lady Dedlock’s heels. I am referring to a woman’s right to go for a walk.

use the equally formalized, rigid discourse of cartography to solve social and urban ills: “By means of its specific
formal disintegration in terms of length, density, and closure, the text participates in, and is meant to influence,
symptoms of what many of Dickens’s contemporaries perceive as the role of the law in social and psychological
disintegration. However, the perceived disconnection among these symptoms may already express a defense
mechanism. Dickens’s contemporaries may already be guarding themselves against what one might call an arbitrary
distribution of disappointment in the context of unsecured commercial and moral expectations” (463).
CHAPTER TWO
Illegibility Takes a Walk: Anne Catherick and the Problem of Narratability in *The Woman in White*

I. Introduction

From the reader’s initial glimpse of Anne Catherick in chapter three of *The Woman in White* (1859–60), the first and best-known of Wilkie Collins’s wildly successful sensation novels, the titular character is an unruly, impatient figure, given to abrupt movements, sudden appearances followed by equally rapid disappearances, and startling eruptions of speech and emotion. Her oft-quoted introduction to the novel’s organizing narrator, Walter Hartright, establishes the pattern that will characterize her comings and goings:

> [I]n one moment, every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me.

> I turned on the instant, with my fingers tightening round the handle of my stick.

> There, in the middle of the broad, bright high-road – there, as if it had that moment sprung out of the earth or dropped from the heaven – stood the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments; her face bent in grave inquiry on mine, her hand pointing to the dark cloud over London, as I faced her.

> I was far too seriously startled by the suddenness with which this extraordinary apparition stood before me, in the dead of night and in that lonely place, to ask what she wanted. The strange woman spoke first.

> “Is that the road to London?” she said. (20)

When Walter glimpses the “extraordinary apparition” that has suddenly burst into the
middle of the high road, he twice within the span of a page describes himself as “startled,” but his defensive physiological response, extreme bewilderment, and immediate suspicion indicate that the reader has stumbled onto a curious role-reversal: while the slender, unprotected damsel-in-distress appears anxious but speaks clearly, if “rapidly,” and remains self-possessed, Walter, the young man who has just boldly opted to take a leisurely stroll down a lonely road after midnight, is terrified. In his “unnecessary and exaggerated” fright, Andrew Mangham locates “an awakening sense of the dangerous possibilities of his own heterosexual desire” (“‘What Could’” 121); in context, Anne stands in for Laura Fairlie, the genteel young heiress who will capture Walter’s heart, and whom the narrator has not yet seen. When the drawing-master meets Laura, the reader swiftly notices the strong resemblance between Laura and Anne; so in turn, like a reflection in a house of mirrors, Laura also stands in for Anne, because it is the woman in white who enters the novel first. “His frenetic question ‘what could I do? … what could I do?’ could be read not only as a justification of his helping a dubious woman, but as a consideration of what the situation could have enabled him to do to Anne” (Mangham, “‘What Could’” 121). In the scene that strikes the key note for sensation fiction, as far as action goes, “little happens”; rather, “the sensation depends not on overt thrills, but on the shock to Hartright's early-Victorian sensibilities,” as the novel's first epoch is set in 1849 (Rance 3).

If part of Walter’s excessively emotive response is a sudden, vertigo-like fear of his own possible actions, as if a chasm has suddenly opened up within his otherwise unremarkable character, the balance of that fear is certainly caused by Anne Catherick herself. If Anne is a

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22. I agree with Rance, who argues that the 1849 setting is more than a plot device that allows Collins to set the end of the narrative in a happier “present.” Rance contends that Collins was interested in “exploring the pre-history of the mood crisis in the 1860s” (82). This does not detract from, but rather contributes to, the contemporary feeling of the novel. By foregrounding Walter's meeting with Anne and tracing various characters' responses to such a body in such a situation, Collins can also trace the process through which the female pedestrian became a focal point of anxiety during the 1850s, an anxiety with which his readers would have been familiar.
distressed damsel, she produces the startling effect of giving her prospective knight in shining armor the desire to run away. As the whiteness of her garments suggests, Walter stands at the head of a line of characters eager to perceive Anne as a blank space waiting to be filled, and they attempt to do this by deciphering the signs written on her body. Although he encounters Anne at “nearly one o’clock” in the morning, Walter finds “nothing wild, nothing immodest in her manner: it was quiet and self-controlled, a little melancholy and a little touched by suspicion,” and while it is “not exactly the manner of a lady” neither is it “the manner of a woman in the humblest rank of life” (20-21). He is baffled: “What sort of a woman she was, and how she came to be out alone in the high-road, an hour after midnight, I altogether failed to guess” (21). And yet, of course, the one thing he decides immediately is that Anne cannot be a lady because, as his repeated emphasis on the time indicates, no lady would be in such a spot at such an hour, never mind alone and initiating a conversation with a stranger.  

Some critics have suggested that the root of Walter’s fear and trembling is actually fear of what Anne might do to him: “Walter prepares for attack and metaphorically protects his manhood from a woman that may well be some form of sexual predator” (Garrison 12). Indeed, Margaret Oliphant’s praise for the novel and for this scene in particular in her 1862 Blackwood’s review hinges upon her appreciation of Collins’s ‘delicacy,’ a term she uses twice. As Laurie Garrison contends, Oliphant's choice of words signifies in a specific Victorian way: “Oliphant is aware of the sexual charge evoked here but she finds this acceptable because Collins never allows these hints towards sexual transgression to overflow into open representation” (12). Thus,

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as with the umbrella term ‘sensation’ itself, what is being evoked is ambiguity. A meaning is suggested but not prescribed, so multiple meaning remain possible. Talairach-Vielmas goes still further, reading Walter’s paranoia as an indication that Hartright silently assumes Anne’s untimely presence means she is a prostitute, and might thus transmit venereal disease through her casual touch.²⁴

Although in his narration Walter purports to accept the woman in white as a hapless victim, at least of circumstances (being alone in the middle of the night on an unfamiliar road) if not definitely of an actual crime, by the end of the chapter he explicitly articulates the suspicion that has been implicit from the instant of Anne’s appearance, latent in every line of the drawing-master’s depiction of her and explanation of his own response: that she is not a victim, but a criminal. Even his insistence that “the grossest of mankind could not have misconstrued her motive in speaking, even at that suspiciously late hour and in that suspiciously lonely place” plainly states that the artist is certain he does, indeed, have reason to suspect Anne’s motives (21). As if it’s a nervous tic, Walter cannot avoid the paralepsis in his narration.

While the previous chapter focused on the portrayal of feminine pedestrian habits in the context of detective fiction and its melodramatic antecedents, the work of this chapter is to situate the body of the lone walking woman in the adjacent realm of sensation fiction. As the passage above from *The Woman in White* illustrates, such a body – Anne Catherick's body – and its encounter with the masculine spectator-cum-narrator is the archetypal site of collective anxiety in the genre, portraying what Rachel Teukolsky calls “sensation as spectacle, beheld by both narrator and reader” (433). The narrative response to her perceived deviance will ultimately be expressed not primarily in terms of criminality, as Walter initially suggests, but of insanity.

As with Dickens's Lady Dedlock, *The Woman in White* explores not how the walking woman fuses cartographical with personal knowledge in order imaginatively to remap urban space – her ability to perceive and manipulate her environment – but on others' perceptions of that act. The project of the text is to map Anne onto the cityscape and narrative plan in order to establish a fixed, permanent reading of a young woman in her situation (unaccompanied on a public thoroughfare in the middle of the night).

The first section of this chapter is devoted to explaining why such a fixed reading of Anne's body is unattainable. While many critics have argued that Anne's illegibility is due to her murky class position or the potential taint of mental instability, the point I will make is that these factors are expressed first and foremost through her physical location and her uncertain movements. To this end I consider Anne Catherick in the historical context of the 1862 debate on middle-class women walking alone on London's busy streets. As Eliza Lynn Linton's “Out Walking” and letters by (male) writers to the *Times* show, the unstable meanings of the hyper-mapped nineteenth-century city were in turn mapped onto the bodies of middle-class, or potentially middle-class, women moving through that space; thus the women's bodies are highly unstable signifiers in the prose of the period. After turning to the ways in which *The Woman in White* mirrors this process in its attempt to interpret Anne Catherick's embodied identity, I will conclude by exploring the way in which Collins strategically limits readerly access to Anne's consciousness, a rhetorical move that allows the author to map the terrain of insanity onto Anne's body and her narrative without letting her speak for herself.²⁵ This deployment of imaginative mapping is, I contend, essential to the development of many of the tropes readers and scholars alike associate with the sensation genre.

²⁵ It is not that limited access to a character's consciousness necessarily results in the conclusion that the character is insane; but that this limited access allows Collins continually to imply that Anne is insane without ever giving direct confirmation or denial. Thus, this restricted access to Anne's interiority guarantees that she remains illegible.
II. “‘Is that the road to London?’”\textsuperscript{26}: Gendered Pedestrianism at Mid-Century

Like Walter’s presence in the dusty city languishing under the summer sun, Anne’s late-night appearance is unseasonable. “The long hot summer was drawing to a close; and we, the weary pilgrims of the London pavement, were beginning to think of the cloud-shadows on the corn-fields, and the autumn breezes on the sea-shore,” Walter confides just before his unanticipated encounter with the woman in white (6). London and its pavements, the sentence suggests, are woefully far removed from such rural holiday delights as cornfields and sea breezes; so the other member of that class of weary pedestrians among whom Hartright includes himself presumably must seek their fresh air and recreation where and how they can find it, i.e. near London and on foot. Their unifying characteristics are limited to two: they are Londoners and pedestrians. Walter has opted to take just such an excursion, having “determined to stroll home in the purer air, by the most round-about way I could take; to follow the white winding paths across the lonely heath; and to approach London through its most open suburb” (19). His casual assertion of his right to amble through suburban London in the middle of the night illustrates that he takes his privilege for granted, and expects the reader to do likewise. As a woman, Anne has no such right, a principle equally taken for granted, as Walter’s first conception of her (“a figure,” an “apparition”) shows: not only does her untimely presence denude her of her gender, but possibly of her humanity as well. Anne’s sin is her deviation from proper process. Her presence might be unimpeachable at 10 a.m.; at 1 a.m., it carries a taint of criminality that stains her throughout the novel’s three volumes. Walter assists her despite his judgment (22); he experiences “self-reproach” (23); and although he answers her anxious queries – “‘You don’t suspect me of doing anything wrong, do you? I have done nothing wrong. I have met with an accident – I am very unfortunate in being here alone so late. Why do you suspect me

\textsuperscript{26} Collins, \textit{The Woman in White}, 20
of doing wrong? … You don’t think the worse of me because I have met with an accident?” (21) – in the negative, when Walter receives the information that Anne has escaped from a mental asylum, he admits it only confirms his suspicions: “I cannot say with truth that the terrible inference which those words suggested flashed upon me like a new revelation” (28).

The initiatory incident of this text, considered by many critics to be the first sensation novel, is imbricated in mid-century spatial politics and practices, particularly those surrounding gendered urban pedestrian habits. Walter is insouciant prior to meeting Anne on the London road because, as a young bachelor, a professional middle-class man, he is secure in the knowledge that he has the unimpeachable right to be where, when, and how he is. On the contrary, Anne's introduction is figured as a disruption because she appears to Walter to be asserting the same pedestrian rights he has, with the crucial complication that her possession of those rights is disputed. Walter does not articulate this dilemma; but he doesn't need to. His body speaks for him. As he describes it, the presence of an unaccompanied young woman, actually touching and speaking to him, in these circumstances is enough to freeze the blood in his veins.

In many ways, Anne and Walter's exchange on the high road prefigures a debate that smoldered in the pages of the Times and the Saturday Review just over two years later, in the early months of 1862. It is fitting that Collins, well-known for his interest in contemporary innovations ranging from medicine and psychology to the legal status of women, was slightly ahead of the curve in bringing the ambiguous status of unaccompanied walking women to the attention of his reading public. More significantly, the 1862 controversy confirms that the meeting of the Woman in White with the novel's narrator is much more than a suitably spine-tingling plot device designed to snare readers; it is the literal embodiment of the text's central focus on unstable identities in a rapidly developing environment, and a dramatization of one of
the era's most vexed and enduring spatial conflicts: the access of (bourgeois) women to public urban spaces.

Headline-wise, 1862 was as a relatively quiet year for Britain, easily overshadowed by the hoopla surrounding the banner year of 1861, with its Great Exhibition redux. By contrast, in the summer of 1862, the Civil War dragged on with a whimper across the Atlantic; the new Westminster Bridge, in its operational infancy, clattered to the sounds of hoof- and foot-traffic; and Queen Victoria’s beloved Princess Alice had just married a German cousin. While these were subjects fit to occupy a few columns, they must have left newspaper-readers and journalists with the sort of slow-news-day void ripe to be filled by what the twenty-first-century media term a “social-interest” story, a topic with mass appeal but devoid of any particular urgency. August would witness the final route of England’s last serving mail coach; but the subject of the debate drawing to a close in July was much more pedestrian – quite literally. Inaugurated by a scandalized missive from “Paterfamilias from the Provinces” published in the Times six months earlier, on January 7th, the controversy explicitly interrogated the ability – and implicitly, the right – of respectable middle-class women to move through the bustling landscape of the capital, alone or even chaperoned, without attracting unwanted masculine attention. The right of single women to move unmolested through urban space has proven difficult enough to establish and secure, as many women in the twenty-first century would attest. However, in the context of the Victorian era and its new hyper-consciousness of cartographical techniques of spatial management, the problem is doubly significant. Unwanted attention, whether it took the form of lewd or reproving glances, unsolicited greetings or comments, or even pursuit through the streets, is merely the outward manifestation of a subtler, and consequently thornier, dilemma: the difficulty of attaching any sort of stable or reliable meaning to the bodies of seemingly middle-
class women walking through urban space when the conjunction of their activity and location yielded a bewildering constellation of unstable, fluid, even contradictory messages. This instability characterizes all mixed-use spaces, and thus influences one's reading of the bodies occupying that space. Was the pedestrian an unmarried (and perhaps sexually available) young lady? A comely matron? A servant? A prostitute? Or, even more disturbingly, might the female pedestrian be some sort of hybrid, a creation of the modernizing city that couldn't be slotted into any of the available categories? As Anne Catherick clearly demonstrates, both time and location influence the reader's perception of the woman's body; but neither of these factors signifies firmly enough to give the body – or the space – a fixed meaning.

In its July issue, Temple Bar published an eight-page piece simply titled “Out Walking” and signed E.L.L. These initials would have already been familiar to a portion of the magazine’s readers as those of outspoken journalist Eliza Lynn Linton, whose star was on the rise; perhaps readers eagerly leafed through the pages, an eyebrow arched or lip quirked in anticipation of another feminine contribution to the on-and-off debate in the pages of the periodical press. The way Linton contextualizes her entrance into the recent outpouring of writing on the subject is instructive, and worth quoting at length:

 Every now and then the daily press enlivens the dull seasons by opening up some new question of social politics, – something quite fresh and unhackneyed, – that sets all the clubs talking, and every pen, new-nibbed, at work. Now it is the possibilities of happiness and the Queen’s Bench evaded by a marriage on three hundred a-year, with domestic contingencies accruing in the place of kid-gloves and an opera-stall; now the culpable negligence of our wives who give us cold mutton weekly, for want of a diligent study of Francatelli and Eliza Acton;
sometimes it is a Belgravian lament, which sets forth the low status of the matrimonial market in a threnody of bitter pathos, eloquently suggestive of hidden sores; now it is on the all but universal prevalence of the Social Evil, which wise philanthropists have fostered into rather a favourite topic with the public than otherwise, and exalted its miserable professors into about the most interesting specimens of humanity; quite lately it was on the difficulties of London walking, and the absolute certainty of all good-looking girls being spoken to and insulted unless under the protection of masculine muscles. One always gets some good out of these discussions, and of course there is always a substratum of truth underlying their more apparent absurdities; but “writers of the Times” have the knack of exaggerating, and generally leave out all the other side, thinking a hodful of bricks quite as good as the whole tower of Siloam intact. This, however, is by the by. (132)

It is Linton’s characteristic tone, simultaneously lofty – she is not among the “writers of the Times,” but aims her words at the presumably more discerning readership of Temple Bar – and self-deprecating – by weighing in at all, she is revisiting a subject she has already diagnosed as stale and hackneyed – with its blending of sarcasm and didacticism, that adds zest to her contribution on what she terms “the difficulties of London walking.” Notably, the questions of social politics among which she situates that of walking women (the folly of impecunious marriage, household mismanagement, the marriage market, and prostitution) all immediately open themselves up to internecine war-between-the-sexes battling; so these qualities must, by extension, pertain to Linton’s current subject as well. Even more germane, the struggle socially and culturally to locate the middle-class woman whose physical location is a city pavement
collapses all four foregoing arguments, because the only familiar subject positions available to
the walking woman are, as I suggested above, the ones they contain: domestic manager or
streetwalker plying her trade.

Linton restates the issue in her own scathing terms: “Is it a fact that modest women are
continually being spoken to if they walk alone? and that even two well-bred, well-dressed, and
well-conducted girls together are not safe, however quiet their demeanour and unalluring their
attire?” she asks; “Is the police of this great city of ours in such a shaky state that even daylight
and the broadest thoroughfares do nothing for the better regulation of manners, but leave us in
the moral condition of the diggings, where the brightest gold to the bravest finder and the
blackest eye to the boldest wooer, make up the sum of public polity?” (132).

What the debate of 1862 as a whole, and specifically the terms in which Linton couches
it, renders transparent is the investment of middle-class British society in the process of (again,
middle-class) women’s movement through the urban landscape. The flurry of irate letters and
essays constitutes “an invaluable source for discovering how women of the middle classes
occupied and moved around the streets of London, and for exposing contemporary beliefs
concerning the nature of respectable public behaviour” (Nead 63). In other words, as in
conventional mapping, the subject of anxiety is not simply where women are located, but how,
when, and for what motive; like traffic flow or sewerage, the orderly, well-regulated movement
of women serves as a shorthand index to the progress of civilization. The journalist, for whom
the options are only two, presses the point further: either rule-following women of the middle
classes are allowed to circulate while remaining unmolested by the masculine element of the
population, or London is wallowing in a state of uncivilized backwardness more suited to an
Australian mining camp, where both shiny gold and pretty women are market commodities liable
to seizure by the swiftest and strongest of men. “If it is so,” Linton sums up, “what becomes of all the modest single women of the middle ranks, who, if they walk at all, are obliged to walk alone, yet who never dream that they are thereby reduced to the standard of social evils?” (132).

This preoccupation with the movement of the middle-class woman, herself often exalted as maternal goddess and moral backbone of the empire, is hardly surprising in a society obsessed with the regulation of the movements of all sorts of bodies, animate and inanimate, and their products, as I have discussed at length in the introduction. In this as in other areas of the discourse of cartographically-based social reform, the watch-words include order, regulation, and predictability – the need to be able to state with assurance not only where a body will move, but how and why. As Pamela Gilbert phrases it in her work on the social body,

Healthy subjects acting rationally would use [the modern, mapped and gridded space of social interactions] in appropriate ways; in turn, the idea of a rational subject whose behaviors were statistically predictable contributed to the notion of the transparency of modern space – the ability to 'know' (metaphorically and actually to see) the properties of spaces and subjects because of this essential similarity. (Mapping xiv)

As Gilbert reiterates, the fundamental principle of cartography is the equation of seeing with knowing; and yet, seeing an unaccompanied woman walking in London (or Manchester or Liverpool or Glasgow) was emphatically not knowing. If a location was difficult to categorize, due either to mixed uses or the mingling of social classes, so were the bodies within it. This was particularly disturbing in the event that the bodies belonged to seemingly middle-class women, due both to their high visibility, as I will explain further, and to their mythologized status, their perceived relationship to the cult of British identity, one rooted in domestic virtues. Hence the
high level of cultural comfort, Victorian and contemporary, with viewing woman’s relationship
to urban space primarily as that of the shopper, whose mission of domestic provisioning
transforms the parts of the city she frequents into safe, semi-domestic spaces.

After her initial bold essay onto the field of verbal battle, Linton clarifies her meaning,
which is considerably more conservative than may be apparent, through a long list of
qualifications and caveats:

If she knows how to walk in the streets, self-possessed and quietly, with not too
lagging and not too swift a step; if she avoids lounging about the shop-windows,
and resolutely foregoes even the most tempting displays of finery; if she can
attain to that enviable street-talent, and pass men without looking at them, yet all
the while seeing them; if she knows how to dress as only a lady can, avoiding
loud colours and too coquettish a simplicity as equally dangerous, the one for its
assertion and the other for its seductiveness; if she has any thing of purpose or
business in her air, and looks as if she understands what she is about, and has
really some meaning in her actions; if she has nothing of the gaper in her ways,
and does not stand and stare on all sides, like a mark set up for pickpockets to
finger, – she is for the most part as safe as if planting tulips and crocuses in her
own garden. (132-133)

Combining etiquette, aesthetics, and street-smarts, Linton's prescriptive list of conditionals
resembles the conventional advice given by guidebooks to inexperienced travelers venturing into
an unknown and potentially dangerous environment – an instructive comparison for
understanding how provincial Britons were trained to view their capital. For women who
walked, or contemplated walking, London's streets, the internalization of such an elaborate and
restrictive code of conduct must have been no light undertaking, particularly on the part of those women who were not urban habitués (unlike the London-living Linton). After all, most of the correspondents to the Times were outraged male relatives from the home counties writing on behalf of women who had journeyed to London for a special occasion – as, that is, tourists – or new city-dwellers, like “Paterfamilias” and his family. While a certain amount of urban street-savvy from one in the know would likely have been welcome, it is difficult to imagine the most modest of maidens mastering all of these strictures. Furthermore, such mastery would preclude the indulgence of behaviors that seem not only to be natural but to constitute the appeal of an unfamiliar setting: slowing down, looking into shop windows, wandering, observing in general. And yet Linton suggests that if a woman cannot or will not follow these rules, she is doomed. “Sometimes, indeed, such a disagreeable adventure as a strange man’s address will happen to the most modest-looking woman, and by no fault of her own;” she admits, “but this is rare” (132).

This is the crux of Linton’s argument, which she goes on to elaborate for seven pages in a style and tone that presage those of her “Girl of the Period” pieces. She proceeds by way of four examples of modern British femininity. The first three are negative but guileless, all pure women who unintentionally garner male interest when they venture into public: there is the poor young woman who makes a gaudy display of herself in bedraggled second-hand finery; the proud matron who dresses too conspicuously; and the girl whose dress is perfectly correct but whose deportment, including frequent dawdling and window-gazing, compromises her. The final (and briefest) example is that of the woman whose costume and demeanor are scrupulously correct, and who thus moves through space unnoticed, like a gray moth. “If [our women] are often insulted, and find that to be spoken to and followed come into the range of the absolute necessities of the condition [of walking out in London], depend upon it they owe it to
themselves, and fail in some of the first principles of womanly wisdom or outside decorum” (Linton 136).

This pronouncement is a slight directed not only at the ignorant yet innocent, but also at the women who might be seeking the covert thrills of such random, sexualized encounters. Nead traces the articulation of this disquieting possibility to the February 1862 issue of the *Saturday Review* in which the author of “The Rape of the Glances” makes this suggestion. Unlike Linton, the *Saturday Review*-er indicates that such active participation in the “ocular economy” of the metropolis may be harmless; it may not impugn the flirtatious women’s status as respectable middle-class damsels (66). This helps to explain why Linton’s rhetoric is not only punitive; it quickly turns animalistic. The bold miner of her opening salvo is now the least of an unwary woman’s concerns. “If our pretty gray puss-moth will not be content to keep in the ranks of the puss-moths, but must needs paint her wings with scarlet, gold, and purple, what can collectors do but chase her with their green-gauze nets expanded, and the pill-box and pins in their pockets?” (136). While the green-gauze net is not particularly threatening, the image of one of these pretty butterflies stuffed into a pill-box, later to have its wings pierced with pins as part of a man’s collection, is one of unwanted penetration and invasion. Linton ends her essay on the same note: “[O]nly, my pretty copyists, don’t cry ‘Wolf’ too often, or swear that he forced the barriers, when you opened the latch yourselves, and poked out your dear little blunt noses for a bait” (139). Pinned wings, forced barriers, the threat of ferocious lupine devouring – the unmistakably sexualized language is that of rape, and through it Linton makes the entire debate’s nearest approach to explicitly articulating the concern at the root of the matter: by penetrating the gray area of public urban space, middle-class women risk opening their bodies to unwanted penetration. This discourse, still lamentably current, blames the victim, as if by wearing a scarlet
petticoat or an outlandish bonnet a woman invites, even justifies, her own potential rape; and yet simultaneously Linton insists upon the absolute right of any rational middle-class woman to occupy a position amid the urban landscape.

Eliza Lynn Linton may have moved around 1860s London with ease, but she was no gray puss-moth, no matter what rules of etiquette she knowingly prescribed for others. The professional pundit is at least as difficult to map onto the mid-Victorian cityscape as are the subjects of this controversy. This is evidenced by the fact that most criticism of the prolific journalist is biographical in nature, invested in turning to her complex identity and subject position as if it were a Rosetta stone for explicating her equally complex, contradictory oeuvre, most of which is strongly and intentionally polemical. Hers is a variegated reputation. The author of 1851’s scandalously radical (and unsuccessful) novel _Realities_ went on to make a name for herself as the writer of the “Girl of the Period” pieces and their ilk, texts traditionally viewed as anti-feminist or, more generally, anti-woman. And yet Linton herself was almost certainly a lover of women; perhaps her sexual proclivities spurred her to stake out a third, more ambiguous identity for herself, one that could not be easily categorized as masculine or feminine. (Her thinly fictionalized autobiographical novel is, after all, to critics’ perpetual delight, the _Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland_ [1885].) The point I wish to make is not that Linton’s conception of gender and sexuality requires further scrutiny; I agree with Andrea L. Broomfield’s assessment that much of the recent scholarly work on Linton, though instructive and welcome in its reappraisal of her as more than a one-dimensional anti-feminist reactionary, “unfortunately obscures the importance of the role she played in the development of popular journalism at mid-century” (268). As her contribution to the pedestrianism debate demonstrates, for Linton (as for Wilkie Collins) one of the key factors in reading a woman's identity, and thus her intentions, is
the way she chooses to dress herself. In other words, dress, comportment, and personal/class identity cannot be separated as individual strains, but are always read together in this discourse that combines visuality with ideology.

As a humorous commentary on the issues at play, Lynda Nead includes in her comprehensive discussion of the debate a lithograph, *Scene in Regent Street*, that dramatizes the scenario under scrutiny (64). The lithograph speaks for itself:

*Philanthropic Divine: ‘May I beg you to accept this good little book. Take it home and read it attentively. I am sure it will benefit you.’
Lady: ‘Bless me, Sir, you’re mistaken. I am not a social evil, I am only waiting for a bus.’*

In contrast to the clergyman’s severe black attire and imposing stovepipe hat, the lady is dressed neatly in shades of what appear to be Linton-approved pastels or neutrals; even the feather in her hat droops demurely. Her miniscule waist is swallowed by the billowing layers of skirts fashionable in the early to mid-1860s, and a single fold reveals a few scant inches of white underskirt above the peeping toe of one impossibly tiny slipper.

The humor of the lithograph relies on the audience’s recognition of the scene. Perhaps Mr. Jones recognizes himself in the flustered “Divine”; maybe Mrs. Smythe has been in the awkward position of the “Lady.” In any case, the artist, C.J. Culliford, can be confident in his jest’s ability to hit home only because he is depicting a subject of which he expects his audience to be aware. Like the smattering of letters in the pages of the *Times*, this image has a very specific geographical location (indeed, in Nead’s black and white version of the lithograph, the “S.W.” on the street sign in the upper right corner stands out in stark relief). In the context of the preoccupation with appropriate versus inappropriate women’s movement, London, as the cultural and political capital of the kingdom, poised on the razor-edge of modernity, both the cradle and the recipient of a nation’s desires and ambitions, surely stands in for public space writ large,
whether that space is in Luton or Leeds. And, of course, the question remains of what one is to do with the new modes of public transit and their bearing on the classed and gendered bodies using them. Could one be a lady and ride an omnibus, or did this automatically make one a woman?

The problem illustrated in Culliford’s lithograph is the problem the Victorian public confronted throughout the tumultuous Victorian era whenever a seemingly middle-class woman appeared on the urban street: a bewildering profusion of signs whose traditionally accepted signifiers no longer provided any guarantee of meaning. This is, of course, not a new dilemma; we need only mention the sumptuary laws of Elizabethan England, or the eighteenth-century preoccupation with cosmetics. Nead reads this image as both a joke on the overeager clergyman and concrete “visual confirmation that respectable women did routinely walk around the city on their own, and that social and moral identities were far more diverse than the simple categories of ‘pure’ and ‘fallen’ will allow” (64). As such, it is worthwhile to interrogate the image for evidence of exactly what may have led the well-intentioned (if potentially punitive) gentleman to his erroneous conclusion. The first information provided by the lithograph – Regent Circus, S.W. – suggests that the most salient fact is the woman’s location on a commercial, fashionable, but potentially suspect street. The better class of prostitutes reputedly frequented the West End shopping districts, mingling with middle-class women making purchases as they displayed their own wares, so to speak. However, in much larger capitals, the sign over the doorway behind her proclaims “Booking Office” – so presumably she has, indeed, just purchased her omnibus ticket, a bit of information that suggests she is in a safe space where the congregation of middle-class women should not be unusual. And yet the four men in the illustration’s background all seem to be intently focused on the two central figures. Are they attempting to read the woman, an
unusual and highly noticeable figure in the landscape, or snickering in anticipation of the clergyman’s inevitable confusion? Is the woman’s proximity to the curb unusual? Is the Divine reading the clandestine glimpse of foot and underskirt, or is the lady too sumptuously dressed for mid-day, the patterning on her skirt too ornate? Perhaps the blush on her cheek is a bit too vivid to be induced by natural embarrassment without the aid of paint. All of this goes to show that the middle-class woman alone in the cityscape became unreadable not through the absence of cues but through their proliferation; it is hyper-legibility that becomes illegible.

At issue is not “the blurring of identities between the respectable woman and the prostitute; the idler does not mistake the country girls for prostitutes, but for naïve young women who may be open to sexual flirtation” (Nead 64). This is precisely the point; it is the nuances that are disturbing, hinting as they do at a tantalizing but frightening array of potential identities, none of which is immediately discernible from a purely visual inspection. As Eliza Lynn Linton expresses it, the problem is that of the uncertain relationship between a container’s label and its contents, or even, in some instances, the lack of a label altogether. Evocatively conflating women’s bodies with both counterfeit goods and adulterated foodstuffs, she inquires, “Are we not perpetually having trouble about trade-marks and labels, so cunningly copied that no one not initiated can detect true from false? and should women be the only infringements of the law of patents, the only contrabands suffered to pass duty free under the very nose of the custom-house officials?” (133). At issue is the discovery of the “genuine article” (133), but by failing to define what that article is, Linton leaves the rhetorical door open to possibility: is the professional prostitute the counterfeit middle-class maven, or, more intriguingly, vice-versa?

In the terms feminist theorists would popularize more than a century later, there was too much ambiguous or contradictory (mis)information written on the middle-class woman’s body.
(The emphasis on the female rather than the male body is, of course, a reminder of the man's much greater range of socially acceptable movement, and the comparative othering of the female form.) Thus the process of women’s movement through the Victorian city reveals the tension at the root of any effort to map process, be it that of traffic, people, disease, or sewage: the desire to regulate the hows and whys of movement not for their own sake or as points of information, but in order to secure a single fixed meaning, one that is clear enough so that he who runs may read. This rhetorical-cartographical move, however, also clarifies what constitutes deviation from that process. As with the case of the Lady in Regent Street, deviation from a prescribed process is difficult to read; it is threatening, and potentially liberating, because it multiplies possible meanings, with the result that the reader is left with an excess of meaning, something that, like energy itself, can be created but never destroyed. In this unmanageable excess inheres the possibility of illegibility, of systemic collapse. The situation is that of a language poised on the brink of meaninglessness because its alphabet’s representational properties have been multiplied exponentially.

Such illegibility of the circulating female form lays the foundation for my consideration in this chapter of the middle-class Victorians' experiential understanding of the middle-class woman's movement through urban spaces. My intention is not to snipe-hunt for a mid-Victorian flaneuse; neither am I looking for a female equivalent to Dick Swiveller, Dickens’s archetypal participant-observer. The type of participant-observer conceived by Dickens is, as I have previously discussed, implicitly and exclusively masculine. I am echoing a long line of critical voices when I say that such a subject position, with its requisite aspect of swiveling, masterful manipulation of urban space in order to construct that type of imaginative geography, was simply not accessible to women – particularly not to middle-class women. Take as an example a middle-
class woman clad in the fashionable everyday wear of an enormous crinoline – the woman from Culliford’s lithograph, if you wish – attempting to lounge before store windows and dart unnoticed through the narrow, winding alleyways of London or Manchester. The image is as absurd to a contemporary audience as it would have been risible to the Victorian public, but it emphatically makes my point: not only are women always embodied, but those bodies are highly visible. A woman cannot occupy the position of participant-observer in the same way as a man because she is herself an object of (presumably male) observation; and “respectable” women were educated to be highly sensitive to this scrutiny. Thus the simplest outing through town or city streets became for a woman an acutely self-conscious practice, causing her to observe herself being observed first, and reducing her surroundings to secondary importance.

And yet imaginative mapping of urban space was never an exclusively masculine preserve; Victorian women’s experiences as street-walkers simply produced distinctly different types of maps. While a search through the pages of Victorian fiction of a female Dick Swiveller would be fruitless, so would the hunt for a male Lucy Snowe, because the practice of moving on foot through the city was (and perhaps remains, for many) a gendered experience. This version of imaginative mapping takes as its focus the observer’s internal rather than external geography, tracing the contours of the walker’s own thoughts, typically mediated through the interpreting lens of an external, usually masculine, narrator.27 Collins adopted this model for The Woman in White because, while displaying Anne's body creates a sensation, allowing the reader or the other characters unmediated access to her mind could have dispelled that effect. A firm statement of

27. Notably, with the exception of “Puella,” all the writers to the Times on the issue of female pedestrianism were men; and though some readers might have recognized Linton as a woman writer, as I suggest, others surely would not. Thus what these texts record is not a woman's understanding of what the act of walking through an urban setting signifies for her, but what onlookers assume that significance to be. In Jane Eyre's titular character and Villette's Lucy Snow, Charlotte Bronte provides two notable exceptions to the rule: female protagonists who record their own reflections on going out walking.
identity or self-recognition on Anne's part would destroy much of the ambiguity necessary to the plot and mood of the novel, just as if Sir Percival Glyde stepped forward and announced his illegitimacy in, say, chapter three. The narrative goes to great lengths in establishing the nature of this plot device not merely as circumstantial, but as inevitable; Collins does this chiefly through recourse to the rhetoric of insanity, the all-purpose disqualifier, as I will discuss in relation to the novel's quasi-testimonial structure.

