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# Murder She Wrote: Victorian Women and Deviant Desires

Sarah E. Knowles

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# MURDER SHE WROTE: VICTORIAN WOMEN AND DEVIANT DESIRES

by

SARAH E. KNOWLES

(Under the Direction of Lindsey N. Chappell)

## ABSTRACT

Sensation fiction allows Victorian women the space to develop apart from the desired angel in the house archetype that is prominent within the realist genre. Pamala Gilbert and Janice Allan are among scholars that outline the social construction of sensation fiction through middle- and upper-class perceptions as the reader's reactions elicit the desired sensational effect. However, what is causing these reactions? In order to analyze sensation fiction's social influence on women more closely, it should be studied alongside its muse, realism, to further understand the potential reactions of Victorian audiences. There are clues found within Victorian marriages that uncover a new discourse for women through the comparison of mirroring genres. I have paired two realist novels alongside two sensation novels to study the parallels between each main female protagonist and their marriages, highlighting where genre defining boundaries blur and female desire runs rampant. Studying genre in this way establishes sensation fiction as an exaggerated version of realism through bigamy plots, hidden identity, discovery of individualism.

INDEX WORDS: Desire, Marriage, Individualism, Houses, Women, Haunting, Landscape, Genre, Sensation, Realism.

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

“I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will.”<sup>1</sup>

Shock. Scandal! Desire. These adjectives frame the sensation genre as it rises to popularity in mid nineteenth-century Britain. Conversely, the realist genre celebrates moments of reservation and rational choices. Both the realist and sensation genres prompt discussions of women in domestic spaces and how they handle social obstacles that arise through marriage; therefore, they have shared dialogue about normal conventional roles for women and how they deviate when viewed through the perspective of a different genre. During the nineteenth century, several shifts in popular genres both reflected and evoked different thinking about conventional roles for women. By pairing the two genres together, I show how sensation highlights gothic elements that critics such as Janice Allan and Armstrong have previously discussed with an alternate analysis that allows women to have more control over themselves as individuals when their emotions and desires are validated. Sensation novels mutate the character arcs of women, illustrating a formula of exaggerated emotion that erupts at its boiling point causing the heroine to be cast into the realist trope of the “mad woman.” However, it is up to the audience to question the motives.

Armstrong describes how the “formalist definitions of genre rely on a permutation of the natural sciences model of creating a taxonomy of texts by family resemblances” (58). This definition of genre connects rational thought to a method of categorizing texts that models after scientists in their fields. Realism emulates the basic conventions of society at their most ideal form and effectively suppresses emotional reactions to do so. British realism rationalizes

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*. (247).

heightened displays of emotion by ascribing residual elements of sensibility to a protagonist's display of neurosis.<sup>2</sup> However, the realist genre does not exist without opposing outside forces for long because "during the very period when the novel was consolidating the formal conventions of the genre, there were periodic outbreaks of new and remarkable versions of the gothic, along with a proliferation of subgenres that include the romantic novel, the sensation novel, the imperial gothic novel" (Armstrong 23). This boom of new subgenres shows potential connections between one another as they were published in the same period and social climate. I argue that the sensation novel evolves from realism, creating a new literary space to critique societal norms about marriage and feminine desire. Instead of analyzing the gothic elements found in realist novels such as supernatural elements, I address those characteristics of realism in conjunction with sensation fiction. Therefore, I move forward from the gothic and analyze its defining characteristics as creating sensation for realist plots. The sensation genre creates a new discourse that gives female characters a new voice. Sensation fiction writes a new narrative for female characters who act on emotional impulses and confronts issues of marriage that act as catalysts for a new social awareness of wives. Pamela Gilbert comments that when we analyze genre as if it "serves as a set of reading instructions, a meta-text situated in social discourses, then genre itself becomes a dialogical process" (59). Approaching genre as set of rules highlights how marriage is the social discourse that instructs the reader how to digest all four novels, acting as the controlled variable if just given those instructions. However, adding a layer of genre to the instructions creates a dialogue to analyze reoccurring social discourses

In this thesis, I show how the sensation genre builds on realism as a foundation. Both genres utilize the marriage plot, placing the spotlight on the potential bride and subsequent

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<sup>2</sup> On definitions of Realism, see Introduction pp 1-25 from Armstrong's *How Novels Think*.

wives. This woman has exaggerated emotions, desires, and actions that stem from her real anxieties of cultivating an ideal marriage and domestic space. Where a woman must fulfil her destiny as the angel in the house in the realist genre by the end of the novel, sensation questions how far women will fall when they are allowed the space to do so. The women in question challenge their individualism against the construction of their marriages to demonstrate how sensation gives women agency to follow through with normative and deviant desires.

Desire for the women of realism and sensation revolves around their marriage plots. Where a secure marriage is the normative desire for the realist characters Jane and Catherine, acting out and threatening the integrity of the marriage plot is deemed deviant for Lady Isabel and Lady Audley. These established and married women show how a woman's normal desires of financial and social security can be weaponized against her by the same social standards that force her to gamble her luck on an eligible suitor. Critics define sensation fiction through its plots that have been shown to portray rebellious women that challenge social norms as well as reflect the cultural anxieties of modern men that made up the eligible suitors.<sup>3</sup> We can uncover why these women act out to an extreme degree by looking at the root of the issue each female protagonist is attempting to solve through rebellion.

By examining the connections between the realist and sensation fiction, I will show how women specifically bridge the gap between this pairing of genre through their deviant desires that have escalated from relying on a husband for social and financial security, to an overwhelming impulse to be an individual woman that will in turn label them insane. Analyzing realism alongside sensation challenges the rationality of realist women against the scandal stirred up by sensation. Are these women truly that different or do they express their deviance in different

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<sup>3</sup> On definitions of sensation, see Chapter Two pp 17-33 from Jessica Cox's *Victorian Sensation Fiction*.

ways that respect the boundaries of their genres? Throughout my analysis I will answer this and show how the audience is called to be their own detective and investigate the mystery of hidden identity.

To discuss genre, I will look at two novels that Victorian scholars conventionally label as “realist” and two that we traditionally have called “sensation.” *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* were both published in 1847 amidst the rising popularity of the realist genre. On the other hand, *East Lynne* was published in 1861 with *Lady Audley’s Secret* shortly after in 1862 as the new sensation novel increased in popularity. While each category of genre’s novels were published close together, the small gaps in publication times shows how variable genre can be over the span of a few months. Through both pairs of novels, I analyze how feminine desire carries across the categorized boundaries of genre as a consistent foundational social discourse founded in marriage. Jane, Catherine, Lady Isabel, and Helen’s desires are significant to connecting the angel in the house figure to the most deviant woman driven to criminal action to secure the financial security from marriage.

One common thematic denominator across realism and sensation fiction is the domestic expectations of women and how they contribute to society through marriage. Where each genre can stand alone, I will show how sensation fiction depends on realism to create shock with examples of real anxiety. This is explicit where “boundaries were destabilized at the precise locations that parallel discourses were disrupted: those of gender, sexuality, and class, among others” (Gilbert 62). My discussion of women and genre will highlight those parallel discourses to confront how gender expectations box women into the desired angel in the house archetype, limiting their normal desires within domestic space as wives and then as mothers. In the realist novels, I will show how marriage is in the foreground of the main female protagonist’s character

arc as it defines her contribution to society. She must suppress her anxieties about her pending domestic role, whereas the sensational heroines have the space within their genre to act on those built-up emotions, allowing their desires to take control. A different kind of woman is presented in each genre; however, they mirror each other through shared emotions of jealousy and desires for autonomy. I want to show how Lady Audley and Lady Isabel are able to be successful in sensation by creating excitement through a bigamy plot and the exploration of marital relationships. They successfully defy marital conventions by engaging in relationships outside their original marriages yet are inevitably punished for their social crimes. On the other hand, Jane and Catherine laid the foundation for the resilience of women at home by returning to that domestic space untouched by permanent scandal.

A common thread found across these genres is the use of hidden identity that is dependent on a character foil; however, in the sensation novels the mystery is taken a step further to call on the reader to act as the detective and uncover the heroine's hidden identity while another murder-mystery unfolds in the background of the plot that coincides with each revelation. Since I am comparing two distinct genres, turning to their audiences is an important factor to understanding their relevance to popular Victorian society. Armstrong describes how the popularities of these "mainstream novels offered readers the fantasy of domestic plentitude or wholeness of being within the household, then popular romances rendered all alternatives to such a household as a monstrous life form capable of transforming the individual from a self-governing citizen into an instrument of group desire" (25). Here the reader is placed in the world of a relatable situation based in domestic life, especially with the popularity of realist novels. While Armstrong mentions the transformation of desire through romance novels, I argue that this is also accomplished through sensation fiction as the mainstream ideal of marriage flirts with

divorce and themes of bigamy as the wives are given more agency to act out against realist tradition of acting as an appendage of her husband and pursue their desires, no matter how deviant they become. Sensationalism thrives off its audience's relation to the realist themes and then hooks them with scandal that exaggerates their own experiences in marriage and the home.

The succession of novels I will include in my analysis evolves from the most ideal realist novel to the most shocking sensational plot as the finale. In *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, I will discuss how these novels are representative of realism yet carry undertones of sensationalism through the more deviant actions of the female protagonists as they act out in relation to their relationship with individualism. Both Jane and Catherine go on their own journeys away from their homes and consequently discover their own definition of individualism. Jane reconnects with teaching while separated from Rochester, yet she selflessly returns back to her former suitor to create a new home amidst the rubble of Thornfield's failed domestic fortress after the revelation of bigamy. Similarly, Catherine is separated from the physical space of her previous home but returns as an apparitional form within the landscape. Now Catherine has control over her own agency and uses her rejection of realist individualism to lure Heathcliff to her space beyond the moors in an attempt to take control of his identity. Here the women are not driven to commit crimes due to the confines of their genre and dedication to acting with reason, whereas the women in *East Lynne* and *Lady Audley's Secret* deviate towards crime after acting out of intense feelings of emotion. As the novels increase in their involvement of sensationalism, their heroine's female agency increases as well, letting her write more of her own story. Lady Isabel and Lady Audley begin to mirror their realist predecessors through their connection to the bigamy plot yet differ as the sensational heroines become more radical with their newfound individualism. Jane, Catherine, Lady Isabel, and Lady Audley write their own

destiny by the way they act out with criminal intent. *Murder She Wrote* situates my discussion of these four title characters within other feminist discourses as well as contemporary interests in murder mystery and true crime entertainment that has captivated audiences across the world and time.

During the next two chapters I will argue how the sensation genre evolves from the realist genre, allowing a space for socially acceptable conventions of marriage and female identity to be exaggerated and emotions to be heightened, teasing out the deviant desires of women when the angel in the house falls from the hearth, into the flames beneath to be punished for her crimes. In this space of genre, the interaction of Victorian audiences creates a discourse that opens the door to new conversations about realist characteristics while maintaining conventional endings and highlighting the similarities between traditionally opposing genres.

