THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE AND THE WOMAN IN WHITE: THE UNFOLDING AND DECODING OF A VICTORIAN STEREOTYPE

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Sandra L. Spencer, B.A.
Denton, Texas

August, 1991

Spencer, Sandra L., The Angel in the House and The Woman in White: The Unfolding and Decoding of a Victorian Stereotype, Master of Arts (English), August, 1991, 108 pp., references, 69 titles.

Modern readers frequently perceive female characters in Victorian novels as insipid and inane, blaming the static portrayals on the angel in the house stereotype attributed to Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name. The stereotype does not accurately reflect the actual Victorian woman's life, however. Examining how the stereotype evolved and how the middle-class Mid-Victorian woman really lived provides insight into literary devices authors employed either to reinforce the angel ideal or to reconcile the ideal with the real. Wilkie Collins's portrayal of Marian Halcombe in The Woman in White features a dynamic female who has both androgynous characteristics and angel-in-the-house qualities, exemplifying one more paradox in a society riddled with contradictions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: MID-VICTORIAN STEREOTYPES, IDEALS, AND LITERARY PARADIGMS

In his book Eminent Victorians, author Lytton Strachey proposes that a history of the Victorian Age can never be written because too much is known about it. Strachey supports this allegation, stating, "For ignorance is the first requisite of the historian--ignorance, which simplifies and clarifies, which selects and omits, with a placid perfection unattainable by the highest art" (7). For those who study Victorian literature, however, Strachey's proposition needs elaboration. The proliferation of knowledge about the age increases the probability of generalization, which, in turn, creates stereotypes. For the scholar who relies upon Victorian stereotypes, ignorance becomes an enemy rather than an ally.

Victorian stereotypes threaten scholarly analysis because nineteenth-century England was a paradox of money and class. The Victorians themselves perceived many of these contradictions. In mid-century Benjamin Disraeli exposed one of the most obvious paradoxes in his book Sybil: or, the Two Nations. Disraeli's character Egremont tells a young stranger:

> 'Our Queen reigns over the greatest nation that ever existed.'
>
> 'Which nation?' asked the younger stranger, 'for she reigns over two.'
>
> The stranger paused; Egremont was silent, but looked inquiringly.
>
> 'Yes,' resumed the younger stranger after a moment's interval. 'Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and not governed by the same laws.'
>
> 'You speak of--' said Egremont, hesitatingly.
>
> 'THE RICH AND THE POOR'. (76-77)

The dichotomy of the rich and the poor exposes one problem of stereotyping the Victorians. Money--who had it and who did not--dictates that these two separate spheres embody at least two separate stereotypes.

Many writers joined Disraeli in articulating the striking differences between the rich and the poor, and indeed the life experiences and expectations of the two differed greatly in mid-century. For example, the Great

Exhibition of 1851, an architectural and cultural masterpiece, celebrated England's progress in industry and art. In a speech to Her Majesty's ministers, foreign ambassadors, and others, Prince Albert stated, "The Exhibition of 1851 is to give us a true test and a living picture of the point of development at which the whole of mankind has arrived in this great task . . . " (Golby 2). Multitudes of Victorians visited the Exhibition, marveling at England's accomplishments; daily attendance often exceeded 60,000 people. When the admission was reduced to one shilling, even the working class entered to view the wonders under the crystal dome (Bryant 116).

The poor, however, shared little of the development which Prince Albert attributed to the whole of mankind. Their hopes were of a far more basic nature. Shortly before the Exhibition, in 1848, the first Board of Health recommended implementation of legislation guaranteeing pure water. The Board had made little progress by the time of the Exhibition as landlords did not want to make expensive modifications in the slums. Therefore, some 16,000 people in London itself suffered and died from water-borne diseases in 1849 (Altick 45). The alarming death rate finally forced a change in sanitation laws, but only after epidemics led to reform.

While one nation flocked to the Great Exhibition's Crystal Palace, the other flocked to the "Poor-Law Bastille," the ominous name given to the workhouse. The Times reflects limited prosperity, listing 734 bankruptcy proceedings from January 1 through March 31, 1851 (Palmer's 6-11). And those who went to the workhouse were usually in worse financial condition than those who underwent bankruptcy. Although many of the worst facets of the New Poor Law of 1834 had been modified by 1850, the status of the poor did not reflect the optimistic mood of those who planned and enjoyed the Great Exhibition. In fact, in January of 1850 an account of a woman's starvation at the Southampton Poor House generated much comment in The Times (3 January 1850: 5b; 10 January 1850: 6e). The guardian of the poor house had denied relief to the woman, who was eight months pregnant, and to her two-year-old child.

The polarities of the rich and the poor extended to children as well. Upper and middle-classes often revered and even sentimentalized their children. Sons and daughters of the upper-class were specifically sheltered from the "wickedness of the world" outside their privileged circle (Godfrey 54). They were often tutored privately and sent abroad for instruction, their anticipated positions as adults determining their education. Young gentlemen received lessons in the classics and in fencing while young

ladies received lessons in drawing and music. In middle-class families, young men were trained to work in their fathers' businesses while young women were instructed in handwork, music, and drawing.

Children of the poor, however, experienced a much different life. Employers frequently exploited and treated them as expendable. The 1851 census shows 30,000 children employed in the Lancashire Mills. The same census shows 500 girls between the ages of five and nine employed as "nurses" or childcare workers (Smith 137). Children worked in domestic service, in the mines, and in the factories. Countless young boys were either maimed or died while serving as chimney sweeps while unsafe factory and mill conditions also claimed many children's lives.

In addition to financial distinctions, class distinctions added yet another classification which stratified the Victorians, creating even more possibilities from which stereotypes may be drawn. The boundaries separating classes were sociological more than monetary. An aged governess, for example, could have been destitute and on relief while still being a member of the gentility. Hence, money and class were not always analogous situations.

The disparities in Britain extended beyond those of money and class, however. Institutions also experienced contradiction. Religion and science espoused different

explanations for the earth's creation, and controversies arose about the biblical miracles as well. Some Victorians defended the accounts as literal while others maintained the accounts were figurative and didactic only. The Anglican Church itself was not immune to controversy, as challenges to orthodoxy arose in the wake of the Oxford Movement.

Disparities arose on the individual level as well as on the institutional level. While creating a healthy market for reading matter, the rising literacy rate even embodied a Victorian paradox. Fiction reading, especially that of novels, rose dramatically, much to the horror of many who viewed novel reading as frivolous. Despite these concerns, the genre gained popularity, as attested by The Athenaeum, which "reviewed 10,000 novels between 1840 and 1870" (Scheurle 17). Periodicals such as The Athenaeum and others flourished, providing a valuable forum for public discourse in a rapidly-changing world. Many people who heretofore could not afford to buy books now obtained them through lending libraries such as Booth's and Mudie's. Although the lending libraries opened new reading possibilities for Victorians, a subtle censorship developed as Charles Mudie, a devoutly religious congregationalist, carefully screened his holdings to ensure that his readers did not get any indecent material.

Other Victorians (described by Steven Marcus in his book of the same name) supported a vigorous growth of pornography. During the middle and latter part of the nineteenth century, "pornographic writings were produced and published in unprecedented volumes--it became in fact a minor industry" (Marcus 283). Although many of the pornographic materials were imported from France and Belgium, underground periodicals, such as The Pearl, The Boudoir, and The Exquisite proliferated, as did many pornographic novels. Marcus attributes the burgeoning trade to the growth of literacy, popularity of the novel, and the rising urban population (282). Despite the prohibitive cost (a volume of less than 100 pages cost more than one pound) and Lord Campbell's introduction of a bill to curb obscene publications in 1857, pornography went virtually unchecked (Pearsall 130).

Yet, despite all these contradictions, "there was an identifiable spirit of Victorianism" as Gertrude Himmelfarb points out in Victorian Minds (276). A certain dynamism allowed all these paradoxes between the rich and the poor, between the classes, and between those of opposing beliefs and values to co-exist. Himmelfarb explains, "Ethics, religion, and philosophy, changing in themselves and shifting in relation to each other, merged to constitute a unique ethos" (276).

One ideal which emerged from this unique ethos was that of the sanctity of home and family. As the gulf separating the worlds of work and home steadily widened in the nineteenth century, man became master of the economic sphere while woman dominated the domestic sphere. The husband's role was to provide money for his family while the wife's role was to create a haven for her husband. Hence, the home became one stable feature in a society where every other institution seemed to be challenged or turned upside down. In discussing the growing importance of the Victorian home and family, Julia Prewitt Brown states, "Consequently, it came to be grossly sentimentalized in the Victorian period as the last preserve of moral values in an increasingly ruthless, commercial culture" (71).

The sanctified perception of the home elevated the role of the Victorian woman. Not only was she the guardian of the moral sphere, but she was also thought to possess a special nature, a mystical power, which enabled her to transform and redeem society. This special nature transcended her domestic sphere. Although her mystical powers were of a passive nature, society deemed them superior to her male counterpart's temporal powers.

Hence an ideal of womanhood emerged--an ideal that was revered, protected and almost deified by the Victorians. The ideal woman was first of all a wife and mother. She

embodied innocence, kindness, inspiration, and redemption. In so doing, she indemnified all of society, not just her husband and family.

David Holbrook refers to this idealization of women as "the Holy Mary syndrome" (72). Many Victorian writers employed a version of this syndrome which evolved as the angel in the house after Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name. The image of woman as angel antedates the poem, but Patmore articulated the image in its entirety. Deemed one of the two "principal manifestoes" in literature of the 1840's and 1850's, the poem epitomized a pure love which could only result in marriage and which bore a mystic resemblance to divine love as well (Houghton 375).

The theme of woman as angel also inundated French readers at this time. A passage in Victorian Women: A Documentary of Women's Lives in Nineteenth-Century England, France, and the United States reveals that "French literature of domesticity was replete with angels" (134). Marie Deraismus, a French feminist, railed against the imposed halo in a public speech in the late 1860's:

> Of all woman's enemies, I tell you that the worst are those who insist that woman is an angel. To say that a woman is an angel is to impose on her, in a sentimental and admiring fashion, all duties, and to reserve for oneself all rights; it is to

> imply that her specialty is self-effacement, resignation, and sacrifice; it is to suggest to her that woman's greatest glory, her greatest happiness, is to immolate herself for those she loves. . . . (140)

The convergence of the ideal with the real posed a unique problem for Victorian writers as well. Many were able to characterize females only in an angel context. Sarah Helsinger and others categorize four versions of the angel in Victorian novels: the Angel in the House, the Angel Out of the House, the Female Savior, and the Angel's Antithesis (Helsinger quoted in Langland 231). The image of woman as angel became a fictional stereotype, and writers of the period had to contend with it as such.

Consequently, many readers today perceive Victorian heroines as insipid and child-like as the twentieth century does not share the angel ideal. Hence, heroines such as Charles Dickens's Dora Spenlow in David Copperfield appear trivial and inane to modern readers. H. M. Daleski mentions Dickens's portrayal of the angel in the house, tying the image to the opposing image of the fallen woman. Daleski cites the example of Rose Maylie and Nancy in Oliver Twist as representing the polarities of home and streets. The author says, "Nearly 20 years before Coventry Patmore put a name to it, Dickens had thus epitomized an Angel in the

House, though as yet an unmarried one" (12). Forcing female characters into such rigid stereotypes resulted in these inflexible portrayals.

Victorian novelists employed several devices to free their female characters from these caricatures. Robert Utter and Gwendolyn Needham, authors of Pamela's Daughters, a book focusing on the evolution of the heroine, attribute one such convention, that of the double heroine, to the Victorians. Dickens's Rose Maylie and Nancy may be seen in this light, as can Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp of Vanity Fair. Utter and Needham call Amelia "the beautiful" and Becky "the beautiful, but . . ." heroines. The "beautiful, but . . ." heroine has a flaw which is offset by her beauty. Only later in the Victorian period do writers incorporate the positive and negative characteristics into a single heroine (407-408).

Occasionally a writer portrayed a female character who did not fit neatly into any of the aforementioned categories. Wilkie Collins's character Marian Halcombe in The Woman in White defies such categorization. When compared to the angel stereotype, Marian fails on most counts. Ugly, unmarried and with no prospects for marriage, Marian is not concerned with finding a husband. She openly admits her impatience with women and her ineptitude at feminine endeavors. Perhaps her most unheroinely aspect is

her masculinity. Marian not only looks and behaves like a man, she frequently wishes she were one, also. She is not a fallen woman, nor is she an angel antithesis, however. She is not merely a double heroine although Collins contrasts her with her half-sister Laura, who is a stereotypical angel.

Although Marian did not possess the characteristics of the ideal Victorian woman, she captured the interest and admiration of Collins's readers nevertheless. His unique characterization reconciled the ideal woman and the real woman, illustrating yet another Victorian paradox. The portrayal of Marian illustrates the necessity of Victorian scholars being aware of stereotypes. Ignorance, as advocated by Lytton Strachey, may simplify and clarify the historian's task, but knowledge of a stereotype and how a writer circumvents that stereotype enables a literary scholar to delineate the forces at work in a character's life, thereby providing a fuller understanding of both the text and the age.

CHAPTER 2

THE PERFECT LADY

The middle-class Victorian woman's life began on her wedding day. Her entire upbringing culminated in marriage. Few other opportunities existed for her as her education consisted of mastering needlework, drawing and music. Deportment was also an integral part of her upbringing, as demeanor was important in attracting the proper young man. Commenting on the training given to Victorian daughters, one feminist critic contended, "They were poorly educated because they were not expected to have to work" (Holcombe 15). Only men earned a living in genteel circles. Martha Vicinus maintains that the feminine endeavor was to be the "perfect lady" (Suffer ix). Vicinus writes,

> All her education was to bring out her 'natural' submission to authority and innate maternal instincts. Young ladies were trained to have no opinions lest they seem too formed and too definite for a young man's taste, and thereby unmarketable as a commodity. (x)

If a young woman wanted a career or if she had to make a living, society frowned upon her for not fulfilling the prescribed role.