It should now be clear that *The Woman in White's* Anne Catherick embodies the elements of nightmare, suspicion, and potential madness contingent upon the appearance of a Victorian middle-class woman shown to be out of place. Walter's excessively emotive response to Anne mirrors the excessive possibilities written on her white-clad body. As the letters dispatched to the *Times* in 1862 demonstrate, encounters between a man and an unaccompanied woman on the London street were perceived by scandalized (and titillated) witnesses to savor of something wrong. The infuriated “Paterfamilias” describes a London “infested” by “ill-conditioned blackguards” who “insult and terrify young ladies by following them and even being daring enough at times to attempt to speak to them.” Disillusioned, he admits that, should a similar situation arise in the future, he has advised his daughters “as soon as they can see a policeman, to ask his protection, and give the monster in charge.” While the policeman in this instance can serve as a generic emblem of law and order, stalwart British civilization confronting the forces of chaos and darkness, Paterfamilias’s recommendation that women so annoyed give the offender “in charge” indicates the bringing of criminal proceedings. Paterfamilias overlooks the fact that these men are not actually breaking a law in the strictly criminal sense; indeed, his bombastic rhetoric suggests that legality is immaterial, as the “monster” has committed a far more serious social and moral crime. In the terms of this scenario, rather bizarrely, it is Anne Catherick who
enacts the part of the “blackguard” or would-be Lothario: she spots Walter before he sees her, approaches him, speaks to him (“Is this the road to London?”), and even goes so far as to make physical contact when she opens their exchange by touching his arm. Even her innocent question acquires an illicit meaning. London is always itself, the concretely locatable entity containing Oxford Street and Piccadilly Circus, Paddington Station, and Regent’s Park, but it is simultaneously a synecdochic gesture toward the type of space that harbors possibilities of all sorts of movements and encounters, licit and illicit. Anne opens up an astonishing array of possibilities when she asks the way to the capital, suggesting that if she is not a London woman yet, she wishes to become one.

Like a proper Londoner, Linton’s “gray puss-moth,” Anne emerges unscathed from her early-morning meeting with Hartright – but this is still no guarantee of her honor or purity. Anne’s fate in the novel is a bit more like that of “Puella,” the first respondent to “Paterfamilias” in the Times, who declared herself to be “in the constant habit of traversing Oxford-street alone,” and insisted that she had never “received the slightest incivility from my chivalrous countrymen” due to her sensible dress and behavior (marking a path very similar to the one Linton would follow). Puella earned herself irate responses from Paterfamilias and “A London Man,” both reasserting the blamelessness of the women of their acquaintance who had been followed and harassed to such a degree that being harassed becomes a mark of feminine propriety, and thereby insinuating that it must be Puella who is somehow at fault because she hasn’t been insulted. Paterfamilias reaches no greater creative height than suggesting Puella’s pedestrian tranquility may be thanks to ugliness (“[S]hall I call her fair?” he asks), while A London Man goes further. Puella “drives us to an uncomplimentary inference,” he comments in his letter of January 17. Initially he echoes the idea that her appearance must not be prepossessing, but then abruptly
veers onto the topic of crafty prostitutes who, aware that nineteenth-century cosmopolitan men vaunt “a contempt for prey that is obvious,” have adopted “the simplest toilette and the most demure manner” as “the surest bait to the loungers of the pavement.” Their sham respectability, he informs readers, goes so far as to include “the accompaniment of a respectable-looking female servant or the loan of a well-dressed child.” Thus the Puellas and Anne Cathericks of the world may not be lone women in need of protection; they may instead be the very antithesis of what they appear, a social evil – that is, the embodiment of disturbing forms of deviance that need to be eradicated – from which even some hapless men may need protection. If they are not victims, they must be the cause of the problem. As the logic of A London Man disturbingly suggests, when it comes to street-side flirtation, yes means yes, but no also means yes. Like the mysterious well-dressed women of Oxford and Regent streets, Anne inspires a thrill of attraction and repulsion because her body harbors the possibility of sexual pleasure yoked to the potential shame of exchanging money for sex or mis-identifying a respectable middle-class matron, and, most horror-inducing, the potential realization that the virgin and the whore are, in fact, one and the same.

*The Woman in White's* focus on the movement of unaccompanied young women through promiscuous urban spaces is not unique among Collins's works. In *Basil*, a gothic novel that in many ways prepares the path the author would retrace in his first sensational work, the title character becomes obsessed with Margaret Sherwin, the daughter of a linen-draper, whom he meets on an omnibus. Like the London road, the omnibus, a form of public transportation that was becoming increasingly widely and cheaply available at mid-century, throws together characters from disparate social classes, or from no discernible class at all. Basil is a slumming aristocrat, while everything about Margaret, from the way she flirtatiously lifts and lowers her
veil, to her status as the daughter of a tradesman, to the neighborhood in which she lives, is ambiguous. Like the men whose behavior inspired the letter-writers to the *Times*, Basil follows the eye-catching beauty to her family's home, which is, tellingly, in a brand-new suburb, a space that—again, like the road connecting London and Hampstead—is not clearly coded as either metropolitan or rural. Likewise, Margaret is a sexually enticing shopgirl figure, “the mesmerizing stranger [who] has literally drawn Basil into her father’s shop, compelling him to buy her father’s wares” as she sells herself (Talairach-Vielmas 25). Instead of becoming wary like Walter Hartright, the besotted Basil marries Margaret; this *Frankenstein*-esque novel explores the ramifications of cross-class relationships. Although the mode and plot of *The Woman in White* are different, the exploration of the fusion of ambiguous social identities with ambiguous locations is emphatically present, even foregrounded. As Laurence Talairach-Vielmas notes, “Margaret functions … like an advertising image. She has no depth and is simply invested with meaning: she is, therefore, insubstantial, a spectral vision, possessing the mind of the consumer as she dispossesses him of his money” (25); this is similar to the way in which Anne's white clothing, as insistently blank as a new sheet of paper, resists the meanings the novel's primarily male characters attempt to inscribe upon her body.

Like his friend Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, who was born in London and lived there nearly all his life, possessed a wealth of urban knowledge, which he strategically deployed in his fictions. The British capital is not just a casual setting, but an integral part of his plots—a feature that is often overlooked, perhaps because Collins did not include the sort of long, detail rich urban descriptions for which Dickens is famous. As biographers Andrew Maunder and Graham Law attest, in Collins's fiction London is “present as a distinct environment full of meaning” of

28. Again, this blankness is, rather paradoxically, the result of over-determination. The white dress could be a nightgown, a young girl's white muslin ballgown, a shroud, a wedding gown—the profusion of possible meanings means that no single meaning sticks.
which “the author’s novels typically give us a double-edged view” (61). In addition to the significance of the London road in *The Woman in White* and the suburb in *Basil*, there is, for example, the location of Count Fosco's rented townhouse in St. Johns Wood, an area whose “comparative remoteness … makes it perfect as a crime site that shields itself through its outward quietude” (Wagner, “Sensationalizing” 203). Collins is writing about real places, ones he knew intimately. His choice of Dickens's *All the Year Round* as the vehicle for serialization of the novel also speaks to the text's immersion in the world in contemporary socio-spatial debates, particularly those concerning movement and the urban environment. While *The Woman in White* was appearing serially in the pages of Dickens's magazine – the second novel to hold that honor, following *A Tale of Two Cities* – it shared space with other pieces of short fiction and journalism designed both to bolster *Woman* by providing context and related commentary, and to seduce readers into perusing these other pieces by drawing on their preexistent interest in Collins's novel, a mutually reinforcing editorial strategy that Deborah Wynne refers to as “the power of juxtaposition” (*Sensation Novel* 3). “For example, on 10 March 1860, an installment of *TWIW* was followed by a travel article, an *Uncommercial Traveller* feature, ‘Mercantile Jack’, an article on France and free trade, and the Eyewitness visiting the poorer districts of London” (Wynne, *Sensation Novel* 27). Such information is useful because it tells us not just what else *The Woman in White*'s audience was reading simultaneously, but how Collins and Dickens intended the novel to be perceived, and in what context. As Wynne's example illustrates, Dickens, and presumably Collins, assumed readers interested in Walter Hartright's tale would also be interested in travel, the circulation of goods, and urban exploration:

> [A]n examination of sensation novels within their magazine context indicates that such ‘sensations’ were not empty of meaning but constituted an important

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29. The “Eyewitness” was Wilkie Collins's younger brother, Charles Allston Collins.
response to the issues of the day, particularly anxieties surrounding the shifting class identities, financial insecurity, the precarious social position of single women, sexuality, failed and illegal marriages, insanity and mental debilitation, fears of criminality, and perceptions that modernity itself was undermining domestic life. (Wynne, Sensation Novel 2-3)

Critics like Jonathan Loesberg and Dallas Liddle link the popularity of sensation fiction in the 1860s to the felt reality of social mobility and the potential ramifications of voting reform on class identity.  

Beyond being an astute business strategy for All the Year Round, the mingling of fact and fiction thus pertains to another of the hallmarks of sensation fiction, the reality-based, “ripped from the headlines” nature of many of the plots. So much has been written on the subject that there is no need to reiterate it here, although it is worth noting that, according to critics such as Maurizio Ascari and Lyn Pykett, Collins likely drew inspiration from Maurice Mejan's Recueil des causes celebres (1808-1814), which he purchased in 1856 while visiting Paris with Dickens. The plot of The Woman in White “replicates an eighteenth-century criminal case ..., in which a rich widow was drugged and imprisoned in the Salpetriere under the name of Blainville at the beginning of 1788, while another person was buried under her name, so that her relatives could inherit from her” (Ascari 103). Furthermore, the serialization of Collins's novel began on the heels of two lunacy panics, further attesting to the timeliness of the novel's plot. 

Using source material from the previous century, Wilkie Collins produced a novel that critics, and presumably

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casual readers, perceived as something innovative, exciting, potentially dangerous, and fully contemporary. As Lyn Pykett wrote two decades ago, “At a time when women and other reformers were clamouring for a widening of women’s legal rights and educational and employment opportunities, sensation novels reproduced and negotiated broader cultural anxieties about the nature and status of respectable femininity and the domestic ideal” (Nineteenth Century 13). As I contend, the terms in which Collins portrayed Anne and Walter's first meeting are essential in the production of such contemporariness. It is the fusion of the woman's body with public, urban space as a source of deep anxieties that caused Collins's early readers to perceive the text as something that could only be a product of their present moment.

For the purposes of this analysis, however, rather than focusing on the literary antecedents of the novel, it is more revealing to note that Walter's first meeting with Anne also has a historical counterpart. In her biography of Collins, Pykett lends credence to the assertion made by J.G. Millais, son of the artist, that Collins's initial encounter with Caroline Graves, with whom the author lived from 1858 until his death, took place in similar circumstances – by which one assumes Millais meant rather unceremoniously and in a public thoroughfare, not on the road to Hampstead in the middle of the night. Collins and Graves probably met in when they were neighbors: in 1856 he had lodgings in Howland Street, off Tottenham Court Road, while Caroline and her mother-in-law lived nearby (Pykett, Wilkie Collins 17). That Collins subsequently based such a provocative, harrowing incident upon his own introduction to the woman who would become his partner indicates that he was well aware of the titillating possibilities yielded by the freedom and license of a meeting with a member of the opposite sex in public urban space, particularly given the unconventional, potentially scandalous nature of his relationship with the widowed Graves. Critics like Martha Nussbaum see such encounters in
Collins's life and his fiction as evidence that he was “a social novelist to whom female transgressiveness is not seen as threatening, and who takes delight in such hybrid monstrosities” (162). Although this strikes me as too unproblematically celebratory, the ambiguity of Caroline Graves's status thus underscores the interpretive issue Walter and the reader confront in the person of Anne Catherick.

Because the parameters of the sensation genre were – and remain – somewhat amorphous, it's impossible to assert definitively that *The Woman in White* was the first sensation novel. It is safe to say, however, that *The Woman in White* was a text that made critics sit up and take notice of the fact that the British public was in the grip of a new style of writing. The novel was tremendously popular. It made Collins a literary celebrity, and spawned a host of tie-in products, from perfume to bonnets to dressing gowns. Perhaps the craze “did not contribute much to the aspiring dignity of novelistic fiction” (16), as Richard Nemesvari dryly comments; but it does attest to the text's popularity, as does the appearance in front of the London footlights of an unauthorized stage version only months later. Because it is Walter Hartright's encounter with a mysterious, ghostly apparition that draws readers into the narrative, it is the encounter of the spectator’s gaze with the hyper-legible female form that engenders sensation fiction. Anne Catherick literally embodies a new genre. Her form initiates the action of the plot, establishes the requisite tone, provides the mystery in need of solution, and haunts every page of the text in ways that exceed the bounds of mere plot device.32

32. For an excellent discussion of how women's white-clad bodies provoked sensational responses across genres as seemingly disparate as sensation fiction and aesthetic painting, see Rachel Teukolsky's comparison of the tropes harnessed by *The Woman in White* and James McNeill Whistler's *The White Girl* (1862). *The White Girl*, rejected by the Royal Academy, scandalized viewers who “were shocked by the image’s transgression of conventional visual codes. The unknown woman was uncontained by any explanatory framing narrative, appearing in a life-size portrait in a style deemed 'sketchy' and unfinished,” and thus without a clearly demarcated signification (424).
The importance of this cannot be overstated, because it is the tone and content of Anne's hair-raising, heart-stopping meeting with Walter, contingent upon her night-walking, that mapped out both the boundaries of what would quickly come to be viewed as a new genre and the sort of terms in which critics, approving and disapproving alike, would speak about it. When, by 1862, reviewers began to write about what they were calling sensation fiction, *The Woman in White* was perhaps more frequently mentioned than any other text, illustrating its formative role in the shaping of the genre, its conventions, and its reception, including the effect the sensation novel was assumed to have on readers. In her argument for a physiologically rather than psychologically based theory of reading, Laurie Garrison suggests that Collins’s attention to physical stimuli and their responses “probably inspired reviewers to theorize the genre through the language of physiology” (56); Collins's technique of describing his characters' emotional and psychological states in physical, at times quasi-medical, language established one of the most recognizable criteria for a work's inclusion in the genre.33 In other words, by expecting sensation novels to have a physical effect on their readers, critics from Collins's day to our own expect the novels' readers to respond to the written word in *exactly the same way* that Walter Hartright responds to Anne Catherick. Walter's reaction to Anne puts the sensation in sensation fiction.

III. The Women in White and the Instability of Identity

Spectral, ephemeral, disconcerting – if this were a gothic novel, she would be a supernatural presence – Anne initially seems to provide contrast to the novel's other, more solid

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33 Talairach-Vielmas extensively details the narrowing gap between medicine and literature in the mid-nineteenth century. He highlights the practice of doctors writing literature reviews that appeared in medical journals, noting that when it came to understanding the effect of a text on the reader, “Medical science undoubtedly struck the keynote. The advances in experimental physiology, which aimed to analyse and measure the body’s activity, pointed to the body as a source of mystery and wonder” (1). Talairach-Vielmas, like Garrison, identifies a more physiologically (rather than psychologically) based understanding of affect, or, in slightly different terms, a physiologically inflected psychology. Because Anne Catherick’s body is immediately presented as just such a source of wonder, *TWIW* both participates in and anticipates this trend.
As the plot progresses, though, *The Woman in White* reveals that it is an extended meditation on the disintegration of identity. In the depiction of the novel's other characters, we perceive the diffusion of the instability established in Walter and Anne's meeting. Like the venereal disease Walter may fear contracting from her touch, this instability – always both spatial and imaginative – is contagious. In other words, recognizing the highly visible site of instability that Anne's walking form provides opens the door to the recognition that other, seemingly fixed bodies and locations are also unstable. As I have discussed previously, this is one of the most salient features of hyper-mapped urban space: efforts to delineate areas based on criteria of social and commercial use may instead reveal such spaces as a promiscuous jumble. This is what happened in the West End, where two feminine economic practices – shopping and prostitution – were seen to overlap. As the nature of a space comes into question, so do the bodies inhabiting that space, beginning with the most contingent or problematic – the Annes of the world. In *The Woman in White*, the promiscuous space of the semi-urban road extends to absorb the narrative space of sensation fiction, which is characterized by promiscuity, instability, and anxiety. The narrative “describes a society in which everyone can play parts and identity is unstable, leading all the characters to look madly for signs that can guarantee individuality” (Talairach-Vielmas 22). Its characters are internally (and sometimes externally, as is the case with Laura Fairlie's half-sister Marian Halcombe, whose feminine body and masculine, mustachioed face jar Walter only slightly less than his introduction to Anne) conflicted.

Although the plot of the novel is well-known, a brief recap is useful for keeping characters and incidents in order. In order to fulfill a deathbed promise to her father, orphaned heiress Laura Fairlie marries Sir Percival Glyde. Glyde, in concert with mysterious Count Fosco, 34

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schemes to secure Laura's fortune for himself and then, taking advantage of her resemblance to
Anne Catherick, to rid himself of both women at once: Anne, because he believes she possesses
knowledge of his illegitimacy; and Laura, in order to deprive her of any legal right to her wealth
or estate. Glyde succeeds in having Laura committed to an asylum and then, when Anne dies,
having his wife declared dead. Later, however, Percival perishes in a fire as he attempts to
destroy the parish registry containing the falsified record of his parents' marriage, while his ally
Fosco is murdered as a traitor by the Italian secret society to which he belongs. Walter and
Marian rescue Laura from the asylum and succeed in partially rehabilitating her, although she is
permanently damaged by her ordeal. Walter and Laura marry and, at novel's end, produce a son,
the heir of Limmeridge. Thus on the surface ambiguity has been banished, and order wins the
day. Laura's legal identity, however, cannot be re-established, and it is her sister Marian who
takes the active role in raising Walter and Laura's child.

For Natalie Huffels, the work of the novel is “dramatizing ideological tensions by
embodying incompatible scientific and philosophical discourses within individual characters”
(43); to this partial list I would add social and political discourses. As the doubling of Anne and
Laura and the inability of the text to read either character without recourse to the other
emphasize, “Instead of hiding inconsistent contemporary beliefs within separate and internally
consistent … frameworks, Collins throws them all together to suggest the multiple possibilities
for interpretation of character and incident that are essential to the paranoid tone of the sensation
novel” (Huffels 43). Although Margaret Oliphant is usually remembered as one of the most
unimpressed critics of sensationalism in literature, her initial review of The Woman in White
was, as Laurie Garrison points out, generally positive; and the specific grounds of her critique
merit a brief analysis here, because in them the author – seemingly unwittingly – reiterates

35. Oliphant herself was no stranger to the use of sensational plot devices, as I discuss in the next chapter.
precisely the novel's core concern. Like many readers, Oliphant was both fascinated with and repelled by Count Fosco. “Fosco is, unquestionably, destined to be repeated to infinitude, as no successful work can apparently exist in this imaginative age without creating a shoal of copyists; and with every fresh imitation, the picture will take more and more objectionable shades,” she wrote. The rhetorical positioning is typical: Oliphant harnesses aesthetics to morality, and fears that an imitation Fosco, penned by an artist less skilled than Collins, will still capture the attention of the reading public and produce a psychologically and morally detrimental result. Because it hinges upon the inability to distinguish between superior original and inferior copy, Oliphant's critique participates in the concern about unstable identities, or identities that fail to signify transparently or properly, that animates the novel. In slightly different terms, this is the question Walter Hartright puts to Laura and Anne: which sister is the original, and which is the copy? Oliphant confidently asserts the primacy of Count Fosco, but the novel answers the question of the two half-sisters in no such certain terms.

As in the Culliford lithograph and the 1862 mobility debate, outward appearances count for little in this novel, and context clues are not a reliable means of deciphering internal identity. Not only do both Anne and her half sister remain near total blanks, but the other characters are either sites of potential mis-recognition (Is drawing-master Walter a gentleman? Is hirsute Marian a woman?) or actively misrepresent themselves in the manner of Sir Percival, Fosco, and Mrs. Catherick, Anne's biological mother. Into this conversation around visually recognizable identities, Collins incorporates an adjacent anxiety about the reliability of text. He does this by literally writing on his characters' bodies: “Laura Fairlie becomes Anne Catherick through

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36. Notably, this is what precedes the most cited, and most negative, passage of the review: “The violent stimulant of serial publication – of weekly publication, with its necessity for frequent and rapid recurrence of piquant situation and startling incident – is the thing of all others most likely to develop the germ and bring it to fuller and darker bearing.”
printed letters on her underwear; the criminals’ bodies are marked by scars, such as Sir Percival’s, or seared brands, like Pesca’s and Fosco’s. Thus, individuals are turned into texts which record the history of the body” (Talairach-Vielmas 46). The brand, the scar: these bodily inscriptions should function as irrefutable proofs of identity, a species of permanent If lost, return to ____. But like conventional written texts, they “can be erased or concealed,” as Talairach-Vielmas points out (46). (Furthermore, brands on the skin or lettering in one's underwear are normally concealed from view, not exposed on the street to the casual passer-by.)

Other than the novel itself, which Hartright lays before the reader as an inadmissible legal document, *The Woman in White's* most vexacious verbal text is the tombstone in the Fairlie family plot; that Anne is persistently linked with this stone monument is key to reading both it and her. At the outset, the tombstone belongs to Mrs. Fairlie, the absent, good mother who contrasts Anne's present, unmaternal mother. As Carolyn Dever states in *Death and the Mother*, in the bulk of Victorian fiction “the mother functions as an embattled signifier of stability” (xiii).37 Anne is seen slavishly cleaning the grave marker in tribute to the woman who cared for her; later Anne, as Laura, will be buried beside her, an act that further problematizes the notion of legitimate versus illegitimate offspring. While the inscription on Mrs. Fairlie's tomb should sanctify her legitimacy and maternal role, the later, erroneous epigraph added for Laura calls the stability of both the tombstone and Mrs. Fairlie into question.

The scene in which Walter returns from Central America to mourn the death of his beloved at his grave, and instead finds the living Laura, is only slightly less notorious than his meeting with Anne. Walter repeatedly attempts to read the epitaph to Laura, and breaks off:

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37. For Dever, the mother can only signify as the ideal of stability through absence: “Rigidly idealized categories of identity – the Victorian ideal of maternity, for example – depend precisely on the absence and the ineffability of the original model, and thus the trope of maternal absence is one of the most powerful tools in the maintenance of the nineteenth-century maternal ideal” (6).
“Sacred to the Memory of Laura, Lady Glyde –” (419). After just such a break, the chapter concludes, “Laura, Lady Glyde, was standing by the inscription, and was looking at me over the grave” (419). In the manuscript, Collins included another line that was canceled before publication. As Walter stands over the grave, the veiled figure with Marion exclaims, “– Walter! It’s Anne – Anne – Anne Catherick!” The revelation complicates the narrative of the tombstone and the identity of the woman who makes the proclamation. Presumably Collins intended the words as Laura's disclaimer: the “it” is the buried corpse, and “it” belongs to Anne Catherick. Although Zigarovich suggests that Collins deleted this sentence in order to heighten the drama of the moment, the statement's lack of clarity must also have played a role. “It's Anne Catherick” could just as easily be read as an embrace of an identity, another way of saying, “I am Anne Catherick.” In a novel whose work is to “warn” the reader about the “rhetorical slippage” inherent in the interpretation of epitaphs (Zigarovich 86), not only slabs of granite and marble but “bodies are in essence ‘blanks’ waiting to be inscribed,” and “writing speaks for, yet defies, the body” (Zigarovich 94). This epitaph is so contagiously unstable that it not only tangles the fates of Laura and Anne to such an extent that they cannot be untangled, but it taints the reputation of the dead sainted mother – for if the marker can lie about Laura, Lady Glyde, it can't be trusted to tell the truth about Mrs. Fairlie or Anne Catherick. As Walter himself is forced to confess, “The fatal resemblance [between the sisters] which I had once seen and shuddered at seeing, in idea only, was now a real and living resemblance which asserted itself before my own eyes” (443).

As the foregoing illustrates, the fluid portrayal of Anne and Laura is the novel's major site of identity slippage. Each of the women should represent a fixed point in the Victorian

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38. For more on this, and on Collins's minute attention to the typography in which the epitaphs would be presented, see Zigarovich, 102.
consciousness: the virgin and the prostitute, the innocent and the criminal/madwoman. Much has been made of Walter's instinctive response to the woman who will steal his heart and, after the windings of six hundred pages, become his wife, because there is much to make of it. “Mingling with the vivid impression produced by the charm of her fair face and head, her sweet expression, and her winning simplicity of manner, was another impression, which, in a shadowy way, suggested to me the idea of something wanting,” he records (50). “Something wanting, something wanting – and where it was, and what it was, I could not say” (51). The peculiar, striking phrase will remind even the most forgetful readers of Walter's encounter with another pale, blonde, white-clad young woman, which is ostensibly why Collins used it. The problem is that Walter views *Laura*, rather than Anne, as the woman whose being is defined by the quality of lacking something. The narrator has already planted the idea that Anne Catherick might lack several things, including sanity; legal, moral, and social reputation; and now legitimacy, since anyone who has ever read a novel knows what an uncanny resemblance between two seemingly unrelated characters is likely to mean. On the other hand Laura, the genteel young heiress, appears to have everything. At its most basic level, this is foreshadowing of Laura's dark, threatening future, an indispensable element in the genre; but it nevertheless opens another interpretive fissure that the novel must labor until its conclusion to repair. Walter strains mightily to prove that it is actually Anne, not Laura, who demonstrates “something wanting,” despite his slip of the tongue. This role reversal, desired not just on the narratorial plane but necessary to the successful resolution of the narrative, is predicated on an impressively multifaceted process of doubling. There is the physical resemblance, of course, enhanced by Laura's first appearance in white and Anne's exclusive wearing of the color (or lack of color). Both aspects are explained by

39. In this context “wanting” could, of course, also mean desiring, in which case the solution to the problem – What does Laura want? – could be in the person of Hartright himself. With its multiple sites of instability and resistance to the conventional marriage plot, however, the novel problematizes this apparently simple reading.
the girls' parentage. Biologically, they are the legitimate and illegitimate daughters of Mr. Fairlie; emotionally, Anne feels that she is the daughter of Mrs. Fairlie, the only woman who ever mothered her, and who is responsible for Anne's proclivity for white – as the reader learns, it was Mrs. Fairlie who first dressed Anne in the color and suggested that white was becoming. Thus legally Anne is her sister's illegitimate counterpart, and part of the “something wanting” is the legal status of a legitimate heir and all that entails: wealth, education, familial care, marriage prospects. The plot hatched by Sir Percival and Count Fosco famously exploits the sisters' physical similarity: they confine Laura, now Lady Glyde, in a mental institution under Anne's name, explaining that the weak-minded, hysterical girl has delusions that she is actually Percy's wife. When the real Anne conveniently wastes away from a heart condition, the resemblance becomes even more useful, as it allows Percival to bury Anne's body in the Fairlie family plot and announce the death of his wife, Laura (who is, of course, still locked up in the asylum). As a corpse, Anne literally embodies the lack: she is buried, erased, void. Her body has become the something wanting that is requisite to the success of the villains' plan. The labor here is to establish the sisters' identities in reciprocal terms: Anne is not-Laura; Laura is not-Anne.

Paradoxically, the rhetorical maneuvering designed to assure the reader that it is Anne rather than Laura who is characterized by lack is undercut by just this same process of doubling. As Lyn Pykett writes, “Collins’s narrative is structured so as to close the social and psychological gap between Laura and Anne” (Wilkie Collins 36), not to widen it. In other words, the rhetorical work of the novel is sabotaged by the too-complete success of its plot. As Carolyn Dever puts it, “[T]he mission of the novel as a whole is to construct a plausible framework for Laura as a living person, its polemic to convince the reader, in lieu of a court of law, that she lives on, married to Walter” (110). Despite what Walter insists, the proof is anything but irrefutable. In the wake of
Sir Percival's complete legal erasure of Laura's existence – she is now a “dead” woman, having “inherited Anne’s previous role as her own walking tombstone” (Zigarovich 101) – Laura's friends have no legal recourse, so Walter's entire case rests on his ability to prove that Laura is not the woman in the grave – that she is not-Anne. That pesky resemblance means that the physical evidence is damning, as is the inscription on the tomb. Laura's fate is literally carved in stone. Complicating things still further, Laura post-asylum is virtually identical to the Anne with whom the reader has been acquainted throughout the novel. Indeed, describing Anne, Percival says, “Fancy my wife, after a bad illness, with a touch of something wrong in her head – that is Anne Catherick for you” (339).

“Laura Fairlie emblematizes [Victorian men's] desires as Anne symbolizes their fears,” so in its portrayal of the two female characters, “the text presents the reader with clues to how the Victorians’ fears and desires overlapped” (Mangham, “‘What Could’” 123). It is this area of overlap – the area of the Venn diagram in which the virtuous maiden and the dangerous whore are revealed to be identical and interchangeable – that ultimately subsumes the entire narrative. Wealthy Laura promises Walter the opportunity to solidify his gentlemanly status; Anne harbors the terrors of promiscuity, anonymity, and madness. Buried in Lady Glyde's grave, Anne becomes Laura; illegitimate, fragile and fractured, Laura, the walking dead, is transformed into Anne.

As the title broadcasts, Anne's most salient characteristic is her whiteness. This quality serves as an inexorable lure both to Walter and to the novel's critics, who cannot resist retreading the narrator's uncertain progress toward a definitive explanation of the white woman. As soon as Hartright glimpses Anne, “Despite his shock, Walter looks upon the woman in white as a figure

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40. This said, Anne's whiteness is not exclusively hers, as Laura also wears white; the vagueness is a deliberate feature of the text. This doubling is echoed in the work of scholars (myself included) who merge discussions of Anne, Laura, their garments, and their blankness.
that needs interpretation,” particularly seeking “signs of irrationality and sexual promiscuity” (Mangham, “What Could” 119). Because of the specific yet ambiguous context of this encounter – in a space that is neither truly urban nor rural, at a time that is neither night nor day, illustrating “the scope of this problem” (Pykett, Wilkie Collins 34) – Anne is always already a cipher. “This strange, deranged woman, and the way in which she is represented, present an interpretative problem for both the characters in the text and the readers of it … Is she a ghost? Is she a street-walker? Is she mad or bad or a victim? Is she a lady?” (Pykett, Wilkie Collins 34).

Whiteness signifies differently for different characters. For the illegitimate Sir Percival, Anne's whiteness “becomes a mocking reminder of his own blank identity” (Mangham, “What Could” 121). Although Anne, and later Laura as well, “emerges as the symbol of a blank space awaiting inscription, of the ghostly attributes that haunt the workings of language and meaning” (Zigarovich 95), ultimately Anne's white dress functions like a shield or, perhaps more accurately, a mirror. It deflects the viewer's (or reader's) attempt to see beyond her surface by instead reflecting the onlooker's fears and/or desires back at him. It is not necessarily that Anne has no interiority, but that Collins never grants his readers or his other characters access to it. This is another definition of hyper-legibility: Anne fails to signify not because she signifies nothing, but because she signifies everything. She is too mobile to be pinned down and securely “located” in any sense of the term. Anne, as Carolyn Dever writes, “is a symptom of every form of anxiety set loose in this novel” (129).

IV. Mobility as/of Insanity

The point I wish to make is not just that Anne embodies all these cultural conflicts from her first, startling appearance; but that she embodies them because of the circumstances surrounding that first appearance. Perhaps more purely than any other character in Victorian
fiction, the Woman in White represents the excess energy that inevitably results, like a chemical reaction, when a potentially middle-class woman is seen to deviate from the reassuring, preordained process of pedestrian movement through the mid-Victorian city. Her middle-of-the-night encounter with the art teacher encapsulates the entire three-volume plot. Walter's tremulous, fretful response to Anne signals all of the text's major themes: the profusion of significations inherent in the body of a woman on a city street; the labyrinthine processes of interpretation to which it gives birth; the anxiety it provokes about the fluid nature of identities (the “recognition” that Harrison and Fantina locate “at the heart of sensation fiction”); and the potential use of the medicalized detecting gaze to 'diagnose' such a woman and her body. A significant part of the audience appeal of sensation fiction is that it “engages the reader in a fantasy of knowingness in which suspense and uncertainty anticipate the pleasures of revelation and explanation – murkiness precedes clarity; messiness invites resolution” (Jones 5). Walter's need to fill Anne's whiteness – with text, with a stable meaning – spurs his adoption of the detective role; and as in many other early uses of the detective figure, the differentiation between detective and stalker is a subtle one.

This aspect of sensation fiction may be closer to contemporary reality than critics have quite appreciated: in his published letter, “A London Man” details the misadventure of a pair of young ladies under the protection of an “elderly nurse” being followed from Oxford Street to Paddington Station. This nameless character goes so far as to wait on the platform, peering into the windows of first-class carriages in search of his quarry, and writing down the destinations of the departing trains in his notebook. When Wilkie Collins has Anne Catherick turn Walter Hartright into a detective, he rehearses the action that would take place two years later on Oxford

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41. Harrison and Fantina, xxi
42. For an expanded discussion of the ambiguity of early detectives and the murky relation of criminality to detective practice, see chapter one.
Street. In both cases, the illegible female body creates the role of the detective – that indispensable element of sensation fiction – and reverses the roles of criminal (the sought-after object of detection) and victim. The detective quest causes/reveals Walter’s own monomania, for if Anne is obsessed with whiteness in general, he becomes obsessed with her particular whiteness. The detective's “obsessional quest is prompted by the difficulty of assigning meaning to the mysterious woman in white, her whiteness eluding all kinds of meaning -- thereby endlessly deferring closure” (Talairach-Vielmas 44). As we have seen previously with Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House*, the woman whose movements transcend the boundaries of time and place that have been prescribed for her (based on age, position, marital status, etc.) is coded as deviant and may thus be pursued as a criminal. Anne's potential criminality is one of the first possibilities that occurs to Walter. Like Inspector Bucket, Anne is everywhere and nowhere simultaneously; “appearing and disappearing like some kind of apocalyptic white angel,” she exhibits a sophisticated level of mobility, both urban and rural, that leaves her pursuers edgy and bewildered (Cornes 111). At different times, Percival, Fosco, Walter, Marian, and Laura all anxiously watch and wait for Anne's reappearance. The narrative doesn't allow the reader to see how and where Anne moves, demonstrating again that her body exists beyond the plane of narratability. After all, Anne is so difficult to pin down that, once she is dead and buried, the novel's remaining characters can't even locate her corpse with confidence.

