

EXPLODING THE LIE: 'ANGELIC WOMANHOOD' IN SELECTED WORKS
BY HARRIET MARTINEAU, ANNE BRONTË, CHARLOTTE BRONTË
AND GEORGE ELIOT

by

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I hoped that, with the brave and strong
My portioned task might lie;
To toil amid the busy throng,
With purpose pure and high.

ANNE BRONTË

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PREFACE.

In the nineteenth-century many enlightened women writers began to move further and further from the Victorian stereotype of the angelic woman. So deeply embedded was this concept in the minds of humanity in general, that allocated male/female roles and patterns of behaviour became entrenched in the very fabric of Victorian society. Few thought to question the injustice of a system that promoted female subservience to such an extent that the mother-wife earned herself the title of 'The Angel in the House' - a catchphrase derived from Coventry Patmore's poem of 1854 (Anstruther 1992:7). (1)

However, the Victorian woman, growing increasingly disgruntled with her 'relative' status (Ellis, in Foster 1985:6), began to reject the artificial identity which had been imposed upon her by a culture of patriarchal domination. Determined to discover her own individual selfhood, this enlightened individual encountered much antagonism, not only from authoritarian males who were eager to maintain the status quo, but also from those women who were content with their servile roles.

Spearheading this revolution towards female emancipation were many courageous women writers of the day. Their novels either subtly or overtly fought for breathing space for their female contemporaries. These writings, together with the more practical reforms endorsed by the feminist movement are indicative of 'the desire for a wider outlook that was rising in the minds of all women' at that time (Acland, in Lerner 1978:187).

(1) The Victorian ideology of angelic womanhood was an established fact long before the composition of this poem. 'The Angel in the House' and variations of this term have been used for convenience in the studied works preceding the publication of Patmore's poem.

My study includes selected works of four women writers who each contributed in some degree to the collapse of the concept of angelic womanhood, and to the creation of a new identity for the Victorian woman. The careers of Harriet Martineau, through Anne Brontë and Charlotte Brontë, to George Eliot 'span...the years from 1832 to 1879 - from Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* to George Eliot's *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* - almost half a century of changing attitudes towards women as "thinking" members of society' (David 1987:xiii).

Each of these novelists, in her own way, presents a critique of the idealised woman of the nineteenth-century. My aim in this dissertation is to reveal the degree to which each is successful in her mission to 'explode the lie' of angelic womanhood, and, in so doing, free her long-incarcerated Victorian sisters.

It took great courage and fortitude to utter at times a lone dissenting voice; and female writers of the present owe a great debt of gratitude to their pioneering Victorian counterparts, who cleared the way for them to take up the banner and continue the march towards female liberation from a stifling ideology.

INTRODUCTION: Contemporary Ideology and the Move Towards a 'Widening Sphere'.(1)

— see cartoon of
M.

The cornerstone of Victorian society was the family, and at its centre resided the angel-wife, the model of femininity. Brought up to be perfectly innocent and sexually ignorant, she was deliberately constructed to be a totally dependent figure in need of protection from the corrupt and materialistic greed of Victorian industrialism. Hers was the private sphere; her domain was the home - a sanctuary - over which she presided as domestic angel. She was trained towards submissiveness, self-sacrifice and selflessness, and was expected to inculcate the feminine virtues of 'modesty, gracefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliancy, reticence, chastity, affability and politeness' (Gilbert & Gubar 1979:23). Her life was so entirely committed to others and the qualities of self-abnegation and self-renunciation were so deeply entrenched in her that she in herself was nothing - a 'relative creature', to use a term introduced by Sarah Ellis (in Foster 1985:6).

According to Mrs Ellis, who was one of the most popular writers on the subject, true womanly behaviour was observed in 'the power of throwing every consideration of self into the balance as nothing' (Dyhouse, in Lerner 1978:174) when ministering to men. (2) Martha Vicinus (1972:x) notes, in her discussion of the perfect Victorian lady, that marriage could prove to be sexually and emotionally trying for women who were trained to be affectionate, yet asexual and mentally blank. Mrs Ellis's advice to the unhappily married woman is to

(1) See Vicinus (1980) in connection with the book entitled *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, of which she is editor.

(2) Kate Chopin, in her novel *The Awakening* describes such mother-women: 'It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings... they were women who idolised their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels'(Chopin 1994:10).

remember that her 'highest duty is often to suffer and be still' (in Vicinus 1972:x). Legally, too, the woman ceased to exist on marriage as the man and wife became one. All her property, her inheritance and her children became his by law (Anstruther 1992:66).

It is thus understandable that many Victorian women, deprived of their very selfhood, began to resist the restricting influence of the ideal image imposed upon them. Virginia Woolf, so resentful of the whole concept of 'the angel in the house', wrote in *The Death of the Moth* (1942):

.... every house had its Angel. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was a chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught, she sat in it - in short, she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathise always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all - I need not say it - she was pure...(in Anstruther 1992:2).

Denied a proper education by a society which considered her to be little more than a decorative ornament in her husband's home, the angel-wife was in no way adequately prepared to take her place at her husband's side in the real world. The level of education attained by Rosamond Vincy in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1965:123) is typical of that which could be expected of middle-class girls in early Victorian England: the teaching at Mrs Lemon's establishment included 'all that was demanded in the accomplished female - even to extras, such as the getting in and out of a carriage'.

Educated only to become a more enlightened companion for her husband, the wife was nonetheless placed on a pedestal and revered as the emotional and moral guide in the home, a paradoxical vocation, considering her apparent physical and intellectual weakness. Françoise Basch (1974:6) presents an interesting viewpoint when she comments on the fact that woman, who was

formerly man's slave, was thus promoted to the rank of guide and inspiration. However, we must not forget that 'her power was the fruit of subjection and submission'.

The only area outside the home which was considered an acceptable extension of the woman's sphere of activity was that of philanthropy. As the moral guide and good conscience of the Victorian home, the woman was seen as the natural candidate for the job of ministering to the needs of the poor, in both the practical and the spiritual spheres.

Not only did the Victorian male have the advantage of pursuing his ambitions in the world at large without any limitations imposed upon him, but he also returned home to be pampered and ministered to by a devoted wife who had been suppressed into a passive existence. Thus, viewed from all angles, it becomes apparent that the Victorian man was the chief beneficiary of this one-sided marriage contract. David Morse (1993:23) points out the duplicity on the part of the Victorian male. By presenting Victorian women with the ideal of the long-suffering, self-sacrificing wife, men were not only able 'to transform the task of ministering to their own selfish needs into the highest of virtues, but they could also ensure that women were confined to the lowliest of occupations'.

This view of Victorian society governed by patriarchal domination is, to a large extent, oversimplified. Some critics comment on the fact that, until recently, gross generalisations, largely based on male literary construct, have been made concerning Victorian society as it was in reality. A recent study (Helsing, Sheets & Veeder 1983a:xi) shows that the model of a single dominant cultural myth is no longer adequate, implying that Victorian society was far more complex than has previously been supposed. Martha Vicinus (1972:ix) states that one of the principle difficulties in analysing Victorian domesticity is the variety of conflicting sources, which are often more 'prescriptive' than 'descriptive' of actual conditions.

Research is now concerned with the relationship between the prescribed ideal of womanhood and the actual reality. The study previously cited (Helsing et al. 1983a:xi-xii) argues that Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and J.S. Mill were in fact not isolated dissenters from a chorus praising one womanly ideal. However, 'until we understand how these voices of protest and prescription relate to the larger contemporary discussion, the old concept of a single public Victorian attitude towards women will remain largely intact'.

Coventry Patmore, writer of *The Angel in the House* (1854), was one of the chief prescribers of the traditional view of the ideal angel-wife. His prejudiced and dogmatic opinion on the intellectual inequality of the sexes is all too apparent in those of his works, such as *Religio Poetae*, published before *The Angel in the House* made its appearance:

To maintain that man and woman are equals in intelligent action is just as absurd as it would be to maintain that the hand that throws a ball and the wall that casts it back are equal. The woman has an exquisite perception and power of admiring all the man can be or do. She is the 'glory' of his prowess and nobility in war, statesmanship, arts, invention, and manners; and *she is able to fulfill this, her necessary and delightful function, just because she is herself nothing* in battle, policy, poetry, discovery, or original intellectual or moral force of any kind. The true happiness and dignity of woman are to be sought, not in her exaltation to the level of man, but in a full appreciation of her inferiority and in the voluntary honour which every manly nature ... pays to the weaker vessel (in Freiwald 1988:547). (emphasis added)

Again, the woman is talked of as being in herself 'nothing' - a mere non-entity, whose main purpose in life is 'her desire to please' (*The Angel in the House* II.viii.III). Patmore's patronizing attitude towards women is evident in the way in which he prescribed the parameters within which woman's happiness should be confined, as well as in his total lack of acknowledgement of each woman's individual needs and attributes. The angel-wife, in accepting her allotted role, is then rewarded with the 'voluntary honour' bestowed upon her by the ever-admiring male - a self-serving attitude indeed!

David Morse (1993:25) confirms this viewpoint in his assertion that 'for Patmore this ideal of womanhood implies not simply dedication to her husband but a total emptying out of self. She can desire nothing more than to become a vacuum that will be filled by *his* presence, *his* will, *his* intelligence'. Patmore's lines reveal his conviction:

A rapture of submission lifts
Her life into celestial rest;
There's nothing left of what she was;
Back to the babe the woman dies,
And all the wisdom that she has
Is to love him for being wise
(*The Angel in the House* II. viii. I)

A wife's role is purely functional; she caters to the male ego and is indispensable in providing emotional support. Vaughan, Patmore's narrator, receives this required encouragement from his wife when he reveals his intention to write a tale of two lovers, Felix and Honoria: (3)

Thus ever answer'd Vaughan his wife,
Who, more than he, desired his fame;
(*The Angel in the House* I. Prologue 2)

Vaughan's hero, Felix, heralds his beloved, Honoria, not only because she represents the embodiment of the angelic ideal, but also because the home which she provides for him offers a haven of domestic peace and security:

Her disposition is devout
Her countenance angelical;
The best things that the best believe
Are in her face so kindly writ
The faithless, seeing her, conceive
Not only heaven, but hope of it.
(*The Angel in the House* I.iv.I)

(3) These two names are deliberately chosen, Felix meaning 'happy' and Honoria intentionally loading the woman with the duty of being honorable.

and

on settled poles turn solid joys,
And sunlike pleasures shine at home.
(*The Angel in the House* II.vii.1)

So the nineteenth-century Victorian woman is depicted in this poem as having no definite identity of her own. Instead she rejoices in a life of doglike devotion and self-immolation in service to the adored husband. He, on the other hand, is quick to warn her that any overt appearance of unfeminine characteristics such as assertiveness or aggressiveness on her part will ensure a swift fall from grace in his eyes. In a section appropriately entitled *The Daughter of Eve*, Felix comments,

The woman's gentle mood o'erstept
Withers my love ...
(*The Angel in the House* I.xi.1) (4)

Ian Anstruther (1992:98) notes that when *The Angel in The House* was first published, the majority of the reviews were disastrous. However, when it was published again more than thirty years later, it became an immediate success. The beauty of Pastoral England was a thing of the past - a casualty of industrial progress - and the feminist voice was asserting itself with confidence. The

(4) Foster (1985:199/201) presents an interesting discussion on George Eliot's dramatic poem, 'Armgarth' (1871), which is relevant here. Foster feels that this poem is Eliot's 'most extensive exploration of aspiring female selfhood', for Armgarth rejects marriage in favour of a career. However, Graf, Armgarth's suitor, feels that '[t]oo much ambition has unwomaned her', and that she should rather be 'concentering [her] power in home delights /Which penetrate and purify the world'. Foster remarks that Graf echoes the sentiments of Patmore and Ruskin. Thus Armgarth reveals a deliberate attempt on Eliot's part to subvert the prevailing ideology of 'the angel in the house'. In fact, Foster argues that this work is 'perhaps Eliot's most honest admission that wifedom or its substitute in service to others may not be the highest female role'.

British public looked with nostalgia upon the quaintness and simplicity that they associated with the uncontaminated England of past decades. Thus '*The Angel's* plot and background exactly caught the mood of the times' (Anstruther 1992:98). Anstruther (1992:flyleaf) also points out that

Patmore's poem in praise of the perfect docile spouse, set in a landscape still clearly pre-industrial, was seized on as a powerful antidote to the dangerous stirrings of feminism and the "Strong-Minded Woman".

Another powerful voice of the times was that of John Ruskin, a staunch advocate for upholding the traditional role of the ideal woman. One of his works in particular, *Of Queen's Gardens in Sesame and Lilies* (1865), had too powerful an influence on contemporary society not to be mentioned here.

Like Patmore, Ruskin (1912:98/9) stressed the sacredness of the woman's place in the home, itself 'a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods'. He introduced the doctrine of the 'separate spheres', based on the belief that the vocations of men and women must necessarily differ owing to the fact that the sexes have social and temperamental differences dependent on the biological make-up of each.

Kate Millett (in Vicinus 1972:126) draws attention to the fact that, based on what Ruskin considered to be factual evidence, he then proceeded to 'map out their worlds, reserving the entire scope of human endeavour for the one, and a little hothouse for the other':

Now their separate characters are briefly these. The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war and for conquest. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle and her intellect is not for invention or recreation, but sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision... By her office and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in the open world, must encounter all peril and trial...(Ruskin 1912:98).

Once again it is suggested that the married woman be confined to the home and restricted in her activities. The question must necessarily arise concerning the plight of the single woman. Which is her sphere? Where does she fit into this perfectly moulded plan? Where is her home with its warm hearth over which she is to preside? Middle-class female education prepared girls for marriage, their sole 'respectable' vocation. Yet the increasing preponderance of women over men, demographically speaking, during the nineteenth-century meant that many expectations remained unfulfilled. Judged by society as a social misfit, and often deprived of a place at her brother's hearthside, the unmarried woman faced both emotional and economic hardship. Poorly equipped to take her place in society, she often found work as a governess - the one area of employment which, though poorly paid, maintained at least an aura of respectability. Few avenues of employment were open to women, and the ultimate debasement was prostitution: 'All social forces combined to leave the spinster emotionally and financially bankrupt' (Vicinus 1972:xii).

As far as education was concerned, Ruskin did reject the concept of the purely 'decorative' education offered to middle-class Victorian females. But his suggestion concerning equal education for girls and boys loses its impact when the reader discovers that he intended women to be educated only in so far as they could be of service to their husbands. As such, they would thus be 'educated partners rather than frivolous drones' (David 1987:15):

A man ought to know any language or science he learns, thoroughly - while a woman ought to know the same language, or science, only so far as to enable her to sympathise in her husband's pleasures...(Ruskin 1912:105).

Ruskin did, however, believe in the widening of the woman's sphere of activity to include philanthropy. In this concern he did have one thing in common with the feminists of the high Victorian period - a wish to get the middle-class woman out of her home. He made it apparent, however, that this leeway is permitted

her only on condition that she extends her charitable support to the other side of the garden gate. Using horticultural imagery, Ruskin encouraged the 'Queens' in the tending of their 'gardens' to concern themselves 'not only with flowers but with "feeble florets": the impoverished, the ill-educated, and the economically oppressed' (in Helsinger et al. 1983a:90). Thus, a woman may draw on her deep reserves of compassion, and, in the true nature of the self-sacrificing angel, spread her moral influence throughout society.

However, to oppose these traditional notions of the protected role of the ideal woman within the confines of the family and home, there was the growing counter-current of the feminist movement. An increasing number of women were no longer content to be dictated to and dominated by a rigidly patriarchal male governing body. Although progress was initially slow, the strength and endurance of the leaders of this movement ensured commitment to new ideals and progressive reform. The feminist voice was heard through the writings of Harriet Martineau, Anna Jameson, Barbara Bodichon and Mrs Hugo Reid. The leaders of the feminist movement wished, in the words of Mrs Reid (in Basch 1974:14), to witness 'an end to the oppression of one half of humanity by the other'. Kate Millett (in Vicinus 1972:121) states that:

[t]he Victorian debate on women appeared to be capable of challenging the most basic of civilization's socio-political institutions - patriarchy itself, together with its ancient relationship of dominance and subordination between male and female.

MS | John Stuart Mill was a prominent spokesman for women's rights and Victorian liberalism in general. Elected to Parliament in 1865, he found that he was in a position to give voice to the major issues concerning the feminists in their fight for freedom from patriarchal domination.

|| In John Stuart Mill's essay entitled *The Subjection of Women* (1869), his

arguments in support of feminism are diametrically opposed to those of Ruskin in *Of Queen's Gardens*. Referring to these differing viewpoints, Kate Millet (in Vicinus 1972:121) comments that 'compressed within these two statements is nearly the whole range and possibility of Victorian thought on the subject'. While Mill's ideas are realistic and rational, Ruskin's are romantic and emotional, yet, as Millet (in Vicinus 1972:121) also points out, 'each claimed to have at heart the best interests of both sexes and the larger benefit of society'. While Ruskin adopted a conservative view in his support of the traditional ideal woman, Mill opted for a radical approach far in advance of the era in which he lived.

The main force of Mill's (1975:427) argument was his drastic conviction of the equality of the sexes. He insisted that:

the principle which regulates the existing social relations between two sexes - the legal subordination of one sex to the other - is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement, and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.

Although this statement was met with outrage and disgust at the time, Mill stood his ground. He found Ruskin's restricting concept of the separate spheres totally unacceptable. In Mill's opinion, woman should be free to widen her sphere of activity, move outside the circumference of the home and take her place alongside her male counterpart in a man's world. Mill's reply to Ruskin's theory of the separate spheres, which was based on the notion of different natures of men and women, was that no-one really knows what woman's true nature is - a fact which, to a large extent, still holds true today. He felt that it had always been prescribed for her by a male-dominated society. Mill (1975:451) argued that '[w]hat is now called the nature of woman is an eminently artificial thing - the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others'. He therefore considered Ruskin's theory invalid.

Millett (in Vicinus 1972:128) confirms that Mill regarded the education offered a middle-class Victorian girl as a 'minimal literary acquaintance with decorative culture deliberately designed to be superficial'. He insisted that women be trained in every branch of education, so that the world's talent might be doubled. Horrified by what he regarded as domestic slavery in the home, Mill put all his efforts into fighting for legal reform for the female victim whose property, inheritances and children were legally owned by the husband, from whom she had no protection, even in the event of sexual assault.

Mill (1975:518) remarked on the irony inherent in the concept of the subservient, obedient woman as the moral and spiritual guide in the home:

[Women] are declared to be better than men; an empty compliment which must provoke a bitter smile from every woman of spirit, since there is no other situation in life in which it is the established order, and considered quite natural and suitable, that the better should obey the worse ...

Mill displayed an ardent concern for human liberty. He believed that happiness requires freedom and thus, for true love to be experienced between members of a family, there must be total equality among them.

To sum up, in fighting to maintain the status quo, Ruskin's views quickly became outdated in a fast-changing Victorian society. Seen as naive in its idealism, Ruskin's theory is regarded by Millett (in Vicinus 1972:138) as 'the fabric of dreams - the very stuff of the era's pet sentimental vapours enshrined in notions such as "The Angel in The House..." '.

Mill, on the other hand, was energetic in his fight for the complete liberation of women. The conclusions that he reached were not only rational, but they also reflected an eager and dedicated belief in the movement towards emancipation and equality. His arguments are grounded in legal reality and social history and are thus seen as valid issues.

In England and America, the nineteenth-century was hailed as the age of the woman writer. Many were achieving professional status, financial reward and literary distinction (Helsing et al. 1983b:3). Those who supported the reform efforts of the feminist movement used their writings as a medium through which to express their own sympathetic leanings towards change. Dedicated and courageous, these pioneer writers faced attack from all sides: Victorian males, reluctant to relinquish the comforts of patriarchal domination; patronising male critics, quick to label them as 'strong-minded' and even 'masculine'; and, most significantly, women who were comfortable in the role of angel-wife and who zealously took it upon themselves to remind female writers of their domestic duties.

Spearheading this latter conservative school of thought were two well-known women literary figures, Sarah Ellis and Isabella Beeton. Mrs Beeton's *Book of Household Management* bolsters the woman's sense of self-worth by endowing her with the title of 'commander of an army of servants' (in Basch 1974:31). (5) Even the poet laureate, Robert Southey, in a letter to Charlotte Brontë in 1837, was quick to condemn women who entered into the male world of literary art: '[l]iterature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation' (in David 1987:viii). This note of advice did not, however, prevent Charlotte Brontë from becoming one of the most revered woman writers of the period.

As more women began to achieve heights of success previously considered to be beyond the limit of their intellectual capacity, so male authors, jealously

(5) In this manner the Victorian woman was the target for 'an onslaught of propaganda calculated to convince her that she held a very powerful position within the home... Women were thus often betrayed from within their own ranks by such influential writers as Mrs Beeton and Sarah Ellis, who saw them playing the role of the Virgin Mary' (Batley, date unobtainable:1).

guarding their literary territory, to which they claimed sole rights of authorship, began a viciously energetic attack on their female counterparts.

In one article, an anonymous author from the *Saturday Review* (1868) talks about the 'horrid nuisance' of 'inky Minervas' who create 'an intellectual tower of Pisa under the shadow of which it is not pleasant to live' (in David 1987:17). In a further article which appears in the same paper, talented female intellectuals are condemned by the view that 'a learned, or even an over-accomplished, young woman [is] one of the most intolerable monsters in creation' (in Lerner 1978:179). Thus, another restricting stereotype was forced upon the woman, who, in committing the crime of self-improvement, was relegated to the ranks of the evil, and condemned as a 'monster'.

In America the situation proved to be just as trying. In 1855, Hawthorne (in Helsingier et al. 1983b:4) had denounced the 'd_____d mob of scribbling women' who were outselling him. Amused by the righteous indignation of his male colleagues, George Henry Lewes, one of the chief spokesmen for women's rights, mocks the personal and professional insecurities of these men. The following passage will be quoted in its entirety because underlying the light-hearted tone which Lewes adopts is an attempt on his part to remove the artificial outer covering of the Victorian ideology of 'woman worship' and expose it for what it really is, patriarchal domination:

It will never do. We are overrun. Women carry all before them. My mother assures me that, in her day, women were content to boil dumplings (and what dumplings! no such rotundities of odorous delight smoke upon our tables: indeed the dumpling is a myth) and do plain needlework ... But now ... women study Greek and despise dumplings ... What am I to do - what are my brother-pens to do, when such rivalry is permitted? How many of us can write novels like Currer Bell, Mrs Gaskell, Geraldine Jewsbury, Mrs Marsh, Mrs Crowe and fifty others, with their shrewd and delicate observation of life? ... What chance have we against Mrs Martineau, so potent in so many directions? ... where, oh, where are the dumplings! Does it never strike these delightful creatures that their little fingers were made to be kissed not to be inked? ...

Woman's proper sphere of activity is elsewhere. Are there no husbands, lovers, brothers, friends to coddle and console? Are there no stockings to darn, no purses to make, no braces to embroider? *My idea of a perfect woman is of one who can write but won't ... who can appreciate my genius and not spoil my market; who can pet me, and flatter me, and flirt with me, and work for me, and sing to me, and love me ...*(in Helsinger et al. 1983b:4-5). (my emphasis)

The emphasized words in the quoted passage cleverly attack the root of the Ruskinian theory of female education - that women must be educated but not *too* educated. In fact, once men recognised that women have the ability to write, a further limitation was imposed upon the woman writer: she was instructed to stick to fiction, as poetry was regarded as an 'unsuitable' area of focus for females.

Despite the support of a few powerful male figures like J.S. Mill and G.H. Lewes, many Victorian women felt intimidated by the overwhelming attacks, not merely on their 'inferior' ability, but also on their very womanhood. In the words of an earlier writer, Anne Finch (in Gilbert & Gubar 1979:7), this prevented many women from ever 'attempting the pen' and 'caused enormous anxiety in generations of those women who were "presumptuous" enough to dare such an attempt' (Gilbert & Gubar 1979:7).

Intimidation and pressure placed on the woman writer were not limited to male critics and public debate; they found their way into the private sphere as well. In their own homes aspiring women writers met with resistance from fathers, husbands and brothers. Many techniques to alleviate this problem - publishing in secret, publishing anonymously or through the use of pseudonyms, flattery and outright bribery - were devised. Despite this persistent oppression, and considering the fact that these women were deprived of the formal education offered to their male counterparts, one can only admit that the heights of success and the major accomplishments that women writers achieved are not only most surprising, but also greatly to be admired.

When one considers all the obstacles confronting women in the nineteenth-century, it becomes necessary to revert to the root of the problem, namely, the Victorian ideology of 'The Angel in the House'. It was this ethereal, idealised being and all her associated qualities that hindered the real, *human* (6) woman in search of her own *individual* identity. In fact, the whole concept of 'the angel' so infuriated Virginia Woolf that, speaking on behalf of the entire female populace, she deemed it necessary to eliminate the 'ideal being' once and for all:

I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her. My excuse, if I were to be held up in a court of law, would be that I acted in self-defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing ... killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer (in Freiwald 1988:539).

It is thus evident that the angel intruded not only on the ordinary Victorian woman's daily existence, but also on that of the woman writer, whose creative inspirations were crushed by this ghostly presence: 'How is it that the shadow of her wings incapacitates, that the radiance of her halo paralyses, that the rustling of her skirts renders mute a keen and eager voice?' (Freiwald 1988:539). It thus becomes necessary to discover who this deadly phantom-woman is and, as Gilbert & Gubar (1979:17) advise, 'we must dissect in order to murder'. Virginia Woolf (in Anstruther 1992:2) complains that:

It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her. It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality. She was always creeping back when I thought I had dispatched her. Though I flatter myself that I killed her in the end, the struggle was severe.

(6) Françoise Basch (1974:xiv) has mentioned that even in eighteenth-century novels such as Richardson's, 'women are far from being ethereal: the body is beneath the clothes'.