The "perfect lady" exhibited the four wifely virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity (Agress 171). The first three virtues had been instilled in the bride since her childhood; the fourth she learned as she assumed her role in caring for a home. As her entire education had been directed to the goal of attracting a husband, the young woman rarely had any training in household management. Even if she were fortunate enough to have servants, she soon found that maintaining a comfortable home was a demanding task.

Luckily several books were available to aid the housewife in her duties. An annotated bibliography in A Widening Sphere describes twenty-five such volumes. One of these, Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management, first published in six parts and later in a single volume in 1861, Vicinus cites as being "the most comprehensive, popular, and used guide to all aspects of maintaining home, children, household" (229). Although only twenty-four years old when her book first went to press, Mrs. Beeton was highly acclaimed for her practical advice. "Women of the English middle classes accepted her as an oracle of household wisdom and rushed to purchase her book which ran second in sales only to that Victorian best-seller, the King James Bible" (Hellerstein et al 292-293).

Beeton's writing style and tone reinforced a woman's duty to her home. "As with the commander of an army, or the leader of any enterprise, so it is with the mistress of a house. Her spirit will be seen through the whole establishment," Beeton stated, adding, "Of all the acquirements which particularly belong to the feminine character, there are none which take a higher rank, in our estimation, than such as enter into a knowledge of household duties" (1). Beeton's book sold two million copies within a decade of publication, garnering its author the title "The high priestess of Victorian Domestic economy" (Bentley 88). While the extent of her influence on household management cannot be assessed, Beeton obviously provided clear guidelines for the duties of the Victorian wife.

The book thoroughly covered housecleaning, food preparation and menus, entertainment, domestic help, and child care. For example, Beeton set out the following financial guidelines, based on annual family income, for hiring servants:

> About 1,000 pounds a year--A cook, upper housemaid, nursemaid, under housemaid, and a man servant.
>
> About 750 pounds--A cook, housemaid, nursemaid, and foot boy.

> About 500 pounds--A cook, housemaid, and nursemaid.
>
> About 300 pounds a year--A maid of all work and nursemaid.
>
> About 150 pounds a year up to 200 pounds--A maid of all work (and girl occasionally). (8)

Beeton also gave a similar summary of guidelines for paying servants.

Although having servants lessened the workload, it also meant added responsibility for the Victorian wife, who expected her domestic help to be industrious, thrifty, courteous, and morally upright. Servants perceived their mistress as incompetent if she did not impose and enforce these standards. Beeton cautioned the homemaker,

> Indeed, when a mistress is an early riser it is almost certain that her house will be orderly and well managed. On the contrary, if she remains in bed till a late hour, then the domestics, who, as we have before observed, invariably partake somewhat of their mistress's character, will surely become sluggards. (2)

The lady of the house, therefore, had to oversee her servants' morals and habits while setting an example which instilled respect for her own conduct as well.

As economy and efficiency constituted basic premises of household management, the housewife could ill afford lax supervision of her help. The wife functioned as an intermediary between the head of the house, her husband, and the servants. As her husband's income financed the household, the lady of the house was responsible for seeing that his money was well spent. Author J. A. Banks succinctly describes the housewife's financial responsibility respecting domestic help:

> The domestic servants of the 1850s and 1860s were income-spenders rather than income-earners for the families who employed them, and the middle- and upper-middle-class housewife's task in organizing them was to ensure that they were occupied efficiently so that they did not become in fact income wasters. (42)

Servants who wasted time represented wives who wasted money.

The wife frequently supervised how her servants managed their personal income as well as their time. She usually kept the household accounts, which included dispensing servants' wages. The wage-book of a vicar's wife covering the years 1849-1866 illustrates how the vicar's wife encouraged her servants to save money. The book lists monetary amounts which servants deposited with her and the amount of interest she, in turn, paid them for doing so.

Once a servant's sum was large enough to invest, the vicar's wife deposited it in a savings account (Peel 147-148).

In addition to managing accounts and servants, the housewife supervised, and usually participated in, the seasonal work of the household. Only the upper-class housewife had the luxury of being idle, especially during the yearly cleaning periods. Beeton's list of seasonal chores contained many challenging tasks.

Winter, Beeton maintained, should be devoted only to daily tasks and preparation for the holidays "in consequence of the necessity there is to attend to the number of fires throughout the household . . ." (23). Hauling coal in and ashes out was a time-consuming, physically-demanding job, especially if the household had only female domestics.

Spring, according to Beeton, was the ideal time for housecleaning. Even the best of housewives could not avoid the accumulated grime from smoke generated during the winter. Spring housecleaning entailed washing all bedding and curtains, taking up carpets, sweeping chimneys, and "turning out all the nooks and corners of drawers, cupboards, lumber-rooms, loft, etc., with a view to getting rid of all unnecessary articles, which only create dirt and attract vermin. . ." (23). Needed whitewashing, painting, or wallpapering followed this general cleaning. Beeton stated that in spring the Victorian home should assume

"a bright appearance, and a new face, in unison with nature." Almost as an afterthought she added, "Oranges should now be preserved, and orange wine made" (24).

Food preservation dominated the summer list of chores. In June and July, the Victorian homemaker preserved berries and fruits and made jams and jellies. Beeton also advised that this was the time to make "green walnut ketchup" and mixed pickles (24).

Beeton deemed summer the proper time to examine and repair all household linens. In order to avoid having to patch sheets, a time-consuming task which resulted in an unsightly product according to Beeton, "sheets should be turned 'sides to middle' before they are allowed to get very thin" (24). She advocated the purchase of a sewing machine, which had first been advertised at the Great Exhibition only ten years before publication of her book. Not only could sheets be mended, but

> with the help of this useful invention, a lady can, with perfect comfort, make and mend every article used by herself and children, and do a great deal towards repairing and making her husband's clothes, and this without labour to herself, and at no expense beyond the first outlay. (5)

Sewing constituted an ongoing project throughout the year, especially if the housewife followed Beeton's suggestion that she make "every article" used by herself and her children.

The housewife devoted autumn to more food preservation with canning and "laying in" of apples, pears, filberts, and "two or three large vegetable marrows" (24). Preparation for winter included getting winter clothing ready as well as "looking to" the fireplaces, grates and chimneys. Summer curtains were taken down and replaced by heavier winter ones. Beeton stated that this was the time to make sure the house was "in a thorough state of repair" (24).

Managing the household included managing a family in most cases, as motherhood was synonymous with being a wife. The frequent pregnancies and births of large Victorian families placed added physical strain on the wife. Many families had ten or more children as the infant mortality rate dropped from early to mid-century (Peel 108). While the physical demands of frequent childbearing affected her physically, the emotional demands of supervising many children affected the woman emotionally. As the family increased, household order became more difficult to maintain, resulting in increased pressure on the mother of the family as a smoothly-running household was her duty. As Peel states, "In the large family order was maintained by

subordinating, possibly by sacrificing, the children to the father, the girls to the boys, the mother to them all" (108).

Even if she employed a nanny or a nursemaid, society expected the Victorian mother to spend most of her time with her children. Beeton warned that the lady's family would suffer if all motherly duties were relegated to others. The mother should begin her day by bathing her children and having breakfast with them. Later she should spend time instructing them and playing with them (32). If the children became ill, the mother's place was at their bedside.

As creating a harmonious atmosphere for her husband and family comprised her utmost priority, the perfect lady chose her leisure activities carefully. Here, too, Beeton advised the homemaker. Beeton chided her reader "not to neglect your reading" (29). Needlework could be done while the husband read to the family in the evening or when casual visitors came to call. The young wife needed to be especially discerning regarding visitors, however. On this subject Beeton was adamant as she warned young wives that

> The choice of acquaintances is very important to the happiness of a mistress and her family. A gossiping acquaintance who indulges in scandal and the ridicule of her neighbors

should be avoided as a pestilence. (35)

In light of such direct advice, it is not surprising that many young wives found Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management indispensable.

The Victorian woman had a carefully prescribed role as a wife, mother, and homemaker. She was supposed to be submissive to her husband, self-sacrificing for her children, authoritative to her servants, and yet redemptive for her society. Figuratively, she was on a pedestal, but in reality she had to work very hard mentally and physically just to fulfill societal expectations. Practicing piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity could not have been a task for the faint of heart, and doing so belies the myth of the idle, inane Victorian housewife.

CHAPTER 3

THE FICTIONAL HEROINE'S LITERARY HERITAGE

The image of the ideal Victorian woman--the wife, mother, and domestic priestess--also emerges as a literary paradigm during the period. To assume this emergence is solely a reflection of Victorian culture, however, is too simplistic as the image of the saintly woman in literature antedates the nineteenth century. Good, pure women abound in many early religious and secular writings. Authors Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar maintain, "There is a clear line of literary descent from divine Virgin to domestic angel, passing through (among many others) Dante, Milton, and Goethe" (21). The Victorian heroine reflects the literary heritage of ancient sagas, culminating in a character who reflects both literary evolution and cultural convention.

"The typical virtuous heroine of the Victorian novel is a softened version of Griselda--rewarded for exploitation by being venerated as a saint," states John Reed in Victorian Conventions (37). Psyche may have provided the model for Griselda, giving the saintly heroine an even longer history. The long-suffering Griselda endured tests of her devotion administered by her spouse while her Victorian counterpart endured tests of devotion to her children and her home as

well as to her spouse. Mrs. Quilp in Dickens's The Old Curiosity Shop exemplifies a Victorian Griselda. Although not the central heroine of the book, Mrs. Quilp best demonstrates both exploitation and veneration at the hands of her husband. Suffering both emotional and physical abuse, Mrs. Quilp, nevertheless, remains loyal and devoted to him. The other characters venerate her because of her virtuous behavior. The leading female character of the book, Little Nell, is also exploited and venerated but on a more global scale than Mrs. Quilp. Both her grandfather and her society exploit Nell, and she suffers an almost sacrificial death, ensuring her veneration. Reed cites numerous examples that project the Griselda image in Victorian fiction and poetry. He states, "For some writers, the Griselda figure represented, without irony, the ideal of the faithful wife, the obedient companion" (41).

Conversely, some Victorian heroines, such as Dorothea Brooke in George Eliot's Middlemarch, ironically represent the ideal implied by Griselda. Mr. Casaubon shamelessly exploits Dorothea after their marriage. Like Griselda, she endures test after test to prove her loyalty to her husband. Her ultimate test comes when Casaubon's will is read, stipulating that she cannot marry without losing her inheritance. Dorothea, without irony, represents Griselda in that she remains faithful and obedient to Casaubon while

he is alive and for a long time after his death. Only when she realizes that she will lose her opportunity to marry Ladislaw does Dorothea quit adhering to her dead husband's wishes to finish The Key to All Mythologies. Ironically, she is then free to become another man's faithful wife and obedient companion, or, in other words, to become someone else's Griselda. Reed contends that despite being at the mercy of authoritarian husbands, many Victorian women did not heartily accept the Griselda figure as a heroine. Although the figure perhaps garnered a measure of respect from readers, she probably did not hold their interest, because, as Reed states, "In the end, the convention died of mocking laughter" (49).

Like Griselda, the convention of the double heroine also began long before Victorian authors and poets popularized the motif. According to Utter and Needham, the initial pairing of a fair and dark heroine occurs in ancient German sagas. This precedent delineates the passive, fair maiden from her active, dark counterpart. The fair maiden, usually blond and blue-eyed, does not need to develop her capabilities because her beauty brings all gifts to her. The dark maiden, usually brunette and brown-eyed, has to use her mind to counter the fair maiden's beauty. Utter and Needham cite Sir Walter Scott's use of this convention, maintaining Scott carries the image even further by using

his dark maiden as a substitute for a male character. Scott thus equates the brunette's dark coloring with boldness and initiative. Scott's blond heroine, however, has no alter ego but rather is "every inch the woman in her own right" (201). Utter and Needham dub the fair heroine "the angel" and the dark heroine "the nut brown maiden," stating that "If anything less than angelic is to be done, the nut brown maiden must do it" (201). Example after example of the double heroine fills prose and poetry of the period.

Matthew Arnold's poem "Tristam and Iseult" features the double heroine motif. Tristam, the hero, is torn between Iseult of Ireland, the dark heroine, and Iseult of Brittany, the fair heroine. Although the two Iseults function on a symbolic as well as a literal level, Iseult of the Fair Hands represents the passive, virtuous angel while dark Iseult plays an active role and ultimately dies for her efforts. Arnold's poem, published in 1852, capitalizes on the double heroine convention which reinforces the symbolic role of the two women as well.

George Eliot's book The Mill on the Floss, published eight years after "Tristam and Iseult," features yet another set of double heroines. The story focuses on the dark maiden, Maggie Tulliver, while her fair cousin Lucy, "who always did what she was desired to do," serves as the angelic heroine (93). Like dark Iseult, Maggie also dies

after taking an active role in life. Although she has no husband, Maggie resembles Griselda also, only society administers Maggie's tests, and, unlike Griselda, Maggie lacks loyalty to cultural conventions. Death is her punishment for this violation.

