

**Rebels in the Family:
New Domestic Novels in Fin-de-Siècle Britain**

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Abstract

This thesis considers three British novels of the 1880s that imagined a range of middle-class domestic configurations that deviated in new ways from the long-contested fiction of the British household as a patriarchal stronghold. Although mid-Victorian novels very often featured narratives of domestic upheaval, they did so in a way that sensationalized and emphasized the rarity of middle-class familial deviance. In contrast, the *fin-de-siècle* domestic novel brought a greater range of idiosyncratic families and households under a newly sociological lens and explored them as part of the reality of modern British family life. The persistent attention to alternative domesticities by novelists writing in the *fin-de-siècle* period suggests that the social problems of the day required new novelistic genres and formal strategies beyond those favoured by writers of sensation fiction and sentimental domestic novels in the earlier part of the century. Through readings of late-career novels by the popular Victorian sensationalist Wilkie Collins and a *New Woman* novel by the anti-feminist editorialist Eliza Lynn Linton, this thesis argues that the generic hybridity of such *fin-de-siècle* British novels resulted in a capacious domestic narrative that often looked beyond the fraught unit of the biological family to posit an unprecedented range of new family configurations.

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Introduction

This thesis participates in the ongoing process of recuperating popular late-Victorian novels from certain entrenched Victorian and Modernist narratives that undermine their historical relevance and literary value. The fin-de-siècle Victorian novel has been stereotyped variously as trite, zealous, and simply too formally and generically awkward to read. In an effort to complicate this stereotype, Gail Marshall describes the period as a confusing yet excitingly rich chapter in the history of British literature, marked by narratives of both degeneration and creative vitality (2). I revisit some of the last gasps of the Victorian novel and, following the lead of critics like Marshall and Jenny Bourne Taylor, suggest a more nuanced way of reading the idiosyncrasies of this fiction. At the fin-de-siècle, the Victorian novel evolved and mutated in the hands of popular novelists, resulting in a formal hybridity that enabled novels to work through social complexity in new and fruitful ways. In this thesis, I focus in particular on the ways in which British novels of the 1880s and 1890s worked with new modes of middle-class domesticity. The middle-class household and middle-class family were in a relatively new state of flux at the turn of the century, as new divorce and child-custody laws, new professions for women both in and out of the domestic sphere, and new modes of friendship saw the light of day. In the midst of this period of transition, a number of plots that had once seemed highly “sensational”, such as the displacement of children from one household configuration to another in the wake of a marital infidelity or other domestic upheaval, became increasingly “real” and commonplace, and novelists began to write a different kind of domestic narrative.

In this thesis, I read three fin-de-siècle domestic novels, *Heart and Science* (1883) and *The Evil Genius* (1886) by Wilkie Collins, and *The Rebel of the Family* (1880) by Eliza Lynn Linton. I argue that Linton’s New Woman novel is worth reading alongside Collins’s later novels

not only because these three texts all center around similar late-Victorian social problems, but also because the formal innovations of the New Woman novel echo some of the distinctive features of Collins's late domestic fiction. In my discussion of what could be described as the "de-sensationalization" of alternative domesticities in the fin-de-siècle novel, I consider how certain newly tempered tropes of Victorian domestic literature fit into our discussion of realism in the context of the history of the novel. Although the fin-de-siècle works of an aging sensation fiction writer such as Collins and the New Woman novels of the same period have much in common in how they think through social change and narrative form, they have rarely been studied side-by-side.

In Chapter One, I provide some background information to the development of the sensation novel at the fin-de-siècle, and offer an overview of Collins's later fiction before entering into my discussion of *Heart and Science*. I consider the place of this later work in the larger context of Collins's legacy in order to foreground my discussion of the formal development of the late-Victorian "family novel". Collins has long been considered a key figure associated with the mid-Victorian subgenre of sensation fiction, and, as such, his fin-de-siècle forays into both a new psychological realism and a nostalgically zealous morality can help us think about how the recurring domestic tropes of sensation fiction were recast in the decades after the height of the genre's popularity. As the result of a sizeable amount of recuperative scholarship dating back to the 1980s, Wilkie Collins is now studied as a literary powerhouse in his own right, apart from Dickens, his more famous friend and sometime collaborator. Collins's best known works, *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868), are now studied as major novels of the Victorian era. However, Collins's later novels have long been maligned for their loose characterization, unwieldy plots, and tendency towards didacticism. A number of

critics such as Jenny Bourne Taylor and Graham Law have worked hard in recent decades to challenge this long-standing tendency of critics to dismiss as poorly composed and thematically dull much of the sensation fiction that Wilkie Collins and others published after Charles Dickens's death in 1870, making the case that Collins' late novels in particular are a rich trove for those interested in both the formal developments of fin-de-siècle novels and the ways such novels depicted social issues. The novels authored by Collins in the final decade of his career tend to combine a consideration of a contemporary social problem or issue (such as the vivisection debate in *Heart and Science*) with an approach to storytelling that recalibrates some of his tried and true sensation fiction techniques and tropes for new kinds of domestic plots. Bourne Taylor asserts that the thirteen full-length novels Collins published after 1870 are interesting for the way that they adapt his earlier sensational storytelling techniques to his new project of "moral reform", describing such novels as steering "an uncertain path between opening up new kinds of questions and closing meaning down" (80).

Heart and Science is the story of Carmina and Ovid, two cousins in love whose courtship is complicated by various plots against their union. These include the machinations of Ovid's mother, Mrs. Gallilee, a scientific dilettante who stands to lose her guardian's allowance should the niece in her care marry, as well as the initial efforts of the governess, Miss Minerva, to thwart the marriage due to her secret unrequited love for Ovid. While Ovid is away on a tour of Canada, Carmina develops catalepsy, and Mrs. Gallilee's acquaintance, Dr. Benjulia, a physician and secret vivisectionist, permits Carmina's health to deteriorate under his watch out of a cold, scientific curiosity. It is this polemical vivisection plot that has been the focus of most critical attention to *Heart and Science*; however, I argue that this novel is also notable for its subversion of sensation novel domesticity. My discussion of the domestic plot in *Heart and Science* is

twofold, revolving around the troublesome female characters of Mrs. Gallilee and Miss Minerva. I first consider the governess Miss Minerva's mutable position in several iterations of the Vere and Gallilee families, in order to argue that her trajectory from bitter spinster to beloved auxiliary family member in *Heart and Science* represents a way of thinking about the permeability of the nuclear family that defies Victorian narrative conventions. Mrs. Gallilee, in turn, is an interesting figure whose narrative in the novel similarly resists the Victorian novel's tendency to punish a female character who refuses to prioritize her husband and daughters. Mrs. Gallilee neither reconciles with her husband nor is forced to abandon the passion for amateur science experiments that she values above family life. In *Heart and Science*, Collins permits both of these women an unprecedented amount of agency, allowing them to devote themselves to their respective personal and professional interests while leaving them outside of traditional family configurations at the novel's end.

In Chapter Two, I focus on a second novel by Collins, *The Evil Genius*, a self-declared "Domestic Story" which engages with family dynamics very explicitly, exploring a number of different possible family arrangements after a governess, Sydney Westerfield, and her employer, Herbert Linley, carry out an adulterous affair that results in a child custody dispute and divorce. In *The Evil Genius*, the Linley family, fractures, proliferates, and reassembles itself multiple times, cycling through various possible configurations of family. The novel does not sanction one version of domestic felicity over the others; indeed, there is a curious emphasis on the interchangeability and indeterminacy of familial bonds in this narrative. I argue that, through its loose approach to characterization and its use of a plurality of morally ambiguous editorial voices, *The Evil Genius* departs from the standard sensation novel treatment of the adultery plot: it refuses to discount the viability of familial structures that deviate from the conventional unit of

married biological parents and child. *The Evil Genius* is, furthermore, a novel in which several narrative authorities discuss issues of sensation narrative and genre, a phenomenon most clearly seen through Herbert Linley's opinionated mother-in-law Mrs Presty's observations about the family's domestic upheavals. My discussion of *The Evil Genius* considers the novel's open-ended treatment of a number of domestic "problems" with no single clear-cut solution. Stories like that of Sydney Westerfield, the wayward governess reemployed as a secretary, defy Victorian narrative expectations of adulterers getting their just desserts, and of the so-called Fallen Woman's incompatibility with domestic happiness. Collins's novel acknowledges the pathos and familial upheaval that are produced by the upper-middle-class Victorian father running away with the governess, yet it resists treating the scandal as a sensation, directing its attention instead to the multiplicity of domestic possibilities that the fracturing of the household order presents.

In Chapter Three, I turn to Eliza Lynn Linton's *The Rebel of the Family*. Linton's novel is considered an example of the so-called "New Woman Novel" that proliferated at the fin-de-siècle. The New Woman novel cuts across fictional genres, and designates generally any novel from this period featuring a heroine who "challenged accepted ideals of marriage and maternity, chose to work for a living, or who in any way argued for the feminist cause" (Cunningham 3). The "New Woman" refers to a cultural trope of the fin-de-siècle, a particular figment of a woman who appeared in newspaper and magazine editorials, caricatures, plays, songs, and novels. The New Woman had admirers and detractors, and was described in many contradictory ways—she appeared variously as a spinster suffragette, a pretty, vain, young spendthrift, an emancipated intellectual, a masculine woman smoking a pipe and wearing knickerbockers in the streets—but all were in agreement that she presented a break from conventional British

femininity and was at the very least a comic disturbance and at most a true threat to society. New Woman novels were written by a great range of individuals with an array of political agendas and literary backgrounds. Thus, it is difficult to suggest any formal hallmarks that are common to all New Woman novels. Olive Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm* (1883) is considered a New Woman novel, as is Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady* (1881). New Woman novels might praise or condemn the New Woman, or adopt a more neutral stance on their heroine's forays into the public sphere. Linton looms large in the history of the New Woman as an anti-feminist figure: in her famous essay "The Girl of the Period" she takes a notoriously conservative stance on gender roles and female domesticity. However, Linton's literary career was both prolific and diverse, and in recent years critics like Ann Ardis and Deborah Meem have argued that her novels in particular reveal a complicated, at times self-contradictory, perspective on middle-class women's autonomies.

My reading of *The Rebel of the Family* considers the ways this novel tests the possibilities and limitations of different family and domestic bonds. I examine Linton's preoccupation in this novel with placing the liminal New Woman in a fitting household. The protagonist of *The Rebel of the Family*, Perdita Winstanley, is a sensitive, misunderstood, politically active young woman who ventures out of her home to take a job at the Post Office Savings Bank in order to help her formerly well-to-do family stave off bankruptcy. Perdita's forays outside of the home that she shares with her Grundyist mother and two sisters involve unsanctioned visits both to the home of Leslie Crawford, a low-born chemist with an unhappy past, and to the feminist "bachelor pad" of Bell Blount and Connie Tracy, a pair of suffragettes whose implied lesbianism is treated by the novel with both fascination and disgust. Bell Blount and Leslie Crawford compete romantically and intellectually for the lost Perdita's soul, a contest

that Leslie eventually wins after his mad wife dies in the asylum (freeing him to eventually declare himself to Perdita) and Bell is revealed to be an elitist hypocrite. While the mannish Bell is ultimately vilified by the narrator and other characters featured in the novel, the “queer, hybrid” home that she makes with her “little wife” Connie and their haughty servant Miss Long captivates Perdita, who is simultaneously enticed and repulsed by Bell and the New Woman’s lifestyle she exemplifies. *The Rebel of the Family* follows Perdita as she considers her place in the world and in relation to her often intolerant family members, and, in the process, devotes significant narrative space to examining women who exist more precariously between social spheres than does its bourgeois protagonist. In my reading of the novel’s hybrid narrative, I analyze the domestic stories of several kinds of “New Woman” characters, arguing that the stories of such liminal characters as Bell Blount and Miss Long flout narrative expectations for such odd women out, contributing even more moral ambiguity to a novel that is both a gothic inspired melodrama and the sometimes weary, realist portrait of a genteel family fallen on hard times.