In killing the angel in the house, the woman writer is, in a sense, killing herself. She is destroying the only identity she has ever known - that which has been pressed upon her by a wilful patriarchal society in which she has long been held prisoner. Gilbert & Gubar (1979:xi) argue that the nineteenth-century woman was not merely a prisoner 'enclosed in the architecture of an overwhelming male-dominated society', but that she also found herself trapped in male-authored literary texts in which she saw herself reflected as in a mirror. Gilbert and Gubar (1979:7/8) further reflect that, as Anne Elliot in Jane Austen's *Persuasion* expresses it, 'the pen has been in their hands' (II Ch.11). So the identity that has been created for the Victorian woman is found to be an artificial one, a lie, 'a monstrous lie' which has to be 'exploded' (Freiwald 1988:539) before the liberated woman can create herself anew.

It is important, however, to remember that the concept of the angel comprised only half the lie. It became imperative that another male-created stereotype be destroyed too. Any woman who did not conform to the ideal of the angel - the assertive, the aggressive, the ambitious, the promiscuous (7), and even to a certain extent, the unmarried - became, in the eyes of the Victorian male, a 'monster'. This classification proved to be as restrictive and inflexible as the mould of the angel.

(7) Joan Perkin (1993:219) notes that '[o]f all the women who did not fit the bourgeois ideal of a domestic angel, prostitutes were the most visible and the most upsetting to respectable Victorians'. Perkin further remarks that '[m]any people felt threatened by the vulgar, sexually aggressive women [whose] raucous behaviour mocked men's notion that women were sexually passive', and that a prostitute was often considered 'a separate species of womanhood'. The Victorians believed that, despite the saintliness and purity of their womenfolk, it was necessary to protect them from outside influences, for they were considered to be innately weak and susceptible to moral corruption. This notion gave rise to the 'Myth of the Fallen Woman', which Langland (1989:27) describes thus: 'The patriarchal ideology that professes to explain the social event of a woman's fall has recourse to woman's nature rather than her nurture. The fallen woman, then, is a daughter of Eve, innately corrupt'.

Both contrasting stereotypes had to be destroyed before the Victorian woman could establish her own *individual* identity, and take her place alongside men in a traditionally man's world. The Victorian woman would thus be liberated, not only from the confines of a patriarchal society, but also from male-authored texts, within which her literary counterpart had long been incarcerated. Having thus established her own identity, the woman writer would then have the power 'to reach toward the woman trapped on the other side of the mirror/text and help her to climb out' (Gilbert & Gubar 1979:16). (8) This dual purpose accomplished, the Victorian woman - as woman and writer - would have achieved what she set out to do: she would have gained the freedom to determine her own identity, and to create her own characters.

Of interest here is Elaine Showalter's study (1977:13) in which she has identified three phases in the development of women's writing. The Feminine phase (from the appearance of the male pseudonym in the 1840s to the death of George Eliot in 1880) is the phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant

(8) This act of rebellion against a society governed by rigid social conventions was no easy task and did not often go unpunished. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* the nameless female protagonist is reduced to a level of childlike dependence by a husband who hides his need for control behind a mask of kindly concern over his wife's state of ill health. Imprisoned in an upstairs nursery which is decorated with grotesquely-designed yellow wallpaper, the woman sees a figure - which she recognises as herself - trapped behind the patterns. If the figure attempts an escape, it is strangled by the designs on the paper. 'The tortuous, indecipherable pattern thus becomes the web of social and domestic domination' (Batley, date unobtainable:12). Sometimes during the daytime the figure manages to crawl out from behind the bars. Significantly, it crawls because of 'the extended infancy that has been forced on it' (Batley, date unobtainable:12). The nameless woman finally does effect an escape, but then only into insanity. Even Edna Pontellier, Kate Chopin's heroine in *The Awakening*, escapes the strictures of an all-consuming society by committing suicide. In both cases these women writers warn their female contemporaries of the price to be paid by any woman who dares to reject tradition and to 'strike her blow for freedom' (Batley, date unobtainable:13). Nevertheless both protagonists are treated by their creators as heroines, who, in fighting for the freedom of womankind, have outwitted society and emerged triumphant.

tradition; and the internalization of its standards of art and its views on the social role. The Feminist phase (1880 - 1920 or the winning of the vote) is the phase of protest against these standards and values and the advocacy of minority rights, including a demand for autonomy. The Female phase (1920 to the present, but entering a new stage of self-awareness in the 1960s) is the phase of self-discovery and a search for identity.

There is a definite progressive development in the assertion of the female voice from Harriet Martineau through to George Eliot. However, in the wider view of things, it becomes apparent from Showalter's classifications that these earlier Victorian writers - the pioneers who were treading new ground - had far more limitations and restrictions imposed upon them than the later writers. Yet there is conclusive evidence in the works of these particular novelists that they did, in varying degrees, reject the traditional stereotype of the ideal woman.

However, it has also become apparent that there is a certain inherent conflict in each of the works considered in this dissertation. These writers, finding themselves cast in an age in which the male voice was at its most powerful and the resident patriarchal authority most dictatorial, had no choice but partially to submit to the rules of the dominant culture. Nevertheless, through the medium of their works and the development of their heroines, they fought to maintain their own identities, so as to ensure that the female voice was heard. Harriet Martineau and George Eliot have been described by Deidre David (1987:230) as both 'collaborators and saboteurs in the world that enabled their very existence as women intellectuals'. She adds that they were 'neither ideological slaves to patriarchal thought, nor distinctly separate from patriarchal culture'.

The stage is set showing the Victorian ideal firmly entrenched. The purpose and design of my subsequent chapters is to show the extent to which my chosen nineteenth-century authors succeeded, through the medium of their

characterisation and plots, in exploding the lie concerning the Victorian woman and her angelic womanhood.

Whatever the degree of success each may have achieved, the fact however remains that the very production of each work took a step forward for womankind from a position of 'self-sacrifice' to one of 'self-development' (Strutfield, in Lerner 1978:192). (9) On this firm footing, subsequent writers such as Virginia Woolf were to build, 'tak[ing] possession of the narrative space that their precursors had opened up' (Langland 1987:392) and continuing in the struggle towards self-realization and self-fulfilment.

(9) These words are quoted as part of Dyhouse's Chapter entitled 'The Role of Women: from Self-sacrifice to Self-awareness'.

CHAPTER 1: HARRIET MARTINEAU: DEERBROOK (1839)

' "I want to be doing something with the pen, since no other means of action in politics are in a woman's power" ' (Martineau, in Webb 1960:114). True to her word, Harriet Martineau attacked every aspect of patriarchal political philosophy. (1) Heralded as one of the outstanding forerunners of the feminist movement, and renowned for her non-fictional works in which, at every opportunity, she pleaded the cause of women, Harriet Martineau was to earn the reputation of being 'one of the most prolific and influential intellectuals of her time' (Hoecker-Drysdale 1992:16).

It is thus surprising that, on first reading, Martineau's most notable work of fiction, *Deerbrook*, appears to be a traditional novel with conventional, idealised characters who snugly fit the ideological patterns of the day. The reader is presented with two main female protagonists, who, in focusing their lives on the men they love, and in striving to create the 'ideal' relationship, appear automatically to fall into the mould of the nineteenth-century concept of 'angelic womanhood'.

Martineau's readers were disappointed; they had expected more from the renowned authoress of *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832) and *Society in America* (1837). Present day students of feminist writings are puzzled that, for one so dedicated to the woman's cause, Martineau, in *Deerbrook*, appears to make little attempt to put 'an end to the oppression of one half of humanity by the other' (in Basch 1974:14).

(1) Education: Martineau bitterly opposed the general belief that women were intrinsically inferior to men intellectually (*Monthly Repository*: "On Female Education" (1823)).

Employment: Martineau proved statistically that a large proportion of women, hampered by lack of adequate training, were ill-equipped to compete with men in the emerging industrial era (*Edinburgh Review*: "Female Industry" (1859)).

Legal System: Martineau vociferously attacked a woman's lack of the right to control her children, property and earnings.

Valerie Kossew Pichanick (1977:29) goes so far as to state that Martineau 'failed to create a new image of woman in literature'. David (1987:86) staunchly supports this claim with the opinion that 'in writing *Deerbrook*, she [Harriet Martineau] gave herself the opportunity to ... point the way to alteration of women's destiny as it was inscribed in Victorian society. She did not rise to her own self-created occasion'. She adds that Martineau 'lock[s] herself...severely into rigid representations of womanhood'.

If one were to assume that the above two statements are true - and the first glance seems to bear them out - then one wonders what contribution, if any, Harriet Martineau made towards the advancement of the feminist movement through the medium of her fictional writings. To what extent were her creative inspirations crushed by the ghostly presence of the angel-woman? Did she even attempt to dissect or to subvert the ideology of 'the angel in the house'? Did she, to any degree, form part of the body of female writers who collaborated in the murder of the angel? Was she one of the first women writers to ignite the fuse intended to explode the lie about Victorian females and their 'angelic womanhood'? Could she claim that she, through her writings, had killed 'the angel in the house'? (2) The answers to these questions can only be determined through a detailed study of *Deerbrook*.

Contrary to the aforementioned arguments that Martineau failed in this regard, I aver that a closer reading of *Deerbrook* in fact provides evidence of a subtle yet definite feminist train of thought.

(2) The actual term 'the angel in the house' is attributable to Patmore as title to his poem written in 1854. Since Martineau's *Deerbrook* had appeared some fifteen years earlier, her writings were not specifically designed to 'kill' the angel in the house, as Virginia Woolf in later years claims to have done, but to explode the construct of submissive, self-sacrificial womanhood which had become deeply ingrained in the fabric of Victorian society since the turn of the century.

However, even Martineau's most ardent admirers cannot claim that *Deerbrook* makes an overtly feminist statement which changed the Victorian concept of womanhood. Her contentions in this regard are too veiled and too delicately voiced to have produced an explosive impact, and her subversive message must needs be sought through a careful perusal of the text. But there is no doubt that it is there, and that Martineau certainly left her mark.

This conflict between an apparently faithful adherence to Victorian principles and yet a subtle undermining of them could be attributed to the inner personal conflict to which David (1987:230) refers when she describes Harriet Martineau and George Eliot as both 'collaborators and saboteurs in the world that enabled their very existence as women intellectuals'. (3) They were, in a sense, fighting the system from within; and in such cases a certain amount of conflict is unavoidable. Furthermore, the reader should take into consideration the fact that *Deerbrook* was written at a time when patriarchal power was at its peak and the concept of the family unit with the perfect wife/mother at its core, was revered with almost religious fervour. The question to be determined, then, is the extent to which the above two factors restricted Martineau's writings, and, in the words of Freiwald (1988:539), 'render[ed] mute a keen and eager voice'.

With the creation of *Deerbrook* Martineau was to offer something new: deliberately deviating from the 'silver fork' tradition (4), she presented her generation with two middle-class orphan sisters and a village apothecary as

(3) Sanders (1986:168/9), aware of certain ambiguities in Martineau's writings, describes her as a Janus-figure: 'her outspokenness on some issues makes her sound surprisingly modern, while her reticence, or conventionality, on others roots her firmly among the more conservative Victorian teachers'.

(4) Scores of fashionable 'silver fork' novels presenting a romantic view of the 'high life' and packed with beautiful, rich heiresses filled the vacuum between the preceding Scott and Austen novels, and those of Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontës and Mrs Gaskell which were to appear only in the 1840s.

central figures of a tale set in a small village in rural England. Martineau was working with a purpose. Her mission, like that of George Eliot, was to educate her readers by providing an image of middle-class society as it was in reality. *Deerbrook* is thus a work of domestic realism. (5)

Through a study of the *Deerbrook* women, Martineau's intention becomes apparent: her middle-class woman initially appears to wear the artificial image of the angelic being, but, on closer viewing, is seen to be subtly presented as an ordinary person with her own unique qualities.

When *Deerbrook* opens, Harriet Martineau introduces the reader to the traditional patriarchal household where the husband/father is head of the family - a fact which is acknowledged in the wife's use of the title 'Mr' in her conversations with him. The women enact their roles of competent wives and mothers whose families are of utmost importance and are set before all else. Marriage features prominently, which is evident in the fact that Hester and even Margaret - in typical Austenian fashion - are virtually 'married off' in the minds of the *Deerbrook* inhabitants as soon as they set foot in the village.

Deerbrook itself is presented in an idyllic setting with wide open fields, pretty gardens and quaint houses. Yet it is amusing to note that Harriet Martineau - albeit quietly and almost incidentally - highlights the less attractive aspects of this 'respectable' existence by exposing the hypocrisies and small-mindedness of the village inhabitants, whose sole purpose in life appears to be a scramble for the top rung of the social ladder; an obsession with gossip and sly innuendos; a manipulative organising of marriage partners; and an exaggerated concern about the opinions of neighbours. One finds it difficult to equate this view of the nineteenth-century woman as mean-minded and selfish with that of

(5) Colby (1974:4) defines domestic realism as 'anti-romantic, un-aristocratic, home - and family - centred ... it draws its subjects mainly from the daily life and work of ordinary people: courtship, marriage, children, earning a living, adjusting to reality ...'.

the generous, sweet-tempered angel-figure that she was supposed to represent. And yet, one wonders what more one could ask of 'people who, living at ease in the country, have rarely anything to expect beyond the days of the week, the newspaper, and their dinners' (Martineau 1983:2). (6)

A ridiculously strict code of behaviour is imposed upon the inhabitants of the village. Hester and Margaret are soon to discover this when they realize that visiting the school-mistress 'before breakfast' and taking a walk on the first morning of their arrival directly contravenes accepted patterns of behaviour.

Thus it is not long before one realises that there is an 'ironic contrast between the idyllic appearance of the village and its spacious houses and the cramped and constrained lives resulting from village hypocrisies and conventions' (Thomas 1985:96). Here Martineau makes her point: once the idyllic outer covering is removed and all the ugliness, narrow-mindedness and hypocritical behaviour of the inhabitants exposed, the 'perfect' community is revealed as what it in reality is: a lie. At the centre of this lie is the ideal Victorian family with the angel-woman firmly entrenched in its midst. Thus, in attacking the community, Martineau, albeit indirectly, is attacking the very root of 'the angel in the house' concept itself.

However, it is through her portrayal of her individual characters that Martineau makes her greatest statement. She employs certain varied devices to ensure that the feminist message is heard: male-female role reversal; overt feminist

6) This is exactly the type of situation that Harriet Martineau was warning her readers of in her non-fictional writings: women who lead boring, vacuous lives tend towards frivolity and pettiness. Martineau insisted that an informed woman would be a better partner for her husband and certainly a more effective educator of her children: 'If "great thoughts create great minds", what can be expected from a woman whose whole intellect is employed on trifling cares and comparatively mean occupations, to which the advocates of female ignorance would condemn her?' (Martineau, in Pichanick 1980:18).

statements; and, more noticeably, the combining of 'angelic' qualities with 'human' qualities within a single character, such as Margaret, who, despite her conformity to the angel-nature, is yet too intelligent to blindly accept the unnaturally imposed restrictions of an illogical ideology. This implies that the 'angel' ideal was not only unattainable by the ordinary woman, but was also unfulfilling in itself. In order for the woman to feel complete it was necessary for her to be recognised as an individual with specific needs, as opposed to a 'perfect' stereotype.

According to Victorian ideology, the mother-wife was gentle, amiable and self-effacing. Yet Mrs Grey and Mrs Rowland, two central female figures who would be regarded as pillars of the community, seek to undermine and better each other at every turn. Domineering and manipulative by nature, each hardly fits the role of angel-woman so carefully designed for the Victorian wife in patriarchal England.

Mrs Rowland, a malicious village gossip, causes much heartache to all around her. By spreading unfounded rumours, she not only interferes in the marriage of Hope and Hester, but also almost destroys the doctor's career. Her spiteful manoeuvres very nearly cause irreparable harm to the relationship between her brother, Philip Enderby, and Margaret Ibbotson. Furthermore, because of Mrs Rowland's unflinching stubbornness and hard-heartedness, her mother, Mrs Enderby, dies an unhappy woman; and her daughter, Mathilda, dies of the plague owing to Mrs Rowland's refusal to make an early appeal to Hope for help.

Mrs Grey, too, causes great distress to those around her, albeit largely unintentionally. Her manipulative match-making designs for Edward Hope and her beautiful niece, Hester, lead to an unfortunate chain of events which almost destroys the happiness of many lives. It is thus apparent that neither Mrs Grey nor Mrs Rowland can be regarded as representative of the angel prototype.

According to patriarchal ideology the man, as head of the house, was expected to dominate and to maintain order within the home as well as in all business affairs. Both Mr Grey and Mr Rowland, partners in business, uphold the admirable qualities of forbearance and detachment in the face of their wives' dissent. Yet their inability to control the behaviour and attitudes of their respective wives is hardly what one would expect from the omnipotent Victorian patriarch.

It becomes apparent that in each family, although the man is acknowledged as the legitimate head of the household, in actual fact he is merely a figurehead; and it is the woman who appears to exert the greater influence. Thus, under the guise of a conventional family set-up, Harriet Martineau manages to undermine the nineteenth-century ideology of the meek, submissive wife and the strong, authoritarian husband in a subtle yet effective manner. In short, Martineau is clearly attacking the current concept of the ideal Victorian family as composed of tailor-made characters who submissively slot into prescribed roles.

With her introduction of the prominent male protagonist, the doctor-hero Edward Hope, Martineau once again defies convention in her depiction of his character. Unlike the typical Victorian patriarch, Edward Hope, sweet-natured, gentle, and unwilling to cause unnecessary pain to others, allows himself to be manoeuvred into a marriage with Hester, a woman whom he greatly respects but does not love. He sees this as his duty. (7)

Hope realises almost immediately that he has made a mistake. According to the tradition of the day, in marrying Hester, he accepts Margaret - his true love - into his home too. He realises that he will have to keep his feelings for Margaret a

(7) The sense of duty was exaggerated in the Victorian milieu - a fact that is brought out strongly by writers of that era, not least in the writings of Harriet Martineau who, clearly in tune with Victorian times, saw love as 'guidable by duty' (Pichanick 1980:116).

closely guarded secret. In rather melodramatic clichés Hope declares that:

"How have I abhorred bondage all my life! and I am in bondage every hour that I spend at home" (Martineau 1983:212).

The image of the presupposing, omnipotent patriarchal male as a prisoner in his own home is ludicrous to say the least, especially as the concept of bondage was usually associated with the Victorian female. Furthermore, Hope has a great respect for the sanctity of home, and he is determined to endure and thus to succeed: 'he had also a deep conviction ... that no consecration of a home is so holy as that of a kindly, self-denying, trustful spirit in him who is head and life of his house' (Martineau 1983:177). Hope, displaying qualities of the angel in the house himself, thus consciously assumes the role of sanctimonious guide in the home.

In every aspect of his affairs Hope shows himself to be morally superior to those around him: his dedication to a wife who stifles those closest to her with her fits of hysterical jealousy; the dignified manner in which he accepts the failure of his practice; the gentleness with which he forgives Mrs Rowland, who has caused his family gross hardships, all proclaim his moral superiority. In evidence here is Martineau's technique of role-reversal. Such noble qualities were acceptedly the prerogative of feminine rather than masculine characters.

Interestingly, however, Hope reverts at times to the typical Victorian male ideal - an example, perhaps, of Martineau's inner conflict. True to tradition, Hope has idealistic expectations of women as superior beings. He takes it as a matter of course that once he and Hester are married she will provide a serene home sanctuary for him; just as Patmore's Honoria does later in the century for her loved one. (8) In a letter to his brother, Frank, Hope refers to the two sisters as

- (8) on settled poles turned solid joys,
And sunlike pleasures shine at home.
(*The Angel in the House* II.vii.1)

'casting sanctity around them as they go' (Martineau 1983:82). He also looks forward to the future years over which 'her [Hester's] image [would] spread its sunshine' (Martineau 1983:141). The fact that this does not initially occur indicates the discrepancy between reality and the Victorian ideal.

Yet this adherence to conventional ideology is not unique to the Victorian male alone. As Mrs Beeton with her keys at her belt affirms the woman's control as mistress of her household domain, so Hester and Margaret discover great delight in preparing the home which the three of them are to share: every object has its place, every room its purpose, and every person his/her duty. (9) The nineteenth-century ideology of the wife ministering to the needs of the husband is carried out here:

... the shaded parlour will be the cool retreat of the wearied husband, when he comes in to rest from his professional toils. There will stand the books destined to refresh and refine his higher tastes; and there the music with which the wife will indulge him (Martineau 1983:138).

In this passage certain phrases - 'professional toils', 'higher tastes' - immediately cast the Victorian male in a superior intellectual mould, while the female is expected graciously to accept the more demeaning role of 'indulger' and 'pamperer' of her male counterpart.

Thus, the idyllic scene is set and each player is expected to accept his/her role gracefully. (10) Yet once again Harriet Martineau breaks from tradition.

(9) This division of duties within the home finds reflection in Ruskin's later mapping out of the separate spheres of activity for men and women.

(10) While Martineau urged the importance of intellectual advancement for women, she nevertheless did not deny that a woman's domestic duties should be treated with the utmost regard. In fact, her ambiguity on the topic is noted by David (1987:46) who points out that Martineau's writings 'frequently urge women to educated acceptance rather than angry refutation of their socially inscribed doctrines, and the admirable clarity of her splendid indignation is sometimes blurred by the traces of male prescriptions for woman's role and function'.

Much as Hester adores Hope and Margaret and longs to be the ideal wife and sister, she is inflicted with a personality flaw which causes great heartache to those closest to her: to Hope, to Margaret, and especially to herself. As was expected of the Victorian wife, Hester submits to and even reveres the man she loves. Yet her deep insecurities are revealed in her need to be loved and placed above all others in the affections of her husband and sister. Unlike the sweet, forgiving angel, Hester has shed her wings and has discovered that she is intensely *human* – a fallible mortal with natural desires and needs. Unable to live up to her own ideal expectations, she is left feeling frustrated and angry. Jealous of Margaret's friendship with the Greys' governess, Maria Young, Hester relieves her tormented soul in several childish reactions like the following:

"You go to others for the comfort you ought to seek in me. You place that confidence in others which ought to be mine alone. You are cheered when you learn that the commonest gossips in Deerbrook care about you, and you set no value on your own sister's feelings for you" (Martineau 1983:248).

Sensing the reticence in a marriage partner whose innermost being she wishes to penetrate, Hester finds herself dissatisfied and disheartened. Denying the traditional belief that marriage brings the fulfilment of every woman's dreams, she complains to her sister:

"...oh! it is all true about the wretchedness of married life! I am wretched, Margaret... Life is a blank to me. I have no hope left. I am neither wiser, nor better, nor happier for God having given me all that should make a woman what I meant to be. What can God give me more than I have?" (Martineau 1983:207).

Contrary to the contemporary ideology of the woman as the moral guide in the home, it is Hester who looks to her husband for nurture and guidance. Before their marriage Hester believes that her problems are over: 'She could grow perfect now, for she had one whom she believed perfect to lead her on. Her pride, her jealousy would trouble her no more...' (Martineau 1983:124). Furthermore, 'by his example, and under his guidance, she should be enabled

to surmount her failings' (Martineau 1983:141). In this instance Martineau appears deliberately to have instigated a reversal of roles: it is Hester who places her husband on a pedestal and reveres him as the emotional and moral guide in the home. Martineau is thus specifically undermining the rigid roles demarcated for men and women in nineteenth-century England.

It is in the healing of Hester's ill-temper that Martineau makes what is possibly her strongest point in this novel: as a result of their change in fortune, poverty-stricken and shunned by most members of the community, the Hope family faces hardships that they never imagined possible. And it is Hester who rises to the occasion. Taking on some of the household chores while nursing a baby and steadfastly supporting a victimised husband, Hester reveals a strength of character and an undaunted spirit which had not surfaced in times of prosperity.

Martineau indirectly makes the point that when the woman finds herself to be useful and needed, and can take her place at her husband's side on equal terms, she becomes one to be admired and finds satisfaction at last. It is interesting to note that Hester's fulfilment is achieved when circumstances permit her to exercise the more masculine qualities of determination, steadfastness and purpose. She is thus freed from the artificial restrictions imposed upon 'the angel in the house', and, in moving away from this binding concept, she emerges as a complete being, fully-fledged in her own right. Martineau is thus deliberately subverting the concept of 'the angel in the house'.
(11)

(11) Sanders (1986:79) draws several parallels between the Hope-Hester relationship and the Lydgate-Rosamond Vincy relationship in *Middlemarch*. Unlike Lydgate, Hope can look to Hester as 'a friend made for adversity' (Martineau 1983:296) and, 'while [Rosamond] sinks into languid distaste, soured by a sense of undeserved personal injury, Hester exults in her shared martyrdom, convinced that persecution has made her wiser, and poverty happier'. Pampered throughout her life, Rosamond is ill-prepared to take her place at her husband's side in a time of crisis. Hester, on the other hand, is not content merely to be a decorative ornament in her husband's home - she revels in the fact that she is needed and can be of use to him.

Needless to say, Hope falls truly in love with a wife whose honour and dignity he can respect. His self-mastery and determination have won him eventual happiness. Far from being an old married man, Hope now regards himself as possessing 'the soul of the lover' in that his feelings for his wife have grown from 'mere compassion, to patience, to hope, to interest, to admiration, to love - love at last worthy of hers - love which satisfied even Hester's imperious affections, and set even her over-busy mind and heart at rest' (Martineau 1983:521). In many Victorian marriages love was not necessarily an ingredient, many marriages being planned and orchestrated by designing parents. Yet Martineau makes a refreshing statement in showing that an equal partnership can lead to mutual respect and deep devotion.

Of all the female characters in *Deerbrook*, Margaret Ibbotson most represents the angelic qualities of sweetness, generosity, kindness, charity, forgiveness, and moral superiority so dear to the Victorian heart. Yet, like Hester, she is portrayed as more than just a being devoid of self and living entirely for the gratification of others. In the creation of Margaret's character, Martineau effectively interweaves 'angelic' and 'human' qualities. Flaunting tradition, Martineau also provides Margaret with the more masculine qualities of strength, courage, endurance, and, most notably, intelligence. Furthermore, Margaret's eager desire to learn, her obvious intellectual ability, and the serious manner in which she discusses the various philosophies of the day, indicate that she - perhaps more than any other *Deerbrook* character with the possible exception of Maria Young - exposes the lie of restricted womanhood so generally accepted by Victorian society.