Given the fetishization of Anne’s body and its unpredictable movements, it is unsurprising that the plot carried out by the villains attempts to solve the problem of Anne by reducing her to unadulterated, insentient corporality. This plot, in which narrator Walter is complicit, requires the reader to believe in the reality of Anne's potential or latent insanity. The text is never able to solve with confidence the enigma of Anne’s mental state, perhaps because
its prime narrator is uncomfortably aware that the argument for a diagnosis of insanity rests on rather shaky circular reasoning; places Walter in the uncomfortable position of being forced to agree with Sir Percival Glyde; and – most damagingly – would foist such a diagnosis onto Walter’s own wife as well. Much of the difficulty of establishing proof of identity in this narrative environment stems from the fact that identity as the novel constructs it is fluid, ephemeral. How can Walter prove that Laura is not Anne when it has become unclear who Laura actually is? As critics have pointed out, we have only Walter and Marian’s word that the confused, childish woman Marian retrieves from the asylum is truly her sister, and not her sister’s sister. On a more symbolic plane, Laura’s true identity as a character, as an individual, is never firmly established within the novel. In many ways she is a flat, archetypal figure, the *jeune fille* of marriageable age, beautiful, wealthy, and naïve. “In Anne’s case conventional feminine dependence and passivity, in the absence of the social and familial frameworks which usually produce and sustain it, becomes a form of illness, an aberrant psychological state” (Pykett, *Wilkie Collins* 36), a rhetorical strategy that blends seamlessly with the nineteenth-century definition of ‘normal’ femininity, signified by “[f]eeling, excess, emotionalism, irrationality, [and] histrionics,” which were also “the main indicators of insanity” (Pykett, *Wilkie Collins* 37).

When Walter first meets Laura, he notices her “little delicate wandering hand” and “quaint, childish earnestness” (51), both of which betoken Victorian femininity, but which are disturbingly close to the “confused and weakened memory” (432) and “clouded” mind (422) that indicate the mental impairment caused by her confinement in the mental institution. Thus when the framework that has sustained Laura is removed, like a hothouse flower, she wilts. Hartright cannot firmly assert that Laura in her post-asylum state is sane, because, as Pykett illustrates, she
now conforms to the contemporary definition of insanity, which was as much circumstantial as it was psychological.43

Laura is not the only character whose mental state is jeopardized by the assumption that Anne exhibits symptoms of insanity. As a detective, Walter becomes monomaniacally obsessed with Anne, and particularly with her mental state – a preoccupation that causes him to wonder if his own sanity is unraveling. As was often the case in mid-nineteenth-century psychological discourse, “Walter’s consideration of Anne Catherick’s madness questions how far the process of detection or diagnosis is itself an unbalanced mental fixation” (Mangham, “‘What Could’” 118). In a world in which definitions of sanity and criminality are not fixed, Walter himself may be criminally insane. “Some of the strange questions” Anne asks Walter when first they meet suggest “the conclusion either that she was naturally flighty and unsettled, or that some recent shock of terror had disturbed the balance of her faculties” (28). While he insists that “the idea of absolute insanity which we all associate with the very name of an Asylum had, I can honestly declare, never occurred to me” (28), Walter contradicts himself, having just admitted that the idea that Anne is an escaped mental patient did not strike him as a surprise, but rather as something he had pre-cognitively known.

Thus the crime of insanity becomes its own testimony: Anne’s presence on the high road at one a.m. is taken as evidence that she is insane – it is a symptom of a preexisting condition – with insanity being constituted as being a woman alone on the high road at one a.m. When Walter learns that she is fleeing from the asylum, he asks himself, “What had I done? Assisted the victim of the most horrible of all false imprisonments to escape or cast loose on the wide world of London an unfortunate creature whose actions it was my duty, and every man’s duty,

43. The issue of Laura's sanity is further complicated by the textual implication that Anne Catherick has inherited her mental instability from her father, who is, of course, also Laura's father.
mercifully to control?” (28-29). The answer suggested by the novel is that he has done both. Tamar Heller calls Anne “a walking signifier for [the female gothic's] claustrophobic narrative,” a phrase that calls attention to the tension between confinement and physical liberty in the portrayal of Anne (114). Walter refers to wrongful confinement in the asylum as “most horrible,” but in truth, acknowledges that Anne confined is a safe figure; Anne abroad inspires terror. Thus Walter's instinctive response to Anne's mobility belies the opposition of the drawing master to Sir Percival: both men would, the text implies, feel much more secure if Anne could be locked up and the key thrown away. In other words, the woman they find so disturbing is reinterpreted as being disturbed. The symptom is presented as the disease, and vice-versa. That is to say, the act is nothing other than itself, and is itself insanity.

This is Percival’s argument about Anne, taking the effect of her imprisonment (a disturbance in the balance of her faculties) and presenting it as the cause, an argument that would work equally well, if not better, with Laura after she undergoes the same traumatic experience and emerges stunted and childishy vacant. The reasoning applied to Anne can only be that if one’s wits are disturbed by the experience of being locked away in an asylum, it is somehow proof that one’s wits were already disturbed anyway. As Natalie Huffels notes, “Collins thus seems to imply something akin to traumatic dissociation by splitting his wounded character in two: one sister [Anne] experiences the shock and the other [Laura] suffers the long-term consequences of it” (46). Because insanity is something that cannot be adequately explained (although, as the century progressed, a host of experts spent increasing amounts of time and energy attempting to do just that), it is figured in the text as a nightmarish state of existence beyond the reach of language; it is the legalized classification of Anne’s opaque body, the
element that moves her beyond the reaches of the narrative as it simultaneously steals from her the power of narration.

Indeed, the portrayal of Anne’s processes of cognition is so opaque as to imply that she lacks the power to achieve any sort of meaningful self-realization: amid the heteroglossia of Collins’s novel, Anne’s narrative voice is notably absent. The trial-by-jury structure of the novel calls each character to give evidence in turn, and Collins has assembled a Dickens-worthy pantheon of misfit characters. As an artist, with but not of the gentry, Walter is socially ambiguous and frequently feminized; Percival is not only illegitimate but, through nature or necessity – or both – a criminal; Marian Halcombe physically and mentally defies gender expectations; Laura is robbed of both her legal right to her identity and her memory; Count Fosco is triply disqualified from what I’ll call normality, being a foreign, bodily grotesque villain; and of course Anne Catherick is illegitimate, perhaps insane, and definitely unsettling. They are all, as Anne Gaylin observes, “liminal” characters, difficult to qualify in terms of social convention or, still more unsettlingly, legal language (307). Even as superficial an iteration as the one above of the novel’s characters and their primary characteristics makes it profoundly clear that Laura Fairlie-Glyde-Hartright is not alone in her inscrutability before the law. The problem of legal interpretation of the individual – that is, the problem of rights, which in turn is expressed as the fundamental problem of identity – is the organizational pivot around which the text, itself in the form of a pseudo-legal document that casts the reader as judge and jury, turns. “The narrative makes explicit that the reader, as well as the characters, becomes invested with the

44. In addition to first-person narration from Walter, Marian, and Count Fosco, the text also contains narratives by a Chancery Lane solicitor; Frederick Fairlie, Laura and Anne's uncle; Percival's housekeeper; and Mrs. Catherick, as well as the “Narrative of the Tombstone” and the text of the marriage registry that casts doubt upon Glyde's legitimacy. As this list shows, Laura's voice is also notably absent.
powers of judgment and must be convinced of an individual’s social and moral legitimacy; social institutions determine personal identity” (Gaylin 307).

The interpretive problem of identity explains why Anne Catherick cannot be called to “give evidence” in the form of first-person narration; even against the dubious standard set by her illegitimate cohort, she is cast as an unreliable witness. While the multivocal narrative structure may “give a voice to women and other outcasts” and “imply an aesthetics of multiplicity over an aesthetic unity that signifies the hegemony of a male-dominated and bourgeois culture” (Heller 37), Anne's voice is conspicuously absent. For Maria K. Bachman, Anne is “the literal and figurative embodiment of Secrecy (with a capital 'S')” (Bachman 79). Anne can be read by neither the law nor the other characters. The “embodiment of Secrecy” cannot divulge her secrets without destroying herself and, in turn, the text; in other words, Anne must remain illegible, her body impenetrable, not only because the cultural environment of the time offered no language nuanced enough to read or write her, but because the narrative requires it: without Anne's non-narratable embodiment of a host of threatening, beguiling possible subject positions, there is no mystery, no novel, and no sensation genre. To this end, the novel employs the popular expedient of casting grave doubts upon Anne’s sanity: this is another mystery that follows her to the grave and beyond. As Taylor writes, “the uncertainty of what Anne does signify, and how her testimony should be listened to … are given a significance, but one [Walter and Marian] can only decipher as 'unsoundness of mind'” (101). Thus the solution is not to listen to Anne's potential testimony at all.

We are informed in Chapter I that both the legal-esque structure of the novel and its publication before the public in its present form are due to the instability of the law; it cannot “be depended on to fathom every case of suspicion” or “to conduct every process of inquiry” (5).
While the law “is represented in terms of an authoritative system of clarification and distinction” it is also “expressly declared to work in a highly unpredictable and erratic fashion” (Erchinger 49). Thus in The Woman in White, the status of crime is unstable; it cannot be evaluated before the law. Crime “becomes semantically indifferent … [C]rime is potentially ubiquitous because every act that appears to be harmless and trivial could still be a crime”; crime is everything it is, as well as everything it is not (Erchinger 60). For narrative purposes, insanity serves as both a justification for the commission of or failure to detect crime, and as itself a crime – a social and intellectual crime; and like more conventional crime, it encompasses everything it is as well as everything it is not. For a young woman, inappropriate circulation through the modern urban world is interpreted as insanity; and insanity in turn is interpreted as a criminal act.

V. Conclusion: The Novel in Search of a Protagonist

In its treatment of Anne, The Woman in White conforms to the pattern of obsessive scrutiny combined with deflection of the gaze that I have identified as surrounding Lady Dedlock in Bleak House. I read the walking woman – herself a body that is always potentially out of place, potentially moving in an unsanctioned fashion – as the locus of a larger narrative pattern of excess, illegibility, problematic subjectivity, illegitimacy, and deviance. To this the sensation novel adds another element, which is silence. Not only can the reader not see Anne as she moves through the text, but she cannot hear Anne's voice. The economy of the narrative ultimately labors to convince the reader not only that Anne’s story is not worth the telling, but that it isn’t even really hers. This operates, as I have suggested, through the process of substitution, and through the deflection of the gaze. In one of fiction’s most bizarre cases of mistaken identity, Laura comes not just to resemble her half-sister physically and psychologically, but to usurp her role as the novel’s central figure of mystery. Because Anne remains illegible, the happily-ever-
after ending ‘solves’ the mystery of the woman in white by reasserting it as instead the mystery of Laura Fairlie, and furnishing a solution by (partially) reestablishing her identity at Anne’s expense – that is, the stratagem of proving Laura to be alive only works because someone else (Anne) is actually dead. Since Anne embodies so much anxiety, the novel's solution is to rid itself of that body, an outcome desired by heroic narrator Walter as well as by villainous plotters Fosco and Percival. If “the mission of the novel as a whole is to construct a plausible framework for Laura as a living person, its polemic to convince the reader, in lieu of a court of law, that she lives on, married to Walter” (Dever 110), then it can only accomplish this by definitively proving that the body buried beneath the tombstone in the Fairlie family plot is not Laura. By process of elimination, if the body does not belong to Laura, it must be that of Anne, who bears such a striking resemblance to her half-sister.

The momentum of the narrative coerces the reader to shoe-horn Laura into the ill-fitting role of female protagonist, a promise held out in the novel’s title but snatched out of the reach of Anne Catherick. The novel's portentous opening line begins this process. “This is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure,” it reads, “and what a Man's resolution can achieve” (5). Although Anne is the first, most apparent woman in white, this sentence immediately suggests that the novel is not her story; Anne is many things, but patience is not one of them. This second attempt to solve Anne as a narrative problem also fails: the figurative barring of the illegitimate sister from the courtroom as an unreliable witness only resurfaces in Laura’s legal illegitimacy and inability to recover her memories of her traumatic past and, thus, fully to recuperate her individual identity. This blank space in the narrative, the real “something lacking” in Laura, not only renders her insufficient to the role of protagonist, but also completes her transformation into an eerily illegible female body fuzzily existing beyond the scope of the law. In an act of
novelistic alchemy, the structure of the text and its imaginative mapping turn Laura into Anne; they transform the genteel young lady in the moonlight into the Woman in White.

Other than Anne’s anxious question about the way to London and demand to know whether Walter thinks badly of her – clearly illustrating that she, like other mid-Victorian women, has thoroughly internalized the conventions regulating the process by which women are to move through the urban streets – the reader is offered no insight into Anne’s understanding of her own physical or mental interaction with her semi-urban environment. Her first, untoward nocturnal appearance on the road establishes the landscape onto which the novel subsequently insists on mapping her, in an extension of what is ostensibly Anne’s own private (unarticulated) narrative. Her imagined world, that of the nightmarish asylum, the mystery, takes on a life of its own: it becomes a genre. The novel presents Walter’s initial vision of Anne and her surroundings as her vision of herself and her surroundings; this is the imaginative mapping that not only pervades but governs the text, entrapping all the other characters as well as Anne and turning their world into that of the sensation novel. This is not Anne’s imaginative vision, but the narrative’s co-option of it. Still, the vision itself – one centered on the titillating encounter of the middle-class woman’s body with the promiscuous space of the urban street – remains incredibly powerful. Just as Anne “is a figurative tabula rasa onto which [the artist Walter] daubs the most disturbing aspects of his own character” (Mangham, “‘What Could’” 120), the imaginative landscape containing that figure becomes the canvas onto which Wilkie Collins paints the darkest fears of Victorian society about its own humdrum quotidian existence. Anne Catherick’s persistent illegibility (which is hers only in the same tenuous sense that her identity and her unspoken narrative are hers) leads not to a personal revelation and the deepening of her
consciousness and self-knowledge, but to the birth of a genre. Her body, itself illegible, can only be read as the sensational narrative map of one of the most popular genres of the decade.

As this chapter has illustrated, and as I discussed in the preface, the primary purpose of mapping is the impulse to clarify, to fix (in both senses of the word) locations, bodies, and acceptable routes and types of movement; however, the cartographic impulse here results in its own frustration. By defining boundaries, the cartographer – whether he be the man at a drafting table with a pen, or the imaginative pedestrian – also always defines the transgression of those boundaries. Thus mapping is an expression of inchoate anxiety that comprehends deviance, insanity, illegitimacy, uncertain class and sexual status, and a host of other topical nineteenth-century concerns. By re-examining nonfiction texts like Linton's beside a novel like The Woman in White, I have illustrated how tracing the movements of a body's movement through urban space articulates distress at least as powerfully as it speaks of reassurance. While the previous chapters have illustrated concerns emanating from the permeability of public space to bodies construed as deviant, and the relationship between their spatial narratives and the powerful dominant narrative of middle-class confidence and hegemony, the following chapters will examine the crises of value and identity that occur when the home – the most sacred of Victorian spaces – is subjected to the cartographical gaze and a host of polyvocal, competing narrative maps of domesticity.
CHAPTER THREE

“If you only knew the price of butter”\textsuperscript{45}. Aspirational Mapping and Rhetorics of Domesticity

I. Introduction

In Chapter VII of Margaret Oliphant's \textit{Phoebe Junior} (1876), twenty-year-old Ursula May accompanies her older cousins on a stroll through London's fashionable shopping district. Initially, Ursula's walk seems to have little in common with those I described in the previous chapter:

[T]hey made their way along the crowded street, where it was difficult for them to walk together, much less to maintain any conversation. And presently Ursula, keeping as close as possible to her cousin's side, but compelled to make way continually for other passers-by, lost herself in a maze of fancies, to which the misty afternoon atmosphere, and the twinkling lights, and the quickly passing crowds lent a confused but not unpleasing background. She was glad that the noise made all talk impossible, and that she could dream on quietly as they glided and pressed their way through the current of people in Oxford Street and Regent Street, as undisturbed as if she had been shut up in her own room – \textit{nay more so} – for the external sights and sounds which flitted vaguely by her, disguised those dreams even from herself ... What if somewhere about, in some beautiful house, with … a carriage at the door, a beautiful young hero should be waiting who would give all those dazzling delights to Ursula? Then what frocks she would buy, what toys, what ornaments! She would not stop at the girls, but drive to the best tailor's boldly, and bid him send down someone to take Johnnie's measure, and Robin's, and even Reginald's; and then she would go to the toy-shop, and to

\textsuperscript{45} Oliphant, \textit{Phoebe Junior}, 265
the bookseller, and I can't tell where besides; and finally drive down in the fairy chariot laden with everything that was delightful, to the very door … [W]hat a commotion would run through Grange Lane, and even up into the High Street, where the butcher and the baker would remember with a shiver how saucy they had sometimes been – when they saw what a great lady she was. (92-93, italics added)

If for Anne Catherick or the offspring of outraged “Paterfamilias” the London streets were the landscape of nightmare, for Ursula they are fodder and backdrop for her daydream of being exalted from her role as a poor village clergyman's eldest daughter and housekeeper, substitute mother to her younger siblings, to Lady Bountiful. Her fantasy is simultaneously specifically located – from shopping on Oxford Street, she will eschew the train and travel in the high style of her “fairy chariot” to Grange Lane, where she lives in her native village of Carlingford – and beyond the reach of space and time, in the realm of fairies and princes charming.

Even as Ursula understands her fantasy as fantasy, she also sees it as potentially realizable, inspired by her recent acquaintance with the fabulously wealthy Mrs. Copperhead, governess turned wife of a railway magnate, who has insisted on buying presents in the London shops for Ursula's siblings. As this passage demonstrates, the act of shopping – coded here as a specifically female practice – provided a powerfully seductive space in which Victorian women, no matter their financial circumstances, could construct alternative narratives for their lives; that is, they could remap both their quotidian experience of domestic drudgery and, through daydreaming, the cityscape itself. Although she imagines one day having a fabulous private carriage, the pedestrian experience is essential to Ursula's enjoyment on this particular occasion, as it was likewise essential in the 1860s polemic around the bodies of unaccompanied, seemingly
middle-class women (or were they ladies?) walking in London or other urban areas. Notice above Ursula's relief at the pressing throng of other pedestrians that renders conversation impossible and makes it easier for her to fantasize than does the space of her own bedroom, where she is surrounded by visual and auditory reminders of her onerous daily responsibilities (planning the dinners, haggling with the baker, mending, attempting to soothe her father's temper). If anyone is observing Ursula, questioning her intent or provenance, she doesn't notice, caught up in an experience that mingles recent memory of having purchased goods for her family (on a much more modest scale than the one she imagines), the glitter of the lights and shop windows in unfamiliar London, and a fantasy whose essential substance could date from the years of the Arabian Nights.

Ursula is passing very near the space depicted in the cartoon I analyzed in the previous chapter, in which the well-intentioned clergyman attempts to share the good news with a well-dressed prostitute, only to find that she is, or claims to be, an irreproachable lady only waiting for an omnibus (perhaps to return from a similar shopping expedition). London's shopping district in particular, and to a lesser extent the shopping area of any town or village, was coded as a mixed-use, promiscuous district, as I have already noted, for two major reasons: first, the proximity of fashionable shops to slums, rookeries, and shops dealing in pornography; second, the mystique that surrounded the body of a shopping woman in mid-Victorian culture: if a woman were looking to buy, might she not also be looking to sell? This accounts not only for much of the street harassment and flirtation reported in the last chapter, but for the dubious connotation of another Victorian figure, the shopgirl, often perceived as willing to sell both herself and her employer's wares. Likewise, prostitutes solicited clients in these same areas, often posing as respectable women out doing the shopping, perhaps even accompanied by a servant or elderly
Certainly before 1876, when Oliphant published this, the last of her Chronicles of Carlingford, shopping had become an active verb in the Victorian consciousness, and one understood to be carried out primarily by women, in particular the wives and daughters of the prosperous middle classes: “A disruptive presence in Britain’s urban shopping districts, the shopper was bringing her disorder home, where, increasingly and uncannily, the Victorians were finding that they were never more themselves than when they were surrounded by their things” (Lysack 79). Signaling a sea-change, James Whitely’s London draper’s shop, arguably the first department store, opened in 1863 (Graham 31).46 Shopping is everywhere present in nineteenth-century literature, from the most modest transactions of the very poor to the fabulous spending of Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s Lady Audley or Thackeray’s Becky Sharp. As the two latter examples indicate, excessive shopping was frowned upon, and often betokened a lacking, or even criminal, character; but moderate shopping was an integral part of the holy gospel of Victorian household management. Jane Austen’s works furnish many instances of early nineteenth-century shopping practices, and foreshadow the evolving signification of the practice through the next sixty years. In Austen, shopping is local, and allows women to participate in the growing capitalist economy, to exchange gossip and news within their social community, and to engage in flirtations; in a large city, shopping was necessarily, for most individuals, a more anonymous experience, but still allowed women active participation, both economically as consumers of goods, and physically, as part of the cityscape, from which they were otherwise largely (theoretically) erased. In the midst of the male-dominated city, shopping carved out a feminized, “appropriate” space for respectable women, a space more often than not interpreted as safe, non-threatening.

46. According to Graham, Whitely got the idea for what we now know as the department store from the array of goods on display at the Great Exhibition.
Only in recent years have scholars persistently asked the question that should follow: why was this the case? Why was the physical and ideological space of shopping, which offered all sorts of risks and temptations, from harassment to flirtation to over-extended credit, identified with middle-class women and thus understood as a safe space? Arguably for much of the twentieth century the stereotypical association of women and shopping remained so naturalized that such a question seemed too obvious to ask, let alone answer. All women, western culture continues to tell us, love shopping, because it's lighthearted fun that doesn't require too much thinking, and allows them to indulge their natural, bird-like penchant for acquiring shiny things while spending their husbands', partners', or fathers' money. This is, of course, a reductive and problematic way of thinking, but I use it here to make a point. In the twenty-first century's continued perception of shopping as a largely feminine enterprise financed by men who are elsewhere, not participating in the shopping but earning money to provide for the goods, our culture retains palpable traces of the Victorian ideology that governed shopping, but much of the historical significance of the practice has been forgotten or, at least, ignored. Shopping in the mid-Victorian period meant procuring goods not as a diversion but as work, albeit sometimes pleasurable work, for the home and its inhabitants; as such, it was an important part of the gendered division of labor and the philosophy of separate spheres. This goes far toward explaining why shopping was considered a safe activity for women: the act was strongly linked to the home, to buying goods for the home and its inhabitants, and thus unfolded in a space ideologically contiguous with the domestic.

Successful shopping was also vital to middle-class self-presentation: the items one bought created a narrative about the individual, the family, and the family's social status – all-important in this era of rapid change and potential upward or downward social mobility.
Shopping and the closely related activity of interior decoration thus could solidify or imperil a family's class position, as the nineteenth-century language of domestic display became increasingly complex. The home was “both a contained physical space and a metaphorical stage with profound political and psychological connotations in a culture of watchfulness, a marker of class 'respectability' and comfort, and the chief signifier of accelerating privatization” (Bivona 109). The demarcation between public and private, paradoxically, could not signify in a vacuum, but only in the presence of spectators whose function was to witness the materiality of the Victorian domestic.

This chapter will consider the ways in which instructions for proper shopping (whether for food, clothing, furniture, or ornaments) and interior decoration became progressively specific and admonitory in the period's didactic household texts, including household management guides and architect Robert Kerr's highly influential and widely read architectural manual, in order to establish the significance of what I am calling aspirational mapping to mid-Victorian cultural cache and social status. As I contend, these guides provide verbal, and sometimes visual, maps of the ideal middle-class home, and are presented as objective, quasi-scientific texts, the domestic counterpart to the scientific art of cartography. Governed by the same ethos of separation, categorization, and transparency, these guides work in conjunction with the period's domestic fiction to lend a deep significance to the old adage “a place for everything, and everything in its place.” After identifying two streams of rhetoric that run through all these nonfiction texts – morality and materialism, presented as complementary practices but, as I will illustrate, often actually contradictory – I will examine the shopping and decorating practices of five characters from the domestic fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell and Margaret Oliphant. These examples – four women and, tellingly, only one man – demonstrate both how these rhetorical streams influence
common depictions of shopping, domestic management, and domestic display; and how differing
degrees of understanding of the fantasies and realities involved in this aspirational mapping can
lead both to vastly different narratives of the middle-class home and to the destruction or
consolidation of personal and social identity.

II. Love at the Helm and Money in the Bank

Sarah Stickney Ellis was one of the most prominent and prolific writers of domestic
nonfiction produced by the nineteenth century. Despite the fact that she made a career of
successfully monetizing domesticity and morality in works like *The Women of England: Their
Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (1839) and *The Dangers of Dining Out; or, Hints to Those
Who Would Make Home Happy* (1842), Ellis's is normally heard as one of the most conservative
voices in the conversation on separate spheres and British domesticity. This, as Karen Chase and
Michael Levenson explain, is only a partial portrait of Ellis; and restoring the context that
produced both the writer and her writing is instrumental in understanding the historical moment
of two distinct rhetorics of Victorian domestic space. Critics “must acknowledge that the fetish of
home life created both a spatial logic and a discursive tonality that allowed 'fireside comfort' to
serve as the basis for repudiating the emergent competitive economy” (Chase and Levenson 78);
that is to say, writers like Ellis, who published actively from the 1830s, concentrated on the
moral and spiritual, rather than material, import of domestic space as the solid building block of
British society. Ellis didn't expect to drag men away from the battlefield of commerce and
confine them in a domestic cage, but she saw home life as a necessary corrective to this outside
existence, the only way of ensuring the moral integrity of future generations:

[T]he immediate object of the present work is to show how intimate is the
connection between the women of England, and the moral character maintained
by their country in the scale of nations … [T]o women belongs the minute and particular observance of all those trifles which fill up the sum of human happiness or misery, it may surely be deemed pardonable for a woman to solicit the interest of her own sex, while she endeavors to prove that it is the minor morals of domestic life which give the tone to English character, and that over this sphere of duty it is her peculiar province to preside. (35)

Although she staunchly asserted the moral, physical, and intellectual superiority of men, “Those men, whose superiority is ensured by axiom, nevertheless show a dazzling gift for moral degradation” due to the necessity of their worldly pursuits (Chase and Levenson 77). It is not that Ellis was disingenuous, or, by the standards of the 1830s and 1840s, contradictory. Here again are Chase and Levenson:

*The Women of England* affirms the special dignity of the middle classes, even as it offers withering appraisal of the economic life of commercial England [which Ellis always presents as masculine]. And if any sense is to be made of midcentury domesticity, this tense subtlety must be respected. It turns up in Dickens as regularly as in Ellis: the distinction between middle-class capitalism and bourgeois domesticity. Instead of identifying these forces as the same historical process, we need to recognize the extent to which early Victorian home life appeared not only as distinct from the new economy but as its saving alternative.

(76)

In Ellis, the reader finds no lists of items to buy for the kitchen or morning room, but a steady flow of maxims and aphorisms that links her more closely to a spiritual writer like Hannah More than to her more secular contemporary Isabella Beeton. The domestic mission does not
incorporate materialism, but provides a spiritual alternative to it, embodied in the much fetishized fireplace. “Needless to say, the fireside was always a flickering and unstable basis, and with the rise of more conspicuous consumption after midcentury, middle-class home life became an ever weaker alternative to ‘worldly aggrandisement’” (Chase and Levenson 78).

Indeed, as later writers demonstrate, middle-class home life became one of the chief arenas of “worldly aggrandisement.” This is a vital cultural, ideological transition, one that required complex verbal maneuvering on its path to naturalization. In *The Victorian Parlour*, an ideological study of the material realities of this central Victorian space, Thad Logan writes, “The doctrine of separate spheres and the development of consumer capitalism led to the establishment of the middle-class home as a privileged space, a feminized space in which material things simultaneously asserted and concealed a relation to the marketplace” (xiii). Logan’s is a concise, if simplified, description (the doctrine of separate spheres developed largely in response to, not just simultaneously with, the explosion of consumer capitalism, as Ellis illustrates). Referring to the popularity of works by Ellis and her successors, Elizabeth Langland observes, “To say … that beginning in the 1830s and 1840s middle-class women controlled significant discursive practices is to argue that they controlled the dissemination of certain kinds of knowledge and thus helped to ensure a middle-class hegemony in mid-Victorian England” (291). She adds, “It is also to argue that middle-class women were produced by these discourses even as they reproduced them to consolidate middle-class control” (Langland 292). Emphasis on the woman as the moral center of the home, while complicit in her theoretical confinement within that home, paradoxically strengthened her power even as it narrowed its scope of direct action. As the mothers and spiritual guides of the nation, the discourse of gendered domesticity “gave middle-class women unprecedented political power” (Langland 292), albeit indirect
power. The marriage of moral with material ideologies of the home explains the increasing fetishization of the physical dimensions of this space during the course of the century, particularly from roughly the 1850s onward. Moral integrity, after all, is less simply displayed than a tasteful painting or a fine dinner for one's business colleagues; and these events and items participated in their own vocabulary of social and moral currency.

By the beginning of Victoria's reign, capitalism and the growing mass production of goods meant that a larger segment of the British population than ever before had surplus income; and how one spent this income became increasingly crucial to one's class and individual identity. Many critics have argued, like Andrew Maunder, that “For a rapidly expanding bourgeoisie possessing the means, but not the social decorum, either to carve out a new position of ascendancy or to assimilate with the aristocracy, the ‘how to’ book became an indispensable guide for the nouveau riche anxious on how to deport themselves in polite society” (‘Alone’” 48). Marjorie Garson elaborates, “As economic changes placed more wealth in the hands of the middle class and the old signs of status – titles, great estates, luxurious living, aristocratic dress – lost their exclusive prestige, new social lines began to be drawn, and the moral and social authority of the middle class to be justified on the basis of its sensibility, manners, morality, intelligence, and initiative” (8). As Garson explains, all these latter qualities came to be grouped under the rubric of taste; its opposite pole is vulgarity, both terms employed frequently in the didactic and fictional texts of the period. Hers is an interrogation of “how 'moral taste' came to be appropriated by the middle classes and applied to the most banal details of everyday life: why … the word 'taste' can be applied without incongruity to a whole range of behaviours, including diction, elocution, social decorum, manners, style of hospitality, and the right attitude to take towards servants, as well as to more narrowly aesthetic pursuits like drawing and making music”
(6). In other words, by mid-century, the ascendancy of the middle classes was being justified on the grounds of a rhetorically moral quality, taste, that was in actuality profoundly materialistic; it is not only that the possession of the aforementioned qualities depends upon the possession of certain status markers, i.e. servants, a drawing room or parlor in which to receive guests, etc., but the possession of the proper exponents of these qualities: good servants, “tasteful” furniture.

It is not an exaggeration to say that a Victorian gentleman's identity – his very gentility – depended upon his style of speech, the clothing he wore, the servants he employed, and, most crucially of all, the items on display for the guests he received within his home. The most accessible examples of this phenomenon come from Dickens's quasi-caricatures: Pip comes to know Wemmick's true character only by visiting his suburban haven, literally a castle in miniature with a drawbridge that allows him to compartmentalize his professional and personal lives; while the excessive shininess of the Veneerings' new plate tells the reader all she needs to know about the glaring novelty of the family's wealth. “The prevailing ideology regarded the house as a haven, a private domain opposed to the public sphere of commerce, but the house and its mistress in fact served as a significant adjunct to a man’s business endeavors. Whereas husbands earned the money, wives had the important task of administering the funds to acquire or maintain social and political status” (Langland 291).

Already we begin to discern the process by which the fixation on being a 'smart shopper' was both elevated and naturalized. Furthermore, the obvious intrusion of commodities into the home – indeed, the recognition of these goods as necessary to and constitutive of the home – belies the ideology of domestic inviolability. In her work on the prominence of domestic fraud in Victorian culture, Rebecca Stern calls attention to the fact that the domestic itself was, to an extent, a fraud, characterized not by privacy but by “a formal tenuousness of categorization in
which the separation of public from private inevitably, predictably, and consistently fails” (4). While this view of the home motivated the ideological and physical retrenching apparent in household management guides, the popularity of domestic fiction, and essays like Ruskin's “Of Queen's Gardens” (1865), it “also paradoxically cultivated a marked appetite for narratives of invasion, seepage, and contamination that asserted the impossibility of maintaining firm boundaries” (Stern 4).

Within this system, Nancy Armstrong describes the function of marriage:

The female operates in this sexual exchange to transform a given quantity of income into a desirable quality of life. Her powers of supervision ensure the income will be distributed according to certain proportions designed to meet certain domestic criteria, no matter what the amount of the husband's income may be. This double translation of one's social value – from a concept of quality based on birth to a quantity of income, which then materializes as a certain quality of domestic life – creates the economic basis for affiliation among competing interest groups. It creates an ideal exchange in which the female alone can perform the necessary economic transformation. Such a representation implies that people with incomes ranging from 1000 to 10,000 per year could share a world of similar proportions and therefore aspire to the same quality of life. (85) Armstrong identifies a central tension in architectural and domestic management guides and the novels that respond to them, which is the idea that, if a woman's domestic management only be good enough, the real amount of her husband's (or father's or brother's) income ceases to matter: she will provide the desirable lifestyle, with all its accoutrements, confirming her self-worth and her family's genteel status. Here Ellis's spiritual understanding of the domestic clashes with its
materialist successor, producing this odd result, which is the materially comfortable home created from moral values: cheerfulness, subservience, tenderness, watchfulness, etc. The other side of this coin, of course, is that if the home is an unhappy one, the fault is entirely the woman’s, because she has not managed properly. This strain of thought persisted through the twentieth century: “Neither good taste nor wealth … can transform a house into a home, for a home does not consist in the quality of its architecture or décor, but in the quality of the lives that it expresses. The Victorian obsession with comfort has some relation to this conviction, for the first – and even the final – test of a home is whether it makes the visitor feel at ease” (Tristram 23). Tristram goes on to reiterate the typical Victorian insistence that “these qualities have no relation to aesthetics” (23), seemingly without irony.

Enter Mrs. Beeton, the best-remembered exponent of Victorian domesticity. Before authoring her well-known book, Isabella collaborated with her husband Samuel on the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, which, unlike its predecessors, “secularised [its readers’] lives, offering the way to domestic happiness rather than salvation” (Beetham 59). By 1857 its circulation was an impressive 50,000. As Margaret Beetham argues, the contents of Samuel Beeton's magazine presented domesticity (and thus middle-class respectability) as a quality that could be learned rather than as preordained, i.e., he cannily tapped into the shifting class identity of his target readership: his audience consisted of Englishwomen, not ladies. For instance, in the magazine, measurements included with the recipes suggested an affinity between cooking and science, both professionalizing women's labor and emphasizing that it was a subject to be learned. Early volumes included lists of “Things worth knowing.” This “not only implied a body of domestic knowledge to be learnt, but assumed print as an appropriate medium for its instruction. This displaced a tradition of direct instruction by mothers and older women”

47. For more on the rhetorical strategies employed within household management texts, see the following chapter.
Isabella Beeton was a major contributor to the EDM, and it is out of this climate that her book emerged. Unlike Ellis, Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management* (1861) is highly detailed, specific, and instructive. “It is reasonable to assume that, in opposing these aristocratic traditions, female conduct books changed the ideal of what English life ought to be when they replaced the lavish displays of aristocratic life with the frugal and private practices of the modern gentleman” (Armstrong 71). Beeton provides different and contradictory modes of consumption that are intended to work in harmony: “Mrs. Beeton offered practical solutions to a bourgeois economy of food usage that was concerned both with ‘gentility’ and elegance and with recycling left-overs, and which promoted status enhancement while ensuring long-term economy” (Day 51). Day calls this “mobial consumption,” indicating that both kinds of practices are always in flux, always being negotiated, and always simultaneous. “These preoccupations [with food, eating and etiquette] were part of larger concerns about status and were related to relative economic and social instability” (Day 49).