The three fin-de-siècle novels considered in this thesis each work through issues of domestic conflict and family structure. While each text tells its story of a bourgeois household upheaval in a distinct tone—the unlikely happiness of the ending of *Heart and Science* is at odds with the weary ambivalence of *The Evil Genius*, which in turn differs from the often harsh disenchantment of *The Rebel of the Family*—all three novels are marked by a preoccupation with new domestic possibilities and an interest in considering the viability of different household configurations. I argue that these three examples of Collins’ and Linton’s late-Victorian fiction can productively be read side-by-side in order to demonstrate how such fin-de-siècle novels used

an idiosyncratic combination of sensational tropes and a realist attention to social issues in order to tell new stories about family composition and mutability.

Chapter 1

“At Last, I’m a Happy Woman”: Fractured Family and Female Autonomy in *Heart and Science*

Algernon Swinburne famously dismissed in one fell quip Collins’s late works as a batch of artistic failures: “What brought good Wilkie’s genius nigh perdition? /Some demon whispered—Wilkie! Have a mission” (598). Collins scholars have only recently started to read and take seriously these later works. It is true that late novels like *Heart and Science* (1883), with its relentless exposition of the horrors of vivisection, read as disjointed and awkwardly polemical when compared with the meticulously crafted suspense of Collins’s most read works, *The Moonstone* (1868) and *The Woman in White* (1860). Yet alongside the staunch didacticism of Collins’s so-called “mission novels” is a critical and realist attention to the social problems of his day. Collins had long-sustained an interest in psychology and criminology: claiming to have successfully “traced the influence of circumstance on character” in *The Woman in White*, he declares his intention to also “trace the influence of character on circumstances” in the preface to *The Moonstone* (Collins, *The Moonstone* xxiii). In many ways, Collins continued to practice both kinds of psychological “tracing” throughout the later stage of his career as a novelist. However, whereas the classic strategy of the sensation novel is to dramatize the social deviance that lurks beneath surface respectability, Collins treats “deviant” modes of sociality and domesticity in his final works as comparatively commonplace and no longer the exclusive property of the subterranean side of Victorian society. Although both *Heart and Science: A Story of the Present Time* and *The Evil Genius: A Domestic Story* take on popular late-Victorian moral crusades in explicit, occasionally heavy-handed ways, they also do a great deal of cultural work thinking through new middle-class domestic possibilities. In my reading of *Heart and Science* and *The Evil Genius*, I will focus specifically on the internal tension between Collins’s simultaneous

impulses in his later novels to expunge and explore new domesticities and household arrangements.

Steve Farmer suggests that Swinburne's obituary for Collins, and scathing, disappointed commentary on *Heart and Science* in the form of that much quoted couplet established a tradition of reading this late novel as a dull and obvious departure from the quality of the sensation novels on which Collins built his name (8). The sensation novel is generally read as an innovation of the 1860s, with Collins as one of its chief proponents alongside the likes of Rhoda Broughton, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Ellen Wood. The sensation novel was notable for its hybridity; Patrick Brantlinger characterises the sensation novel as a "unique mixture of contemporary domestic realism with elements of the Gothic romance, the Newgate novel of criminal 'low life', and the 'silver fork' novel of scandalous and sometimes criminal 'high life'" (30). What made the sensation novel distinct from these earlier sensational narratives was its contemporaneity and greater incorporation of realist strategies: "In the sensation novel, the Gothic is brought up to date and so mixed with the conventions of realism as to make events seem possible if not exactly probable" (37). Lyn Pykett highlights the generic slipperiness of the sensation novel, wondering whether it actually constituted "a distinct genre or subgenre, or was it rather a label applied to a range of novels by certain kinds of reviewers to express a particular kind of cultural anxiety?" She adds that some reviewers considered any "attempt to spice up a fiction market that had become a little dull and domestic or, alternatively, too preoccupied with social problems" to be a "sensation novel," further noting in sensation fiction "a tendency to emphasize 'incident' or plot rather than character" (50-51).

Jenny Bourne Taylor describes Collins as having become "more explicitly radical, more openly socially committed" in the later years of his career, when a shift in publishers gave him

cause to “pin his cultural hopes on a mass popular audience rather than a Bohemian avant-garde or liberal coterie”. She describes the problem that Collins now grappled with as “how to revitalize the pleasurable potential of ‘sensation’ conventions by making them ‘work harder’ while at the same time intensifying the fictional and psychological codes they draw on, by giving them a more clearly tendentious purpose” (210-211). His later novels, including *Man and Wife* (1870), *The New Magdalen* (1873), *The Law and the Lady* (1875), *The Fallen Leaves* (1879), *Jezebel’s Daughter* (1880), *Heart and Science* (1883), *The Evil Genius* (1886), *The Legacy of Cain* (1888), and *Blind Love* (finished after Collins’s death in 1889 by Walter Besant and published posthumously in 1890), cover a range of familiar genres, including “mission” literature, melodrama, and domestic realism. Bourne Taylor comments that his later novels “wound up sensation conventions to an increasingly strained pitch, so that what had been a culturally dubious hybrid now became an unsettling montage: ‘His new book is an outrageous burlesque upon himself’, the *Athenaeum* noted of *The Law and the Lady* in 1875”. She suggests that each of the later novels “manifests its own peculiar form of generic indeterminacy”, representing “an uneasy mixture of modes” (81-82). Indeed, *Heart and Science* can be read as both a highly sensational contribution to fin-de-siècle anxieties about modern science run amok and an earnest meditation on vivisection as a real social problem. It is not exactly a sensation novel, but neither does it wholly eschew the tropes and narrative strategies of this genre.

Collins himself was aware of the multivalence of his project and dispensed some words in defending its integrity. As is true for many of his novels, *Heart and Science* is prefaced with a self-righteous series of justifications, addressed first to “Readers in General” and then to “Readers in Particular”. In his remarks to the former, Collins expresses a conviction that, despite the success of his earlier, plot-heavy sensation novels, what the reading public actually respects

most in a novel is the presence of both “Character and Humour”, and that his “advancing years and health that stands sadly in need of improvement warn me—if I am to vary my way of work—that I may have little time to lose”. He goes on to compare himself obliquely to Shakespeare,¹ Scott, and Faraday², elaborating on the realist, almost scientific attention in his fiction to character, human foible, and social problems that he maintains is the highest of literary achievements, and seemingly anticipating some resistance from a readership accustomed to the plot-driven sensation novel:

Still persisting in telling you a story—still refusing to get up in the pulpit and preach, or to invade the platform and lecture, or to take you by the buttonhole in confidence and make fun of my Art—it has been my chief effort to draw the characters with a vigour and breadth of treatment, derived from the nearest and truest view that I could get of the one model, Nature. (37)

Addressing “Readers in Particular” who might open his novel “with a mind soured by distrust”, Collins asserts that the science of *Heart and Science* is all the result of “promiscuous” research towards the end of realism, and not sensationalized authorial invention (39). In his “Preface”, he also distinguishes his contribution to the anti-vivisectionist cause from literature that capitalized on the shocking, gory details of vivisection: “the outside of the laboratory is a necessary object in my landscape – but I never once open the door and invite you to look in” (38). These justifications before the novel suggest that Collins was aware of the demands of a diverse

¹ This attempt at a respectable literary genealogy was nothing new—a series of defenses of the sensation novel published in *All The Year Round* in the 1860s sought to claim Shakespeare as a sensationalist (Garrison, 182).

² Collins alludes to Michael Faraday and several other venerated scientific figures at various junctures in the novel itself in order to emphasize the distinction between these noble scientists and heartless modern practitioners like the fictionalized Dr. Benjulia and Mrs. Gallilee.

audience and was eager for *Heart and Science* to be received as an arresting, character-driven story predicated on real scientific knowledge. Indeed, Collins wrote in a letter to a close friend in 1882 that *Heart and Science* had become his “life” and that he was writing it “in blood and dynamite” (371).

Heart and Science, set in Collins’s present day after the “weary old nineteenth century had advanced into the last twenty years of its life” (45), has been studied primarily in the context of late-Victorian anti-vivisection discourse.³ Collins’s letters to his publisher reveal that he wrote *Heart and Science* partially as a response to the heavily sensationalized Ferrier Case of 1881, in which an acclaimed London professor of physiology was tried for and ultimately acquitted of practicing animal experimentation without a licence after he attended the cranial dissection of a living monkey (Farmer 17). Collins’s Dr. Benjulia is a caricature of the morally bankrupt vivisectionist, whose quest for medical knowledge is motivated by hubris and social deviance rather than a desire to ease human suffering. The vivisection plot in *Heart and Science* showcases tropes common to the sensation novel. For example, Benjulia’s desolate, iron gated home laboratory, “so near to London, and yet, in its loneliness, so far away” (*H&S* 129), represents exactly the sort of “modernization of the Gothic” that Lyn Pykett details in “Collins and the Sensation Novel” (54). Indeed, the subject of vivisection is an ideal one for a sensation novel, which, according to Pykett, derives its power to thrill from the fact that its “‘ghosts’ are always still living” (56). However, interwoven with the vivisection plot in *Heart and Science* is a family plot that both echoes and challenges the gothic domestic narratives that were a staple of Collins’s earlier sensation novels. When the novel’s strikingly generic male protagonist is

³ See Dougal MacEachen’s “Wilkie Collins’ *Heart and Science* and the Vivisection Controversy.” *The Victorian Newsletter* (Spring 1966): 22-25.

forcibly displaced to Quebec, he is sidelined from an inheritance struggle that unfolds among female characters on English soil. This inheritance plot is complicated by the conflicting agencies of the family matriarch and the governess in her employ. Whereas the vivisection plot in *Heart and Science* is a generic retread of various sensational tropes, with this domestic plot, Collins explores familial upheaval and women's roles and agencies within the domestic sphere in ways that are formally interesting both because of how they overshadow the sensational details of the vivisection plot and because of the unconventional ways in which the novel resolves the issues of family disorder created by the domestic plot.

In *Heart and Science*, Ovid Vere, a young doctor, falls in love with his cousin Carmina who moves to London as his mother's ward following the deaths of her Italian mother and English father. Ovid's own mother, Mrs. Gallilee, has squandered much of her brother's money on French fashion and various scientific hobbies. Mrs. Gallilee encourages the over-worked Ovid to take a recuperative trip to Canada, in order to forestall a marriage between the cousins that would force her to forfeit her guardian's allowance and reduce her and her young daughters' chances of inheriting the family fortune. In Ovid's absence, the Gallilees become closely acquainted with the brain and nerve specialist (and notorious vivisectionist) Dr. Benjulia, who becomes an accessory to Mrs. Gallilee's schemes. When Carmina is struck by a mysterious brain illness, Benjulia cruelly lets her condition deteriorate out of scientific curiosity. At the novel's conclusion, Ovid returns from Montreal with a cure for Carmina's illness in hand (discovered by an anti-vivisectionist doctor in Canada), Benjulia releases his animals and commits suicide, and Ovid and Carmina are married.