These inherited literary conventions coincide with the ideal of the perfect Victorian lady. The passive, saintly ideal gained enormous acceptance while many writers ignored everyday examples of active women who worked hard and managed well as financial planners, job supervisors, and caregivers in their homes. Hence the popular angel in the house became both a paradox and a paradigm for the age.

CHAPTER 4

AN EPIC OF VICTORIAN DOMESTICITY: THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

In late 1854, Coventry Patmore published Book One of The Angel in the House, which was entitled The Betrothal. Book Two, The Espousals, followed in 1856. These two books comprised the first part of the poet's intended epic poem dedicated to love and marriage. Patmore began planning his epic when he was nineteen. The actual composition of The Betrothal (which was referred to as The Angel in the House prior to the publication of the second part) took only six weeks although the poet admitted, "I had thought of little else for several years before" (Champneys 1: 160).

The two books share a similar structure. Each begins with a prologue which sets forth the poet's purpose in composing the book. In the prologue of The Betrothal, the speaker states that he has undertaken the project to honor his wife and their love on their eighth wedding anniversary, and although he would like to gain fame for his wife's sake by composing the poem, he feels his verses are too humble to do so. The prologue of The Espousals features the same speaker on his tenth wedding anniversary. His wife's "sole rival" for his time and affection has been his writing, but their love has been his primary occupation because it has

sustained his poetry (Angel 2.24). A single epilogue closes the two books, beginning where the last prologue ended, on the speaker's tenth anniversary. The speaker mentions their relationship in two other contexts in the epilogue; he first likens the two of them to couples in antiquity and then likens their relationship to a divine relationship with God to be experienced in the hereafter. An acquaintance greets them, however, and ends the speaker's brief metaphysical reverie.

Twelve cantos comprise each book with each being structured into preludes followed by a narrative. The preludes break the symmetry of form somewhat in that some cantos have only two while others have as many as five. No correlation exists between the number or arrangement of preludes in the two books. The Betrothal contains forty while The Espousals contains thirty-six.

The preludes feature the muse or poetic philosophy for the narrative part of the canto. The narratives illustrate the philosophical tenets set forth in the preludes. For example, in The Betrothal, Canto IV, "The Morning Call--," the three preludes entitled "The Rose of the World," "The Tribute," and "Compensation" enumerate all the special virtues of a woman destined to be an angel in the house. The philosophy in "The Rose of the World" is that of an ideal woman, divinely created: A paragon of goodness who

produces holy faith in others by her example; sensible yet witty; poised, modest, pure, and sincere; she converses intelligently and attracts her man without guile. In "The Tribute," the poet muses that woman's beauty not only supersedes nature's beauty, but that nature's beauty was created to complement woman's beauty. God grants woman this gift because she has been blamed for the Edenic fall. The final prelude, "Compensation," which is only four lines long, dwells on the paradox that modesty reveals the woman's loveliness.

The narrative portion of this canto features an actual morning call made by Felix Vaughan, a poet, on Honoria Churchill, the beautiful daughter of a clergyman. As the couple walk through the garden, Felix observes in Honoria the catalog of qualities which had been set forth in the first prelude. Honoria's beauty enhances nature's beauty as well, just as the second prelude foreshadows. Felix muses,

> She seems the life of nature's powers;
> Her beauty is the genial thought
> Which makes the sunshine bright; the flowers
> But for their hint of her, were nought. (Canto IV.9-12)

Felix and Honoria share simple pleasures on their walk. They admire flowers, count the apricots on a tree, and watch the gold-fish being fed. Her quiet demeanor appeals to

Felix, and he falls in love with her, not because she tries to charm him, but because she does not try to do so. Again, the philosophy of the prelude materializes in the narrative. The narrative goes one step further, however. Felix leaves, attends to business on his way home, and then cries when he is alone, vowing he will marry Honoria. Although the preludes do not explicitly predict this course, perhaps they imply a special culmination if the narrative meets all the philosophical criteria spelled out in the preludes. Thus the planned union in the narrative would be the result of Felix finding a woman who meets all the ideal characteristics of the preludes in Canto IV.

The combination of both lyrical and narrative modes in The Angel in the House, while complementing each other thematically, seems somewhat disjointed overall. This combination does not represent conventional Victorian poetry. Neither facet, however, is strong enough to carry Patmore's theme alone. The author of Patmore's entry in the Victorian Poets After 1950 comments on the dualistic pattern of the poem, saying,

> The preludes, exalting, choruslike, soft, or witty, seem to grow naturally into the idyll that follows. The idyll in its turn grows out of and yet turns back to the preludes, particularizing, illustrating, demonstrating in the characters'

> actions or thoughts emotional or psychological truth. The structure becomes a metaphor for its theme: the angel, or love, is incarnated and given shape in the house, the body, as the preludes are given flesh or form in the narrative. (185)

In any event, the unusual form may partially explain the lack of reader enthusiasm when The Betrothal was first published.

Another feature of the poem which may have bothered Victorian readers is the meter. Patmore seldom varies the iambic tetrameter pattern, and the resulting rhythm tends to be monotonous, especially since the poem is continuous rather than stanzaic. The rhyme scheme compounds the sing-song effect with a very predictable pattern of a-b-a-b-c-d-c-d-e-f-e-f and so on. Literary critic Edmund Gosse found Patmore's versification tedious, commenting in an 1886 essay in The Athenaeum:

> Dowered with a rare ear for metrical effect, educated in all the niceties of metrical science, he has of set purpose chosen the most sing-song of English metres as the almost exclusive vehicle of his ideas. (771)

Despite complaints regarding form, length, and versification, the poem provides an enduring image that has outlived its creator. Often perceived as a sentimentalized

ideal, the central image of the poem, that of the selfless wife and mother, is immortalized. Over a century has passed since Patmore wrote The Angel in the House; few people recognize his name, and fewer still can quote so much as one line of the poem, but his image has become a literary paradigm.

As a child, Patmore showed unusual poetic promise. At his father's urging, he embarked upon his literary career at age twenty-one with the publication of a nondescript book entitled Poems in 1844. The book elicited praise from the Pre-Raphaelites and other literary notables although Blackwood's and the Edinburgh Magazine gave the book unfavorable reviews. Patmore's father's position as an editor and critic may have influenced reviewers' responses. "Patmore himself was dissatisfied with them [the poems] and claimed he was rushed into publication by his father" (Victorian Poets 182). Financial concerns, however, soon overshadowed the young poet's limited literary endeavors. His father had speculated on railway stock, losing everything. The elder Patmore then fled England in disgrace, leaving his son in desperate financial circumstances. The young Patmore meagerly supported himself by writing literary reviews, which evolved into a lifelong career.

In 1846, Richard Monckton Milnes, a friend of Patmore's father, secured a post for the young man as an assistant librarian in the British Museum, where Patmore would work for the next twenty years. A year after his appointment, Patmore married Emily Augusta Andrews, the daughter of a minister.

Emily Patmore entertained and enchanted her husband's literary friends, including Tennyson, Browning, Ruskin, Carlyle, Emerson, and Hawthorne. She took an active role in his poetic career, reading his poetry and giving advice about revision. She became a contributing member of their literary circle as well. According to author E. J. Oliver,

> she wrote stories and rhymes for children under the name of 'Mrs. Motherly,' composed a book on domestic arts [The Servants' Behaviour Book], helped Patmore to compile A Children's Garland from the Best Poets, but also acted as hostess to men who were to become the leading writers and artists of the period. (46)

She also composed stories for several juvenile magazines. According to many Patmore biographies, she inspired Robert Browning's poem "A Face." She was beautiful, intelligent, and captivating. In the biography of his great-grandfather, Derek Patmore tells of a party given by Bryan Waller Proctor (Barry Cornwall) at which "Alfred Tennyson scarcely spoke to

anyone but her (Emily Patmore), to the apparent envy and surprise of certain great ladies. . ." (77).

Emily Patmore recognized her husband's poetic talent, encouraged him, and sacrificed so he could pursue his career. She not only inspired his epic poem celebrating married love, but she also encouraged him and actively contributed to its progress. In a letter reprinted in The Life and Times of Coventry Patmore, she wrote to her husband, "I have been trying to get some 'Ideas' for you [for The Angel in the House] but have found only one, and that a bad one I fear, as the fruit of a morning's thoughts" (79). Patmore acknowledged his wife's active role in the composing of the poem, saying, "The subtlety and severity of her taste in poetry owes whatever completeness it has, not to mention many of the best thoughts, which stand verbatim as she gave them me" (Champneys 1: 119).

Realizing that her husband needed both more time and more money to embark on such an ambitious project, Mrs. Patmore twice rented their house, and the family moved into furnished rooms to minimize expenses. This arrangement also allowed her husband to leave his family and find the solitude necessary for his work. In his diary Patmore later wrote of Emily's support at this time.

> The pleasure she took in the progress of 'The Angel,' and how the assurance of its importance

> and ultimate success made her joyfully consent to a life of voluntary poverty for years, involving twice letting our house, and going into very poor but heavenly happy lodgings. (Champneys 1: 144)

The dedication of The Angel in the House also reflects Patmore's recognition and appreciation of his wife's sacrifice and inspiration. It reads: "THIS POEM is inscribed to the memory of her by whom and for whom I became a poet."

Patmore's original plan was for The Angel in the House to be a six-part epic divided into three books. The first book he intended to entitle The Happy Wedding (Derek Patmore 80). Patmore revamped these plans as he wrote, however. The final product consisted instead of four parts divided into three books. Depending upon the publication all four parts were sometimes referred to as The Angel in the House although Faithful For Ever and Victories of Love were usually considered to be independent volumes. The first two parts were ultimately named The Angel in the House. In The Athenaeum, John W. Parker and Son advertised the first part, The Angel in the House: The Betrothal, for sale in November 1854 for six shillings (18 Nov. 1854: 1406). The book bore the pseudonym "C. K. Dighton," a derivation of Patmore's given name. Later editions appeared anonymously.

Patmore's reticence to have his name appear on The Betrothal may be attributed to his father, who had recently reappeared in England after the railway scandal. The elder Patmore had published three volumes entitled My Friends and Acquaintances during his absence. Critics viciously attacked this book shortly before The Betrothal went to press. Wary of how critics might receive another work authored under the name of Patmore, the younger Patmore declined to use his real name (Derek Patmore 82). Although satisfied with The Betrothal, Patmore did not assume that the first book of The Angel in the House would be a financial success; on the flyleaf of the manuscript "he offered a reward of 10 shillings to any finder in case of its loss" (11).

Emily reacted to the publication of The Betrothal with enthusiasm. In a letter to a friend, she summarized the reception the book garnered from many of her husband's contemporaries:

> W. S. Landor writes a letter full of somewhat senile ecstasy, which I will not quote. Carlyle calls on Coventry to quit the field of fiction and bring his powers to bear on the world of fact, which, for the want of the like of him is what it is--this, I mean a propos of power displayed in this book. Ruskin writes 'I cannot tell you how

> much I like your book. I had no idea you had this kind of power. The book will be, or at least ought to be, one of the most popular in the English language, and blessedly popular, doing good wherever it goes'. Tennyson writes: 'You have begun an immortal poem, and if I am no false prophet, it will not be long in winning its way into the hearts of the people.' (Derek Patmore 82)

Based on the positive response her husband's book received from these friends, Mrs. Patmore saw a bright future for The Angel in the House.

Tennyson shared Mrs. Patmore's views and responded to The Betrothal in a letter to Patmore after receiving a copy from the fledgling poet. Although the letter was laudatory, Tennyson did not hesitate to point out stylistic faults. After thanking Patmore for sending him a copy and commenting that the poem had "a fair chance of immortality," Tennyson remarked that "There are passages [that] want smoothing here and there" (Champneys 1: 165). Tennyson went on to point out a few examples of these places and to offer Patmore suggestions for alternatives. Tennyson ended his letter with a compliment. "As for the whole, I admire it exceedingly, and trust that it will do our age good, and not ours only. The women ought to subscribe for a statue for you" (165).

Like Tennyson, Patmore's other literary friends were also encouraging about The Angel in the House. Browning predicted that the poem would be a success. He told Patmore, "I do not say that it will be now, or soon; but, sometime or other, this will be the most popular poem that was ever written." D. G. Rossetti remarked that the poem was "very good indeed" although he expressed reservations about its length. Monckton Milnes, another noted literary friend, also predicted success for the poem (Champneys 1: 167-168).

Critics, however, did not respond as favorably as did Patmore's wife and friends. A reviewer in The Athenaeum even parodied the poem in the January 1855 issue. H. F. Chorley, author of the anonymous review, may have been unduly harsh because Patmore had close ties to the Pre-Raphaelite circle with whom Chorley had traded literary gibes for some time (Champneys 1: 170). Under the column head "Minor Minstrels," Chorley mockingly adapted Patmore's octosyllabic versification.

> The gentle reader we apprise That this new 'Angel in the House' Contains a tale not very wise About a person and a spouse. The author, gentle as a lamb, Has managed his rhymes to fit, And, haply, fancies he has write Another 'In Memoriam.'--How his intended gathered flowers, And took her tea

> and after sung, Is told in style somewhat like ours, For delectation of the young.--But, reader, lest you say we quiz The poet's record of his She, Some little pictures you shall see Not in our language but--in his,--. (76)

The reviewer then included two stanzas from the poem and, picking up in the same vein he used to introduce the lines, continued,

> Fear not this saline Cousin Fred, He gives no tragic mischief birth--There are no tears for you to shed Unless they may be tears of mirth.--From ball to bed, from field to farm, The tale flows nicely purling on.--With much conceit, there is no harm, In the love-legend here begun.--The rest will come another day If public sympathy allows;-- And this is all we have to say, About 'The Angel in the House.' (76)

Although many readers shared the critic's dissatisfaction with the awkward measures, Chorley's veiled prediction about the lack of public sympathy for the second book of The Angel in the House did not materialize.