## CHAPTER 2

## KEEPING THE HOUSE: THE DOMESTIC ANGELS OF VICTORIAN REALIST FICTION

The marriage plot is commonly used as a device in realist novels to highlight a clear courtship at the beginning and an ordained marriage by the close. Realist novels, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* portray this through their main female protagonists desire to be married. I have chosen to pair the two protagonists because they define their use of realist individualism in opposing ways. I argue that Jane Eyre fills the angel in the house role and desires to tie her identity to her love interest, Rochester, while Catherine Linton rejects this idea of individualism by haunting Heathcliff after she is released from her marital obligations to her husband through death. While Jane and Catherine showcase these realist characteristics, they also face the pull towards sensation fiction through haunted houses and the teasing of bigamy plots with multiple potential spouses under one roof. These characters present their quests for autonomy through different plot lines, but both demonstrate how women are limited to their realist boundaries within genre by testing the limits of realism but also remaining there by the close of their marriage plots.

**The Ideal Wife**

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë's title character faces realist situations of marriage and domestic responsibility as she transitions from boarding school to the prospect of becoming a wife. This realist novel places Jane Eyre in situations that ask her to question her identity as an individual and as a wife. After Jane's aunt sends her off to Lowood boarding school, she is sent to Thornfield Hall to be a governess for the owner's daughter. During Jane's stay, the tension between herself and Mr. Rochester rise until he proposes marriage. However, their wedding is halted with the revelation that Mr. Rochester is already married and has been hiding his wife in

the attic of Thornfield. This prompts Jane to leave the house and discover who she is as an individual away from Rochester and is taken in by St. John and his sisters. Brontë uses her protagonist, Jane, to confront the challenges of finding individuality within marriage using the realism genre. However, these themes teeter on the edge of sensation as Jane takes control of her female agency after the shocking revelation of the madwoman in the attic.

While Jane Eyre is the heroine of a realist novel, she exhibits symptoms of sensation fiction through small acts of rebellion from the time she is at Lowood to fleeing Thornfield Hall. Shortly after Jane is introduced to the reader, she lashes out against her aunt, Mrs. Reed. After, Jane reflects “something of vengeance I had tasted for the first time; as aromatic wine it seemed on swallowing, warm and racy: its after-flavour, metallic and corroding, gave me a sensation as if I had been poisoned” (37). Here, Jane gets her first taste of defiance as she stands up for herself against her aunt instead of submitting to an individual of a higher station and age. She compares the act to drinking wine, highlighting the scandalous nature of disobeying her aunt. At the same time, the feeling and taste of the wine is described as the second part of rebellion and the consequences of her actions. By comparing the tingling feeling from the wine to being poisoned, Jane connects passion to murder as she alludes to the most extreme punishment for acting out against her aunt. Since Jane is a child in this first volume of the novel, drinking wine would have been against the rules, therefore the comparison between the alcoholic beverage and her rebellion emphasizes the arousing feeling for Jane as she awakens a new layer of her personality that is starting to take shape.

This fire that has been lit inside Jane is subdued when she arrives at Lowood boarding school. After witnessing a physical punishment for disobedience, Jane meets Helen Burns and is told about the dangers of speaking out against authority at the school and as a governess. Helen

warns, “it is far better to endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you” (54). Jane’s new friend emphasizes the importance of control in major to minor situations that may incite the temptation to act brashly on heightened emotions. Helen encourages Jane to endure the truth that is only known to one, instead of letting impetuous thoughts take control and lead to a spectrum of crime that escalates to murder. Rather, Jane should learn to take the high road and not prove to another the truth of a situation when the risk is greater than the reward. Helen’s comment also calls attention to genre as she molds Jane’s realist character to control her desires to be outspoken and control her agency instead of the quiet angel in the house that submits to her husband. In *How Novels Think*, Armstrong confronts the boundaries of individualism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Armstrong calls attention to genre as she discusses “what came to be known as British realism, the Victorians proceeded to rationalize the residual elements of sensibility by ascribing them to a protagonist’s naïveté or neurosis, as well as to the deceptions perpetrated by those who were heartless, twisted, corrupt, malevolent, or just plain knavish” (22). Any symptoms of anxiety or characteristics that could cause a disruption are written off as neurosis, or in extreme cases, madness. This helped to write off any socially unacceptable behavior that was associated with women in a majority of cases within the genre before sensationalist authors started teasing those traits out, exaggerating them to create shock amongst its audience and give those female victims a new voice. This can be seen in *Jane Eyre* with the character Bertha as she is cast as the resident mad woman in the attic. By analyzing Bertha through a new lens or genre, she is given another life by asking why she is perceived as insane, especially as described by her husband. *Jane Eyre* provides a baseline of female anxieties

surrounding the domestic space for the sensation genre to evolve from as Jane herself faces an internal struggle of giving into her desires or to remain the reserved graduate of Lowood school.

Jane flourishes in her role as governess at Thornfield and is instantly taken with the tall, dark, and handsome Edward Rochester. Jane expresses she “had not intended to love him: the reader knows I had wrought hard to extirpate from my soul the germs of love there detected; and now, at the first renewed view of him, they spontaneously revived, green and strong!” (170). Here Jane professes her love for Rochester to the reader, a love she formed against her better judgment. The force of the marriage plot pulls Jane and Rochester together in a realist move, yet their romance is adulterated by sensational characteristics. Descriptive words, such as ‘spontaneously’ point out an abandonment of rational thinking that is characteristic of realism. Jane acts on an overflow of emotions that overrides her training from Lowood, kickstarting the bigamy plot between herself, Rochester, and Bertha.

In volume two of *Jane Eyre*, Jane leaves Thornfield for a month in late Spring to visit her dying Aunt Reed and returns to Rochester on midsummer. Upon her return, Jane wanders the ground of Thornfield one night reminiscing about her time with Adele, her pupil, and camouflaged herself within the flora of the garden. Jane pauses, remarking how she felt as if she “could haunt such shade for ever: but in threading the flower and fruit-parterres at the upper part of the enclosure, enticed there by the light the now-rising moon casts on this more open quarter, my step is stayed—not by sound, not by sight, but once more by a warning fragrance” (241). Despite staying hidden from sight; Jane is discovered by the sense of smell as the warm fragrance of Rochester’s cigar is unavoidable due to the gravity between them. The colon in this quote signals how Jane is frozen in time as if she were going to haunt Thornfield as well as the action of haunting aligns with the reference to the moon. Both of these characteristics are

conducive of madness as the moon is a symbol of lunacy when discussed alongside women. The light of the moon casts the desire to haunt Thornfield, and therefore Rochester, which is symptomatic of madness. However, Jane is stalled in the garden by the recognition of Rochester through his familiar scent, thus, proving Jane is not controlled by the moon in this scene, but by Rochester. The male protagonist is the one silently orchestrating the women that are potential suitors, getting what he desires through manipulation. Jane falls prey to Rochester's tactics thus far because she harbors a sensual desire to follow her heart toward this manipulative suitor. While Jane embodies a realist woman and works to bury her occasional sensational outbursts, Rochester is the catalyst that reignites her deviant fire.

Rochester makes his romantic intentions known to Jane when he proposes marriage upon her return. Where the audience is only privy to Rochester's nature through Jane's internal dialogue, this proposal brings his manipulation to light. Rochester divulges his plan to win over Jane's heart, describing how he "wished to render you as madly in love with me as I was with you; and I knew jealousy would be the best ally I could call in for the furtherance of that end" (225). Rochester focuses in on using emotional manipulation to disrupt the realist desires Jane possesses for marriage and stable family, getting her addicted to the rush of jealousy. Yet, Jane remains reserved and does not go off the deep end as she continues to portray her realist role so she may ascend into the coveted angel in the house position through marriage. Talia Schaffer describes how for Jane, "marriage with powerful, dominant, wealthy Rochester offers no new vocation and indeed threatens the meager, somewhat unsatisfying one that Jane already has" (33). If Jane follows through with a marriage to Rochester as he is until Thornfield's destruction, she will lose her connection to teaching and the ability to dictate part of her female agency that informs her individuality. Jane carries the sensational desires, but the male love interest,

Rochester, is the figure who cultivates those feelings through manipulation that has become socially acceptable for men. Jealousy is an emotion that is shown to incite many sensational events within the genre, therefore Rochester's use in this situation highlights the crossover.

A naïve Jane Eyre gives in to her love and devotion for Rochester and agrees to marry her mysterious suitor. However, when the realist marriage plot is almost consummated, a secret is revealed that creates shock and scandal. Rochester's brother-in-law, Richard Mason, makes a spontaneous appearance at Jane's wedding to reveal the identity of his lost sister. Mason reveals that Bertha Mason still lives, in the attic of Thornfield Hall under the lock-and-key of Edward Rochester. The wedding is stalled as Rochester lashes out at this revelation, recklessly proclaiming: "Bigamy is an ugly word! —I meant, however, to be a bigamist: but fate has outmaneuvered me; or Providence has checked me, --perhaps the last. I am little better than a devil at this moment; and, as my pastor there would tell me, deserve no doubt the sternest judgments of God, --even to the quenchless fire" (283). Rochester teases the reader with characteristics of sensation fiction when he mingles with plots of bigamy and jealous outbursts to gain the attentions of Jane, the ideal wife. However, since the wedding was not performed *Jane Eyre* remains within the bounds of realism while also demonstrating the fine line between these two genres. Rochester admits to wanting to take another wife, backing up his reasoning with the reveal of Bertha herself.

In a fit of passion, Rochester leads the wedding guests up to Thornfield's attic and through a series of doors until he reaches a room with no windows. Mrs. Poole is there to greet the party and "in the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours, it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it

was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane” (285). Here, Bertha is depicted as a wild animal and is stripped of all humanizing characteristics, except for the mention of clothing. Jane finally comes face-to-face with her foil, Rochester’s first wife. The infamous madwoman has been locked up, caged within the house that should have been her domain as a wife. Instead, Rochester weaves his own narrative of Bertha that aids his intentions of remarrying with his lying eyes now set on Jane Eyre. Jane fits the mold of the ideal realist wife because she has been resigned and docile thus far by suppressing any feelings that would lead to scandalous acts. Armstrong uses this representation of Jane to show how “Brontë created what can only be described as an ontological gap between her most famous protagonist and Bertha Mason, a woman whose monstrous interiority disfigured her appearance and behaviors to the point where they were no longer recognizably female, much less feminine” (79). By defining the relationship between Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason as an ontological gap, Armstrong highlights the liminality as the foils mirror each other. However, I argue that the monstrous interiority Bertha exhibits was cultivated by Rochester during their marriage. The juxtaposition between Jane and Bertha’s appearance places an emphasis on wives appearing feminine for their husbands. Bertha’s narrative is viewed through Rochester’s perception, creating the ultimate image of the madwoman in the attic who failed to be an angel in the house, therefore, placing the entirety of the blame onto the woman. By molding Bertha into an animalistic figure, Rochester is the true mad man. He capitalizes on society’s harsh restrictions of wives to be subservient to their husbands in order to manipulate the system of marriage. This shocking image of what Bertha has become acts as foreshadowing for Jane if she follows through with a marriage to Rochester, thus placing her in a crossroads between genres. To complete the marriage plot, and fulfil the realist requirements, Jane must marry; however, the bigamy plot introduces sensational

devices that threaten the integrity of realism. The use of individualism also shapes the novel and determines which genre the plot belongs to, thus “we find Victorian fiction differentiating between what might be called femaleness (aggressive tendencies formerly celebrated as expressive of individualism) and femininity (the domestic virtues anchoring the new ruling-class home)” (Armstrong 80). Bertha must be kept hidden in the attic to avoid a cross between genres if Bertha represents sensation fiction and Jane, realism. Perhaps Bertha is the physical manifestation of what becomes of a woman who fights for her independence in the bounds of a realist novel where a woman is deemed mad at the slightest threat of aggression. Jane acts as Bertha’s foil in order to restore femininity to Thornfield in the absence of a wife that is sane, according to society’s standards, and to promote how an angel in the house should act when standing by her husband.