Collins's treatment of female characters in this novel in some ways mirrors Eliza Lynn Linton's conservative reproach to the New Woman in *The Rebel of the Family*, as we will see in

Chapter 3: here, not only is the return of the male hero to England the ultimate salvation of his dainty betrothed, as is the case in so much domestic fiction, but the heroine's life is imperilled by the moral weaknesses of the women surrounding her in his absence, thus leaving the true resolution of this gothicized family struggle to be decided among the family's female members. Yet the characters of Mrs. Gallilee, the upper- middle-class autodidact, and Miss Minerva, the hot-headed intellectual governess, are endowed with complicated agencies within the middle-class household. Despite the fact that Mrs. Gallilee proves herself to be an unfit mother to her own daughters, and a near fatal threat to her ward, she goes unpunished in the novel for these deviations from a commonplace Victorian maternal ideal. She ultimately chooses to devote herself to tadpole-breedings in the name of scientific inquiry over raising her own daughters; although she is briefly confined in a lunatic asylum and is made perpetually financially dependent on her son, Mrs. Gallilee is permitted to make her choice of occupation in *Heart and Science*, and to declare herself a happy woman. Miss Minerva is a pathetic spinster with a sallow complexion who is hopelessly in love with her employer's son. Her narrative takes an unusual departure from the tropes and plots most typically assigned to unlucky governesses and bitter servants in the nineteenth-century British novel: she is ultimately incorporated into her erstwhile employer's family as a beloved auxiliary member. In *Heart and Science*, we can trace points of continuity with and the subtle subversion of sensation novel domesticity, particularly through these two female characters. In this strikingly hybrid late novel, Collins partly perpetuates certain sensational tropes that appear in his popular earlier works, seemingly offering his readers the familiar gothic figures of the sinister governess and the lunatic wife, yet subverting the expected narratives of both Miss Minerva and Mrs. Gallilee to tell a new story about the ways a family might splinter, rearrange, and, ultimately, declare itself "happy".

The private governess was a notoriously problematic figure in Victorian society. She was typically an unmarried (sometimes widowed) gentlewoman fallen into poverty who was employed to teach the children of middle-class families. A governess was a status symbol for a family: as Jeanne Peterson notes, “the governess was a testimony to the economic power of the Victorian middle-class father,” such that “even complaining about the governess was a way of showing her off” (9). The governess thus occupied a unique and liminal position in the Victorian household as a domestic labourer with a lady’s education. Like Charlotte Brontë’s solitary Jane Eyre, the governess often ate her meals alone, as she was deemed an unsuitable presence at both the family’s and servants’ tables. She might go days without conversing with a fellow adult. Unsurprisingly, many governesses suffered mentally under these conditions, and the psychological plight of the governess was discussed extensively in various Victorian publications.⁴ Despite this widespread understanding of the governess’s vulnerable position in the house and in society at large, literary representations of the Victorian governess often showed her as a domineering threat to the household order. Although many Victorian novels—*Jane Eyre* most famously—depicted a suffering governess and promoted an understanding of her precarious living situation, others just as often showed her in an unsympathetic light, as a resentful, manipulative force within the upper-class family. For example, Collins’ governess Miss Gwilt in *Armadale* (1866), is a laudanum addict and the villain of the novel.

⁴ See Mary Poovey “The Anathematized Race: The Governess and Jane Eyre” in *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Miss Minerva turns out to be a marked departure from Collins's characterizations of governesses as either mannish and tyrannical or meek and self-effacing in earlier novels⁵. She is an unhappy, unattractive, but intelligent woman, who, like many in her position in Victorian society, had been raised a gentlewoman and fallen into governessing after her family's financial ruin. She resents and scorns the Gallilees—Mr. Gallilee for his simple mind and indolent nouveau-riche lifestyle, and Mrs. Gallilee for her cruel, controlling nature and scientific pretensions. Collins offers his readers (who, on learning the Gallilees had a governess would have been curious to learn what “type” of governess Miss Minerva was⁶) this introduction to the Gallilee governess:

Miss Minerva's eager sallow face, so lean, and so hard, and so long, looked [...] as if it wanted some sort of discreet covering thrown over some part of it. Her coarse black hair projected like a penthouse over her bushy black eyebrows and her keen black eyes. Oh, dear me (as they said in the servants' hall), she would never be married—so yellow and so learned, so ugly and so poor! And yet, if mystery is interesting, this was an interesting woman. (61)

This description of Miss Minerva as an unattractive, yet intriguing woman is not so different from Collins's description of the novel's heroine Carmina:

⁵ Collins had regularly depicted governesses in earlier novels, including the middle-aged and masculine Miss Garth in *No Name* (1862) and Miss Gwilt in *Armadale* (1866) and a few self-effacing and passive governesses including, Norah Vanstone in *No Name*, Mrs. Vesey in *The Woman in White* (1860), and Anne Silvester in *Man and Wife* (1870).

⁶ M. Jeanne Peterson describes several common attitudes for a governess to adopt, noting that a governess who presented herself “to the world with an over-supply of pride” as Miss Minerva does would be widely criticized for being “oversensitive to neglect and disrespect”. “The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society” *Victorian Studies* 14. 1, (1970): 7-26, 17.

It was not altogether a matter of certainty, [in Carmina's case], that the attractions were sufficiently remarkable to excite general admiration. The fine colour and the plump healthy cheeks, the broad smile, and the regular teeth, the well-developed mouth, and the promising bosom which form altogether the average type of beauty found in the purely bred English maiden, were not among the noticeable charms of the small creature in gloomy black, shrinking into a corner of the big room [...] Men might dispute her claims to beauty—but no one could dispute that she was, in the common phrase, an interesting person (52-53).

“Interesting” women haunt many of Collins’s novels. Some, such as queer, crippled “Limping Lucy” in *The Moonstone*, are so thoroughly beyond the frame of reference of Collins’s narrators that—though interesting—they remain always on the periphery of the domestic narrative and we never learn enough about them to understand their motivations. Others, like Carmina, are merely imbued with gently gothic features (Carmina is a non-threateningly “small creature in gloomy black”) that function as a kind of aesthetic shorthand to define the heroine as tragic but deserving. Yet Miss Minerva is no gothic heroine like the infamously plain and interesting Jane Eyre. Unlike Carmina, who is described in the above passage as merely lacking in beauty, Miss Minerva is cursed with yellow skin and a lean, crooked physique that excludes her from this plain, pious paradigm of Victorian femininity. Collins writes that Miss Minerva’s face seems to cry out for a veil or covering to lessen its disturbing effect. This governess is not a plain Jane so much as a grotesque figure who unsettles every member of the household, including Mrs. Gallilee, whose easy authority in the household is often undermined by the governess.

Although her position as governess in many ways leaves her vulnerable to abuse at the hands of the family, Miss Minerva nonetheless derives power by monitoring the Gallilee family, and by interfering in the domestic order of the house as an odd woman out. As a governess, she is deprived membership in both the upstairs community of the family and the downstairs community of the servants, yet she also has unique access and a vested interest in the secrets of both: “Miss Minerva leaned back in her easy-chair. Her mind was occupied by the mysterious question of Ovid’s presence at the concert. She raised her keenly penetrating eyes to the ceiling, and listened for sounds from above. ‘I wonder,’ she thought to herself, ‘what they are doing upstairs?’” (66).

Miss Minerva’s prying into the affairs of the family renders her both dangerous and pathetic, and this confusing balance is a cause of alarm for characters on all sides of the domestic plot throughout the novel. Although she is initially set up by Collins as a physically repulsive and villainous outcast in the Gallilee household-- an evil meddler who, from her privileged place of observation, schemes to keep the lovers apart and inflict terror on her young charges--she is eventually revealed to be sympathetic and is even integrated into the family after Mrs. Gallilee’s departure. Yet along the way to finding a fraught peace in her complicated inclusion in the expanding Vere and Gallilee family, the volatile Miss Minerva threatens many times to erupt. Miss Minerva is a mystery plotline unto herself in *Heart and Science*. Just as Miss Minerva keeps a watchful eye on her mistress, Mrs. Gallilee likewise dedicates an unusual amount of effort to observing and analyzing her disturbing employee. Although Mrs. Gallilee correctly perceives Miss Minerva’s unrequited devotion to Ovid, this insight does not neutralize the governess’s threatening air of inscrutability: “As it was, nothing more remarkable exposed itself to view than an irritable temper; serving perhaps as

a safety-valve to an underlying explosive force, which (with strong enough temptation and sufficient opportunity) might yet break out” (61).

As the inheritance plot unfolds, Miss Minerva overcomes her jealousy of Carmina and Ovid’s relationship, works to protect the former from Mrs. Gallilee’s machinations, and ultimately even abets the romance between the young lovers. She at first seems very similar to other pitiful yet ultimately helpful spinster characters written by Collins and his contemporaries. Her grotesque figure and inferior social status make a romance between her and her beloved hero pathetic and impossible, and so she gives up on this dream, willingly or not, and serves the protagonists. Sometimes such characters are rewarded with a more socially appropriate love interest at the end of a novel; other times they are simply sacrificed at the end of their story-arc as a “useful” character, as when Rosanna Spearman commits suicide in Collins’ *The Moonstone*. In *The Woman in White*, Collins finds a socially acceptable place in the household for the heroine’s spinster half-sister, Marian Halcombe, who moves in with her sister and brother-in-law as a kind of “good angel,” providing the couple with intellectual company, love, and child-care (Lepine, 190). Marian’s role and ultimate fate in *The Woman in White* is unusual but not unconventional: her agency as a spinster is made respectable within the confines of her own middle-class family. In contrast, Collins creates an unwieldy scenario in *Heart and Science*, as Miss Minerva persists in complicating the family narrative, exchanging her liminal yet familiar position as the Gallilee governess for an unprecedented new intimacy with the family by the novel’s conclusion.

Collins portrays Miss Minerva at turns as a misunderstood and nobly self-sacrificing woman—he goes so far as to give her the Christian name “Frances”, a gesture

that links her to prominent anti-vivisectionist Frances Power Cobbe, and aligns her with the novel's larger moral crusade.⁷ However, not even the sight of the governess gently attending Carmina at her bedside can render her less unsettling to the other characters: "Mr. Null [the family's "medical advisor"] never liked Miss Minerva. At the same time, he was a little afraid of her. This was not the sort of nurse who could be ordered to leave at a moment's notice" (298). Teresa, Carmina's grandmotherly old nurse who travels with her to London from Italy, is characterized as equal parts comical and canny: she is capable of seeing past Mrs. Gallilee's ruses, yet she cannot read Miss Minerva who repulses her. Even playing a benevolent role, Miss Minerva fails to elicit kind thoughts from anyone but the narrator: "Teresa opened the door and looked in—impatiently eager to see the intruding nurse sent away. Miss Minerva invited her to return to her place at the bedside. 'I only ask to occupy it,' she said considerately, 'when you want rest.' Teresa was ready with an ungracious reply" (298). Miss Minerva eventually earns Teresa's trust and proves instrumental in reviving Carmina, as Ovid enthusiastically reports in a letter to his step-father: "Miss Minerva---what shall I do without the help and sympathy of that best of true women?--Miss Minerva has cautiously tested her [Carmina's] memory..." (311). Nonetheless, the governess remains a source of disturbance in the family, at least for the Gallilees' youngest: "Zo turned round—and instantly collapsed. A terrible figure, associated with lessons and punishments, stood before her" (315). Zo, one of the characters who symbolizes the "Heart" of *Heart and Science*, cannot fully absolve Miss Minerva of her past cruelties and incorporate her into the family—though she and her older

⁷In his Introduction to the 1996 Broadview Edition of *Heart and Science*, Steve Farmer discusses the parallels between Power Cobbe's antivivisectionist discourse and that of Collins's characters in his introduction (19).

sister Maria are seemingly unaffected by their mother's complete disappearance from family life. Zo's resistance to Miss Minerva suggests that the governess cannot be recast as an entirely non-threatening, angelic presence in the home, despite her good will and efforts to aid Carmina and Ovid. While Mrs. Gallilee, as I will discuss in the final part of this chapter, finds a new household and vocation quite apart from her initial role in the novel as wife and mother, Miss Minerva finds no such new station and instead lingers along the periphery of the Gallilee and Vere households, in what is an even more liminal situation than her position as governess.