A less scornful critic who reviewed The Betrothal applauded Patmore's choice of wedded love as a subject. The reviewer alluded to Tennyson's love poems, stating,

> But Coventry Patmore is the first to attempt a sustained poem in woman's praise and honour, with such definite earnestness, such serious sweetness, such fine thought and feeling, and such manifest capacity for the work. (Eclectic 548)

Despite his praise, however, the reviewer found much fault with The Betrothal. He first criticized Patmore's point of view:

> It has too much the look of courtship as the author would court now. To us, the rich flushes and warm golden lights of that happy nevermore--that Eden of Love's past--are too much subdued by the cold cloistered colour of his present contemplation. . . . (548)

Tempering his criticism somewhat, the reviewer predicted that Patmore's point of view would be better served in the second book of the poem depicting wedded love (556).

Patmore's lyricism in The Betrothal also drew criticism from The Eclectic Review critic who found the sound of the poem to be as "monotonous as a solo on the drum" (549). The reviewer also complained about the extra foot which Patmore inserted here and there.

> If the rhythm had been more lyrical and leaping, the extra syllable might have been rendered effective; but the rhythm of this poem has a

> conscious loftiness and a stately movement so that these leaps which have to be taken are as out of place as a polka hop in the midst of a minuet. (550)

The critic ended his review on a positive note by summarizing many of the "angel-like" characteristics set forth in the poem and ascribing these same characteristics to the poem itself. The conclusion appeared to be a cautionary note to those who might have missed the image which Patmore's poem presented.

In 1856, Patmore published the second book of the epic entitled The Espousals. Although the second installment also received mixed reviews, the overt condescension and mockery displayed by critics in The Athenaeum and The Eclectic Review for Book One were noticeably absent. Reviewers couched their complaints about the cumbersome versification and the stilted style in encouraging praise of Patmore's subject matter.

Thomas Carlyle, famed Victorian social commentator, praised Patmore's second effort in a letter dated July 31, 1856. Carlyle stated that The Espousals was "nearly perfect in its kind; the execution and conception full of delicacy, truth, and graceful simplicity. . ." (Champneys 1: 311). The metaphysical aspects of this second book especially appealed to Carlyle. If he had any reservations about the

second installment of The Angel in the House, Carlyle did not express them in his letter.

Unlike Carlyle, essayist George Brimley expressed many misgivings about The Angel in the House. Brimley found fault with the action, structure, and style of both books. Commenting that it had taken Patmore two books to get to the subject of wedded love, the essayist complained that "the age is no longer able to bear poems of epic length, even with, and much less without, epic action" (qtd in Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism 330). Brimley pointed out that Patmore needed to dispense with the preludes which introduced each segment of the narrative and plunge into his story sooner. He exhorted the poet to "treat these two parts as an experiment that has partially failed . . ." and let the narrative stand alone on its own merit (331). Despite Brimley's strong convictions about "the jerkiness of the verse" and "over-refinement" of language, he still affirmed Patmore's imagery, chiding the poet "to remember that the angel in the house is, as the least sensuous of poets remind us--An angel, but a woman too" (331).

Ironically, the very features Brimley found objectionable Aubrey DeVere praised in his review which appeared in The Edinburgh Review in January 1858. Speaking of The Angel in the House, DeVere, a personal friend of

Patmore, maintained that "the merit of it consists entirely in its careful and ingenious execution" (63). While never alluding to Brimley's review, DeVere countered every negative assessment made by Brimley with a positive assessment of his own. The structure that Brimley found artificial and jerky, DeVere found charming and mellifluous.

About Patmore's versification, which Brimley found forced and unnatural, DeVere remarked,

> It is obvious that the musical flow of these lines, and the delicacy of the sentiment they convey, owe much of their charm to the genuine art bestowed on their composition. Yet the singular felicity of Mr. Patmore's diction is derived apparently rather from that habitual carefulness which gradually weds itself with spontaneity of style, than from elaborate correction. In its precision it never loses flexibility, nor does it sacrifice clearness in order to gain depth and grace. (66)

The two reviewers could hardly have held more divergent perspectives on the same work.

DeVere mentioned only minor reservations about the poem. He found the language in places "a shade too colloquial. Such words as 'bouquet' and 'boudoir,' we

cannot accept as sound English," he remarked, almost in passing (66).

DeVere made an interesting, almost inadvertent, observation that may have played a role in his audience's acceptance of The Angel in the House. In opening his article, DeVere presented more than a page of prefatory material which described the changing nature of English poetry since the first quarter of the century. He finally narrowed his focus to Patmore's epic poem, citing it as one of the "the most original and the most artistic" he had seen (63). DeVere remarked that the work had been successful both in England and America, "where, if we are rightly informed, twenty thousand copies of it are already in circulation" (63). Although the English did not, by any means, consider American readers as arbiters of poetic taste, DeVere's inclusion of this statistic, nevertheless, lent credibility to the critic's appraisal of the poem.

Indeed, Patmore's epic had created a stir in American literary circles. In his book English Notebooks, which chronicles his trip to England, Nathaniel Hawthorne mentioned calling at the British Museum twice, trying to see Patmore. Hawthorne shared a personal look at Patmore in his entry dated January 3, 1858. When the poet mentioned that Mrs. Patmore had been unable to accompany him to meet Hawthorne, the American author ruminated about her absence.

> We were very sorry for this, because Mr. Patmore seems to acknowledge her as the real 'Angel in the House,' although he says she herself ignores all connection with the poem. It is well for her to do so, and for her husband to feel that the character is her right portrait; and both, I suppose, are right. It is a most beautiful and original poem,--a poem for happy married people to read together, and to understand by the light of their own past and present life; but I doubt whether the generality of English people are capable of appreciating it. I told Mr. Patmore that I thought his popularity in America would be greater than at home, and he said that it was already so; and he appeared to estimate highly his American fame, and also our general gift of quicker and more subtle recognition of genius than the English public. . . .(600-601)

Whether the American public had a keener perception and acknowledgement of poetic genius was, of course, a matter of conjecture. However, as the author of Coventry Patmore's entry in Victorian Poets After 1850 points out, "popularity can reveal something about a reading public and, thus, something about a period or an age" (181). Perhaps the fact that Romanticism, still flourishing in America in mid-

nineteenth century while English Romanticism was waning, accounts for Patmore's greater popularity in America.

Hawthorne's praise for Patmore's poetry extended to the American's personal life as well. After her husband's death when she was preparing his English Notebooks for publication, Sophia Hawthorne wrote Patmore a letter about their visit eleven years earlier. "I feel an infinite obligation to you for your Poems," Mrs. Hawthorne stated (Champneys 2: 97). She went on to say that once when she was exhausted and exasperated during their 1858 trip, "my husband put 'The Angel in the House' into my hand, saying that I should be refreshed and enchanted, and forget all my vexations by reading it. I cannot express to you my enjoyment of it" (2:97-98). Mrs. Hawthorne especially praised the preludes which seemed to her "like lovely Porticos of fair columns of perfect grace--" (2:98). After profusely praising his poem, Mrs. Hawthorne encouraged Patmore to visit her should he be in Dresden where she planned to reside for the next two or three years. After closing her letter, Mrs. Hawthorne added a postscript:

> It is such rare praise from Mr. Hawthorne to call a poem 'most beautiful and original' considering the careful, conscientious, and modified way in which he always awarded praise of poets--that I

> remark it almost a solitary instance in your regard. (2: 98)

The fact that Hawthorne rarely meted out praise to poets made his admiration of The Angel in the House all the more favorable.

Another prominent American, Ralph Waldo Emerson, also praised the first book of The Angel in the House. Emerson's letter to Patmore attested to the poem's popularity in the United States:

> I think there never was so sudden a public formed for itself by any poem as here exists for The Angel in the House, which was read and published by acclamation of a few, before yet anyone had heard or guessed the name of the author; and since our edition was out is known and loved and recited by young and old, an ever larging company. (Derek Patmore, 83)

Emerson closed his letter by urging Patmore to publish The Espousals as soon as possible.

Criticism of The Angel both at home and abroad concerned Patmore a great deal, yet he professed not to read the reviews (Champneys 1: 170). He frequently mentioned which reviews were positive and which were negative in his correspondence, however. Shortly after The Betrothal was published, he wrote to his friend Monckton Milnes about the

poem's mixed reception. Patmore expressed his thanks for the support he had received from Milnes, Carlyle, Tennyson, and Ruskin, but he devoted the majority of his letter to negative reviews of the poem:

> The Literary Gazette says it is so bad that is would pass for a joke, but for the respectable name of the Publisher. The Athenaeum goes out of its way to write a contemptuous squib in rhyme; the Westminster laughs at it in a minor notice, and so on. (Champneys 1: 170)

Unless the situation improved, Patmore feared his poetic career was at an end.

By the time The Espousals was published in 1856, however, the popularity of The Betrothal had grown modestly. In a second letter to Milnes, Patmore again expressed disappointment and frustration about sluggish sales and limited public response. He bitterly remarked,

> Unless the Edinburgh, the Quarterly or the Times neutralizes the neglect of the rest of the press by giving the book a notice some twenty years or so before the usual time for noticing good poetry after its publication, the appearances of the 'Angel' are likely to be very few and far between. (Champneys 1: 171)

Patmore's discouragement was profound, especially considering the praise garnered from literary circles for The Espousals. Some of the most prominent thinkers commended the second book, just as they had done with the first. Thomas Carlyle wrote to Patmore,

> Certainly it is a beautiful little Piece, this "Espousals"; nearly perfect in its kind; the execution and conception full of delicacy, truth, and graceful simplicity; high, ingenious, fine,--pure and wholesome as these breezes now blowing round me from the eternal sea. (Champneys 2: 311)

Like Carlyle, many of Patmore's contemporaries affirmed the success of the poem long before the media or the public realized its worth.

The pattern of praise from friends and vituperation from the press continued throughout Patmore's career. One such media attack in The Critic on The Victories of Love, the sequel to The Angel in the House, prompted John Ruskin to respond in a letter to the editor:

> It seems to me you have read it hastily; and that you have taken such view of it as on a first reading almost any reader of good but impatient judgment would be but too apt to concur with you in adopting--one, nevertheless, which, if you examine the poem with care, you will, I think,

> both for your readers' sake and for Mr. Patmore's, regret having expressed so decidedly.
> The poem is, to the best of my perception and belief, a singularly perfect piece of art; containing, as all good art does, many very curious short-comings (to appearance), and places of rest, or of dead colour; or of intended harshness, which, if they are seen or quoted without the parts of the piece to which they related, are of course absurd enough, precisely as the discords in a fine piece of music would be, if you played them without their resolutions.
> (Champneys 2: 281)

Like The Angel in the House, The Victories of Love, too, eventually surmounted its initially indifferent reception and became a Victorian favorite.

The open attacks on his poetry in the press deeply affected Patmore, and even time did not totally lessen their sting. In a letter to his daughter approximately ten years after The Betrothal was published, Patmore recalled a review in Punch. He expressed delight that Mrs. Marshall, his daughter's guardian while he was out of the country, shared his dislike of the periodical. Patmore wrote, "I dare say an odd number of 'Fun' with a parody upon the 'Angel' in it, did once get into our house, and that it was given to you

and Bertha to cut up--as a proper punishment for having 'cut up' me" (Champneys 2: 124).

Despite bad publicity, readers eventually justified the faith of Patmore and his friends in the worthiness of The Angel in the House. By the time the poet died forty years later in 1896, "over a quarter of a million copies of the poem had been sold" (Victorian Poets 181).

Critics dissected The Angel in the House well into the first half of the twentieth century. Criticism focused mainly on Patmore's use of octosyllabic verse and his treatment in poetry of a subject many thought would be better served in prose. Patmore's poetry written after The Angel in the House and The Victories of Love assumed a distinctly metaphysical aspect, reflecting Patmore's conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1864 after his first wife's death. Critics, however, for the most part ignored the shift in perspective caused by his new spirituality and still compared everything Patmore wrote to The Angel in the House.

With the rise of the feminist movement in the twentieth century, however, Patmore's poem became the target of an entirely different kind of criticism. These critics ignored his poetic devices and concentrated instead on his image of the idealized woman. Lee Edwards quotes Virginia Woolf's essay "Professions for Women" written in 1931, wherein Woolf

attacked the angel image as a convention that had undermined female potential since its very inception:

> In those days--the last of Queen Victoria--every house had its Angel. And when I came to write I encountered her with the very first words. The shadow of her wings fell on my page; . . . I did my best to kill her . . . in self-defense. Had I not killed her she would have killed me. . . . She died hard. . . . But it was a real experience; it was an experience that was bound to befall all women writers at that time. Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer. (546)

Ironically, by killing her personal angel in the house, Woolf helped keep Patmore's literal angel alive.

Not all feminist critics share Woolf's outright indignation, however. Two of the most frequently cited books on nineteenth-century women are edited by Martha Vicinus, one of which features a lengthy article on The Angel in the House. Carol Christ, the author, discusses Victorian masculinity in light of the poem in A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women. Christ's aesthetic distance makes her article appear more objective and rational than many others on the subject. She matter-

of-factly describes the socio-political context which made the angel a desirable ideal for the Victorians:

> Experiencing at once the breakdown of faith and the dehumanizing pressure of the marketplace, many Victorian writers relocated those values in the home and in the woman who was its center. It was she who could create a sanctuary both from the anxieties of modern life and for those values no longer confirmed by religious faith or relevant to modern business. (146)

Christ thus provides a logical backdrop, which many of her counterparts seem to disregard, before examining the subject.