At the close of volume two, Jane’s domestic bliss is shattered with the revelation of Rochester’s first wife who has been hidden in Thornfield’s attic while the couple kindled their relationship. In volume three, Jane is faced with processing how she fits into her character’s realist plot. Rochester attempts to defend their messy situation by deflecting the blame, explaining to Jane how “the doctors now discovered that *my wife* was mad—her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity” (289). Labeling a wife as mad became an effortless way to write off any actions that did not promote or depict a woman as the angel in the house within her domestic responsibilities. Therefore, this begs the question, was Bertha Mason actually insane, or was her husband no longer satisfied with her as his wife? I argue that Bertha was a victim of a patriarchal society that values the happiness of the man. Bertha’s situation is significant to Jane because it shows her what Rochester is capable of as a husband and represents real anxieties that real Victorian women have surrounding marriage. Rochester’s actions are

acceptable within the boundaries of realism, but they turn into sensational actions when performed by women.

After quietly standing by Rochester this far into their relationship, Jane finally takes a stand for herself. On the engaged couple's wedding day, the ceremony is stalled because of Rochester's secret wife. Rochester pleads with Jane while she contemplates whether to "soothe him; save him; love him: tell him you love him and will be his. Who in the world cares for *you*? Or who will be injured by what you do?" (308). In this moment Jane chooses herself and takes control of her own agency to put her desires before the man she loves. While Jane attempts to remain within her realist borders by avoiding a bigamy plot, she causes sensation by leaving the domestic space in order to find her identity as an individual and as a woman. Jane redirects the energy she was giving to Rochester and Thornfield, to caring for her own wants. If Bertha remains a tenant of Thornfield, even in the attic, she threatens Jane's future marriage and pulls *Jane Eyre* across the threshold into sensation fiction; therefore, the young governess must flee to prevent the stain of bigamy from setting into her narrative.

Along Jane's journey, she is cast out by society because she is a woman alone without the company of a man, denoting a fall from grace. Despite following society's rules about multiple wives, Jane is still punished for not following through with the marriage plot and creates a whisper of scandal by taking control of her own agency. Jane wanders, lost and exhausted, until she catches sight of a candle in the distance and ponders the idea of reaching it in time as it "is much too far away: and were it within a yard of me, what would avail? I should knock at the door to have it shut in my face" (321). The candle represents more than a family at home, but also the realist idea of domesticity. Throughout her journey, Jane has been scorned by society as she contemplates marriage with Rochester and travels further away from that domestic space.

However, I argue that this distance from the sensationalized house allows Jane to navigate her destiny as the angel in the house. The candle on the horizon signifies a stable domestic space that foreshadows Jane's rekindled relationship with marriage and creating a warm, welcoming home. When Jane is welcomed into the house by its occupants, St. John and his sisters, she crosses the threshold of the house and "felt no longer outcast, vagrant, and disowned by the wide world. I dared to put off the mendicant—to resume my natural manner and character" (328). The proper example of an ideal domestic space makes Jane feel comforted and releases the pent-up anxiety from the scandal at Thornfield. This shows that *Jane Eyre* belongs within the genre of realism as flirtations with acts of sensation are short lived and not sustainable for her character. However, these dalliances uncover the connections between the two genres that stems from a wild flame in the home.

During Jane's stay at Moor House, she develops a routine in her new life as a teacher as well as the eye of her host, St. John. Despite previously feeling a failed engagement, Jane's character is caught up again by the marriage plot, however, in this case to another type of suitor. Jane rejects St. John's proposal of marriage, protesting the lack of romantic love between the two as she values their friendship and continues to pine for her great love, Rochester. St. John offers a rebuttal, declaring that Jane's refusal will limit her "to a track of selfish ease and barren obscurity. Tremble lest in that case you should be numbered with those who have denied the faith and are worse than infidels!" (398). Jane's suitor places her on the same level as social outcasts that do not uphold the pillars of an ideal realist genre, therefore, St. John is also commenting on the audience's social climate. St. John embodies the familiar suitor that is inclined to marry because that is included in the realistic version of events for society's young adults. Schaffer agrees, noting how St. John becomes "a variant of the familiar suitor—a version

whose disinterest in sexual connection is chilling, whose emphasis on vocation is dehumanizing, St. John becomes one way that this novel trains its readers to dislike the familiar category. *Jane Eyre* thus powerfully contributes to the growing influence of romantic marriage” (32). While this suitor is a suitable and reserved choice for Jane, the anxiety of a loveless marriage overrides her decision, and consequently, she refuses. Here, Jane begins to lean farther into sensation fiction as she relies on her emotions to make decisions, instead of being realistic about her prospects of marriage as an orphan without a dowry.

After the proposal Jane describes the days that followed before St. John left for India and the torture of remaining reactionless. Jane fixates on emotions, or a lack thereof, showing the reader that the heroine has not completely extinguished her sensational characteristics. The tension builds up in Jane like “a slow fire of indignation, and a trembling trouble of grief, which harassed and crushed me altogether. I felt how—if I were his wife—this good man, pure as the deep sunless source, could soon kill me; without drawing from my veins a single drop of blood, or receiving on his own crystal conscience the faintest stain of crime” (400). Jane highlights how society accepts violence between spouses on the part of the husband, violence that is not physical but emotional. She compares a marriage without love to a murdered spirit, causing the wife to become a shell of a person. This is comparable to Rochester’s first marriage as Bertha was eventually treated like an animal, as if she was stripped of the characteristics that made her a wife, therefore, regressing and showing signs of madness that were just cries for help.

### **Rejections of Realist Individualism**

The spiritual connection between Jane and Rochester is comparable to Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* as they both are categorized as realist novels yet mingle with creating sensation via a supernatural discourse. While *Jane Eyre*

does not stray far from its realist boundaries, in volume three, Jane hears Rochester's voice calling out to her, "'Jane! Jane! Jane!' Nothing more" (408). In this moment, the fated pair are connected to one another spiritually, as if Rochester was haunting Jane in an attempt to draw her back towards Thornfield through disembodiment to reassert his claim over her individualism. Catherine Linton enters this supernatural discourse when she reanimates into the objects and landscape, she was a part of before her death. This is shown through the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff, highlighting their connection spiritually as they break the boundaries of identity, becoming one. Where critics agree that Catherine's vitality is reanimated into objects within the landscape of the moors at Wuthering Heights, I argue that this reanimation is evidence of Catherine's location liminally between life and death. As Catherine has returned to the landscape as a ghost, haunting Heathcliff, she demonstrates her inability to fully cross the threshold into an afterlife. Catherine uses the liminal purgatory between life and death to resurrect her vitality into the objects and landscape she was once a part of to haunt Heathcliff until they are reunited after death, demonstrating rejection of realist individualism as Catherine aims to strip Heathcliff of his individualism and become one with her.

Published in 1847, *Wuthering Heights* enters the gothic discourse before it reached its peak popularity among the Victorians. Heathcliff and Catherine's story surpasses an overlying theme of toxic romance with elements of hauntings and ghosts. Ioana Boghian describes how "the Victorian discourse of the supernatural revolves around the major paradigm of the verb 'to haunt'" (56), placing Emily Brontë's novel at the center of this discourse as it alludes to and describes a haunting of a protagonist, Heathcliff. *Wuthering Heights* strays away from realism by giving metaphorical meaning to seemingly ordinary objects, creating the proper conditions for the recently deceased Catherine to carry out a haunting. As Catherine's ghost is no longer a part

of the realm of the living, she does not abide by the same earthly rules. She now has the freedom to torment and manipulate objects within the landscape to achieve her goal of drawing Heathcliff back to her. Catherine is also part of the realist genre, therefore, grounding gothic elements in reality. The use of the supernatural also provides a parallel to the sensation genre as Catherine's ghost creates scandal for Heathcliff as he is affected on the earthly plane. Aviva Briefel adds how "this unruly energy was concentrated in the period between 1853 and the early 1860s, marking a phase of British spiritualism in which the presence of ghosts was registered primary through animated objects" (210). This animation is present in *Wuthering Heights* and takes control of Heathcliff, infecting his mind with visions of Catherine as he is surrounded by objects in nature and *Wuthering Heights* itself. While Heathcliff is not plagued by moving furniture and other domestic objects, he is haunted by the animation within.

One of the narrators, Mr. Lockwood, signals to the presence of the supernatural in *Wuthering Heights* when he initially inquires about Heathcliff's wife. Heathcliff responds curtly, "you would intimate that her spirit has taken the post of ministering angel, and guards the fortunes of *Wuthering Heights*, even when her body is gone" (9). He acknowledges Catherine's presence within the landscape around him after her body no longer roams the earth. Instead, she is caught somewhere in between the earthly plane that holds Heathcliff and an unreachable afterlife that secures her place within a supernatural discourse. Mr. Lockwood represents an outside perspective to the narration of Catherine and Heathcliff's story, but he is still touched by elements of the supernatural. After arriving at *Wuthering Heights*, Mr. Lockwood finds himself plagued by a nightmare of Catherine as she calls out, "'Let me in!' and maintained its tenacious grip, almost maddening me with fear" (20). This first look at Catherine foreshadows the crossing of boundaries as she interacts with Mr. Lockwood through a dream. The memory of Catherine's

experience at *Wuthering Heights* remains as she connects with Mr. Lockwood through a dream. She does not attempt to cause harm to the narrator, like she interfered with Heathcliff, but instead makes her presences known through a mode of haunting that can be explained through a rational explanation that it was just a dream. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane interacts with a similar supernatural presence when she is separated from Rochester in volume three. Where Jane briefly feels the pull of Rochester to come back to him, Catherine infiltrates the outer frame of the narrator's story. Before Mr. Lockwood begins narrating Catherine's story, the apparition interacts with him, creating a hint of suspense that leaves the audience to ponder if the threat of the supernatural could come true. According to Boghian, dreams in *Wuthering Heights* "contain prophetic power, characters experience moments of genuine clairvoyance, and the barrier between the living and the dead collapse" (60). Before the reader is led through the threshold into Catherine and Heathcliff's narrative, Mr. Lockwood describes a sneak peek into his own experience with liminality. Mr. Lockwood and Nelly Dean's narration sets the stage for a haunting as they delve into the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine, placing *Wuthering Heights* soundly as a member of the supernatural discourse.