Beeton's is arguably the first work that can accurately be termed a household management guide; the works of Sarah Ellis, like those of her predecessors, are really conduct manuals, a genre with roots in the Middle Ages that, according to Carolyn Steedman, had already begun to undergo profound changes. Nancy Armstrong elaborates, “Until sometime around the end of the seventeenth century, the great majority of conduct books were devoted mainly to representing the male of the dominant class” (Armstrong 61). It was, that is to say, an etiquette guide, and the “dominant class” was the land-based aristocracy; but as industrialization began to change the structure of society, it likewise changed the aim of conduct books, which began to be directed at women of the emergent middle classes. “An exclusive concern for the practical matters of running a household classified certain handbooks for women as domestic economies,
which meant they belonged to an entirely different genre than conduct books that aspired to be
courtesy literature” (Armstrong 61). These categories remained constant until the 18th century,
when the two categories began to merge, and the proper running of the household to be
reinterpreted as a reflection of a woman's morality rather than just her efficiency – that is,
efficiency became morality. Steedman states that such volumes written after about 1760 “are all
acknowledgment of these changes taking place in the organisation of social relations in civil
society (or in the class structures of emergent industrial capitalism)” (144). In writing and talking
about women's roles, “By the 1830s and 1840s the language used was increasingly secular and
the belief in the natural differences and complementary roles of men and women which had
originally been particularly linked to Evangelicalism, had become the common sense of the
English middle class” (Davidoff and Hall 149)48. As I have explained, Ellis wrote exclusively for
the middle classes: she “was particularly concerned with those families of traders, manufacturers
and professionals where there were one to four servants, where there had been some kind of
liberal education, and where there was no family rank” (Davidoff and Hall 182-183).

The introduction of specific instructions associated with the Beetons is a key ingredient
in the formulation of a new genre as well as a new audience.49 As the title of the magazine
emphasizes, not only is the publication directed at women rather than ladies, but Englishness is
closely associated with, and may depend upon, the practice of domesticity. “What made The

48. Even Ellis was criticized for not being sufficiently religious in her writings; she responded that, rather than being
didactically Christian, she intended to be a moral writer.
regard to Hannah Glasse’s The Art of Cookery (1747), Meir asserts, “Glasse’s reluctance to offer instructions [“Nor
indeed do I think it would be very pretty to see a Lady’s Table set out after the Directions of a Book”] is
characteristic of eighteenth-century handbooks’ supposition that the lady of the house has her own habits,
preferences, and methods” (135). Echoing Steedman and Armstrong, she adds that “although both conduct books
and cookery books can be found beginning in the middle ages, what makes the mid-nineteenth century unique in a
broad historical context is the increasing number of works on social instruction targeted for the first time at the
middle and working classes” (136). As the nineteenth century progressed, it became conventional for cookery books
to include recipes and instructions for their preparation.
Book of Household Management (1861) so popular and successful was a complex mixture of good marketing, timing, a sense of completeness, and the particularities of tone and form of address which offered inspiration to readers and understood their aspirational desires” (Day 55).

The concept of a single, unified Victorian middle class is painfully reductive (as it remains in our own society). The goal of the advice book is to unify that plurality by subsuming both individual idiosyncrasy and the shadings and nuances that identify and differentiate each sub-class – the old professions, the new professions, merchants, shopkeepers, civil servants, clerks, etc. – one from another beneath the sheltering rubric of management. A successful guide simultaneously reaches and effaces this goal by performing as if the Middle-Class Ideal were already the reality. Such a tactic is extremely effective at the practical level: it obviates the need to reach a consensus on standards of meaning by instead behaving as if such a consensus is preexistent. As critics such as Davidoff, Langland, and Natalie Kapatarios Meir have emphasized, works within this genre achieve the end of disseminating a class- and taste-based ideal not just through their content, but by employing a range of narrative techniques that themselves reinforce that content. As Meir explains, from mid-century the guides make extensive use of iterative narration, whose skeletal, list-like structure is a highly effective form of prescribing without using prescriptive words like “should” or “must,” in that it assumes that activities with the home simply do proceed as they are being described as a matter of course. So it establishes an idealized standard under the guise of quotidian practice, merging form and content in order to do so. Meir's specific focus is the era's obsession with the practice of eating:

Within the large body of Victorian dining handbooks, there is not only a

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50. This is the only reliable method of actually reaching such a consensus, as the universal standard measurement can only exist if it is wholly shared, an eventuality that can only be effected if the entirety of the society is not only middle class but, really, located smack in the middle of the middle class – a logical impossibility, as there can be no middle without a perimeter.
striking repetition of content from one handbook to the next, but also a repetition of narrative styles, patterns, and devices that imply that the procedures under discussion are universal phenomena, divorced from human agency, interpretation, and variable social circumstances. In other words, these handbooks render the conventions natural. (133)

The same can be said of more broadly defined household management guides. My own research has confirmed, for example, not only the similarity of the content across a range of texts, but that J. H. Walsh's chapters on nursing and the sickroom from *A Manual of Domestic Economy: Suited to Families Spending from 100 to 1000 a Year* (1856) find their way verbatim into subsequent guides, such as *The Modern Householder: A Manual of Domestic Economy in All its Branches* (1872). While this may strike the modern reader as flagrant plagiarism, this is a misunderstanding that fails to take the context and purpose of these volumes into consideration. The goal here is not originality but standardization; and what better way to put up a unified front, so to speak, than to include extracts from previous works on the same subject? This fortifies Langland's assertion that “the manuals apparently served more to consolidate a public image within the middle classes than to facilitate a rise in status for other ranks” (293).

In the *Book of Household Management*, it is very clear that the material reality of the home has begun to register as an accurate measure of the domestic manager's moral qualities. “What moved me, in the first instance, to attempt a work like this, was the discomfort and suffering which I had seen brought upon men and women by household mismanagement. I have always thought that there is no more fruitful source of family discontent than a housewife's badly-cooked dinners and untidy ways,” writes Beeton (3). Now “[O]ne can measure success in the game of self-control by measuring its rewards in terms of successful dishes served, appetites
satisfied, and domestic peace and order imposed” (Bivona 112). In other words, while the domestic manager's mission may have become more secular, with its directions and lists of ingredients, it is no less the moral and spiritual heart of the English home, and thus of English society. This fusion of morality and materialism creates strange bed-fellows, as we shall see.

As titles like Eliza Warren's *How I Managed My Household on £200 a Year* make clear, the need to economize is at the core of the domestic idyll; however, these influential guides offer disconcertingly paradoxical recipes for domestic propriety, wherein expenditure often features as a cunning strategy for saving money while projecting a desirable middle-class identity. Whether you’re buying a joint of meat or furnishing a townhouse, the message remains the same. Making proper purchases – spending on acquiring the best available to you – is presented as a strategy for saving, rather than wasting, money. By making the proper display, you establish and solidify your social and class status – your identity as a Victorian of the middle classes. As Laura Baker Whelan phrases it in her investigation of the Victorian suburb, “At the most basic level, the middle class was concerned with marking its space to reinforce class boundaries. An observer should have been able to identify the social position of any individual by the space that individual inhabited” (75). Choosing the proper locale for one’s residence was only the first of many steps in this process; the contents of the house, and the use of those contents, were at least equally important, and this is where the Victorian woman could exercise real, if limited, agency.

For this reason the prescriptive nature of cookery books and household management guides is beguiling, and here again the elision of the all-important leap between the potential and the actual is brought to light. Take, for example, architect and author Robert Kerr’s *The Gentleman’s House; or, How to Plan English Residences, from the Parsonage to the Palace*
As the title makes clear, it is the nature of his domestic arrangements that provide the true litmus test of a man's right to call himself a gentleman. What, then, must the gentleman’s house provide? “Quiet comfort for his family and guests, – Thorough convenience for his domestics – Elegance and importance without ostentation” (73). Kerr spends several hundred pages elaborating these vague but intimidating criteria under the following headings: privacy, comfort, convenience, spaciousness, compactness, light and air, salubrity, aspect and prospect, cheerfulness, elegance, importance, and ornament (74). First and foremost, before any building commences, “A Gentleman’s House, however unpretending, ought to be placed in a well-selected locality generally, on a well-selected site specifically, and with due regard in detail to aspect, prospect, approach, soil, salubrity, water, air, drainage, and other influences and surroundings” (310). Assuming this idyllic locale (in the vicinity of, say, the upscale London suburb of Ealing, perhaps; or in one of the other suburbs of the metropolis that developed so rapidly after mid-century), building and furnishing must proceed hand-in-glove so that all the furniture is suitably adapted to the functions and aesthetics of the various rooms. The matter of the all-important sideboard illustrates this aptly. In the dining room, which should be fifteen to twenty feet wide, with eighteen feet preferred, “It need not be said also that there is a certain importance inherent in a good sideboard, which demands one end of the room for itself” (104). The room must be designed with the sideboard in mind rather than the other way about, because “the sideboard ought never to be surmounted or even flanked by end windows; because not only are the operations of the servants thus brought into prominence, but when a gentleman does honour to his guests by displaying his plate, its effect is destroyed by the glare of light” (104).

51. “As professor of the arts of construction at King's College, as council member of the Royal Institute of British Architects, as district surveyor for the Metropolitan Board of Works, Kerr embodied the social consolidation of architectural expertise which by the sixties had become academically respectable, institutionally secure, and legally sanctioned” (Chase and Levenson 158).
This is a prime example of the extreme import afforded to the selection of proper furniture and household wares: a house’s furniture, like the house itself, was meant to endure, not to be disposed of or discarded. Thus any aesthetic misstep could result in a permanent embarrassment.

*The Modern Householder: A Manual of Domestic Economy in All its Branches*, edited by Ross Murray, is even more prescriptive in its treatment of the dining room, which Kerr calls “the most fastidious in its demands” (110). The volume leaves nothing to chance:

The Dining Room should look warm in winter, and cool in summer. The carpet should be a rich Turkey or Axeminster – not quite covering the floor, but leaving a border of polished oak. The sideboard should be (in the country) of old oak carved, all the furniture matching it; in London, of polished mahogany, the cellaretto match. The dining-table should be oval, of polished mahogany; the chairs of the same, with leather cushions harmonizing in colour with the curtains. The side-tables should not be too large; the chimney-ornaments of bronze; on the walls, family portraits, or well-chosen landscapes – not paintings of any painful subject. (22).

Lest this degree of specificity be read as an aberration, consider these methodical instructions for furnishing a suitable library. It should have a rich Turkey carpet, and the furniture should be of a handsome and stately character, of carved oak or rosewood. Above the bookshelves should be busts of distinguished authors, and in the intervals between them Mercuries (or tall stands) with the same. Over the mantel-piece a good picture; on the chimney-piece itself a marble or bronze timepiece; bronze ornaments; a centre table, two writing tables with small drawers, duly fitted up with inkstand, pens, blotting-
books, tapers, letter-weighers, paper weights; a Postal Directory on one, a Peerage on the other, a barrel of string, large scissors, paper-knives, penknives, globes and maps between the bookshelves; a portfolio stand for choice engravings, a cabinet for gems of art; general colouring grave and warm. (23)

Although the Victorian era in Britain witnessed a bewildering profusion of new household objects, as the foregoing passages clarify, this proliferation did not necessarily entail the expansion of free choice or an emphasis on whimsy when it came to interior design. Ideally the choice was not whether or not to place a bronze timepiece in your library, but *which* bronze timepiece to place in your library. The question is less one of personal discretion or artistic judgment than it is of propriety, of gentility – of *Englishness*. “The characteristic bourgeois interior becomes increasingly full of objects, cluttered – to modern eyes, at least – with a profusion of things, things that are not primarily functional, that do not have obvious use-value, but rather participate in a decorative, semiotic economy” (Logan 26).

Kerr and company are in no way unusually fastidious in this respect; their fetishization of uniformity, order, and proper choices (i.e. good taste) enables the inhabitants of these English houses to classify and interpret their surroundings. Above all, idiosyncrasy should be discouraged. “It is certainly true,” Kerr notes, “that the domestic arrangements of our better classes follow almost without exception a regular system” (80). The conclusion initially seems counter-intuitive: the bourgeois Victorian home, crammed as never before with a mind-boggling array of furniture, knickknacks, utensils, and handicrafts, was a realm of rigorously limited aesthetic decisions. The profusion of objects poised to descend easily into Dickens’s vision of eccentricity, hoarding, and neglect should instead be coded as the bastion of hyper-organization: a place for everything and everything in its place. This is, in fact, Robert Kerr’s definition of
convenience, one of the cardinal virtues signifying the gentility of any home. Not only must each item have its place, but each of these items should have one function, just as each individual room should be suited to its single function. For example, cookery guru Mary Jewry provides lists of the articles absolutely essential in the kitchen in Warne’s Model Cookery and Housekeeping Book (1869). There are three lists: one for 38l. 10s.; one for 10l. 15s.; and one for 4l. 5s. The mid-range list consists of thirty-six separate entries for a total of fifty-two “essential” items. Rigid separation of functions, furnishings, and individuals is essential. The vogue of the term “household management” now appears perfectly sensible: all these goods and chattels required strict management in order to retain their proper positions and, thus, signification. In a thriving, well-appointed household, inventory alone must have been an exhausting, never-ending task.

The drawbacks to this peculiar system of social economy are obvious: for many, even many who considered themselves as appertaining to the middle classes, many of the aforementioned “requirements” would have been out of reach. Indeed, how is one meant to accomplish all this on a limited income? Kerr is insouciant: “if it be borne in mind that one Gentleman’s House differs from another altogether in degree rather than in kind, the discrimination of such difference in detail … will be matter of no difficulty at all” (226) – Assuming, apparently, that one can afford a minimal outlay of £1,250, which is the bottom point on the scale of Kerr’s “Estimator’s Ready Reckoner” for prospective home-builders. This corresponds to thirteen family rooms at 8d. per cubic foot as well as thirteen servants’ rooms, with Kerr assuming that his prices are accurate in the vicinity of London. This would immediately appear to be enormously problematic, as most middle-class country homes, to say nothing of town homes, consisted of considerably less than twenty-six rooms. Kerr’s breakdown

52See Appendix A for these three lists.
of the respectable necessities is as follows: one dining room, one drawing room, one porch, two floors of staircase, two bedrooms (16 feet by 13 feet), two bedrooms (12 feet by 12 feet), one dressing room, one nursery, one bathroom and water closet, one passage to bedrooms, one kitchen, one scullery and wash-house, one larder, one pantry, one lady’s store-room and china closet, one linen closet, one knife house; one ashbin and water closet (so apparently the servants’ WC is intended to include the ashbin), one coal-cellar, one wine-cellar, one beer-cellar “&c.”, one servants’ bedroom (12 feet by 10 feet – presumably deemed adequate to house two servants), one passage, plus landscaping, legal costs, fixtures and extras. The real total Kerr envisions here is £1,688, exclusive of land (413-414). Kerr suggests that leasing, rather than building, a house might be more economical, but would entail its own drawbacks, chief among them being the probability of getting stuck in a poorly designed house.

Robert Loudon, whose focus was the suburban garden, adopts the same tone in his The Suburban Gardener, and Villa Companion (1838): “All the necessities of life may be obtained in as great perfection by the occupier of a suburban residence in the neighbourhood of London, who possesses 200l. or 300 l. a year, as by the greatest nobleman in England, and at a mere fraction of the expense” (9). Again, this seems unlikely, as “Loudon describes individual properties crammed with objects, scenes, and 'effects' – statues, flower stands, urns, rock works, birdbaths, fountains, waterfalls, rock arrangements, fanciful outbuildings” (Garson 189).

Walsh is less encouraging. “It is true, that a man with 100 pounds a-year to spend will not be able to afford a ten-roomed house,” he reflects, “but that which will suit him is so very simple and so like those described under the dwellings of the laboring classes, that it will not be necessary further to allude to them” (104). As practical advice goes, this is certainly depressing, but not very helpful. The complex hierarchy of things and places evoked by the strain of rhetoric
shared by all forms of aspirational mapping under discussion here leaves no room – pun intended – for genteel poverty scraping by in a cottage. Laborers live in laborers’ cottages; members of the middle classes live in middle-class houses like the ones described by Kerr, Walsh, and Warren. As your status is defined by the space you inhabit and how you inhabit that space, you simply cannot be middle-class if you don’t live in middle-class surroundings and middle-class style. On the £100 end of the scale, prospects appear dismal. Of Kerr, Chase and Levenson observe, “This work, so full of sketches, charts, designs, and diagrams, becomes itself a diagram of middle-class self-understanding at a particularly fragile moment in its history, when distinctions of sex, class, and property, all under pressure, twisted within one another's arms for comfort” (158). Kerr acknowledges, repeatedly and with clear irritation, that the vast majority of British houses do not, and never will, conform to the standards he identifies as essential. “Beneath its tone of boundless complacency, professional authority, and national pride, it is a nervously stammering text that unwillingly reveals the secrets of the fantasies it looks to support” (Chase and Levenson 158-159); “it possesses a rich imaginative life that can tell us much about dreams of the ideal home” (Chase and Levenson 158).

And yet the seeming confidence with which these requirements are pronounced must also have been attractive and reassuring. If belonging to the middle classes is a task to be performed, like juggling or learning ancient Greek or crocheting, then a list of instructions is eminently useful. Ensure that your dining room window faces east; buy an appropriate sideboard; prepare your mutton on a Sunday; and congratulations, you have achieved middle-class status! Thus it is appealingly black-and-white, shades of grey banished to the distance, or at least to the margins of the page. “These publications often seem to be sheer fantasy-peddling for profit, and yet the

53. The converse of this is borne out in Margaret Oliphant's *Phoebe Junior* (1876). Despite their Grange Lane address, the unrefined tastes of Mr. and Mrs. Tozer, retired grocers, keep them firmly situated outside the middle class.
number turned out from the 1830s onwards indicates that they were fulfilling a need for social
guidance” (Davidoff 18). Indeed, confronted with this abundance of commodities, “an instinctive
response was to moralize every act of domestic agency. The new abundance must be met by the
defiant moral assertion of families: home in relation to the commercial economy stood as the
soul within the thoughtless body, and if the home/head could become a judiciously arranged
interior, then it would never be defiled by dirty commerce” (Chase and Levenson 11).54 The
genre was self-consciously performative and therefore theatrical (Garson 18), calling for role-
playing (for example, the perfect hostess) and the distinction between the stage (the parlor, the
dining room) and the rooms that were behind the scenes (bedrooms, servants' quarters).
Household management guides and books like Kerr's are also, I contend, self-consciously aware
that they occupy an uneasy position between reality and fiction, between the (pseudo)scientific
map, list of requisite furniture and utensils, and architectural plan, on the one hand, and sheer
fantasy, like Ursula May's, on the other. As Theresa McBride notes, “The continued insistence of
the domestic economy manuals suggests that few households met the rigid standards of
efficiency which the manuals described” (30). If, indeed, the guidelines espoused in these
manuals had universally, or even widely, been met – or agreed upon – the genre would have
quickly outlived its own usefulness; once one has memorized a recipe, one ceases to consult the
cookbook. In Kerr’s revealing lapses into self-consciousness or Mrs. Beeton’s tacit
acknowledgments that business should be, but is not, conducted along the lines she advocates,
these domestic gurus admit that they are describing not a current reality but an aspirational
future. In the words of Leonora Davidoff and Catherine Hall, “Mrs Ellis, Harriet Martineau [in

54. The need to moralize is the response to a phenomenon Murray Roston sees at work in nineteenth-century culture:
“As society became increasingly aware of the appalling conditions in the sweat-shops, factories, and mines, created
by the ruthless cost-cutting which lay at the foundation of the commercial expansion of Victorian England, there
arose a guilty perception of the fundamental incompatibility of such vigorous, competitive, and often merciless self-
advancement with the basic principles of Christian compassion, altruism, and love for one's fellow creature.” (98)
her writing on political economy] and John Loudon in their very different ways were concerned with transforming the daily lives of middle-class families and finding ways to make domesticity a lived reality. All three were self-conscious ideologues” (180). In their words, charts, and diagrams, these works provide aspirational maps whose contours, if adhered to, hold out the prospect of the perfectly realized middle-class domestic fantasy.

This is cultural hegemony at its most powerfully persuasive: by treating aspiration as reality, such guides could exert tremendous pressure on the harried middle-class woman being told that perhaps 200 pounds a year should allow her to transform her reality of fussy children, a single over-worked servant, threadbare sofas, a chimney that smoked, and, say, a drafty parlor or an overbearing mother-in-law into a smoothly sailing, water-tight domestic ship, if only she had the business acumen and moral fortitude. It is this tension between actual and aspirational that hints at the presence of multiple, polyvocal narratives of domestic space, and helps to explain the resurgence of domestic fiction in the 1840s, the same decade that witnessed the rebirth of the household management guide.

III. “‘It is management that is wanted’”:

 **Wives and Daughters** (1864-66), Elizabeth Gaskell's last, unfinished novel, provides a clear dramatization of the rhetorical clash I have identified above, in which the Victorian home is presented first as a private, spiritual refuge from the commercial world beyond its doors, and the later grafting of materialism onto this discourse, whereby the objects within the home become the most accurate reflection of the household manager's prowess and morality. Self-effacing Molly Gibson is, from the opening page, identified with her simply decorated bedroom:

> In a country there was a shire, and in that shire there was a town, and in that town there was a house, and in that house there was a room, and in that room there was

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55. Oliphant, *Phoebe Junior*, 265
a bed, and in that bed there lay a little girl; wide awake and longing to get up, but not daring to do so for fear of the unseen power in the next room – a certain Betty, whose slumbers must not be disturbed until six o’clock struck, when she wakened of herself ‘as sure as clockwork’, and left the household very little peace afterwards. (5)

The novel allows the reader to witness Molly's growth from child to young woman, slowly transitioning from being tyrannized over by the family's faithful servant to being tyrannized over by her step-mother. Although Molly is hardly a Cinderella figure, the narrative is a familiar one, complete with a wicked step-mother – or is it?

The fairy-tale style of this opening paragraph (it commences, “Let us begin with the old rigamarole of childhood”) alerts the reader that not only is she immersed in the past, but that, in the midst of what will quickly become contemporary reality, Molly is associated with the past, and with an old-fashioned and sentimental view of her surroundings that is no longer shared by those who inhabit that space with her: her father, her new step-mother, and her step-sister. Although Molly rapidly grows up, her essential character remains the same – as does her bedroom. Molly is not quite as ethereal and self-sacrificing as Little Nell – she doesn't have the opportunity to be, since she grows up in a stable middle-class environment, doted on by her doctor father – but she is the type of self-effacing, highly sentimental heroine who would be more at home in a Dickens novel of the late thirties than she is in Gaskell's novel of the mid-sixties. The material objects in her home matter to her only insofar as they are freighted with emotional, nostalgic value. When the reign of her new stepmother commences,

Molly went with Miss Browning to see the changes going on in her father’s

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56. Molly's dearest friends, the Hamleys, live in a house in which “the draperies were threadbare, and the seats uncomfortable, and [with] no sign of feminine presence [to lend] a grace to the stiff arrangement of the furniture,” and yet Molly is more comfortable there than she is in her own home after it has been redecorated.
house. To her they were but dismal improvements. The faint grey of the dining-room walls, which had harmonized well enough with the deep crimson of the moreen curtains, and which when well cleaned looked thinly coated rather than dirty, was now exchanged for a pink salmon-colour of a very glowing hue; and the new curtains were of that pale sea-green just coming into fashion. ‘Very bright and pretty,’ Miss Browning called it; and … Molly could not bear to contradict her. She could only hope that the green and brown drugget would tone down the brightness and prettiness. There was scaffolding here, scaffolding there, and Betty scolding everywhere (151).

Gaskell continues,

On Tuesday afternoon Molly returned home, to the home which was already strange, and what Warwickshire people would call ‘unked,’ to her. New paint, new paper, new colours; grim servants dressed in their best, and objecting to every change – from their master’s marriage to the new oilcloth in the hall, ‘which tripped ‘em up, and threw ‘em down, and was cold to the feet, and smelt just abominable.’ (171-172)

Initially Molly thinks that her bedroom will be spared: “‘I’m right down glad of it,’ said Molly. ‘Nearly everything in it was what mamma had when she lived with my great-uncle. I wouldn’t have had it changed for the world; I am so fond of it’” (152). Molly, that is, expects the domestic realm to operate in the manner described by Sarah Stickney Ellis. Its chief characteristics are love and shared experiences; and, since the home functions as the antithesis of the busy, workaday world, a refuge from its pressures, its contents and habits matter only to the extent that they bolster her father's comfort.
Seen through her stepmother's eyes, the furnishings are merely “old-fashioned” (172). “But it doesn’t signify. By-and-by we’ll renovate the house – won’t we, my dear?” (172). After she has dealt with the front-stage drawing and dining rooms, she redecorates Molly's bedroom: “So Molly’s little white dimity bed, her old-fashioned chest of drawers, and her other cherished relics of her mother’s maiden-days, were consigned to the lumber-room” (183). The second Mrs. Gibson is clearly an exponent of the later, more materialistic understanding of domesticity; the language she speaks is that of aspirational mapping and display. While her thought of “how pleasant it would be to have a husband once more; – some one who would work while she sate at her elegant ease in a prettily-furnished drawing-room” may strike the reader as unforgivably materialistic (105), this is largely because the sentimental ethos of Gaskell's novel takes Molly as its focalizing character. However, “[A]n important part of a middle-class woman's duty vis-a-vis the home was to manipulate effectively the signifiers available to her in the realm of decoration and consumption in order to 'utter' the existence of a family, to articulate its distinct being in the social world” (Logan 93). Regarded in this light, Mrs. Gibson's insistence that she is doing her duty, and must be seen to be doing her duty rather than showing favoritism to her own daughter, rings less hollow. Instead of materially asserting the existence of a sentimental family unit that, by Molly's reckoning, does not exist, Mrs. Gibson sees herself as creating that unit through her practices of shopping and decorating. By the sixties this was, after all, firmly entrenched in the cultural zeitgeist as a woman's primary function, and a crucial one. Mrs. Gibson may not be so shallow or self-important: “Women, insofar as they were primarily responsible for domestic arrangements, played a critical role, at a local level, in the management of things. It was women who were responsible for deploying objects to create the interior space identifiable as ‘home’. They were, in some sense, its inmates, but they were also its producers, its curators, and its
ornaments” (Logan 26). Walsh explicitly links shopping and decorating practices to a woman's effectiveness as household manager, and reads both as an index of her moral character:

It is truly astonishing how much a woman will contrive to spend upon herself, when she is encouraged in extravagance; and, on the other hand, we must all admire the spectacle of the good manager, who contrives to maintain a respectable appearance, and a comfortable fireside, and also often to bestow a considerable amount of benefits upon her poorer neighbors. In the one case, there is a constant desire for excitement, which alternates with ennui and depression; whilst on the other, all is peace and serenity: and the possessor of these valuable qualities is a pleasure to herself and all around her. (1)

Unsurprisingly, Walsh's formulation makes a distinction between the woman who shops to satisfy her own desires, and the woman who shops in order to maintain respectability, comfort for her family, and benefit her less fortunate neighbors. Ideally, “the house could serve as a showplace for the male's successful activities in the marketplace” (Dickerson xviii); but in so doing, it also displayed the woman's character. As the passage with which I opened this chapter illustrates, however, shopping could be a pleasurable activity for a woman, and could allow her to exercise agency, to create her own imaginative narrative of the space she inhabited, provided she stayed within the bounds of proper domestic display. Michel De Certeau identifies shopping as one of the “everyday” activities that can serve as a potentially transformative site within the capitalist system, an opportunity for a type of agency that is not consumer choice (which he regards as a fiction), but in “ways of operating” or “ways of using” the products available within the capitalist system (Lysack 17-18).57 The long lists of acceptable furnishings given by Kerr,

57. De Certeau means “site” not in the sense in which I am using it – as the physical locations in which shopping and displaying the acquired goods occur – but as a strategy or tactic for deforming the conventional capitalist system.
Walsh, etc., as well as the catalogs that became popular during the latter half of the century, operate within these parameters: the consumer's choice is not free – it is limited by “expert” aesthetic as well as financial criteria – but there is a choice, and a greater range of choices than had ever been available before. In its heightened emphasis on furnishings, “The nineteenth-century novel never ceases remarking the reach of market forces into the parlors, bedrooms, and closets of a domestic realm that thus never ceases to fail in its mission to shelter its inhabitants from the clash of these armies ... The novel's celebration of domesticity as a sanctuary from the vicissitudes of the cash nexus is everywhere spoiled” (Nunokawa 4). On the other hand, as with the selection and preparation of the family's food, the “vicissitudes of the cash nexus” gave (some) women unprecedented power. As Lysack contends, “[T]hese alternative discourses of consumption open up and complicate notions of desire by emphasizing the agencies and mobilities that women obtained through their consumer practices and lived relationships to consumption, rather than their prescribed affinities with and purported vulnerabilities to the seductions of the commodity” (Lysack 8). Logan summarizes, “[S]ince all social practices are rule governed, to point out that a code of correctness presided over interior decoration does not vitiate the potential for individual performance within this system” (101).

The discourse of aspirational mapping can only function as a tool of cultural hegemony if the middle-class home itself is understood as a performative space – a space that, like the theater, consists of public and private areas. One of the chief functions of the nonfiction texts I have referenced is to demarcate the public from the private territories of the home, the private family areas from those that will be frequented by visitors. “Three general (and interrelated) principles seem to have governed the development of the house in the nineteenth century: a growing interest in privacy; a new inclination to rigid differentiation of the internal domestic space; and a
desire to articulate social status” (Logan 16). We see this clearly in Kerr's repeated emphasis on privacy as a cardinal British virtue; and, as I have already contended, we also see that such privacy was always a fiction. The paranoia surrounding the introduction of sewerage, with its cargo of potentially working-class effluvia, and John Snow's inclusion of domestic interiors in his mapping of the 1854 Broad Street cholera outbreak, are two oft-mentioned instances of the tension surrounding public incursions into the private home; and as many critics have argued, the presence of even one servant not only embodies the intrusion of commerce into the middle-class home, but introduces the possibility of multiple, competing narratives of the domestic space based on class and experiential distinctions.\(^\text{58}\) Chase and Levenson identify “one of the leading features of the age: the extent to which domestic life itself was impelled toward acts of exposure and display … [P]ride in domestic achievement drove toward overt expression.\(^\text{59}\) So estimable, so complimentary to national character, the virtues of an English home should not hide their light in the parlor” (7). Domestic fiction itself creates a paradox: although it is conventionally understood to reify the sanctity (and thus the privacy) of the home, it does so by putting that home on display, inviting readers in as voyeurs. As it is defined in all management guides at least post-Beeton, if not before,\(^\text{60}\) domesticity requires its own invasion; like a theatrical performance, it necessitates an audience. The function of that audience in turn is to appreciate this quality of domesticity, thereby confirming its existence. Juliet Kinchin writes, “The Victorian theater was in many senses a ‘home away from home’ that deployed a shared knowledge of furnishing

\(^\text{58}\) The imaginative maps created by servants through quotidian knowledge and practice, as well as the inherent threat they posed to middle-class stability and identity, are the subject of the following chapter.

\(^\text{59}\) Chase and Levenson argue that this way of thinking was officially expressed in the 1851 census, which counted not individuals but members of households. As such, it required the government to engage in the rhetorically complicated task of defining what constituted a household. As Chase and Levenson point out, it was surely not coincidental that 1851 was also the year of the Great Exhibition, designed to display British virtues, via British goods, to the world.

\(^\text{60}\) I am using Mrs. Beeton's book as a turning point here because its popularity makes it a recognizable cultural watershed, but in doing so I am in no way suggesting that she pioneered the rhetorical, display-based strategies she employed.
conventions, on stage and off ... Actresses such as Lillie Langtry, Sarah Bernhardt, and Elsie de Wolfe all moved with ease from the stage into the related sphere of interior decoration” (66).

This evocative fact indicates the Victorians' own recognition of semi-public domestic spaces – the parlor, the morning room, the dining room, the drawing room, etc. – as locations characterized by the enacting of prescribed cultural roles (as opposed to “natural” behavior) in need of the same sort of set-dressing as the theatrical stage. Appearance, not utility, was paramount. “Servant power was squandered on hours of polishing silver, or brass door handles and stair rods and producing a surface polish rather than real cleanliness. A household where there was a lady's maid to pack, do the hair of the mistress and grown-up daughters and wait on them, a butler to open the door and pour the wine, could still be actually dirty” (Davidoff 90).

It is no wonder, then, that during the nineteenth century, as Marjorie Garson states, taste became “the sine qua non of moral identity” (4). She continues,

Every reader is struck by the ineffable tastefulness of so many Victorian novel heroines – Gaskell's Margaret Hale, for example, or Eliot's Dorothea Brooke, who manage to dress stunningly without ever thinking of their wardrobes and furnish their homes with charm even in the absence of material resources, and whose excellent taste asks to be understood not as a result of self-conscious strategy or painstaking effort, but rather as a kind of unmediated emanation of their refinement of spirit. (5)

This is the same logic I have been tracing through the rhetorical shifts of household management guides during Victoria's reign, with a slightly different inflection. The accumulation of goods operated as a hallmark of domestic propriety, from the single-task implements recommended for the kitchen to “many decorative objects with a straightforward narrative content, whose
communicative value lay in their assertion of certain patterns of thought and behavior. Presumably, for certain social subgroups, the presence of paintings, prints, sculptures, or Berlin work (what we would now call needlepoint) that told stories of filial devotion or religious faith would speak to outsiders of the family's sound opinions” (Logan 93) – but only to a point. As shopping became an activity more accessible to a greater percentage of the population, indiscriminate accumulation became a signal of vulgarity. By the sixties, with the widespread usage of gas lighting, 61 “Shops commonly opened at daybreak, as early as 6 a.m. in the summer and 8 a.m. in the winter” (Graham 7). These are hours necessary to accommodate the schedules of a range of lower-middle-class or even working-class individuals with money to spend; simply being able to buy the profusion of goods we now associate with Victorian interiors was no longer a sufficient indication of rank. This is one reason that “The conventions of home were in perpetual motion. Even as codes of normality came into prominence, they were revised, abandoned, and then replaced by new statements of the code” (Chase and Levenson 66).

The concept of refined taste, which Garson calls both natural taste and moral taste, became key. Natural taste “functions not to connect the individual to whom it is attributed to the rest of humanity by virtue of the common human nature she shares with them, but rather to mark out the exceptional individual who deserves social advancement because she already possesses the refinement her new position would demand” (10)62.