Christ also notes something else many feminists overlook when attacking The Angel in the House: the poem itself. While this would appear to be an essential facet of any scholarly endeavor on the subject, writers frequently deal solely with the paradigm resulting from the poem and ignore the poem itself entirely. Christ does not make this mistake. While agreeing with almost all twentieth-century critics that the poem itself is not well executed, she posits that it merits examination nonetheless because "it is culturally significant, not only for its definition of the Victorian sexual ideal, but also for the clarity with which it represents the male concerns that motivate fascination

with that ideal" (147). Christ, therefore, seems to perceive what many critics do not; the poem yields a wealth of possibilities in examining Victorian male-female relationships. First, the poem provides the characteristics of the ideal Victorian woman. Second, as the poem was conceived by a male poet and written with a male persona, it provides insight into male values, concerns, and fears. Finally, the poem does furnish one person's perspective of how courtship and marriage functioned at the time. As few Victorians, male or female, voiced opposition to how Patmore described the relationship, it is unlikely that some basis did not exist in fact for the poem to be plausible for so many readers.

Many feminist critics cry "Foul!" because the poem presents only a male perspective. In so doing, they negate the fact that Patmore did not intend to do anything else. Nowhere does he claim that his perspective is the only one. Attacking a poem because it presents only a one-dimensional view seems indefensible because it presupposes the poet's accountability for other views. Christ's study, therefore, appears more credible than many others since she does not charge Patmore with ignoring what, as a poet, he had every right to ignore.

Christ does, however, hold Patmore accountable for his presentation of a "naturally passive" woman who has no

desire to achieve. Christ points out the paradox implicit in a heroine who can only grow into womanhood as she regresses into "the more passive state of childhood and infancy" (149). Passivity, the author maintains, results in all the virtues Patmore ascribed to his heroine. In linking The Angel in the House to Victorian masculinity, however, Christ exposes yet another paradox. If men are active rather than passive creatures, they often appear uncomfortable with the "capacity for action, aggression, and achievement" which their activeness implies. They cannot shed this role because doing so constitutes "a loss of identity but to accept it leads to self-hatred." This masculine paradox partially explains why the Victorians prized female passivity, which, as Christ points out, "frees woman from the obligation of accomplishment that man finds so burdensome" (149).

In examining the poem from a perspective of male ambivalence toward his projected societal role, Christ uncovers at least three more significant paradoxes. She cites the paradox most often seen by feminist critics: In idealizing his passive heroine, the Victorian male finds someone who is not torn between the "necessity of achievement and the denigration of it" (152). Christ mentions this in both a social and sexual context, assuming the male can be the only choice as aggressor in such a

situation. The angel is thus trapped in one more paradox: while supposedly being superior to the male, she is yet dominated by him. This actually constitutes a two-fold paradox as the male likewise is forced to be an active aggressor in a situation wherein he seeks refuge from societal expectations of that very same trait. Christ aptly notes that Patmore retreats into a metaphysical stance in an attempt to explain what appears to defy explanation in these instances. Christ maintains that this dichotomy of domination and superiority troubled Patmore in both his personal and poetic lives (152-153).

Christ's remaining two paradoxes concern the Victorian man more than the Victorian woman, yet they merit attention because The Angel in the House reveals them fully. One paradox deals with the angel representing a masculine ideal of freedom from desires and responsibilities, but, as Christ says, the ideal "is both a symptom of their difficulty in dealing with the world of action and a strategy for retreating from it" (161). While admitting that the ideal set forth in the poem harmed the perception of women, Christ poses her final paradox: The ideal of the angel in the house also harmed the man who subscribed to it because to him a woman then represented both "a perpetual reproach and a perpetual temptation." Hence, the Victorian man was then

left in a situation whereby if he won he also failed (161-162).

Edwards also condemns the paradigm of the angel in the house taking a slightly different tack by explaining how several nineteenth-century novels portray the paradigmatic role of the self-sacrificing wife and mother. From the closing lines or scenes from these novels, Edwards concludes that they "reveal increasing authorial self-consciousness about the social limits of domesticity" (547-548). Edwards discusses several nineteenth-century heroines, all of whom are expected to assume the angel's role but whose self-actualization will be thwarted by doing so. Edwards's examples follow a chronological pattern, her first being that of Elizabeth Bennet in Pride and Prejudice, which was published in 1813. Mr. Bennet cautions his daughter about her forthcoming marriage to Mr. Darcy: "I know your disposition, Lizzy, I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior." Throughout the novel Elizabeth and Darcy have had an egalitarian relationship; now that she is to become a wife, Elizabeth is admonished to be subordinate (548).

Jane Eyre (published 1847) provides Edwards's second example. The novel ends with Jane marrying Mr. Rochester and moving to Fernwood Manor. Although Jane professes

happiness about being with her husband, Edwards views her marriage as circumventing Jane's chances for a fulfilling life. After all, as Edwards maintains, Brontë portrayed Fernwood Manor as "unhealthy, damp and reclusive." Rochester could not even find a tenant for Fernwood Manor. As Edwards says, "We are entitled to ask what sort of happiness grows in such a place" (548). While Jane appears certain about her future happiness, the reader may entertain doubts after reading Edwards's article.

The third example Edwards features is that of Dorothea Brooke in George Eliot's Middlemarch, published in 1872. Like Jane Eyre's story, Dorothea's story ends with her marriage. The narrator, who may express the personal concerns of Eliot herself, remarks,

> Many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought to have done. . . .

The heroine's ambivalence toward her own end appears to be the best attitude for which a woman character (or a woman writer) can hope (548).

The remaining two examples Edwards provides project an even grimmer possibility. Edwards claims that these

"angels" provide a typological rather than a teleological structure, yet the last two examples seem to constitute a progression from the angel in Pride and Prejudice (547). Both Sue Bridehead of Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure (1895) and Edna Pontellier of Kate Chopin's The Awakening (1899) go through stages of being admonished and of being ambivalent about marriage. Both these heroines die at the end of their novels. Teleologically, this progression from Elizabeth Bennet through Edna Pontellier shows a growing alienation from self-fulfillment accentuated by the angel in the house role. A teleological reading of these endings culminates, then, in death, the ultimate alienation.

Each of these heroines marries, "but not," as Edwards maintains, "because marriage is presented as the best and most fulfilling choice but because it emerges as the only positive alternative" (551). Edwards contends that these authors, as well as many others, "seem caught in the grip of an irreconcilable paradox." Marriage, the only course open to these heroines, decidedly limits the "woman of intelligence, energy, and vision" (550). Furthermore, the paradoxical situation of the angel in the house places both real women and fictional heroines in the position of simultaneously serving as queen of one realm (the domestic) while being a slave in the other (the public) (569). Thus, twentieth-century women writers, such as Virginia Woolf,

Tillie Olsen, Doris Lessing and the like, must kill Patmore's paradigm in order to create alternative identities for themselves and their heroines. The post-angel heroine at least has the possibility of achievement and fulfillment on her own merit and within her own control.

Other twentieth-century critics attack the angel in the house much less obliquely than Edwards. Gilbert and Gubar maintain that few women have fully confronted this image. These authors suggest that "At this point in our construction of a feminist poetics, then, we must really dissect in order to murder" (17). Gilbert and Gubar treat the angel in tandem with an opposite image, that of woman as monster, implying that both images are grotesques. The authors present the angel as a secondary creature who exists only to fulfill her husband. She possesses the "'eternal feminine' virtues of modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliancy, reticence, chastity, affability, politeness" (23). These characteristics imply that the angel is more godly than human.

Unlike other feminist critics who attack the paradigmatic angel in the house without delving into Patmore's poem itself, Gilbert and Gubar go to the source in order to begin their dissection. While they do not provide a line-by-line explication, they synthesize the actions where necessary and present a surprisingly objective account

of the poem. Of course, they focus on the paradigm not on poetic conventions, as the paradigm is central to their study. Gilbert and Gubar illustrate the angel image in everything from eighteenth century conduct books to present-day "Dear Abby" (23). The authors analyze how the role of the angel in the house affected the selfhood of many fictional characters, and ultimately, they, like Woolf, perceive that the angel in the house must be killed for women writers to survive.

Elizabeth Langland also examines the angel in the house as a paradigm, but Langland does not address the poem per se. She instead focuses on the "mythological" implications of the angel being the "moral regenerator of mankind" (382). The author attributes four separate myths about women to the Victorian imagination, each perpetuating women's salvatory role in the lives of men.

Langland exposes how these myths separately and collectively secure social repression of females. She says, "This preoccupation developed into an ideology that legitimized unequal power relations in the economic and political sphere even as it glorified women's role in the domestic and moral sphere" (382). The author provides several examples of how this paradoxical role of women has functioned in narratives of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her treatment of the angel as a

paradigm of self-effaced womanhood exemplifies the trend in twentieth-century feminist criticism.

One of the most recent articles examining the paradigm occurs in an article published in Texas Studies in Literature and Language in the winter of 1988. In her article, "Of Selfsame Desire: Patmore's 'The Angel in the House'," Bina Freiwald, like many feminist critics before her, also alludes to Woolf's essay, summarizing that "Woolf's paradigmatic female persona has not a debt to repay but a crime to avenge." Freiwald also refers to Gilbert and Gubar's contention that in order "to create herself," the female persona must expose the angel in the house imposter. Freiwald further notes that mainstream criticism of the poem fails to fully address why feminist critics are so enraged by the paradigm (539). The author then develops her thesis, considering both the poem and the paradigm.

After briefly summarizing the body of scholarship presently available, Freiwald maintains that, "In uncritically accepting Patmore's self-declared agenda for the poem, however, critics have fallen victim to the same ideological distortions and conceptual blind spots that mar Patmore's own thought" (541). She further contends that both Patmore and the critics fail to notice that while the poet proposes a sexual duality between men and women that duality is depicted in a hierarchal system which negates any

possibility of such duality. Her essay takes issue, as she openly states,

> with a critical tradition which, in complicity with Patmore and the poet-narrator of The Angel in the House, has chosen to 'forget' or disregard the fact that the poem [is] far from being an expression of reciprocal conjugal love. . . . (541)

Freiwald's essay dwells more on critical disregard than on Patmore's omission. Friewald deserves credit for isolating this anomaly; despite the poem's presentation of a seemingly-reciprocal love, readers should be sophisticated enough to discern that a male persona will most likely present a male perspective. Nonfiction essays writers are obliged to present opposing perspectives; poets have no such constraints.

Freiwald delineates several paradoxes inherent in the poem itself. She quotes critic Osbert Burdett, for example, in citing the central paradox perpetuated throughout the poem, that of praise which diminishes and degrades rather than elevating its object. Like others before her, Freiwald maintains that Patmore retreats into mysticism when confronted with such problematic situations (543).

The paradoxes Freiwald exposes in the poem, as well as her criticism, provide ample ground for discussion. She

cites Francoise Basch's book Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and in the Novel as exposing the source for a paradox of power in the poem. The angel's power theoretically rests on both physical and intellectual weakness (546). In examining primary sources, Freiwald exposes yet another paradox: the angel is simultaneously innocent and cunning. Such paradoxes perhaps reveal more about the poet than the angel, however, which Freiwald tacitly acknowledges (555).

Freiwald's exhaustive, well-documented study has a recurrent theme that resounds through almost all feminist criticism. Freiwald again examines the primary source, the poem itself, for this central issue. "Man must be pleased; but him to please/Is woman's pleasure" Freiwald quotes from the first book, Canto IX (554). That appears to be the crux of the problem for critics who deal solely with the paradigm. Feminist objections to such a situation is not surprising. In going to the poem, however, Freiwald defuses a possible negative reception to her study.

Paradoxically, The Angel in the House has a somewhat checkered yet interesting past. While his contemporaries condemned Patmore's style and structure, later critics faulted his subject matter. Although the poet can and should be held accountable for his poem, he should not be held accountable for the image that evolved into a paradigm,

as he only ostensibly created the image. Like the preludes and their veiled philosophy, the angel in the house existed in the psyche of Victorian society. Patmore simply articulated what the Victorians had already internalized. Condemnation of the poet's portrayal of the angel only adds another puzzle for the Victorian scholar to unravel.

CHAPTER 5

MARIAN HALCOMBE: THE ANDROGYNOUS ANGEL OF THE WOMAN IN WHITE:

Two writers hardly could be more dissimilar than Wilkie Collins and Coventry Patmore. The two men, who were a year apart in age, both experienced an upper middle-class upbringing among British literary and artistic circles. Each man made important contributions to the Victorian literary field although their genres differed considerably, and each enjoyed immense popularity in the 1860s. There, however, any similarity between the two ends.

While Patmore's father fled the country to avoid scandal, leaving his son penniless, William Collins, a distinguished landscape painter, provided every possible social and financial advantage for his son William Wilkie Collins. The younger Collins, named after his father and a family friend, Sir David Wilkie, dropped the name William, using the name Wilkie throughout his lifetime. The family lived in Italy for two years when Wilkie was an adolescent, and he later attended private schools in England. In 1841, Collins's father secured a position for his son in the tea trade. While so employed, the seventeen-year-old secretly began his first novel Antonina about his stay in Rome. His

father, delighted with young Collins's endeavor, withdrew his son from the tea trade and enrolled him at Lincoln's Inn for a career in law. Although called to the bar in 1851 at age 27, the young man never practiced law. His father had died in 1847, and Collins immediately began a biography which ultimately comprised two volumes. Although the memoirs of his father reflected a lack of literary skills, the work nevertheless was well-received, and Collins fancied he would either write or follow in his father's footsteps as a landscape painter for his livelihood.