In order to analyze Heathcliff's hauntability, his relationship with Catherine must be addressed first since she is in control of her individualism, allowing her more power than Jane possessed alongside Rochester. Catherine reanimates vitality not only into objects but into Heathcliff himself. When Heathcliff is first introduced, Catherine's father refers to him with the pronoun 'it.' This objectifies the young boy as Mr. Earnshaw describes how "he thought it better to take it home with him at once than run into vain expenses there; because he was determined he would not leave it as he found it" (30). Heathcliff is objectified from the moment he is introduced. Catherine exposes his objecthood in order to haunt him through his physical body

while he remains on an earthly plain. As she reenters the landscape through reanimating objects, she does so with Heathcliff. He acts as his own container that facilitates the haunting; therefore, only in death and reunion with Catherine will he be set free. Lutz contends that Heathcliff's "body craves the release of death, as if it desires to assert its status as material. Heathcliff never properly separates himself from objecthood" (402-403). Although Heathcliff attempts to separate himself by leaving Wuthering Heights to acquire wealth and become a gentleman, his established objecthood since his arrival to the house follows him like a shadow that Catherine's ghost crawls into, never letting go. Catherine now has the upper hand, possessing more freedom and agency to take control over Heathcliff. Approaching the reanimation of objects through a feminist lens demonstrates the shift in power to Catherine's favor as she leans away from a traditional marriage plot and into a liminal space between the realist and sensation genres, allowing her space to explore her desires to marry Heathcliff within the safety of the landscape after her death.

Whereas in the landscape of the living, Heathcliff exudes power over Wuthering Heights and the characters that reside there, he can no longer command Catherine in her ghost form. However, what separates an unruly ghost from the hysterical woman archetype? While Catherine is afflicted with bouts of delirium while alive, this was not out of hysteria, but her desire to travel to an afterlife where she can be reunited with Heathcliff away from the moors. Catherine experiences an episode of delirium before her death, exclaiming, "Oh, I'm burning! I wish I were out of doors—I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free...and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed?" (109). Catherine desires to escape from the house and away from the domestic space she is trapped in with Edgar Linton as her husband. Congruent with her physical and mental state, the delirium shows through the text in the form of dashes, exclamation points, and ellipses. She notes the changes she is undergoing

while demonstrating through punctuation her eagerness to continue on to an otherworldly life. By mentioning her childhood, Catherine recalls memories of Heathcliff, signaling her desire for a return to their relationship before he abandoned the moors. Warhol concurs, describing “the illogicality to the punctuation...though contributed by the narrating self, mirrors the disordered state of mind of the experiencing self. And that state of mind—terrified, irrational, accepting as real what cannot *be* real—typifies the heroine of Gothic fiction” (866-867). Catherine moves away from the hysterical archetype, into a refined heroine who transcends gender roles. Her desire to be with Heathcliff sparks this episode that realism defines as neurosis, yet I argue that Catherine is sane. Catherine creates sensation among readers through her dramatic episodes, tying this realist character to the sensation genre. Nelly Dean notes that during Catherine’s delirium “there was no moon, and everything beneath lay in misty darkness” (109). Where the moon is associated with lunacy and hysteria, a lack of one highlights how Catherine is not bound to the gender rules of femininity. The absence of the moon proves that her hysteria was not a result of her female identity.

As Catherine gains more control over her femininity, Heathcliff loses control of his masculinity. Through their otherworldly bond, Catherine and Heathcliff are shown as doubles that reflect gender differences as one remains living and the other is within a liminal space. According to Warhol, signs of doubleness have the potential to be “related to the ambivalence about gender difference—the persistent but inconsistent undermining of traditional gender roles—that runs throughout the Brontë’s’ works” (871). The doubleness of Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship facilitates a give and take that changes the roles of their gender dynamic. Where Heathcliff builds upon his masculinity through wealth and property after returning to *Wuthering Heights* in order to exude power over Catherine, she undermines his plan

by utilizing her death to reanimate her vitality into the objects and landscape around Heathcliff. Thus, Catherine effectively holds power over her masculine counterpart by taunting him with the only thing he truly desires, herself. Catherine and Heathcliff's dynamic is the opposite of Jane and Rochester as the latter follow traditional gender roles of the man chasing and courting after the woman. These heroines, Jane and Catherine, are categorized within the same genre but illustrate different examples of realist individualism as Catherine rejects the idea of being an appendage of her husband. Oppositely, Jane desires to be married and fulfil her role as a submissive wife.

After Catherine's death, where one may conclude she has passed on to an afterlife, Heathcliff questions this, exclaiming, "where is she? Not *there*—not in heaven—not perished—where?" (145). If not in heaven, nor completely absent from the earth, Catherine is trapped in the landscape, her own purgatory between life and death. She slowly takes control while reanimated through his objectivity, transferring her spirit to his. Catherine foreshadows this take over to Nelly while she is still alive, stating, "Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff—he's always, always in my mind—not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself—but, as my own being—so, don't talk of our separation again—it is impracticable" (72). In order to remain with Heathcliff, she becomes a part of the Yorkshire moors instead of transitioning on to an afterlife. Through Catherine and Heathcliff's spiritual connection, they are drawn together, unable to part with one another even in death. Thus, Catherine is caught in a liminal space between life and death in the landscape where the couple formed their relationship. Wang points out that "the everyday boundaries...are repeatedly broken down and blurred in *Wuthering Heights*, creating a constant state of fluctuation which is profoundly unsettling to the reader, and which calls into question conventional notions of reality" (168). As *Wuthering Heights* develops, it evolves further into a

supernatural landscape as lines between the living and the dead fade away, causing Heathcliff to question what is real and what is a trick of his imagination.

While Catherine is reanimated into objects, she utilizes the landscape of the Yorkshire moors to fuel her ability to haunt on the earthly plane she is no longer a part of. The presence of the supernatural within the landscape creates a loophole for Catherine to slip into while she carries out her mission of haunting Heathcliff to incite their reunion. Mr. Lockwood senses this liminal space within the landscape when Heathcliff offers to walk him back across the moors to Thrushcross Grange, noticing how “the whole hill-back was one billowy, white ocean, the swells and falls not indicating corresponding rises and depressions in the ground” (25). The green hills of the moor fades away to reveal an expansive ocean, indicating a liminal space between the two houses that incites twists and turns for the characters who encounter it. Mr. Lockwood recognizes the possibility of hidden narratives that lie like secrets on the ocean floor. Lauren Goodlad indicates to the presence of “*occulted landscapes*: geographic formations that bespeak the ontological gap between what individuals positively know and what they feel to be real but cannot directly perceive” (112). This description creates a definition for the landscape in *Wuthering Heights*, that accounts for Catherine’s ability to seamlessly reanimate herself into the objects through the liminal space created by the occulted Landscape. While Heathcliff knows that Catherine is dead, he also feels her presence in the landscape, as if her soul has not passed onto an afterlife. The Yorkshire moors uses Catherine and Heathcliff’s connection and her reanimation of objects to create a supernatural landscape that “troubles the ontological borders between...life and death, past and present, nature and supernature” (Goodlad 110). Catherine becomes a part of the liminal space between life and death, creating a plane for her to cross between borders as a ghost or through the reanimation of objects within the landscape.

As Heathcliff struggles to come to terms with the news of Catherine's death, he calls on her to take shape within the occulted landscape so that she is never lost to him in spirit as well as in body. Heathcliff calls out to Catherine, asking, "I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad!" (145). Heathcliff acknowledges the existence of ghosts, inviting Catherine to haunt him and foreshadowing his madness caused by her reanimation. He then becomes, as Goodlad suggests, "a kind of walking, talking avatar of an object-oriented ontology, Heathcliff, like Mary Shelley's monster, is a posthuman archetype" (127). This establishes the connection of objecthood to Heathcliff, turning him into a gothic creation that is manipulated by Catherine's ghost until they are reunited.

In order to return to the landscape of the living, Catherine reanimates her vitality within the objects she was familiar with, therefore facilitating the haunting of Heathcliff. Deborah Lutz maintains that objects become "a location where the line separating life and death seems to become porous. Here matter and space do more than hold traces of the dead; they act as evidence" (394). The objects once owned or associated with Catherine when she was living allow her to reanimate them, now that she is recently deceased as they already hold traces of her previous life, proving her existence. If Catherine is trapped in her own purgatory that she created through the landscape, the porous nature of objects allows her to stand at the threshold to the living, just present enough to torment Heathcliff to madness. Heathcliff becomes aware of Catherine wherever he turns, questioning "what is not connected with her to me?...In every cloud, in every tree—filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every objects by day, I am surrounded by her image!" (280). Catherine animates nature that is a part of the landscape surrounding Heathcliff so that he is consumed by her presence and the reminder that she is close by but not physically there. As the haunting escalates, Catherine increases her ghostly presence.

Despite attempting to locate Catherine, Heathcliff only discovers that “the entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!” (280). By reanimating the objects that are familiar to Heathcliff, Catherine brings the associated memories back to life. This drives him further into madness, as he can feel her but cannot reach out and touch her. Although he tries, Heathcliff realizes when he opens Catherine’s coffin, “though it cannot be discerned, so certainly I felt that Cathy was there, not under me, but on earth” (250). While Catherine is not reanimated in her body, she is present in the coffin in an attempt to draw Heathcliff to her physical body. She becomes more frightening by showing Heathcliff that she is present in the landscape and not trapped in her once human form. Therefore, she is able to attract Heathcliff to her grave, showing him that she is no longer a part of her body but in a liminal place that is preventing her from transitioning into an afterlife.