More explicitly than perhaps any other author of the period, Margaret Oliphant engages with all the nuances of aspirational mapping and domestic ideology – more properly, domestic

62. As Garson notes, “‘Natural taste’ is evidently an oxymoron: since what is considered tasteful at any particular historical moment is always a cultural construct, anyone who has taste has already been cultivated” (9).
ideologies – in her fictions, particularly her Chronicles of Carlingford, the occasional series she penned between 1862 and 1876. Oliphant's domestic fiction everywhere reveals the fissures and ruptures between the aspirational idyll and daily reality. Not only was the home writ large the chief subject of Oliphant's Chronicles (it subsumes even the requisite marriage plots, which are defined largely in terms of who lives in what house), but her own home was the author's writing workshop; for this reason Oliphant is attuned to the resonance of “the home as work” (Cohen 5) as well as that of “the home as a vocational outlet” (Cohen 7), two distinct but related ways of seeing. Nicholas Rance traces the maturation of Oliphant's domestic fictions, from the early, ultra-domestic The Athelings (1857) to Miss Marjoribanks (1867), the penultimate Chronicle and what he calls the “coup de grace to the domestic saga” (47). The Athelings, he contends, is a domestic epic, calculated to appeal to a public who were eagerly lapping up similar sentimental works such as Bulwer Lytton’s The Caxtons (1848-49). Oliphant, as the chief provider of her own domestic and familial arrangements, was canny enough to understand the market and conform to it. “Characteristically, she reserved her mock domestic epic [Miss Marjoribanks] until the time was right. By 1865, the sensation novel had long made it fashionable to undermine domestic moralism” (Rance 137-138).

I am less convinced that Oliphant set out to undermine domestic moralism; but certainly she problematizes it, not least through the shopping and interior decorating practices of her characters. Where Gaskell contrasts the earlier, purely moral definition of domestic space to the later, more materialistic incarnation, Oliphant, in her last two Chronicles, deals primarily with the ramifications of the widespread embrace of the domestic arena as a space whose moral qualities are expressed through its material contents. Although one can scarcely open a Victorian

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63. Rance notes that even Bulwer Lytton's tales reveal an “underlying neuroticism” about the domestic (38). Bulwer Lytton's “Caxtoniana,” as he called it, finally concluded in Blackwood's in 1863; so structurally it was not dissimilar to Oliphant's Chronicles.
novel without finding a detailed description of interior decoration or a scene of shopping (even if it is only humble marketing for vegetables), Oliphant approaches these aspects of her fiction with an unusual degree of detail and an effort to reveal, rather than conceal, the ideological freight of these activities. Because analyzing these practices in *Miss Marjoribanks* and *Phoebe Junior*, where they are overt, provides an instructive model for considering the ideology animating the same activities in works in which they are covert, naturalized, the remainder of this chapter will examine three examples of shopping, decorating, and domestic management from these texts. In doing so, I will consider the different narratives of domesticity that correspond to differing perceptions of the relationship between aspirational mapping, with its complex language of display and value, and experiential mapping of lived reality.

III.i “‘A comfort to dear Papa’”[^64]: Interiority and Interior Decorating in *Miss Marjoribanks*

When Lucilla Marjoribanks's invalid mother quietly fades away, her death betokened only by her disappearance from the sofa, teenage Lucilla has only one desire: to be a comfort to her dear papa. When she returns home from finishing school to attend the funeral, and grief doesn’t hamper her from quickly deciding “in the intervals of her tears, that the drawing-room furniture had got very faded and shabby, and that it would be very expedient to have it renewed for the new reign of youth and energy which was about to commence” (7-8). Redecorating the drawing-room is an essential part of Lucilla's plan; and the goal of Lucilla's plan, as she insists repeatedly, is to comfort her father, a bluff Scottish physician whose idea of a social event is periodically inviting his friends to an all-male dinner. The reader is liable to assume Lucilla is being disingenuous. Her stated ambition of comforting her father seems at odds with the means by which she intends to go about it: selecting new carpets and drapes, and inviting Carlingford's...

[^64]: Each time this phrase appears within the pages of *Miss Marjoribanks* (as it frequently does), it is enclosed in quotation marks. Of them, Chase and Levenson state, “These marks are the typographical signs of a dated domestic rhetoric: what had seemed vigorous in the young Sarah Ellis or in *A Christmas Carol* now seems quaint” (216).
high society to enjoy them – and her company – on Thursday afternoons. This, however, is a misreading. Self-important and over-confident though she is, Lucilla is not a liar. “She has perfect ‘good faith’ in the ‘reality’ of the roles that she plays, and a purely applied grasp of how to insert others into roles as well ... Lucilla deploys the idealized feminine roles provided by domestic ideology as a general deploys cannon, merely as tools whose ‘reality’ she accepts completely” (Schaub 210-211). She has faith in the system of materialistic morality that she has absorbed growing up at mid-century, as Oliphant takes pains to illustrate. In what seems like an explicit reference to *Wives and Daughters*, the narrator informs us that, upon finding herself installed in her childhood bedroom, “Miss Marjoribanks, who had no sentimental notions about white dimity, shook her head at the frigid little apartment” (27).

Much to her dismay, Lucilla is sent back to school to finish her education, forced to defer her dream of being the comfort and stay of her father's autumn years. Once Lucilla has hoisted the domestic scepter, however, the novel presents the first major event in her career – or rather, the first major events, both of which occur simultaneously: Miss Marjoribanks achieves her first major domestic coup as Carlingford’s linen-draper, Mr. Holden, and his minions arrive to do over the drawing room, and her cousin Tom requests a private interview before he goes abroad to make his fortune. Predictably, Tom proposes: if this were a traditional marriage plot novel, this would be a watershed moment (and shouldn’t be occurring until the vicinity of the third volume). And for Lucilla it is: “She reflected in herself that though it was excessively annoying to be thus occupied at such a moment, still it was nearly as important to make an end of Tom as to see that the pictures were hung rightly” (72-23).

No doubt Oliphant’s 1870s readers found this at least as amusing as do her twenty-first-century readers. Surely as an upper-middle-class Victorian maiden Lucilla has her priorities
reversed; the point of the newly made-over drawing room is to provide an attractive setting for Lucilla’s feminine charms, with the goal of luring a suitable husband – a Tom. Or is it? Like any young lady receiving a proposal, Lucilla’s anxiety mounts: “‘Tom, listen!’ cried Miss Marjoribanks, rising in her turn; ‘I feel sure they must have finished. There is Mr Holden going through the garden. And everybody knows that hanging pictures is just the thing of all others that requires a person of taste. If they have spoiled the room, it will be all your fault’” (73). Tom likely voices the question that is on the reader’s lips when he demands, “‘Lucilla! what does it matter about furniture and things when a man’s heart is bursting?’” (71). Indeed, for Lucilla it matters a great deal; and the text – the entire Carlingford series – endorses her point of view, even if it does so with tongue in cheek. When Tom accuses his cousin of trifling, she retorts, “‘It is you who are trifling … especially when you know I have really something of importance to do’” (73). When it comes to the quotidian reality of her existence, the colors in the drawing room are, indeed, of more importance than the state of Tom’s emotions. Emotions, and even human relationships, are transient; furnishings, as Robert Kerr teaches, are forever.

Lucilla represents the ripening to maturity of the stringent codes of conduct laid out in mid-century household management and conduct guides; she is the embodiment of the rather peculiar virtues of Victorian aspirational mapping pushed as far as possible toward the point of parody without absolutely toppling over the other side into the realm of farce. The discord the reader perceives throughout much of the novel between Miss Marjoribanks and his or her idea of the ideal mid-Victorian maiden (as illustrated so aptly in the proposal scene) is the real point. The figure of the heiress “transforms our readings of the nineteenth-century marriage plot by revealing an interest in and anxiety about economic developments in the place where we least expect or want to find those materialist concerns, at the heart of romantic stories about the
triumph of love over money” (Michie, Vulgar Question xiii). Throughout the novel Miss Marjoribanks has been an heiress; by the time she accepts Tom's second proposal, her father's fortune has been lost. However, her marriage remains rooted in solid economics: her union with Tom will translate her to Marchbank, the family's estate, the physical culmination of her three-volume efforts to recreate her surroundings in her image. The house, and Tom, will be her new career.

Where Ursula May finds herself trapped between the grandiose rhetoric of aspirational mapping and the scanty practical information it provides for someone in her mundane position, Lucilla Marjoribanks understands that it is the rhetoric itself that is the ultimate power source. The brilliance of Oliphant’s characterization of her heroine is that Lucilla internalizes this rhetoric so thoroughly that she is able to co-opt it, to manipulate it for her own purposes, without ever even appearing to be cognizant that this is what she’s doing. Oliphant deploys this trope over and over, so that the reader rapidly accepts it as the fundamental tenet of Lucilla’s character. One is apt to chuckle when, after having “achieved one of the fundamental duties of woman” by rearranging the drawing room furniture and pacing the room’s dimensions with the eminently practical view of determining how much carpet she will need to order, Lucilla virtuously avows to her father, “‘I always was so domestic. It does not matter much what is outside, I always find my pleasure at home’” (45). The reader’s chuckle may transform into a genuine laugh when she realizes that this has been the prelude to Lucilla’s all-important request: “‘Papa, if you have no objection, I should like to choose the colours myself. There is a great deal in choosing colours that go well with one’s complexion. People think of that for their dresses, but not for their rooms, which are of so much more importance’” (46). Dr. Marjoribanks assumes, with the reader, that his only child is cannily manipulating him; but this is again a misreading of Lucilla’s character
and her function within the text. Oliphant makes this as plain as possible by insisting that Miss Marjoribanks has absolutely no sense of humor. With her avowed goals of “being a comfort to dear Papa” and acting for the good of society – goals to be accomplished by harmonizing her drawing room and having open house on Thursday evenings – Lucilla is in deadly earnest.

“Decorating the parlour [or drawing-room], whether with the work of one’s own hands or with consumer goods, constituted one of the primary duties of woman: it was a generally recognized aspect of domestic management, and to neglect it was a sign of domestic distress or incompetence” (Logan 35). Not only is domestic management in the proper style her career, but it is her fundamental duty as a young Victorian woman of the upper-middle-class, the only daughter of a widowed father. “The pleasure of Oliphant’s novel lies in the tension between its humorous tone and the trivial actions it describes and the care with which it references terms key to the moral philosophy of the period” (Michie, Vulgar Question 156-157).

Lucilla repeatedly refers to the three primary activities of her life – being a comfort to dear papa, cultivating a social community among her neighborhood's elite, and ensuring that both of these unfold against the backdrop of a gorgeously decorated home – as her career, one she approaches with “professional detachment” (Michie, Vulgar Question 161). Oliphant's mock-heroic description may obscure the reader's view of Lucilla as a professional, but should confirm it: she is “the young sovereign” (28) who “unfold[s] her standard” and makes her father realize that “he had abdicated, without knowing it, and that the reins of state had been smilingly withdrawn from his unconscious hands” (29).

For Elsie Michie, Miss Marjoribanks is very much a professional, “an exemplar of Mill's idea of the cultivated individual who displays a set of talents through which he or she can achieve a position of distance or detachment enabling a form of social action that those who are
less distanced and more involved in the immediacy of daily affairs cannot achieve” (*Vulgar Question* 145). Lucilla's work is the creation of social coherence – that is, being a comfort not only to her father, but to all of Grange Lane. Michie takes Lucilla at her word, acknowledging her genius in interior decorating and the creation of uplifting, unifying social situations, and contends that “Oliphant wrenches originality and genius out of the context of high art and intellectual culture and resituates them in a new more explicitly material environment” (*Vulgar Question* 146). In Michie's formulation, Lucilla is Mill's “enlightened individual,” and the “novel implicitly asks the question that also troubled Mill: what use is the enlightened individual if she cannot raise others to the level of her awareness because of the limitations of the raw material of human nature with which she has to work?” (*Vulgar Question* 161).

If enlightenment is synonymous with professionalism, then this is true. Lucilla succeeds socially largely due to her detachment from the petty gossiping and quarrels that surround her. While we know that Oliphant read J.S. Mill, however, and Michie argues persuasively that his ideas influenced the last two Chronicles, it seems more likely that Lucilla has read Mrs. Beeton or one of her contemporaries. Nicholas Rance calls the setting of *Miss Marjoribanks* “claustrophobia-inducing” (47). He continues, “The geographical range of the novel is limited to Carlingford, almost entirely to Grange Lane, the most prestigious road in Carlingford, and then usually to the best house in Grange Lane, that inhabited by the heroine. What is unusual is that the restricted sphere of the female is not idealised” (47). This is certainly true to the extent that Lucilla understands her social and domestic endeavors (which are part and parcel of the same project) as work, sometimes pleasurable but sometimes tiring, frustrating, or anxiety-producing. Lucilla feels a tremendous sense of public responsibility. It is also true that, by the novel's final volume, Lucilla has begun to wish for a grander scope for the exercise of her talents. However,
she has so completely internalized the materialistic narrative of domestic morality that it informs every aspect of her understanding of her surroundings, her relationships, and her role in life.

Miss Marjoribanks represents the acme – or the nadir – of this philosophy. Much of the humor of *Miss Marjoribanks* stems from the fact that although Lucilla’s grandiosity and self-importance are laughable, she isn’t actually *wrong* in her beliefs. She may not make Carlingford a better place or even succeed at being a “comfort to dear papa”; but the text bears out her opinion of the extreme importance of her Thursday evenings and the social machinations that swirl around them. By ruling her “private” social sphere from the center of Grange Lane, she effectively rules all of Carlingford. One would be hard-pressed to think of another character within this, Oliphant’s penultimate Carlingford text, who could do better. Lucilla has complete faith in her system of management, and complete faith in herself, exactly as mid-Victorian ideologues instructed. It is this fervent faith in the material that allows Lucilla to solidify her own identity, to narrate a story for herself that can withstand the loss of her father’s fortune as well as the decade that intervenes between her first proposal and her marriage. What Oliphant offers is a literalized example of “the possibilities of women’s becoming through consumption” (Lysack 12), as borne out by the novel’s utterly conventional conclusion.

After a series of near misses in the marriage department, when Miss Marjoribanks is teetering on the brink of confirmed spinsterhood, Tom returns to Carlingford and reiterates his proposal in a turn of events that may leave readers relieved yet vaguely dissatisfied. Recent critics have tended to interpret the novel’s end as Oliphant’s less-than-subtle critique of her title character’s grandiose plans. After more than a decade and several hundred pages, Lucilla has seemingly returned to her starting point – rather than revolutionizing Carlingford’s cultural scene, Dr. Marjoribanks’s daughter is reduced to behaving like any other typical novel heroine.
and marrying her clumsy, unromantic, intensely reliable cousin. She marries neither up nor
down, but laterally. And yet this is another misreading. What, at least in the world of Victorian
fiction, is more commonplace than to have a cousin waiting in the wings, obligingly pining away
for the heroine? And what could be more peaceful and domestic than marriage to that cousin,
whom the heroine has known from childhood? In the final analysis, the fact that “It was to be
Tom after all” (474) is what makes Lucilla’s career a success: he allows his cousin to bridge the
gap between the fantasy and the real, merging the two. The marriage plot is essential not just in
itself but as a crucial piece of scaffolding upon which Oliphant hangs the fiction of the domestic;
and the promise that Lucilla and Tom will inhabit, and be, Marjoribanks of Marchbank,
consolidates, rather than diminishing (as some critics have contended), Lucilla’s successful
negotiation of the aspirational map. She now quite literally embodies the domestic idyll. It is
Marchbank, and so is she, and so will she be. What clearer confirmation could there be that
Lucilla has succeeded in creating for herself a stable, solid domestic identity? In place of
interiority, in Lucilla Oliphant gives us interior decorating.

III.ii Unhappy Families: Domestic Display and Social Mobility in Phoebe Junior

While Ursula May must content herself with window-shopping and buying a few modest
articles for her younger siblings, her father is, he decides, bound by no such pedestrian
considerations as pecuniary difficulties when it comes to satisfying his desires as a consumer.
The reverend Mr. May has a simple, entirely reasonable (so he tells himself) desire: to purchase a
handsome bookcase for his study. Behaving much more like a straying waif than a man of the

65 “In Miss Marjoribanks, Oliphant discovers a way not just to include narrative commentary on how her writing
fails to follow traditional paradigms but to refuse and rewrite those paradigms by making the undesirable rich
woman, the stout and sensible Miss Marjoribanks who triggers disgust in Dr. Rider, the heroine of the story”
(Michie 155-156). Although Michie’s book is devoted to the exploration of the perceived vulgarity that adhered to
the heiress due to her excessive wealth, she never explicitly addresses the fact that Lucilla herself is rather vulgar,
and certainly materialistic – that is to say, she exercises her “genius” through materiality.
cloth, Mr. May lets himself be tempted into an auction and encounters “evil fate” wearing the aspect of “a noble piece of furniture, in which books would show to an advantage impossible otherwise, preserved from dust and damp by the fine old oak and glass door … Almost everybody has wished for something unattainable,” Oliphant explains, “and this had been the object of his desires for years” (313). Despite the fact that he has no ready money – and, really, no unready money either – May rushes home and prepares his study for the arrival of the new piece, much as Oliphant’s eager bridegrooms prepare their homes for the reception of their blushing brides, and then delights in arranging his books precisely according to his wishes. In the first flush of possession, he feels no compunction: “When the books were all in he sat down at his table and surveyed [the bookcase], rubbing his dusty hands. How much that is childish, how much that is fresh, and youthful, and innocent must be in the mind of a man (you would say) who could be thus excited about a book-case!” (318).

It is Oliphant’s parenthetical, seemingly casual “you would say” that provides the key, not only to Mr. May’s dilemma and downfall, but to the agenda underlying the nuanced exploration of domestic space that unites all the entries in the Chronicles of Carlingford. This, Oliphant's final return to the village, was published in 1876; and by the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century, “Housekeeping manuals, etiquette books and magazines … confirm that the expected standard of living had risen considerably for all upper- and middle-class groups. Much of the expenditure was, however, on items of ceremonial display and formal entertainment within the home” (Davidoff 13). Mr. May is neither childish nor innocent; the spontaneous purchase that leads to his downfall – in contrast to the controlled shopping of his daughter – results from a misreading of the sophisticated but contradictory codes of domestic display that had become a deceptively “natural” part of middle-class culture by the 1870s. While Oliphant
explored the strange marriage of sentimental and materialistic modes of mapping the Victorian home and the idea of household management as a vocation in *Miss Marjoribanks*, she returned more explicitly to the same themes in *Phoebe Junior*. Lucilla, with her wealth and complacent self-confidence, succeeds in mapping herself onto her surroundings through the practices of interior decoration and social maneuvering. Ursula May and her father are less successful, and end up beholden to the taste and managerial prowess of the titular Phoebe, the daughter of a *nouveau riche* dissenting minister, for their domestic comforts. As this brief summary indicates, the politics at work here are multivalent, the main events far from the traditional marriage plot, and early reviewers as well as contemporary critics have struggled to unpack them. As with *Miss Marjoribanks*, is Phoebe to be lauded, critiqued, or both? Is she grossly materialistic, or the professional woman of the future? And what of Mr. May, with his strange tale of death-by-bookcase, or his eldest daughter, who simply cannot whip up entrees out of nothing, no matter how much she reads the cookery book? The remainder of this chapter will explore the differing spatial narratives created by the competing shopping and decorating practices embodied in these three characters. By doing so, I will analyze the domestic agenda at work in this, arguably Oliphant's least transparent, most complex entry in the Carlingford series.

The Mays' domestic ménage, as Ursula experiences it, has little in common with the paeans penned by domestic gurus. As Ursula sheds tears at the prospect of having to return to Carlingford from London, Oliphant's narrator opines,

> All the mendings, all the keepings in order, the dinners to be invented with a due regard for the butcher's bill, the tradespeople to be kept in good humour, the servant to be managed\(^66\), and papa, who was more difficult than the servant, and

\(^66\) Theresa McBride reminds us that “the average servant-employing household in the nineteenth century included only one or two servants” (19-20).
more troublesome than the children! If Ursula sighed over the prospect, I don’t think the severest of recording angels would put a very bad mark against her. She had been free of all this for ten wonderful days. No torn frocks, no unpleasant baker, no hole in the carpet, no spoiled mutton-chops, had disturbed her repose.

(87)

Mr. May, though classically educated, is “no more than Incumbent of St. Rogue, an old perpetual curacy merged in a district church ... a poor appointment for an elderly man with a family” (70). Contrast to this the prosperous Mr. Beecham, a dissenting minister in a fashionable London church, husband of Phoebe Tozer – the daughter of a Carlingford shopkeeper – and father of Phoebe Junior. Ursula May is a poor relation to her genteel cousin Sir Robert Dorset; but the Dorsets themselves are treated by the brash, wealthy railroad baron Mr. Copperhead as poor relations. 67 Here one clearly sees the shifting hierarchy within the British upper and middle classes that had gripped Victorian society by the last quarter of the century, as industry and new scientific and commercial professions altered the distribution of wealth. “[T]he shift from status professionalism to occupational professionalism” was in full swing by the 1870s (O'Mealy 247).

At the same time, “Growing dependence on the market increased vulnerability to irregular or insecure income and heightened the values of deferred gratification, avoidance of debt and strict budgeting” (Davidoff and Hall 384). The figure of a poor clergyman is a familiar one; equally familiar are the motherless children and the eldest daughter tasked with nurturing and housekeeping. Oliphant is counting on this recognition; she names her characters after the similarly situated May family in Charlotte Yonge's 1856 The Daisy Chain, but there the resemblance ends. While Yonge's tome preaches earthly sacrifice and self-denial as the path to a

67. The Dorsets are related to the second Mrs. Copperhead, the former governess who inspires Ursula's fantasies of splendid wealth and shopping sprees.
heavenly reward, Oliphant's characters are much more concerned with their material reality than with their spiritual future. “[H]ad Ursula been of the kind of those who suffer and deny themselves by nature, she would have had her hands full, and abundant opportunity afforded her to exercise those faculties. But she was not of this frame of mind,” the reader is told (70). Repeated references to Ursula as a “poor child” or “poor little girl” signal the reader to sympathize rather than critique. If Ursula prefers “a pantomime, or the poorest performance in a theatre, or even Madame Tussaud's exhibition” to the intellectual conversation of her father and brother, this is only natural (70). Ursula, in her own way, has as much faith in material domesticity as does Lucilla; only Ursula lacks the materials.

Ursula’s travails become more arduous when her father takes on Clarence Copperhead, the railroad scion's son, as a pupil. Although the reverend’s impetus is the financial remuneration he so desperately needs, he is equally determined to augment his own social pedigree by keeping the young man in the fashionable style to which he is accustomed. For Ursula, this translates into the expectation that she will manage late dinners (at seven rather than two) and produce such newfangled, costly delicacies as entrees and made dishes, with no training and only a scanty increase in the housekeeping budget. When she protests, her father loftily responds, “Well, perhaps it is a great deal to expect at your age; but if you read your cookery-book, as I have often said, when you were reading those novels, and learned how to toss up little dishes out of nothing, and make entrees, and so forth, at next to no expense –”” (265). The reverend sounds very much as if he has been reading the cookery book, even if his daughter hasn’t; but she has several practical, pressing concerns:

“How can I toss up little dishes out of nothing? If you only knew the price of butter, not to talk of anything else. Made dishes are the most expensive things! A
leg of mutton, for instance; there it is, and when one weighs it, one knows what it costs; but there is not one of those entrees but costs shillings for herbs and truffles and gravy and forcemeat, and a glass of white wine here, and a half pint of claret there. It is all very well to talk of dishes made out of nothing. The meat may not be very much – and men never think of the other things, I suppose.”

(265)

If the frequency with which he references the two texts can be taken as a guide, Mr. May seems to have more faith in the cookery book and its transformative powers than in his bible. “It is management that is wanted,” he informs his daughter unequivocally; “to throw nothing away, to make use of everything, to employ all your scraps. If you once have a good sauce – which is as easy as daylight when you take the trouble – you can make all sorts of things out of a cold joint; but women never will take the trouble … If you wanted really to help us,” he concludes, “and improve my position, you might, Ursula” (265). Mr. May has absorbed what Kay Boardman calls “a discursive formation that privileged the specifically middle-class articulation of class identity and class power” (151). Cookbooks, domestic management guides, and periodicals like *The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* or *The Ladies’ Treasury* emphasized a woman’s agency through the practices of cooking, management, and decorating as the domestic counterpart to the man’s public identity. This illustrates the problem with the reverend’s perspective: rather than straddling the divide between the fiction of the ideal and the quotidian reality of the family’s existence, May has fallen entirely onto the side of fantasy – perhaps he is the one who has been reading ‘those novels,’ albeit not Oliphant’s. While Ursula mines her cookery book for practical hints and finds it lacking, her father has succumbed completely to the seductive power of the rhetoric in which the fantasy vision is clothed. Rather

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68. Mrs. Warren, author of *How I Managed My House on Two Hundred Pounds a Year*, edited the Ladies’ Treasury.
than making the best of everything, he seems to expect his daughter to make the best of nothing.

Ursula is not alone in her dilemma; as Mrs. Warren recalls, when she was a young bride, “I consulted various cookery books, but they contradicted each other, and besides, required so many expensive ingredients that were beyond, far beyond, our twenty-seven shillings a week” (30). Mrs. Warren’s solution – to set up shop as an authority and write her own cookery book – doesn’t occur to Mr. May’s daughter; but despite her inability to regulate her family’s promiscuous household according to the dictates of domestic fantasy, she doesn’t lose faith. “‘Get the cookery-book, Janey,’” she admonishes her younger sister; “‘perhaps if you were to read it out loud, and we were both to try to fix our mind upon it – for something must be done’” (266).

The perception of bad food and poor cookery, and its relationship to the happiness of the home, had been a frequent topic in British periodicals since the 1850s. In this discussion of culinary matters, “The economic, physical, moral, and emotional well-being of the entire nation is at stake as well. Physical dissatisfaction with badly-cooked meals is projected into the political sphere as social disaffection. In such reckoning, strikes, bread riots, social unrest, and other crises of industrial Britain are the indirect, far-flung consequences of indigestion” (Bhattacharya 3). Just as Ursula's dinners are to be produced for Clarence and judged by her father, “In the discourse of bad cookery, women's own appetites are rendered invisible, but the role of women in thwarting legitimate masculine appetites is underscored” (Bhattacharya 8). In the absence of a housekeeper, the woman is likely in charge of procuring the ingredients for these meals, but the relationship between these two types of consumption is obfuscated. Good cooking, on the other hand, could be a defensive weapon, an assertion of national identity and “at homeness” in the face of social mobility and a growing overseas empire. The typical Victorian cookbook is a text
“in which the Other presents itself not as a source of threat and contamination but of nourishment. By virtue of their own domesticity, Victorian women could neutralize the threat of the Other by naturalizing the products of foreign lands” (Zlotnick 53). While Miss Marjoribanks appears chiefly in her capacity as a decorator, Ursula's capabilities – or lack thereof – are often figured in relation to the other major domestic art, cookery. Cooking has an obvious function, but in *Phoebe Junior* it is valued more as an aesthetic object; and, like the reverend's bookcase, it fails to signify properly in the chaotic, uncomfortable household. What essays and books on improving or standardizing the British kitchen and its products emphasize is the virtue of common sense, as Bhattacharya notes in her discussion of the class and political ramifications of a well-boiled potato; but Mr. May is not asking his daughter to exercise common sense.

Other than her London venture, most of Ursula's shopping is limited to the humble realm of food provisioning, but there is a notable exception. When her brother Reginald agrees to take the job he regards as a sinecure, Ursula, “transformed by the instinct of business and management into the leader of the party” (191), purchases the decorative items his new home will require, and keeps her brother and sister in line when they act “as if [they] had the bank in [their] pockets” (191). “Why, a Turkey carpet costs a fortune. Mr. Holden, I think, if you please, Brussels will do; or some of those new kinds a jumble of colours without any decided pattern. Not too expensive” (192). Arlene Young sees Ursula as “the typical Victorian heroine who is unaware either of loving or of being loved, who is perpetually the pawn in other people's games” (132); but, as I stated above, although Ursula marries (as does Phoebe), this is not a conventional marriage-plot novel. (It's difficult to name an Oliphant text that would fit such a description.) In seeking to narrate her own domestic experience, Ursula is seeking to form her identity according to the tenets of mid-Victorian philosophy; and she is self-aware in that she realizes her own
failures and lack of agency. As Logan writes, decorating the parlour not only reinscribed gender
difference, but “also performed three other distinctive functions: it asserted a household's social
identity, established the home as a site of physical and psychic comfort, and fostered aesthetic
experience in everyday life” (76). These goals are much easier to see in relation to the successful
Lucilla; but Ursula's desire for comfort and self-expression through decoration echoes the same
values. “In order for the architectural space designated as a parlour to function as such within the
social space of the nineteenth-century home, it had to be furnished, and it had to be embellished;
decoration was constitutive of the parlour, not an optional act” (Logan 36). At her father's,
Ursula's desires are doomed by comparative poverty: “This woman's-room space, now moved
into the very centre of the home, testifies not only to feminine charm but also to national
character, social responsibility, and 'family values,' and its conventional props … function … not
as material possessions but as resonant signs of moral taste” (Garson 92). When Chase and
Levenson ask of Kerr's architectural manual, “[W]hat happens when one descends still further
down the scale …, when one passes beneath the arbitrary limit of a thousand pounds?” (169). As
they point out, Kerr does not ask this question; but the resultant portrait of domesticity might
look very much like the Mays' home. “By the force of Kerr's own argument, home comfort
depends on elaborate and precise distinctions within household space, and if the distinctions
cannot be maintained, then the cataclysm of home life must inexorably follow: the smell in the
library, the sharp cry piercing the parlor walls, the collision with the servants” (Chase and
Levenson 169). Ursula cannot make her reality tally with domestic fantasy: “The dreary
Carlingford street, papa finding fault, everything going wrong, and Janey laughing at her! To be
Cousin Anne’s maid, or governess to the little Indian children would be better than this” (105). In
the face of Mr. May's insistence that his daughters are “useless impedimenta, not even able to
scrub the floors, and make the beds, which is all you could ever be good for” (157), Janey, too, announces that she will “go out and be a maid-of-all-work whenever you please. I am sure it would be much happier than here” (158). As they yearn to escape their unpleasant circumstances, both sisters echo Ursula's wish for a sinecure like her elder brother's, not for religious but for domestic labor. As for Oliphant herself, “home” is hard work.69 The Mays' house is truly not a home: in order to get away, Ursula and Janey fantasize even about downward social mobility, which is perhaps their father's biggest fear.

With the dramatic, and very domestic, plot twist of Mr. May's crime, Phoebe Junior illustrates how “the Victorian investment in family life unfolds in the awareness that at any moment it can turn into the antifamily of popular sensation” (Chase and Levenson 7). Emily Steinlight asserts that “Sensation novels blurred the boundaries fiction itself had drawn between those within and those excluded from the household, making their central characters virtually indistinguishable from a multitude of others” (503); but here Oliphant's sensational subplot functions in the same manner. Middle-class in terms of taste and education, but not financially, Mr. May is haunted by the specter of descent down the social ladder. Michie notes, “May has an almost visceral or sexual sense of shame over his lack of money and the comforts it brings … In Oliphant’s world, one overcomes such humiliation not by denying but by indulging one’s desires for commodities, momentarily transforming shame into bittersweet pleasure” (“Buying” 89). It is thus particularly appropriate that he purchases his bookcase at an auction, likely either a bankruptcy auction or an estate sale. Jeff Nunokawa calls the former “terroristic extensions of the market's long arm into the domestic realm” that “works to realize the pervasive condition of commodification that manages to hold all homes under constant threat: whenever household...

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goods are put up for sale, we have reason to recall that they always can be” (5). Obsessed with the idea of displaying his respectability vis-a-vis his bookcase for public consumption, May constantly fears the darker exposure of his poverty and fraud.

The bookcase may be a coffin, but it is supposed to be a life-raft. This reading of Victorian middle-class domestic space lays the groundwork for a more sympathetic reading of Mr. May’s misreading. Because he (mis)understands the bookcase as being the values the discourse of aspirational mapping allows it to symbolize (such as stability, intellectual ability, and refined taste), rather than understanding it as the symbol of those values, he fails to account for the possibility that the bookcase will not, or cannot, signify properly within his fractious, disorganized home. Mr. May’s interpretation of the philosophy of aspirational mapping is the most literal among those espoused by Oliphant’s characters, so naturally his fate is the least adorned or romanticized. He would have fared better had his “unattainable” bookcase remained unattained. In short order, the clergyman faces financial, professional, and personal ruin when the bank refuses to renew the bill of credit he has used to cushion his debts. As if this weren’t bad enough, the bill is in the name of an intermediary – a member of the reverend’s flock, the local corn-chandler – and the signature, that of another prosperous merchant, Phoebe Junior's grandfather, is a forgery perpetrated by May. The situation is precarious enough; the added weight of the bookcase tips May over the edge. Faced with the crisis and the prospect of public shame, perhaps prison, he falls ill, loses his wits, and dies, all in the last few chapters of the novel. As Anthea Trodd writes, “It was the secrecy of the home and its problematical relationship with the public sphere which was the real theme of the Victorian novelist who used plots of domestic crime” (2). This may not be the only recorded literary instance of death-by-bookcase, but it makes a fairly explicit point: the not-so-good reverend is destroyed by the unsuitable
nature of his household god[s]. Mr. May is confident that his outlay in butcher’s meat and bookcases will be vastly exceeded by the return in social currency, as his neatly arranged volumes and dinner parties enhance his prestige; Ursula, in her role as housekeeper and counter of shillings, wishes her father would simply consider the cost of the butter.

It is not precisely that either Mr. May or his eldest daughter has misread the collection of aspirational literature; but rather that they are different types of readers, and have thus extracted two different messages and modes of conduct from it. Ursula thinks she should be a saver, even if the prospect doesn’t appeal; her father is a spender or, put more properly, an investor (as was Margaret Oliphant herself, be it noted). This underscores the potential problem with contemporary household management guides, the problem at the heart of the Chronicles of Carlingford. The save-by-spending strategies of domestic economy and strictly regimented, rigidly class-based guidelines for building, furnishing, management and behavior facilitate a false consciousness of the domestic space, particularly of the middle-class domestic space. Some who have absorbed this discourse, like Mr. May, conflate the idiosyncratic reality of their homes with the generalized fantasy of The Home and all it represents. Even as he rants and rails at the imperfections he perceives in his home, Mr. May assumes that he and his children are living in the fantastical, sanitized reality of aspirational mapping. They not only should but must live according to its dictates, hence the late dinners, the entrees, and the logical purchase of the bookcase. The reverend is quite sure of his gentlemanly status; ergo he must prove it by living accordingly, or his social standing – who he is in the community – will be jeopardized.