In addition to being admitted to the bar, Collins also met Charles Dickens in 1851. "Thus began the most important friendship of his life" (Peterson 14). He and Dickens, who was twelve years older than Collins, remained fast friends for most of Dickens's lifetime. Their friendship may even have been more important to Dickens than the friendship he shared with John Forster. Collins later deprecatingly referred to Forster's biography of Dickens as "The Life of John Forster, with occasional Anecdotes of Charles Dickens." Collins covered his copy of Forster's book with additions and corrections (Victorian Novelists 472).

Many Dickens biographers credit Collins with "loosening Dickens's view of pleasure" (Wilson 220). The two frequently immersed themselves in London nightlife and even took trips abroad together, usually accompanied by Augustus

Egg, a young artist. Peter Ackroyd maintains that this friendship flourished because "Collins . . . embodied for Dickens all the easy-going and open-hearted bravura of youth which he himself had never experienced" (638). The friendship probably puzzled many Victorians as Dickens represented moral propriety while Collins represented quite the opposite. Collins blithely ignored social mores, living with one mistress for over twenty-five years while concurrently maintaining a separate home for another mistress by whom he fathered three illegitimate children.

The mistress with whom Collins lived, Caroline Graves, reputedly inspired his bestseller The Woman in White. Collins met her one summer evening when he, his brother, and a friend were out for a moonlight walk. Graves, dressed all in white, burst screaming from a nearby house. She paused to look at the three men and then ran on. Collins gave chase, and the two others waited in vain for his return. When they questioned him the following day, he evaded their queries, but the young woman moved in with him shortly thereafter. In the ensuing years, Collins's second mistress, Martha Rudd, and their subsequent family lived within walking distance of the home shared by Collins and Graves. He often derisively referred to Rudd and their children as his "morganatic family" (Peterson 17). According to Edgar Johnson, Collins "was often involved in

intricate tangles with several women at once; he was amusing, cynical, good-humored, [and] unrestrained to the point of vulgarity" (784). Dickens enjoyed Collins's company despite the younger man's bohemian way of life, however. The friendship's effect on either man's personal life is speculative, but some scholars surmise that the free-wheeling Collins was not a good influence and may even have encouraged Dickens's marital separation.

The Dickens-Collins friendship affected their professional lives as well. As Dickens was imminently more successful, however, Collins receives little credit for his impact on Dickens's work although some critics attribute tighter plot construction in Dickens's later novels to Collins's influence.

Dickens, in turn, influenced Collins's character development and revision techniques. Painstakingly revising not only his own writing but almost all the writing that he edited for his periodicals, Dickens revamped some of Collins's manuscripts himself but taught his protégé to revise carefully and frequently. Collins's manuscripts after his meeting Dickens reflect much more attention to revision.

Dickens's genius for character development probably influenced Collins's writing even more than his intensive revising, however. In his 1927 essay entitled "Wilkie

Collins and Dickens," T. S. Eliot observes specific influences of the authors on each others works.

> "Bleak House" is the novel in which Dickens most closely approaches Collins (and after "Bleak House," "Little Dorrit" and parts of "Martin Chuzzlewit"); and "The Woman in White" is the novel in which Collins most closely approaches Dickens. Dickens excelled in character; in the creation of characters of greater intensity than human beings. Collins was not usually strong in the creation of character; but he was a master of plot and situation, of those elements of drama which are most essential to melodrama. "Bleak House" is Dickens's finest piece of construction; and "The Woman in White" contains Collins's most real characterization. . . . Count Fosco and Marion [sic] are indeed real personages to us; as "real" as much greater characters are, as real as Becky Sharp or Emma Bovary. In comparison with the characters of Dickens they lack only that kind of reality which is almost supernatural, which hardly seems to belong to the character by natural right, but seems rather to descend upon him by a kind of inspiration or grace. Collins's best characters are fabricated, with consummate skill,

> before our eyes; in Dickens's greatest figures we see no process or calculation. . . . Dickens's characters are real because there is no one like them; Collins's because they are so painstakingly coherent and lifelike. Whereas Dickens often introduces a great character carelessly, so that we do not realize, until the story is far advanced, with what a powerful personage we have to do, Collins at least in these two figures in "The Woman in White," employs every advantage of dramatic effect. . . . (525)

Eliot concluded that "each had qualities which the other lacked, and they had certain qualities in common. It is perfectly reasonable to assert that the relations of the two men . . . affected profoundly the later work of each" (526).

Despite Collins's supposed shortcomings of character development, many of his characters captivated readers besides Eliot. Count Fosco, the villain of The Woman in White, particularly intrigued readers. Margaret Oliphant observed in a Blackwood's review of the novel that

> no villain of the century, so far as we are aware, comes within a hundred miles of him: he is more real, more genuine, more Italian even, in his fatness and size, in his love of pets and pastry, than the whole army of conventional Italian

> villains, elegant and subtle, whom we are accustomed to meet in literature. (566-567)

Oliphant also mentions that Collins received many letters from readers interested in Laura, Marian Halcombe, and Anne Catherick (570).

Reader interest in Collins's female characters reveals an interesting paradox as his portrayal of females shows much more versatility than those of Dickens, the acknowledged master of characterization. As one critic who compared the two authors remarked,

> Dickens, for all his genius, was never able to create a 'good' girl who had much spirit; the Rose Maylies and Agnes Wickfields, the little Doras and Dorrits, are pleasant but a trifle insipid, whereas Collins's heroines are often bold, strong-willed, and independent. (Peterson 34)

Marian exemplifies such qualities.

In November 1859, Dickens's periodical All the Year Round published the first installment of The Woman in White which featured Marian Halcombe as a principal character, despite her departure from the usual female literary conventions popular at the time. Marian, who is androgynous in appearance, feelings, and actions, functions more as an

unconventional Victorian hero than as a conventional Victorian heroine.

The unmarried Marian nevertheless illustrates several female literary paradigms popular at the time. She is unmarried. Victorian spinsters are usually portrayed as unfulfilled, incomplete, and even deprived. Francoise Basch maintains that no matter what aspect of character an author develops when depicting a spinster, that character remains unfulfilled until she marries. If she does not marry, she is a failure. Hence, as Basch states, "The old maid occupies a secondary place in these fictional universes" (189).

Marian epitomizes another literary paradigm, that of the penniless orphan. According to several sources, the orphan in nineteenth-century literature frequently symbolizes alienation and isolation, thereby garnering reader sympathy (Reed 266). "To be a female and an orphan as well, was to be doubly disadvantaged in an age that valued family and empowered men" (Reed 254). Thus Marian's status creates a four-fold bind: she is an orphan, she is female, she is unmarried, and she is financially dependent upon her half-sister, Laura.

Together, Marian and Laura exemplify another Victorian literary paradigm, that of pairing female orphans. Reed maintains that this convention enables authors "to indicate

the different ways in which those thrown on their own emotional resources might develop" (255). Of their status Marian says, "Except that we are both orphans, we are in every respect as unlike each other as possible" (23). Marian emerges as the strong, resolute character while Laura remains compliant and indecisive.

The sisters also exemplify the "double heroine" convention, another literary device, although their characters are not the typical bad girl/good girl pairing popularized by the likes of Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley. Marian is dark and active while Laura is fair and passive. Time and again, Marian's action and Laura's inaction illustrate every attribute Utter and Needham assign to the double heroine.

Marian's departure from feminine paradigms, however, makes her the most dynamic as well as the most interesting female character in the novel. From the outset, Marian is a divided character. The reader first sees her through the eyes of Walter Hartright, the drawing master, when he comes to Limmeridge House. As Walter enters the room to meet her, she stands with her back turned to him, peering out a window. He admires her form: tall, comely and well-developed. He views her through the eyes of an artist, appreciating her form, noting she is unfettered by stays.

On seeing her face, however, Walter exclaims, "The lady is ugly!" He describes her:

> The lady's complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark down on her upper lip was almost a moustache. She had a large, firm, masculine mouth and jaw; prominent, piercing, resolute brown eyes; and thick, coal-black hair, growing unusually low down on her forehead. (21)

Walter remarks that this makes him "almost repelled by the masculine form and masculine look of the features in which the perfectly shaped figure ended--" (21).

The physical characteristics of a nineteenth-century heroine, as articulated in Pamela's Daughters, bring the paradox of Marian's appearance into sharper focus. These physical characteristics include

1) being slender
2) being healthy
3) having white skin
4) feigning weakness
5) having a slender waist
6) having small feet
7) being of small stature
8) having blond hair
9) having blue eyes
10) having no body hair (ch. 6).

Being healthy and having milk-white skin imply that a female is both robust and fragile at the same time. Her slender waist shows that the heroine has not developed muscles through physical labor. Commenting on the tenth characteristic, Utter and Needham state, "It is no wise indelicate for a lass to have a vigorous growth of hair on the head, but there is no record of a time when it was allowable anywhere else" (185). "Even as early as the 16th century, art showed women with hairless bodies" (187). Some of these characteristics may be observed outside of fiction in the nineteenth century as well, when women wore long sleeves to hide hairy arms and when some women ate small amounts of arsenic to make their skin white.

Marian can not be a heroine because her characteristics are too far afield from those of the prototype. She is slender, healthy and small-waisted. Perhaps she has small feet; that information is not given, but she probably does not, because of her large hands and tall stature. Even her health is suspect in this case because she does not have the counter-balance of white skin to offset her robustness. Hence, she only weakly satisfies three of the ten criteria deemed necessary for heroine-hood.

In Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth, Nina Auerbach discusses Marian's features stating, "The Woman in White opens with a pious invocation of personified

sexual stereotypes that threatens to obliterate the dashingly intelligent Marian before she even appears. . . ." Auerbach asserts that Walter's description of Marian "dissipates her power for the conventional reader . . . " (136). While readers, conventional or otherwise, may be surprised or even repelled by Marian's physical appearance, her intelligence and actions soon overshadow her odd features. Many readers may not share Auerbach's choice of verb in this assessment: rather than dissipating Marian's power, her appearance may belie her power. Her ugliness merely creates suspense by countering reader expectations in the then-emerging sensation genre.

Auerbach further conjectures that Marian may not be ugly at all. The author compares Marian to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's portrait of Jane Morris, stating that Morris had the same physical characteristics as Marian. Auerbach comments that the Rossetti portrait of Morris emphasizes "her powerful, un-English beauty" (139). Count Fosco, an Italian, falls in love with Marian and makes no reference to her ugliness, which Auerbach further cites as evidence that Marian is not ugly (137). But whether Marian is beautiful or ugly is really of little consequence. Auerbach's assessment, however, reinforces how Marian's physical appearance creates a cleavage in reader perception from the very outset.

Auerbach's analysis of Marian appears in the chapter entitled "Old Maids and the Wish for Wings," yet in the eight pages devoted to The Woman in White, the author only touches on Marian's spinsterhood, perhaps because the character fits few stereotypical categories of the Victorian spinster. Her unmarried state implies a paradox, as statistics show that 85-88% of all women in England at the end of the century were married (Hellerstein et al, 121). Economic necessity, societal expectations, and romantic ideals pressured women to marry both in reality and in fiction of the period. Despite her financial dependence on Laura, however, Marian shows no desire to marry. She discusses marriage candidly, although never mentioning herself in a marital context. About Laura's engagement she says,

> It is an engagement of honour, not of love--her father sanctioned it on his deathbed, two years since--she herself neither welcomed it nor shrank from it--she was content to make it. Till you came here, she was in the position of hundreds of other women, who marry men without being greatly attracted to them or greatly repelled by them, and who learn to love them (whom they don't learn to hate!) after marriage, instead of before. (52)

Marian's remarks indicate she does not subscribe to the typical romantic ideal of wife and mother. This old maid expresses no "wish for wings" with which to flee her solitary nest.

Marian does express other wishes, however, frequently musing about what she would do if she were a man. The night before Laura and Sir Percival return from their honeymoon, Marian cannot sleep. In excited anticipation of seeing Laura again, Marian says,

> If I only had the privileges of a man, I would order out Sir Percival's best horse instantly, and tear away on a night-gallop, to meet the rising sun--a long, hard, heavy, ceaseless gallop to York. Being, however, nothing but a woman, condemned to patience, propriety and petticoats, for life, I must respect the housekeeper's opinions, and try to compose myself in some feeble and feminine way. (152)

Marian hereby acknowledges that men have more power over their options, and she longs for that power. For Marian, being "nothing but a woman" implies a distinct lack of power--even feebleness. As she later witnesses Sir Percival's ill-treatment of Laura, Marian again wishes she were a man. After taking Laura's side in a marital argument

and being chastised by Sir Percival for doing so, Marian angrily thinks,

> If I had been a man, I would have knocked him down on the threshold of his own door, and have left his house, never, on any earthly consideration to enter it again. But I was only a woman--and I loved his wife so dearly! (189)

Again, Marian equates her lack of power with being female. She tempers her frustration, however, with common sense, linking her possible actions with their probable consequences. The circumstances surrounding this wish are more volatile than those surrounding her earlier wish, yet Marian does not denigrate her femininity here as she did earlier. Instead, she not only accepts the limitations of her feminine role but still values rationale over impulse.

One other occasion illustrates Marian's wish for masculine power. When Count Fosco has discovered Marian and Laura's hiding place, Marian tells Walter of her reaction to the Count's letter: "My hands tingled to strike him, as if I had been a man! I only kept them quiet by tearing his card to pieces under my shawl" (432). She expresses no reservations about being female here. Instead, she takes action, symbolically tearing the Count to shreds.