Catherine Linton slowly exhibits symptoms of delirium that coincide with Heathcliff’s renewed presence at Wuthering Heights, highlighting their connection to each other and to the landscape of the Yorkshire moors that also houses Thrushcross Grange. Nelly Dean describes how Catherine’s eyes “no longer gave the impression of looking at the objects around her; they appeared always to gaze beyond, and far beyond—you would have said out of this world” (135). Catherine begins to disassociate from her reality among the living as she begins to focus on a place that is free from the conflict she faces between Heathcliff and her husband, Edgar Linton. She fixates on another world where she has more freedom, as the houses and objects around Catherine confine her. A previously delirious Catherine is able to escape the “shattered prison” (139), as she is “tired of being enclosed here...wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there” (139). Catherine is unable to be contained on the same landscape with the living any longer. Here she signals her desire to join another world where she possesses freedom

over herself and no longer kept within Thrushcross Grange or her husband. Thus, Catherine escapes to this glorious world, but not before she is confined to her own purgatory. She is destined to haunt Heathcliff from her liminal space between life and death until they are reunited, now able to obtain their heaven alongside each other. Catherine does not possess Heathcliff but latches on as she draws “him toward death, over to that place where she is” (Lutz 402). She uses the liminal space between life and death to haunt Heathcliff to madness, facilitating their reunion beyond the moors. Catherine fulfills her premortem promise to Heathcliff, not to “rest till you are with me” (109), by interrupting his sleep so whenever he “closed [his] eyes, she was either outside the window, or sliding back the panels, or entering the room, or even resting her darling head on the same pillow as she did when a child” (251). By choosing Catherine’s childhood bed for reanimation, her ghost has direct access to Heathcliff physically as well as emotionally. The bed itself signifies a place of rest; however, Heathcliff is unable to sleep because he is tormented by Catherine’s unruly spirit. This piece of furniture also represents Heathcliff’s impending death as it becomes the symbol of his coffin, where he returns as he is driven to madness by the ever so persistent Catherine. Where Catherine previously disturbed Heathcliff constantly, she did not torment him with restlessness. Heathcliff describes to Nelly how he “was tranquil. I dreamt I was sleeping the last sleep, by that sleeper, with my heart stopped, and my cheek frozen against hers” (249). In the dream realm, Catherine is able to cross the boundary from her liminal purgatory into Heathcliff’s subconscious to show him his fate. Heathcliff describes this image as tranquil, which signals his desire to be reunited with Catherine once more, as that would put his mind and Catherine’s haunts to rest.

At the close of Mr. Lockwood’s narration of his experiences at Wuthering Heights, he reflects on his time on the landscape, remarking how he, “listened to the soft wind breathing

through the grass; and wondered how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in the quiet earth” (292). While the earthly plane is quiet, the space in-between is awake with the movement of supernatural beings. He places a heavy emphasis on the quietness of the earth, juxtaposed with an oxymoron. This contradicts the silence of the moors, highlighting instead the unrest experienced by the dead. Mr. Lockwood is perplexed that such a quiet landscape could house a tumultuous event. Begging the question, was the haunting just a figment of the imagination, or a yearning between two lost souls trying to find their way back to one another.

## CHAPTER 3

## BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE: THE FALLEN ANGELS OF VICTORIAN SENSATION

## FICTION

The popular genre of sensation fiction houses the shocking desires of women that captivated its target female audience in the Victorian period. Sensationalism follows in the footsteps of realism as it draws from real-life characteristics of nineteenth-century society and marriage. However, this genre uses scandal to highlight women's normative desires of a secure domestic space and demonstrate how they are instead perceived as deviant because of the lengths each female protagonist went through to claim them. As I analyze the connections between the realist and sensation genres, I will confront the anxieties within the domestic sphere, loss of identity through bigamy plots, and the fall of the angel in the house archetype in Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*.

Similar to the rush of watching modern true crime entertainment, sensation fiction creates a space that sets up the reader as a detective in charge of gathering the salacious details of women who fall from society's good graces as they attempt to solve the unsolved mystery at hand. In discussions of genre, Janice M. Allan describes how "'the sensational' was perceived as a problem to be investigated, a riddle to be solved, and literary critics embarked on a self-conscious attempt to determine what it might signify, both in and of itself, and for mid-Victorian culture and society more generally" (85). Since the genre creates a stir on its own, it also creates its own publicity for the mysterious plots of individual novels. Yet, what is the riddle of 'the sensational?' I challenge that the sensational elements that pull readers in are the same situations that the everyday, middle-class Victorian woman experience. Pamela K. Gilbert adds to this conversation, stating "sensation novels as a genre are perceived as feminine, despite their

murderers, plots, and generally very active characters, which would see, to align them with the ‘masculine’ adventure novel” (74). Sensation novels provide the space for female authors, such as Wood and Braddon, to write their female protagonists going on adventures that challenge their domestic role as the married angel in the house. With newfound freedom, women can alter their identity to create new lives for themselves, however, this version of events generally leads to shocking revelations that create the characteristic excitement for sensation fiction.

By hiding behind plots of bigamy and fits of jealousy, women’s real anxieties are magnified and manifest through the protagonists, sometimes brash actions. As the sensation genre evolves from its realist roots, it begins to threaten “the bedrock of values that ground the English middle-class subject” (Allan 86). The female protagonists in these novels act out their own deviant desires that are unattainable through realism. In *East Lynne*, Lady Isabel Vane confronts anxieties around her identity as a wife and a mother that cause her to act without thinking, thus threatening her family. Whereas in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, Lucy Graham resorts to murder in an attempt to keep her identity and secret hidden. When the question of her sanity arises, the men around Lucy write off her actions on madness, excusing the possibility that Lucy could commit such a crime while in her right mind as a woman, despite her unhappiness within her marriage. Despite the differences between Isabel and Lucy’s stories, the source of the sensational factors and anxieties begin in the home. This space brings realism and sensationalism together, as they use one another to magnify the cracks in the domestic mirror.

Published in 1861, Ellen Wood’s sensation novel, *East Lynne*, catches the attention of Victorian society as the literary genre gains popularity. Before Lady Isabel Vane, the main female protagonist, takes over the household at East Lynne, she arrives to town for the first time with her father. Upon visiting Mrs. Levison, Lady Isabel Vane is introduced to her grandson,

Francis Levison. While pouring tea, Mrs. Levison calls attention to Isabel's necklace that consisted of a "golden cross, set with seven emeralds, which Isabel wore round her neck. It was of light, delicate texture, and was suspended from a thin, short gold chain" (15). A present from Isabel's mother, this necklace represents a bond with her mother that completes her image as a respectable and titled lady. However, when Lady Isabel drops the golden cross after Mrs. Levison asks for a closer look, Francis Levison "managed to set his foot upon it, and the cross was broken in two" (16), therefore shattering the image the cross represents in a moment that foreshadows Lady Isabel's fall from grace when she abandons her idealized family. In an image of broken emeralds, Isabel's life is laid out for her. As this cross is a symbol of a religious faith, it reflects the sacrament of marriage that Isabel will take with Mr. Carlyle before the eyes of God. While their marriage embodies the ideal Victorian upper middle-class household, envy takes control over Isabel when her husband engages in secret meetings with her foil, Barbara, that is represented through the emeralds of the cross necklace. Then, just as Francis breaks the physical cross, he is the catalyst that inspires Isabel to spontaneously abandon her family, thus fracturing her marriage (and embodying the impetus) and inciting the scandalous events that create the sensation of East Lynne.

Francis Levison brings immorality to the central marriage plot developing between Isabel Vane and Archibald Carlyle. In her chapter, "Historicizing Marriage, Developing the Marriage Plot," Talia Schaffer breaks down the male suitors present in the marriage plot as they have evolved from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. Schaffer points out that, "in order to have a marriage plot, the sexualized romantic figure has to have a realistic rival, a morally admirable figure" (68). Thus, Wood creates rivalry between Carlyle, the moral familiar suitor, and Levison, the romantic rake figure, as they are presented to Lady Isabel Vane before she is involved with

either man. The tension among this love triangle, creates a foundation for scandal that sensationalize an otherwise, realistic marriage. Schaffer discusses the marriage plot, as it “commented on reality, often by posing a compensatory fantasy that worked very differently from real practices” (41). Through the love triangle of rival suitors and a stirring bigamy plot that will erupt later in the novel, *East Lynne* demonstrates a fantastical marriage that can only happen in a fictional setting. While these marriages deviate from real practices, they continue to offer a source of relatability to the novel’s audience. The fantastical elements of the fictional marriage between Isabel and Carlyle, as well as in other marriage plot novels, to generate shock and scandal.

Where a marriage plot may appear rigid and loveless, there are layers of impropriety hidden underneath that are keen to make their appearance after the newlyweds say, I do. Before scandal takes root, realist characteristics must be established to connect with the female, middle-class audience. Lady Isabel is new to her domestic role and still learning the responsibilities of being Archibald Carlyle’s wife. One of those roles, as the residing angel in the house figure, is possessing the keys of the house. When Lady Isabel moves into East Lynne, she is introduced to her future lady’s maid, Joyce, who asks permission to keep the keys of Isabel’s things. However, Lady Isabel responds, saying “I don’t know anything about the keys...I never keep them” (150). This shows how Lady Isabel is unprepared for the complete domestic responsibility of keeping a house, foreshadowing her role as a non-traditional wife of her status. Isabel’s imperfections as a wife are highlighted here in order to set her up as a foil to Barbara Hare. The two women find themselves silently at odds with one another as they are both involved with ever so charming, Archibald Carlyle. This begins to establish Carlyle as the “suitor of rational esteem [that] was emerging from novelists’ and conduct writers’ imaginations...modeling middle-class virtue:

reliability, duty, trustworthiness. He will develop into the familiar lover” (Schaffer 69). Carlyle is set up as the ideal husband which contrasts with his chosen bride. Where Barbara would be a reliable choice for a wife, Carlyle chooses a woman who is uncouth in comparison. So, how does this differ from a realist marriage? Outside the pages of the novel, Barbara would have been Carlyle’s first choice by nature of their previously established relationship and her preparedness to be an angel in the house. Yet, this does not lead to the same page-turning-excitement of watching an inexperienced Isabel navigate the trials of marriage and seduction of another man.

This sensational excitement derives from the marriage plot in *East Lynne*, by calling on the reader to play the detective and distracting them from the deviant wives. Wood evokes sympathy for Lady Isabel to get audiences infested in her storyline, so they are anxious to watch her scandal unfold, alongside a longstanding murder-mystery. Over time, audiences read on as Isabel and Carlyle’s marriage yields three children, adding to Isabel’s responsibilities as a wife and mother. While Isabel adores her children, she gets caught up in jealous feelings as her husband and Barbara are seen spending more time together in discussions alone. After Isabel witnesses Barbara and Carlyle walking through the moonlit garden, arm-in-arm, her feelings of envy reach their pinnacle. The omniscient narrator then describes Isabel’s feelings whereby “a jealous woman is mad; an outraged woman is doubly mad; and the ill-fated Lady Isabel truly believed that every sacred feeling which ought to exist between man and wife, was betrayed by Mr Carlyle” (271). Here is the turning point of the novel where Isabel sparks the most illicit scandal by running away with another man and abandoning her family. Wood takes the realistic feelings of betrayal and amplifies them into the realm of sensation. In “Sensationalism Made Real,” Janice M. Allan argues that “by re-locating the signs and tokens of realism to the realm of the sensational, they are effectively framed; a gesture that invited the reader to pause and take

note of the normally ‘invisible’ disjunction between the ‘true’ and the ‘real’” (106). These signs can be found in this moonlit garden scene. Where Lady Isabel’s feelings are real, stemming from the scene unfolding below her, her interpretation of the scene is not true. The blurred lines between what is real and what is true, is enough ambiguity to cause the two literary concepts to mimic each other. In the novel form, realist and sensational traits invite the reader to pay attention to the differing details to solve the unfolding mysteries as well.