On the sisters' arrival in Deerbrook attention is focused on the beautiful Hester, while Margaret is declared to be quite plain. But it is not long before her inherent good qualities win her the respect and love of those who are able to appreciate her true worth. The fact that the two most eligible young men in the village both fall in love with her is indicative of this. As she is strong and courageous, others turn to her for support: Hester depends on her for comfort

and consolation; Hope relies on her calm, unflurried presence in the midst of emotional chaos; Maria Young relies on her companionship and her ability to discuss matters which require profound thought and intelligence; Philip Enderby relies on her love and steadfastness which holds them together through trying times; members of the community look to her for sympathy and for practical help in times of intense need. (12)

Sensible and down-to-earth, Margaret has little patience with women who regard marriage as their sole ambition in life and who pay little regard to the seriousness of the commitment. In an early conversation, Philip Enderby asks her what she thinks of the whole art of wooing: ' "You surely would not overthrow the whole art of wooing? You would not doom lovers' plots and devices?" ' Margaret, in her usual practical manner, replies:

"There are silly girls, and weak women, who, liking mysteries in other affairs, are best pleased to be wooed with small artifices... But I certainly think those much the wisest and the happiest, who look upon the whole affair as the solemn matter that it really is, and who desire to be treated, from the beginning, with the sincerity and seriousness which they will require after they are married" (Martineau 1983:62/3).

Harriet Martineau's portrayal of Margaret's ability to rationalise on the subject of marriage and the commitment which it requires is a far cry from the typical Victorian girl who was trained to view marriage as an end in itself. It is a far cry, too, from the angelic figure who dared not voice an opinion at variance with that of her suitor.

This loyalty is what Margaret expects of Philip, and, although he means well and would never deliberately hurt her, he does not prove to be capable of the same

(12) In evidence here is the Ruskinian concept of the ideal woman who, in the true nature of the self-sacrificing angel, spreads her moral influence throughout society.

steadfast commitment that she makes. Caught up in the web of misunderstanding and intrigue carefully contrived by Philip's sister, Mrs Rowland, who, in Philip's absence, falsely declares his intention to marry Mary Bruce, Margaret endures much pain and suffering. This is only alleviated by Philip's denial of these allegations on his return. Overcome with guilt at her distrust of Philip's intentions, Margaret, typically the Victorian female, is abjectly apologetic and absolves him from any blame. Furthermore, Philip, typically the nineteenth-century man, endorses her self-condemnation with the following accusation: ' "I thought that you knew me enough, and cared for me enough, to understand my mind, and trust my conduct through whatever you might hear of me from others. I have been deceived..." ' (Martineau 1983:277).

However, the situation is reversed when Mrs Rowland leads Philip to believe that Margaret is really in love with Hope, and that he, Philip, is merely a substitute. There is evidence of a double-standard at work here when Philip ironically believes these allegations after having previously condemned Margaret's distrust of him. He self-righteously refuses to accept Margaret's innocence as claimed by Hope, and, displaying a short-sighted meanness of character, refuses even to give her the opportunity to defend herself: ' "...spare yourself the effort of self-justification. It is not needed" ' (Martineau 1983:409).

Conquering her natural inclination to blame Philip for his actions, Margaret refuses to allow Hope, Hester or Maria to criticise him in any way. When he at last discovers that he has been duped by his sister's lies, Philip begs Margaret's forgiveness and is rewarded with an instant pardon. Margaret's trusting acceptance of his apology and her willingness to forgive him cast her in the

mould of the ideal woman. (13) Little does Philip know of the pain and trauma which Margaret has had to endure in silence. Like Hope, and acting on the advice of Maria Young, her friend and confidante, Margaret shows strength in endurance and self-denial. She declares her intention ' "to live for Him [God] ... and my heart, let it suffer as it may, shall never complain to human ear. It shall be as silent as the grave" ' (Martineau 1983:416). These words bring to mind Mrs Ellis's advice that a woman's 'highest duty is often to suffer and be still' (in Vicinus 1972:x).

True to convention, in Margaret's relationship with Philip, she, the woman, is depicted as morally superior in that she is the one who rises above the 'human' qualities of condemnation and self-righteousness, while he is portrayed in this instance as intractable and uncharitable. Philip openly admits Margaret's moral superiority when he tells her that she has raised him out of a trifling existence and has opened his eyes to the meanness and selfishness of such a life. Just as Hester relies on Hope, so Philip appeals to Margaret to be ' "the guide of my

(13) Patmore would certainly have approved of Margaret's self-effacing attitude, which he regards as appropriate behaviour for his angel:

Man must be pleased; but him to please
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
Of his condoled necessities
She casts her best, she flings herself.
How often flings for nought! and yokes
Her heart to an icicle or whim,
Whose each impatient word provokes
Another, not from her, but him;
While she, too gentle even to force
His penitence by kind replies,
Waits by, expecting his remorse,
With pardon in her pitying eyes;
And if he once, by shame oppress'd,
A comfortable word confers,
She leans and weeps against his breast,
And seems to think the sin was hers...

(The Angel in the House l.ix.l)

life" ' (Martineau 1983:281). (14) The reader's one consolation lies in the fact that Philip does possess many good qualities that make him worthy of such a woman as Margaret. The couple are quickly reunited: 'Within the hour, Philip and Margaret were by that fireside, finally wedded in heart and soul' (Martineau 1983:514).

Martineau uses a reversal of roles in her parallel marriage relationships to show how painful it is for women to adhere to the accepted stereotype. The Philip/Margaret partnership represents the accepted Victorian pattern where the woman determines the moral fibre and strength of the home. In contrast, however, in the Hope/Hester relationship, it is Hester who looks to Hope for spiritual guidance and upliftment. In this regard Margaret, not Hester, is the required female example of gentle forgiveness and yet spiritual strength and fortitude. In presenting Hester in stark contrast to Margaret, Martineau plainly reveals how difficult it was for the Victorian woman to aspire to such an unrealistic ideal as the concept of the 'angel in the house'. Is Martineau not perhaps highlighting the evils of a system by revealing the conflicts that arise when human nature rebels against artificial social norms and expectations?

Of all the characters portrayed in the novel, the one who most deeply questions the ethics behind such an artificially-constructed doctrine as angelic womanhood, is the Grey/Rowland governess, Maria Young. On first meeting, Margaret Ibbotson and Maria Young discover an affinity for one another which develops into an enduring and mutually-fulfilling friendship. They have several interests in common: they are both intelligent; they both enjoy studying; and their lengthy discussions and profound debates indicate a tendency on the part of each to indulge in the art of philosophising. Unmarried and crippled, Maria

(14) It well to bear in mind the fact that J.S.Mill (1975:518), in criticising the self-serving attitude of the Victorian male, argues against the illogicality of such a statement when he remarks that 'there is no other situation in life in which it is ... considered quite natural ... that the better should obey the worse'.

does not participate to any great degree in the activities going on around her, so, standing on the 'sidelines of life' (Colby 1974:254), she is in the ideal position to adopt the role of observer. This is summed up in Maria's own words when she states, ' "I am out of the game"' (Martineau 1983:35). This comment is particularly significant, for Maria unashamedly acknowledges the fact that she has failed to achieve the goal of mother-wife supposedly desired by every Victorian woman.

Maria is no passive onlooker, however, for a reading of the conversations between her and Margaret reveals the fact that Martineau obviously intends to use the voice of the governess as a means of expressing her own feminist views. The two women intimately discuss such controversial topics as sexual passion, the education and employment of women, and the hardships of governesses' lives - topics surely considered taboo in an ultra-conservative nineteenth-century society. This reveals an obvious attempt on Martineau's part to explode certain apparent misconceptions relating to the demure and naive angel-figure. Unswerving in her aim, Martineau, through the medium of her novel, speaks loudly and clearly on behalf of the feminists - a factor which can hardly be considered the norm in a 'conventional' nineteenth-century novel. (15)

Furthermore, Sanders (1986:59) states that Harriet Martineau's governess, Maria Young, 'heads a succession of new and distinctive heroines in nineteenth-century women's fiction'. Given the traditional view of the Victorian governess as a poor and pathetic old maid who deserves pity from all quarters, any reader of Sanders's remark should be suitably, if not pleasantly, surprised at seeing the term 'heroine' used in relation to a governess. Yet this definition is of particular significance here, as it aptly describes Maria Young and the qualities which she represents. The image portrayed, then, is one of courage and strength.

(15) Martineau met with horrified opposition from all quarters, not least of whom were members of her own sex who supported and endorsed female subservience, thus 'clipping the wings' of any aspiring woman.

This is not to say, however, that Martineau has presented an idealistic view of the governess and her lifestyle. In fact, the image created of Maria Young is humanely realistic. The reader is intentionally made thoroughly aware of the hardships she (and, by implication, the Victorian governess in general) endures and yet, most importantly, she is presented as a *person* in her own right as opposed to a stereotype.

Crippled and solitary, Maria appears at first glance as a figure to be pitied. She earns a minimal salary and has no future job security. Speaking of unmarried women in general, Vicinus (1972:xii) comments that '[a]ll social forces combined to leave the spinster emotionally and financially bankrupt'. For the Victorian woman was expected to remain securely within the bounds of the home, fulfilling her role as ministering angel. No place was reserved for her in the male world of business, and any attempt on her part to force her way in was regarded with suspicion and heralded as unnatural.

It thus comes as no surprise to the reader that Maria's employment as the Grey/Rowland school-teacher offers her little satisfaction. For, despite her love of children, it is not necessarily the career that she would have pursued had she been given a choice in the matter. A conversation between Maria and Margaret concerning employment opportunities reveals that a career in education was the only field open to middle-class single women who needed to support themselves. In answer to Margaret's question regarding employment, Maria answers: ' "... for such a woman there is in all England no chance of subsistence but by teaching ... for which not one in a thousand is fit" ' (Martineau 1983:448).

(16)

(16) In her article entitled "Female Industry" which appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* in April 1859, Martineau pointed out that, owing to the country's changing economy brought on by the urban/industrial age, women who had formerly been supported by fathers or husbands were now being forced to earn their own living - a feat for which, as former recipients of patriarchal protection, they were poorly equipped (Pichanick 1977:16).

In addition to this 'financial bankruptcy' enforced upon the vulnerable spinster, society ensured that she was left emotionally bereft too. Maria is no exception, for she lives a solitary existence, and is often excluded from activities as she has no living family members on whom she can depend. Throughout the narrative the Greys praise her enthusiastically and regard her as one of them; and yet when they are leaving town because of the plague, it is no longer 'convenient' to include her. When Mary asks if Miss Young can accompany them, her sister replies ' "... you know Mamma says it is not convenient: and Miss Young is not ... a member of the family ..." ' (Martineau 1983:483/4).

The old maid was also constantly reminded that she was a burden to a beneficent society to whom she owed a debt of gratitude for her mere existence. Once again, Maria is no exception to this rule: 'Priscilla [Mrs Rowland] reminded her of her poverty and infirmities [and] spoke of the gratitude she owed to those from whom she derived her subsistence...' (Martineau 1983:366). Maria, then, is expected to pay a 'penalty' for having 'failed' to achieve the woman's ultimate goal: marriage and motherhood. Yet she challenges this concept at every turn, and also emphatically refuses to assume the expected alternative of the despised 'monster'. Maria proves conclusively that it is possible for an unmarried woman in Victorian Society to stand on equal terms with her domesticated sister. For in her strength of character alone, she far outshines many of her married counterparts.

Thus Harriet Martineau was possibly the first Victorian novelist who, apart from exposing the harsh realities of the single woman's existence, also accentuated several strong positive aspects of her character. In so doing, Martineau helped to expose the lie of the unmarried woman as 'monster', and aided in creating a fresh identity for her as an independent person in her own right.

For Maria is presented as a passionate woman with an intelligent, enquiring mind and strong convictions. She is a devoted friend to Margaret, for whom she offers the ultimate sacrifice. Maria has long been in love with Philip herself, and

yet, once accepting the fact that Margaret and Philip are attracted to one another, she acknowledges that '[h]er duty then was clearly to give them up to each other, with such spirit of self-sacrifice as she might be capable of' (Martineau 1983:65/66). This is surely a truly angelic gesture, hardly the expected reaction of one so flippantly labelled by society as a deviant. A realisation of what it has cost Maria to make this sacrifice is evident when one is made aware of the depths of passion which she has felt for Philip.

According to Victorian ideology, the mother-woman was pure and devoid of sexual passion. Yet Martineau explodes this lie when Maria portrays passion as a deep, earth-moving emotion which one hardly expects the unsullied Victorian angel - let alone an unmarried old maid - to have experienced: ' "I was speaking of love - the grand influence of a woman's life, but whose name is a mere empty sound to her till it becomes, suddenly, secretly, a voice which shakes her being to the very centre - more awful, more tremendous, than the crack of doom" ' (Martineau 1983:159). (17) No-one, suggests Margaret, prepares girls for this feeling. Such raw passion and crude sensuality certainly would have horrified prudish members of Victorian society, who jealously guarded the aura of spiritual purity and untouchable innocence surrounding the image of the angel-maiden. Degrading bestial passions were reserved for the prostitute and the whore, the ultimate personifications of the 'monster'. Yet through Maria's down-to-earth perception of sexual feelings natural to all human beings, male and female, Martineau opens avenues of thought previously closed to contemporary society.

(17) Sanders (1986:64) points out that in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1983:173) Mr Rochester warns Jane of the effect of passion: "Your soul sleeps," he observes: "the shock is yet to be given which shall waken it." He predicts that she will come some day "to a craggy pass in the channel, where the whole of life's stream will be broken up into whirl and tumult, foam and noise: either you will be dashed to atoms on crag points, or lifted and borne on by some master wave into a calmer current ...".

Maria's thoughts on marriage are equally intuitive. She abhors the fact that marriage is more like a financial transaction than a union of hearts, and she reasons that this is because 'all girls are brought up to think of marriage as almost the only event in life' (Martineau 1983:160). She blames this on the fact that ' "while girls hear endlessly of marriage, they are kept wholly in the dark about love" ' (Martineau 1983:161). (18)

Surely such a passionate and independent woman as Maria, so outspoken and scrupulously honest in relating her many opinions and convictions, would not have been favourably regarded by a Victorian readership. She certainly did not fit into the carefully nurtured class of the 'angel-wife', yet nor did she conform to the stereotypical role of the old maid. Thus, in her portrayal of Maria Young, Harriet Martineau, in refusing to adhere to traditional ideology, makes a major statement, and sets a trend which later influential novelists were to imitate.

In conclusion, Martineau's inner conflict - derived from the fact that she was neither an 'ideological slave' to, nor 'distinctly separate from patriarchal culture' (David 1987:230) - indicates that she could hardly claim to have 'killed' the angel in the house. On the other hand, her creative inspirations were certainly not entirely crushed by the ethereal presence of the angel-figure. A close study of *Deerbrook* has revealed that far from 'lock[ing] herself ... severely into rigid representations of womanhood' (David 1987:86), Martineau provides a refreshing alternative to the 'ideal' woman in her portrayal of the warmly human 'real' woman. For while Hester and Margaret initially emerge as 'pattern' young women leading 'pattern' lives, to use Charlotte Bronte's term, a closer scrutiny of each girl's thoughts and actions reveals a depth of character previously concealed. For each is presented as neither angel nor monster, but as a natural, happy medium between the two.

(18) Vicinus (1972:x) notes that marriage could prove to be sexually and emotionally trying for women who were trained to be affectionate, yet asexual and mentally blank.

Contrary to Pichanick's (1977:29) previously quoted statement that Martineau 'failed to create a new image of woman in literature', I feel that in her portrayal of Maria Young, Martineau unquestionably redefines the role of the Victorian governess. In presenting Maria as a strong and intelligent heroine, Martineau not only proves false the desired concept of the governess as meek, mild, and a figure to be pitied, but also explodes the cruel misconception of the single woman as 'monster'. For Maria Young is certainly no monster. Thus, through her portrayal of her three heroines, Martineau effectively subverts the entire angel-monster myth.

Pichanick (1977:29) further states that it was 'the men and boys in [Martineau's] stories who acted, and the women and girls who suffered'. Once again, I disagree because while the women in *Deerbrook* do 'suffer' in varying degrees, they are also seen to do most of the 'acting'. Furthermore, Edward Hope, a male, is the character who undoubtedly suffers the most.

In addition to this, any portrayal of female suffering, such as Margaret's in her relationship with Philip, is surely a deliberate attempt on Martineau's part to use this as an opportunity to expose the failings of an ideology which unfairly expects so much of a self-sacrificial female and so little of a self-righteous patriarchal male. Of interest is Hoecker-Drysdale's (1992:1) opinion that Martineau 'gave women salient roles in her fiction to illustrate certain principles of social life'.

The courageous effort which was required for Martineau to take a stand in a society in which patriarchal views were staunchly adhered to was no light undertaking. For *Deerbrook* was written in 1839 when the feminist movement was scarcely underway. Pichanick (1977:14/5) makes the point that '[b]efore the fight against The Contagious Diseases Acts in the 1860s there was no recognizable women's movement in Great Britain, and Harriet Martineau's voice was one of the very few raised in lonely and mainly futile protest against the accumulated prejudices of generations'.

It is not surprising that Martineau's steps were hesitant, and that any statement which she felt the need to make was discreetly concealed behind the mask of conventionality. Nevertheless, her contribution was great and, while, as I have said, one cannot go so far as to claim that she 'exploded' the lie of angelic womanhood, she certainly shook its foundations.

Thus, in her life and in her work, Martineau was treading new social and literary ground. Radical in her beliefs and relentless in her promotion of change, she 'marched ahead of most of her contemporaries' (Pichanick 1980:243), and, in R.K.Webb's (1960:365) words, 'stood proudly at the radical pole itself'.

CHAPTER 2: ANNE BRONTË: THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL (1848).

'The slamming of Helen Huntingdon's bedroom-door against her husband reverberated throughout Victorian England' (Sinclair, in Gérin's Introduction to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* 1979:7). Yet Anne Brontë did not intend to startle her readers. Unlike Harriet Martineau, she would not have termed herself a feminist and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is not overtly about Women's Rights. It is, however, about Human Rights, and Anne Brontë, taking 'her courage in both her hands when she sat down to write *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*' (Sinclair, in Harrison & Stanford 1959:236), claimed her freedom to reveal the truth as she knew it. (1) Gérin (1976:v) notes that Anne Brontë wrote 'without any intention of shocking, but merely from the promptings of a heart that scorned injustice and that was as honest as it was kind'. In her Preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (August 1848) Anne Brontë stubbornly states, '...when I feel it my duty to speak an unpalatable truth, with the help of God I *will* speak it...' (A. Brontë 1985:30). (2) Harrison & Stanford (1959:238) appropriately refer to Anne as a 'moral realist'.

(1) Gérin (1976:v), referring to the forthrightness and independence reflected in Anne's writings, calls her 'the bravest of the Brontës' - a description which hardly seems befitting the sweet, gentle, pious girl who has always been regarded as 'a pale shadow of her sisters' (Langland 1989:149). However, modern-day students of English literature are showing renewed interest in Anne Brontë and her work, and Gérin remarks that a tribute to Anne - termed a 'literary Cinderella' by George Moore - has long been overdue.

(2) Anne Brontë was deeply affected by the torrent of negative comments such as, 'a morbid love of the coarse, if not of the brutal' (in Chitham 1991:168) that accompanied the publication of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Her Preface to the second edition of the novel is largely an attempt to justify her choice of subject. Her aim in writing the novel was to *tell the truth*:

When we have to do with vice and vicious characters, I maintain it is better to depict them as they really are than as they would wish to appear. To represent a bad thing in its least offensive light is doubtless the most agreeable course for a writer of fiction to pursue; but is it the most honest, or the safest? Is it better to reveal the snares and pitfalls of life to the young and thoughtless traveller, or to cover them with branches and flowers? Oh, Reader! if there were less of this delicate concealment of facts...there would be less of sin and misery to the young of both sexes who are left to wring their bitter knowledge from experience (A.Brontë 1985:30).

Thus one wonders to what extent - deliberately or otherwise - Anne Brontë furthered the feminist cause through the medium of her novel? Did her portrayal of the Victorian home and its inmates in any way correlate with contemporary ideology? Was her contribution to the killing of the angel in the house - written almost a decade after *Deerbrook* had made its appearance - a more blatant statement than Harriet Martineau's had been? An in-depth study of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* reveals the answers to these questions.

A woman's desperate flight from her abusive husband in order that her son might escape the contaminating influence of his father could hardly be viewed as appropriate subject matter for conservative Victorian readers. For, after all, the conventional Victorian novel was expected to depict a harmonious family setting with the serene mother/wife at its core, and its circumference comprised of the protective arms of the husband/father, whose role it was to defend his family from the evil influences of the outside world. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Anne Brontë deliberately subverts the ideology of domestic harmony and reveals the reality hidden therein: domestic misery. Langland (1989:25) aptly describes it in the following terms: Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* 'explodes the myth of domestic heaven and exposes the domestic hell, from which the protagonist ultimately flees into hiding.' Thus the contemporary ideology of the ideal family unit - the prototype on which all 'decent' Victorian families were expected to model themselves - is revealed for what, in reality, it is: a lie!

Yet Anne Brontë deviates even further from the norm in her allocation of the major portion of the novel to a female narrator. Speaking of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Langland (1989:31) remarks that '[w]omen writers had not yet claimed for themselves the authority of speaking directly through a woman as narrator. It allowed new freedoms for developing the woman's perspective in the world'. Yet, in a later article, Langland (in Harrison & Taylor (eds) 1992:111) notes that, despite this privilege, Helen Huntingdon's narrative, in the form of a diary, is embedded or 'nested' within Gilbert Markham's story, and is thus legitimized or 'authorized' by a respectable male narrative. She concludes that

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall 'may tell an untraditional tale of a fallen woman redeemed, but it tells it in such a way that reaffirms the patriarchal status quo of masculine priority and privilege, of women's subordination and dependency'.

One could argue that herein lies an example of the selfsame conflict which was faced by Harriet Martineau - a conflict in which women writers were 'neither ideological slaves to patriarchal thought, nor distinctly separate from patriarchal culture' (David 1987:230). And yet, in my opinion, surely Anne Brontë structures her text in this manner for a specific purpose? It is important for the reader to view Helen Huntingdon initially through Gilbert Markham's eyes, in order that her impeccable qualities be established before one learns of the evils which have driven her to become - in the eyes of Victorian society - a fallen woman. Langland (1989:123) corroborates this point in her argument that it is 'only by incorporating Helen's diary into his own narrative that Markham can reinterpret the Fallen Woman and runaway wife of Victorian convention as the model of excellent womanhood...'. (3)

Gilbert Markham is first introduced to Helen Huntingdon under her assumed name, 'Helen Graham', when she enters the Linden-Grange area and takes up residence as the mysterious tenant of Wildfell Hall. Helen satisfies the curiosity of the members of the village community by declaring her status as a widow of small means who finds it necessary to work as an artist in order to support herself and her son. Like Harriet Martineau's *Deerbrook* residents, who had little

(3) Anderson (1993:2) comments on the fact that while the concept of fallenness is religious in origin, '[m]ost studies of Victorian prostitution acknowledge the fluidity of the term "fallen woman" '. Referring to this 'wide umbrella term', Anderson states that 'the designation ... signifies a complex of tabooed behaviours and degraded conditions' ranging from prostitution, adultery and marital desertion to assertiveness and ambition. Even the harmless old maid was branded a 'monster' for her failure to comply with society's notion of ideal femininity.

better to do with their time than to interfere in the affairs of their neighbours, the Linden-Grange inhabitants are, with few exceptions, depicted as mindless, petty, and prone to scandalous gossip.

Helen Graham, an independent woman with staunchly unconventional ideas, presents an inconceivable enigma for small-minded women such as Eliza Millward and Jane Wilson, whose interests are limited to attending tea-parties, seeking eligible marriage partners, and indulging in incessant - and, on the whole, destructive - chatter. This is certainly a far cry from the pure angel-being who was designed to be spiritually elevated and morally upright. What Anne Brontë implies here was forthrightly stated by Harriet Martineau: women who, owing to the tradition of the day, are deliberately kept uninformed, lead vacuous lives and thus tend towards frivolity and pettiness. Women writers, in order to expose the artificial identity created for the Victorian woman, were intent upon portraying her in as realistic a light as was possible.

Much of the malicious gossip is directed at the defenceless Helen, who, for her own and her son's safety, cannot reveal the truth. It is only when Gilbert himself begins to doubt her integrity that Helen hands him her diary to read. Spanning a period of six years from 1821 - 1827, it tells of her courtship and marriage to the charming, irresistible but morally-corrupt Arthur Huntingdon.

Helen Lawrence's narrative begins with her return to Staningley - her uncle's estate - after her first season in London, where she has recently met the worldly-wise Huntingdon. Fully aware of his compulsive habits and the debauched social circle in which he moves, she is nonetheless young, inexperienced, idealistic and strong-willed, and insists on accepting his marriage proposal in direct defiance of her aunt's warnings. Duped by contemporary ideology, she is naively overconfident in her belief that her moral superiority will enable her to convert and thus to 'save' Huntingdon from his many weaknesses derived from

over-indulgence. (4)

Anne Brontë's heroine is severely criticised by Craik (1968:230) for her 'misguided vanity' and by Scott (1983:78,85) for her 'spiritual pride' and her 'arrogant folly' in believing that she has the power to influence so headstrong a man as Huntingdon. These criticisms are harsh indeed. In Helen's defence, one feels led to enquire: is this not what Victorian ideology trained women towards - that is, assuming the role of moral guide in the home? Was it not the woman's single allotted 'responsible' vocation to instil in the family members the purity and moral rectitude necessary in keeping alive so vital an ideology as the 'angel in the house' and all its corresponding ideals? Is Helen not merely preparing herself to assume the Ruskinian duties carefully designated for her as mother-wife in the sacred home? (5) These points are supported by Langland (1989:141) who reminds the reader that, because Victorian women were protected from the outside world, they thus maintained their purity and, as such, could serve as 'redemptive angels' to fallen men. She argues that 'Helen is initially seduced by this ideology and expects to "save" Huntingdon'. Thus one wonders at the injustice of critics who unfairly condemn Helen for attempting to assume the role for which she has been ordained by society.