In the intervening pages between Marian's wish to strike Sir Percival and her wish to strike the Count, she

suffers a grave illness. Commenting on illness in the nineteenth-century novel Reed says,

> Illness frequently plays an important part in the completion of the moral design. And, most certainly, illness was a traditionally recommended occasion for meditation upon life's vanities. . . . (14)

The post-illness Marian will not be denied doing what she deems necessary because she is a woman. Her illness serves as a catalyst for self-actualization. And for Marian, self-actualization is synonymous with accepting her androgyny. Her feminine fetters fall, and she becomes whole.

Marian herself first raises the question of her androgyny when she entertains Walter during their first breakfast together in Limmeridge House. Prophetically, the setting is "in the broad August sunlight" where no shadows of doubt may linger (20). Marian remarks,

> How can you expect four women to dine together alone everyday, and not quarrel? We are such fools, we can't entertain each other at the table. You see I don't think much of my own sex, Mr. Hartright--which will you have, tea or coffee?--no woman does think much of her own sex, although few of them confess it as freely as I do. (22)

Marian thus illustrates that she perceives herself in a feminine light--"We are such fools"--but she also sets herself apart from other women--"few of them confess as I do."

She prides herself on being different from other women. Marian continues her breakfast conversation by comparing herself to Laura:

> I am dark and ugly, and she is fair and pretty. Everybody thinks me crabbed and odd (with perfect justice); and everybody thinks her sweet-tempered and charming (with more justice still). In short, she is an angel; and I am--try some of that marmalade, Mr. Hartright, and finish the sentence in the name of female propriety, for yourself. (23)

Marian ostensibly wants Walter to define her for himself, but it appears she is incapable of self-definition. She is more certain of what she is not than of what she is.

In her struggle for self-definition, Marian frequently mentions opinions of her sex to herself and to others. At her first drawing lesson, she says, "Women can't draw--their minds are too flighty, and their eyes are too inattentive," thus deeming her sex unfocused and deficient (24). She later expresses disdain for women's inability to control their feelings. She admits in her diary, "Women, as

everybody knows, constantly act on impulses which they cannot explain even to themselves" (197). When Walter later reveals his love for Laura, Marian exhorts him to resist impulsively declaring his love: "Crush it!" she says. "Here, where you first saw her, crush it! Don't shrink under it like a woman. Tear it out; trample it under foot like a man!" (51). Again, Marian attributes power and control to men and lack of same to women.

Readers have an advantage over Marian because her self-perceptions are revealed along with others' perceptions of her as well. Many of Marian's characteristics are masculine. She says, "I do not know one note of music from the other; but I can match you at chess, backgammon, écarté, and (with the inevitable female drawbacks) even at billiards as well" (24). Apparently Marian does not consider her mind flighty or her eyes inattentive or she would not have mastered the skills that enable her to make this challenge. She also says that when she cries "My tears do not flow so easily as they ought--they come, almost like men's tears, with sobs that seem to tear me in pieces, and that frighten everyone about me" (126).

Bidding Marian farewell as he leaves Limmeridge House, Walter comments on how masculine her hands are. He says, "She caught me by both hands--she pressed them with the strong, steady grasp of a man--" (92). Laura also comments

on an aspect of Marian's masculinity, chiding her for having an untidy sewing box (another feminine virtue gone awry), and remarking that Marian's umbrella is a "horrid, heavy, man's umbrella" (163). Count Fosco not only treats Marian differently from other women, he sees her as his equal. These perceptions foreshadow her assumption of a less feminine role.

The Count's treatment of Marian serves two functions as she assumes her new identity. First, his recognition of her latent power before she recognizes it herself makes him an even more powerful foil. More importantly, Fosco forces Marian to seize her latent power. When her first attempts to enlist male help fail, she sees herself as Laura's only protection from Percival and Fosco. She relies on her feminine common sense in not making Fosco her enemy as she uses her masculine strategy to uncover their plot. "I was wise enough, under these circumstances, not to attempt to deceive him by plausible explanations--and woman enough, notwithstanding my dread of him, to feel as if my hand was tainted by resting on his arm," Marian says (209).

As Fosco's devious plans unfold, Marian's aggressiveness and strategy likewise unfold. She first defeats Sir Percival by openly threatening him with legal measures. He acquiesces when Fosco does not support him. Marian realizes that, alone, Percival constitutes an easy

match for her. She utilizes her strength to neutralize Percival's position. "As long as I had him to deal with alone, I felt certain of not losing my presence of mind. Any woman who is sure of her own wits, is a match, at any time, for a man who is not sure of his own temper" (240). Percival unwisely underestimates his adversary, and she undermines him by exerting power she did not know she had.

Fosco does not make the same mistake as Percival. Trying to stop his devious plan, Marian relies on the best of both her feminine and masculine attributes, drawing from her reservoir of strength without attributing it to either masculine power or feminine weakness. She carefully masks her power from Fosco, realizing that he is a far more cunning enemy than Percival. She says, "I hid my disgust from him--I tried to smile--I, who once mercilessly despised deceit in other women, was as false as the worst of them, as false as the Judas whose lips had touched my hands" (237).

Marian aggressively takes control and eavesdrops on Fosco and Percival from the veranda roof. She changes from her rustling silk dress and her multiple white petticoats into a dark petticoat and her traveling cloak. She says, "In my ordinary evening costume, I took up the room of three men at least. In my present dress, when it was held close about me, no man could have passed through the narrowest spaces more easily than I" (248). Symbolically, she sheds

her feminine inhibitions along with her petticoats as she climbs out the window, leaving her passivity behind. Accepting her androgyny makes this feat possible.

Fosco commits one of his few errors here; he does not consider an eavesdropper above him, especially in an area where a man could hardly fit and where a woman would likely never go. Marian discovers the villains' plans by taking this chance. She hears Fosco warn Percival about her. Fosco compares women to children, saying there are only two ways to handle them: by using force or by refusing to be provoked. But the villain knows Marian is no ordinary woman. "Where are your eyes?" he asks Percival.

> Can you look at Miss Halcombe, and not see that she has the foresight and resolution of a man? With that woman for my friend, I would snap these fingers of mine at the world. With that woman for my enemy, I, with all my brains and experience--I, Fosco, cunning as the devil himself as you have told me a hundred times--I walk, in your English phrase, upon eggshells!

Fosco follows this tribute with a toast to Marian's love and courage, saying that she "stands firm as a rock between us two, and that poor flimsy pretty blonde wife of yours" (252).

Marian's androgyny places her both literally and figuratively between Laura and Fosco. Carolyn Heilbrun in Toward a Recognition of Androgyny "claims that androgyny circumvents literary patterns of dominance and submission associated with rigid paradigms of gender" (Humm 67). Fosco's admiration of Marian could be partly attributed to his recognition of her androgyny and the power therein. This recognition forces Marian to assume the hero's mantle to save Laura. The book Psyche as Hero: Female Heroism and Fictional Form includes several characteristics of the female hero which Marian amply exemplifies. Author Lee Edwards states that the female hero always possesses remarkable physical characteristics. "Her status is partly conveyed by her capacity to draw the crowd's attention to her person. Often . . . she is remarkably un-beautiful . . . [provoking] repulsion at odds with fascination" (33). Edwards also cites social marginality and economic insecurity as "characteristics employed frequently as heroic markers" (21).

It is Marian's assumption of power which most secures her hero status, however. In a patriarchal society, such as that of the Victorians, a female hero clearly constitutes an anomaly. Edwards cites the female hero's assertion of power as "subvert[ing] the fundamental dialectic of power and submission that feeds society's dynamics" (22).

Collins's contemporaries may not have identified Marian as a hero, but reviewer Harry Quilter makes two interesting observations about the novel which illuminate Marian's heroic role. First Quilter notes, "The so-called hero of The Woman in White disappears for some hundred of pages in the most vital portion of the book, without our even noticing his absence" (580). Marian probably functions as Walter's alter-ego at this time, as The Woman in White is rife with alter-egos: Sir Percival and Fosco, Laura and Anne, Laura and Marian, etc. Marian serves as surrogate hero only until she cannot fulfil the role any longer; she then turns the role over to Walter.

Jean Kennard corroborates this view, maintaining that Collins uses "the two suiters" convention in The Woman in White, and that Marian,

> acts as a substitute for Walter Hartright for most of the novel. Although the two suiters convention works on the surface in the familiar way, the sympathetic figure of Marian and the count's admiration for her independence at least hits at an underlying criticism of woman's traditional role in marriage. (57)

Quilter's second observation concerns the book's ending, which he maintains actually concludes after the confrontation between Fosco and Hartright. Quilter

comments, "Then, lo and behold! We have some twenty more pages. . . (581). In these final twenty pages, Collins picks up the domestic thread once again, and Walter confers angelhood upon Marian. Hence the novel's final line brings the strong-willed, androgynous Marian into the demure Victorian drawing room. "Marian was the good angel of our lives--let Marian end our Story" (498).

Offering yet another interpretation of Marian, D. A. Miller discusses gender identification in The Woman in White at length in his book The Novel and the Police. Miller analyzes both Walter and Marian in a Freudian context. About Marian he states,

> However 'phallic,' 'lesbian,' and 'male-identified' Marian may be considered at the beginning of the novel, the implicit structuring of these attributes is precisely what is responsible for converting her--if with a certain violence, then also with a certain ease--into the castrated, heterosexualized 'good angel' of the Victorian household at the end. (176)

Miller's interpretation and inference of such a subtext is strained and overlooks the fact that the plot is primary in a sensation novel. Despite Collins's sexual liberality, his novels feature characters which were subordinate to plot;

his works do not concentrate on revealing troubled sexual psyches.

Kennard also comments on Marian's "feelings for Laura [which] often seem more loverlike than sisterly" (59). Kennard, however, offers a more plausible explanation than Miller:

> I do not mean to suggest that there is any conscious sexuality here, only that Collins, in creating an independent woman, had no way to describe her except through attributes and behavior that are traditionally masculine. Like Charlotte Brontë in her creation of Shirley and George Gissing in his creation of Rhoda Nunn, Collins discovered his society lacked models and, indeed, language for female strength and initiative. (60)

Kennard's interpretation fits the sensation genre much more aptly than that of Miller.

Walter and Marian jointly plan the final strategy to reclaim Laura's fortune. Only Walter, however, asserts the physical action as Marian tacitly abdicates her power to him. Walter attributes his success to Marian, saying, "My absolute reliance on her was the one earthly consideration which helped me to restrain myself, and gave me courage." (428). But as the book ends, the redefined Marian fully

sheds her androgyny and again assumes a passive role. U. C. Knoepflmacher notes,

> But just as Walter and Laura revert to their stereotypical roles after Fosco's defeat, so does Marian Halcombe again become a subsidiary figure, the kindly maiden aunt of Laura's and Walter's child. Collins deliberately toys with the artificiality of this return to convention. (365)

Peterson comments that "Collins often champions the cause of women in his fiction. . . . In The Woman in White he makes a strong case for granting married women control of their own money apart from the community property of the marriage" (49). Other Collins novels reflect his concern for fallen women and those deprived of their rightful inheritance. Strong female characters dominate both his later novels No Name and Armadale. Unmarried Magdalen Vanstone, who may be seen as either the heroine or the female hero of No Name, assumes a traditional angel in the house role when she marries at the end of the novel. Lydia Gwilt, the leading character of Armadale, remains a villainess throughout the novel and is denied any semblance of real or surrogate angelhood.

Unlike Coventry Patmore, Wilkie Collins worried little about the sensibilities of his readers. He condemned many social inequities in his novels and probably realized that

the angel in the house was a lofty, untenable ideal. As The Woman in White constituted his first real success in the writing field, however, he could not afford to ignore this paradigm.

Dickens undoubtedly urged Collins to incorporate the characteristics of the ideal into Marian's portrayal. In fact, Dickens may have even insisted upon it, as his periodical All the Year Round had only been in business for seven months when serialization of The Woman in White began. Also, Victorian society had not yet forgiven Dickens for making his marital woes public, and he dared not risk affronting his contemporaries even further. Hence, in his role as editor, which was always finely attuned to his audience, he may have been even more sensitive to what characters readers would or would not accept.

Collins witnessed first hand Dickens's many ruptured personal and professional relationships when people disagreed with the emminent author. The moderately-successful Collins needed the widespread readership All the Year Round offered. In later years when his reputation was more secure, Collins once complained about Dickens's female characterizations. According to a Collins biographer, "He claimed that since the portrayal of Nancy in Oliver Twist Dickens 'never afterwards saw all sides of a woman's character--saw all round her'" (Robinson qtd in

Knoepflmacher 360). Hence, reverting to the stereotypical ideal may have been an editorial compromise.

The artificiality of turning Marian into a more conventional female at the end of the novel could well be more than a mere narrative device, however. It could be Collins once again playing the alter-ego game with his readers. Knoepflmacher concludes, "In The Woman in White Collins deftly undermines the fictional conventions he purports to follow" (368). Much as a judge tells a jury to disregard information inadvertantly brought to their attention, Collins knows his audience can not and will not disregard Marian's pre-angel role, no matter what Walter says or does to redefine her. Hence, Collins leaves readers a final paradox: a female character consciously perceived as a surrogate angel but subconsciously perceived as a powerful, androgynous woman.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: DECODING STEREOTYPES

Not all Victorian women were "condemned," as Marian lamented, "to patience, propriety, and petticoats for life" (152). While the ideal of the saintly wife and mother presupposed a definite role for women, the problem of self-definition plagued many women at mid-century. The rapidly-changing society necessitated changing role definitions as well. Hence, the ideal of the angel in the house began disintegrating even as it was being formed. Knowing all the nuances of the stereotype, however, helps a reader assess to what degree the stereotype operates in Victorian society at large, in fictional female characters, and, perhaps most interestingly, in the life of the writers who created those characters.