In Lady Isabel’s story, emotions are the driving factor that are used to illicit sensation from realistic feelings. These feelings of jealousy towards Barbara stem from Isabel’s conflict around identity as she learns to navigate being a proper angel in the house for East Lynne, while also filling her role as a mother and lover to her husband. Isabel buries these thoughts instead of discussing them with her husband, allowing Francis Levison to benefit from her insecurities and “soothe her with all the sweet and dangerous sophistry of his crafty nature” (271). This description conveys Levison’s true intentions with Isabel and possible responsibility for the murder mystery plot in the background of the novel. In a quick escape, Isabel flees East Lynne with Levison under the cover of night, leaving her family and identity behind and falling victim to the “aristocratic rake: a leisured person seeking sexual pleasure (Schaffer 69). In a shocking turn of events, Lady Isabel falls from her place alongside Carlyle by succumbing to the charismatic charms of a dishonest man who will never marry her. Where in reality, the average middle-class Victorian woman does not have the means or ability to leave her marriage, Isabel acts out those fantasies safely within the confines of fiction. However, she also grapples with the consequences of abandoning her family as she falls further into scandal and can now bear the title of fallen angel. Mariaconcetta Constantini calls attention to the responsibilities of an ideal wife who was expected to “incarnate a ladylike ideal that combined upper-class refinement with

bourgeois morality. The incongruities of this role were exposed by sensation novelists, who unveiled the mercenary motives of marriages, related bourgeois domesticity with crime and dramatized the collision between morality and social performance” (106). Lady Isabel was financially dependent on her husband, but she fell short in other areas of display and household management. This is where Barbara and Lady Isabel collide. Barbara is of a similar class station and has been groomed to run a household; therefore, she is the realistic and ideal choice for the proper social performance. The previously established murder mystery plot, that is continuing in the background of Lady Isabel’s improprieties, is the source of the drama. Barbara and Carlyle often take covert strolls alone, leaving Isabel to wonder about an ongoing affair between the two friends. This inclusion of crime in the background then contributes to the social transgression of adultery on behalf of the wife.

Now that Isabel is no longer the lady of the house at East Lynne, Barbara Hare has the opportunity to swoop in and become Carlyle’s new wife, thus inciting a bigamy plot between the trio. After a train accident that kills Isabel’s infant child and accompanying nurse, a letter detailing her death was accidentally sent to her ex-husband, Archibald Carlyle. With the news of Isabel’s supposed death in the hands of her former family, “it was over. Lady Isabel Vane was as one forgotten” (327). Now Isabel is stripped of her former identity and can have a fresh start, however, she is drawn back to East Lynne under the guise of a nanny and tutor. The new Madame Vine sets aside her past vices with Barbara as she accepts her new position at East Lynne, but how long can she keep her former identity a secret while living alongside her divorced husband and his new wife. These new living arrangements create the foundation for a bigamy plot that further scandalizes East Lynne. While Carlyle is under the impression that his first wife is dead, he not only remarries, but chooses the woman who was the source of Isabel’s

insecurities. In her discussion of bigamy plots, Maia McAleavey argues, “the novel’s main point of contact with sensation fiction is its agonizing account of three spouses in the house at once” (63). When Carlyle takes a new wife, he is technically still married to Lady Isabel, despite circumstantial evidence alluding to her death. Therefore, Carlyle creates a new bigamous dynamic that hooks readers once again as Wood finally exposes the main scandal that has been brewing at East Lynne. The fallen angel and angel in the house archetype converge under one roof as “the house is the most important metonym of marital happiness and monogamous seclusion, and therefore it is also the most terrifying haunting-ground for a lingering erotic past” (McAleavey 47). While East Lynne attempts to represent the ideal domestic house, Wood emphasizes realistic stressors of marriage that result in fictional scandal between the families involved to a sensational degree. Archibald Carlyle is given a second chance at the sought-after marital happiness with Barbara Hare. In this second marriage, audiences get a glimpse of an ideal union as Barbara is Isabel’s foil and more prepared for the responsibilities of being a wife. On paper, Barbara is a doting angel in the house that puts her husband, even before her own children. Yet, Isabel’s plot line still lingers, showing that Carlyle’s first marriage was a love match that still harbors desire between the walls of East Lynne. In order for the ideal version of marriage to survive, Isabel must make her peace with the family she lost after succumbing to jealousy and anger to let her husband live in monogamy, no longer haunted by her presence. Isabel must be punished for her social crimes, therefore, completing a realist plot despite *East Lynne* being categorized as sensation.

After Lady Isabel’s train accident left her scarred and in need of employment, she lays her old feelings of jealousy to bed to return to *East Lynne*. She shifts her focus to her children as she becomes their governess and teacher. When one of her children, William, is on his death bed,

“Lady Isabel had consented to remain at East Lynne during Mrs. Carlyle’s absence, on purpose that she might be with her children. But the object was frustrated: for Lucy and Archibald had been removed to Miss Carlyle’s” (608). With the second wife out of the house, Isabel gets a taste of her old life as a new version of the insecure lady of the house, naïve to the responsibilities of marriage. It took Isabel removing herself from the home, to discover the woman she wanted to be, separate from society’s version of ideal domestic life. This demonstrates Isabel’s shift from jealous wife to caring mother, calling attention to the hierarchy of domestic roles wives play in their marriages. Realistically, can a wife be both a devoted wife and mother? Here, the bigamy plot exposes those faults. Barbara utilizes hiring a governess to take the bulk of her childcare responsibilities to devote more time to her husband and his endeavors. On the other hand, Isabel recognizes the importance of caring for her children when she loses both roles when she abandons East Lynne.

The sensation genre allows for the exploration of these themes in a bigamous and salacious setting that draws from the anxiety of realistic marriages. While bigamy would have been inappropriate in Victorian society, this fictional space depicts an accidental surplus of wives at East Lynne. Carlyle is unaware that his first wife is still alive until the end of the novel when Isabel’s identity is exposed on her death bed. Despite Carlyle’s efforts to keep one wife, “the first clear thought that came thumping through his brain, was, that he must be a man of two wives” (614). Each wife fulfills a domestic duty through an accidental bigamy plot, yet the notion of multiple wives remains sinful. Isabel highlights the flaws in a bigamous relationship by showing her inability to completely move on from her jealous feelings of Barbara while living under the same roof. Isabel confesses to her estranged husband how difficult it has been “to live in this house with your wife; to see your love for her; to watch the envied caress that once were mine!”

(615). Luckily for Carlyle, Isabel does not use her jealousy to incite crime and instead suffers in silence. Isabel not only envy's Carlyle's love for his new wife, but how well Barbara fits into her role as a wife. While both women are living under the same roof, the tension between them rises and calls attention to "the house, both as a *metaphor*, because the house as a symbol of the eternal union of its master and mistress has been emptied of power, as a *blueprint*, because the topography of the house is mobilized through the investigation of duplicity. Was the wife there while the lover (or bigamous spouse) was there?" (McAleavey 49). Since Carlyle remarried, Barbara remakes the blueprint of the house into her own to wipe away traces of the previous wife. However, during Isabel's brief return to East Lynne, both women share similar experiences with the house, highlighting their interchangeability. By allowing the bigamous spouse to live in the house with the husband and wife, that marriage is undermined by the past that must be confronted to restore the house to its ideal order.

While Isabel was Carlyle's first wife, she becomes the bigamous spouse when she returns to East Lynne after Barbara steps into her role as the angel and mistress of the house. Isabel keeps her head down and acts as her children's governess until her health takes a turn after the death of her son. This is significant because Barbara and the children are away from East Lynne, allowing Isabel and Carlyle to be alone in the house that was once theirs. Isabel requests to see Carlyle on her deathbed to ask for forgiveness from abandoning their children and marriage all those years ago. Carlyle listens to Isabel's testimony and "'fully and freely forgives [her]'" (616). This gesture of forgiveness allows Isabel to peacefully die and erase any traces of the bigamy plot. Isabel's life of scandal and role in the bigamy plot at East Lynne is forgiven by society because her downfall elevates Barbara and Carlyle's ideal marriage. Lady Isabel Vane was destined to meet a tragic end as she was responsible for creating the scandal and

sensationalizing her marriage. The amplified emotions in this sensation novel confront realistic marital anxieties in the form of multiple wives. However, the disgraced wife receives forgiveness, and the ideal marriage regains its monogamy in a realist move that shows how sensation is not that different from realism.

### **One Woman's Drive for Self-Sovereignty**

In 1862, one year after *East Lynne*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon publishes *Lady Audley's Secret*, as the sensation novel continues to pique the interest of middle-class Victorian women. However, Braddon takes her plot a step further than Wood as she mingles with gendered crime and murderous wives. This novel centers around the elusive Lady Audley and uncovering her past after the mysterious murder of George Talboys after returning to England from Australia. Braddon uses nature to set the scene, describing how the “leaves rustled with that sinister, shivering motion which proceeds from no outer cause, but is rather an instinctive shudder of the frail branches, prescient of a coming storm” (61). This description foreshadows Lady Audley's entrance and her sinister intentions with her new husband, Michael Audley. The lack of external force causing the rustling leaves parallels to the catalyst causing Lady Audley to act out with criminal intent and bring a storm of scandal to the Audley household. In order to discover the cause of Lady Audley's sinister motives, the novel's genre must be investigated as it “acts as a topographical feature of the terrain of the marketplace and as a set of reading instructions anterior to the text itself” (Gilbert 59). The blueprint of the sensation genre denotes scandal and exaggeration, signaling Lady Audley as the main perpetrator. However, it is up to the reader to act as a detective and uncover the heroine's motives for escalating to extreme criminal activity.

Before Lady Audley's double identity is revealed, she presents to her new family as a young and innocent new bride who is still navigating her domestic responsibilities. Slowly Lady

Audley's façade is chipped away with the introduction of her husband's nephew, Robert Audley, and the frantic George Talboys. When Robert and George arrive at the Audley house, they go on a tour of the house and are halted when Lady Audley's rooms are locked. The housekeeper concludes "that [her] lady has taken the key to London" (61). Lady Audley's possession of the keys signifies her control over the house and ability to manipulate the domestic space by closing off her most intimate spaces from the public and rest of the house. This lady of the house is portrayed initially as with an elusive background and questionable motives for marrying Michael Audley as she has set strict domestic boundaries between her rooms and the other residents of the house. Even though Lady Audley has not committed a heinous crime at this point in the novel, these subtle actions that define her character relate back to genre. Janice M. Allan compares Lady Audley with genre as she argues how "sensation fiction is threatening because it is able to transgress the boundaries of class and culture by disguising its dubious origins and masquerading as something better and more worthy than it is" (90). Something as simple as taking the house keys may appear to be a simple error, but the sensational genre takes these instances and asks audiences to question the motives of the main characters involved. Sensation fiction asks the audience to be the detective and uncover the threat that is masquerading as another in order to move freely between class boundaries, typically through marriage. As Lady Audley's mask is chipped away and her identity is threatened, she resorts to murder to keep her place in a financially secure marriage.