Enter Phoebe Junior, with whom I will conclude. While “books and articles on what we would now call interior decoration began to proliferate about mid-century” (Logan 1), the goal was to be like one of the ineffably tasteful literary heroines Garson names, and not to need any
guide other than one's own instinct. Phoebe Junior fits easily into this category – despite the fact that she shouldn't. In her analysis of *Phoebe Junior* and *Miss Marjoribanks* as practical negotiations of John Stuart Mill’s liberal philosophy of the professional as a “cultivated individual” who is uniquely placed to enable social interaction and action meshing differing class and cultural groups into a single network, Elsie Michie sees *Phoebe Junior* as “a crossover between these two realms” (the commercial and the professional) because it identifies “its heroine, who comes from the commercial classes, as a connoisseur who can recognize the beauty of an embroidered shawl” (*Vulgar Question* 166). Phoebe recognizes the forgotten shawl as the type of aesthetic object that will help to cement her unstable class position – the Mays will be able to read its significance at a glance – but it is illegible to her grocer grandparents, so it doesn’t signify for them. Such a shawl was “So powerful … as a signifier of social status that its appearance even on a woman who clearly bore all the markers of poverty and hard living could temporarily unsettle the system of class markers, at least in a context which lacked skillful readers” (Daly 238). Phoebe’s manipulation of aspirational objects suggests that she has already mastered the behavioral codes that inhere in conduct manuals, as it simultaneously emphasizes the tenuousness of her position – because she is the granddaughter of a grocer and the daughter of a dissenting minister, appearing poorly or inappropriately dressed is, perversely, a luxury she cannot afford. This convoluted class and social position seems to suggest that Phoebe would be the ideal audience for a household management or conduct guide, but she needs its guidance least. It is the genteel Ursula May who needs such instruction. Oliphant’s juxtaposition of Phoebe’s effortless management – of another man’s home, no less – with Ursula’s unsuccessful entrees, both against the background of the reverend’s disastrous bookcase venture, dramatizes the new type of spatial and personal narrative that could emerge from successful domestic
management. Because she is truly wealthy, Phoebe doesn't need to shop: she turns found objects into art, and is characterized by refusal – of her grandparents' furnishing and fashions she sees as vulgar – rather than acquisition. Here she has just arrived at the Tozers':

Phoebe, it must be allowed, had a good cry when she got within the shelter of her own room, which had been very carefully prepared for her, with everything that was necessary for comfort, according to her grandmother’s standard; but where the ‘tent’ bed hung with old-fashioned red and brown chintz, and the moreen curtains drooping over the window, and the gigantic flowers on the carpet, made Phoebe’s soul sick within her. (133)

As is often the case, “Good taste is defined in negation, as what is not-vulgar” (Garson 28). While Lucilla is tainted with the vulgarity of her money and outsized presence; and Ursula, by her grinding contact with messy reality; Phoebe, who should seemingly be the least equipped to do so, emerges unscathed. Her rejection of her grandparents' preferences is key: “Since the taste of the elite must be a sign of their transcendence of material necessity, the dominant class favours the spiritual over the material, form over matter, the abstract over the concrete; since it signals their more developed, evolved state of being, they privilege the difficult over the easy, the subtle over the obvious, chaste austerity over ornament” (Garson 28). When, at her grandmother's behest, Phoebe must appear at a public meeting in a dress she thinks is unsuitable for the occasion, she is humiliated almost to the point of physical illness. Garson explains,

Evidently because colour itself has the taint of the pleasurable, colour consistently has less aesthetic prestige than 'colourless colour.' Throughout the period, subtle, blended shades are consistently privileged over bright, primary hues, which are associated with children, dark-skinned races, the working class, the nouveau
Despite the odds against her, Phoebe is rapidly accepted into the Mays' family circle, due in part to her acquaintance with Clarence Copperhead; and she is soon able to do what Ursula cannot: she makes the parsonage into a convivial home, bringing together Reginald May and Horace Northcote, the dissenting minister who has almost become his sworn enemy, along with Ursula, Mr. May, and Clarence. Phoebe brings comfort, itself “a polemical weapon with which to defend the preeminence of Victorian domesticity. The comparative modesty of the Victorian home, its sobriety, its managed intimacy, becomes a mark of distinction. Economy, not extravagance; modesty, not grandeur; comfort, not luxury – these are the measures of architectural maturity” (Chase and Levenson 160). As a hostess, “It was important to appear ‘at home’ and at one with the room in order to stress the consistency between one’s ‘true’ character and one’s projected image” (Kinchin 71); and it is Phoebe, not Ursula, who fills this role.

Predictably, refined, scrupulous Reginald falls in love with Phoebe. Michie states that Oliphant is inviting her reader to consider “what power [Phoebe's] cultivated taste might have to overcome the class barriers” (Vulgar Question 166), and that she thereby charts a “process of assimilation” (Vulgar Question 174). This assimilation, however, occurs not through marriage, as one might expect, but through Phoebe's exercise of taste and domestic management. In Phoebe’s (potential) relationship with Reginald May, Oliphant represents “the possibility that the loosening of class boundaries could be experienced not as a threat but as a pleasure, a mutual enrichment” (Michie, “Dressing Up” 312). Since it is Phoebe’s mastery of the codes of aspirational mapping that yields this tantalizing possibility, the codes themselves provide for

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70. The importance of Phoebe's acceptance into the Mays' domestic space cannot be overstated. Indeed, “The practice of calling can, in fact, be understood as a highly ritualized system of entering and leaving domestic space. From one perspective, in fact, this carefully orchestrated exchange of spatial intimacies, rather than conversation, was precisely the point of the call” (Logan 31).
their own transgression. She maps her own personality, so to speak, onto the Mays' residence for a period of time; but, because this is not Wives and Daughters, she does not marry Reginald. Instead, she saves Mr. May's reputation by preventing her grandfather from revealing that May has committed forgery and fraud – clearly illustrating her nobility of spirit – and then elects to marry Clarence Copperhead. As in Miss Marjoribanks, “Oliphant consciously addresses the overlap … between economic self-interest and marital choice” (Michie, Vulgar Question 143). Phoebe approaches the situation realistically: “He was not very wise, nor a man to be enthusiastic about, but he would be a career to Phoebe. She did not think of it humbly like this but with a big capital – a Career. Yes; she could put him into parliament, and keep him there … He would be as good as a profession, a position, a great work to Phoebe” (Oliphant 300). This was, of course, the sticking point for Oliphant's contemporary reviewers, and Michie explains it by arguing that Oliphant “was particularly interested in the fact that those who endorsed Mill's thinking had not fully worked out the implications of a complex stance that was at once idealistic and materialist, at once in favor of liberty and of constraining it” (Vulgar Question 148).

Michie's argument is persuasive but, as I have contended, John Stuart Mill was not the only philosopher of the nineteenth century to espouse theories that were both idealistic and materialist; nor was he the most popular. Equally influential, if not more so, were the dueling rhetorics of domesticity I have identified: the spiritual/sentimental, and the second, later idea of material objects as signifiers of morality. While Elizabeth Gaskell explores the clash of these two ideologies, Oliphant, writing later, considers the ramifications of the grafting of the material discourse of domesticity onto its predecessor. “As a world of objects thus invested with meaning, the household could not be invoked and used arbitrarily any more by authors of fiction than by those who wrote conduct books. Domestic fiction proceeded from the assumption that a similar
interpretive mechanism could be put in motion merely by representing these objects in language” (Armstrong 86). Perhaps no one was more aware of this than Margaret Oliphant, for whom “the domestic was the professional world, and the professional was the domestic” (D'Albertis 817). In addition to being imbricated in the rhetorical style and ideologies of household management guides, architectural manuals, and other types of aspirational maps, Oliphant's final Chronicles of Carlingford explicitly interact with earlier domestic fictions, reflecting and refracting their portraits of the home. By insisting upon the inescapable materiality of Victorian domesticity, and the elements of fantasy inextricable from its exaltation, while refraining from judging her ambitious heroines, Oliphant forces the reader to consider discomfiting elements of one of the era's most celebrated, most British virtues. Writers like Oliphant are the reason modern scholars must, as Karen Chase and Michael Levenson write, develop “[a] more flexible notion of the public sphere ..., one that recognizes how 'publicity' and collective revelation can also occur in small groups, around a fireside as well as in a courtroom” (17). In my final chapter, as I venture into the below-stairs world of servants in sensation fiction and analyze the unique threats posed by their spatial narratives of middle-class domesticity, such a flexible notion is exactly what I will articulate – or rather, I will let Mrs. Henry Wood's servants speak for me.
CHAPTER FOUR
Safe as Houses: Servanthood, Role-Play, and Middle-Class Identity in *East Lynne*

I. Introduction

In what has become a fairly well-known anecdote among scholars, artist Henrietta Ward recounted what did not happen when she dropped in to meet one of the nineteenth century’s most popular and least critically celebrated novelists, Ellen (better known as Mrs. Henry) Wood. “Calling upon her one day when she was alone I hoped that perhaps she would reveal a hidden depth yet unseen,” Ward wrote. “But alas the topics she clung to and thoroughly explored were her servants' shortcomings, and a full account of the cold she had caught” (qtd. in Hughes 111). Ward's sense that Wood was characterized by a lack – of literariness, genius, artistry – picks up a common motif in contemporary criticism of Wood’s work, one that has been irresistibly reiterated by twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars. In Ward's account, Wood remains a frustratingly embodied woman concerned with material comforts and discomforts, not an *artiste* devoted to a life of the mind. If Wood is too little intellectually, physically she and her novels are too much, crammed full of quotidian detail.

Disappointed in her quest to find a more conventionally literary figure, Ward failed to realize that the subject of Wood's conversation was identical to the subject of the sensational fiction that had made her a household name. As Emma Liggins writes, “Wood's brand of domestic fiction tended to focus very specifically on material and political realities and the class implications of domestic management” (57). Applauded and ridiculed for her extensive cataloging of the unromantic details of middle-class housekeeping, Wood tapped unerringly into mid-century anxieties surrounding domestic management, servant-keeping, and their role in the consolidation of middle-class identity. Her novels contain the requisite murders and adulterers, but the real fodder for sensation – and secret to her popularity – is the vulnerability of domestic
space and its inhabitants to surveillance, publicity, and class contamination.

Although the high visibility of Wood's servants is unusual, her use of the servant figure is not unique. By mid-century, it was common for writers to “seize upon and exploit the symbolic ambivalence of the servant precisely in order to manage the ideological conflicts that underwrite norms of privacy and publicity” (McCuskey 361). No study of the scientific and imaginative mapping of Victorian space can be complete without a consideration of both servants’ built environment in the realm below stairs and of the alternative imaginative maps their lived reality of middle-class domestic space allowed them to produce. In this chapter’s reading of the servant's place across a range of mid-Victorian texts, what I will demonstrate is that as we attempt to recuperate the complex constellation of domestic, social, and economic anxieties that were mapped onto the body of the domestic laborer during the nineteenth century, it is helpful to acknowledge the voice of cartography in this conversation. Doing so opens new ways of understanding how and why the “servant problem” and its genre par excellence, sensation fiction, reached a crisis point (extreme paranoia on the one hand, and extreme popularity on the other) in the early 1860s. As with the highly codified language of domestic display that I discussed in the previous chapter, the fetishization of the servant's body and its relation to specific areas, items, and activities within the house illustrates sophisticated imaginative mapping based on scientific, i.e. objective, or at least pseudo-objective, mapping, and is rooted in unease about the instability of domestic space and the identities of those who inhabited that space. As a dramatic infusion of capital transformed the topography of the Victorian city, so too did it alter the structure and symbolic import of the bourgeois family and its environment; and in both instances, the desire to map, code, and regulate the movement of bodies and objects viewed as other or deviant resulted. In the home, the science of mapping that was carried out by the
surveyor and cartographer on the street was transferred to an army of professionals and experts: architects, domestic management gurus, housekeepers, chefs, etc. After having fallen out of favor for several decades, a range of new how-to texts in the first third of Victoria's reign found an eager audience in families striving to carve out a new class identity. Prolific Sarah Ellis, for example, “was particularly concerned with those families of traders, manufacturers and professionals where there were one to four servants, where there had been some kind of liberal education, and where there was no family rank” (Davidoff & Hall 182-183). Even as works like architect Robert Kerr's *The Gentleman's House; or, How to Plan English Residences from the Parsonage to the Palace* (1864); journalist Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management* (1861); and professional housekeeper Eliza Warren's *How I Managed My House on Two Hundred Pounds a Year* (1864) painstakingly draw the visual and verbal maps that are intended to preserve the privacy and propriety of the domestic establishment and the ideal relationships between its upstairs and downstairs residents, they reveal lacunae of anxiety that hint at the presence of other, competing imaginative maps of that space – the maps designed by servants and sensation novelists.

II. More Servants, More Problems

Although he was certainly not the first mapmaker to include the private details of a domestic interior, John Snow's 1854 maps of the Broad Street cholera outbreak, which I discussed in the preface, marked the entry of cartography into the Victorian home in a spectacular way. From Snow's perspective, such details as how many bedrooms a house contained or where the kitchen was located were necessary, as medical and sanitation experts worked to locate the exact origin of the outbreak. These maps, though, and the mid-century sewer gas panic are only the most obvious intrusions of mapping into the domestic realm – and
mapping, with its ethos of and technologies for scrutinizing and regulating, meant opening up the private, personal, middle-class home to outside influences. That such a home was always already open seems to have been a collective blind-spot that Victorian culture worked very hard to maintain. Anxiety over the intrusion of a sewer pipe or, later, the prescribed inspection of working-class dwellings by eager amateurs or trained professionals is, quite literally, a dislocation of the anxiety produced within the bourgeois home by the familiar, seemingly innocuous presence of the servant. As John O. Jordan asserts, “The absence of servants from such idealized depictions of the Victorian home as that of Ruskin can best be understood as an effect of ideology. Servants, by their very presence, call into question the homogeneity of the home” (80). Rebecca Stern elaborates, calling “the Victorian ideology of separate spheres … precisely that – an ideology, one that operated alongside, and crucially depended for its popularity on, a reality that offered no such clear separation” (4). Here I will argue that sensation fiction depended for its popularity on the uneasy but titillating clash between the fantasy of privacy and separate spheres, and the reality of the middle-class home as a container of heterogeneous, working-class bodies whose access to that home problematized the basic premises of Victorian middle-class propriety.

No matter how neatly capped and aproned, the servant's is a liminal, potentially threatening figure that represents the mingling of public and private spheres of action. “Themselves forms of capital, servants had capacities for mobility and circulation that replicated the operations of capital beyond the home” (Stern 16-17). In consequence of the swelling flow of capital that allowed more and more Britons the means of hiring servants, for an increasing percentage of laborers – initially many of them agricultural, but with others also coming from the nation's town and cities – domestic service became a viable option. According to the 1861
census, England and Wales had 1,123,428 indoor domestic servants, or 14.3% of the labor force, of whom 226,816 lived in London (McBride 36); according to Jordan, one in eight women in England and Wales was in domestic service in 1871 (80). By 1891 the number had increased to a total of 1,386,187 women and 58,527 men (Fernandez 2). Critics including Kristina Straub, Bridget Hill, and Bruce Robbins all date the textual and rhetorical beginnings of the “servant problem” to the eighteenth century, a phenomenon Straub relates to an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the master-servant relationship as contractual and thus commercial, a mingling of public and private. In other words, servants became problematic when their status as working-class wage laborers could no longer be obfuscated through recourse to feudal notions of filiality. 71 “What became 'the servant problem' of the nineteenth century was, in the eighteenth, a collection of hopes and fears that clustered around a member of the household whose mixed contractual and affective status formed the basis for many of the contradictions embodied in the family under early capitalism,” as becomes clear after even a cursory survey of the manner in which the servant was interpellated by Victorian advice manuals (Straub 6). As the nineteenth century progressed, appearances of the faithful, long-serving family retainer (Dickens's Peggoty or Kit, for example) grew fewer, as more fast parlor maids and foppish houseboys cropped up, highlighting the inevitable realization that domestic labor was usually just that: a job, and one that could be used by its performers as a springboard to social mobility.

In the bodies of its servants, mid-century fiction “never ceases remarking the reach of market forces into the parlors, bedrooms, and closets of a domestic realm that thus never ceases to fail in its mission to shelter its inhabitants from the clash of these armies” (Nunokawa 4). Thus

71. The professionalization of servants accelerated in the late eighteenth century. Because of new taxes levied to garner money during wartime, “Between 1777 and 1792, a servant became a different kind of legal category, became one whose skills, capacities and actual work were detailed in order to declare him or her one” (Steedman 78). Thus the stress on function rather than familial relationship was a relatively recent development.
the servant's role as gate-keeper is ironic, and it is no surprise that the activities servants performed around the doors (and to a lesser extent, the windows) of the home – answering the bell, scouring the entryway, drawing the curtains – receive particular attention in the management guides. Tasked with guarding the threshold, servants themselves operated like thresholds, not only interacting with the outside world on behalf of their employers but bringing aspects (sanctioned or immoral) of that world into the home through their background and connections, dealings with tradespeople, and relatively free circulation through the streets. “Both a barrier and a point of access, the threshold in effect defines the home by what it keeps out; yet at the same time, as the point of contact and transition between the separate spheres, it allows and perhaps even invites transgression” (Jordan 80). This accounts for the minute prescriptions for how to hire a good servant, and how and where to keep her once you had secured her. “Increasingly, the 'good' servant came to be socially, culturally and psychologically crucial for the maintenance of an employer's class identity” (Fernandez 3).

Fiction that deals with domestic space (not merely the narrow generic category of domestic fiction) simultaneously conforms to and shapes the careful delineation of the servant's role that is laid out by experts in household management guides and architectural manuals. Each of these genres offers verbal, and sometimes visual, maps of domestic space. As with recipes for the dishes on the dining table or lists of objects to decorate the morning room, the profusion and popularity of texts detailing the correct place of the servant within the home indicate both the critical ideological importance of servant-keeping and the acknowledgment that the old way of managing was no longer the best way, or, arguably, even a possible way. A review of this literature reveals that a servant's character and utility were ultimately defined in spatial terms: where she was to be found in the house, and how she used that space (productively or idly). I

72 For more on the verbal architecture of domestic fiction, see the previous chapter.
will begin, as did most Victorian authors, with the where. Locating certain behaviors and practices within certain domestic spaces produces a fantasy of complete knowability. This is the fantasy presented by architectural plans, which offer a view of the house laid bare, its walls and ceilings as transparent as its windows, and in the household management guide – if the mistress is canny enough, she can be all-seeing and all-knowing. Except in the largest of establishments, those with out-buildings galore and a legion of footmen, the servant is most frequently associated with three locations: the kitchen (including the scullery and pantry), the servants' hall (or housekeeper's room), and the threshold. In *The Gentleman's House; or, How to Plan English Residences, from the Parsonage to the Palace* (1864), Robert Kerr's opinions about which parts of the house the servants should occupy, and how they should occupy them, are definite.73 “It becomes the foremost of all maxims ..., however small the establishment,” he insists, “that the Servants’ Department shall be separated from the Main House, so that what passes on either side of the boundary shall be both invisible and inaudible on the other” (74-75).74 Invisibility and inaudibility, terms contingent upon the complete erasure of the servants' embodied presence, indicate the type of aspirational mapping the architect deploys throughout. The servants and their masters are to be separated so completely that, for all practical purposes, the servants might as well not be there at all (unless someone rings for tea). The psychic jolt of an unanticipated meeting is expressed by Kerr's instruction to “let the family have free passage without

73 Kerr was, at least unofficially, recognized as the era's foremost expert on Victorian architecture. Not only is his text the most specific and descriptive of those available to modern scholars, but Kerr's contemporaries frequently referenced his work as the best of its kind. Many household management guides, including that of J.H. Walsh, which I use in this and the previous chapter, include extracts from or very close paraphrasing of the architect's seminal volume. In my reliance upon Kerr, I echo the Victorians who acknowledged him as one of the primary authors of the fantasy of mid-century domesticity.

74 In addition to unpleasant sights and sounds, servants were also associated with unpleasant smells, particularly those related to food and the waste it produced. This explains a near-ubiquitous feature of Victorian architecture: “Segregating the mess and smell of food preparation from the social ritual of eating became an important hallmark of respectability and meant that the kitchen became ideally as remote as possible from the living rooms, no matter the cost in servants, or wife's time and labour” (Davidoff and Hall, 383).
encountering the servants unexpectedly, and let the servants have access to all their duties without coming unexpectedly upon the family or visitors” (75).

Note how the physical limits of the house must strain to accommodate this definition of privacy. While many homes did have back stairs, only the largest would have had a complete network of separate corridors for the servants; in middle-class homes, conscious avoidance or willful blindness would also have been key. Here already is a hint at the mutual possession of inappropriate or extra knowledge of one another's movements and habits that is a key element in sensation fiction. As Anthea Trodd states, “The concept of invisibility operating in employer-servant relations is a complicated one; it is not always quite clear who is supposed to be invisible to whom” (51).

Not only must family and servants be kept apart, but a different standard is to govern the servants' quarters: “As respects privacy, instead of that seclusion which is the privilege of the family, what we have to provide for the servants is that freedom from interruption which is essential to the efficient performance of their work” (Kerr 221). Servants signify only when/where they are laboring. Whereas in the upstairs rooms of the house Kerr prizes form and aesthetic value, as I discussed in the previous chapter, in the servants' domain function rules. In a servant's environment as in her attire, plainness and sobriety are read as tokens of honesty and suitability.

Servants' leisure time, represented by the location in which it is presumed to occur, is characterized by the same principles of segregation and rigid control. Kerr writes, “The

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75. It is only fair to note that this rigid segregation extended beyond upstairs/downstairs on the basis of gender. “The same passion for control through categorisation and segregation of populations and functions as that found in Victorian public institutions coloured the ideal of the gentleman's house ... The ladies' boudoir, the smoking-room (and in larger houses, the billiards and gun-room), the guest suites with separate staircases for bachelors and unmarried women ensured that even full participants interacted only in set places at set times” (Davidoff 86-87).

76. Rather euphemistically, Kerr denominates this freedom to work “commodiousness” (73), a characteristic that has little in common with our modern, or the Victorians' own, definition of comfort.

77. In many establishments, servants' leisure time itself was likely a fiction. As Judith Flanders points out in her Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England (2004), the duties were so numerous
Servants-Hall [will be] properly the point of meeting, with on one side the domain of the butler and on the other that of the housekeeper, and as little necessity as possible for the subjects of either officer to pass beyond the boundary” (Kerr 221-22). The servants may meet, but are not here imagined to linger, lest they form flirtations or gossip. They may have been little inclined to linger, since the architect dictated that “as the servants have not the same dislike to a low temperature and the open air which their superiors have, the attribute of snugness is not to be attempted in their working rooms” (Kerr 225). The ideal landscape for the servant, then, is drafty, barren, and silent. Kerr devotes fewer words to the servants' quarters than he does to the stables, indicating the minimum possible dimensions that can sanitarily house the maximum number of servants, and cautioning that “completeness” (i.e. furnishing) is to be avoided. The clear message is that the live-in servant is to be reminded throughout her day that she is valuable only for the services she provides. Kerr summarizes, “every servant, every operation, every utensil, every fixture, should have a right place and no right place but one” (222), as if a servant were an inanimate object – a knife that could be left in a drawer until it was wanted again. The principle of itemized separation and control governs every aspect of Kerr's lauded architectural plans. As Philippa Tristram notes, Kerr's model houses – she takes the plan of Bearwood the architect executed from 1865-74 for John Walter, one of the owners of The Times, as her example – are spatially categorized and divided according to “function, class, and sex” (58). Such a house “is no expression of community; rather, like other houses of its type, it is a microcosm of Victorian society” (58) in which “lives are inevitably connected because they are passed beneath a single roof, depend on the same resources, and cannot but have an effect on one another; yet the planning of the great house does all it can to obliterate these connections” (59).

Few Victorians occupied one of Kerr's model houses, but what the architect offered was for the servant in a small establishment as not to leave her time to bathe.
an aspirational map for middle-class families to mimic as closely as they could. As with the middle-class display I interrogated in the previous chapter, the reality is secondary to the fantasy. As Kerr apportions domestic space, servants’ bodies – those working-class bodies that are necessary to the hard labor they perform – get in the way of their usefulness; everywhere the desire is to squeeze them into as small a space as possible. This seems is an effort to keep the domestic space homogenous by effacing the physical traces of social and economic interlopers. Despite the paternalistic rhetoric that continued to govern master-servant relationships, portraying a faithful servant as one of the family, the architecture reveals a different ideology. Robert Loudon, author of the popular *The Suburban Gardener, and Villa Companion* (1838), a guide to aristocratic landscaping for the middle classes, endorses this ethos, going so far as to suggest high hedges designed to screen paths frequented by servants from the family's view and regulations concerning the hours at which servants should be allowed to move around outdoors, in order to minimize the possibility of an unwanted sighting. “Readers of the *Villa Companion* cannot forget about the servants: the need to get them out of the way keeps them constantly in mind” (Garson 204). Although many domestic servants lived in, they were not to feel at home.

And yet terms used in the hiring and firing of servants belie this physical erasure. A job in service is a *position*, a *situation*, or a *place* – all terms that emphasize not just the economic, professional, and social advantages (or disadvantages) of the job, but its location, and the domestic and social inclusion it entails. Volumes like Kerr’s offer a rarefied map of Victorian domesticity; acknowledging servants’ bodily presence, and the ramifications of that presence, I suggest, would offer another, competing map. Servants no doubt related to the homes in which they worked and often lived in ways quite different to those of the upstairs family. Not only did they inhabit different areas, with widely variant degrees of comfort, but their experience of
shared spaces – the dining and sitting rooms, the family's bedrooms – was different, governed by
different activities and social dynamics. A servant's experience produced an alternative
imaginative map of the domestic space, one that might have included the mistress's bad temper,
the stair that squeaks, or the table that's so difficult to dust. As I have explained, different maps
always produce different narratives; and in the middle-class home, ideally and ideologically
characterized by its inviolable privacy and security, acknowledging the existence of competing
spatial narratives – admitting that, in a sense, the home also belonged to someone else, a social
inferior and employee – produced unlimited anxiety. Allowing servants into these restricted-
access spaces suggests the possibility of an entirely different narrative of the Victorian house, a
remapping that would estrange the familiar space and potentially up-end family, professional,
and class identities.

III. Mrs. Warren: Her Fall and Rise

Painting with broad strokes, the project in the itemized lists and detailed instructions of
Victorian household management guides can be seen as minimizing the possibilities for servants
to engage in imaginative mapping of middle-class domesticity, and minimizing the ramifications
of those spatial narratives when they do. However, most management guides also draw heavily
on personal narratives of the authors or authors' (fictitious) female friends. While these
narratives, like the iterative passages, are designed to provide instruction and reassurance to
readers, they deploy a different strategy: they dramatize the worst case scenario of bad
management, usually in very pathetic terms, and then relate how the narrator used the tactics in
the guide in order to right all wrongs and triumph. (A variation of this is to set up a straw woman
who exhibits these egregious failures and contrast her to the author's righteous model.) Thus
these volumes function as a bridge between the pseudo-objective mapmaking of Kerr et al. and
subjective sensation fiction like that of Ellen Wood.

One such bridging text is Eliza Warren's 1864 *How I Managed My House on Two Hundred Pounds a Year*. As a young wife and mother, Mrs. Warren is ill-equipped for domestic management (here almost exclusively *servant* management), and her ignorance leads to financial and emotional devastation. In her solution to this dilemma, however, Warren dramatizes the issues of class identity inherent to, but normally sublimated in, the discourse of household management: she becomes a professional housekeeper\(^7\), a role that muddles her social status while it supplies the credentials that allow her to claim authority and, ultimately, authorship.

Her slender volume begins in the lofty style familiar to readers of Mrs. Beeton or her predecessors. “If a young wife of middle class be handy with her needle, and has had experience under her parents’ roof, she will find two hundred pounds per annum, a sum all-sufficient to steer her matrimonial craft safely over shoals and breakers, provided always that love sits at the helm” (iii), the budget-conscious author notes, although she admits, “It is true she may never actually perform the work herself, but in the present day she must certainly teach her servant, or there will be no comfort in her house. ‘The eye of a mistress will do more work than both her hands –” ’ (iv). As in the majority of Victorian household management guides, the preoccupation with specular economy – the mistress must keep her servants under steady surveillance – and its relation to monetary economy – such surveillance will ensure the servant’s productivity, thus increasing the value-for-money of servant-keeping, and making the household run smoothly, which the guide presents as the surest way of saving some of those precious two hundred pounds – is key. While Mrs. Beeton successfully employed passages of chatty intimacy, Warren's text is firmly grounded in autobiography. It is, in fact, a cautionary tale directed at unwary young wives,

\(^7\) That is, Mrs. Warren is officially employed as a waged housekeeper for a family to whom she is not related, rather than the more common practice of unofficially keeping house for a relative.
and the bad example is Mrs. Warren herself. After narrating how she, a girl from a respectable family, married a young man with a sufficient, although not luxurious, income; she quickly found herself unequal to the task of housekeeping, and hired a likeable but inefficient servant; the tale takes a melodramatic turn. Without permission Ann, the servant, takes the Warrens' infant with her to visit a fellow servant in a home where she unwittingly exposes her charge to “spasmodic croup and whooping cough” (16). The doctor attending the sick family instructs Ann to go home and immediately tell her mistress what has transpired, but Ann doesn't; and the Warrens' baby falls ill and dies. The scene of Ann's confrontation with her master and mistress, presented in much richer detail than the death of the child, is worth quoting in full:

“Do you know,” said [Mr. Warren], “that you have murdered that child?”

She fell on her knees. “Oh! sir, I did not mean to do it. I did not know there was any harm.”

“Then, why not have told your mistress, as the doctor said to you?”

“Because I was afraid, sir; the doctor looked so angry that I was sure if I told that I should be scolded.”

“And again I tell you, you have murdered my child!”

The girl looked with such pitiful anguish at me that I said, “That is enough: you may go, Ann.” For a long time after, she sat on the step of the stair outside the door sobbing as if her heart would break; but mine was turned to stone, a numbing despair settled on me, for welling up within was the silent reproach that if I had not gone in debt this never had been, and instead of this surrounding misery of my own making, I had been a happy mother in my own native village. I could not say, “This is God’s hand,” for through my own thoughtlessness had this
grief overtaken me. (16-17; italics in the original)

Mrs. Warren's distraught assumption of culpability for the negligent act committed by her servant is a transferral of responsibility that mimics the dislocation of physical household labor from the servant to the overseeing housewife. Such a masochistic response makes complete sense in the context of Victorian domestic ideology. The servant is construed as an extension of her or his employers, and should reflect their values and qualities, especially beyond the walls of the home. Kerr clarifies the qualities necessary for civilized (British) domesticity:

It must have been apparent for some time that one of the most important points involved in the improvement of [architectural] plan has been that of domestic privacy. With regard to this, it may be remarked that there are two forms in which in our own day it is especially cared for, namely, the separation of the family from the servants and the still further retirement of the female sex; and it may appear wonderful that ideas now so axiomatic in their nature as these should have required any considerable time for development. (30)79

The semantic linkage of these two types of separation suggests not only that both are hallmarks of advancing civilization, but that they are intrinsically connected. The wife and the objects within the domestic realm display the wealth and couth of the [middle-class] husband; and ostensibly the servants, as ambassadors abroad, carry out a similar function. However, as the literature makes clear, the servant role is much more strictly tied to the expertise of the mistress, and understood to reflect her style of housekeeping, intelligence, religious and moral integrity, and personal character. Thus the misbehavior of a servant is not only under the purview of the mistress, but always already reflects her failure. In this light, the guides' obsessive emphasis on

79. Kerr dates the beginning of privacy so defined to the fourteenth century, with the emergence of a separate bed chamber for the lord and lady of the manor.
good hiring practices seems logical. Much of Mrs. Warren's volume consists of quotes from her friend, 'Bertha Chapman,' preternaturally wise in the ways of all things. Here she expatiates on how one should go about hiring a servant (the opposite of what Warren has done):

“Upon no pretext or pretence take one without a character for honesty and civility. Lay not too much stress on anything else: what may be cleanliness in one house may not be thought so in another. Do not take a written character: the appearance of the mistress of the house will go far to assist your judgment as to the servant. Distrust equally a very good or very bad character, and do not take a servant who has lived years in a place: be assured she will be mentally making disagreeable comparisons between yours and the family she has left, and be so settled into their ways that she will not change to yours. Besides, depend upon it she has been tolerated in many shortcomings for which her plea of long service has been sufficient, or she would not have been discharged.” (154-55)

If this seems designed to militate against the servant's career advancement, it does so in order to insulate the potential future mistress from criticism. Chapman's guidelines indicate several possible sources of falsehood, from the servant herself, who might lie about her employment history or worse, to the former mistress, who might offer a false or inaccurate reference, whether through the desire to avoid conflict or coercion. The transposition of a servant's moral qualities onto the plane of vocational qualities is a typical rhetorical and ideological move. For example, Walsh dictates that the ideal servant is “honest, sober, diligent, civil, and clean” (216), and for Beeton, “Your first questions should be relative to the honesty and morality of [the] servant” (14). Here the servant is valued not primarily for her ability to perform actual labor, but for her integrity, often a euphemism for obedience.
The misbehavior of the Warrens' servant with its tragic consequences confirms the need for critical surveillance on the part of the mistress, but it also indicates that (a) such surveillance often fails; and (b) the punitive system of surveillance may be doomed to short-circuit itself: Ann only lies to her master and mistress because she fears punishment, likely dismissal. The paranoid lesson here seems to be that a wary mistress will simply assume her servants prevaricate. J.H. Walsh is particularly gloomy on the subject: “There is nothing more painful to witness than the treatment of a servant in a way which we should not like to submit to ourselves; and yet in nineteen cases out of twenty I fully believe that the scriptural rule, if carried out, will fail” (217). In other words, do not treat your servants as you would wish to be treated, because your servants aren't like you.

While household management guides devote thousands of words to the need for keeping a watchful eye on one's servants, they also reveal a pervasive paranoia at the thought that the servants are likely to be looking back. Indeed, the guidelines for being an ideal servant require such observation. “The General Requisites towards good waiting are – quickness without noise, or apparent bustling; constant watchfulness, without officiousness; and precision in placing dishes on the table, without apparent effort, which is a rare faculty, and dependent upon a natural gift” (Walsh 240). The desirable servant is attentive, anticipatory; and yet “Privacy, one of the cornerstones of Victorian domestic ideology, remains under siege as long as the family remains under surveillance” (McCuskey 359). The gossiping servant is a literary and theatrical archetype, but here the servant is figured more as a spy, a professional detective. Not only does she detect her mistress's whims, but she “perform[s] a policing function in the home – guarding valuables, sizing up strangers, escorting their employers – that necessarily but not offensively encroaches upon the family's privacy” (McCuskey 361).
Of course, if the servant's acute observation gives her access to illicit information, the
detective/policing function does become offensive. This is the operation deployed in sensation
fiction, where plots often hinge upon the ability of the servant to blackmail the employer (Phoebe
in *Lady Audley's Secret*, Mrs. Catherick in *The Woman in White*) or to supply the missing detail
that will solve the mystery (*The Moonstone*, *Lady Audley's Secret* again, *East Lynne*). The
anxiety that real life will devolve into a sensational plot seems to govern much of the guides'
rhetoric surrounding servants' access to the bodies, spaces, and secrets of their employers.
Accordingly, most manuals contain rules for the behavior of domestic staff in addition to rules
for the management of that staff. In Mrs. Beeton's book, for example, John O. Jordan traces the
shifting tone from instructive to “prescriptive and admonitory” (81) when the author discusses
matters related to servants, as if she is no longer talking to an equal (the mistress) but to an
inferior (the servant herself). Much of this advice details not what the servant should do, but
what she should not do, or see. Thus it “acknowledge[s] and articulate[s] precisely the guilty
secrets – alcoholism, illness, adultery, domestic violence – that middle-class householders were
so determined to suppress” (McCuskey 360). The implication is that domestic propriety and
stability hinge not upon the presence or absence of these illicit behaviors, but upon the ability of
the servant to blind herself or hold her tongue, thus giving the servant a dangerous degree of
agency. In her *How I Managed*, Mrs. Warren, guilty not of adultery or theft but of
mismanagement and genteel poverty in extremis (she and her husband barely have enough food
to stave off starvation), echoes this sentiment in her fear that Ann, the servant girl who has
committed infanticide-by-proxy, will spread the Warrens' “crime” abroad. “We were unwilling to
send her home to our own village,” she explains, “where, from her lips, our adventures would
have done duty for a ‘sensation’ novel” (18).