While the indeterminacy of Miss Minerva's fate alone is not a total departure from the customary management of the governess figure in the Victorian novel, the specific way in which Collins permits her to linger is interesting. Miss Minerva cannot, in fact, be "ordered to leave" the narrative. Collins seems unwilling to send her away from the Gallilees and Veres, yet he is equally unprepared to keep her around in an orderly, familiar capacity. Although her actions facilitate the heroine's rescue and reunion with the hero, Miss Minerva's altruism does not lead her to an ending, happy or otherwise, that especially resolves the problem of her volatile, intrusive social status. She is a kind of permanent guest in Ovid and Carmina's lives, and is included as a guest of honour in the penultimate scene of the novel, a dinner party at Ovid's including the entire family except for Mrs. Gallilee. The scene at Ovid and Carmina's wedding day is a kind of inversion of the outing to the zoo that takes place early in the novel during which a jealous Miss Minerva strives to keep the amorous cousins apart at all costs. At the end of the novel, however, she graciously excuses herself from a wedding to which she should not have been invited in the first place: "they had only waited to go to church, until one other eagerly expected person

joined them. There was a general inquiry for Miss Minerva” (325). And yet Miss Minerva is present at the wedding in the form of an intimate note to Carmina that the latter keeps hidden from Ovid inside her bosom throughout her wedding day. Despite first aligning herself with Science in the zoo scene in which she contrives to interrupt Ovid’s courtship of Carmina with recitals of zoological lore for her charges, Miss Minerva proves to be a person of “great heart” (310) who deserves special recognition and rewards from the family that transcend what she is owed as an erstwhile employee of the family: “It was at Ovid’s suggestion that the infant daughter was called by Miss Minerva’s Christian name” (325). Miss Minerva’s inclusion in the new happy family, however, is half-hearted and tenuous. Although she leaves Mrs. Gallilee’s employment and then turns down a prestigious post as governess in France in order to help Ovid rescue Carmina, the question of Miss Minerva’s employment is left unresolved by the novel’s end. The reader is left to speculate as to whether Ovid is supporting her financially, whether the earnest lawyer Mr. Mool is courting her, or whether she has perhaps found new employment as a governess on English soil. The novel is simultaneously interested in and indifferent to what becomes of this odd woman out who is audaciously intimate with the protagonist’s upper-middle-class family.

Miss Minerva’s story is not the only complication to the ending of *Heart and Science* that presents a problem for the reader. While the romantic plotline of *Heart and Science* is resolved by Ovid’s triumphant return from Quebec with the medical knowledge necessary to save his fiancée from her hysterical catalepsy, Benjulia drinks poison and then sets fire to himself in his laboratory after setting loose his living specimens, thoroughly terminating the vivisection plot. Much of the novel’s ending adheres to a moral logic common to much Victorian fiction, and

some of it, like Benjulia's demise, is as flamboyant and melodramatic as the ending of any sensation novel. Mr. Gallilee, who is drunk and weak-willed throughout the novel, finally puts his foot down and takes his daughters to live in Scotland, far from the sinister influences of his wife and Benjulia, eventually going so far as to place Mrs. Gallilee temporarily in a series of asylums to keep her at bay. Her craze for science apparently makes her dangerous enough to be committed to a private asylum, though at least one contemporary reviewer found this idea difficult to swallow:

Neither [Dr. Benjulia] nor the scientific Mrs. Gallilee, with her talk of 'radiant energy' and 'sonorous vibrations,' can be accepted as a type; and, therefore, the conception, though interesting enough as an artistic product, has really no polemical value", and, while Benjulia's character is "singularly interesting [...] for reasons which I have not space to give, Mrs. Gallilee is, I think, less successful (Unsigned review, the *Academy*. April 28, 1883, Number 573 p. 290).

Mrs. Gallilee's internment is partly farcical; it is yet another way for Collins to lampoon a culture of "science mania" that might be represented by Benjulia at its most corrupt extreme and by Mrs. Gallilee at the tiresome and absurd other end of the spectrum. Collins uses the asylum both to prevent Mrs. Gallilee from meddling in the resolution of the inheritance plot and to underscore the anti-maternal, unhealthy, and ridiculous nature of her passion for science. Mrs. Gallilee's love of science is entangled with her avarice throughout the inheritance plot, and, as she indulges both vices during Carmina's illness, it is cause for her to be disposed of as an unfit parent. Benjulia's quest for scientific knowledge is also weighed against the "Heart" of the novel (represented by both the innocent child Zo, and by Ovid, the good surgeon) and condemned; the dastardly

vivisectionist participates in a familiar, masculine, pseudo-Promethean narrative of a good doctor corrupted by the intoxicating pursuit of knowledge and fame. Despite the novel's vilification of his scientific practice, he is ultimately recuperated as a tragic figure after his death. Benjulia leaves his entire estate (or, rather, what remains of it after the fire) to the innocent and comically uneducable child Zo, and, in so doing, symbolically concedes that Heart is more sacred than Science.

Mrs. Gallilee, by contrast, does not repent of her over-inquisitiveness, nor does the novel truly punish her for her continued devotion to science. She is instead allowed to retain her family's financial support while relinquishing her responsibilities as wife and mother. Although the novel reproaches Mrs. Gallilee at several points, she is never long deterred from pursuing what she considers her self-actualization as a woman of science and learning. After a letter from the Gallilee family's erstwhile music master Mr. Le Frank surfaces inviting Mrs. Gallilee to help him frame the old nurse Teresa for attempted murder, a shaken Mrs. Gallilee retreats to her study to calm herself and reflect on Le Frank's insolence. His proposed scheme would have made use of her knowledge of chemistry, and his letter is obviously written with the idea of flattering his mistress into becoming his accomplice through mention of her scientific accomplishments: "a lady, possessed of your scientific knowledge, does not require to be told that poisons are employed in making artists' colours" (277). Mrs. Gallilee's furious thoughts at her library-table about Le Frank are interrupted by a reproachful monologue from the narrator:

Look to your library table, learned lady, and take the appropriate means of relief that it offers. See the lively modern parasites that infest Science, eager to invite your attention to their little crawling selves. Follow scientific inquiry, rushing into print to proclaim its own importance, and to declare any human being who ventures to doubt

or differ, a fanatic or a fool. [...] Submit to lectures and addresses by dozens, which, if they prove nothing else, prove that what was scientific knowledge some years ago, is scientific ignorance now—and what is scientific knowledge now may be scientific ignorance in some years more. [...] And when you have done all this, doubt not that you have made a good use of your time. You have discovered what the gentle wisdom of FARADAY saw and deplored, when he warned the science of his day in words which should live for ever: ‘the first and last step in the education of the judgement is—Humility.’ (286)

Mrs. Gallilee does not seem to hear nor heed this voice⁸, and happily continues perusing her books, pausing to laugh upon discovering a volume entitled “Gallery of British Beauty”, which reminds her of her “foolish” girlhood: “Comparing the girl of seventeen with the mature and cultivated woman of later years, what a matchless example Mrs. Gallilee presented of the healthy influence of education, directed to scientific pursuits! ‘Ah!’ she thought, as she put the book back in its place, “my girls will have reason to thank me when they grow up; they have had a mother who has done her duty” (287). Ironically, shortly after this episode in the library Mrs. Gallilee is deemed an unfit mother and sent to an asylum⁸. She is, of course, a far from dutiful mother, and seems to derive only a very limited and fleeting satisfaction from drilling her eldest child, Maria, on her scientific studies. The novel is very clear that the bumbling Mr. Gallilee, who permits his prepubescent daughter to get drunk on champagne and consort with her aunt’s rowdy Scottish manservants, is a more fit parent to Maria and Zo (albeit with the occasional assistance of Ovid and Carmina) than his pedantic wife.

⁸ Farmer takes his reading of this strange reproach a step further, proposing that this monologue is intended to be the voice of Mrs. Gallilee’s own conscience (286).

Collins at first seems to be setting up Mrs. Gallilee for the sort of reality check that Eliza Lynn Linton deals to her “New Woman” protagonist in *The Rebel of the Family*, as I will discuss Chapter Three. Mrs. Gallilee has a hysterical break upon learning of Mr. Gallilee’s flight to Scotland: “Mrs. Gallilee laid her head back again on the chair—and burst out laughing. ‘Will somebody pray for me?’ she cried piteously ‘I don’t know how to pray for myself. Where is God?’” (295). As spiteful and insincere as these pleas may be, Collins plants the idea that Mrs. Gallilee may be delivered from her slavish devotion to Science:

Thus far, the measures taken to restore Mrs. Gallilee to herself had succeeded beyond expectation. But one unfavourable symptom remained. She was habitually silent. When she did speak, her mind seemed to be occupied with scientific subjects: she never mentioned her husband or any other member of the family. Time and attention would remove this drawback. In two or three months more perhaps, if all went well, she might return to her family and her friends, as sane a woman as ever. (311)

In Mr. Gallilee’s only visit to the asylum, during which he hopes to reconcile with his wife, he is met not with the “habitual silence” described above, but by Mrs. Gallilee’s violent umbrage, which forces him to relocate her to a private asylum. Mrs. Gallilee, then, is not silent in the asylum because she has been subdued and made to regret ripping her family apart. Rather, her silence during this initial forced separation from her husband and children represents the beginning of her new identity as a single woman with an all-consuming scientific vocation. Although she must prove she is sufficiently “cured” of her science mania in order to be released from the asylum, Mrs. Gallilee does not in fact repent, and is quick to reprise her studies once she is out. At the novel’s conclusion Mrs. Gallilee is gleefully planning her next grand series of scientific lectures. She carries on with her life without any effort to reconnect with her family.

After receiving Ovid's assurance that he will loan his mother money whenever she needs it, Mr. Gallilee takes the family lawyer's advice regarding his estranged wife: "Mr. Mool sighed and shook his head. 'Messages from her husband are completely thrown away on her,' he answered, 'as if she was still in the asylum. In justice to yourself, consent to an amicable separation, and I will arrange it'" (326). Mr. Gallilee separates from his wife and raises his daughters himself, dividing their time between his Scottish cottage and Ovid's London home. The very last scene of the novel depicts the incorrigible Mrs. Gallilee hosting a scientific society meeting with none of her family present. To her great pride and her guests' amazement, her experiments in tadpole nutrition have resulted in a brood of extraordinarily robust frogs that is given the run of the house. This new chosen family of frog children and scientific dilettantes to appreciate them brings Mrs. Gallilee the ultimate fulfilment that evaded her throughout the family plot of the novel. As she surveys her empty sitting room after the party is over, Mrs. Gallilee provides the last words of the novel: "At last, I'm a happy woman!" (327).

Collins's leniency with Mrs. Gallilee, who is, after all, the main antagonist in the novel's family plotline, is just as unusual and unprecedented as his strange inclusion of Miss Minerva in Ovid and Carmina's family life, and, I argue, represents a similar rethinking of how the novel might depict the household in a new era of increased domestic fracturing and reconfiguration. It is important to consider that Collins's experiments with reshaping the family and household in his late novels accomplish something more than merely reflecting changing domestic realities of the 1870s and 1880s. Indeed, as a frustrated anonymous reviewer wrote in an 1883 review of *Heart and Science* for the *Athenaeum*, Collins often misrepresented the new social realities he was concerned with depicting in his novels: "A lawyer could also have given some useful information on the guardianship of infants, a department of the law with which Mr. Wilkie

Collins seems not to be familiar”. The same reviewer went on to add that “Unfortunately the story has a weak ending” (330-331). The ending of *Heart and Science*, and the respective fates of Miss Minerva and Mrs. Gallilee in particular, are not so much socially realistic as they are imaginative “solutions” (or half solutions) to the problem of these women who cannot integrate or reintegrate into the Victorian household.⁹ Both Miss Minerva and Mrs. Gallilee are worried by a set of gendered debts at the outset of the novel—Miss Minerva’s stem from the various cosmetics she purchases in an attempt to make her sallow colouring less offensive to Ovid, Mrs. Gallilee’s come from squandering her late brother’s money on the latest Parisian fashions—and both characters come by novel’s end into a kind of social autonomy from the household as it had been configured at the beginning (although it is implied that both might be supported financially through Ovid’s generosity). From the start, both women are characterized as frustrated and discontented due to an imbalance of ambition and means—financial, social, and, in Miss Minerva’s case, physical. “My mind must be filled—as well as my heart!”, declares Mrs. Gallilee (72). Miss Minerva suffers under an inverse set of expectations. It is no surprise that the two intellectual women are at turns confederates and nemeses while they participate in the same household, one as mistress and the other as governess. Both characters thoroughly disturbed (or at the very least annoyed) contemporary readers of *Heart and Science*. Another anonymous reviewer, this time writing for the *Pall Mall Budget*, found Miss Minerva’s story to be “wholly unnatural, forced, and superfluous”. Further, “Mrs. Gallilee and her eldest child Maria are only caricatures of Maria Newcome and her family pushed into a region which the genius of

⁹ Collins’s attention here to the problem of “odd women” in British society predates George Gissing’s 1893 novel of the same name by a decade.