Lady Audley's past is unable to stay buried as her new husband's nephew begins investigating into George Talboys' untimely death. Even though Robert Audley just recently met George, he felt a responsibility to find justice for his death, as he suspected foul play. George was returning to England, back to his young wife, after he left for Australia to find financial stability.

He expected to find his wife, Helen, waiting for him but he was met with a notice in the newspaper documenting her death, or so he thought. Helen was still alive under a new identity, Lady Lucy Audley. She devised a plan to fake her own death to find a better financial situation for herself and her young son. Although Helen has executed her plan well, her estranged husband begins to threaten her scheme, so she throws him down a well to silence him forever. As Robert investigates and visits his uncle at the Audley Manor, he engages with the other residents about the fate of George and how crime is committed in mundane places when others are not paying attention. Robert tells Lady Audley that he believes “we may walk unconsciously in an atmosphere of crime and breathe none the less freely. I believe that we may look into the smiling face of a murderer and admire its tranquil beauty” (124). Robert Audley’s premonitions are correct as he just described Lady Audley herself. Lucy presents as a youthful and innocent wife that married into a secure future, yet Robert suggests that someone as unassuming as her, is capable of such a crime. Therefore, the angel in the house archetype becomes a façade to mask a fallen wife that is hiding behind her innocent and dutiful characteristics. Braddon offers another, more aggressive side to middle-class wives, that Gilbert argues, “seem to be the real key in defining the novels as sensational, and it is indeed this element that current critics identify as the subversive feminist appeal of these novels” (79). Lucy becomes the key to making *Lady Audley’s Secret* sensational through her radical actions when her comfort and financial security are threatened. Just as *East Lynne* identified Lady Isabel as the key to creating sensation, Lady Audley exposes the typical anxieties of being a wife to an extreme level to shock audiences. Emma Liggins adds another perspective to this argument, describing how the “sensation plot was charged with bearing little relation to lived experiences and encouraging its women readers to lead dangerous life” (27). Liggins further connects the female audiences to sensation plots by highlighting their experiences

in the home. I counter that the sensation plot does show relation to lived experiences of the ordinary Victorian women through the portrayal of marriage.

*Lady Audley's Secret* and *East Lynne* illustrate marriage and how it is viewed across class divisions. Where Barbara and Lady Isabel represent opposing sides of economic backgrounds, Helen Talboy's identity as Lady Audley shows how an individual can cross those boundaries through marriage. The search for a financially secure and eligible spouse was a shared experience by most women, particularly of the middle class. While the average wife does not act out like Lady Audley, they share Lucy's motives for wanting a marriage that provides financial security. However, finding that perfect suitor becomes a glamour of fiction, then a reality. On Robert Audley's search for answers about his missing friend, he ponders the institution of marriage, exclaiming, "look at marriages! Who is to say which shall be the one judicious selection out of the nine hundred and ninety-nine mistakes?" (175). Robert highlights how the marriages in *Lady Audley's Secret* are related to realistic marriage plots through the uncertainty of a spouse's true identity. A bride in everyday life may not completely know her husband before marriage but may have chosen a suitor that possesses a few destructive qualities. For Helen Talboys, those anxieties come to fruition as her husband, George, cannot support their family financially after the first few years of marriage. Schaffer comments on the necessity of marriage, highlighting how "marriage is the only acceptable portal to one's future, and marriage needs to fulfill two crucial and often incompatible goals: personal romantic pleasure and pragmatic future security" (69). In Helen's situation, she sacrifices pragmatic future security for personal romantic pleasure in her marriage to George as their financial security only lasts for a few years. After George leaves for Australia, Helen once again relies on marriage to secure her future, despite already being married. Helen

takes control of her potentially destitute situation by creating a new identity, Lucy Graham, and masterfully restarts her life.

While Robert Audley continues to scrutinize a woman's role in a marriage, he is also pursuing his search for answers around the disappearance of his friend, George Talboys. After locating George's sister, Clara, he contemplates mentioning the idea that her brother was not missing but had been murdered. His internal dialogue comes abruptly to an end when their cab arrives at his destination. The omniscient narrator steps back in to comment on the mundane and repetitiveness of an industrial society, describing how humanity needs an outlet from the machine. As a result of the pent-up emotion and anger from being human, "we want to root up gigantic trees in a primeval forest, and to tear their huge branches asunder in our convulsive grasp; and the utmost that we can do for the relief of our passion is to knock over an easy chair or smash a few shillings' worth of Mr. Copeland's manufacture" (176). These violent comparisons show the juxtaposition between the heightened emotions humanity feels and desires to act out on versus what they are allowed to fulfil. This narratorial aside is directed at just the audience to foreshadow the attempted violent crimes, focusing on the relief of passion that happens with the use of violence. The intense release of emotion is also indicative of the sensation genre, thus setting the stage for scandalous behavior, but through which characters? The heroine becomes the focus of Robert's investigation as he uncovers each layer of her deception, step-by-step. Robert polices Helen's acts of sensation when he exposes her monstrous crimes to the other characters. However, Lady Audley conducts one last act of control over her autonomy by choosing to feign madness, creating an ending fit for a realist novel.

*Lady Audley's Secret* is a novel that reaches the peak of sensationalism through the ultimate crime, murder. However, the most shocking detail is the accusation of a woman

committing the murder and the motive to continue lashing out with feminine crime. While this detail is not revealed until the novel's finale, Lady Audley and her sex are placed under the microscope and analyzed against their male counterparts, primarily under the direction of Robert Audley. The concerned nephew, and friend of the victim, lets his opinion of women known as he acknowledges women as "the stronger sex, the nosier, the more persevering, the most self-assertive sex" (178). Yet, this description is also the reason "[he hates] women...they're bold, brazen, abominable creatures, invented for the annoyance and destruction of their superiors" (178). While other men may underestimate the power women have to be cunning, Robert Audley watches the domestic space with a cynical eye as he views the self-assertiveness of women to be abhorrent and an un-feminine quality. His character polices sensation to uphold realist characteristics by the close of the novel. Emma Liggins comments on this view of women as she discusses how the sensational heroine trades "on her sexuality and [uses] violence to secure her social status, the sensation heroine gained control by her manipulation of the marriage plot" (27). Where in a realist novel, the heroine would have been destitute without the support of her husband, who left for Australia to make more money, in sensation fiction, she disregards social conventions and manipulates suitors to find the most useful match that will provide the security her first marriage could not. While in *East Lynne* the shock and scandal was developed through an intense emotional reaction of assuming Isabel's husband was having an affair, Lady Audley stirs up sensation through extreme acts of violence that depict her as a dangerous women, unfit to be the angel in the house.

As tensions rise at Audley court, Lady Audley has become increasingly aware of Robert's pursuits to uncover her crime and consequently, her real identity. While visiting Michael Audley, Robert takes tea with the other company in Lady Audley's boudoir. The narrator describes this scene to the reader, paying attention to highlight the way "a pretty woman never looks prettier than

when making tea. The most feminine and most domestic of all occupations imparts a magic harmony to her every movement, a witchery to her every glance” (190). Here, Lady Audley is depicted in the most domestic role for an ideal, angel in the house figure that is fulfilling her role of serving guests as a reserved and docile wife. However, her femininity is compared to that of witchery, thus highlighting the undertones of deviance and manipulation of the domestic space. How long will Helen Talboys be able to continue to hide behind her domestic mask as Lucy Audley before she is driven to another violence crime? The longer Lucy can keep her secret, the more confidence she gains. Therefore, Lady Audley’s confidence to defy domestic rules illustrates Liggins conclusion that “women rejecting the security of the marriage plot in favor of crime posed a threat to middle-class propriety, particularly when they concealed their criminal desires behind their marital roles” (28). Robert analyzes this threat and creates anxiety surrounding women, not trusting their intentions in case they should be secretly a violent criminal, but who would suspect an innocent wife who has no prior offenses?

If women are starting to lash out with violence, they are also threatening to lose their femininity in favor of more masculine traits. During this same tea, the narrator shifts the focus to great women of England and their use of masculine characteristics in order to stand their ground within a patriarchal society that would rather see their women as an angel figure, serving tea. The narrator asks the reader to “imagine all the women of England elevated to the high level of masculine intellectuality; superior to crinoline; above pearl powder...and that cruelly scandalous and rather satirical gossip which even strong men delight in; and what a dreary, utilitarian, ugly life the sterner sex must lead” (191). Without the femininity women bring to the lives of men and their husbands, English society would be a dreary place. Yet, Lady Audley achieves both an innocent façade with her husband and a cruel secret that defies all social convention. By turning

toward violence, Lady Audley takes control of her agency and dictates who she will marry and who she will divorce when marriage no longer serves her, even if that is through murder. The tendency to lean towards violence romanticizes the ultimate crime by giving women control, “as if the murder plot might be a way for women to make their own money, as it were, in a bid for masculine power” (Liggins 35). The boundaries of sensation fiction provides a space for the heroine to drop the domestic façade and show the audience how cunning women can be when their financial and social security is threatened. The angel in the house begins her fall from grace towards something menacing and starts to kindle a spark of vengeance on the men who seek to uproot her identity.

At the pinnacle of sensation in *Lady Audley's Secret*, Robert Audley reveals Lucy's identity to Audley court. Due to her extreme actions, the men are shocked by the pure scandal of a woman driven to murder and attempt a second. While Robert attempts to describe Helen's cold-blooded actions, she commits one final act of manipulation and convinces her audience that Robert has “used [his] cool, calculating, frigid, luminous intellect to a noble person. You have conquered—a—MADWOMAN!” (294). Helen decides that pleading insanity would be the best course to follow versus being label a cold, deviant woman and can maintain her feminine façade even after getting caught for her crimes. Since lunacy in women was a common diagnosis for the slightest inconsistency of women and wives, Helen is able to make a case for genetic madness; therefore, she was not acting out of cold blood when she thought she murdered her first husband. The sensation genre can be used as a space to experience the most extreme emotions and deviant desires that provide an outlet for domestic anxieties that are also present within realism. While the opposing genres appear to have clear boundaries, they blur together on topics of domesticity and a woman's experience in a male dominated society that are expressed through their heroines.

## CHAPTER 4

## CONCLUSION

“fire! fire! fire!”<sup>4</sup>

When the rule-abiding women of realist and sensation fiction are backed into a corner, they are destined to react according to the confines of their genre, yet they both use the same catalyst to signal a revelation. Fire, or the allusion to the burning flames, is strategically placed at the pinnacle moments in *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *East Lynne*, and *Lady Audley's Secret*, thus bridging a gap between the realist and sensation fiction genres. Where fire can offer warmth and be used to spark new life, it can also quickly turn into a mechanism of destruction that is used to silence the truth, even when there is only a false alarm. This earthly element is what binds these novels together, highlighting how truly sensational realistic women can be and thus how realist sensation fiction acts as well. Despite realism and sensationalism being opposing genres, they influence each other and are threaded together by fire in the case of the novels previously discussed.