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Sensation so defined is akin to domestic melodrama, a revelation of what occurs behind closed doors, counterpart to the domestic melodrama emerging simultaneously on stage, both of which were “a rhetorical form of specifically domestic resistance [to market forces and a degenerate aristocracy] during the middle decades of Victoria's reign” (Hadley 134). Domestic melodrama, with its reliance on tropes like the fallen woman, divorce, adultery, etc., is typically seen as a conservative genre invested in reifying the status quo. However, as Elaine Hadley explains, “As a vehicle of protest ..., the melodramatic mode could empower its practitioners with rhetorical and behavioral strategies responsive to invasions of market culture, but the power so derived was nostalgic and regressive in its impact” and thus “especially difficult to see as resistance” (Hadley 137), particularly in works such as Wood's *East Lynne*, as we will see.

If the potential poking and prying of servants provoked no response other than anxiety in middle-class readers, however, the sensation genre could never have achieved its phenomenal popularity. The possibility of pleasure also inheres in this specular economy, “a fantasy of the employing classes ... that the servant might be watching you, and through his or her witness, your dimensions, your shape and form as a person, might become clearer, your outline more solid, and that you might be affirmed by the servant's observation and recounting of you,” as Carolyn Steedman expresses it (333-334). Such an affirmation lends dignity and gravitas to actions that are otherwise routine; a watchful servant “both fixes the middle-class family as the center of servants' attention and affirms middle-class secrets as worth possessing” (McCuskey 362). Thus the motif of the ocular, which Steedman dates to the seventeenth century, operates on multiple levels, as servants look at and up to their masters, seeking to be like them and to be what was wanted by them (336). In Foucauldian terms, the domestic ideal presented in management texts may be the Panopticon, but the model collapses, as McCuskey says, “as soon
as the servant appears from below stairs to answer the bell” (363). The Victorian home is
governed by a different disciplinary relationship, as if the prisoners looked up at the guard tower
and in response the guard became flustered. Ideally, then, master and servant keep one another in
check, but the recognition of the servant as an active participant in this ocular or specular
economy hints at the potential of a reversal in the power dynamic.

As sensation fiction makes plain, in addition to self-aggrandizing, such surveillance
harbors the possibility for another kind of pleasure that is more like titillation. The reader has the
opportunity to peer into other people's houses, to pass beyond the carefully tended front gate and
curtained windows. The most famous example of this is from Dombey and Son, when Dickens's
quasi-omniscient narrator announces the agenda of domestic fiction: to take the tops off private
houses and reveal their interior dramas to the reading public. As Bruce Robbins declares, “It
is servants who actually take the house-tops off” (167). In Margaret Oliphant's reconfiguration of
the trope in The Doctor's Family, both the author and the reader are leagued with the servant,
who enjoys unrestricted access to the house when her employers are out. “Perhaps you would
prefer to go up-stairs and see for yourself what was the skeleton in Edward Rider’s cupboard,
rather than have it described to you,” the narrator invites (57). “Now that he is certainly gone,
and the coast clear, we may go up-stairs. It is true he all but kicked the curate down for taking a
similar liberty, but we who are less visible may venture while he is away” (58). “[L]ess visible”
initially implies the disembodied, omniscient force Dickens envisions; but if 'we' are incorporeal,
why must 'we' wait until the doctor is out, and why must 'we' use the stairs? It is not that the
reader is invisible, but that the reader is less visible than the (middle-class) curate. The reader is
embodied, but barely visible – the reader is a servant. I stress this point because it dramatizes the
process at work in all Victorian fiction concerned with domestic space. As I have already
discussed, even the most ideologically conservative domestic fiction sabotages its own project by making the domestic space public to an audience of readers. But the process goes a step further in sensation fiction, whose plots rely on the uncovering of family or domestic secrets. In the act of reading these novels, the reader – presumably middle-class – is positioned by the text as the spying, prying, detecting servant feared by household management guides. The reader is expected to mimic both her peculiar kind of mobility through middle- and upper-class houses, and to take a low delight in making public what out to be kept private. Perhaps, then, even as the specter of downward mobility loomed, part of the appeal of sensation fiction may have been the opportunity to go slumming, to audition the role of the prying, all-seeing servant.

IV. Mapping Middle-Class Identity in *East Lynne*

Mrs. Warren's emotive narrative hints at the broad melodramatic appeal in the nuances of master-servant relations; and when it came to tapping this rich vein for commercial exploitation aimed at a wider audience, no one surpassed Ellen Wood. Wood is understood as a quintessentially middle-class writer, but modern literary criticism has only just begun to examine the different planes upon which this designation signifies. Much of the canonization of Wood as a secular Victorian saint, the ideal of the perfect domestic angel, derives from her son Charles Wood's biography of her, tellingly entitled “Mrs. Henry Wood, a Memorial” and basically a species of “hagiography” (Sussex 159). Charles Wood devoted his pen to idealizing his mother in the specialized context of the domestic sphere about which she wrote so much, and “as a consequence, Ellen Wood has become as iconic of her age as ‘Mrs Grundy’ or even Queen Victoria herself. Despite her invariably melodramatic and often bloodthirsty subject matter, an aura of formidable – some would say repellent – respectability surrounds her” (Sussex 158). The allegation of Grundyism accurately sums up much of the critical response to Wood's work, a
view of her fiction as tame, a little dull, but still pleasurable – like a quiet Sunday afternoon – that dates from her early productive years, gained steam toward the end of the century, and persists into the twenty-first century. Deborah Wynne quotes an anonymous 1874 review in the Spectator: Mary Elizabeth Braddon

“cannot touch her veteran rival in gorgeous common-place, the nice adjustment of murder-and-morality, servants'-hall episodes, the romance of the apothecary and the greengrocer, funeral etiquette and expenses, the gossip of the back-shop, and pulpit eloquence. Miss Braddon lacks the direct, bold, entirely confident Philistinism of Mrs Henry Wood... [who] resorts to no garnishes for her plain English fare, but serves up murders and mutton, suicides and rice-pudding, stolen cheques and thick bread-and-butter.” (88, “Big Wide Bed”)

Interpreting Wood as a writer unreflectively celebrating the middle class is problematic, first and foremost, because of the genre that made hers a household name. If Wood's fictions didn't provoke the outcry of a new work by Wilkie Collins or Braddon, neither were they received with uniform complacency. Critics have long noted that many of the scandalized responses to sensation fiction were caused by the perception of the large, promiscuous and indiscriminate reading public presumed to be devouring these works. As with the early novel, many worried that readers were vulnerable women and young people; but the more disturbing possibility was that the market for sensation was bloated by the new, working-class readers whose literacy had been ensured by education reform. “[I]ts popularity was cited as its single most alarming characteristic. Everyone from the lady of the manor to the scullery maid was reading” sensation novels (Hughes 6). Servants reading sensation fiction rehearsed the dynamic at work in so many of the plots of that fiction by contaminating the middle-class home through
their reading practices: “Low culture, imported into the household through improprieties of reading and writing on the part of its menials, possessed insidious powers of cultural contamination, and could interrogate the moral center” (Fernandez 4) of the closed family unit, the building-block of Victorian society. As texts like Wood's offered anxious responses to domestic anxieties, their consumption by domestic workers added a new, parallel dimension to the problem. And while Wood successfully traded upon her reputation as “the least unwholesome of the sensation novelists” (Maunder, *East Lynne* 15), choosing to put her forth as an arbiter of respectability is rather like the twenty-first-century dilemma of choosing a “healthy” junk food. As critics like Sussex, Jennifer Phegley, Wynne, Beth Palmer, and Tamara S. Wagner have recently asserted, viewing Wood's huge corpus of fiction as a smug celebration of middle-class culture denudes it of much of its content as well as its significance and, likely, much of the appeal it had for Victorian middle-class readers.

For Lyn Pykett, *East Lynne* is “a narrative about the making of the modern, professional, middle-class family, which inscribes middle-class insecurities about social mobility” (*Improper* 121). For Wagner, “The social panorama [of] most of Wood’s novels ... forms a charting of the social and cultural competition between gentility in decline and, conversely, upstart vulgarity” and “seek[s] to negotiate shifts in the social construction of gentility as a central cultural enterprise in the nineteenth century (‘Essentially’” 200). If the title of Dinah Birch's review of the 2000 Broadview edition of *East Lynne* in the *London Review of Books*, “Fear Among the Teacups,” emphasizes the perceived smallness and detail-oriented nature of Wood's plots and her reliable mixing of murder and Mrs. Beeton – like a nineteenth-century forerunner to Miss Marple – it also recuperates the specific context of the 1860s, when the supposedly serene domestic interior had an almost unparalleled ability to provoke an array of fears. Conventional crimes are
the accessories; “sensation novels evoke their most typical moments of sensation response from images of a loss of class identity. And this common image links up with a fear of a general loss of social identity as a result of the merging of the classes – a fear that was commonly expressed in the debate over social and parliamentary reform in the late 1850s and 1860s” (Loesberg 117). As Nicholas Rance, one of the earlier critics to acknowledge the power Wood's ostensibly more conservative brand of sensation fiction, writes, “anxiety is betokened by the unbending deference to the precepts of orthodoxy urged on readers of East Lynne” (5). According to one definition, this makes East Lynne the sensation novel par excellence: “In effect, the sensation novel worked in tandem with the more ‘realistic’ domestic novel to establish middle-class norms of behavior; domestic fiction gave a straightforward behavioral model, while sensation fiction helped readers identify that which did not belong in middle-class spaces” (Whelan 12).

Making a compelling case for reading East Lynne as a novel primarily devoted to negotiating the vicissitudes of middle-class domestic life and identity at mid-century, Wynne observes, “[T]he major theme she pursued throughout her career was class conflict, her favoured plots depicting a righteous bourgeoisie asserting their values over an enfeebled, yet corrupt, aristocracy and infantilized, occasionally troublesome, working class” (Sensation Novel 62). Although Wagner doesn't see Wood's middle-class characters as quite the army of righteousness Wynne describes, her work on the author's use of the shabby genteel as a means of working through the conflict between a faded aristocracy and an upstart professional class in Red Court Farm (1868) further establishes Wood's career-long engagement with class conflict (‘Essentially’). Marie Riley, too, insists that Wood's “characteristic interrogation of class boundaries can be read as articulating the ideological struggle of the mercantile middle classes to

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80 These anxieties are thus the counterpart to the discomfort produced by the seemingly middle-class woman walking unaccompanied in public space, as I detail in chapter two.
consolidate their status and cultural identity in a society in a state of flux” (Riley 166). As these scholars illustrate, the critical tendency to extrapolate Wood's aims, interests, and social positioning entirely from her best-known novel has resulted in a limited, if not outright distorted, understanding of Ellen Wood's place in nineteenth-century culture. My intent is to use this clearer understanding of Wood's career as author and editor and the issues to which she consistently returned in order to produce a more nuanced reading of one of the most widely read texts of the Victorian era.

For Wood as for overtly didactic writers like Kerr, Loudon, Beeton, Ellis, and Warren, class identity is always spatialized, and middle-class respectability is contingent upon its physical and ideological domestic locale. Intrusions of public space and issues are endemic to *East Lynne*, a novel in which the rhetoric surrounding domestic space is constantly fighting a rearguard action against the details of the plot, which proceeds by means of said intrusions. The novel (and with it its many theatrical versions) has entered the popular consciousness as the story of a wife who courts trouble by running away from home; but more accurately, it is the narrative of the series of troubles that seem to court the home (both East Lynne, a specific home, and the home writ large) and its family. As Wynne points out, although Isabel Vane is usually assumed to be the novel's protagonist, the book isn't called *Isabel*. Not only is East Lynne the site of the narrative's major incidents, but the house itself is the real main character.

Upon closer examination, Wood's fetishizing of East Lynne is almost as unusual as the visibility of its servants, although both aspects of the novel are easily obscured by the cozy veil of domesticity and the modern critical understanding of the typical Victorian novel as one stuffed with minutiae. The naming of novels after their primary setting was not, of course, an innovation; among countless others, Austen did it with *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*. 

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and before her there were gothic favorites like *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Indeed, *East Lynne*'s resemblance to its gothic predecessors is pronounced: “In its probing of ideologies of domesticity within the transposition of Radcliffian narratives of escape from the imprisoning castles of the past, sensation fiction’s domestic Gothic at the mid century almost invariably depicts the middle-class home as both a threatening and a threatened location” (Wagner, “‘Essentially’” 200). In Wood's work, however, there is a shifting of focus. Whereas in the earlier texts the crumbling castle or aristocratic estate is important in relation to the events that unfold within its walls, East Lynne derives its interest not only from its history and inhabitants, but inherently: it is a house that matters *qua* house. This is evident in its naming, as the estate is East Lynne while the entire town is West Lynne, suggesting that they are balanced poles. East Lynne functions as a home, an ideal, a status marker, a necessity, a luxury, and a barrier.

Such as it is, Wood's description of East Lynne's exterior comes in chapter three. Upon leaving West Lynne,

about a mile farther on you came upon the beautiful estate which was called East Lynne. As you drove along the road you might admire its green, undulating park; not as you walked, for an envious wall, unconscionably high, obstructed your view. Large, beautiful trees affording shelter, alike for human beings and for the deer, on a day of summer's heat, rose in that park, and a great gate between two lodges to the right of the road, gave you entrance to it, and conducted you to the house. It was not a very large house, compared with some country seats, but it was built in the villa style, was white and remarkably cheerful: altogether a charming place to look upon. (59)
Although the possession and maintenance of this house and its inhabitants constitutes the main plot of the novel, physical description of it is scanty. Instead Wood foregrounds the features that separate the house from public land: the high wall, the park, and the gate. This gate can open to give “you” entrance, but here the reader is neither allowed to look over the wall nor to pass through the gate. By focusing on these barrier elements and the estate's beauty, Wood implies that restricted access is requisite to the experience of East Lynne as a pleasant, desirable home. And yet, as the nexus of gossip, crime, marriage, birth, death, hiring, firing, lovemaking, and feuding, East Lynne is always already in the public domain.

The main events that set the novel's plot into motion are all presented to the reader as real estate transactions, a tactic that further emphasizes East Lynne's role as both tool and symbol of social and political control. “A rumour has reached my ears, my lord, that East Lynne is in the market,” Archibald Carlyle, the main male character, tells the Earl of Mount Severn (45) at their first meeting. A familiar archetype – the aging aristocrat whose indulgent habits have long consumed his wealth –, Mount Severn is only too willing to turn to the rising young professional for salvation. Intruding upon the unbroken history of the landed gentry and its slow decline that Wood spends the first pages of the novel describing, the market is also now in East Lynne; Carlyle has brought it, in the shape of his professional identity and a semi-shady real estate deal that doesn't become public until the earl's death. Indeed, Archibald has bought “everything as it stands,” as he puts it to Mount Severn's creditors (137); and once he has wooed the earl's daughter, Isabel, through a combination of common sense and financial stability (he gives her a hundred-pound note, which humiliates her even as she feels too guilty to spurn his generosity), it becomes clear that the earl's daughter, like the furnishings, goes with the house. This is less feudal than it sounds, since nineteenth-century ideology dictates that the home is the woman's
domain: “The Victorian woman more than any other female before or after her was in the house, of the house, the very house itself” (Dickerson xviii-xix). Isabel understands her situation in the same spatial terms; the death of her father and her fortune leads to a new mapping of a familiar space. “Instead of being a young lady of position, of wealth and rank, she appeared to herself more in the light of an unfortunate pauper;” Wood writes, “an interloper in the house she was inhabiting ... She was in Mr Carlyle's house, now. And how was she to pay the servants?” (141). Patricia McKee argues that in this text what female characters desire is a space or place rather than an object. As Isabel’s dilemma illustrates, the two are often inextricable. So close is Isabel's identification of herself with the house that she asks if she is allowed to keep her clothing. The first breech of East Lynne's defenses, its purchase by bourgeois Archibald, is effaced by a second, more vulgar breech as creditors storm the house demanding payment and go so far as to arrest the earl's corpse. The class politics at work here show in stark relief, as the middle-class professional mediates between flaccid aristocracy and coarse working class. Carlyle is now no longer the social-climbing intruder, but the heroic protector and guardian of East Lynne and its contents.

Many critics have argued that the exaltation of the middle-class professional is precisely Wood's agenda in the novel. As John Kucich writes that “the novel's fascination with ruptured class boundaries produces an atmosphere of social anomie, represented most of all by Carlyle's transformation – which defines the dreams of many of the novel's readers – from middle-class country attorney to wealthy gentleman” (164). Certainly Archibald is an exponent of a demographic that was burgeoning in the era: “By 1851, professional male household heads made up 21 per cent of the middle-class census sample. Within this group, roughly one-half were the older professions of the church, the law and medicine, while the other half were mainly teachers
plus a scattering of newer professions such as engineers, architects, surveyors, estate agents, naturalists, authors and artists” (Davidoff and Hall 260). Kucich elaborates,

> Although an upward social trajectory may not have been the universal lot of the novel's contemporary audience, the long economic boom beginning in the mid-1850s certainly induced a general feeling of affluence by 1861 ... Professions like architecture, engineering, and education (not to mention those of cultural intellectuals) expanded rapidly at this time, and the decade of the 1860s saw the founding of many of the public schools, which provided a path to gentrification for the sons of wealthy businessmen. (162)

To a great extent, the first third of *East Lynne* presents a middle-class fantasy, an exaggerated but not impossible version of contemporary reality, in which ascendant professionals usurped physical and cultural territory previously occupied by the aristocracy. “The unique feature of Victorian society is that ... essentially middle-class patterns of behaviour were grafted on to the honorific code of the aristocracy or gentry to produce the widened concept of 'gentility', which was, without doubt, one of the most effective instruments for social control ever devised” (Davidoff 36).

Before becoming engaged to Carlyle, Isabel is forced to live with the shrewish wife of the new Earl of Mount Severn. Isabel finds her circumstances intolerable and wonders not what she shall do, but where she will go; and Carlyle proposes marriage to her less as a proposition or an event than as a potential location. “There is but one way ... only one way in which you could return to East Lynne ... as its mistress,” he suggests, and adds after the interval of another paragraph, “and as my wife” (164). The concepts here are not unusual: marriage was to provide a Victorian wife with a career and a refuge. What is unusual is Wood's unabashed foregrounding of
the ideological and architectural facets of major life decisions, and that her masculine hero acknowledges the primary appeal of his proposal to Isabel as its ability to restore her to East Lynne. The important relationship is to the house rather than to the man. When Lady Mount Severn hears of the proposal, she crassly echoes this assessment: “How very grateful Isabel must feel to you ... East Lynne is a beautiful place, I have heard” (165-166). When the author gives the reader access to Isabel's thought processes, they run parallel to those of her suitor and relative: “That Mr Carlyle was not of rank equal to her own, she scarcely remembered: East Lynne seemed a very fair settlement in life, and in point of size, beauty, and importance, it was superior to [the new earl's estate, Castle Marling]” (166). For a fourth time within as many pages, Wood reiterates the primacy of the house when rakish Francis Levison echoes, “East Lynne is a place to be coveted. I wish you happiness” (167). For Dan Bivona, Wood's project in *East Lynne* is imbricated in the dynamic I have just described. In its commitment to “exploring how the management of the external domestic space and the management of self become one and the same,” particularly through the character of Isabel, Wood's novel offers insight into the means by which “'Household management' in the nineteenth century becomes coextensive with self-control” (110, 111). Isabel's progress as a character is figured through her shifting relations to two houses: East Lynne, her ancestral home; and her body, the 'house' of her spirit.

Isabel's relationship to East Lynne is perpetually unstable. Although she and the narrator rhetorically exalt the estate as her home, she was raised elsewhere, and only came to stay there with her father, who himself intended only to visit, shortly before his death – around the time Carlyle purchases East Lynne. Thus, while the text unfavorably contrasts Isabel's position in the house as Archibald's wife to her position there as the earl's daughter, her relation to East Lynne has always been precarious. That her position is still not what it seems – she is mistress in name
only, under the dominion of Archibald's sister Cornelia, who insists that an “ignorant baby, befrilled and bejewelled” cannot run a household (182)\textsuperscript{81} – is illustrated by a pathetic moment when she and Carlyle return from their wedding trip. “I should like to go to my rooms, Archibald,” she tells her husband, “but I don't know which they are” (189).

This confusion is Cornelia's doing, and is the result of another plot device disguised as a real estate transaction. When he returns from his wedding journey she tells her brother, “I have let [my house] furnished: the people entered today. You cannot turn me out of East Lynne” (191). Ostensibly a money-saving tactic designed to stave off the financial ruin she insists will be the result of Archibald's having taken an aristocratic wife, this is also a usurpation of Isabel's role as mistress and yet another encroachment upon East Lynne's privacy.\textsuperscript{82} If Cornelia is a familiar strong-minded spinster figure, she also represents a more traditional understanding of her family's position in the social scale and the style of living appropriate to it. Without saying it outright, she implies that her brother is both a social-climber and poseur. As an illustration of this, and of the necessity of her presence, Cornelia's first act at East Lynne is unceremoniously to fire the servants Archibald has hired for his new estate because the footmen's striped jackets and the maids' “fine mousseline-de-laine gowns, with peach bows in their caps” (181) visually code them as vain and self-important, and thus as undesirable employees (although where they could have obtained this matching finery, unless from their new employer himself, remains unclear). In

\textsuperscript{81} Perhaps Cornelia, unlike Isabel, has extensively studied the period's management guides. As Nancy Armstrong writes in \textit{Desire and Domestic Fiction}, “conduct books from the early decades of the nineteenth century had already come to see the country house, not as the center of aristocratic (male) power, but as the perfect realization of the domestic woman's (non-aristocratic) character. During the high Victorian age, this model of middle-class domesticity began to determine the way the aristocracy represented themselves as well” (74). That is, not unlike her brother, Cornelia understands middle-class values as the highest ideal of British culture, and thus grafts them onto East Lynne, formerly a traditional country house.

\textsuperscript{82} A survey of a text such as Jessica Gerard's \textit{Country House Life: Family and Servants 1815-1914} (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1994) makes it clear that East Lynne operates not as a country house with a huge retinue of servants, but as a middle-class establishment, despite Cornelia's worries. The departure of Isabel's maid Marvel is also the departure of the last vestige of the older system.
Cornelia's eyes, Archibald's marriage to an aristocratic wife and hiring of unsuitable servants are part and parcel of the same social and domestic project. When he asks her what the servants had done to cause her to dismiss them, she implicitly links the two events by responding, “‘[H]ow could you go and make a fool of yourself? If you must have married, were there not plenty of young ladies in your own sphere of society – ’” (191). Unsuitable wives entail the appearance of unfit servants, and both, Cornelia fears, will make her brother ridiculous.

Although *East Lynne* is notorious as the story of a fallen aristocratic woman who infiltrates her former home in the guise of governess, as this brief introduction demonstrates, social mobility is everywhere in *East Lynne* – not just in Isabel's narrative – and occurs in a continual, bi-directional flow throughout the text. Unlike the maternal melodrama, this is a fixture of Wood's oeuvre. “Throughout Wood’s mid-century novels, the ups and downs brought about by what is shown to be a two-way realization of social mobility capture a climate of uncertainty” (Wagner, “‘Essentially’” 214). Although I will return to Isabel, my primary interest in this chapter is to explore the ways in which Wood details both the threats and pleasures to her readers contingent upon the increasingly visible phenomenon of social mobility through *East Lynne*’s servants, and particularly through their differing relationships to and methods of movement through the house itself. Wood's frank acknowledgment of the existence and physical presence of many servants in the home and text – her refusal to overlook or look through them – is one of the elements of her writing that, like detailed descriptions of jewelry and furnishings, have led to more than a century and a half of accusations of the author's own vulgarity, materialism, and “straining after gentility” (Pykett, *Improper* 119). Such criticism

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83. For example, when Richard Hare, the fugitive son of the local judge, reappears, he is working as a stablehand.
84. For instance, in *Parkwater*, another of Wood's serialized works, the author “engages with a range of contemporary anxieties relating to the permeability of class boundaries and the possibility that class (and gender) identities are merely performative. But while some of these anxieties are, seemingly, introduced for the sole purpose of negating them, the novel as a whole refuses to endorse any simple trajectory of bourgeois ascendancy” (Allan 9).
fails to acknowledge one of the main functions of sensation fiction, Mrs. Wood's in particular: “Fiction offered an easy way of understanding the complex codes surrounding the different conventions of genteel life. Wood offered invaluable information in her fiction on the suitable arrangement of domestic space, the genteel codes of bedroom etiquette, receiving visitors, and the correct costumes and proper display of jewellery” (Wynne, “Big Wide Bed” 97). In addition to its significance as providing a rare glimpse into the quotidian management of a mid-sized Victorian estate, and thus functioning as a strong bridge between the household management guides I have discussed above and the nineteenth-century novels that endorse the out-of-sight, out-of-mind school of thought when it comes to servants, Wood's focus on servant characters in East Lynne serves a dual purpose within the plot itself. On one level, by transferring both the obvious desire to move up the social scale and the potential involvement in criminal activity from her main characters to their hired help, Wood deflects criticism from the novel's most obvious social-climber, Archibald himself, that paragon of middle-class professional identity. This gesture is in keeping with the conservative ideology usually attributed to Wood. Secondly, if anxiety and insecurity are equated only with bad servants, then by purging them from within the walls of East Lynne through disgrace or death (or both), the reader is ostensibly left with a cozy, secure vision of middle-class propriety and integrity. East Lynne ends with Archibald and his second wife, Barbara, embracing, swearing eternal faithfulness (in direct contrast to Isabel, the fallen spouse), and promising to raise all the Carlyle offspring according to the doctrines of Christianity and middle-class prosperity. Taken at face value, Mrs. Beeton has met Samuel Smiles, with a dash of Mary Elizabeth Braddon tossed in for seasoning, and then tossed back out again.

However, what I will illustrate is that Wood's use of servants is more subtle than the
above implies, and complicates both the idea of the ideal home as a private, safe space for its
inhabitants above stairs and the general critical consensus that, despite flashes of discomfort or
rebellion, the novel and its author blithely uphold middle-class hegemony. Silent or gossipy, hot-
tempered or docile – in short, good or bad – Wood's text displays how each servant inherently,
unavoidably represents a threat to the ideologies of domesticity and separate spheres at the core
of bourgeois complacency. The perceived degree of threat embodied by each of the servants I
will analyze is demonstrated by the scope of her access to East Lynne; but much that the other
characters interpret as virtue or banality ultimately reveals itself to be equally as threatening as
the novel's obvious crimes of murder and adultery.

One among the accumulating odd features of East Lynne's servants is that Wood allows
so many of them to have names. There is Peter, the Vanes' faithful footman who remains to serve
the Carlyle family; Wilson, the gossipy nurse maid; and Marvel, Isabel's lady's maid who
abruptly departs from East Lynne upon discovering that it is no longer being run in a style
suitable to her liking. Each of the aforementioned three is a recognizable type, and each has a
species of spotlight scene. Peter is associated with Isabel's panicked flight to her father's
deathbed; Marvel confirms Cornelia's dire suspicions about Isabel's sort of servants; and when
Isabel, feverish and insecure, overhears Wilson's gossip that Archibald is in love with Barbara
Hare, this incident precipitates her abrupt departure with Levison. However, none of them plays
a role whose prominence compares to the three servants I will consider in depth: Joyce, the
Carlyle family's loyal, and astonishingly mobile, servant; her half-sister, Aphrodite, sometime
companion and lady's-maid, much more interested in becoming a lady herself than waiting on
one; and Madame Vine, alias Lady Isabel Vane Carlyle, hired as governess to her own children in
the novel's last third.
Joyce, to whom Isabel essentially grants custody of her children before fleeing with Levison, is the novel's model servant. She has received much less attention than either her sister or Isabel, whether from Wood's contemporaries or more recent scholars, probably because she is the most easily recognized and taken for granted of the servants Wood draws. Her relationship to East Lynne, its occupants and contents, is a near approximation of the aspirational narrative of servanthood espoused by Beeton et al. Plain and efficient, Joyce, who serves as a kind of upper maid/lady's maid/nursery maid hybrid, never mentions wages, but presents her service as a labor of love; like the reader, she is drawn to Lady Isabel from their first meeting. In the absence of a housekeeper and with Wood's decision to hide the cook in the kitchen at all times (one assumes there must be a cook), Joyce is the most powerful upper servant at East Lynne. When first the reader meets her, she is Cornelia Carlyle's maid, “plain, but sensible-looking” (100), who, in contrast to her half-sister, does only “as she was bid” (100). Joyce is respectful and deferential to her master and/or mistress, and faithful to her duties. She does retort defensively when Miss Carlyle accuses her of negligence in dusting the breakfast room, but the text endorses Joyce's version of events: that she has “exerted [herself] to the utmost” and the room is dusty because Cornelia insists on leaving the window open (104). Although the accusation of laziness in servants is a common refrain across fiction and management guides, as is recrimination for back-talk, Wood suggests that Joyce remains within bounds because she is protecting her dignity and professionalism against Cornelia's eccentricity and fault-finding. (Cornelia has just insulted her cook severely enough to make the latter quit.)

More significantly, Joyce participates in her employers' bourgeois condemnation of her social-climbing sister, Afy, demonstrating that she shares a middle-class understanding of what behaviors and ambitions are appropriate to members of the working class. One of the first things
the reader learns about her is that she is ashamed of the shenanigans of her younger sister: “We did not agree upon the point; I said a person of his rank would do her no good,” she explains of Afy's relationship with the gentleman who called himself Captain Thorn (Francis Levison in disguise) (101). Joyce is content to be a servant, her only ambition seemingly to be allowed to fulfill her promise to Lady Isabel by remaining with the children after Archibald marries Barbara Hare. Ideal that she is, Joyce's primary emotional ties are not to her own kin, but to the Carlyle family. Although she mentions that her father's grisly murder made it unpleasant for her to remain in the family cottage, her emotive response to the incident centers primarily around her shame at Afy's conduct and her fear that knowledge of it will cause Isabel to dismiss her – that is, she worries most about her professional/moral standing. Contrast this to Joyce's fainting spell when she realizes Lady Isabel has left her husband, or her scream of terror when she recognizes Isabel in the role of the new governess, Madame Vine. In presenting Joyce's bond to her employers as one of affinity, Wood retrenches the defenses of domestic space against incursions of capital and publicity by replacing the Carlyles' reliance upon their servant's work with her emotional reliance upon the family.

*East Lynne* puts Joyce's discretion on display. She disappears for chapters at a stretch, and then reappears answering the door or shepherding the children, revealing that she has been present the entire time, functioning like the noiseless machinery the ideal servant is supposed to be. Her appearances in the narrative mimic her relationship to the house: she is everywhere, observing but unobserved. As her hybrid role indicates – despite the presence of other servants, Joyce appears so often engaged in such various occupations that she almost mimics a maid-of-all-work – Joyce has nearly unrestricted access to East Lynne. When J.H. Walsh wrote the following, he might well have been describing Joyce's relationship to the family:
Except the relation of parent and child, nothing can be more beautiful than that sometimes existing between the employer and the employed; and though rare, instances are not unknown, even in these degenerate days, of servants bearing a state of almost absolute starvation rather than desert in their adversity those who have treated them well and kindly in their prosperity. (218)

This short passage contains three important points, each of which has a bearing on Wood's depiction of Joyce: first, although the Carlyles remain financially prosperous, Isabel's desertion brings shame upon the entire household, and Joyce resolutely weathers it along with her employers, never thinking of deserting her post; second, Walsh's use of the adjective “degenerate” makes it clear that servants like Joyce are now the exception rather than the rule (justifying the existence of detailed guides like his); and finally, Archibald's treatment of Joyce demonstrates that she is both trustworthy and simple, or trustworthy because she is simple, in a state of working-class childishness that requires Carlyle's paternalistic supervision. When Richard Hare must seek refuge at East Lynne, Cornelia and Archibald realize it cannot be managed without letting Joyce in on the secret of his presence (which means physically allowing her into the locked room where they are closeted). Joyce has been firmly convinced both that Richard killed her father and that Afy ran away with him, the majority opinion in East Lynne; but when Carlyle insists otherwise, she readily believes him. This passage demonstrates both Joyce's crucial distance from her sister and her ready acceptance of what others perceive to be truth, in this case a version of events based on gossip and hearsay, traditional lower-class methods of exchanging information, quickly discarded when her master presents another version of events.

Ironically, it is Joyce's near perfection that begins to break down her model relationship to the family: because she is so diligent and faithful, she is entrusted with the responsibility of
looking after the children. As a surrogate, she mothers the offspring for a longer period of time than does Isabel and more actively than Barbara, showing quite clearly that she is capable of parenting and thus doesn't require parental supervision herself.