(4) Langland (in Harrison & Taylor (eds.) 1992:118) points out that Victorian fiction contains a legion of female saviours among whom are Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, who is to 'guide and protect a reformed Rochester', and George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke and Mary Garth who are to 'give a social focus to the self-indulgent desires of Will Ladislaw and Fred Vincy'.

(5) The Ruskinian doctrine of the 'separate spheres' was presented only in 1865 - seventeen years after the publication of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Ruskin, however, was articulating a concept which had been in evidence since the turn of the century.

Helen's aunt tries in vain to dissuade her from committing an irredeemable error. She argues:

'...do you imagine your merry, thoughtless profligate would allow himself to be guided by a young girl like you?'

Helen naively replies,

'... I think I might have influence sufficient to save him from some errors, and I should think my life well spent in the effort to preserve so noble a nature from destruction ... sometimes he says that if he had me always by his side he should never do or say a wicked thing, and that a little daily talk with me would make him quite a saint' (A. Brontë 1985:165/6).

and later,

'there is essential goodness in him; - and what delight to unfold it! If he has wandered, what bliss to recall him! If he is now exposed to the baneful influence of corrupting and wicked companions, what glory to deliver him from them! - Oh! if I could but believe that Heaven has designed me for this!' (A. Brontë 1985:168).

Blaming his many faults on a foolish, over-indulgent mother, Helen confidently asserts, '...his wife shall undo what his mother did' (A. Brontë 1985:191). Such is the influence of so indoctrinating an ideology as that of woman's redemptive power that Langland (1989:141) comments, 'The *idea* is so entrancing to Helen that it is perhaps more instrumental than Huntingdon himself in winning her consent to marriage'. (my emphasis)

Thus, for one so dedicated to her worthy cause, Helen's failure surely comes as a bitter blow. It is not long before she discovers that Huntingdon enjoys the freedom of his bachelor-style existence and has no intention of reforming. His boyish charm and good looks enable him to secure the attention and devotion of others. He is spoilt in the extreme, entirely self-centred and single-mindedly self-indulgent. He demands Helen's undivided attention which she - striving to be the perfect angel-bride - eagerly gives him: '...since I love him so much, I can

easily forgive him for loving himself: he likes to be pleased, and it is my delight to please him...' (A. Brontë 1985:216). This is reminiscent of Patmore's angel, whose main purpose in life is 'her desire to please' (*The Angel in the House* 11.viii.III). Morse's (1993:25) comment that 'for Patmore this ideal of womanhood implies not simply dedication to her husband but a total emptying out of self' is entirely relevant here, for this is exactly what Helen is prepared to do for her husband.

Huntingdon is unreasonably jealous of anything that lays claim to his wife's attention. Resentful of Helen's prayerful concentration during a church service, he childishly complains, '...you were so absorbed in your devotions that you had not even a glance to spare for me - I declare, it is enough to make one jealous of one's Maker...' (A. Brontë 1985:217). Early in their married life, Helen comments that Huntingdon is easily bored: '...he never reads anything but newspapers and sporting magazines; and when he sees me occupied with a book, he won't let me rest till I close it' (A. Brontë 1985:221). Once Helen becomes a mother and her attention is divided between her husband and her child, Huntingdon pathetically whines, 'Helen, I shall positively hate that little wretch, if you worship it so madly! You are absolutely infatuated about it' (A. Brontë 1985:253). When Helen's father dies, Huntingdon displays an inexcusable lack of sympathy: 'My poor father died last week: Arthur was vexed to hear of it, because he saw that I was shocked and grieved, and he feared the circumstances would mar his comfort' (A. Brontë 1985:279). Even on Huntingdon's deathbed, when Helen devotedly attends to his needs day and night, he complains to his friend Hattersley, 'What are her sufferings to mine?' (A. Brontë 1985:448).

Implicit in her descriptions of Huntingdon's extreme self-absorption, is Anne Brontë's criticism of a prejudiced ideology that so unfairly favours male over female. Her point is clear: entire submission on the part of the woman encourages patriarchal tyranny and is detrimental to both partners in a marriage. That Huntingdon whole-heartedly approves Helen's devoted adherence to the

role of the pure, saintly companion of Victorian ideology is evident in the many instances in which he refers to her as his 'angel', his 'sweet angel', his 'household deity' (6) and - when she is a touch too severe in her admonitions - his 'angel monitress'.

According to Victorian ideology, the woman required protection from the evils of the outside world and was thus - 'for her own safety' - confined to the four walls of her home. So Huntingdon - impatient and impulsive as he is - speeds up their European honeymoon in order to settle her all the more quickly into their home, Grass-dale Manor:

He wanted to get me home, he said, to have me all to himself, and to see me safely installed as the mistress of Grass-dale Manor, just as single-minded, as naive and piquante as I was; and, as if I had been some frail butterfly, he expressed himself fearful of *rubbing the silver off my wings* by bringing me into contact with society ...(A. Brontë 1985:216). (my emphasis)

Huntingdon's direct reference to the 'silver' on his wife's 'wings' reveals his indoctrination by an ideology which promotes the notion that any prolonged contact with the outside world will tarnish the purity of the woman's angelic nature. Naively unaware of the self-serving motive behind this move, Helen appears to be rather touched at Huntingdon's apparent concern for her welfare. At first she is happy with her lot, but it is not long before she admits to an error of judgement in her choice of a marriage partner. Barely eight weeks after the wedding Helen admits to herself, 'Arthur is not what I thought him at first, and if I had known him in the beginning as thoroughly as I do now, I probably never should have loved him...' (A. Brontë 1985:215).

(6) Ruskin stresses the sacredness of the woman's place in the Home, itself 'a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household gods' (1912:98-9).

So begins the downward spiral of their marriage. The speed with which this dissolution occurs reveals Anne Brontë's determined attempt to undermine the most sacred of contemporary institutions: marriage. For months at a time Helen is left at Grass-dale Manor while Huntingdon consorts with his profligate companions in London. Year after year the same pattern of debauchery and over-indulgence repeats itself - drunken orgies and compulsive gambling contests in London, and, in the Autumn, wild, raucous hunting parties at Grass-dale Manor. At first Helen resents being left at home while Huntingdon spends a large portion of the year in London. In her letters she appeals to him to return and rebukes him for his behaviour. Huntingdon's friends, who had regarded his marriage as a betrayal of themselves in the first place, scorn her attempts to control him. She thereby earns the epithets 'she-tiger', 'vixen', and 'tigress', (7) and is even said to possess 'porcupine quills'. She is accused of being 'unnatural' and 'unwomanly' - both terms used for assertive women who dared to deviate from the norm of angelic womanhood. Helen's fall from grace in the eyes of Huntingdon and his friends occurs remarkably quickly and is reminiscent of the words of Patmore's protagonist,

'The woman's gentle mood o'erstept
Withers my love ...'
(*The Angel in the House* I.xi.I)

Even more than Huntingdon's absences in London, Helen comes to dread the riotous hunting sessions at Grass-dale Manor. Nightly scenes of drunken debauchery horrify and disgust her. One evening in particular is memorable for its multiple displays of idiotic behaviour and abusive actions and language. Helen's total loss of respect for her husband is evident in her description of him

(7) These are all stereotypical epithets used to categorise a woman who defied accepted norms.

as he is helped up to bed:

At last he came, slowly and stumblingly, ascending the stairs, supported by Grimsby and Hattersley, who neither of them walked quite steadily themselves, but were both laughing and joking at him, and making noise enough for all the servants to hear. He himself was no longer laughing now, but sick and stupid...' (A. Brontë 1985:291).

So much for the patriarchal figure of authority! What horrifies Helen more than anything is the concern that, far from succeeding in elevating Huntingdon's character, she finds herself being dragged down to his level. She suddenly becomes aware of the fact that 'things that formerly shocked and disgusted [her], now seem only natural' (A. Brontë 1985:274). She admits that, 'Instead of being humbled and purified by my afflictions, I feel that they are turning my nature into gall' (A. Brontë 1985:323).

Thus Anne Brontë comes to the same conclusion that Harriet Martineau had reached: the Victorian woman was more than a saint endowed solely with angelic qualities - she was an individual in her own right, a fallible mortal with specific needs and desires and passions. Langland (1989: 142) supports this viewpoint: 'Helen Huntingdon is not simply "good" in the mode of some of Charles Dickens's pure heroines; she is a woman of passion and vacillation - a fully credible, struggling individual'. (8)

In addition to all her initial worries Helen, to her horror, discovers that her husband is involved with one of their lady-guests, Annabella Lowborough, the wife of one of Huntingdon's friends, Lord Lowborough. Huntingdon is initially repentant and makes several feeble efforts to excuse his behaviour. One of his

(8) Agnes Wickfield in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* is the epitome of the pure heroine. Dickens frequently uses 'angel' terminology when referring to her, just as Huntingdon initially does with Helen.

patronizing arguments anticipates the Ruskinian concept of the differing inherent natures of men and women:

'It is a woman's nature to be constant - to love one and one only, blindly, tenderly, and for ever - bless them, dear creatures! and you above them all - but you must have some commiseration for us, Helen; you must give us a little more licence ...' (A. Brontë 1985:248).

Gérin (1976:254) notes that 'Anne Brontë, in advance of her time, denied this right to Huntingdon, or to any other man, and made it one of the capital issues of her book to proclaim that one equal moral law was binding for men and women alike'. When Helen queries Huntingdon's feelings for Annabella, he cleverly reassures her:

'She [Annabella] is a daughter of earth; you [Helen] are an angel of heaven; only be not too austere in your divinity, and remember that I am a poor, fallible mortal' (A. Brontë 1985:249).

In an attempt to justify himself, Huntingdon is unconsciously forming a clear distinction between the pure angelic lady of Victorian ideology and her corrupt mortal counterpart - the fallen woman, daughter of Eve. And yet Helen does not pretend to be an angel; in struggling to suppress her 'wrath' and her 'fury', she admits to being a mere human who is not prepared to endure humiliation and insults at the hands of others. Exploding the lie of the pliant, forgiving Victorian female, Helen not only finds it impossible to excuse her husband his disloyal behaviour, but readily professes her hatred for him. He has tortured her past endurance and there is no turning back: 'I think the petrification is so completely effected at last, that nothing can melt me again' (A. Brontë 1985:332). She asks Huntingdon's permission to leave with her son, but he refuses, as is his legal right, so she insists that from then on they will remain husband and wife in name only - a bold assertion indeed! This is a clear reversal of roles as Helen lays the ground rules for her future life with her husband.

Helen is prepared to endure this heartless existence until it becomes apparent that Huntingdon is corrupting their son. In order to 'make a man of him', Huntingdon and his friends teach the child to 'tipple wine like papa, to swear like Mr Hattersley, and to have his own way like a man, and sen[d] mamma to the devil when she trie[s] to prevent him' (A. Brontë 1985:356). Fearful for her son's future, Helen does the unthinkable: she plans to defy Victorian law and social conventions by running away with her child. In so doing, she fully realises that she will bring upon herself the wrath of society and will be treated as an outcast - a fallen woman - forever. Ironically, through no fault of her own, she is now classed in the same category as Annabella Lowborough - that of the 'monster' of Victorian ideology, for what she has undertaken to do is no small crime in the eyes of conservative nineteenth-century society. When Huntingdon brings his new mistress into their home as governess to her son, Helen realizes that it is time to leave. With the help of her brother, Frederick Lawrence, squire of the Linden-Grange area, Helen escapes to Wildfell Hall, their old family home, part of which he has had renovated in preparation for her.

A year later, on hearing the news that her husband is desperately ill and has been deserted by all his friends, Helen feels duty-bound to return to his bedside in order to nurse him. The reader wonders why a woman as strong as Helen, who has so unashamedly defied convention, is drawn back to her husband out of a sense of duty. (9) Contrary to the opinions of several critics who feel that Helen returns to 'torment' her husband on his deathbed, it is my belief that she returns out of compassion for the man she once loved. (10) Important to note,

(9) The sense of duty, for both men and women, was exaggerated in the Victorian milieu, as has already been made apparent in the writings of Harriet Martineau.

(10) Langland (in Harrison & Taylor (eds) 1992:119) questions Helen's motive in this regard. She wonders whether Helen returns to 'redeem' or to 'punish'; whether she goes out of 'love' or of 'hatred'; whether she is a 'ministering angel' or a 'vengeful devil'; or whether she is a 'holy saint' or a 'common sinner'. It is also interesting to note that throughout the novel Anne Brontë herself uses rhetoric which represents the whole angel/devil ideology.

however, is the fact that Helen does not return to resume her role as 'angel in the house', for, insisting that Huntingdon sign a document which gives her and her son their freedom, she returns on her own terms, and he is expected to play by her rules.

In contrast to Gilbert Markham, who feels that Helen is 'actuated by the best and noblest motives', and who envies Huntingdon for having 'such an angel by his side' (A. Brontë 1985:435,444), Huntingdon believes that she has returned to taunt him. He regards her motive as '...an act of Christian charity, whereby you hope to gain a higher seat in heaven for yourself, and scoop a deeper pit in hell for me' (A. Brontë 1985:430).

Helen tries in vain to persuade Huntingdon to ask for pardon but, though he sincerely tries to repent, he finds that he cannot. He asks, 'Where's the use of a probationary existence ...if the vilest sinner may win the reward of the holiest saint, by merely saying, "I repent"?' (A. Brontë 1985:450). When he dies, Helen comforts herself with the belief that 'through whatever purging fires the erring spirit may be doomed to pass - whatever fate awaits it, still, it is not lost, and God, who hateth nothing that He hath made, *will* bless it in the end!' (A. Brontë 1985:452). Helen Huntingdon has failed in her mission to save her husband. (11) Anne Brontë thus deliberately subverts the belief in the redemptive power of the Victorian woman, which has been tried and found to be wanting.

(11) Critics commonly believe that Helen's failure to 'save' her husband reflects Anne Brontë's sense of defeat in failing to save her brother, Branwell, whose death was largely owing to an overindulgence in drink and opiates. Anne worked as governess for the Robinson family at Thorpe Green from 1840 to 1845. In 1843 Branwell joined her as tutor to the Robinson's son. Branwell subsequently fell in love with Mrs Robinson and believed that she returned this love. Her ultimate rejection of him led to his rapid degeneration and early death at the age of thirty-one. Anne blamed herself for she had introduced him to the Robinson family. She wrote in her diary paper that during her time at Thorpe Green she had had 'some very unpleasant and undreamt-of experience of human nature...'. It is believed that Anne channelled many of her feelings and experiences into the writing of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (Langland 1989:21).

Langland's (in Harrison & Taylor (eds) 1992:118) statement supports this view: *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* 'explodes the myth of woman's redemptive spirituality and insight'.

Before dealing with Helen's experience as the tenant of Wildfell Hall, it is necessary to discuss several characters whose lives interact with those of the Huntingdons. My intention in this regard is to illustrate that characters other than Helen exemplify my theme of exploding the patriarchal lie of angelic womanhood and its related issues.

Lord Lowborough and Annabella Wilmot, members of Huntingdon's social circle, marry. However, their union is doomed from the start. Lord Lowborough, a compulsive gambler, loses all his money and turns to drink. The reader witnesses the mammoth conflict raging within him in his endeavour to break free from this world of corruption. Loneliness and depression repeatedly drive him back to his circle of friends, who encourage him to succumb. Huntingdon once boasts that '[he] tenderly brought him back to the fold' (A. Brontë 1985:207). On another occasion Huntingdon declares, 'I took him home -that is, to our club...' (A. Brontë 1985:202). This is a conscious perversion of the concept of 'home'. In Victorian ideology 'home' was the centre of all that was sacred - a retreat in which the patriarchal husband could find relief from the pressures of the outside world. It is obvious that men such as Huntingdon and Hattersley form their own 'family' within the club, totally insensitive to the fact that their wives and children are being neglected. How different, therefore, is the atmosphere of the 'club home' from the serenity and peace of the supposedly ideal Victorian home! In fact, Huntingdon and Hattersley, in their evil subversion of this myth, unintentionally betray its emptiness.

It is from this world of debauchery that Lowborough wishes to escape. But his desperation leads him to think irrationally and to marry for the wrong reasons:

'...if I could get a wife, with fortune enough to pay off my debts and set me straight in the world... and sweetness and goodness enough to make home tolerable, and reconcile me to myself, - I think I should do, yet' (A. Brontë 1985:209).

In contrast to the Huntingdon situation it is now the male who seeks redemption in the form of an angel-saviour. For Lowborough seeks in a wife the moral goodness sadly lacking in his own life.

His disappointment is acute when he discovers that, contrary to the influence of the ideal spiritually-elevated and pure mother-wife, the Eve-like Annabella, herself a 'fallen woman', entices him to return to his evil habits. Far from fulfilling the role of the saviour that Lowborough so desperately needs, Annabella becomes his 'temptor' (A. Brontë 1985:283). Her deception does not end here, for she allows herself to become involved in an illicit liaison with his best friend, Huntingdon. With Annabella's desertion of her husband and children, Anne Brontë intentionally undermines the concept of the devoted wife-mother, and relegates her to another stereotypical role - that of the 'monster', a social construct created in part to define any woman who fails to fulfill her wedding vows.

The Hattersley/Hargrave marriage, too, proves to be a disappointment to both parties. In Hattersley's search for a life-long partner he draws up definite specifications:

'I must have somebody that will let me have my own way in everything - not like your wife, Huntingdon; she is a charming creature, but she looks as if she had a will of her own...' (A. Brontë 1985:233/4).

Hattersley finds exactly what he is looking for in Millicent Hargrave, who is bullied into marriage by her over-ambitious mother. She is meek, submissive and self-sacrificial. In fact, she is the perfect angel-bride. Ironically, however, Hattersley soon discovers that he is dissatisfied because she is *too* perfect. Referring to her 'exceeding goodness', he explains,

'When a boy has been cramming raisins and sugar-plums all day, he longs for a squeeze of sour orange by way of a change. And did you never, Milly, observe the sands on the sea-shore; how nice and smooth they look, and how soft and easy they feel to the foot? But if you plod along, for half an hour, over this soft easy carpet - giving way at every step, yielding the more the harder you press, - you'll find it rather wearisome work, and be glad enough to come to a bit of good, firm rock, that won't budge an inch whether you stand, walk, or stamp upon it...you'll find it the easier footing after all' (A. Brontë 1985:298).

Once again, yet in a different context, Anne Brontë cleverly criticises the Victorian notion of perfect womanhood: a woman who fits the mould *too* snugly ceases to be intriguing. The implication here is that the ethereal, saintly being of Victorian ideology does not ultimately satisfy the ever-demanding male, who seemingly prefers a more substantial life partner. (12)

Against this backdrop of unhappy marriages, a young girl such as Esther Hargrave, Millicent's younger sister, understandably chooses to remain single rather than suffer the slave-like existence of the voiceless angel. She is prepared rather to face the consequence of being termed a 'monster' for failing to meet society's requirements regarding perfect womanhood.

Considering the unhappiness of those around her, it is little wonder that Helen Graham - as the tenant of Wildfell Hall - finds relief from the complexities of her previous existence. It is interesting to note that, in assuming the patriarchal role as provider for her small family in her new household, Helen finds happiness

(12) Interestingly, Basch (1974:98) makes a similar remark with regard to George Eliot's *Romola*: 'right from the start of their relationship...Tito is crushed by the moral superiority he senses in Romola, and is blinded by the halo round her head. He would have preferred her less noble and more human'.

and fulfilment. (13) Langland (1989:140) makes an important observation when she stresses the fact that '[t]he outside world in which Helen succeeds as an artist is far less threatening than her "home" at Grass-dale'. Anne Brontë thus undermines the lie that women require patriarchal protection from the harsh realities of the outside world.

Much to the surprise of the Linden-Grange community, who take it upon themselves to call on her, Helen adopts a 'masculine' pride in the work which she takes so seriously. (14) Resenting any interruption she continues, much to the discomfort of her guests, to put finishing touches to her picture in their presence.

Gilbert Markham's initial view of Helen is not a very favourable one. Not only does he find her rather severe in appearance, but they clash on important basic issues. Anne Brontë's most overt feminist statement is revealed in a heated discussion regarding the different methods of educating the two sexes.

(13) Gérin (1976:251) claims that Helen is surely 'one of the very first married women in fiction who is both competent and resolved to keep herself not by any of the accepted means of employment open to women of birth and education such as housekeeper, companion, governess, but as a painter selling her canvasses to dealers'. According to Batley (date unobtainable :6), the pursuing of a career was one of two most common ways - the other being sexual adventure - in which 'the imprisoned Victorian woman struck her blow for freedom'.

(14) Gilbert & Gubar (1979:81) provide an interesting viewpoint regarding Helen's career as an artist: Helen signs with false initials the landscapes she produces in her art, and she titles her works in such a way as to hide her whereabouts. Thus, she uses her art as a means through which to express herself, as well as a camouflage behind which to hide. The inner conflict apparent in women striving for freedom from patriarchal domination is evident here.

Gilbert upholds the traditional belief that boys should learn to resist temptation while girls are protected from any form of outside influence. On the other hand, Helen, voicing Anne Brontë's personal views, argues that all forms of temptation as far as is possible should be removed from the experience of youngsters until they are strong enough to withstand them, and that, above all, males and females should be treated alike.

After Helen's witnessing of her husband's over-indulgence, she is determined to teach her son to abhor any form of alcohol. Her unconventional viewpoints earn her the scorn of men and women alike. Gilbert's mother, Mrs Markham, is horrified: 'The poor child will be the veriest milksop that ever was sopped!' (A. Brontë 1985:54). When Helen declares her intention to educate her son herself, Mrs Markham protests: '...you will treat him like a girl - you'll spoil his spirit, and make a mere Miss Nancy of him...' (A. Brontë 1985:55). It is evident that Mrs Markham is severely bound by society's notions of what constitutes 'manly' behaviour.

It is through the expression of Mrs Markham's viewpoints that Anne Brontë provides her most serious critique of the differing roles expected of males and females in Victorian England. Mrs Markham concurs with the idea that men deserve to be indulged. She actively encourages her sons to adopt this belief. (15) Though initially annoyed at Helen's outspoken contradiction of his viewpoints, Gilbert admits that perhaps he has been spoilt:

(15) It is important to remember that the concept of man as 'taker' and woman as 'giver' was supported by many women, including such influential writers as Mrs Ellis and Mrs Beeton, who reinforced the view that men should be indulged. Referring to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Scott (1983:79) shows insight in his comment that 'the book fairly canvasses...those "active" faults in women which help their menfolk to defect'.

'I was naturally touchy, or it would not have vexed me so much. Perhaps, too, I was a little bit spoiled by my mother and sister, and some other ladies of my acquaintance' (A. Brontë 1985:58).

Gilbert's sister, Rose, though she performs the household duties expected of her, resents the obvious preferential treatment afforded her brothers. Rose's defiance of the system is so appropriately voiced that it should be quoted in detail. Gilbert is late for tea and yet he has the audacity to complain of the overdrawn flavour. When Mrs Markham orders her daughter to make a fresh pot, Rose expostulates:

'Well! - if it had been *me* now, I should have had no tea at all...but *you* - ~~w~~ can't do too much for you - It's always so - if there's anything particularly nice at table, mamma winks and nods at me to abstain from it, and if I don't attend to that, she whispers, "Don't eat so much of that, Rose, Gilbert will like it for his supper" - *I'm* nothing at all...or, "Rose, don't put so many spices in the pudding, Gilbert likes it plain," - or, "Mind you put plenty of currants in the cake, Fergus like plenty." If I say, "Well, mamma, I don't," I'm told I ought not to think of myself - "You know, Rose, in all household matters, we have only two things to consider, first, what's proper to be done, and secondly, what's most agreeable to the gentlemen of the house - anything will do for the ladies" ' (A. Brontë 1985:77/8).

This excessive fawning over men, which extends to catering to their pettiest preferences, has aptly been detailed by Rose. The most telling phrase is 'I'm nothing at all' - these few words encapsulate the whole Victorian concept of the woman as a non-entity and the man as omnipotent. (16)

Gilbert admits that Rose is right and that men who are constantly indulged tend to become selfish. He declares that when he marries he will '...expect to find more pleasure in making [his] wife happy and comfortable, than in being made

(16) Rose's words '*I'm* nothing at all' serves as a reminder of Sarah Ellis's comment that true womanly behaviour was observed in 'the power of throwing every consideration of self into the balance as nothing' (in Lerner 1978:174).

so by her...' (A. Brontë 1985:79). Mrs Markham, one of many Victorian women duped by society and influential female writers into the stereotypical role of the angel in the house, finds her son's contravention of accepted Victorian policy rather alarming. She is quick to assure him that it is his wife's duty to be of service to *him*:

'...It's your business to please yourself, and hers to please you!' (A. Brontë 1985:79). (17)

Her unquestioning acceptance of a husband's role in marriage is evident in her description of her relationship with Gilbert's late father:

'...I should as soon have expected him to fly, as to put himself out of his way to pleasure me. He always said I was a good wife, and did my duty; and he always did his - bless him! - he was steady and punctual, seldom found fault without a reason, always did justice to my good dinners, and hardly ever spoiled my cookery by delay - and that's as much as any woman can expect of any man'(A. Brontë 1985:79).

A limiting view of wedlock indeed! Anne Brontë insists on highlighting the emptiness of a marriage based on such principles.