Thackeray¹⁰ prevented his treading—the region of absolutely unnatural *charge*. Something of the same could be said of Miss Minerva” (332). This idea of a hyperbolic “region of absolutely unnatural *charge*” seems to me key to what such unsettling characters accomplish within this liminal, seemingly post-sensation novel.

Miss Minerva and Mrs. Gallilee are unnatural in their different ways, but they move the family plot to a resolution that is both dissonant with narrative expectations and aligned with an unprecedented novelistic interest in imagining new domestic possibilities. Even though the reader may be supposed to pity Mrs. Gallilee for thinking herself a happy woman when she has forsaken her entire family, the novel does very little to suggest that the hour of Mrs. Gallilee’s regret is at hand, or indeed, that it will come at all. Mrs. Gallilee’s late brother, Carmina’s father, similarly abandoned his familial responsibilities before the start of the novel in order to pursue his passion for painting, and in so doing “degraded himself in the estimation of his family”. The narrator’s description of Robert Vere’s life in “voluntary exile” parallels Mrs. Gallilee’s last words: “he was a happy man for the first time in his life” (73). I do not mean to suggest that Collins’s portrayal of a happy woman who derives her happiness from sources outside of her family is meant to be a vindication of an intellectual, if matronly, New Woman. The fact that the dutiful Ovid indulgently foots the bills for this mother while she is “at Home with Science” punctures any such reading. However, that Collins concludes his novel without reconfining Mrs. Gallilee in either an asylum (a well-worn trope of the sensation novel) or her own nuclear family, permitting Mr. Gallilee and his friends to parent Maria and Zo without her, is a move towards the kind of mundane family fracturing that is showcased on a grander scale in *The Evil Genius*.

¹⁰ This reviewer references Thackeray’s 1855 novel *The Newcomes*, which features Maria Newcome, a pretentious middle-class woman who surrounds herself with artists in a way that parallels Mrs. Gallilee’s scientific social life.

Likewise, Miss Minerva's continued and problematic presence in the narrative outside of her tenure as Gallilee family governess is a tenuous reimagining of the governess as an new kind of participant in familial intimacy, a simultaneous usurper and benefactress who remains near but unassimilated at the novel's conclusion.

Chapter 2

“As Pretty a Domestic Scene as a Man Could Wish”: Duplicating and Substituting Family in *The Evil Genius*

Whereas Collins gave *Heart and Science* the subtitle “A Story of the Present Day”, *The Evil Genius* (1886) was distinguished as “A Domestic Story”, and, indeed, this later novel more explicitly concerns itself with family affairs and tries out an experimental range of domestic arrangements. *The Evil Genius* is a divorce novel centered on an adulterous affair and a child custody battle, complicated by a family’s mobility between Scotland and England, and the different divorce and custody laws in force in the two countries.

Like *Heart and Science*, *The Evil Genius* trades on sensationalist tropes with its well-worn governess narrative and the gothic flourishes that frame the family’s ancestral Scottish home. Indeed, while the novel’s central family, the Linleys, and their usurping governess initially dwell in the fantastically grand Mount Morven, where the private life of the modern family is housed within an ancient Scottish castle that is open to tourists by day, Collins swiftly shuts up this house and scatters the family to less suggestively gothic locales ranging from the London suburbs to a modern sea-side hotel. Although Collins takes us from the medieval to the modern, and seemingly away from gothic trappings, the claustrophobia of confined settings where family members are thrust together is never left behind, as the novel explores a range of different temporary and permanent family bonds. As I will discuss, the modern urban and suburban contexts of various key moments in the plot rework the sensational elements of the adultery and divorce narrative, leaving room for the novel to consider the relationships among the characters of a family scandal in a more nuanced mode than what was favoured by earlier sensation fiction.

Although there is nothing like *Heart and Science*'s foray into the late-Victorian vivisection debate to distract from the domestic problems, the divorce in *The Evil Genius* is not written as an entirely commonplace event taken in stride by Collins's characters. The legal and social event of the divorce registers as shockingly modern and mercenary to perhaps all but the lawyer. However, the novel takes a remarkably open and often curiously neutral approach to the ways in which the Linley family reconfigures and reinvents itself in the wake of the domestic upheaval. I will argue that the novel's focus on the ways that a family might fracture, replicate, and expand itself while still functioning on some level as a family is more surprising and unprecedented than the novel's dramatization of the initial scandal of the adulterous relationship and divorce. This chapter reads some of the formal devices and plot points that make up *The Evil Genius*'s curiously expansive approach to the family--such as the loose approach to characterization, the strange sympathies between characters, the plurality of morally ambiguous editorial voices, not to mention the text's more obvious thematic exploration of unconventional family configurations--in an attempt to understand this novel's particular contribution to a new fin-de-siècle literary discourse of domestic idiosyncrasy.

In *The Evil Genius*, Sydney Westerfield, a young English governess with a tragic upbringing, has an adulterous affair with her employer, Herbert Linley of Mount Morven, who leaves his wife of eight years to temporarily set up house with the erstwhile governess. After fleeing Britain briefly to evade Herbert's legally-sanctioned request for custody of their young daughter, Kitty, Catherine Linley returns to reluctantly divorce her husband under Scottish law in order to secure child custody for herself.¹¹ After the divorce, Catherine and her mother, the

¹¹ Although Collins was a barrister briefly in his youth, he had a complicated relationship with the law and its Victorian discourses. Collins's representation of English and Scottish family law in his novels is often imprecise; however, in *The Evil Genius*, he represents legislative

conniving Mrs. Presty, retreat with Kitty to the obscure seaside town of Sandyseal, where they find little reprieve, however, from the high-profile scandal of the Linley divorce. Catherine then has an emotional chance encounter with Herbert and Sydney that shames the latter into leaving the relationship and eventually seeking reemployment as the secretary of a Home for Fallen Women. The home has been founded by the unflinchingly Christian Captain Bennydeck, who is also the newly-divorced Catherine's suitor for a time. Mrs. Presty distorts the truth to convince Bennydeck and Kitty that Herbert is dead and Catherine a widow. Bennydeck and Catherine relocate their courtship to London's Sydenham suburb, where the latter is eventually overcome by her lingering feelings for her ex-husband and her desire to protect Bennydeck from the ugliness of the divorce scandal, and confesses her true status as a divorcee to the Captain. Bennydeck rescinds his marriage proposal not out of fear of scandal, but out of a religious conviction that "whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" (327). Catherine is moved to tell Kitty the truth about her father and ultimately to reconcile with Herbert. The novel ends with Herbert and Catherine remarrying and sustaining an intimate friendship with the penitent Sydney and her new employer Captain Bennydeck, both of whom are much beloved by Kitty.

The titular "Evil Genius" of the novel is most likely Herbert Linley's mother-in-law, Mrs. Presty. The title is a reference to an Ancient Greek belief that a family's fate was influenced by

developments in Victorian Britain fairly accurately (Law, 11). A Civil Divorce Court replaced divorce by private Act of Parliament in England in 1857, which established women's power to petition for divorce, although they were still greatly impeded by legal conventions that made it more difficult to establish cause for divorcing a man than a woman; in Scotland, civil divorce dated back to the sixteenth century, and a single definition of adultery applied to both men and women. Child custody laws were also being transformed across the century: by 1873, for example, several legislative moves had successfully challenged the common-law presumption of a father's absolute right to claim custody of his child, and the welfare of the child was considered the deciding factor in settling such disputes in court.

two resident genii representing good and evil. Although Mrs. Presty herself refers to Sydney Westerfield as the “Evil Genius”, other members of her family are disinclined to agree with her. In a scene in which Mrs. Presty reflects with Herbert’s brother Randal on Sydney’s return to the family, she remarks, ‘I knew she would come back again! The Evil Genius of the family—that’s what I call Miss Westerfield. The name exactly fits her!’ The idea in Randal’s mind was that the name exactly fit Mrs. Presty” (159). Mrs. Presty may be alone in her opinion, but her interpretation of Sydney’s role is not without foundation: at least according to the conventions of the governess novel, Sydney can certainly be understood as the title’s referent. The plurality of possibilities for the eponymous identity of the “Evil Genius” that Mrs. Presty’s reading keeps in play is characteristic of a novel that is forever experimenting with looseness and ambiguity in both characterization and narrative perspective.

Like *Heart and Science*, *The Evil Genius* closes on a happy domestic scene, in this case a picnic attended by Kitty and a host of adults who care for her. However, this happy picnic represents a far more ambiguous ending than that offered by Collins’s earlier novel. At the end of *The Evil Genius*, what I will suggest is the superficially conventional restoration of child custody to the newly remarried biological mother and father is complicated by the simultaneous assemblage of an alternative “family” of adults at the picnic who are not Kitty’s parents, but who nonetheless suggest themselves as capable of playing that role. The novel cannot settle on the conclusion that the reassembled biological family unit is the best and only possible family for Kitty. Instead, the novel’s ending appears to endorse two alternative, apparently equally viable family arrangements, with Kitty standing at the heart of each, a resolution that unsettles the commonplace (as ideologically charged in our own day as it was in Collins’s) that the biological family is the best possible unit for raising a child. The resolution of *Heart and Science*, as

discussed in Chapter One, is notable for showcasing a family that has fractured and reassembled itself in what might be the best of all possible arrangements for the individuals involved—Mrs. Gallilee is a woman at home with her tadpoles and scientific coterie while her children are raised more effectively by their father without her, and supported by a family network comprised of the young newlyweds, Ovid and Carmina, and their intimate friend the governess. Although the novel presents this as the happiest solution to the family plot, the domestic arrangement in which the Gallilees, Veres, and Miss Minerva find themselves at the conclusion of *Heart and Science* is highly unconventional. The intimacy sustained between the newlyweds and Miss Minerva, erstwhile governess to Ovid’s nieces, is very peculiar, for, although she played a brave role in reuniting the lovers, Miss Minerva retains both her incongruent status¹² as a governess and her problematic, unrequited love for Ovid. The novel’s omission of even a gesture towards rehabilitating the scientific Mrs. Gallilee back into her domestic roles as wife and mother is perhaps even more remarkable, as are the degrees of success and happiness this resolution ascribes to the new, collaborative parenting of Maria and Zo undertaken by Mr. Gallilee and the Veres with the additional support of Miss Minerva and the wealthy Scottish relatives Lord and Lady Northlake. Thus, in *Heart and Science*, the family is left in an irregular assemblage that seems to be the one version of family that will do the work of caring for the two Gallilee daughters, after the upheaval of the family plot.