Even in cases less extreme than Mrs. Warren's, Victorian parents' worry about the influence of servants on the children of their social betters is a common refrain. As I explained above, the acknowledgment of the servant's function as pseudo-parent and ambassador accounts for much of the baroque nature of nineteenth-century hiring practices, which were designed to eliminate unsuitable elements from the home. However, as Joyce illustrates, even hiring the ideal servant cannot fully eliminate the threat inherently posed by servant-keeping, which is the invasion of middle-class privacy by the lower-class gaze. Clear-sighted Joyce embodies the sensational fear that the servant's mental mapping of the house and its ethos is truer, more accurate, than the family's normative view of that space; in the words of Patrick Brantlinger, “Perhaps the deepest secret of the sensation novel is that there is a seeing beyond seeing, a double vision that can, by a new kind of expert, professional looking (detecting the clues), discern realities behind appearances” (162). Brantlinger is referring to the professional looking of a professional detective, whom he sees as “a sort of super-reader” (145), but as this case study emphasizes, that 'professional looking' could be exercised more thoroughly as well as more subtly by domestic servants. For Anthea Trodd, “If the policeman as occasional intruder represented an obvious threat, the live-in servant could clearly be seen as a greater and more insidious one. The frequent association of housemaids and policemen in jokes of the period was a comic expression of the pervasive view of servants as fifth columnists in the home” (8). The suspicion of such 'fifth columnists' means that domestic management was truly “the problem of controlling a household of spies and criminals” (Trodd 8).
The novel confirms that Joyce's map of East Lynne is more accurate than any other character's, due to her range of motion. She is silent, unobtrusive, trustworthy, and never gossips about what she sees or hears; she even cautions Wilson, “[I]t appears to me that you have carried on a prying system in Mrs Hare's house; do not attempt such a thing in this” (228). However, Joyce possesses sensitive knowledge just the same. She knows that Cornelia is a demanding, unfair mistress; she knows of Archibald's dealings with the future Richard Hare. It is Joyce who finally tells Archibald how Cornelia has terrorized Isabel: “I say [Lady Isabel] has been driven to it. She has not been allowed to indulge a will of her own, poor thing, since she came to East Lynne: in her own house she has been less free than any one of her servants ... A gentle-spirited, high-born lady, as she was, could not fail to be driven to desperation; and I know that she has been” (330-331). Because she will recognize “Madame Vine,” Wood gets her out of the way temporarily thanks to a twisted ankle; but she still does eventually recognize her former mistress, unlike the members of the family. Furthermore, with her sympathy for Isabel, Joyce provides continuity as a mother figure to the children, proving that the fallen woman/dead mother cannot be kept out of the home as long as Joyce is there. As discretion personified, the model servant, she is Wood's best effort at reassuring her audience that, despite the social mobility and public intrusions evident everywhere else in the text, “safe” servants exist. However, even here Wood cannot help but open the door to the possibility of a servant who could be as careful and observant as Joyce, but who could put such information to a different, much more sinister use (in which case we would have the common blackmail plot, as in Lady Audley's Secret, to cite a prominent example).

Joyce's role begins to demonstrate how East Lynne takes full advantage of a standard feature of British domestic design: “Rooms did not interconnect or have folding doors, as they
did on the Continent; they had a single door that could be shut” (Tristram 59). Kerr explains, “The idea which underlies all is simply this. The family constitute one community; the servants another. Whatever may be their mutual regard and confidence as dwellers under the same roof, each class is entitled to shut its door upon the other, and be alone” (Kerr 76). While architects intended the single closing door to ensure privacy, coded as a particularly British value, they did not take into account that the fetishization of keeping others out (or in) could engender the desire to spy or eavesdrop by “infusing … the closed room with the air of scopophilic mystery” (Bivona 109). Indeed, “In an age when the 'information culture' was making rapid advances, the individual realised a new significance in his privacy, and could perceive threats of exposure in almost any relationship” (Trodd 4). The urge to watch, to spy, is endemic in East Lynne, leading Jeanne Fahnestock to contend that the degree of voyeurism in the text unique. However, “Servants cannot be policed in the same way that they police their own employers, a fact that many enterprising characters are able to turn to their advantage” (Steere 67). The inability to police the servants has two major causes. The first is the necessary unknowability of their bodies and, thus, their private lives. The uniform of a servant is designed to identify her by her function, indicating “the suppression of human individuality by the realities of labor” (Goldstone 615). This goes far toward explaining the backlash against modish or suspiciously well-dressed servants: such clothing attracts, rather than repelling, the gaze. Mrs. Warren cuts to the heart of the matter: “I have often wished sumptuary laws were in force to compel them to attire themselves in a manner becoming to their station” (87). Walsh, too, laments, “It is the vice of

85. Elsewhere Kerr contradicts himself, as I have already noted, admitting that while the family deserves absolute privacy, the servants' privacy is only conditional. Absolute privacy in a house that contains servants – social outsiders – is, however, always a fiction.

86. As Trevor May reminds in his The Victorian Domestic Servant (Princes Risborough, England: Shire, 1998), as late as the Middle Ages servants were typically drawn from the same social class as their masters (6). This fear haunts Victorian texts as the specter of the social-climbing servant.
the present day, in all but the highest classes, for each to try to tread upon the heels of the class above it” (2). Beyond the threat of too brazen individuality there lurked another danger, that of paying too much attention to one's servants and thus appearing small or vulgar – the recurring accusations in reviews of Wood's fiction.88

In Chapter 34, one of the men-servants literally opens the door to the more threatening possibilities harbored in the servant figure:

If not a lady she was attired as one: a flounced dress, and a stylish shawl, and a white veil. A very pretty woman, tall and slender was she, and she minced as she walked, and coquetted with her head, and, altogether, contrived to show that she had quite as much vanity as brains in her head. She went boldly up to the front entrance of the house, and boldly rang, drawing her white veil over her face as she did so.

One of the men servants answered ...; and, seeing someone very smart before him, bowed deferentially ... The man was rather taken to. He had deemed it a visitor to the house, and anwas prepared to usher her into the drawing-room, at least; but it seemed it was a visitor for Joyce. He showed her into a small parlour. (381)

The confusion over where to place Afy offers a shorthand introduction to her character and function. In the novel's opening chapters, Afy literally cannot be located; and once she appears, she still cannot be easily placed because her speech and appearance code her as belonging to an

87. Plainly the main perpetrators of such 'treading' were members of the expanding middle classes, not servants; but since works such as those of Walsh and Warren are directed at a middle-class audience, the anxiety around imitating one's betters is deflected, foisted upon the servant class.

88. The critique is not only that Wood's fiction is vulgar, but that the author is as well. Much was made of Wood's background as the daughter of a Shropshire glove manufacturer and, once such things could be discussed, her birth two months after her parents' marriage. For a more nuanced reading of Wood's biography and its relation to her writing career, see Riley.
indeterminate social class. Despite her close blood relationship to Joyce – reminding us again that there are few guarantees when it comes to selecting a good servant – Afy Hallijohn embodies some Victorians' worst fear about their servants: that, no longer content with serving the middle class, these laborers would prefer to become middle-class – and they just might be able to do so. “Because of their activity, mobility, and access to the emblematic trappings of middle-classness, servants metonymically signaled the vulnerabilities of the household … [and] they were also itinerant figures in the popular imagination, emblematic of the slippage between classes and of the commerce among spheres” (Stern 56). Servitude was a possible stepping-stone to better things. As Theresa McBride explains, “Occupational mobility related to factors like education, delayed marriage, and the opportunity to save wages. Occupational mobility for men was occupational change; for women, usually marriage” (84). Afy's dislike for physical labor and reiterated desire to “marry up” emphasize this perceived danger. With her loud clothing and extravagant name, Afy breaks all the rules, refusing the deliberate depersonalization Davidoff locates in “standardised liveries and ... standardised names, e.g., Thomas and Susan, whatever their real names might be” (88).

Indeed, both Joyce and her half-sister are model servants; they are simply different models. “Well-trained upper servants could be hired by the nouveaux riches to teach them the subtleties of upper-class life,” and it would have been possible for Afy to serve in such a capacity (Davidoff 88). Aphrodite is a sort of Lady's Maid Version 2.0, potentially the servant of the

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89. Archibald immediately recognizes Afy for who and what she is, suggesting that while members of the lower classes might be fooled by her performance, her 'betters' will not succumb. Contrary to this, however, Richard Hare admits that he had planned to marry her; and while Richard may be presented as a fool, he is still a middle-class fool.

90. In addition to this fear, sensation fiction also plays upon what was often a servant's reality, life at the other end of the social spectrum: “The servant population had high rates of illegitimate births, thefts, drunkenness, prostitution, infanticide, suicide. In fact, a substantial segment of the servant class was downwardly mobile and ended up among the disreputable poor” (McBride 99). McBride does briefly consider possible causes for these statistics, including poor wages, ill health, lack of job security, rapid growth of the servant class, the inability to defend oneself from a predatory employer, and the impossibility of obtaining employment without a positive character.
future, much to Wood's dismay. She is lampooned by the novel's other characters as well as its narrator to the razor's edge of vilification for her class-crossing romantic dalliances, ultra-modern style of dress, and pretensions of grandeur. In Wood's eyes, these are qualities that clearly fit hand in glove with, if not immorality, at least amorality, in direct contrast to Joyce's sentimental piety. Since Joyce is relentlessly down to earth, the implication is that Aphrodite's differing qualities, as well as her grandiose name, come from her mother, herself a former governess. Because the girls' father clerked for Mr. Carlyle the elder, both, but especially the younger sister, fall into a gray area that is neither middle- nor working-class; but Wood labors to make their entry into servitude seem like a natural transition rather than a descent. Afy models a type of servant that was becoming increasingly popular – and powerful – by the 1860s, a category including highly visible servants such as ladies maids and footmen. “Such 'front-stage' servants were deliberately chosen for height, good looks, and clear speaking voice, qualities which effectively barred the promotion of girls from poor backgrounds, especially workhouse girls” (Davidoff 88). The possession and display of polished servants was especially important to rising members of the middle class who were themselves keen to exhibit their new-found gentility. (Even after Afy asks for Joyce, the confused man-servant informs Joyce that “a lady” has come to see her.) Thus many of the qualities that Wood emphasizes in order to turn Afy into a comedic character are the very qualities that would have made her a desirable employee (just not to Archibald Carlyle). Unlike Joyce, Afy is a professional servant, tied to her employers only by the purse strings, not by bonds of affection, and ricochets among situations – social and geographical – during the course of the novel.

Afy is introduced to the reader via her role in her father's murder and her dalliance with Richard Hare. As Richard tells it, however, Afy had set her sights higher than a county
magistrate's son: “She told me once that she could be a grander lady, if she chose, than I could ever make her” (97). One immediately recognizes the heartless social-climber who judges her suitors by the sizes of their purses and the cuts of their clothes. Mrs. Hare has recurring dreams of the murder of which Richard is accused, in which “that wretched Afy was standing at the end of the kitchen, looking on” (69). Although the murder took place in Mr. Hallijohn's cottage, the kitchen location ties Afy to the scene of a servant's work, while suggesting that she possesses knowledge she hasn't divulged – not only knowledge about the murder but, perhaps, about the employers in whose service she earns her keep during the novel's present, and which she has gained by 'looking on' at their private lives. Like Wilson, Afy is an inveterate gossip; and Wood's handling of this aspect of her personality illustrates how Afy, as a bad servant, is a necessary threat.

The text's most mobile and least predictable figure, Afy pops in and out of East and West Lynne and then turns up in Germany, where she coincidentally runs into Madame Vine. This degree of mobility alone is distressing, particularly when it implies that Afy might move as easily up the social scale and reveals the permeability of the insulated domestic space. Spatially and textually, she provides the strongest link between the main and sub-plots. If Joyce's goodness is confirmed by her silence, Afy has no compunction about using the information she has gained to her advantage, if she can. When Joyce comments that she must have “listened at keyholes,” her sister responds, “I had a fancy to hear the particulars; and when I do make up my mind to know a thing, I don't let trifles stand in my way” (386). Afy's shadowy map of her surroundings includes much knowledge gathered this way, as well as many unflattering opinions about her employers, and an expertise in cultural mimicry that allows her to advance socially. Bertha

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91. Cornelia chides Richard, “Well, you have no one to grumble at: you brought it upon yourself ... You would go hunting after that brazen hussy, Afy,” indicating that Richard's crime is as much class-crossing as it is the murder of which he stands accused (405).
Chapman, like Archibald, would never hire her; but the plot requires that she be present to tell Isabel all the latest gossip from West Lynne, including Archibald's marriage to Barbara Hare and the Carlyles' need for a new governess. Thus, if Joyce opens the door to Afy (so to speak), it is Afy who opens the door for Isabel's return. Isabel and her “strange counterpart” (Kucich 174) have much in common: both socially ambiguous, both seduced by the same man, both sexually deviant.

Lyn Pykett writes,

   In *East Lynne* the stories of the upstart servant and the aristocratic heroine are carefully juxtaposed. The similarity of their situations is obvious: they are both seduced and abandoned by the same man (Thorn/Levison). However, the effect of the narrative's insistence on the similarities between the sexual transgressions of Afy and Isabel is ultimately to call attention to the fundamental differences between them. Afy is not required to undergo the punitive moral, emotional and physical suffering which is constructed for Isabel. Isabel is harrowed; Afy is ridiculed. (‘Improper’ 123)

While Wood white-washes Joyce's knowledge of intimate family secrets by showing the use to which she puts them, she strives to evacuate the threat a servant like Afy represents by making her ridiculous. Forced to testify before the magistrates and confirm Thorn's true identity as Levison, Afy traps herself in a series of lies. “All this told badly at West Lynne, and Afy in public opinion became as graceless as ever” (627). Afy brazenly protests her blamelessness, attempting to throw over her fiancé, Mr. Jiffin, a respectable shopkeeper, for Richard once his innocence has been proven; but Richard is no longer interested. She goes back to Jiffin, again planning to marry him. “A butter and bacon factor is very – so very – what I have not been accustomed to! And
then, those aprons!” she laments (668). Afy has, at last, been put in her right place. The reader should derive pleasure from the downfalls of Isabel and Afy, but very different kinds of pleasure. The difference is one of class, as “Afy plays a crucial role in constructing and sustaining the category from which she herself is excluded” (Pykett, ‘Improper’ 124). While Kucich contends that Afy's is a “much happier fate” (174), one might argue that the novel presents being made ridiculous and forced down the social ladder as a fate worse than death – that is, due to her social class, Afy doesn't deserve the extravagant punishment Isabel receives, but neither is she allowed the martyrdom that turns the other woman into a heroic quasi-saint. Like the debt-collectors who invade the home after the earl's death, Afy serves as such a flagrant example of inappropriate, threatening mobility that she deflects the reader’s attention from other, middle-class examples of the same phenomenon, as well as from Isabel's aristocratic performance. For Elizabeth Steere, the essential difference between the two women is the direction in which they are socially mobile. Afy's efforts to move up court “scorn and ridicule,” but “by mimicking the climb down, rather than up, the social ladder, Isabel Vane, the lady-qua-servant, deflects suspicion and attention” (Steere 53). Steere's reading of both women as performers is perceptive, but when she contends that “Isabel's performance as a domestic servant threatens stability within her home, but Afy's pretensions to a higher class offers a more wide-reaching and dangerous threat to the social hierarchy” (64), she misses the mark. Aphrodite's performance, and the threat it engenders, is much more obvious than Isabel's; and this is precisely why Isabel is the *more* dangerous figure.

Although Wood was not, like her contemporary Mary Elizabeth Braddon, a professional actor, recent scholarship acknowledges that she was an astute, if sincere, performer. 92 “Though Wood played up her womanliness and presumed amateurism early on in her career, she

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92 On some level – perhaps not a conscious one – reviewers' consistent comparisons of Braddon's flashy to Wood's mundane sensationalism underscore this shared performativity, as consistently linking the two women in the popular zeitgeist indicates that both authors were playing a role.
ultimately promoted her work in a highly professional way, developing a behind-the-scenes professional identity” that is particularly evident in her close attention to, and intervention in, the marketing of East Lynne and in her tenure as editor-in-chief of The Argosy, the journal she purchased upon her husband's death in 1867 and managed until her own death (Phegley 181). “Uncovering the ways in which Wood performed her respectable Christian piety through her writings and her editorship, … we begin to understand the complexity of that performance and the difficulties of separating out Wood's conscious editorial strategies from her unconscious effects” (Palmer 115). As Jennifer Phegley states, Wood's editing career is entirely absent from Charles Wood's “Memorial,” likely because the “professional visibility” of that role “exceeded the bounds of the domestic image that he wished to share with the public” (183). This is in keeping with the persona and reputation Wood worked hard throughout her career to establish and maintain. She understood role-playing, a quality evident not only from the well-documented theatrical qualities of East Lynne that led to its easy translation to the stage, but in the way she endows so many of the novel's characters with roles that they themselves understand as performative and the voyeuristic narrative style that positions both characters and readers as onlookers. “Rendering sympathy a spectator's melodrama, East Lynne makes spectatorship a condition of sympathy and, in doing so, discloses the role played by sympathy and spectatorship, and sympathy with spectatorship, in the construction of middle-class identity” (Jaffe, Scenes 100). Wood makes it clear that this melodrama is a domestic melodrama, one likely occurring in the middle-class reader's home, since the archetypal spectator is the servant. Joyce, Afy, and Isabel all play this role within the novel.

While the sisters perform their expected roles as good and bad servant, respectively, the most discussed performance is that of Isabel herself when she returns to East Lynne not as its
mistress, but under the guise of Madame Vine, the English widow of a Frenchman, who has fallen upon hard times and been forced to earn her keep as a governess. To be a governess is not, of course, to be a servant; but it is to be a waged employee rather than a member of the family, a notoriously fraught position in the Victorian household and one suited to Isabel's ambiguous social status. Like Steere, I take Isabel's own perception of her position as one of abject servitude as sufficient grounds for including her in this discussion of the text's major servants. Without understanding Isabel's altered position in this light – not merely as a mother unrecognized by her children or as a wife perversely titillated by watching her ex-husband make love to her replacement, but as an actual household employee – Wood's treatment of social mobility within the novel will appear much murkier, as it has to previous generations of critics, the outlines of her agenda difficult to distinguish. Lady Isabel Vane's social trajectory is the novel's most dramatic, but its seeming excesses do not make it as easy to interpret as some have assumed. Instead, it is in her depiction of Isabel's ever-shifting relation to East Lynne that Wood most clearly displays her ambivalence to the middle-class fantasy she has so painstakingly constructed.

If Mrs. Warren's book of domestic advice might be subtitled, as I have suggested, “Her Fall and Rise,” Isabel's mobility has no such clearly discernible pattern. It is not, as Wood's contemporary reviewers contended, a simple downward plunge crafted to castigate the sexually impure heroine and frighten maiden readers into strict propriety. I have already explained how Isabel's first step down the social ladder, from aristocratic heiress to middle-class housewife, is seen by her titled relatives as a step up. Paradoxically, because East Lynne is the only part of her penniless father's estate that wasn't entailed, she has – through Archibald – managed to inherit it. However, because Isabel lacks the managerial skills inculcated in middle-class girls, her
marriage turns out to be the step down Cornelia Carlyle fears.\textsuperscript{93} As with Joyce and Afy, Isabel's position within the narrative world of \textit{East Lynne} is metonymically represented by her range of motion – itself an expression of her degree of authority and trustworthiness – within the physical world of East Lynne. As Archibald's wife, she is repeatedly confined, by Cornelia's strictures, pregnancy, or bodily weakness.\textsuperscript{94} “Unable to participate in middle-class life by virtue of her aristocratic identity, figured as her oversensitive body, Isabel in the latter half of the novel 'assents' (Wood's term) with all the intensity of her spectatorship and suffering to the value of that life” (Jaffe, \textit{Scenes} 100). This is true; but the other side of the coin is that Isabel's masochistic suffering makes her more appealing, even heroic, to the reader, and seemingly to the narrator. Isabel's mental map of her surroundings is never as clear as Joyce's; but what it lacks in objectivity, it makes up in subjectivity. With a mother's eyes, she sees that her son is dying when others insist his illness is minor; likewise, with the anguish of an ex-wife, she comes to see the steadiness of Archibald's character, his value as a husband, and the idyllic features of middle-class life at East Lynne.

Madame Vine's return to East Lynne after Isabel's supposed death is a scene that bookends Isabel's return as a new bride to what was her father's estate. Both emphasize her dislocation within her home, the estrangement from what was once familiar. Isabel doesn't know where Mrs. Carlyle's rooms might be; Madame Vine knows where they are, but that their doors are forever closed to her. Although Wood emphatically states that Isabel's motive for taking the position as governess is maternal yearning, the journey is figured not primarily as transporting

\textsuperscript{93} Cornelia's is a self-fulfilling prophecy: because she assumes Isabel's birth has unfitted her for domestic management, she makes no effort to teach those skills to her new sister-in-law, effectively insuring that Isabel will be unable to run a household. Thus Cornelia validates the need for written guides like those of Mrs. Beeton, which, as Steedman and Armstrong assert, replaced the older tradition of such information being passed orally from older to younger female relatives.

\textsuperscript{94} Andrew Maunder sees Isabel's poor physical health as another inherited trait to be juxtaposed with middle-class hardiness: “Isabel's debauched patrimony has been imprinted in both her behavioural patterns and her lack of physical vigour so as to make her fall almost inevitable” (63).
her toward her loved ones, but toward the house itself. “And once more she knew *East Lynne*, the dear old house,” we are told (457); she is reintroduced first not to Archibald, Barbara, and the children, but to the rooms, which provoke the same emotive responses that will later be caused by their inhabitants:

> On she followed, her heart palpitating: past the rooms that used to be hers, along the corridor, towards the second staircase. The doors of her old bed and dressing-rooms stood open, and she glanced in with a yearning look. No, never more, never more could they be hers: she had put them from her by her own free act and deed. Not less comfortable did they look, than in former days: but they had passed into another’s occupancy. The fire threw its blaze on the furniture: there were the little ornaments on the large dressing-table, as they used to be in her time, and the cut glass of the crystal essence bottles glittered in the firelight ... No: these rooms were not for her now: and she followed Joyce up the other staircase. (458)

Vicky Simpson points out that Isabel's changed position is figured primarily in terms of her altered relationship to the spaces and objects in the home (592). “Lady Isabel's punishment for adultery ... takes the form of furniture deprivation” (Wynne, “Big Wide Bed” 105), in keeping with Wood's “advice to female readers ... to seek security through the acquisition of as much portable property as possible” (Wynne, “Big Wide Bed” 91). At this point in the story, Isabel has nothing left but the small amount of luggage she brings to East Lynne.

Wood pulls out all the stops when it comes to altering Isabel's physical appearance: maimed in the rail accident that killed her illegitimate child, her scarred face and prematurely gray hair might, one imagines, be enough to complete her disguise, but Wood further endows her with voluminous black dresses that hide her frame and green spectacles that shield her eyes. As
in most depictions, “the muted uniform of the governess visibly embodies in the melodramatic style the literal incursion of the market into the family that the occupation of governess represented,” just like the servant's uniform (Hadley 156). Still, modern readers are often confounded by Carlyle's inability to recognize his ex-wife. However, unlike Joyce, he “tends to see the familial roles rather than the individuals who occupy them” (Simpson 593). Not only does this explain his failure to see Isabel in the governess, but it explains the similarity of many scenes he enacts with both wives, as well as the transmission of personal property like the hairbrush from first to second wife. Likewise, “She goes backward not exactly to reclaim a lost place or object, as does Richard Hare, but to realize herself as a lost place and a lost object” (McKee 175); what Isabel recognizes repeatedly is her own unrecognizability. We learn that Isabel “feared Joyce's keen eyes more perhaps than she feared any others” (459). Joyce's gaze is more penetrating than Archibald's because she, too, has experienced the submersion of her individuality within her role.

The return is calculated to inspire readerly sympathy. Abroad and fallen, Isabel may be sad or lamentable; returned to East Lynne, she is a heroine. “East Lynn reaches its tragic pitch by repositioning her in the household that failed to contain her (but from which, it turns out, she cannot be excluded). Thus what seems to exceed the limits of domesticity proves nonetheless internal to it” (Steinlight 511). This is true of Joyce and her half-sister as representative servants and keepers of knowledge, but Isabel's return renders the phenomenon spectacularly visible. She is very much an internal threat, possessing far more knowledge about her employers than they can even begin to suspect, and her new professional position gives her a greater range of motion.

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95. Isabel's outfit is more outlandish than muted, but serves the same veiling function. According to Hadley, in theatrical versions Madame Vine was typically outfitted in a subtler gray.

96. For example, the song Barbara plays for Archibald on the piano is the one Isabel used to play; and Isabel repeatedly recognizes the sameness of the caresses once given to her that are now given to Barbara.
and authority than she enjoyed as mistress. (Note how her narrative arc echoes Mrs. Warren's: in both cases, loss of caste leads to the acquisition of practical knowledge that can be asserted in a professional capacity, resulting in new-found respect based on what one does rather than how one is born.) Most modern critics agree that Madame Vine's is, comparatively, a position of authority. “By playing the role of a servant, Isabel literalizes her previous performances of female subservience and uses it as an unexpected source to attain power over herself, her relationships, and her choice of role within her own home” (Steere 59). This is an overstatement, as Madame Vine's agency is limited. However, while Isabel cannot take her children with her when she is sent to rest on the Continent, or insist that Archibald not allow dangerous Francis Levison to stay at East Lynne, the governess is allowed to nurse dying William, have him sleep in her room, give him the sweets he craves, and insist that he be taken to consult a doctor. “Refusing to be entirely exiled and erased, she settles for being uncanny, at home yet not at home,” the typical position of servitude (Rosenman 27).

It is with Isabel's return that the novel's voyeuristic tendencies become most blatant, and most masochistic. While “East Lynne can also be understood as a polemical literary text engaging with both the degeneration debate and the accompanying surveillance; policing and punishment deemed necessary to keep women's sexual appetites in check” (Maunder, “‘Stepchildren’” 61), Audrey Jaffe sees this surveillance as necessary to the production of readerly sympathy. As Jaffe asserts, “the spectacle of degradation Isabel embodies as Madame Vine reproduces Isabel Vane's subjection to the relentless middle-class gaze” (Jaffe, Scenes 103). Isabel is repeatedly forced to witness intimate moments between Archibald and Barbara; furthermore, even behind closed doors, her pain and mutilated body are on display for the
reader.97 “East Lynne’s many doors, guarantees of a temporary privacy that allows the expression of unwholesome emotion while keeping those without in semi-ignorance of it, thus enclose spaces for private theatricals acted out one-to-one by Madame Vine with various characters in the drama—her ex-husband, his sister Cornelia, her children, and the servants” (Bivona 116). As we have already seen, closed doors paradoxically allow information to circulate; that is, they allow for “private” conversations behind closed doors.

Here again, so closely identified are the house and its inhabitants, especially Isabel, that the house itself seems to be one of the chief actors in this part of the narrative. “‘You have become ill at East Lynne,’” Archibald tells Isabel when she sinks into her fatal illness; so she must “‘permit East Lynne to do what it can towards restoring you’” (665). Predictably, the house fails to “restore” Isabel thrice over: first to her aristocratic position as an earl's daughter; second, to her role as Archibald's wife upon her return as Madame Vine; and here, to physical health. Indeed, a healthy Isabel is a narratological impossibility, the character's fate sealed at least from the moment of her elopement with Levison, if not even earlier, from her father's decision to sell to Carlyle. As Jeff Nunokawa states in a materialist reading of the Victorian novel imbricated in its thriving capitalist culture, “to have property is to settle in life and to lose it a taste of death” (7).

Reviewers noted both the danger of Isabel's appeal as a heroine and the sympathy Mrs. Wood consciously elicited on her behalf. In the August 1863 issue of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Margaret Oliphant wrote, “When [Isabel] returns to her former home under the guise of the poor governess, there is not a reader who does not feel disposed to turn her virtuous

97. Critics like Rosenman identify the strong masochistic strain in Wood's depiction of Madame Vine as itself productive of a potentially subversive agency: “the glib association between femininity, weakness, and suffering makes masochism a particularly effective disguise for power: if women's pain appears to be natural, if it appears to conform to gender norms, it can smuggle its contraband desires unnoticed” (25).
successor to the door, and reinstate the suffering heroine, to the glorious confusion of all morality” (“Novels” 170). Not only morality, Oliphant might have said, but middle-class identity and hegemony, qualities Archibald and Barbara earnestly represent. Up until Isabel's return to East Lynne, the narrative conforms to Nancy Armstrong's definition of domestic fiction as a genre invested in the translation of national social and political problems to the domestic arena, where they could play out instead as a gendered and sexualized struggle, i.e. the marriage plot: “This struggle to represent [female] sexuality took the form of a struggle to individuate wherever there was a collective body, to attach psychological motives to what had been the openly political behavior of contending groups, and to evaluate these according to a set of moral norms that exalted the domestic woman over and above her aristocratic counterpart” (5). Barbara Hare is a sympathetic character; Wood makes no effort to portray her as anything else. This is in keeping with Wood's understanding of her readership and her ability to tap into their “fantasies of class usurpation” (Wynne, *Sensation Novel* 67). By offering Barbara up as a compelling alternative to Isabel – arguably the choice Archibald should have made – Wood is “opening up the possibility for enjoyment in Barbara's triumph and Isabel's humiliation. Isabel's adultery gives Wood and her middle-class readers a pretext to gloat over the downfall of an aristocratic lady” (Wynne, *Sensation Novel* 67). For Pykett, the novel “warns middle-class men against the growing practice of taking aristocratic wives, and middle-class women against embracing the excessive refinement and susceptibility to feeling of the upper-class woman” (‘Improper’ 121).

This holds true only until Barbara does triumph; Barbara as jealous, heartbroken maiden is a sympathetic character, but Barbara as prosperous, complacent wife is not. Although Emma Liggins's verdict that in *East Lynne* “transgressive women who reject the role of home-maker are

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98. As I have shown, Wood's treatment of the text's servants illustrates that one cannot offer the fantasy of middle-class upward mobility without also inviting the specter of lower-class upward mobility.
quietly celebrated and offered as alternative role models to wives struggling to follow the advice of Ellis and Beeton” (60) oversimplifies Wood's multi-faceted approach to space, gender, and class identity within the domestic realm, I agree that it is hard to see the angel in the house as the heroine of the text or, for that matter, to see Barbara Carlyle as the angel in the house, although she is the perfect managerial middle-class wife. This is clearest in a scene that ironically inverts the household management advice that infiltrates the text: “‘Let the offices, properly belonging to a nurse, be performed by the nurse – of course taking care that she is thoroughly to be depended on. Let her have the trouble of the children, their noise, their romping; in short, let the nursery be her place and the children's place. But I hope I shall never fail to gather my children round me daily, at stated periods, for higher purposes’” (464-465). Elizabeth Gruner contends that this adds nothing to the plot, but, by “increasing both Isabel's and the reader's discomfort to an unbearable pitch, the passage makes clear the anxiety about female roles evinced throughout the novel in its central theme of masquerade. This repeated trope ... enacts a discomfort with the instability of familial roles” (315). Who, in other words, is the Carlyle children's mother? Barbara is not motherly; Isabel is not recognizable. Kucich echoes Joseph Litvak in asserting that rather than enacting motherhood in a 'natural' way, Isabel and Barbara both perform it in a way that “deforms” the domestic space (193).

The domestic space of East Lynne, of course, is already deformed. Isabel's maimed body is a manifestation of the way in which the novel fetishizes intrusions of public issues into private space; it serves as a constant reminder of the calamities that will befall the woman who courts rather than shuns such advances. As Andrew Mangham states, “[I]t is clear from Isabel's wraith-like appearance that her disgrace is figured as a form of death rather than an alternative to it’
By the time she dies, her death is not punishment but release, further complicating the reading of *East Lynne* as fully devoted to traditional domestic ideology. "Wood is both influenced by and resistant to the powerful contemporary cultural representations of dying and femininity, and in her novels death is rarely a straightforward punishment for female transgression, but rather the site at which conflicting constructions of femininity collide and are negotiated" (Beller 229). As a servant, Isabel is a bourgeois nightmare, misrepresenting herself and lying about her antecedents. For the third time, the threatening servant figure has been expelled from East Lynne, but traces of her remain: in Archibald's memories, Joyce's loyalty, her children's genes, the sympathy of the readers, and the house itself.

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99. Mangham elaborates, "What is interesting here is that the fallen woman is literally a revenant; she cannot be accommodated into domestic culture or into a particular social place, which offers some explanation for why she is spectralized" ("Life After," 294) – That is, death can either “obliterate” the fallen woman from the narrative or turn her into a martyr, so, until the novel's end, Wood had no choice but the path of Isabel's peculiar zombie-like state of living death.
APPENDIX


“[W]e offer … here three lists of the articles absolutely essential in the kitchen” (12):

*Prices:*

First-rate: 381l. 10s.
Medium: 10l. 15s.
Cottage: 4l. 5s.

*Cottage:*

Slack’s patent digester, 1 teakettle, 1 toasting fork, 1 bread grater, 1 tin meat screen and bottle jack, 1 set of skewers, 1 meat chopper, 1 block-tin butter saucepan, 1 colander, 2 iron saucepans, 2 iron stewpans, 1 enamelled saucepan, 1 iron boiling pot, 1 fish slice, 1 fish kettle, 1 flour dredge, 2 frying-pans, 1 gridiron (hanging), salt and pepper dredgers, 1 rolling pin, 1 paste board, 12 patty pans, 1 pan for Yorkshire pudding, 1 pan of scales, 1 spice box

*Medium:*

1 teakettle, 1 toasting fork, 1 bread grater, 1 wooden meat screen and bottle-jack, 1 dripping pan and stand, 1 meat chopper, 1 colander, 3 block-tin saucepans, 5 iron saucepans, 1 do. And steamer, 1 large boiling pot, 4 enamelled stewpans, 1 butter saucepan, 1 stock pot, 1 fish and egg slice, 2 fish kettles, 1 flour dredge, and pepper and salt do., 2 frying-pans, 1 omelet pan, 1 double hanging gridiron, 1 salamander, 2 sets of skewers, 1 pair of steak tongs, 1 box of larding pins, 2 pudding moulds, 2 jelly do., 1 rolling pin, 1 paste board, 1 paste jigger, 12 patty pans, 2 tart pans, 1 pan for Yorkshire pudding, Warren’s Everybody’s Cooking pot, Warren’s Everybody’s curry pot, 1 spice box

*Primo:*

Set of 6 wrought-iron saucepans, 1 wrought-iron stock-pot, 1 Bain-marie pan, 1 wrought-iron teakettle, 1 oval boiler, 1 digester, 1 saucepan digester, 1 stewpan digester, 6 enamelled stewpans, 1 saute pan, 1 French do., 1 potato steamer, 1 salamander and stand, 1 oval frying-pan, 1 round do., 1 fluted gridiron, 1 bachelor’s frying-pan, 1 omelet pan, 1 omelet soufflé pan, 1 broiling pan, 1 preserving pan and spoon, 1 flour dredge, 1 sugar do., 1 brass bottle-jack, 1 dripping pan and stand, 1 basting ladle, 1 wooden meat screen, 1 coffee mill, 1 meat chopper, meat saw, 1 colander, pestle and mortar, 2 gravy strainers, 1 bread grater, 2 sets of skewers, 1 fish slice, 1 egg slice and ladle, 1 pair of steak tongs, 1 egg whisk, 1 beef fork, 1 French cook’s knife, 1 steak beater, 1 fish kettle, mackerel saucepan, turbot kettle, salmon and jack kettle, 1 pair of fish scissors, double hanging gridiron, sliding toaster and trivet, toasting fork, Carson’s patent salting apparatus, Kent’s patent soup strainer, mincing machine, weighing machine, spice box, herb stand, box of paste cutters, 12 patty pans, 3 tart pans, 3 Dariol moulds, marble slab for making paste, rolling pin – American with revolving handle, 1 paste jigger “Piston” Freezing Machine, 1 cheese toaster, 3 larding pins, 2 cook’s knives, 1 mushroom mould, 1 star fritter mould, 1 scroll fritter mould, 1 vegetable cutter, or “the French Vegetable cutter,” 1 vegetable mould, 3 pudding moulds, 6 jelly moulds, 3 cake moulds, 2 wooden spoons and mashed potato fork, ice closet,
sugar spinners, sugar moulds
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