More to the point, however, is the extent to which Gilbert has been moulded by his upbringing. He has already admitted to being spoilt. There is also evidence that he is arrogant, conceited, and condescending to women - qualities usually attributed to the Victorian patriarch. Interestingly, Chitham (1991:142) reflects that Gilbert 'walk[s] through the book with a host of male faults'.

(17) This idea anticipates Patmore's declaration that
Man must be pleased, but him to please
Is woman's pleasure...
(*The Angel in the House* l. ix.l)

However, to his credit, Gilbert does not remain a static character. Through his contact with Helen, and through the reading of her diary, Gilbert is 'reeducated'. (18) It is not long before Anne Brontë intentionally effects a radical reversal of male/female roles, in order to subvert the ideology of the patriarch as 'taker' and the angel as 'giver': Gilbert, used to female attention and puzzled at Helen's indifference to him, strives to impress her:

'...even when she angered me...by her uncharitable conclusions respecting me, it only made me the more dissatisfied with myself for having so unfavourably impressed her, and the more desirous to vindicate my character and disposition in her eyes, and if possible, to win her esteem' (A. Brontë 1985:85).

According to Victorian ideology, the woman should be self-effacing and thus quick to accept the blame for any adverse circumstance. In contradiction to typical patriarchal behaviour, Gilbert blames himself for Helen's ill-treatment of him. Furthermore, instead of the patriarchal male favouring the female by bestowing his attentions upon her, it is now Gilbert who feels honoured when Helen notices him:

'...whenever she did condescend to converse, I liked to listen'
(A. Brontë 1985:85).

As far as the development of their relationship is concerned, it is Helen who sets the pace. Once they have acknowledged their love for one another, it is she who determines not to meet with him again, only allowing him the consolation of contact through correspondence once a period of six months has lapsed.

(18) Langland (1989:138) comments that 'Helen's radical reeducation of her son parallels the reeducation of Gilbert Markham, and both underscore Anne Brontë's trenchant critique of male education and of the whole Victorian patriarchal system'.

When the couple is finally reunited, it is Helen who takes the initiative in her declaration of love for him. Symbolically offering him a winter rose which has managed to endure many hardships, she declares, 'The rose I gave you was an emblem of my heart...would you take it away and leave me here alone?'. Helen has, in effect, proposed to Gilbert - a more obvious reversal of roles there surely could not be! Of Anne Brontë's heroine, Gérin (1976:251) remarks, 'Helen Huntingdon is thinking and acting like a woman of the twentieth-century'.

Gilbert's evident transformation in character bodes well for the couple's future together. Ironically, what Helen worked so hard for and failed to achieve with Arthur Huntingdon, she has unconsciously and effortlessly accomplished in Gilbert Markham: she has managed to 'undo what his mother did' (A. Brontë 1985:191).

Helen displays admirable independence of mind and strength of character in her insistence that she live her life in the manner which most accords with her beliefs and principles, regardless of whether or not they conform to traditional notions of acceptable behaviour. Anne Brontë's portrayal of such a spirited heroine, together with her deliberate role-reversal in her heroine's relationship with Markham, is undoubtedly a pointed attempt on her part to explode the lie restricting the Victorian woman to the limited confines of being 'the angel in the house'.

The final question to be determined concerns the true identity of Helen Huntingdon: is she 'angel' or 'monster'? A fine line separates these two classifications - a line which Helen crosses long before she takes leave of Huntingdon. In all fairness, Helen's intentions are good. She longs, with heart and soul, to be the perfect angel-wife for Huntingdon. She tries to do all that is expected of her in this role: she loves him; she pampers him; she gives him her undivided attention; and, above all, she strives to uplift him morally and spiritually.

Herein lies her initial error. When Huntingdon misbehaves, Helen's over-enthusiastic rebukes and remonstrances tend towards self-assertion, a crime in the eyes of Victorian society, for a strong-minded woman was considered 'unnatural' and 'unwomanly'. Thus Helen has already crossed the line. Her unpardonable sin, however, is her highly illegal flight from her husband's side, taking with her the child who is his by law. It is little wonder that Anne Brontë's readers were shocked, for, according to Victorian ideology, her 'heroine' proved to be a 'monster' in disguise! Little attention is paid to the torments and abuses which drove Helen into exile, earning her the title of 'fallen woman'. Yet Anne Brontë's story has a satisfactory ending, for, through Helen's own impeccable qualities, and through Gilbert's 'reinterpretation' of her in his narrative, the fallen woman is redeemed.

Does this mean, then, that Helen's angelic status has been restored to her? I think not. It is my contention that both classifications - 'angel' and 'monster' - are lies. Helen is not an 'angel' in the Victorian sense of the word: she is not meek, submissive, or compliant. In short, she has a will of her own, and her actions are understandably human. In fleeing from a husband who does not deserve her loyalty, she is protecting her son from future corruption. This does not make her a monster. Through her skilful portrayal of Helen Huntingdon as a true-to-life heroine, Anne Brontë successfully depicts the Victorian woman as in reality she was, a flesh and blood human being who demanded the right to control her own life.

Langland (1989:55) confirms this point with her acute observation that Anne Brontë presents us with powerful portraits of women 'who have sufficient self-confidence and autonomy (financial and emotional) [so] that they can ultimately command the terms of relationship. And if the man fails to meet those terms, they will simply walk away'.

Anne Brontë's message in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is portrayed in far clearer and less ambiguous terms than that of Harriet Martineau in *Deerbrook*. It is

ironic that, although Harriet Martineau, an ardent feminist, certainly *exposed* the lie of angelic womanhood through a subtle undermining of Victorian ideology in *Deerbrook*, it was the gentle, meek, yet determined Anne Brontë who, through her belief in justice for all mankind, male or female, came close to *exploding* this myth in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

CHAPTER 3: CHARLOTTE BRONTË: SHIRLEY (1849).

'What such a "sister of the spotted, bright, quick, fiery leopard" would do in any other fiction of the period, one trembles to think; one spring into the drawing-room with her great dog Tartar at her side would shatter the whole Victorian frame' (Bentley 1977:73). Charlotte Brontë's ingenious creation of her eponymous heroine, Shirley, is surely a serious attempt on her part to 're-define feminine selfhood, freed from restricting images and assumptions' (Foster 1985:71). For Shirley is described by Bentley (1977:73) as 'a very remarkable young woman to find in a novel published in 1849'.

Yet, like her youngest sister, Anne Brontë, Charlotte was not a feminist in any formal sense of the word. In fact, Inga-Stina Ewbank (1966:xv) comments that '[n]one of the Brontë sisters has left a mark on the history of female emancipation, in the same ways that such of their contemporaries as Harriet Martineau and Frances Power Cobbe did'. She further states that 'the movement for Women's Rights was slowly beginning to gather force in the 1840s, but it received little support from the Haworth parsonage'. (1)

It was only through their literary work that Charlotte and Anne voiced their dissatisfaction with the prevailing ideologies that endorsed 'the oppression of one half of humanity by the other' (in Basch 1974:14). Both sisters (as has already been established in the case of Anne) believed implicitly in the need to

(1) Ewbank comments that although Charlotte Brontë felt strongly about the position of women in society, 'her interest was not of a reformatory kind and ... she did not envisage the possibility of a fundamental change'. In a letter to W.S.Williams in 1848, Charlotte stated:

When a woman has a little family to rear and educate and a household to conduct, her hands are full, her vocation is evident; when her destiny isolates her I suppose she must do what she can, live as she can, complain as little, bear as much, work as well as possible (in Ewbank 1966:xv).

tell the truth, to present as accurate a version of nineteenth-century daily life as possible; and, most notably, to portray the Victorian woman as in reality she was, a human being with emotions and desires, and not an artificial angelic figure who lacked true substance. The commitment to this cause resulted in the development of a strict artistic principle which played a crucial role in the shaping of Charlotte Brontë's novels:

Unless I can look beyond the greatest Masters, and study Nature herself, I have no right to paint. Unless I can have the courage to use the language of Truth in preference to the jargon of Conventionality, I ought to be silent (in Ewbank 1966:160/1).

Charlotte Brontë is quick to clarify this point as, in the second paragraph of *Shirley*, we read:

If you think that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken. Do you anticipate sentiment, and poetry, and reverie? Do you expect passion, and stimulus, and melodrama? Calm your expectations; reduce them to a lowly standard. Something real, cool, and solid, lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning ... (C. Brontë 1985:39).

The Brontë sisters may not have taken an active stand in any overtly feminist rebellion, but their plainly-stated commitment to literary realism (evident in the above passages written by Charlotte, as well as in Anne's Preface to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*) has earned them the reputation of having produced 'some of the most unwomanly novels of the Victorian period' (Ewbank 1966:xvi/xvii).

A detailed examination of *Shirley* will determine Charlotte Brontë's contribution to the furthering of the nineteenth-century woman's cause through the medium of literature, as well as the extent to which she actively participates in the

women novelists' killing of the 'angel in the house'.⁽²⁾ Her portrayal of the 'fine wild girl' (Bentley 1977:73), Shirley, cannot be equalled by the heroines found in the pages of either Harriet Martineau or Anne Brontë. Does this mean, then, that Charlotte Brontë was more adventurous, and thus more successful, than her two contemporaries had been in her design to throttle the angel in the house? Does she manage, as successfully as Anne Brontë before her had done, to explode the lie concerning Victorian women and angelic womanhood? It is my intention to illustrate that, while the creation of Charlotte's unique heroine enabled her to surpass both Harriet Martineau and Anne Brontë in originality and insight, she was nevertheless beset by the same inner conflicts that her fellow novelists had experienced.

Just as Harriet Martineau and George Eliot have been described by Deidre David (1987:230) as both 'collaborators and saboteurs in the world that enabled their very existence as women intellectuals', so Ewbank (1966:xvii) says of the Brontës, 'Custodians of the Standard, they yet also helped to undermine that standard'. ⁽³⁾ It is the adoption of this same view that impels Shirley Foster (1985:71), in her chapter entitled 'Charlotte Bronte: A Vision of Duality', to remark that, like so many mid-Victorian women, Brontë 'experienced the sense of a divided self'. Foster (1985:79) suggests that as a result of this there are two 'levels' in Brontë's fiction: 'the one conscious capitulation to convention, the other dissent concealed by overt orthodoxy'. Feminist critics, Foster says, have taken Brontë as 'a paradigm for the many Victorian women novelists who ...

(2) As I have stated previously it must be remembered that Patmore's catchphrase 'the angel in the house' had not yet come into being. However, the concept of the woman as a pure angelic entity had long been in existence.

(3) 'Custodian of the Standard' was the term introduced by a historian of the Victorian age, G.M.Young (in Ewbank 1966:205).

express their sense of dualities through "devious" or "covert" strategies'. (4) It is therefore necessary to look 'below the overtly "angelic" dogma and the many Victorian women novelists who ... express their sense of dualities through overtly "angelic" dogma and the explicit commentary to discover the real implications of the narrative' (Foster 1985:78).

Thus it is that *Shirley* appears at first to be a traditional nineteenth-century novel filled with patriarchal males who assume authority over their willingly subservient and passive womenfolk. It is only on closer analysis, and when Shirley is introduced in Chapter 11, that Charlotte Brontë's protest becomes deliberately subversive. At first glance, Caroline Helstone, the other, equally important, heroine of *Shirley*, appears to represent submissive girlhood. Young, pretty, sweet-tempered and pure, she has a sole purpose in life: to be the future Mrs Robert Gerard Moore. (5) She wishes, more than all else, to fit into the mould so neatly cut out for her by society. Winifred Gérin (in *British Writers* Vol 5:145) remarks that 'Caroline Helstone remains one of the most charming heroines in all Victorian fiction'.

Caroline has grown up in the home of her cold, austere, yet respected clergyman uncle, Matthewson Helstone. She has received little education and, typical of the young girl of the day, is ill-equipped to fill any role but that of

(4) These subtle strategies were also adopted by Harriet Martineau in her writing of *Deerbrook*, in which is strongly evident her own sense of ambivalence concerning the Victorian woman and her needs.

(5) The story is set in the West Riding district of Yorkshire in 1812. Robert Moore, a West Riding millowner, is determined to succeed in his business, which is severely hampered by the country's ever-failing economy owing to the effects of the Napoleonic War on British trade. Moore decides to instal some of the cloth-dressing machines in the hopes that the saving in labour costs will cheapen his product and expand his market. The irate workers form themselves into bands called Luddites, and take it upon themselves to destroy the machines that are stealing their livelihood. Moore is aided in his fight to defend his mill by other neighbouring manufacturers and by the clergy and gentry of the district.

mother/wife. Moulded by her misogynist uncle who 'thinks everything but sewing and cooking above women's comprehension, and out of their line' (C. Brontë 1985:118), it is hardly surprising that Caroline has never considered an alternative future career for herself. On her return home from the Moore cottage, where she has been taught her lessons by Robert's spinster sister, Hortense, Mr Helstone patronizingly congratulates her on having sewn a shirt that day: '... stick to the needle - learn shirt-making and gown-making, and pie-crust-making, and you'll be a clever woman some day' (C. Brontë 1985:122). Such was the patriarch's limited notion of woman's intelligence! The sarcastic tone employed here indicates Brontë's intolerance of patriarchal conceit, as well as her deliberate intent to subvert the contemporary ideology which encouraged restricted education and activity for females.

Mr Helstone, who can be very charming when it suits him, regards women as 'a very inferior order of existence' (C. Brontë 1985:82). In his youth he had married Mary Cave, a beautiful and deific being, ever submissive and pure, who he initially thought would aptly suit his concept of a perfect mate. In her attempt to create society's image of the 'ideal' woman, Charlotte Brontë endows Mary with 'the face of a Madonna; a girl of living marble; stillness personified' (C. Brontë 1985:81). Helstone's arch-rival, the Radical Mr Yorke, had once been in love with Mary Cave too. In a discussion with Robert Moore, Yorke comments on the similarities between Caroline Helstone and her Aunt Mary. However, he makes a point of saying that Mary was 'less lass-like and flesh-like. You wondered why she hadn't wings and a crown. She was a stately, peaceful angel - was my Mary' (C. Brontë 1985:503).

It is obvious that both the men who thought they loved Mary Cave had preconceived and delusive images of women based on contemporary ideology. Mary, like *Jane Eyre's* Helen Burns, is presented as the epitome of the selfless angel in the house - an etherealized, spiritual being. In her portrayal of Mary Cave, Brontë obviously intends to highlight the dangers incurred to women when such notions as 'the angel in the house' are rigidly adhered to. For eventually,

deprived of human warmth, love, and companionship, Mary passively fades away. Her decline goes unnoticed by her self-absorbed husband, who registers surprise at the news of her death. Such is the fate of the ideal woman. Charlotte Brontë's subversive message is implicit yet clear: being substanceless, this shadow of a woman will fade, unnoticed, into her native nothingness. This point is confirmed by Gilbert & Gubar (1979:376) who refer to Mary Cave as 'an emblem, a warning that the fate of women inhabiting a male-controlled society involves suicidal self-renunciation'. (6)

The plight of Mary Cave serves as an ever-present warning to Caroline who, as isolated and vulnerable as her aunt had been, also lives invisibly in her uncle's house. Her only satisfying means of escape is into the Moore household where her rather eccentric, self-important, yet kind-hearted cousin Hortense takes it upon herself to educate the motherless girl. Narrow and inflexible in her views on female education, Hortense decides that Caroline 'is not sufficiently girlish and submissive' (C. Brontë 1985:95), and sets about attempting to reform her. In highlighting Hortense's dogmatic views, Charlotte Brontë draws the reader's attention to the fact that many women, comfortable and secure in their servile positions, promoted the doctrine of self-repression and self-renunciation and, in so doing, undermined any progress that was being made towards the attainment of female liberation. Basch (1974:158) comments that '[a]s retrograde as the most narrow-minded of the women-haters in the novel, [Hortense] would like to destroy in her pupil the smallest leaning towards initiative and originality'.

Yet Caroline does not complain of this treatment for she is fond of Hortense and, nevertheless, is prepared to put up with anything so long as she has the chance

(6) Gilbert & Gubar (1879:513) make a similar comment with regard to *Middlemarch*'s Dorothea Brooke. They believe that, through Casaubon's death, 'Eliot liberates Dorothea from her oscillations between murderous anger and suicidal self-punishment'.

to catch a glimpse of Robert Moore, or even to inhabit the same room in which he has eaten his morning meal. She is grateful for any attention which he bestows upon her, and her happiness is frighteningly dependent on his moods: if he smiles she is happy for the rest of the day; if he is business-like in his approach he renders her miserable. Caroline is perceptive enough to realise, however, that Robert has important business concerns on his mind and cannot always be thinking of her. The injustice of the situation begins to dawn on her: she is obsessed with Robert because she has nothing else to do with her time and no occupation to absorb her attentions:

'Different, indeed ... is Robert's mental condition to mine: I think only of him; he has no room, no leisure to think of me. The feeling called love is and has been for two years the predominant emotion of my heart; always there, always awake, always astir: quite other feelings absorb his reflections, and govern his faculties' (C. Brontë 1985:188).

Thus Charlotte Brontë provides an effective critique of the differing interests allocated to men and women in nineteenth-century England: Victorian women were expected to make their homes the centre and circumference of their lives, while men were free to occupy themselves with far more exciting and fulfilling ventures. (7)

When Caroline's uncle and Robert Moore become bitter political adversaries, Mr Helstone forbids his niece to continue with her lessons at Hollow's Mill. With nothing to hope for and nothing to do, the days ahead stretch long and lonely before Caroline as, deprived of her only reason for living, she faces a purposeless existence: 'What am I to do to fill the interval of time which spreads

(7) This brings to mind Ruskin's idea of the 'separate spheres' which, although it made its appearance some years after Brontë's novel was published, was nonetheless an accepted notion long before then. Kate Millet (in *Vicinus* 1972:126) criticises Ruskin for his unjust distribution of activities: he proceeds to 'map out their worlds, reserving the entire scope of human endeavour for the one, and a little hothouse for the other'.

between me and the grave?' she asks, and, later, 'What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my place in the world?' (C. Brontë 1985:190). In these words the reader hears the panic of the Victorian woman who, educated into believing in the elevation of the married state, finds herself deprived of the only vocation which has demanded life-long preparation, and is left facing an empty future, certainly a frightening prospect.

Caroline's solitary state forces her to examine the situations of others around her, and to adopt a more realistic perspective on life. Perhaps for the first time she sincerely considers the plight of the single woman, and it is through Caroline that Charlotte Brontë portrays her disgust at a social system which makes no effort to include the unmarried woman among the ranks of the respected. As was apparent with Maria Young in *Deerbrook*, society patronizingly offers the old maid the occupation of being of service to others: 'Your place is to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help is wanted' (C. Brontë 1985:190), a self-serving notion indeed. Caroline refuses to believe that such self-sacrificial work will provide the inner fulfilment necessary to one's well-being:

Is this enough? Is it to live? Is there not a terrible hollowness, mockery, want, craving, in that existence which is given away to others, for want of something of your own to bestow it on? I suspect there is. Does virtue lie in abnegation of self? I do not believe it. (C. Brontë 1985:190).

In placing her own desires before those of others, Caroline loses the status of 'angel', for she displays traits of selfishness and thus no longer complies with the necessary standards ironically presented by Virginia Woolf (in Anstruther 1992:2) in her later description of the angel:

...She was utterly unselfish ... she sacrificed herself daily ... she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathise always with others

Caroline does have a mind and a wish of her own, and Charlotte Brontë's intention becomes clear: contrary to traditional belief, the woman is a flesh-and-blood human being with individual needs and desires. Thus the reader, looking 'below the overtly "angelic" dogma and explicit commentary' discovers the 'real implications' of Charlotte Brontë's narrative (Foster 1985:78).

Caroline's visit to two spinsters in the neighbourhood, Miss Mann and Miss Ainley, confirms her initial convictions: Miss Mann has through neglect, lack of love, and lack of purpose become a bitter and malicious gossip (8); and Miss Ainley, while devoting her life to alleviating the sufferings of others, nevertheless, as far as Caroline is concerned, endures an existence so 'deeply dreary because it was so loveless...' (C. Brontë 1985:198).

Craik (1968:152) comments that 'the spinsters...do their part simply by existing. Miss Mann, Miss Ainley, and Miss Hall say nothing and advance the action not at all'. Victorian readers would corroborate this view of the old maid as a worthless, valueless social parasite who deserves to be labelled a 'monster' for her failure to achieve the approved status of devoted wife and mother.

Caroline endures the double torture of disappointed love and an inactive vacuous existence. Her efforts to help Miss Ainley in her charitable work bring little relief. Restless during the daylight hours and unable to sleep at night, Caroline wastes away as her aunt before her had done. She is forced to contemplate her only other alternative: to work as a governess. Mr Helstone is horrified. He is as unaware of Caroline's decline as he had been of his wife's: 'Her uncle, ignorant as the table supporting his coffee-cup of all his niece had undergone and was undergoing, scarcely believed his ears'. However, noticing

(8) Both Harriet Martineau in *Deerbrook* and Anne Brontë in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* have made, implicitly or explicitly, this same point: pettiness and gossip occur in the lives of those who lack purpose and direction.

her white cheeks and miserable expression, he discovers that '[w]ithout his being aware of it, the rose had dwindled and faded to a mere snow drop: bloom had vanished, flesh wasted; she sat before him drooping, colourless, and thin' (C. Brontë 1985:203).

Typical patriarchal male that he is, Mr Helstone cannot understand that Caroline's survival depends upon her finding a reason to live. He assumes that her motive is a financial one. Disregarding her feelings on the matter, he assures her that she will be taken care of after his death, and considers the problem solved. Andrew and Judith Hook (Introduction to *Shirley* 1974:20) confirm this viewpoint: 'What Caroline is denied - what she sometimes struggles to deny herself - is the freedom to feel'.

It is only when Caroline has sunk to the depths of despondency that Charlotte Brontë introduces Shirley Keeldar who brings her back to life. Shirley, certainly not in any way the traditional Victorian heroine, is offered in sharp contrast to Caroline: she is bright, vivacious, full of vitality, wildly independent and *alive*! A wealthy heiress who has inherited her own estate, Fieldhead, Shirley confidently takes her place alongside men in a masculine business world.

However, through her business dealings she comes into contact with her tenant, Robert Moore - a situation which causes Caroline much distress and which ultimately results in a further decline. For Caroline believes that Shirley and Robert Moore are romantically involved. In a manner typical of the uncomplaining, self-sacrificial woman, Caroline, as did her predecessors Margaret Ibbotson and Maria Young, suffers in silence. As a female she has no right to protest at the injustice of unrequited love: '[a] lover masculine so disappointed can speak and urge explanation; a lover feminine can say nothing' (C. Brontë 1985:128). Caroline's crime will not go unpunished, for '[s]he had loved without being asked to love, - a natural, sometimes an inevitable chance, but big with misery' (C. Brontë 1985:129). Charlotte Brontë satirically offers the only solution available to a woman imprisoned in the cramping ideologies of

nineteenth-century England - 'self-enclosure' or 'self-containment' (Gilbert & Gubar 1979:377):

You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion.
Show no consternation: close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it
sting through your palm. Never mind: in time, after your hand and arm
have swelled and quivered long with torture, the squeezed scorpion will
die, and you will have learned the great lesson how to endure without
a sob (C. Brontë 1985:128). (9)

In a typically self-effacing manner, Caroline passively gives up all claims to Robert's love without a struggle. Concealed beneath the narrative is Charlotte Brontë's criticism of a system that encourages feminine weakness hidden under the guise of socially approved self-renunciation. Sanders (1986:66) comments that '[b]oth [Caroline] and Lucy Snowe [in *Villette*] make themselves ill with self-repression'.

When Shirley's relatives, the Symptons, arrive, Caroline once again finds herself alone and unoccupied. So begins the next phase of her decline, broken intermittently by occasional uncharacteristic outbursts against the injustice of the patriarchal system which so unfairly favours males over females. Through Caroline we hear the voice of Charlotte Brontë herself:

'I believe single women should have more to do - better chances of interesting and profitable occupation than they possess now' (C. Brontë 1985:376/7). (10)

(9) The reader is reminded of Margaret Ibbotson's response to such a situation: '...my heart, let it suffer as it may, shall never complain to human ear. It shall be as silent as the grave' (Martineau 1839:416).

(10) Charlotte Brontë uses another of her heroines, Jane Eyre, to voice a similar complaint:

'Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field of their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer' (in Morse 1993:190).

Referring to the many single girls in the neighbourhood, Caroline protests:

'The brothers of these girls are every one in business or in professions; they have something to do: their sisters have no earthly employment, but household work and sewing; no earthly pleasure, but an unprofitable visiting; and no hope, in all their life to come, of anything better ... their minds and views shrink to wondrous narrowness. The great wish - the sole aim of every one of them is to be married ... they scheme, they plot, they dress to ensnare husbands [but] ... the matrimonial market is overstocked' (C. Brontë 1985:377).
(11)

One wonders whether many women cultivated this ideology because the alternative - a single existence - was too shocking. Caroline, however, in seeking occupation for women, is proposing a further alternative. In a desperate plea to the 'Men of England' (C. Brontë 1985:378) to do something to alter the present state of affairs, she speaks for all her enlightened Victorian sisters in their refusal to endorse the status quo.

Caroline's gentle, diffident manner belies the discontent felt within. Her greatest fault is that, while she rebels inwardly, she never acts on these impulses. Ewbank (1966:185) comments that in Caroline there 'is no struggle because no strength; she just suffers the traditional Victorian heroine's "decline"'.