In *The Evil Genius*, by contrast, a number of unconventional family units form and disassemble at a dizzying rate throughout the novel, only to be finally merged and reworked at

¹² See M. Jeanne Peterson’s “The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society” *Victorian Studies* 14.1 (Sept. 1970): 7-26 and Mary Poovey’s “The Anathematized Race: The Governess and Jane Eyre.” in *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). 126-63, for a discussion of the governess’s liminal domestic and social position.

the conclusion as two families: a remade nuclear Linley family consisting of the remarried Herbert and Catherine, Kitty, and her grandmother Mrs. Presty, and a curious second or spare would-be family made up of Captain Bennydeck and his new employee Sydney. Two avuncular figures, Kitty's actual uncle Randal and the sentimental family lawyer Samuel Sarrazin, also operate as Kitty's interpreters and caretakers in their capacity as liaisons between the final two domestic units of the novel. Just as the relentlessly earnest Randal Linley struggles with moral ambiguity for the first time when he finds himself torn during the tumult of the divorce between his blood loyalty to his wayward brother and the familial bonds and affectionate ties that connect him intimately to Catherine, Sarrazin wavers remarkably at the novel's conclusion between his exaltation at the remarried couple's domestic bliss, and his strange intimation that Kitty might thrive just as well in the pseudo-family of Captain Bennydeck and Sydney. Indeed, Sarrazin sanctions this closing tableau by suggesting that the latter family makes "as pretty a domestic scene as a man could wish to look at", despite his fear of retribution from his conservative English wife for daring to think so (350). Thus, while at the end of *The Evil Genius* the Linleys are reinstated at Mount Morven and Kitty is provided with a far more conventional household than Zo and Maria are afforded at the conclusion of *Heart and Science*, Collins's later novel refuses to shut off other domestic possibilities in the way that *Heart and Science* does. Where *Heart and Science* thoroughly severs Mrs. Gallilee's contact with her husband and daughters, underscoring the mutual autonomy of the newly configured family units, *The Evil Genius* insists instead on lingering over the unknown potential of the other family, the complicated assemblage of adults who choose to be at the picnic and who prove themselves all equally devoted to Kitty's interests.

The remarriage of Catherine to Herbert Linley and the reemployment of Sydney Westerfield as a secretary are two key events in *The Evil Genius* that appear to repair the fractured family and restore a Victorian domestic morality to Collins's narrative. Sydney, the Fallen Woman, is recuperated and meaningfully employed at a Christian institution under the watchful paternal eye of Captain Bennydeck. The reconciled Linleys remarry and go on a second honeymoon with Kitty in tow, the family unit restored. However, the novel attends to the ways in which a remarriage is not the same as a marriage, and the ways that Sydney's tenure as Bennydeck's secretary—a job that, in contrast to governessing, takes her outside of the domestic sphere—is not the clean break from the family narrative that it might seem.

Perhaps even more remarkably, the novel acknowledges that the Linley reunion is not the only family configuration that might suit Kitty. The intrigue of *The Evil Genius* revolves around the youngest Linley: Kitty is the reason Herbert brings Sydney into the family, she is manipulated by Mrs. Presty at a key moment to make it impossible for her parents to interact privately and potentially resolve the developing marital conflict, her illness is the catalyst for Sydney's catastrophic return to Mount Morven, and it is the problem of her custody that motivates the actions of the characters in the second, third, and fourth books of the novel. Like Zo in *Heart and Science*, Kitty is the companionable daughter of upper-middle-class parents who is simultaneously spoiled and neglected. In this capacity, she interrogates the adults in her world with relative ease and impunity. The questions that Kitty asks her governess, her parents, her grandmother, her uncle Randal, the family friend, Captain Bennydeck, and the trusted family lawyer, Samuel Sarrazin, often serve as the novel's comic relief, but these questions also interrogate and denaturalize various family configurations, and, in so doing, problematize both domestic conventions and the solutions to domestic upheaval that the adults invent throughout

the novel. Kitty's childish questioning of the family order and Sarrazin's passionate appeal to "the influence of love" (194) together assert the real emotional stakes in what is otherwise a curiously understated and ambivalent narrative of domestic upheaval and reconciliation. In addition to the question of how best to care for Kitty, the novel ponders romantic love between adult characters—love that is sanctioned by law and convention and love that is not. Like the lawyer Sarrazin, torn between his French passions and English sensibilities, the novel vacillates between sympathy for and disapproval of Sydney's love for Herbert and Catherine's love for Captain Bennydeck. However, as *The Evil Genius* explores possible domestic configurations, the question of what suits Kitty gives shape to some of the novel's more surprising moments of ambiguity. Different adult authorities throughout the domestic narrative are at turns taken aback by how unconventional childcare arrangements prove to be as functionally viable as the Victorian ideal of domesticity. In this novel, with its overall tone of being wearily resigned to flux in the domestic sphere, Collins invites us to appreciate that what looks sensational is, on closer inspection, quite banal.

Well aware of the contrast between the naturalism and privileging of psychological interiority of the fin-de-siècle "new school" of fiction and the narrative demands of the fast-paced storytelling of the sensation fiction by which he made his name, Collins's novel produces a strange balance of melodrama and narrative understatement. Caught between the old and the new, the novel lets its characters voice this narrative predicament.¹³ Indeed, Collins suggests

¹³ Whereas Collins uses the preface to *Heart and Science* to assure his readers that he has done his research over the years and has perfected the formula for what sort of novel they will find the most entertaining, *The Evil Genius* comes with no such insight into the novel's understanding of its own formal objectives. *The Evil Genius*, in fact, is rare among Collins's novels in that it does not begin with one of his trademark officious prefaces. The voice in Collins's prefaces often flatters his readership while providing both instructions for reading the novel and pre-empting various anticipated criticisms.

through the opinionated Mrs. Presty that his novel, while not a classic sensation narrative, may not care as much about concerns of psychological realism and narrative consistency as other fin-de-siècle tomes. In a conversation with her daughter Catherine about modern fiction, Mrs. Presty comments sarcastically,

‘You are evidently not aware of what the new school of novel writing is doing. [...] These new writers are so good to old women. No story to excite our poor nerves; no improper characters to cheat us out of our sympathies, no dramatic situations to frighten us; exquisite management of details (as the reviews say), and a masterly anatomy of human motives. (89)

Mrs. Presty’s sarcastic observation, wrapped up in Collins’s wry critique of the new school novel as suitable reading material for elderly women, characterizes the new novel as interested in the same project of psychological realism that Collins exalted in the prefaces to earlier works such as *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White*.¹⁴ Collins’s description of the psychological realism of his own fiction notwithstanding, few contemporary or modern readers of his sensation novels would identify his work generically with the modes of realism associated with fin-de-siècle new fiction writers like Henry James and George Moore. The distinction between Collins’s version of psychological realism in narrative and that practiced by the new school comes into sharper focus with Mrs. Presty’s observation that the new novel is devoid of both sensational elements that excite the nerves and “improper characters to cheat us out of our sympathies”. This meta-reference to the kinds of sensational storytelling techniques that linger in Collins’s later fiction reflects *The Evil*

¹⁴ For example, in his preface to *The Woman in White*, Collins writes his opinion that “it is not possible to tell a story successfully without presenting characters; their existence, as recognisable realities, being the sole condition on which the story can be effectively told”. (620)

Genius's lack of concern with, or perhaps even rejection of the psychological consistency associated with what Mrs. Presty describes as the new school's "masterly anatomy of human motives".

While Mrs. Presty sardonically declares herself to be a passive reader of new novels, she demonstrates an impressive ability to author her own sensation narratives. In her capacity to invent sensational stories for her own practical purposes, Mrs. Presty is perhaps the "Evil Genius" of both the Linley family and the novel itself: she "widows" Catherine and "shipwrecks" Herbert for Captain Bennydeck and Kitty respectively. Indeed, in the novel's conclusion, she briefly contemplates creating a desert island and rescue scenario for Herbert in order to explain his sudden reappearance to her granddaughter, but the abrupt reunion of father and daughter renders further prestidigitations from Mrs. Presty unnecessary.

The difficulty of squeezing new content into old narrative forms can be seen in part in the notably loose and inconsistent use of characterization and the attribution of moral values in *The Evil Genius*. Captain Bennydeck, for example, is unrelentingly grim and persuaded of the moral righteousness of the letter of the Bible, yet the novel's ending implies that he may be entering into a courtship with the disgraced Sydney, without any explanation of this apparent lapse in his personal standards. Other characters in *The Evil Genius* take on a variety of different names, identities, opinions, and perspectives as they move through the different family units of the novel. While this loose characterization contributes to the difficulty of pinpointing a single, consistent narrative authority in *The Evil Genius*, the observations and declarations made throughout the novel by the lawyer Samuel Sarrazin—a character who is at once insider and outsider, French and English, professionally distant and passionately invested—seem most closely to follow the thought process of the novel itself as it narrates a motley set of character

movements and relationships that Sarrazin can finally defend legally and emotionally as making up a family.

In the end, it is Sarrazin's own wife to whom he must defend the remade Linley family: the conclusion of the novel appears in the form of a letter from Sarrazin to his wife in which the lawyer playfully invokes the discourse of his profession to construct an "Apology," a "Defense" and a "Last Word" on the matter of the Linley divorce and remarriage. This section, entitled "After the Story," is perhaps one of the novel's most striking contortions, as Sarrazin's character switches rapidly among several modes. He is at various turns a dispassionate professional who thinks in terms of "lawful desire" and listens with initial scepticism to Randal Linley's sanctimonious defense of his brother (a "sexually frail" man whom Randal contends belongs to a special class of adulterers who deserve clemency from their wives¹⁵); a hen-pecked husband¹⁶ who breaches his client's confidentiality when he allows Mrs. Sarrazin to open and read Catherine's private legal query "received at the domestic tea-table"; and an introspective gentleman who feels compelled to express and justify his moral positions to his wife.

¹⁵ Randal's speech to this end, which Sarrazin admits sounds "right", seemingly summarizes the novel's take on the Linley Divorce; however, it does not include a thoroughly satisfactory explanation of what exactly sexual frailty is and why it falls short of a "deliberate desertion":

Where there is absolute cruelty, or where there is deliberate desertion, on the husband's part, I see the use and the reason for Divorce. If the unhappy wife can find an honorable man who will protect her, or an honorable man who will offer her a home, Society and Law, which are responsible for the institution of marriage, are bound to allow a woman outraged under the shelter of their institution to marry again. But where the husband's fault is sexual frailty, I say the English law which refuses Divorce on that ground alone is right and the Scotch law which grants it is wrong. (346-347)

¹⁶ Sarrazin explains that he writes his Apology from a distance because he fears his wife's volatile temper: "I would rather have my writing-paper blown up than be blown up myself" (345).

The Evil Genius assigns an interesting role to both Mrs. Presty and Mrs. Sarrazin: the novel positions both of these formidable matrons as disapproving readers of the new domestic narrative. Mrs. Presty, for example, declares that she is bored to sleep by the “new school of novel writing,” while also regularly feigning sleep to listen at doors and collect information for her own meddlesome purposes. She attempts to use the trope of the tired, cantankerous widow nodding off in an armchair to her advantage, affecting a sort of weary, exasperated response to the affairs of the younger characters, yet she fools no one—this “Evil Genius” thrives in times of scandal and upheaval, and proves herself to be passionately invested in Catherine’s and Kitty’s livelihoods. Despite her preference for plot-driven fiction, Mrs. Presty self-identifies as a shrewd reader of character, having learned severity from her first late husband, the MP Mr. Norman, and charm from her second late husband, Mr. Presty the vinegar merchant. Her frequent allusions to her two late husbands inject some of Collins’s trademark humour into the novel: “Presented by their widow with the strictest impartiality to the general view, the characters of these two husbands combined, by force of contrast, the ideal of manly perfection. That is to say, the vices of Mr. Norman were the virtues of Mr. Presty; and the vices of Mr. Presty were the virtues of Mr. Norman” (89). Mrs. Presty’s stubborn insistence on putting “obscure Mr. Presty”—who, as a jumped-up vinegar magnate, is considered the inferior man by everyone except her—on the same level as “distinguished Mr. Norman” is striking: she combines their memories into one spectral super-husband through whom she voices various opinions. While it no doubt amused Collins to suggest a certain equivalence of character between a Member of Parliament and a vinegar merchant, the doubling and conflation of husbands here also reflects the novel’s interest in duplicates and substitute family members. Mrs. Presty’s highly advantageous marriage to Mr. Norman, through which she produced Catherine and acquired status, wealth, and insight into the

workings of the Government, could not have been more different from her two-year marriage to the “ugly and dull” bourgeois Mr. Presty. Yet Mrs. Presty mourns Mr. Presty with “tears of sincere sorrow”, and obstinately conflates his memory with that of Mr. Norman (88). Although she “reads” the new domestic world of the novel through the anachronistic bifocal lens of her two dead husbands’ personalities and politics, often affecting fatigue or annoyance at the goings-on between members of the younger generation, Mrs. Presty demonstrates a flair for inventing stories with the same “exciting”, “dramatic”, “improper”, and sensational tropes whose absence from the New Novel she disingenuously celebrates from her armchair. Mrs. Presty is one of the most actively engaged characters of the novel—one contemporary reviewer of *The Evil Genius* described her as a “well-meaning feminine Iago” and credited her with manufacturing both Herbert’s and Sydney’s betrayals of Catherine by “almost driving them into each other’s arms” as a result of her tendency to see danger where there is none¹⁷. Mrs. Presty reveals her chief motivation in the novel—greater even than her propensity for mischief—as ensuring the material and social wellbeing of Catherine and Kitty. Ironically, it is her tendency to read the domestic content of “New Novels”—that is to say, seemingly unremarkable, mundane events staged to illuminate interiority and character—as if it is the stuff of sensation novels that sets the wheels in motion for those events of the novel that most complicate Catherine’s and Kitty’s places in the world. It is through Mrs. Presty’s exertions as the “Evil Genius,” that is, that the domestic narrative in the novel is the awkward hybrid thing that it is—an uncertain invention that is properly categorized as neither a sensation novel nor one of the soporific modern novels that she keeps by the fire.