In reality, the domestic angel bore little resemblance to the average Victorian middle-class housewife. The hard physical labor and mental acumen needed to manage a household and a family contradicted the vision of the weak, childlike woman who lacked logic and direction. While the average housewife stayed at home, economic necessity forced many married women of both the middle and lower classes to

children were prohibited by law from working in the mines in 1842, images of women, often naked, wearing harnesses made of chain, hauling carts of coal deep beneath the earth haunted Victorian memories during the period in which Patmore and Collins were writing. Countless middle-class married women wrote poetry, short stories, novels, and columns in periodicals to help support their families as well. The parameters of propriety slowly expanded as society realized the incongruence between the stereotypical angel and the real woman.

Single women suffered similar problems of definition. Not all of them sought marriage, a primary criterion for angelhood, contrary to the usual perception of the Victorian spinster. Single women such as Harriet Martineau and Florence Nightingale echoed Jane Austen's sentiments about the joys of "single blessedness." Many determined single women, such as Martineau and Nightingale, developed meaningful lives away from the domestic sphere.

By mid-century, women's rights became a public issue. Women's periodicals reflected growing concerns beyond the home for women of all classes as women sought better educational and employment opportunities. The Englishwoman's Review, founded in 1866, "became virtually the magazine of record for the woman's movement" (Schur 595). Thus organized feminists paradoxically coexisted in

the same place and at the same time as the stereotypical angel in the house.

Parallels in female characters and the angel in the house illustrate Victorian confusion about the stereotype. The profusion of literary conventions and devices for female characters created during the period reflects a panorama of angels, fallen women, double heroines and the like. Although the paradigm probably would have evolved without Patmore's poem, Honoria, about whom the poem is written, possesses all the stereotypical qualities of the angel. She is passive, compliant, demure, and deferent to Felix in all matters. As feminists point out, the poem is written from a masculine perspective. Felix, the male narrator, also reinforces the masculine perception of the angel, as Honoria herself says very little. Most of the dialogue in the poem that is not between Felix and Honoria is between Felix and other males, contributing even more to the masculine perspective.

The Woman in White offers a much broader perspective of the stereotype. Laura and Madame Fosco portray static characters and very much represent the angel in the house. Marian presents a contrast to the stereotype. Like Martineau and Nightingale, she shuns marriage. She does, however, assume angel characteristics of submissiveness and passivity when it suits her purposes. Although her

character reflects many different literary devices, she seems more real than many Victorian fictional women because she does not fit squarely into any category. The adjective "insipid" surfaces again and again in criticism of female characters during this period, but critics never apply that assessment to Marian.

Studying real women and fictional females reveals paradox, but studying the individuals who created or inspired those characters reveals even stronger contradictions. In Patmore's case, looking at his first wife and marriage, which so profoundly affected the writing of The Angel in the House, reveals an interesting paradox: Emily Patmore was not an angel in the house. In the midst of her own wifely and motherly duties, she pursued a writing career. Even though her works focused on the domestic realm of children and servants, her writing career reveals intelligence and dedication to something besides her home and family. She also initiated renting their home and moving into more modest quarters to generate income. Although Emily did this for her husband, her logic, not his, conceived the idea. She was a capable, intelligent woman little resembling the passive angel in the house. Ironically, the man who articulated the image of the Victorian feminine ideal was happily married to a woman whose personality did not fit into the prescribed mode. Her

real life status was incongruent with the image her husband held of her.

Both of Collins's mistresses blatantly defied description as angels in the house as well. Moralistic Victorian society must have been aghast at his living with not just one but two women without the benefit of clergy. Neither woman appeared concerned about her reputation, however. Graves, who lived with Collins for over 25 years, once left him and married someone else. She and Collins resumed their living arrangements a short time later, and she reportedly did not bother divorcing her husband. Rudd, who may have garnered a small measure of sympathy from Victorian society for having had one child out of wedlock, compounded her social transgressions by bearing two more illegitimate children. Although Graves and Rudd represent extremes of Victorian womanhood, the angel ideal seems to have had little, if any, impact on their lives. Polite company, of course, received neither of them, but neither were they shunned by their community.

Collins himself probably found the angel stereotype boring in both real life and in fiction. He advocated women's rights long before it was popular to do so. His own flaunting of convention suggests a more egalitarian outlook than that of many of his contemporaries. His novels all feature female characters who are much more rounded than

most of those drawn by his fellow writers. Practical considerations about publication, however, probably forced him to incorporate an angel or two into his works. When doing so, however, he never allowed the angel a leading role.

In reality few women fit the ideal of the angel in the house although many strived to do so. The fact that so many women's lives contradicted the ideal should make scholars skeptical about all Victorian stereotypes, not just the angel in the house. Hence, the stereotypical assumption that the Victorian age's prescribed roles for men, women, and children made for a less complicated time is erroneous. Contradictions and complications arose from people trying either to fulfill or ignore these ideals.

Commenting on the incorporation of societal ideals into literature, Reed says:

> Stylization in literature is a way of consolidating and preserving the state of the times. By understanding the forms that stylization takes, one may discover anxieties and hopes of the audience who accept such conventions. Insofar as writers alter, attack, or ironically reverse stylizations or conventions, these conventions become indicators of new modes of

> perception, and often of some form of discontent as well. (491)

Patmore's depiction consolidated and preserved an ideal of the time; Collins's depiction indicated both discontent with the ideal and a new perception independent of it.

Recognizing stereotypes such as the angel in the house provides enrichment for readers of Victorian fiction and poetry. Observing literary conventions employed by writers to reconcile the ideal with the real reveals the confusion that the paradigm created for many Victorians. Perceiving a writer's skillful incorporation of stereotypical traits into a character who primarily defies the stereotype itself presents new possibilities about the literature, the people, and the age itself. Recognizing stereotypes and literary conventions while analyzing Victorian fiction in light of these factors obviates Strachey's proposition that ignorance simplifies and clarifies the historian's task. If one believes literature reflects life, then the historian as well as the literary scholar can ill afford ignorance of stereotypes.

REFERENCES

Ackroyd, Peter. Dickens. New York: Harper Collins, 1990.

Agress, Lynne. The Feminist Irony: Women on Women in Early Nineteenth-Century English Literature. Cranbury, NJ: Associated UP, 1978.

Altick, Richard D. Victorian People and Ideas: A Companion for the Modern Reader of Victorian Literature. New York: Norton, 1973.

Rev. of The Angel in the House: The Betrothal. The Eclectic Review ns 9 (1855): 546-56.

[advertisement]. The Athenaeum: Journal of English and Foreign Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts 141 (1854): 1406.

Auerbach, Nina. Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982.

Banks, J. A. Victorian Values: Secularism and the Size of Families. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.

Basch, Francoise. Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel. Trans. Anthony Rudolf. London: Allen Lane, 1974.

Beeton, Mrs. Isabella. The Book of Household Management. London: Beeton, 1861.

Bentley, Nicholas. The Victorian Scene: A Picture Book of the Period, 1837-1901. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968.

Brimley, George. "Coventry Kersey Dighton Patmore: 1823-1896." Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism Ed. L. L. Harris. Vol. 9 Detroit: Gale, 1981-. 330-331.

Brown, Julia Prewitt. A Reader's Guide to the Nineteenth-Century English Novel. New York: Macmillan, 1985.

Bryant, Arthur. Pageant of England 1840-1940. New York: Harper, 1941.

Calder, Jenni. Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction. New York: Oxford, 1976.

Champneys, Basil. Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore. 2 vols. London: George Bell and Sons, 1900.

[Chorley, H. F.] "Minor Minstrels." The Athenaeum 1421 (1855): 76.

Christ, Carol. "Victorian Masculinity and the Angel in the House." A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women. Ed. Martha Vicinus. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977. 146-162.

"Wilkie Collins." Victorian Novelists After 1885, Dictionary of Literary Biography 18 (Detroit: Gale, 1983) 472-491.

"(William) Wilkie Collins: 1824-1889." Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism. Ed. L. L. Harris. Vol. 1. Detroit: Gale Research, 1981-. 171-192.

Collins, Wilkie. The Woman in White. Cambridge: Harvard, 1982.

Cruse Amy. The Victorians and Their Books. London: Allen and Unwin, 1935.

Daleski, H. M. The Divided Heroine: A Recurrent Pattern in Six English Novels. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984.

DeVere, Aubrey. Rev. of The Angel in the House. The Edinburgh Review, or Critical Journal 107 (1858): 62-68.

Disraeli, Right Honorable B. Sybil: or, the Two Nations. London: Longmans and Green, 1871.

Edwards, Lee R. "Flights of Angels: Varieties of a Fictional Paradigm." Feminist Studies 5 (1979): 547-570.

---. Psyche as Hero: Female Heroism and Fictional Form. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1984.

Eliot, George. The Mill on the Floss. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980.

Eliot, T.S. "Wilkie Collins and Dickens." The Times Literary Supplement 4 August 1927: 525-26.

Freiwald, Bina. "Of Selfsame Desire: Patmore's The Angel in the House" Texas Studies in Literature and Language 30 (1988): 538-561.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. New Haven: Yale UP, 1984.

Godfrey, Elizabeth. English Children in the Olden Times. New York: Dutton, 1907.

Golby, J. M., ed. Culture and Society in Britain 1850-1890. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986.

Gosse, Edmund. Rev. of "Poems." The Athenaeum 3059 (1886): 771-72.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. Our Old Home and English Notebooks. Cambridge: Riverside, 1891. Vol. 8 of The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne. 15 vols.

Hellerstein, Erna Olafson, Leslie Parker Hume, and Karen M. Offen, eds. Victorian Women: A Documentary of Women's Lives in Nineteenth-Century England. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1981.

Himmelfarb, Gertrude. Victorian Minds. New York: Knopf, 1968.

Holbrook, David. Images of Women in Literature. New York: New York UP, 1989.

Holcombe, Lee. Victorian Ladies at Work: Middle-Class Working Women in England and Wales, 1850-1914. Hamden, CT: Archon, 1973.

Houghton, Walter E. The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870. New Haven: Yale UP, 1957.

Humm, Maggie. Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critics. New York: St. Martin's, 1986.

Johnson, Edgar. Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph. 2 vols. New York: Simon, 1952.

Johnson, Wendell Stacy. Sex and Marriage in Victorian Poetry. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1975.

Kennard, Jean. Victims of Convention. Hamden, CT: Archon, 1978.

Knoepflmacher, U. C. "The Counterworld of Victorian Fiction and The Woman in White." The Worlds of Victorian Fiction. Ed. Jerome H. Buckley. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975. 351-369.

Langland, Elizabeth. "Patriarchal Ideology and Marginal Motherhood in Victorian Novels by Women." Studies in the Novel 19 (1987): 381-394.

Marcus, Steven. Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England. New York: Basic, 1964.

Miller, D. A. "Cage aux folles: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins's The Woman in White." The Novel and the Police. Berkeley: U of CA Press, 1988. 146-191.

[Oliphant, Margaret.] "Sensation Novels." Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine 91 (1862): 564-584.

Oliver, E. J. Coventry Patmore. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956.

Palmer's Index to "the Times" Newspaper. Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint Ltd., 1965.

"Coventry Kersey Dighton Patmore: 1823-1896." Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism Ed. L. L. Harris. Vol. 9: 324-367. Detroit: Gale, 1981-.

"Coventry Patmore." Victorian Poets After 1850, Dictionary of Literary Biography 35 (Detroit: Gale, 1984) 171-194.

Patmore, Coventry. The Angel in the House Together With the Victories of Love. 1903. Introd. Alice Meynell. London: George Routledge, n.d.

Patmore, Derek. The Life and Times of Coventry Patmore. London: Constable, 1949.

Peel, Mrs. C. S. "Homes and Habits." Early Victorian England, 1830-1865. Ed. G. M. Young. London: Oxford UP, 1934. 77- 151.

Pearsall, Ronald. Public Purity, Private Shame: Victorian Sexual Hypocrisy Exposed. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976.

Peterson, Audrey. "Wilkie Collins and the Mystery Novel." Victorian Masters of Mystery: From Wilkie Collins to Conan Doyle. New York: Ungar, 1984. 11-69.

Quilter, Harry. "A Living Story Teller (Mr. Wilkie Collins). "Contemporary Review 53.316 (1888): 572-93.

Reed, John R. Victorian Conventions. n.p.: Ohio UP, 1975.

Scheurle, William H. "Amusements and Recreation: Middle Class." Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia. Ed. Sally Mitchell. New York: Garland, 1988.

Schur, Owen. "Periodicals: Women's." Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia. Ed. Sally Mitchell. New York: Garland, 1988.

Smith, W. John. "Child Labor." Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia. Ed. Sally Mitchell. New York: Garland, 1988.

"Starvation Case at Southampton." The Times [London] 10 January 1850: 6e.

"Starvation Case at the Southampton Poorhouse." The Times [London] 3 January 1850: 5b.

Strachey, Lytton. Preface. Eminent Victorians. By Strachey. New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988.

Utter, Robert Palfrey and Gwendolyn Bridges Needham. Pamela's Daughters. New York: Macmillan, 1936.

Vicinus, Martha, ed. Introduction. Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1973.

---. A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1977.

Wilson, Angus. The World of Charles Dickens. New York: Viking, 1972.