Using members of the Yorke family as mediums through which to express her own opinion on the matter, Charlotte Brontë berates Caroline for her inability to pursue her dreams. In a visit to Hortense Moore, Caroline finds herself in the company of the tyrannical and outspoken Mrs Yorke and her two young, but

(11) The use of the words 'matrimonial market' confirms the opinion of Maria Young in *Deerbrook*, who abhors the fact that marriage is more like a financial transaction than a union of hearts. Maria's comment that 'all girls are brought up to think of marriage as almost the only event in life' (Martineau 1983:160) is reflected in Caroline's claim that 'the sole aim of every one of them is to be married'.

stubbornly independent daughters, Rose and Jessie who, despite their youth, are dogmatic in their views on life. Rose scorns Carolines's mundane existence and insists that monotony is synonymous with death. She declares:

'I am resolved that my life shall be a life: not ... a long, slow death like yours in Briarfield Rectory ... Might you not as well be tediously dying, as for ever shut in that glebe-house - a place that ... always reminds me of a windowed grave?' (C. Brontë 1985:384)

Feminist that she is, Rose declares that while it might be necessary for a girl to learn all that is associated with womanly and domestic employments - even to the mending of her brother's stockings - she refuses to be confined within these limits. (12) Referring to the Biblical story of the hidden talents, Rose insists that she has more to offer the world than the accomplishing of mere mundane duties. Her lengthy, vehement tirade against the injustice of the patriarchal system hinges on the repetitive statement, 'I will *not*' (C. Brontë 1985:385). Even Rose's little sister, Jessie, informs Caroline that she 'ought to work for her living honestly, instead of passing a useless life' in her uncle's home (Brontë 1849:391). Charlotte Brontë's subtext is evident: she suggests that if women wish to alter their present subservient status, they should help themselves.

Mrs Yorke, too, heaps on her contribution: in a vicious attack on Caroline, whom she suspects is intent on ensnaring Robert Moore, and whom she obviously regards as a frivolous romantic with no knowledge of the real world, Mrs Yorke accuses her of having

'managed to train [her] features into an habitually lackadaisical expression, better suited to a novel-heroine than to a woman who is to make her way in the real world...' (C. Brontë 1985:387).

(12) Rose Yorke is modelled on Charlotte Brontë's lifelong friend from Roe Head, the ardent feminist Mary Taylor, who was well known for her strong radical views, blunt outspokenness and independence of spirit.

Unfair though this assault is, it jolts Caroline out of her lethargic state and forces her to defend herself. The spirited manner in which she accomplishes this feat is surely admirable, for few people dare to counter the formidable Mrs Yorke.

Unfortunately, however, Caroline's defiant outburst is short-lived. The following day she falls ill and so begins a long, steady decline in mental and physical health. With nothing to live for, Caroline passively gives up the struggle for her life and descends to a state near death. It appears that Caroline, a helpless, vulnerable girl in a loveless masculine world, is to share the fate of her aunt, Mary Cave. Gilbert & Gubar (1979:378) remark on the seriousness of Caroline's situation: 'Withdrawing first into her room and then, more dangerously, into herself ...she begins literally to disappear from lack of food'.

Caroline is saved, however, by a person who is to play an important role in her life, Mrs Pryor, Shirley's former governess and Caroline's long-lost mother. The awareness that Mrs Pryor, a woman whom Caroline has grown to love dearly, is her mother, brings the release that Caroline needs. She now has someone to live for and thus strives to regain her health. With her mother's nurturing care Caroline finds the strength to face the world again. However, despite her newfound happiness, Caroline remains unfulfilled, for even a mother's love is no lasting substitute for a young girl's deeply-embedded vision of wedded bliss. It is not long before Caroline focuses her thoughts once again on the idea of becoming a governess.

Through the conversations which take place between Caroline and Mrs Pryor, the reader learns of Charlotte Brontë's views on working as a governess. (13)

(13) Charlotte Brontë herself was forced to teach purely for financial reasons. She regarded her work as a frustrating obstacle which hindered her in her writing.

In an attempt to explain why she would like to enter the field of teaching, Caroline describes her soulless existence as a single woman leading a worthless life in a society which reserves no place for those who do not conform to the angel ideal:

'...it is scarcely *living* to measure time as I do at the Rectory. The hours pass, and I get over them somehow, but I do not *live*. I endure existence, but I rarely enjoy it' (C. Brontë 1985:362).

In order to protect Caroline from the harsh realities of the life of a governess, Mrs Pryor relates her own miserable experiences. She reveals how she was regarded as a 'burden and a restraint in society'; as a 'tabooed woman'; and as 'a bore' (C. Brontë 1985:363). Like Maria Young, Mrs Pryor is told by her former employer that she is 'ungrateful'. It is thus evident that the unmarried woman poses a threat to the status quo, in that she does not submit to society's requirements regarding perfect womanhood. She thus falls into the category of the 'monster', as has already been revealed in the cases of Maria Young in *Deerbrook* and even Esther Hargrave in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

Caroline's reunion with Robert Moore takes place when, after having unsuccessfully proposed to Shirley Keeldar for financial reasons, he realizes that Caroline is the woman he loves and wishes to marry. Before this can occur, however, Moore has to learn a lesson in humility. He is very unpopular with the mill workers whose livelihood depends upon his employment of them. His stubborn and inflexible views on replacing human labour with machinery change somewhat when he witnesses the poverty and hardships in London and Birmingham. Ironically, it is when he is informing his friend, Yorke, of his plans to introduce reforms at the mill, that he is shot.

During his recuperation period Moore is incarcerated in an upstairs bedroom of the Yorke home, Briarmains, and 'tended by an Amazon nurse [Mrs Horsfall]

who reduces him to a childlike state of helpless dependency' (Showalter 1977:150). Showalter offers an interesting observation with regard to male suffering: female novelists 'believed that a limited experience of dependency, frustration, and powerlessness - in short, of womanhood - was a healthy and instructive one for a hero' (Showalter 1977:150). (14) For once in his life the indomitable Robert Moore finds himself at the mercy of females.

He returns home a partially transformed man who is ready to marry. As soon as his financial difficulties are resolved, he proposes to Caroline who eagerly accepts. The reader does, however, experience moments of concern, for Moore - although more flexible and understanding than before - makes several comments which indicate that his notions of what constitutes a good marital relationship have remained unchanged. Displaying the selfishness typical of the patriarchal male who thinks only of what the woman has to offer, Moore uses the traditionally confining images of purity and saintliness to describe his future wife. He addresses Caroline as 'my dove', compares her favourably with the loveliest pictures of the Virgin, and assumes that she will provide for his every need:

'... these hands will be the gentle ministrants of every comfort I can taste. I know the being I seek to entwine with my own will bring me a solace - a charity - a purity - to which, of myself, I am a stranger' (C.Brontë 1985:595).

Robert Moore has inherited the strain of deceit which appears to be inbred in the Victorian male, for he falls into the category of men described by Morse (1993:23) who were able not only 'to transform the task of ministering to their

(14) Showalter (1977:150) enlarges on this idea: 'the recurring motif in feminine fiction that does seem to show outright hostility, if not castration wishes, toward men, is the blinding, maiming, or blighting motif'. Apart from Robert Moore, Showalter offers several examples, among whom are Rochester, who is blinded in the fire at Thornfield, and Tom Tulliver who nearly cripples himself while playing with a sword.

own selfish needs into the highest of virtues, but they could also ensure that women were confined to the lowliest of occupations'. For Moore's motive is undoubtedly self-serving, a fact which he unconsciously disguises under a barrage of compliments. (15) According to Victorian ideology the saintly woman, the emblem of purity, was to be the spiritual guide in the home. In evidence here is Moore's affirmation of this belief, a notion obviously unsupported by Brontë, who takes pains to reveal to her readership the hypocrisy beneath the flattering rhetoric.

Thus Caroline, the largely traditional heroine, achieves her initial goal: she becomes Mrs Robert Gerard Moore. However, it is important to note that she has developed as an individual, for, through her own suffering, she has gained a broader awareness of the many problems facing women in general. Foster's (1985:79) comment that Brontë's heroines' 'involvement in traditional roles enables them to question those roles' certainly holds true here.

Though content to slip into the iconographic mould as the angelic wife, Caroline, through her thought-provoking outbursts on the woman question, has proved herself to be an individual in her own right. Thus this apparently conventional heroine has far greater depths of personality than was at first apparent, and Charlotte Brontë, through subtle means, makes her point: the 'ideal' woman (represented in this novel by Mary Cave) does not have the strength to survive in a cruel patriarchal environment and thus ceases to exist. The 'angelic' female image has thus been proved to be a lie, and the true Victorian woman emerges as a human being who requests the right to her own place in the real world.

(15) This is an example of Harriet Martineau's notion that in a patriarchal society 'indulgence' is exchanged for 'justice' (in Pichanick 1980:96).

Conservative Victorian readers would have perceived Shirley as an anti-heroine. Unorthodox in the extreme, Shirley must surely have horrified the traditionalists of the day. Endowed with a man's name and a man's title, Shirley Keeldar, Esquire, she declares, '...it is enough to inspire me with a touch of manhood ... really I feel quite gentlemanlike' (C. Brontë 1985:213). Even Mr Helstone, who is amused by her spirited independence, refers to her as 'Mr Keeldar' and 'Captain Keeldar'. Giving the lie to the notion of angelic womanhood, Shirley assumes her right to sexual equality with not a vestige of inferiority. Foster (1985:97) comments that Shirley's 'assumption of masculinity is ... a positive challenge to claims of male superiority'. (16)

Utterly uninhibited in every sphere, Shirley demands recognition. She is thus portrayed in direct contrast to Caroline, who prefers to be out of the limelight. Foster (1985:97) declares that Shirley and Caroline act as 'foils' to each other. Caroline admires in Shirley the qualities of outspoken confidence and bold assertiveness which have gained her respect, even as a young single woman in a man's environment. Gilbert & Gubar (1979:382) comment that Caroline sees in Shirley 'a woman [who is] free from the constraints which threaten to destroy her own life'. (17)

As active as Caroline is passive, Shirley does what Caroline only dreams of doing. The two girls are deliberately presented by Brontë as extremes, for Shirley's energetic entrance into the world of the novel comes at time when

(16) Foster (1985:97) also notes, however, that it has been suggested that this masculine role-playing is actually an expression of female powerlessness: by pretending that she is a man, Shirley acts out the values of her society and thus continues the old pattern of sexual domination.

(17) Gilbert & Gubar (1979:382) suggest that Shirley is Caroline's double - a projection of all her repressed desire.

Caroline, despite her strivings towards freedom, realizes that, in reality, she has achieved nothing, for she 'is trapped in the marble of her social role' (Hook, A & Hook, J. Introduction to *Shirley* 1974:11). Gilbert & Gubar (1979:382) agree: 'Shirley emerges only when Caroline has been completely immobilized through her own self-restraint and submission'. Caroline's decline is indicative of the helplessness of the traditional woman, while Shirley represents Brontë's optimistic view of the possibility of female emancipation. It is interesting to note that Caroline endures two periods of life-threatening depression, and, in both cases, is freed by a female relationship - first with Shirley, then with Mrs Pryor - and not by an impending marriage.

In providing Caroline with an example of female independence, Shirley creates a new image of womanhood free from oppression of all kinds. Shirley's arrival transforms Caroline. At the Whitsuntide gathering Caroline, who had in previous years dreaded this social event, now 'seemed a new creature. It was Shirley's presence which thus transformed her: the view of Miss Keeldar's air and manner did her a world of good' (C. Brontë 1985:294). Shirley thus does for Caroline what the enlightened nineteenth-century woman novelist intended to do for her female reader: to help release her from the artificial identity created for her by a male-dominated society.

Perceiving Caroline's naturally passive acceptance of her lot, Shirley encourages her to think critically and to question male motives. The two girls indulge in several conversations concerning males' perceptions of female identity:

'If men could see us as we really are, they would be a little amazed; but the cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light: they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend' (C. Brontë 1985:343).

The perception of women as either 'angels' or 'fiends' was a common trend in Victorian male-architected society. In an attempt to criticize this notion, Charlotte Brontë uses Shirley's observation regarding men's illusions about women. The implication here is clear: Brontë's intention is to destroy the angel-monster lie and to offer as a substitute a new realistic vision of the woman as a human being complete with faults and attributes.

The discussion between the two girls expands to include images of females in male-authored texts. Part of the challenge of the Victorian woman writer in her drive to kill the angel in the house was to liberate her literary counterpart who had long been incarcerated in male literary works. The novelist's aim was 'to reach toward the woman trapped on the other side of the mirror/text and help her to climb out' (Gilbert & Gubar 1979:16). (18) The fact that Brontë makes this a topic of discussion between her two central female figures indicates her intention to be part of this liberating process. For Shirley declares that these artificially-derived heroines are false creations: 'fine and divine it [the creation] may be, but often quite artificial - false as the rose in my best bonnet there' (C. Brontë 1985:343). Gilbert & Gubar (1979:386) note that Shirley realizes how subversive her critique of male authority is, because she remarks that her comments, if heard, would not go unpunished: '...if I gave my real opinion of some first-rate female characters in first-rate works, where should I be? Dead under a cairn of avenging stones in half an hour' (C. Brontë 1985:343). It is thus through Shirley's comments that Charlotte Brontë criticizes several socially unacceptable aspects of nineteenth-century English society.

In her business affairs, as in her private life, Shirley is honest and outspoken. Undaunted by even the noblest of patriarchs in the community, Shirley

(18) This is exactly what Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1973) attempts to do in *The Yellow Wallpaper* later in the century. The end result - her nameless female protagonist's insanity - indicates that she clearly intends her readers to understand that despite the progress made by the women's movement thus far, the release of the long-incarcerated woman is yet no easy task.

possesses the endearing gift of treating each individual as her equal, certainly an admirable quality in such a class-conscious society as that of Victorian England.

Few men seem to resent her favoured position in their 'man's world', and those who do are soon put in their place. When Joe Scott, the chauvinistic overseer in Moore's mill, declares that 'women is to take their husbands' opinion, both in politics and religion: it's wholesomest for them', Shirley is horrified:

'Consider yourself ground down, and cried shame over, for such a stupid observation,' said Miss Keeldar. 'You might as well say men are to take the opinions of their priests without examination. Of what value would a religion so adopted be? It would be mere blind, besotted superstition' (C. Brontë 1985:323).

Even those who consider themselves powerful figures in the community yield under Shirley's dominant self-will. Foster (1985:97) describes this aptly:

...trading on her position as 'Captain Keeldar', [Shirley] fires out against Yorke's taunts about her matrimonial plans, firmly dismisses the outrageous Donne, gets round Helstone better than any other woman, and defies her bullying uncle by asserting her right to choose her own husband.

Robert Moore, too, is severely reprimanded for egotistically offering himself in marriage to Shirley, in return for financial gain. Shirley Keeldar, Esquire, demands respect and it is duly paid. But Charlotte Brontë has a further point to make: no matter how dynamic, assertive or respected a lady is, she will never be included in the practical side of the business world. So it is that when Shirley's own property, Hollow's Mill, is attacked, the men take great pains to conceal all information from her. Though she and Caroline witness the attack, they are not involved in any way. According to Victorian ideology, women were at all costs to be protected from the dangers of the outside world. This situation is no different. Shirley comments, '... this is the way men deal with women; still concealing danger from them: thinking, I suppose, to spare them pain' (C. Brontë 1985:342).

The only man who appears to have genuine influence over Shirley is Robert Moore's brother, Louis Moore. However, owing to his status in life, a mere tutor to Shirley's cousin, he is considered an unsuitable suitor to a wealthy heiress. Needless to say, this does not deter Shirley who insists that she be able to love her husband. Mr Sympson reproaches her for her assertiveness: 'Preposterous stuff! - indecorous! - unwomanly!' (C. Brontë 1985:444). Any 'strong-minded' woman in Victorian England, like Helen Huntingdon in *The Tenant of Wildfell*, was considered 'unnatural' and 'unwomanly'. As far as her uncle is concerned, Shirley's behaviour, in all spheres of activity, is outrageous. He would far rather she resembled his own daughters who, like the Nunnely and the Sykes girls, are 'pattern young ladies, in pattern attire, with pattern deportment' (C. Brontë 1985:375), and who will surely make pattern wives. But Shirley has a mind of her own. She refuses to be cut from the same cloth as these superficial young ladies who, possessing no individuality and little originality, are mere replicas of the artificial image of womanhood designed for all 'good' women of the era.

Thus Shirley's free-thinking attitude extends to her choice of a marriage partner. Charlotte Brontë, in her attempt to undermine a rigid ideology which specifies sexual roles, introduces an interesting reversal of positions here. In the eyes of the materialistic world Louis is decidedly Shirley's inferior. While Shirley inhabits the masculine world of business, Louis Moore is confined to the feminine sphere of teaching. Ewbank (1966:185) refers to him as a 'male governess'. His subservient status places him in a position of weakness, which is usually depicted as a feminine trait. Gilbert & Gubar (1979:395) suggest that Charlotte Brontë 'began *Shirley* with the intention of subverting not only the sexual images of literature but the courtship roles and myths from which they derive'.

For Louis Moore is as independent a character as Shirley. He may not have the social standing of the majority of males in novel, but he has one defining quality that raises him above all others: unlike the traditional patriarch, he refuses to accept the contemporary woman's illusive angel image as real. For Shirley is

no angel. Like Henry Sympson, Louis prizes the fact that Shirley is an earthly being who possesses genuine depths of feeling:

'She [Shirley] is lovely in this world, and fitted for this world. Shirley is not an angel; she is a woman...' (C. Brontë 1985:459). (19)

Brontë cleverly uses two male voices who declare their preference for the 'real' woman over the angelic ideal. This betrayal of the male sex from within their own ranks is an effective device employed by Brontë to reinforce her own denial of the concept of angelic womanhood. Louis Moore appreciates Shirley's faults, which he regards as proof of the fact that she is a human being. Like Hattersley in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, he uses images of nature to describe what he desires in a wife:

'I worship her perfections; but it is her faults ... that bring her near to me ... If she rose a timid, artificial mound, without inequality, what vantage would she offer the foot? It is the natural hill, with its mossy breaks and hollows, whose slope invites ascent - whose summit it is pleasure to gain' (C. Brontë 1985:488).

Louis considers the differences between Shirley and Caroline, whom he regards as 'nearly faultless'. Caroline, who in many ways conforms to the angel-image, reflects the purity of a lily of the valley. Like Hattersley, Louis seeks something more substantial in a wife. (20) He likens his ideal woman to a rose, which is far

(19) Shirley, like Jane Eyre, would indignantly object to being defined as an angel. Jane argues,

'I am not an angel ... and I will not be one till I die; I will be myself. Mr Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me ... I had rather be a *thing* than an angel' (C. Brontë 1983:262-4).

(20) Soon tiring of his angel-bride's passive submission, Hattersley compares Millicent to seasand that yields at every step, and voices his longing for 'a bit of good, firm rock, that won't budge an inch whether you stand, walk, or stamp upon it' (A. Brontë 1985:298).

more vivid and exciting, though more troublesome than the pure, pale lily:

'My sweetheart ... must bear nearer affinity to the rose: a sweet, lively delight guarded with prickly peril. My wife ... must stir my great frame with a sting now and then' (C. Brontë 1985:490).

This is further proof of the fact that even males in this patriarchal era were dissatisfied with the limiting ideology of the angel in the home.

The differences between Shirley and Caroline extend to their choice of clothing, which is a further reflection of their contrasting characters. At the Whitsuntide gathering Shirley, glorying in her individuality, appears in a purple silk dress and embroidered scarf while Caroline presents the image of purity, in a white muslin dress and white crêpe scarf. The two girls look 'very much like a snow-white dove and gem-tinted bird-of-paradise joined in social flight' (C. Brontë 1985:293). Charlotte Brontë's tone of approval here sounds rather like a plea for tolerance, requesting the acceptance of woman's individuality in all its forms. Brontë thus rejects the concept of a single ideal image towards which all Victorian females were expected to strive.

Shirley's free-spirited independence often results in her being referred to as a wild creature which needs taming. Somewhat ironically both she and Louis Moore appear to acknowledge this fact. Brontë's inner conflict regarding dominance and subservience in male/female roles appears to surface here. For, despite Shirley's proud assertiveness, she, like Jane Eyre, wishes to marry a man who has the strength of character to control her:

'... I prefer a *master* ... one in whose presence I shall feel obliged and disposed to be good. One whose control my impatient temper must acknowledge. A man whose approbation can reward - whose displeasure punish me. A man I shall feel it impossible not to love, and very possible to fear' (C. Brontë 1985:514).

Louis is the man to perform this task. He rather arrogantly delights in his ability

to 'tame' Shirley, and refers to himself as her 'keeper'. He in turn describes Shirley as a 'lioness', a 'leopard', and a 'pantheress'. She is willing to relinquish her freedom only for him. Owing to their master-pupil relationship, Louis has the advantage of a position of authority over Shirley, and the image of her kneeling rather uncharacteristically at his feet (C. Brontë 1985:440) is impressed firmly upon the reader's mind.

It is hardly surprising, then, that feminist critics have expressed disappointment in Brontë's apparent return to convention in the closing stages of the narrative. With the appearance of such a unique character as Shirley, Brontë's novel had initially shown much promise. Shirley's capitulation is thus especially surprising and disheartening. Foster (1985: 78) complains that:

by the end of the novel both girls have retreated to a state of female subservience, united to the men who have 'mastered' them, Shirley 'conquered by love, and bound with a vow ...vanquished and restricted' ... Caroline nestling dove-like in the arms of the stubborn mill-owner who once so cavalierly rejected her.

Basch (1974:165), wondering what remains of the feminist protest, expresses a similar sentiment: 'When satisfied with a certain degree of self-expression the heroine is happy to abdicate totally before a superior personality'.

The point which remains to be determined, then, is the extent to which Charlotte Brontë, in *Shirley*, succeeds in exposing the lie of angelic womanhood. The feminists argued that this angel-image was a monstrous lie about women. They believed that the woman was a real person who had earned her right to her own individuality. The woman novelist's occupation was to help release the members of her own sex from the suffocating and artificial ideology of the angel in the house. It was her job to redefine feminine selfhood through the medium of literature and, in so doing, create a new, more realistic concept of female identity. This new perception of herself would then release the woman from the male-created image imposed upon her by patriarchal society.

However, this task was not easy, for the women writers of the period, including Charlotte Brontë herself, found themselves experiencing inner conflict derived from the fact that they could neither entirely submit to, nor actively rebel against the predominant patriarchal culture. In consideration of Brontë's 'dual vision', one wonders about the extent of her contribution to the feminist cause.

In answer to this question, and in Charlotte Brontë's defence, certain factors demand attention. First, Caroline and Shirley are both given the freedom to decide their own futures. Each chooses marriage because she believes it will fulfil *her* needs. Neither one comments on what she perceives as her contribution to the marriage. In addition to this, neither one seems to give a thought to her single Victorian sister against whose plight both girls, when their own futures were yet unresolved, so vehemently objected. However, owing to the fact that Brontë, in *Shirley*, focuses quite pointedly on the worries and concerns of the unmarried woman, it seems that she does not share her protagonists' selfish attitude in this regard. In her portrayal of Caroline and Shirley as self-centred, she is merely confirming the fact that neither girl is a model angel. Furthermore, Brontë uses them both to illustrate a certain principle about which she feels strongly herself: each woman's right to an independent selfhood.

Foster (1985:79) supports this argument. Of Caroline and Shirley, she remarks:

...they rarely regard romantic commitment in terms of motherhood or even of dedicated service; their prime emphasis is always on personal fulfilment. According to conventional values, they are social and moral revolutionaries, selfish egoists demanding self-satisfaction; in female-oriented terms, they are merely asserting their creator's insistence that the special requirements of womanly selfhood be recognised.

Thus it is apparent that under the guise of traditionalism, Charlotte Brontë successfully explodes the misconception of the woman as the model of selfless generosity.

The second factor to be considered is Brontë's selective choice of a marriage partner for Shirley. Louis Moore, despite traces of arrogance, earns his place at Shirley's side, for he is the only one who understands her fully. He is aware of her desire for independence, as well as her conflicting need to feel loved and cared for.

Foster (1985:100) remarks that Louis

...shares with her [Shirley] a sense of the dichotomies of woman's nature. His awareness of her as both tyrannical and angelic, wild and submissive, shows that he has some understanding of the conflicting impulses of the female psyche.

In a concerted effort to reach an acceptable compromise, Brontë's solution in *Shirley* is to provide independence *within* marriage, for the Keeldar/Moore partnership promises mutual support and respect. Contrary to the belief of many feminists, Charlotte Brontë's implication here is that marriage is not necessarily synonymous with repression. However, Shirley's need for both freedom and security indicates that Charlotte Brontë shares with her protagonist 'a sense of the dichotomies of woman's nature' (Foster 1985:100).

It is for this reason that Brontë's feminist message in *Shirley*, like Harriet Martineau's in *Deerbrook*, is largely portrayed through subtle or covert means. She does not, however, restrict herself to this strategy, for there are many indignant feminist outbursts, reminiscent of those found in Anne Brontë's novel, which indicate that the author can 'suffer and be still' (in Vicinus 1972:x) no longer.

Through her portrayal of the various female characters in *Shirley*, Charlotte Brontë offers a new concept of female identity. Mary Cave, the epitome of the angel ideal, is entirely passive and, possessing no self of her own, ceases to exist. Through her the 'angel in the house' lie is effectively called into question. Caroline survives only because her passive acceptance is interrupted by

displays of assertive temper, thus proving that her angelic exterior conceals a soul with a will of its own.

It is through her portrayal of the character of Shirley, however, that Charlotte Brontë makes her greatest contribution to the feminist cause. For Shirley is like no other Victorian heroine. Neither 'half doll' nor 'half angel', Shirley, in patriarchal terms, would almost certainly be classed as the 'fiend' (C. Brontë 1985:343). Yet she is both respected and admired by fellow protagonists, by the reader, and most assuredly by the author herself.

CHAPTER 4: GEORGE ELIOT: MIDDLEMARCH (1871/2)

'Dorothea's marriage does not shatter her ideals, but it closes the gates with a resounding clang on the avenue she has chosen for their realization' (Calder 1976:152).

The cornerstone of Victorian society was marriage and the family anchored firmly together by the ever-devoted angel-wife. Yet George Eliot chooses as the central theme of *Middlemarch* the repeated failure of this time-honoured institution, and the resulting devastating effects on the individuals concerned. In so doing, Eliot overtly attacks the very root of nineteenth-century patriarchal ideology.