¹⁷ Unsigned review of *The Evil Genius*, *Academy* 752 (Oct. 2, 1886): 219-220.

The arrival at Mount Morven of a telegram from Herbert early on in the novel allows Collins to juxtapose the perceived reactions to a commonplace event of two sorts of readers: the excitable readers of sensation fiction and the unfazed sophisticated reader of the fin-de-siècle modern novel. Reversing the expected voicing of these positions, Collins has Catherine at first take the arrival of the telegram as a portent of the drama and tragedy a reader would be likely to encounter in the mid-Victorian sensation novel: “‘An accident!’ she said faintly. ‘An accident on the railway!’” (90). Mrs. Presty, who can nimbly alternate between the sensational and the modern, rejects this possibility as improbably melodramatic, preferring to channel the late Mr. Norman’s even temperament, and opens the telegram herself:

‘If you had been the wife of a Cabinet Minister,’ she said to her daughter, ‘you would have been too well used to telegrams to let them frighten you. Mr. Presty (who received his telegrams at his office) was not quite just to the memory of my first husband. He used to blame Mr. Norman for letting me see his telegrams. But Mr. Presty’s nature had all the poetry in which Mr. Norman’s nature was deficient. He saw the angelic side of women—and thought telegrams and business, and all that sort of thing, unworthy of our mission. I don’t exactly understand what our mission is--’

‘Mamma! mamma! is Herbert hurt?’

‘Stuff and nonsense! Nobody is hurt; there has been no accident.’ (90)

Having aligned us with Mrs. Presty’s disenchanting reading of the telegram, Collins later makes us aware that the alternative sensationalist reading was paradoxically the more accurate one, as its heralding of Sydney’s introduction into the family sets off the chain of melodramatic events that drives the plot. Sensationalism can still be slyly pumped into the

domestic narrative even if the consequences are less chilling than the reader of sensation novels might be led to expect.

Catherine is certainly not alone in the expectation of a blood-curdling sensation narrative; an anonymous 1886 reviewer of *The Evil Genius* described what the cover of the first edition—an ominous murky green binding decorated with an illustration of bats and what appears to be some sort of exotic tree—paired with the name Wilkie Collins, which was by this point inextricably linked with his classic sensation novels, primed him to expect from this novel:

THE title of Mr. Wilkie Collins's latest novel and the bats which figure upon its somber cover naturally suggest expectations of a creepy, not to say blood-curdling, story. These expectations are by no means realized; for though *The Evil Genius*, like all its author's books, has plenty of life and movement, it has comparatively little of the excitement of incident and the mystery of complication which the greatest living master of narrative, pure and simple, has taught us to expect from him. The "evil genius" of the family [...] is neither a masculine villain with sinister countenance and unholy aims, nor a golden-haired deceiver with a weakness for forgery or murder; but simply a mischievous mother-in-law, who is not even wholly bad-hearted, but who possesses what may make much more trouble than a bad heart – a suspicious temperament and an inveterate love of meddling. (219-20)

This reviewer tells us that the first edition book-object of *The Evil Genius* accomplished visually the same trick that the novel itself pulls by means of plot when it has a telegram sent to the gothic castle of Mount Morven: the reader who is set up to expect tragic railway

accidents and spine-tingling intrigue instead encounters a governess sent to a middle-class family with not so much as a single madwoman in their attic.

In addition to the reader of sensation novels whose nervous anticipation her daughter channels upon the arrival of the telegram, Mrs. Presty introduces two other sorts of readers into the narrative through her memories of her late husbands. There is Mr. Presty, who though a mercenary salesman by trade, here occupies the stance of the moralistic reader: much like Captain Bennydeck's position later on in the novel, Mr. Presty is concerned about the effect of a text's contents upon its reader's soul. Then there is the steely, unimaginative Mr. Norman (and Mrs. Presty on those occasions when she chooses to follow his example), the reader who is *too well used to telegrams*. We are simultaneously disarmed and put on alert: perhaps this worn-out plot device can still be used to lure us into complacency? Might the everyday domestic affairs of ordinary families prove calamitous in their own way?¹⁸ Mrs. Presty thinks she is a reader who is "too used to telegrams"; however, upon opening Herbert's telegram and contemplating his relatively unremarkable disclosure about engaging a governess for Kitty, Mrs. Presty recoils strangely from her casual approach to the telegram by projecting a family "crisis" onto the situation and predicting Sydney Westerfield's seduction of Herbert and betrayal of the family. Although Mrs. Presty's alarmist domestic forecasts may not entirely constitute the sort of self-fulfilling prophecies that the anonymous *Academy* reviewer accuses them of

¹⁸ In "Miss M.E. Braddon", Henry James credits Collins's earlier Sensation Novels with "having introduced into fiction those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors" (*The Nation* (9 Nov. 1865): 593-5).

being¹⁹, Mrs. Presty's curious position as a "reader" of the new domestic narrative and sensationalist storyteller gives shape to the way that *The Evil Genius* understands its own genre in relation to the conventions of gothicism, sensation, and realism. *The Evil Genius* is a self-contradictory hybrid that pulls from multiple nineteenth-century novelistic traditions at once. Collins was writing for an audience that was "too used to telegrams", not to mention marital breakdown, to be shocked by the mere suggestion of a divorce in an otherwise respectable family, yet one that also expected a certain degree of titillation from a book with his name on the cover. Like Mrs. Presty, who possesses the dry, world-weary affect of age and experience paired with an incorrigible love of melodrama, *The Evil Genius* is forever fluctuating in its stress and tone, resulting in a capacious, hybrid, sometimes creaky narrative whose characters dramatically flee the continent via boat under cover of fog but also are surprisingly blasé when faced with certain forms of familial ambiguity.

The Evil Genius is strongly inclined towards embracing ambiguity without sanctioning any particular moral interpretation of the characters' actions within the domestic sphere. Mrs. Sarrazin, the other disapproving, matronly reader in the novel, provides us with a sounding post for these sentiments. She has more in common with the late Messrs. Norman and Presty than she does with any living character in the novel: despite her looming presence in the novel's conclusion, we never hear directly from her but are apprised of her personality and thoughts exclusively through the projections and attributions of her spouse. Her character is introduced through the collection of "legal arguments" that makes up the novel's conclusion, which is

¹⁹ This reviewer comes to the rather bold conclusion that "Linley would never have been really unfaithful to his wife or Sydney to her benefactress had they not been almost driven into each other's arms [by Mrs. Presty]" (*Academy* no. 752 (Oct. 2, 1886): 219-20).

written in the strange style of Mr. Sarrazin's thoughts as he composes a letter to his wife and ventriloquizes her response. Her peripheral status notwithstanding, Mrs. Sarrazin plays a central role, akin to that of Mrs. Presty, in forcing the novel to justify its remarkable wavering among the varied domestic options it presents. As Mr. Sarrazin imagines her, Mrs. Sarrazin represents a reader whose perspective falls somewhere between that of fussy, moralistic Mr. Presty and harsh, unsentimental Mr. Norman, a reader who is not quite convinced of the propriety of the Linley remarriage or of Kitty's visit to Captain Bennydeck's "Home". I will return to the problem of the novel's ending and Mrs. Sarrazin's implied response to it at the end of this chapter, after further explicating the significance of the narrative's departure from the gothic geography of Mount Morven to the decidedly less romantic spaces of the modern hotel and middle-class suburb; however, it is important to note the novel's pointed attention to Mrs. Presty and Mrs. Sarrazin as readers, and the strange self-interrogation of the novel's generic position that such attention produces.

The first books of *The Evil Genius* are concerned with Sydney Westerfield's tragic history and her integration into family life behind the "venerable grey walls" of Mount Morven (87). The family's Scottish domicile presents "the same social problem" to all who visit it: "how can the family live in such a place as that?" (87). To the many tourists passing through the ancient battlements and museum-like foyer of Mount Morven, it seems incredible that normal, modern family life might carry on against such an imposing backdrop. The historic halls and fortified grounds of Mount Morven perpetuate this gothic mystery as they are maintained as a popular site for tourists. The gothic atmospherics seem even to penetrate the determined modernity of the Linleys' private family quarters within the castle: though the Linleys cozy their walls and floors with modern luxuries and outfit Kitty's room with brightly coloured bedclothes

of the “last new pattern” (87-88), Collins’s narrator intimates to the reader that the upper level cannot quite be done justice to with the “modern” phrase “first floor”, nor is any view of the former border fortress truly without reminders of “perils of past times”. The Linleys may be perfectly comfortable confined to the second floor; however, there is something strangely forced about the way that they contort themselves to accommodate tourists visiting the estate. Even while Kitty lies perilously ill with typhoid fever upstairs, Captain Bennydeck and a group of sightseers are permitted to give themselves a tour of the grounds and loiter in the house “looking at the rooms and the pictures” (163). The family is awkwardly encamped in an anachronistic dwelling that is their birthright, yet somehow not exactly theirs to do with as they might, nor entirely suitable to their needs. The idea that an exit is required from an unsuitable place is furthered by the fact that the Linleys’ impoverished Highland neighbours are emigrating from inhospitable Scotland to America in droves throughout the novel.

Mount Morven, thus, is not quite a home, but nor is it wholly unfamiliar. Collins’s narrator informs us that the gothic fortress houses a mundane, recognizable family: confronted with the matronly shape of Mrs. Presty hunched in her armchair in front of the fire, “married men among the tourists would have recognized a mother-in-law” (88). In this introductory passage and at several other junctures throughout the novel, the reader-as-tourist is made to bear witness to the simultaneous mystery and banality of Mount Morven—itsself as geographically liminal as the Anglo-Scottish Linley family.²⁰ In contrast, Sydney’s first days at Mount Morven are spent less in a state of curiosity with regard to the grandeur of the house and manners of the

²⁰ This moment where a tourist is confronted with the family rather than the castle is echoed in the third book’s Chapter XXII, “Retrospect”, when, at the end of autumn after peak tourist season has finished and “Scotland left to the Scots”, a solitary traveler arrives to view Mount Morven, only to be apprised of the family scandal and told that the estate has been “shut up” (176).

family as they are in a strange reversal of roles with Kitty and the adult Linleys. Kitty acts as Sydney's governess, feeding her and teaching her to relax and play, while Catherine vows to treat Sydney "as if she were a daughter of my own" (105). Sydney has none of the observational distance from the family possessed by the tourists, and, later, Sarrazin. Her relationship with the Linley family is from the start disturbingly intimate in a way that walks a line between sweet and problematic. Mrs. Presty alone voices a concern that Sydney might pose a threat to the Linleys' marriage or to the entire balance of life at Mount Morven: "The introduction of a stranger (without references) into the intimacy of the family circle was, as Mrs. Presty viewed it, a crisis in domestic history" (95). She urges Catherine to lock up her jewel box and questions Herbert's motives in employing such a young governess.