Turning towards realism, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* integrate smaller references to fire throughout their plots to foreshadow the development of the main female protagonist. At the close of *Jane Eyre*, Jane returns to the grand Thornfield Hall to find “a blackened ruin” (413), after she left to discover her identity and reclaim her female agency away from the romantic suitor, Rochester. However, at the beginning of Jane’s story, she engages in a conversation with Mr. Brocklehurst, the master of Lowood school, about wicked people and where they go after death. He pushes Jane to describe hell as “a pit full of fire” (31), that she is intend on avoiding. This reference to fire foreshadows Jane’s time at Thornfield as she embodies

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*. (555).

the angel in the house archetype and framing Rochester as the devil when their characters reach their final form after the house's destruction by the destructive flames. Jane proves that she is the realistic ideal of a wife by returning to Rochester to care for him, despite another offer of marriage, but her actions mimic the sensational women of *East Lynne* and *Lady Audley's Secret* because a marriage to Rochester is based on passion, not rational.

Now that Thornfield has become a ruin of Jane's former life, she returns to Rochester a new woman, deviating from her demure upbringing as a governess. Jane's arrival signals her rebirth of identity as her foil, Bertha, dies in the fire she started. Rochester's first wife was spotted on the roof, her "long, black hair...streaming against the flames as she stood" (416). Bertha's death by fire is congruent with her passionate and savage descriptions offered by Rochester, effectively destroying the source of Jane's pull towards deviance, or so it appears. I deduce that Bertha's death was necessary to keep *Jane Eyre* within the spectrum of realism as Jane is now the remaining woman who was Bertha's marital rival. With Rochester's lawful wife out of the picture, the bigamy plot is incinerated, and Jane can now become the new wife in compliance with a conventional realist marriage plot. Jane also continues to mimic sensational elements by returning to a maimed Rochester, whose "one eye was knocked out, and one hand so crushed that Mr. Carter, the surgeon, had to amputate it directly. The other eye inflamed: he lost the sight of that also. He is now helpless, indeed—blind and a cripple" (417). The once attractive and prosperous Rochester has been touched by the fire enough to harm but let him live to no longer gaze upon Jane's physical beauty but appreciate her sensible characteristics that have informed her ability to be a caring wife. The fire at Thornfield not only revealed Jane's new identity as the angel in the house, but molded Rochester into a realistic husband that draws from the familiar suitor. The memory of the flames also serves as a reminder to the passion that is still

alive inside of Jane Eyre that provoked her to return to her true love and succumb to her passions.

Similarly to Jane, Catherine Linton straddles the boundary between genres as she practices domestic responsibility with her husband, Edgar Linton, yet is caught in the throes of passion with Heathcliff. However, where in *Jane Eyre* there are physical flames, *Wuthering Heights* uses symbols of domesticity to signal revelations of identity throughout the novel. With Cathy running the show from beyond the grave, Heathcliff is a conduit of metaphorical fire that is shown through his brash and passionate temper. When Heathcliff returns to Wuthering Heights to win Catherine back, he is “revealed by the fire and candlelight...to behold the transformation of Heathcliff...A half-civilized ferocity lurked yet in the depressed brows, and eyes full of black fire, but it was subdued; and his manner was even dignified, quite divested of roughness though too stern for grace” (83). Heathcliff is the fire that sparks Catherine’s desires to deviate from her practical marriage and drive her to the brink of madness until they are reunited in a supernatural landscape parallel to their previous home, Wuthering Heights. The new Heathcliff is born by candlelight, magnifying his rough edges and deepening his desire to claim Catherine.

*Wuthering Heights* threatens to cross over into the sensation genre with the progression of Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship when Cathy creates scandal on the moors by haunting Heathcliff. While Catherine does not murder Heathcliff, she does take his life in the sense that he is no longer in control of his free will, under her influence. She manipulated Heathcliff from her liminal space within the moors in a sensational move that separates realistic, married Catherine Linton from her passionate apparitional form. After Heathcliff’s eventual death at the end of the novel, Lockwood describes “a fine, red fire illuminated the chimney; the comfort which the eyes derive from it, renders the extra heat endurable. But the house of Wuthering Heights is so large,

that the inmates have plenty of space for withdrawing out of its influence” (266). The remaining presence of fire at Wuthering Heights signals the presence to Catherine and Heathcliff within the moors as well as a new calm now that the destructive fire within Heathcliff has been put to rest. Now fire symbolizes the comforting domesticity at home, an element used for warmth and harmony among the new generation of residents. The angel in the house has returned to her pedestal on the hearth now that Catherine and Heathcliff are reunited. Once Catherine is no longer associated with her domestic duties to Edgar Linton and Thrushcross Grange, she utilizes the liminal space between life and death to wield destruction as she chases her deepest desire, Heathcliff.

Where fire has played a role to signal identity in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, it continues to evolve through *East Lynne* and *Lady Audley's Secret* as the flames lead to an attempted murder. *East Lynne's* false alarm begins in the middle of the night when Wilson shouts, “fire! fire! fire!...we're all a-being burnt up together” (555). During the commotion, the main protagonists and other servants are woken up and searching for the truth to these claims that turn out to be a false alarm. Once everyone has calmed down, Archibald's children are rounded up and taken back to bed by Joyce and Madam Vine. In this moment, Madam Vine's identity as Lady Isabel is exposed to Joyce. Mr. Carlyle notices a visible change in his housekeeper, exclaiming. “why, Joyce! what is the matter with *you*?...You look as if you had seen a spectre” (557). The presence of fire, while it turned out to be fake, coincides with Lady Isabel's identity reveal as her façade is beginning to crack under the pressure of the bigamy plot. It is later revealed that this is the moment Madame Vine's identity is compromised as Joyce recognizes her as the lost Lady Isabel Vane. While Isabel's connection to fire is not as destructive as Catherine's it mimics Jane's rebirth and clarity about her marital situation.

On the other end of the spectrum, *Lady Audley's Secret* creates more scandal through a house fire of its own, but this time it is set intentionally and intended to capitalize on destruction. The unassuming Lucy Audley resorts to fire after finding out Michael Audley is on to her about the murder of her first husband, George Talboys. Once again, Lady Audley takes her destiny into her own hands and finds the room where Michael is staying at Mount Stanning at the end of the novel. In an effort to protect Lady Audley's fraying second identity, she "was obligated to place the flaming tallow candle very close to the lace furbelows about the glass, so close that the starched muslin seemed to draw the flame towards it by some power of attraction in its fragile tissue" (276). Where in the previous novels, the instances of fire were not started by the main female protagonist, in *Lady Audley's Secret*, Lucy Audley is explicitly described starting the fire as she further falls from her position as angel in the house. This proves Lucy is willing to commit a second murder, more heinous than the first, to protect her position and security as Robert Audley's wife. Lucy caught creating sensation to protect her realist anxieties of being destitute without the protection of marriage. The curtains go up in flame quickly, mimicking Lady Audley's brash decisions to protect her hidden identity. Lucy blatantly sets the room on fire in front of a witness, Phoebe, and does not show remorse for what she assumes her actions will cause and continues to walk "towards the house in which her husband slept, with the red blaze lighting up the skies behind her, and with nothing but the blackness of the night before" (278). The red glow from Lady Audley's fire illustrates her aura as she makes her way back to Audley court, not caring who her pyromania maims. The color red highlights Lucy's passionate and brash actions that she makes to protect herself and secure a future, yet the further she strays from rational, the more she gives into insanity. Lucy's crimes have escalated the further she must lie to

retain her identity as Lady Audley, each more shocking than the first to retain her domestic security through marriage.

This fire is the turning point in Lady Audley's plot line when it is revealed that Michael Audley did not die in the fire at Mount Stanning and exposes her old identity, Helen Talboys. After Michael confronts Helen, she exclaims, "'I AM MAD! because my intellect is a little way upon the wrong side of that narrow boundary-line between sanity and insanity; because when George Talboys goaded me, as you have goaded me...my mind, never properly balanced'" (294). Here the Lady Audley façade fades away and Helen Talboys lashes out against the man that tore apart her secret life and marriage to Robert Audley. Helen confesses to being mad, but a man's definition of madness that is used as an excuse when a woman forms too many of her own opinions based on intellect. Helen, as a woman, is not allowed to be cunning and manipulative as those traits do not align with the angel in the house archetype. Instead, she is diagnosed with madness to write off her deceitful and manipulative character. She describes how her madness is a result of the men in her life provoking her continuously, therefore, not allowing her mind to rest.

These novels come together through a similar use of fire, where Jane emerges from the fire with a new feminine identity and harnesses the motif, Lady Audley is controlled by fire. Lucy is pulled in by the destruction of fire and alters her role as the angel in the house at Audley court from domestic and comfort to a destructive fallen angel that resorted to violence when pushed too far by men in her life. This connection of fire is significant because it is a common thread that connects two opposing genres together. The use of fire, specifically in the home itself, comments on how this motif is directly related to women and the main female protagonists I discuss. Analyzing fire within the domestic space opens a new door in how to approach

discussions of women through a feminist lens. Instead of a character rising from the ashes of a fire like a phoenix, what happens when the narrative is flipped, and fire is not used to cleanse but to as a weapon to destroy? Jane, Catherine, Lady Isabel, and Lady Audley are connected to fire in their own ways, but together they show how fire destroys identity, revealing the most shocking scandal of them all, the reality of marriage in Victorian society.

Across the four previously discussed novels, fire is used to cleanse, highlight controlled domesticity, to identify, and destroy. While each heroine wields fire in her own way, the flames are always controlled by the boundaries of realism by the close of each novel. By comparing the use of fire in both novels, my analysis shows that the women of sensation are also bound to a realist ending to make her scandalous actions excusable. Lady Isabel and Lady Audley may have more freedom throughout their plot lines, but their stories are tied up with a realist ending so they are punished for their crimes against society and the law. Where the use of fire is at its full strength by the finale of Jane and Catherine's marriage plots, Lady Isabel and Lady Audley's use of fire draws attention to their bigamy plots as it signals Madam Vine's identity and attempts keep Helen Audley's identity a secret.

In this thesis I have discussed the parallels between the realist and sensation genre, analyzing their connections through their female protagonists, bigamy plots, individualism and haunted spaces. By focusing this discussion on female desire, I show that the normal desire to have a socially and financially secure marriage can turn deviant when the angels of the house are driven to commit crimes against their marriages as well as find their female autonomy as a result of straying from their domestic space, the house. Female desire in these novels is only labeled deviant after society has pushed their female protagonists off of the domestic pedestal, creating destruction only temporarily. Critics such as Schaffer, Armstrong, and McAeavey have shown

the relevance of marriage, individualism, and bigamy; my work introduces a strong connection between realism and sensation that still needs to be discussed further. For example, how do children complicate a marriage plot when bigamy is involved? How does class contribute to this discussion that is illustrated through the title characters as well as the genre's audience? These questions can be explored further with the introduction of other novels in addition to the ones already chosen. Jane, Catherine, Lady Isabel, and Lady Audley are just the beginning to analyzing connections between genre and the surprising similarities that demonstrate the true nature of Victorian women's deviant desires.

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