One wonders then at the furious outcry of overzealous feminist critics who feel betrayed by the woman novelist's refusal to transfer 'her own epic life to her novel' (Lundberg 1986:272). However, while George Eliot was deeply concerned with the issue of women's rights, and while she did support the call for reform, she never claimed to be a feminist. Nevertheless, her compassionate regard for the plight of womankind surfaces throughout her novels, which prove to be 'profound studies of the pinched, confining, and repressive female role: the social corset she and all her sisters were forced to wear' (Zimmerman, date unobtainable:231). (1)

Eliot struggled with the same conflicts and anxieties as those endured by Harriet Martineau and the Brontë sisters, and Deirdre David (1987:164) argues that '[u]nfairly and irrationally, we expect Eliot's learning, intelligence, and success to make her extra-resistant to her male-dominated culture'. As Lundberg (1986:280) notes, 'There were limits to what [Eliot] could publish in Victorian England in 1871', and the reader must remember that the nineteenth-century

(1) Mrs Transome in *Felix Holt, the Radical* observes, 'God was cruel when he made women' (Eliot 1966:346).

women novelists formed an inherent part of the very culture against which they felt impelled to rebel. David Daiches (in Calder 1976:10) agrees that the women novelists' 'dependence on the very society their novels probed and exposed ... tended to compound the ambivalence of their attitudes'.

While there is no denying that Eliot, to a degree, shared in this inner conflict experienced by women of her era, she nevertheless strode ahead of her contemporaries, and, standing in a class of her own, insisted upon the truth being told. For Eliot was always sceptical of the artificial angelic image created for women by a self-serving male populace. (2) Thus, in the creation of her female characters she presents a most powerful critique of the idealised woman of the nineteenth-century.

For, far from creating romanticized notions and fairytale endings, Eliot vowed to present as accurate a version of the real world and its inhabitants as she possibly could. She was a realist par excellence. (3) Eliot was to explain to her publisher, Blackwood, 'I undertake to exhibit nothing as it should be; I only try to exhibit some things as they have been or are' (in Sanders 1986:22). (4)

(2) Of the attempts of all the novelists in this study, George Eliot's struggle to subdue the spectre of the 'Angel in the House' was surely the most severe. For, having chosen an unconventional existence for herself, Eliot was fully aware of the penalties incurred in any deviation from society's norm. Labelled as a 'fallen woman' for her long-term extramarital affair with George Henry Lewes, Eliot also chose to become an agnostic and a career woman. In the eyes of polite Victorian society she thus surely would have been termed not only a 'monster', but a 'strong-minded' one at that.

(3) Eliot's contemporaries Anthony Trollope and Henry James saw her as the first psychological realist in the English tradition (Wiesenfarth, in DLB 1983:146).

(4) When the critics protested against the erotic attraction between Maggie and Stephen in *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot replied: 'If the ethics of art do not admit the truthful presentation of character ... then, it seems to me, the ethics of art are too narrow, and must be widened!' (Wiesenfarth, in DLB 1983:164).

So successful was Eliot in her endeavour to adhere solely to the truth, that she managed to deviate not merely from the entrenched view of women as weak, submissive non-entities, but also from the long-standing stereotype of the all-powerful authoritarian patriarch. It is thus through the presentation of these characters, each an individual in his/her own right, that Eliot offers her contribution towards the formation of a newer, more realistic ideology, and, in so doing, helps to bury the destructive angel-image which so threatened her and her fellow novelists.

George Eliot uses Dorothea Brooke to voice her disapproval of many facets of discrimination against women inherent in nineteenth-century England: male criticisms of female intelligence, inequalities in education, marriage institutions geared to cater to the husband's desires while the wife's needs feature not at all. To this ardent, intelligent young woman, patronising remarks about female intelligence running 'underground like the rivers in Greece, you know - it comes out in the sons' (Eliot 1965:69), coming from an uncle, possessor only of a 'butterfly mind' (Harvey, Introduction to *Middlemarch* 1965:12) himself, must rankle indeed.

Resentful too of the academic education offered only to men in Victorian society, Dorothea scorns the 'toy-box history of the world adapted to young ladies which had made the chief part of her education' (Eliot 1965:112). She yearns to be part of something more important, more expansive, more ambitious. Her overriding goal is to make a difference in the lives of those less fortunate than herself. Preoccupied with ideas such as improved architectural plans for labourers' cottages, Dorothea chafes against the confines of Victorian decorum which would frown upon a woman concerning herself with such manly issues. She is described as

struggling in the bands of a narrow teaching, hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses, a walled-in image of small patterns that led no whither (Eliot 1965:51).

For Dorothea, Reverend Edward Casaubon is the embodiment of all she has yearned for. A dedicated scholar and author, possessed of a wealth of superior knowledge, he epitomises to her the perfect soulmate. Believing him to be engaged in some highly intellectual research, she sees the possibility of marriage to him as being her passport to the exciting wider world of endless knowledge, and an avenue whereby she might realise her carefully-laid plans:

Her whole soul was possessed by the fact that a fuller life was opening before her ... now she would be able to devote herself to large yet definite duties; now she would be allowed to live continually in the light of a mind that she could reverence (Eliot 1965: 67).

Eagerly anticipating her future role of adoring angel-bride, Dorothea naively envisages herself as Casaubon's indispensable assistant firmly entrenched at his side, and the future appears to glow with promise:

'I should learn everything then,' she said to herself ... 'It would be my duty to study that I might help him the better in his great works ... I should learn to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it by' (Eliot 1965: 51).

However, despite Dorothea's eagerness to fulfill her traditional wifely role, the constant reference to the words 'I' and 'my' in this passage reveals an underlying element of self-interest in her nature. The reader becomes increasingly aware of Dorothea's preoccupation with her own gain, hidden behind the seemingly altruistic intent of being her husband's 'helpmeet'. Unlike the ever-giving, self-sacrificial angel in the house, Dorothea obviously intends her marriage to be a partnership from which she benefits also. (5) Casaubon's contribution is to

(5) The saintly Victorian wife was expected to dedicate her entire being to her husband without a thought of accepting anything in return. It is well to remember David Morse's (1993:25) comment on Coventry Patmore's notion of the ideal woman, 'for Patmore this ideal of womanhood implies not simply dedication to her husband but a total emptying out of self. She can desire nothing more than to become a vacuum that will be filled by *his* presence, *his* will, *his* intelligence'.

provide her with the education whereby she may realise her ideals: '[She] had not reached that point of renunciation at which she would have been satisfied with having a wise husband; she wished ... to be wise herself' (Eliot 1965:88). This is surely a far cry from the angelic wife in Patmore's *The Angel in the House* of whom it is said,

...all the wisdom that she has
Is to love him for being wise
(*The Angel in the House* II.viii.I).

How different, then, is Dorothea from the average Victorian maiden, and indeed from her own conservative sister, Celia. The latter, lacking Dorothea's ardent enthusiasm and intellectual energy is, according to Lady Chettam, by far the better candidate for wifehood and motherhood for, after all, 'she is fonder of geraniums, and seems more docile' (Eliot 1965:117) than her 'headstrong' older sister.

In Victorian England, marriage for a woman was seen as an end in itself. Any hint that she could possibly presume to move beyond the parameters of this confining institution was treated with disbelief and indignation. Yet Lundberg (1986:270) states that *Middlemarch* is 'the story of Victorian provincial life which really depicts the quest of a very un-Victorian heroine for fulfilment in life beyond wifehood'. Edwards (1984:91) corroborates this viewpoint: 'By describing Dorothea's obsession with her future life as initially focused on vocation rather than marriage, Eliot ... isolates her central character from the generality of women and makes us aware of Dorothea as a boundary breaker'. Eliot wishes her reader to see in her heroine an ambitious young woman with ideals of her own, who is not prepared to wear the straitjacket of Victorian convention and ideology.

Dorothea Brooke is a 'doer', not an observer. Wishing to free herself from 'the gentlewoman's oppressive liberty' (Eliot 1965:307), Dorothea refuses to perform

her Ruskinian duty of home-maker, thereby leaving her husband free to enter the world of action and accomplish great deeds. She fully intends to place herself at the very centre of life's activities. (6)

Thus Dorothea's disappointment on discovering that 'there was nothing for her to do in Lowick', Casaubon's home, comes as no surprise to the reader, who, though acknowledging her good intentions, becomes aware of a certain desire for self-recognition on her part. For Dorothea herself is rather ashamed to discover that she would have preferred her new home to be in a parish 'which had a larger share of the world's misery, so that she might have had more active duties in it' (Eliot 1965: 103). Harvey, (Introduction to *Middlemarch* 1965:16) notes that Dorothea's 'reforming passion is streaked with egoism', a quality highly undesirable in a woman who was expected to throw 'every consideration of self into the balance as nothing' (in Lerner 1978:174).

In all fairness to Dorothea, however, one could argue that she is merely fulfilling her Ruskinian function of attempting to move 'beyond the garden gate' to tend to those less fortunate than herself, and thereby spreading her moral influence throughout society. For, after all, part of the Victorian girl's training included unselfish acts of philanthropy.

(6) Gilbert & Gubar (1979:494) draw an appropriate parallel between Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* and Dorothea. Like Maggie, Dorothea's frustration lies in the fact that,

So it has been since the days of Hecuba, and of Hector ... inside the gates, the women ... watching the world's combat from afar, filling their long, empty days with memories and fears: outside, the men, in fierce struggle with things divine and human ... (Eliot 1952:308)

Daniel Deronda's Gwendolen Harleth was later to complain of similar treatment.

Further disillusionment awaits Dorothea, for even before her honeymoon is over she realises that neither Casaubon nor his scholarly achievements lives up to her romanticised expectations. The blame for the rapid dissolution of the Casaubon-Brooke relationship lies largely with Victorian society itself. For while girls were educated solely towards a career in marriage, they were rarely enlightened as to how to cope with the realities of everyday living.

Far from automatically assuming her previsioned role as her husband's soulmate and secretarial assistant, Dorothea is denied entry into both his private and his academic worlds. Once she discovers that his claims to intellectual prowess are hollow, Dorothea realises that her marriage is a farce. For she had wed Casaubon out of admiration for his scholastic mind - remove this, and she is left with very little. Her dreams of using her position as Mrs Casaubon to further her ambitions recedes into oblivion. Lacking a solid foundation, the whole concept of the Victorian marriage, a haven of domestic bliss, with assertive, commanding husband, and gentle admiring wife, collapses about the couple almost before the wedding bells have ceased to ring.

Far from providing the soothing comfort and solid security expected of the adoring bride, Dorothea increasingly becomes silently critical of her husband's every move. Casaubon, acutely aware of his failure to achieve in his work is horrified to discover that his young wife has

turned out to be capable of agitating him cruelly just where he most needed soothing. Instead of getting a soft fence against the cold shadowy, unapplausive audience of his life, had he only given it a more substantial presence? (Eliot 1965:234).

Dorothea's role as supportive wife requires that she act as buffer against the harsh objective criticisms of the outside world. Yet, far from providing unconditional endorsement of his efforts, Dorothea's judgemental attitude serves only to accentuate Casaubon's own feelings of unworthiness and

inadequacy. Thus she fails one of the preliminary tests required of the saintly woman: she is 'blind to his inward troubles' (Eliot 1965:232) and insensitive to his needs.

This response, coupled with the withdrawal of her unquestioning admiration, serves to 'deal [Casaubon's] ego a mortal blow' (Edwards 1984:101) from which he never recovers. Edwards (1984:93) comments on Dorothea's 'power to destroy Casuabon', and the reader is shocked into an awareness of just how far removed Eliot's heroine is from the traditional figure of the angel in the house, who was supposedly a weak, ineffective nonentity with no mind of her own.

It appears at this stage that Dorothea, as a 'failed' angel-wife, is to shoulder the full burden of the blame for the collapse of her marriage to Casaubon. Yet George Eliot has deliberately created her heroine to be an independent, thinking woman with her own unique needs, ambitions, desires and, above all, failings. For the authoress saw it as her duty to expose the deeply embedded lie that the woman of the era was a stereotypical creature unrealistically endowed solely with saintly qualities.

Eliot's criticism of contemporary ideology does not rest here, however, for she uses her novel to reveal the unfairness of a system which indoctrinates members of society with the belief that marriage is a text-book process whereby men and women simply slot into the 'separate spheres' preordained for them. Both Dorothea and Casaubon, victims of this lie, suffer the consequences of an unhappy marriage.

For a girl as active and aspiring as Dorothea, it must surely come as an insult to be considered a mere decorative ornament, a tantalising plaything, and a soothing comforter to a patriarchal husband who has been raised to regard this

pampering attention as his due. For Casaubon has

made up his mind that it was now time for him to adorn his life with the graces of female companionship, to irradiate the gloom which fatigue was apt to hang over the intervals of studious labour with the play of female fancy, and to secure in this, his culminating age, the solace of female tendance for his declining years (Eliot 1965:87).

Beer (1974:193/4) sympathises with Eliot's heroine: 'It must be even worse to be married as a sunbeam than as a sicknurse, and tragic indeed when having tried most conscientiously to be both, as Dorothea does, your efforts are rejected like hers'.

Dorothea is too naive and idealistic in her view of matrimony to take heed of the warnings contained in Casaubon's letter of proposal when he refers to ways in which *she* will be of use to *him*. He speaks of her 'capability of devotedness' and looks forward to the time when she will 'cast a charm over vacant hours' (Eliot 1965: 66). (7) For Casaubon initially believes that Dorothea is all that the mother-wife is expected to be: '...he observed with pleasure that Miss Brooke showed an ardent submissive affection which promised to fulfill his most agreeable previsions of marriage' (Eliot 1965:87).

Far from being permitted to assume what she regards as her rightful position at her husband's side, Dorothea is instead referred to as 'a little moon' who would serve to 'adorn the remaining quadrant of his course' (Eliot 1965:121). Displaying little modesty, Casaubon sees himself as the pivot around which Dorothea will revolve. But Eliot's mocking humour is surely in evidence here, for ironically it is Dorothea who possesses radiant energy, while Casaubon remains a pale reflection of humanity. It is through subtexts such as this, in which female outshines male, that Eliot provides a subversive critique of the entire patriarchal ideology.

(7) This reminiscent of Hope's comment regarding the Ibbotson sisters whom he sees as 'casting sanctity around them as they go' (Martineau 1983:82).

Humiliated by Casaubon's obvious disregard for her as a *person* with her own interests and ambitions, and resentful of repeated rejection at his hands, Dorothea, in exasperation, cries out, 'It is his fault, not mine' (Eliot 1965:463). In so doing, she once again defies the concept of ideal womanhood. A true Victorian wife would seek in her own nature the reason for all discordant conditions, as her husband must always be above reproach.

Admittedly Dorothea, despite her inherently progressive nature, makes a concerted effort to mould herself into a flawless image of the perfect wife. She confesses to 'shut[ting] her best soul in prison, paying it only hidden visits, that she might be petty enough to please him' (Eliot 1965:464).

The Victorian concept of angelic womanhood was an artificial construct, largely literary in origin, deliberately engineered by men, and even some women, with male interests at heart. Gilbert & Gubar (1979:15) thus remark that, in the pages of male-inscribed literary texts, the woman is 'killed into a "perfect" image of herself'. Social ideology then imposes this 'copy' upon its womenfolk, who in turn attempt to reflect the behavioural modes of the counterfeit.

So it is with Dorothea who, in her determination to adopt the suitable wifely qualities that her husband so yearns for, endures the 'killing' of her inner self or, as Calder (1976:152) expresses it, the 'obliteration of her own personality', for this was what was required of the nineteenth-century woman - to be a 'relative creature' (in Foster 1985:6). (8) This task is surely a great trial for one so

(8) Gilbert & Gubar (1979:490) comment on the fact that George Eliot's other heroines suffer similar fates. Milly Barton, Caterina Sarti and Janet Dempster, among others, all attain angelic submission only after considerable inward struggle against resentment and anger. They thus 'kill' themselves into 'ladylike docility and selflessness', and, in so doing, force themselves into the moulds prepared for them in a society governed by an inflexible ideology. It is interesting to note that Charlotte Perkins Gilman's nameless woman in *The Yellow Wallpaper* and Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* respectively choose insanity and suicide rather than submit to an existence without identity.

outspoken and free-spirited as Dorothea. Her salvation lies in the fact that she is released from this inward struggle through Casaubon's premature death. Gilbert & Gubar (1979:513) declare that Eliot, in removing Casaubon from the scene, 'liberates Dorothea from her oscillations between murderous anger and suicidal self-punishment'. Ironically, Dorothea's marriage had been intended as her 'open sesame' into a world of liberty and unrestricted activity. Instead she finds herself bound body, mind and soul. The incarceration of a woman of such great potential and promise as Dorothea would certainly have infuriated liberated Victorian women, impelling them to hasten their drive to eliminate the increasingly unpopular figure of the Angel in the House.

The failed Casaubon union acts as an appropriate vehicle through which George Eliot delivers her simultaneous attacks not only on the artificial stereotype of the Victorian angel-woman and her authoritarian partner, but also on the dangerous illusions formulated around the whole concept of matrimony: males and females, victims of an ideology into which they have been educated, suffer and fail because of preconceived visions of what is to be expected of the most intimate of all human relations - marriage.

Tertius Lydgate and Rosamond Vincy are also enticed into wedlock by 'the alluring ideologies which make marriage seem such a glamorous proposition' (Foster 1985:195). The fact that Eliot reveals yet another unsuccessful attempt at domestic harmony indicates her concern for the well-being of the Victorian people, in particular the women, who have fallen prey to a culture's dominating influence.

Eliot deliberately subverts society's concept of the angelic woman by producing a second heroine who, from the outset, deviates from the traditional view of submissive girlhood, for Rosamond Vincy 'makes her first appearance as a young lady who sees no reason why a brother should get his way any more than a sister' (Blake 1983:43/4). Blake thus concludes that Rosamond has 'the makings of a feminist of the most literal-minded sort...'. Gilbert & Gubar

(1979:514) claim in fact that '...it is with Rosamond that we must associate Eliot's most important study of female rebellion'. Unlike Dorothea, who is initially naively willing to accept the married woman's subordinate status, Rosamond rejects all forms of patriarchal control, even as she deceitfully cultivates a facade of angelic appeal.

Beautiful, blue-eyed and flaxen-haired, this 'flower of Miss Lemon's school' (Eliot 1965:123) apparently possesses all the expected attributes. Miss Vincy

had just the kind of intelligence one would desire in a woman - polished, refined, docile, lending itself to finish in all the delicacies of life, and enshrined in a body which expressed this with a force of demonstration that excluded the need for other evidence (Eliot 1965:193).

So conditioned was society to accepting this mother-wife concept, that men used it as a yardstick in determining their choice of a life-partner. By this standard, therefore, Lydgate finds Dorothea Brooke too 'unwomanly', and certainly too intellectual, for him:

'It is troublesome to talk to such women. They are always wanting reasons, yet they are too ignorant to understand the merits of any question' (Eliot 1965: 119/20).

His patronising attitude is further revealed when he reflects that

[Dorothea] did not look at things from the proper feminine angle. The society of such women was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form, instead of reclining in a paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for a heaven (Eliot 1965:122). (9)

In contrast to Dorothea, Rosamond personifies perfect womanhood as far as Lydgate is concerned. She has the decorative appearance that would grace any

(9) This is reminiscent of the Hope household in *Deerbrook*, in which 'the shaded parlour will be the cool retreat of the wearied husband, when he comes in to rest from his professional toils. There will stand ... the music with which the wife will indulge him' (Martineau 1983:138).

Victorian home without the superior intelligence that might challenge his masculine intellect. For Lydgate, like Casaubon, is a prisoner of limited patriarchal thought. He mistakenly sees a wife not as an intelligent, knowledgeable being with whom he may communicate on all levels - intellectual, spiritual and emotional - but as a mere adornment fit only to cater to his own exaggerated sense of manly pride. Thus, to Lydgate, Rosamond appears to be

an accomplished creature who venerated his high musings and momentous labours and would never interfere with them; who would create order in the home and accounts with still magic; yet keep her fingers ready to touch the lute and transform life into romance at any moment; who was instructed to the true womanly limit and not a hair's breadth beyond ... (Eliot 1965:387).

Lydgate therefore concurs with Ruskin's opinion that a woman should be educated only in so far as she can be of service to her husband. He also shares Patmore's notion that 'the woman has an exquisite perception and power of admiring all the man can be or do' (in Freiwald 1988:547):

he held it one of the prettiest attitudes of the feminine mind to adore a man's pre-eminence without too precise a knowledge of what it consisted in (Eliot 1965:301).

It becomes increasingly apparent that Lydgate, in company with other Victorian males, is as much a victim of an ideology which promotes sexual discrimination as are the women of the era. Duped by society's Ruskinian notion that male/female biological differences create natures which complement one another, Lydgate naively believes that when the pieces of the gender jigsaw puzzle fit together, man and wife will live happily ever after. This is evident in the words of George Eliot's narrator who explains:

Lydgate relied much on the psychological difference between what for the sake of variety I will call goose and gander: especially on the innate submissiveness of the goose as beautifully corresponding to the strength of the gander (Eliot 1965:391).

On this romantic estimate of his forthcoming marriage and his lovely bride, Lydgate builds high hopes for a successful future. However, a rude awakening awaits him, for beneath Rosamond's cherubic exterior lies a calculating mind filled with devious intent.

Rosamond Vincy, in her turn, is sufficiently intelligent to realise that securing a husband will be, for her, an easy task. Favoured by fortune with all the necessary physical attributes and artistic accomplishments so admired at the time, she knows that she can effortlessly win the attention of any young man she fancies, and her sights fall on Lydgate.

Well aware of the qualities that the patriarchal male seeks in his choice of a bride, Rosamond sets out to market herself by deliberately contriving an image of perfect femininity:

[she] diligently attended to that perfection of appearance, behaviour, sentiments, and all the other elegancies, which would find in Lydgate a more adequate admirer than she had yet been conscious of (Eliot 1965:196).

In absolute contradiction to the selfless, sacrificial martyr who willingly allowed her selfhood to be entirely consumed by that of her husband, Rosamond thinks only of her own gain in marrying the intriguing young doctor, newcomer to Middlemarch. For Tertius Lydgate boasts a family of good birth, a factor which rates highly on Miss Vincy's list of priorities. Unlike the saintly being who was concerned only with spiritual elevation, Rosamond, a snob at heart, is driven by materialistic greed:

The piquante fact about Lydgate was his good birth, which ... presented marriage as a prospect of rising in rank and getting a little nearer to that celestial condition on earth in which she would have nothing to do with vulgar people ... (Eliot 1965:195).

Thus, far from entering marriage with a view to assuming the role of adoring wife whose husband's interests must always be paramount, Rosamond, true to her nature, is concerned only with her own self-centred 'needs':

[she] was entirely occupied not exactly with Tertius Lydgate as he was in himself, but with his relation to her (Eliot 1965:196).

So blinded is Lydgate by society's empty promises of future nuptial bliss, that he fails to heed early warning signs that his 'angel' is not all that she appears to be. While they are yet engaged, Rosamond's wilfulness surfaces quite openly. She is heard to remark confidently, ' "I never give up anything that I choose to do" ', (Eliot 1965:385), and later, ' "...you know that I never change my mind" ' (Eliot 1965:388). Little does Lydgate realise the stubborn strength of will hidden behind the decorative and enchanting facade.

It does not take long, however, for the cracks to appear in a union based on the unrealistic expectations of each spouse. Rosamond, in particular, from the outset of their marriage, deviates from the expected behaviour of the traditional wife. Faced with unforeseen crippling financial stress, their marriage, lacking a firm foundation, quite simply falls apart. Lydgate, to his credit, does all in his power to protect his wife and to salvage their fragile relationship, but to no avail.

Rosamond, in her turn, is bitterly disappointed. She has been brought up to believe that

marriage means security, a certain standard of comfort and freedom from petty concerns ... Her parents and relations have taught her that, with her beauty and her status, she is owed a good marriage, i.e. a financially secure marriage, and she cannot accept that she hasn't got it (Calder 1976:138).

Rosamond petulantly blames Lydgate for inflicting this uncomfortable situation upon her. In retaliation she launches into a campaign of passive resistance and

truculent defiance, countermanding his orders and challenging his authority at every opportunity. In total disregard of the Victorian pattern of male prerogative, advantage and domination, Rosamond demands the freedom to speak her mind. In response to Lydgate's astonished fury at her audacity in openly defying him, she retorts, ' "I think I had a perfect right to speak on a subject which concerns me at least as much as you" ' (Eliot 1965:709). Yet, in Victorian ideology, the patriarch's word was law and as a 'relative creature' the wife had no rights. Not surprisingly, this does not deter Rosamond Vincy Lydgate, who dares to deviate from tradition and assert her independent status, for the young lady has a mind of her own. (10)

In a time of extreme crisis Rosamond - unlike *Deerbrook's* Hester Hope whose strength surfaces when her husband needs her most - fails Lydgate at every turn. Her pretence at fulfilling the ideological role of the angel-wife assumed to ensnare Lydgate is laid bare in all its selfishness and insincerity. For from Rosamond's limited perspective she is the only innocent party in a world full of 'disagreeable people who only thought of themselves, and did not mind how annoying they were to her' (Eliot 1965:716).

The Victorian mother-wife was the supposed emblem of selfless devotion dedicated both to husband and children. Here, too, Rosamond fails for, yet again defying Lydgate's orders, she goes horse-riding with a member of his genteel family and loses the baby which she is carrying. In causing the death of her child, Rosamond's greed for social recognition overrides her maternal instinct.

(10) Rosamond Vincy certainly cannot be termed an 'angel in the house' who has previously been described as '...so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathise always with the minds and wishes of others' (Woolf, in Anstruther 1992:2).

Lydgate is shattered at the turn of events. He wonders what has happened to the gentle, submissive creature society has promised will always be at his side to comfort, soothe and cajole. His whole concept of dependent womanhood is exposed as a lie: (11)

he secretly wondered over the terrible tenacity of this mild creature. There was gathering within him an amazed sense of his powerlessness over Rosamond. His superior knowledge and mental force, instead of being, as he had imagined, a shrine to consult on all occasions, was simply set aside on every practical question (Eliot 1965:631).

Lydgate's authority is challenged; his male ego destroyed. He finally realizes the naivety of his former ideals, for Eliot, deliberately subverting the concept of commanding male and servile female, portrays Rosamond as mistress of her own home, who expects to be consulted in all matters of importance, and to be catered to by an adoring husband who hastens to comply with her every wish.

Thus, it is not long before Lydgate is forced to admit that 'his will was not a whit stronger than hers' (Eliot 1965:702), and, in a direct reversal of roles, he submits to the truth that 'she had mastered him' (Eliot 1965:719). Lydgate finally comes to terms with the fact that he has been duped by a false social ideology. He is compelled to relinquish elevated ideals in favour of reduced hopes circumscribed by reality:

The first great disappointment has been borne: the tender devotedness and docile adoration of the ideal wife must be renounced, and life must be taken up on a lower stage of expectation (Eliot 1965:702).

(11) Lydgate is as much a victim of social stereotypes as is Rosamond. The reader is earlier informed of Lydgate's fascination with Madam Laure, the French actress, who murdered her husband simply because he wearied her. Lydgate's vision of perfect femininity is thus destroyed until he meets the supposedly pure and innocent Rosamond who temporarily renews his faith in the female sex. Lydgate is thus initially duped by the Madonna/whore stereotype. However, Rosamond does not long live up the Madonna part of the equation.

Calder (1976:140) attributes the failure of the Lydgate/Vincy marriage to the fact that

[n]either Lydgate nor Rosamond have thought about what marriage might mean as a human relationship. They have seen it as a social arrangement, as a professional arrangement, as a mutually attractive institution, but neither has looked at the other as an individual with individual needs and expectations.

For there was certainly no room for any form of individuality in an ideology which depended for its success on rigid codes of ethics and behaviour. Herein lies the reason for much of the frustration and discontent felt by many women of the era who were confined to the home and limited in their activities. So it is with Rosamond, who jealously guards her position as matriarch of her own little empire, for she has been educated into the belief that the home - her identity - is at once the centre and circumference of a woman's entire being. It is thus understandable that Rosamond, under threat of losing her home, is driven to protect 'that which is her only legacy, the only claim most Victorian women have in life' (Lundberg 1986:275).

Eliot was deeply concerned about the vacuous existence that was the lot of the average Victorian woman. Restricted to a limited education, tied to domestic duties, involved in frivolous activities and petty social engagements, there was little scope for personal interests and ambitions: 'We women are always in danger of living too exclusively in the affections ... we ought also to have our share of the more independent life' (in Uglow 1987:196).

George Eliot, in exposing the weaknesses inherent in an ideology in which the male is active and the female merely exists, is calling for reform. (12) Speaking of Rosamond, Hutton (in Swinden 1972:80) agrees:

This exquisitely-painted figure is the deadliest blow at the common assumption that limitation in both heart and brain is a desirable thing for women, that has ever been struck.

For, despite all that she has been through, Rosamond has gained nothing from her experiences. Unlike the traditional angel-figure who constantly caters to the needs of others with no thought for herself, Rosamond regards her own interests as paramount, and she certainly has no intention of reforming. In the Finale the reader is informed that

[s]he simply continued to be mild in her temper, inflexible in her judgement, disposed to admonish her husband, and able to frustrate him by stratagem. As the years went on he opposed her less and less, whence Rosamond concluded that he had learned the value of her opinion (Eliot 1965:893).

Thus the 'ineducable Rosamond' (Daiches, in Swinden 1972:117) refuses to benefit from experience, and her vision remains narrow. Having rejected all forms of traditional feminine consciousness, Rosamond distorts the angelic image more severely than does almost any other nineteenth-century female

(12) Calder (1976:155) comments that *Daniel Deronda's* Gwendolen Harleth complains of the same stifling inactivity: 'We women can't go in search of adventures - to find out the North-West passage or the source of the Nile, or to hunt tigers in the East. We must stay where we grow, or where the gardeners like to transplant us. We are brought up like the flowers, to look as pretty as we can, and be dull without complaining. That is my notion about the plants: they are often bored, and that is the reason why some of them have got poisonous' (Eliot 1967:Ch 13).

protaganist, and, in so doing, earns herself the label of 'domestic vampire' (Simcox, in Swinden 1972:45). Foster (1985:209), claiming that Rosamond Vincy's prototype is George Eliot's Hetty Sorrell, declares:

With this perfectly-finished creature, Eliot punctures the contemporary image of ideal womanhood more devastatingly than in *Adam Bede*.

Both the Casaubon and the Lydgate marriages begin to disintegrate almost from the moment when the vows are made. There is no period of wedded bliss in either home. George Eliot uses the failure of these two unions to highlight a distinctive message: marriage was a major casualty of the Victorian ideology. The absurd notion that men and women could be poured into established moulds, neither daring to cross the dividing threshold, was bound to prove socially disastrous. No consideration was given to individual natures, tastes or ambitions, and this quite naturally led to bitter disillusionment and the resultant collapse of the marriage covenant.

It is thus rather surprising that after Dorothea's first disastrous attempt to achieve domestic harmony, she marries once again. Will Ladislav becomes Dorothea's second husband. Feminist critics were horrified. Having narrowly escaped life-long imprisonment in a confining marriage, it was expected that Dorothea would use her newly-found freedom to accomplish great deeds.

Thomas (1987:396) reflects that 'Some feminists complain of Dorothea's failure to blaze a new, triumphant trail for herself' after Casaubon's death. Instead she 'dwindles into marriage' (Harvey, Introduction to *Middlemarch* 1965:8) for a second time, once again with a husband who appears to be 'such an inadequate partner for this large-souled heroine' (Foster 1985:13).

For Ladislav is a drifter, a free spirit without home, title, or inheritance. Yet, in her original portrayal of Will, George Eliot provides a refreshing view of masculinity released from any restricting stereotype. The antithesis of the

patriarch, Will has no wish to assume the qualities usually associated with the powerful authoritarian male. In a radical attempt to subvert the image of masculine strength and domination Eliot endows Ladislav with the sensitivity normally associated with females: 'He was a creature who entered into every one's feelings, and could take the pressure of their thought instead of urging his own with iron resistance' (Eliot 1965:539).

Gilbert & Gubar (1979:528/9) argue that 'Will is Eliot's radically anti-patriarchal attempt to create an image of masculinity attractive to women'. In contrast to the imprisoning effect Casaubon has on Dorothea, Will's love for her is a freeing experience: 'It was as if some hard, icy pressure had melted, and her consciousness had room to expand' (Eliot 1965:683). With Will as her husband Dorothea will be encouraged to discover her own unique identity and to explore any paths that might interest her.

Of concern, however, is the fact that Will's image of Dorothea initially appears to be an exaggeration of the traditional view of 'woman as angel' placed on a pedestal in Victorian ideology. He talks of Dorothea's 'halo', and does not refer to her 'loveliness', but rather her 'divineness', for 'the ordinary phrases which might apply to mere bodily prettiness were not applicable to her' (Eliot 1965:250). He describes her as being 'for ever enthroned in his soul: no other woman could sit higher than her footstool' (Eliot 1965:510).

One wonders if Will - like the Casaubon and Lydgate couples before him - is merely deluded by the false notions and illusive ideals surrounding matrimony. However, the reader comes to realize that his adoration of Dorothea is genuine; that he does not enter marriage with the sole purpose of wondering what *she* can do for *him*; and that Dorothea, who has spent her life searching for a satisfying vocation, is fulfilled by his love, and is able to realize many of her ideals by working alongside him in his efforts, as a liberal member of Parliament, to bring about social reform. Howells (in Swinden 1972:90) compliments Ladislav:

Dorothea made great and sorrowful mistakes through her generous and loyal nature; but Ladislaw was one of her inspirations: a centre of truth in which her love and her duty, otherwise so sadly at odds, could meet and be at peace.

In the finale the reader is told that the couple 'were bound to each other by a love stronger than any impulses which could have marred it' (Eliot 1965:894). Thus, Will and Dorothea prove that once the restricting stereotypical facades are cast aside, men and women will be free to appreciate the unique qualities inherent in each individual nature.

Lydgate, too, has grown sufficiently in self-knowledge to share in this liberating experience. Part of his growth process is the revision of his original estimation of Dorothea's character. In his former superior attitude he had regarded Dorothea as a handsome, but rather irritating woman. Once he looks past her feminine exterior he, in his humility, sees her as a person upon whom he can depend - someone with enough courage and individuality to support him when no-one else, including his own wife, believes in his integrity. Lydgate says of Dorothea, 'She seems to have what I never saw in any woman before - a fountain of friendship towards men - a man can make a friend of her' (Eliot 1965:826). Eliot's message is clear: once the guise of male-female stereotypes has been stripped away, solid relationships can be forged on sound bases.

Despite the fact that Dorothea has achieved happiness and fulfilment with her newfound love, feminist critics remain dissatisfied. They feel that George Eliot has betrayed the heroine who initially showed so much potential. Even the narrative voice in the Finale acknowledges that

[m]any who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother (Eliot 1965:894).

Yet it is also argued that 'no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done' (Eliot 1965:894).

The most ardent feminist would have to admit that in an era governed by rigid ideologies such as was the case in Victorian England, a woman's scope of opportunity was limited in every direction. Even Eliot's supreme idealist, Dorothea, eventually faces reality and lowers her expectations. Through experience she has come to terms with the fact that until society's ideologies are revised there is very little that one woman on her own - even as ambitious and passionate as she herself is - can do to alleviate the miseries of the world. Dorothea admits that she ' "used to despise women a little for not shaping their lives more, and doing better things" ' (Eliot 1965:589). Edwards (1984:99) argues that 'George Eliot simply could not find this new and bigger world'.

Does this mean, then, that George Eliot failed to explode any facet of the lie regarding the Victorian woman and her angelic womanhood? I think not. Though Eliot might appear to revert to tradition in the closing pages of her novel, a closer study of *Middlemarch* reveals that she ruthlessly highlights every injustice so carefully camouflaged in the supposedly ideal patriarchal system. And she uses every means at her disposal - overt or subversive - to accomplish this feat.

Eliot's attack on marriage - the institution at the heart of patriarchal ideology - is quick and decisive. There is no hint even of initial success in the Casaubon and Lydgate relationships. Morse (1993:361) endorses this point:

In *Middlemarch* George Eliot brutally rips back the lace curtain that shrouds the intimacies of man and wife to expose not love but a damaging and interminable struggle for power. But what she also shows is that this struggle is not what it seems - the woman is the stronger.

Both Casaubon and Lydgate enter marriage believing implicitly in their own power and strength. It is not long before their inherent weaknesses begin to emerge and they are forced to hide any inadequacies behind the stereotypes provided for them by patriarchal ideology. Knoepfelmacher (in Todd 1981:141) concurs, 'George Eliot rejects the sterile stereotypes that her threatened male characters so often regard as a refuge from contradiction and doubt'.

Female characters throughout the novel triumph inwardly as each in turn proves to be stronger than her male counterpart. Dorothea not only humiliates Casaubon by exposing his inadequacies, but she also exerts great influence over Lydgate and Ladislaw too. Mrs Bulstrode, when her husband's hypocrisies are revealed, becomes the sustaining force upon which the man who has prided himself on being the power behind Middlemarch business enterprise, leans. Even the intelligent Mrs Garth, who preaches female submission, is consulted by her husband in all matters of importance.

Mary Garth stipulates which career choices her future husband is permitted to consider. Loyal and dependable, Mary provides Fred Vincy with the stability and the drive in life that he so desperately lacks. For Fred, though sweet-natured and charming, is an irresponsible young drifter who lacks both ambition and a definite sense of direction. (13) Pampered by an over-protective mother, Fred feels that the world owes him a living. Mary, on the other hand, is a 'doer' who, believing that things 'were not likely to be arranged for her peculiar satisfaction' (Daiches, in Swinden (ed) 1972:118), is not afraid to work hard to achieve her goals.

(13) As I have noted previously Langland (in Harrison & Taylor (eds.) 1992:118) comments that Victorian fiction contains a legion of female saviours among whom are George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke and Mary Garth who are to 'give a social focus to the self-indulgent desires of Will Ladislaw and Fred Vincy'.

Down-to-earth and realistic in her judgement of situations and of people, Mary is not taken in by the illusive ideals and glamorous notions surrounding the concept of matrimony. For she possesses a 'needlelike ability to prick through human illusions' (Knoepfmacher, in Todd 1981:143). She is too strong and too intelligent a character to play the part of the meek, submissive angel-wife, and Fred is hardly the autocratic, domineering patriarch. With her feet firmly on the ground, and fully aware of Fred's limitations, Mary, unlike *Middlemarch's* other heroines, enters marriage well aware of what to expect. In fact Foster (1985:197) claims that Mary's level-headed affection for Fred highlights Dorothea's and Rosamond's naive ignorance of their own marriage partners.

Though there is no doubt that Mary's feelings for Fred are genuine and that she wants only what is best for him, she does seem to enjoy the power that she wields over him. Having had the opportunity to marry the Reverend Farebrother - a man more her moral and intellectual equal - she nevertheless favours Fred, for, as J G Thomas (1987:408) claims, 'unconsciously or not, she ... chooses the match where her power is most direct', and, '[she] mothers Fred, and he loves it'. However, there is a serious undertone in the words of Morse (1993:361) who comments that Mary is 'sufficiently sure of herself to insist that if she is to marry Fred Vincy it will be only on her terms' (Morse 1993:361).

Thus Eliot shatters the idea of the forceful Victorian patriarch and reveals in its stead an image of masculine weakness. She is, however, far more overt in her destruction of the angelic ideal upon which the whole ideology is founded. For neither Dorothea nor Rosamond conforms to traditional female roles. Dorothea is constantly informed that neither her thoughts nor her actions are appropriate to a woman of her class. It is only when she learns to look past stagnant male stereotypes and illusive ideals of marriage that she is rewarded with the happiness and fulfilment that she so deserves.

However, 'it is with Rosamond that Eliot reveals her most realistic attitude towards women in this novel' (Foster 1985:210). For Rosamond casts aside the

cloak of conventionality without the slightest hesitation and reveals the real woman beneath - a selfish being who has a strong enough sense of her own identity to enable her to withstand any pressure to change. Feminist critics who profess to be disappointed with George Eliot's choice of fate for Dorothea, can hardly call into question her motive in her outspoken portrayal of Rosamond Vincy-Lydgate, who single-handedly explodes many falsities surrounding the entire concept of the Victorian angel-wife.

CONCLUSION

It is little wonder that historically women have hesitated to venture into the male-dominated and male-orientated journalistic world. Only the most intrepid of female authors have dared to challenge the man's prerogative in literary circles. For centuries of subservience to her male counterpart have forced the woman to accept the role he had prescribed for her, submit to his image of her and bow to the limits he has set for her socially, economically and functionally:

Authored by a male God and by a god-like male, killed into a 'perfect' image of herself, the woman writer's self-contemplation may be said to have begun with a searching glance into the mirror of the male-inscribed literary text. There she would see at first those eternal lineaments fixed on her like a mask...[b]ut looking long enough, looking hard enough, she would see... an enraged prisoner: herself (Gilbert & Gubar 1979:15).

Thus there grew among thinking women the urge to assert themselves and to rebel against this image of dependent womanhood so foreign to their natural inclinations. Before the woman writer could 'journey through the looking glass toward literary autonomy, however, she must come to terms with the images on the surface of glass...' (Gilbert & Gubar 1979:16/7).

She must expose, examine, and eventually subordinate the male-generated extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster', which have for so long fettered female creativity. In short, she must, as Virginia Woolf says, kill the angel in the house before it kills her:

Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing... (in Freiwald 1988:539).

Only then would the way be clear for the liberated female writer, who had for so long perceived her own image 'through a glass darkly' (Gilbert & Gubar 1979:17), to create for herself a new identity.

This was a daunting challenge indeed, and the average Victorian woman turned for support and practical aid to outspoken and enthusiastic leaders of the feminist movement, as well as to courageous women writers, brave enough to give voice to the many grievances and injustices of the time.

The aim of this dissertation, therefore, is to determine, through a study of the works of selected female novelists, the extent to which each succeeded in exposing the false angelic identity, and, in so doing, improving the lot of women. This task was fraught with difficulties, for Martineau, the Brontës and Eliot were writing at a time when the patriarchal voice was at its most eloquent, and the feminist movement scarcely underway. Not only were anti-establishment ideas unpopular, but there were also limits to what was acceptable for publication in the conservative atmosphere of Victorian consciousness.

Furthermore, the writers were themselves victims of a culture which impressed upon the woman the importance of her angelic stature. Having been bred and nurtured within this culture, female authors found it difficult to escape its strictures, view it from without, and present an objective appraisal of its characteristics. Thus it is not surprising that these women, termed as 'neither ideological slaves to patriarchal thought, nor distinctly separate from patriarchal culture' (David 1987:230), experienced a resulting inner conflict which surfaced prominently as tension in their writings. Therefore, while some criticism was voiced openly, much of the rebellion was hinted at in subtle innuendos.

Several subversive techniques are common to all four writers. The most obvious of these is the use of the prominent female protagonists to undermine conservative trends of thought and behaviour. The heroines, for the most part, are independent beings with minds of their own, challenging the accepted norm of the submissive and self-effacing Victorian wife.

Conversations between Margaret Ibbotson and Maria Young in *Deerbrook* reveal both women as thinking, intelligent people who question the unjust and

illogical principles upon which patriarchal ideology was based. Maria Young, in particular, presents a fresh image of the Victorian spinster who was commonly rejected by society as a misfit, and even termed a 'monster', for failing to achieve the woman's ultimate goal: marriage.

Helen Huntingdon in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* commits an unpardonable sin, not only in the eyes of society, but of the law itself. In fleeing from a despicable husband, and in the establishing of an independent career, Helen portrays a strength of mind and character little in evidence among contemporary women. Ironically, for the 'crimes' she commits, she is awarded the status of the 'fallen woman'.

Charlotte Brontë's two heroines in her novel *Shirley* also engage in thought-provoking conversations, which reveal each girl's dissatisfaction with the role enforced upon the nineteenth-century woman. While Caroline, in her quiet manner, calls into question society's unjust treatment of the single woman, the wildly independent and unashamedly self-assertive Shirley demands the right to her own place alongside the man in a hitherto exclusively patriarchal establishment.

Both Dorothea Brooke and Rosamond Vincy in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* reject, for entirely different reasons, the confining stereotype of the ideal woman. In outright betrayal of the angel-image, Rosamond is portrayed as single-mindedly wilful and selfish in the extreme, thus earning society's label of 'monster'. By contrast, Dorothea's intentions are good. However, her ambitious visions of achievement and her unquenchable yearning towards intellectual development reveal an assertiveness unacceptable in women and frowned upon by rigid Victorian society.

The male protagonist in his turn comes under the spotlight too, as the reforming female novelist lost no opportunity to undermine the image of patriarchal power and female weakness. An obvious reversal of gender roles is one technique

used to achieve this goal. Eliot's Rosamond, for instance, is undoubtedly the stronger character in the Lydgate partnership, while Anne Brontë's Helen Huntingdon shows uncharacteristic initiative in her insistence upon the right to determine the terms of relationship with both the men in her life.

Attributing the typically feminine qualities of patience and sensitivity to the hero is another ploy to equalise the sexes, and hence nullify the image of the mother-wife as subordinate. Edward Hope in *Deerbrook* is just such a character. It is he who supplies the spiritual guidance in the home - a position usually reserved for the saintly woman. In other cases menial occupation - such as in the case of Louis Moore a mere schoolmaster - or inferior social status - a position typified by Will Ladislaw, a man without inheritance or title - relegates the male to a demeaning position usually occupied by women.

The 'maiming motif' (Showalter 1977:150), and even death itself, are fairly common means of 'punishing' the overbearing male figure. Robert Moore in *Shirley* is injured and suffers at the hands of a bullying female nurse, which proves to be an 'educational' process for him. Casaubon, in his turn, experiences an early death, thus releasing Dorothea from life-long incarceration in a marriage of hell. Thus, in response to such evidence of female dissent, Todd (1981:2) claims that women writers have often 'puncture[d] the heroic myths men have created for themselves'.

A further form of subversion portrayed most obviously in the works of Anne Brontë and George Eliot, is the collapse of the institution of marriage, the buttress of society, upon which rests the entire foundation of the 'angel in the house' ideology.

Thus the reader is presented with powerful evidence that all four novelists eagerly, and with serious intent, assumed the task of 'exploding the lie' of angelic womanhood. Does this mean, then, that each succeeded in her task?

While I aver that each greatly contributed to the release of her incarcerated Victorian sisters, many feminists would disagree. Their main argument lies in the fact that, while many of these heroines are initially presented as promising figures who are likely to have a positive impact on a society in need of reform, they are frequently permitted by over-cautious creators to recoil from their mission in various ways, thus capitulating to the system.

Middlemarch's Dorothea Brooke is presented as just such a potential heroic figure. She emerges at the outset as an outspoken woman of great ambition and ability. However, instead of being allowed to maintain the impetus of this superior role to the conclusion of the novel, she disappoints feminist critics by 'dwindl[ing] ... into marriage' for a second time. (Harvey, Introduction to *Middlemarch* 1965:8). Edwards (1984:92) claims that Dorothea 'is not the same character at the book's conclusion that she was at its beginning; at first a latent epic hero, she is ultimately a comic heroine'. (1) Edwards's disappointment is understandable, because if Dorothea had achieved the status of 'hero', then she would have had nothing left in common with the angel in the house, who by definition will always be cast in the supporting role. In achieving a status equal to that of a man she would have proved conclusively that the angel-ideology is a lie.

Dorothea Brooke's fate provides evidence of the Victorian woman writer's ambivalence regarding her own contradictory role in a society which allowed her

(1) Edwards (1984:22) presents an interesting theory regarding 'male' heroes and 'female' heroines. She states that the deserving female figure has every right to claim the title of 'hero': 'Women who assert the slightest claim to power assume the status of potential heroes because their assertion subverts the fundamental dialectic of power and submission that feeds society's dynamos'. Edwards (1984:5) states furthermore, that 'the woman hero questions the conventional associations of gender and behaviour. If she can do as he has done, then patriarchy's prohibitions are a lie'.

the privilege of contributing to its literary culture, and yet still expected her to remain subservient to her male counterpart. It thus cannot be denied that while pioneering women writers like Martineau, the Brontës and George Eliot certainly questioned the woman's role in Victorian society, the steps they took were understandably hesitant. Notwithstanding this fact, however, if one views the contribution of these women in the greater time frame of the past two centuries, their role as initiators of the decline of patriarchal domination is indisputable.

It is interesting to bear in mind Showalter's (1977:13) identification of three phases in the development of female authorship. Briefly stated, these begin with the Feminine Phase (from the appearance of the male pseudonym in the 1840s to the death of George Eliot in 1880). This is the phase of little change, a mere imitation of prevailing modes, traditions, standards of art and social roles.

The following Feminist Phase (1880-1920) is one of protest against these values and norms; while the Female Phase (1920 to the present), the most vital, is the phase of self-discovery and a search for identity. Thus Gilbert & Gubar (1979:17) claim that '[f]or all literary artists self-definition necessarily precedes self-assertion: the creative "I AM" cannot be uttered if the "I" knows not what it is'.

Showalter (1977:13) stresses that these phases overlap in the work of most writers. In my opinion, my selected novelists corroborate this point, crossing the spectrum of all three phases in varying degrees. Belonging historically to the Feminine Phase, it is not surprising that the influence of male authors is clearly apparent in their work. Gilbert & Gubar (1979:17) aver that 'the images of "angel" and "monster" have been so ubiquitous throughout literature by men that they have also pervaded women's writing to such an extent that few women have definitely killed either figure'. However, their voices raised in loud protest against restricting norms and male-inspired prohibitions, attest their claim to enter the Feminist Phase. Finally, their contributions towards the destruction of the 'angel-image' entitles them to claim participation in the Female Phase, for

herein lies the emergence of a new self-awareness and consequently of a new identity.

The question remaining to be determined is whether or not the reforming authoress of the Victorian era succeeded in 'exploding the lie' of angelic womanhood. There is no doubt that her efforts were severely hampered by a deeply-rooted patriarchal culture. Her determination was nevertheless unflinching and her courage strong, but fearful odds beset her path and she was frequently forced into subtle rather than overt means of protest to express her dissent. Thus, while it might be argued that despite the claim of certain women writers, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, to have achieved this aim, few others would be so bold. (2)

In fact, considering the sexual controversies still raging in the world today, one wonders if even liberated twentieth-century woman could claim to have forged for herself a totally independent identity and an unassailable position in a traditionally male-orientated society. Martha Vicinus (1972:xv) insists that women are still largely excluded from circles of power, authority and prestige; and that marriage is still lauded as the prime goal of every young woman. She talks 'not only of the distance women have travelled, but of the miles yet to go'. Even Virginia Woolf (in Freiwald 1988:558), possibly the most prominent advocate of the creation of woman's new identity, is not sure that a definite identity has been established: 'What is a woman? I assure you, I do not know. I do not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill'.

(2) Referring to the artificially-contrived angel-figure, Barrett Browning once stated that in her mature art she had succeeded in replacing this 'copy' with the 'individuality' or true identity (Gilbert & Gubar 1979:17).

There is no doubt that women have taken giant steps towards the fulfilling of this aim, and, while it might be argued that the authoresses of my selected works did not actually 'explode the lie' of angelic womanhood, they certainly shook it to its very foundations. In acknowledgement of their noble contributions, we should lay roses (3) before all the courageous women writers of the nineteenth-century for initiating the process of 'reach[ing] toward the woman trapped on the other side of the mirror/text and help[ing] her to climb out' (Gilbert & Gubar 1979:16).

(3) Virginia Woolf bestows figurative bouquets on those who have in some way advanced the cause of women (Lundberg 1986:282).

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