Despite Mrs. Presty's cautions, Sydney swiftly wins over the three Linleys with her kindness and good manners. Catherine gratefully offers her a new dress and a golden bracelet; in a party scene reminiscent of *Jane Eyre*, Herbert sees the made-over Sydney across the room and recognizes his feelings for her. Unlike Mrs. Presty, Catherine is unable to voice any awareness or suspicion of Sydney's problematic intimacy with Herbert. She can see Sydney only as having succeeded with her daughter on a level that other governesses have not. Family acquaintance Mrs. MacEdwin's remarks to Mrs. Presty upon watching Sydney at a social gathering at Mount Morven ("Look at that sweet girl and your little granddaughter! I declare I should cry when I see how they understand each other and love each other" 115), however, forewarn us of Sydney's disruptive presence, and indicate that Mrs. Presty's wariness is not misplaced. "[Y]ou mustn't be fonder, my dear, of your governess," Catherine reprimands her daughter playfully, "than you are of your mother." (128).

But if the mother-daughter bond can be in some way supplanted, is the husband-wife role not in similar peril? Catherine's mock reproach comes on the eve of Kitty's birthday, after Sydney and Herbert have spent the night together in the summer-house and Sydney, exhausted, guilt-ridden, and subjected to Mrs. Presty's interrogations bursts into tears in front of mother and child. When Catherine gently suggests that Sydney take a few hours to rest before returning to the classroom, a distressed Kitty declares that "where her governess went she would go too" (128). Kitty's words unsettle Mrs. Presty, in whose eyes Sydney, as part of her conquest of Herbert, threatens to usurp Catherine's maternal role in Kitty's small domestic world. Although Mrs. Presty misreads the threat that Sydney poses to Catherine's relationship with her daughter, she correctly realizes that Sydney's intrusion has altered the family dynamic, especially the ways in which the family forms around and cares for Kitty. Herbert's taboo relationship with Sydney, Randal's paternal interest in tracking down Sydney's long lost relations, and Sydney's sometimes sororal, sometimes maternal intimacy with Kitty all attest to the ways that Sydney swiftly moves beyond the (already liminal) professional position of the governess as a teacher and childcare provider and spurs the family to accept her in various fraught capacities.

Thus, despite the inaccuracy of Mrs. Presty's and Mrs. MacEdwin's supposition that Sydney's successes with Kitty put her in competition with Catherine, Herbert and Sydney's affair is presented as an event that will first and foremost have an impact on Kitty. Following the pair's first adulterous kiss in the family summer-house, Sydney recoils in distress while Herbert looks on in confusion: "She moved a few steps away with a heavy sigh. 'Kitty!' she said to herself. 'Poor little Kitty!' He followed her. 'Why are you thinking of the child,' he asked 'at such a time as this?'"(123). This moment is perhaps most revelatory of the novel's domestic sympathies. It takes the self-centered Herbert some time to realize the impact of his affair on his

daughter. Sydney and Catherine, by contrast, both focus their sympathy on Kitty from the outset. Kitty's affection for Sydney almost sanctions Herbert and Sydney's affair; at the same time, it intensifies Herbert's betrayal of Catherine. Yet Sydney's intimate connection to Kitty actually earns her Catherine's perverse blessing, in the wake of the child's near-fatal illness, to take her wayward husband:

With the same terrible self-possession which she had preserved from the first – standing between her husband and her governess – Mrs. Linley spoke.

'Miss Westerfield, you have saved my child's life.' She paused – her eyes still resting on the girl's face. Deadly pale, she pointed to her husband, and said to Sydney: 'Take him!'

She passed out of the room – and left them together. (175)

In this scene, Catherine "gives" Herbert to Sydney after she has symbolically lost her daughter to her governess: Sydney has saved Kitty's life but in so doing has seemingly asserted her superior claim to the hearts of Catherine's daughter and husband. Sydney's presence at Mount Morven foregrounds the custody battle over Kitty, as her many successes with Kitty seemingly render Catherine ineffectual in the care of her own child.

The near interchangeability of Sydney and Catherine in domestic scenes that include both Herbert and Kitty is a recurring motif throughout the novel: it is presented as a domestic "problem" with no clear resolution. Several self-consciously "domestic scenes" offer a wry panorama of the collapse and re-assembly of Herbert and Catherine's marriage. The first of these, narrated by Mrs. Presty, occurs when Herbert and Sydney escort Kitty on a walk after Kitty has made her extraordinary declaration about her place being by her governess's side. Mrs. Presty sneers sarcastically at Herbert in an effort to

warn him that she sees his interest in Sydney: “‘Quite a domestic scene!’ the sly old lady remarked. ‘Papa, looking like a saint in a picture, with flowers in his hand. Papa’s spoiled child, always wanting something, and always getting it. And Papa’s governess, so sweetly fresh and pretty that I should certainly fall in love with her, if I had the advantage of being a man’”(129). Mrs. Presty paints this scene to shame Herbert; it is an ironic, almost Hogarthian caricature of the sinister sexuality that lurks beneath the governess’s superficial wholesomeness and the ostensibly ideal husband’s saintly facade. Although Mrs. Presty’s words are meant to expose Herbert’s infidelity and the true precariousness of domestic life at Mount Morven, her “domestic scene” also inadvertently admits the joyfulness of Sydney and Herbert’s union. Although her mother has been displaced from this scene, Kitty is still indulged and given an abundance of adult attention. Her every need and whim still gratified, she continues to enjoy a storybook childhood replete with nosegays and the promise of an extravagant birthday celebration. While Mrs. Presty’s description is intended to expose the perversion of this domestic scene of a would-be family headed by a hypocritical patriarch and a sexpot governess whose charms are so unnatural that they nearly seduce Mrs. Presty herself, she nonetheless describes a family configuration that on some level works for Kitty. Even the “spoiling” of Kitty is not of particular moral concern to Collins’s narrator, who remarks earlier that “spoiled children (whatever moralists may say to the contrary) are companionable and affectionate children for the most part—except when they encounter the unfortunate persons employed to introduce them to useful knowledge” (107). Since Sydney has successfully charmed Kitty into the classroom by letting the child speak freely and playfully without punishment, Herbert’s spoiling of his daughter is not cast as a particular threat to domestic order.

The theme of Kitty as a spoiled child is critical to the way that *The Evil Genius* works through which conventional and alternative familial arrangements “work”. As an entitled child, Kitty is capable of self-advocating to a certain degree, and, as I will discuss, interrogating the situations in which she finds herself. Kitty’s spoiling also creates a juxtaposition in the novel between the material and superficial trappings of home and family, and the authentic lived experience of particular domestic arrangements. For example, in a scene that is both extraordinarily layered and rather heavy-handed, Catherine gives Kitty an expensive French doll for her birthday. At Kitty’s request, her gifts remain hidden behind a screen: “‘Hide them from me,’ said this young epicure in pleasurable sensations, ‘and make me want to see them until I can bear it no longer’”, remarkable instructions that foreshadow the pining that Kitty will do in the ensuing books of the novel, first for her absent governess and then for her absent father. Kitty’s comment also gives a nod to Collins’s famous dictum of his sensation narrative technique: “‘Make ‘em cry, make ‘em laugh, make ‘em wait’”²¹ (138). Herbert, Catherine, uncle Randal, Sydney, and Mrs. Presty gather to watch Kitty react to her birthday present:

The dress of this wonderful creature [the doll] exhibited the latest audacities of French fashion. Her hand made a bow; her eyes went to sleep and woke again; she had a voice that said two words—more precious than two thousand in the mouth of a mere living creature. Kitty’s arms opened and embraced her gift with a scream of ecstasy. That fervent pressure found its way to the right spring. The doll squeaked: ‘Mamma!’—and creaked—and cried again—and said: ‘Papa!’ Kitty sat down on the

²¹ Although the quotation is also often attributed to fellow nineteenth-century British novelist Charles Reade, Collins is alleged to have given this as his formula for a successful sensation novel.

floor; her legs would support her no longer. ‘I think I shall faint,’ she said quite seriously. (139)

Catherine’s present to Kitty foreshadows the child’s distress cries on losing her “poor Papa,” the doll’s uncanny voice delivers a reproach as well to Sydney, who has interfered with the basic family unit of “Mamma”, “Papa”, and child, and to Herbert who has abandoned his wife and child in order to pursue the governess. In this way Catherine unwittingly punishes the adulterous lovers²². Yet Kitty does not lose herself in play with the gift from her mother. She requires the participation of her entire family, including Sydney, in her birthday celebration. Sydney, Herbert, and Randal all present Kitty with doll accessories that complete Catherine’s gift. Kitty can’t play her game with the doll until she receives and examines the doll’s perambulator from her father, the doll’s parasol from her uncle, and, significantly, a similarly themed present from her governess.²³

²² Tamara S. Wagner misattributes the gift of the doll to Herbert Linley in her reading of this passage, and suggests that Herbert might best be understood as an example of “the gift-bearing Victorian father”, a middle-class archetype whose long absences from his child’s life are punctuated by episodes of lavish gift-giving (Wagner 5). This trope of the gift-bearing absentee father is still a mainstay in contemporary divorce narratives, though it’s inaccurate to cite *The Evil Genius* as one of its sources. Wagner’s contradictory reading of Herbert, which discusses him as embodying this type yet also explains his affair with Sydney as the inevitable consequence of “too much time spent in the nursery”, speaks to Collins’s (often frustratingly) loose style of characterization in *The Evil Genius* as much as it speaks to the fraught identity of the middle-class father in Victorian literature. Wagner’s conflation of Herbert and Catherine in her brief discussion of the talking doll, moreover, is understandable in the context of this novel where characters’ affects and moral postures are frequently strangely interchangeable (Wagner 5-6). Yet the fact that it is Catherine and not Herbert who gives Kitty the grand gift of the talking doll is still significant: while she is not cold and uninterested in her child like Mrs. Gallilee in *Heart and Science*, Catherine still is forced into the shadows of the pretty “domestic scene” composed of her child, husband, and governess: thus, despite her unvarying physical presence in Kitty’s life, Catherine must play the role that Wagner identifies as that of the treat-bearing absentee parent in her efforts to secure her daughter’s affections.

²³ Indeed, the only birthday gift that Catherine’s talking doll eclipses is a six-penny picture-book from Mrs. Presty, which is shelved meaningfully in the grey area between Byron’s *Don Juan* and Butler’s *Lives of The Saints* until Kitty is old enough to appreciate its value.

Far from stealing from anybody's jewel box, as Mrs. Presty fears upon Sydney's arrival at Mount Morven, Sydney actually brings a new jewel box to the family in the form of the doll's jewelry casket that she gives Kitty for her birthday. Similarly, Sydney does not steal a limited supply of daughterly affection that Kitty had previously directed exclusively at her mother: Sydney brings a new supply of care with her into the family. It is Herbert's neglect that marginalizes Catherine rather than the extraordinary familial intimacy between governess and child. Indeed, the proliferation of birthday gifts parallels the proliferation of family figures and familial intimacies in this novel. In this light, Catherine's remarks that Kitty "mustn't be fonder of her governess than of her mother" (128) is not an expression of the mother's jealousy so much as an example of her playing with Kitty: Catherine understands that she and the governess are complements rather than substitutes, just as everyone at the birthday party besides Mrs. Presty understands that the doll's jewel box is a toy and not an adult luxury that will corrupt Kitty.

Thus, although the secret of Herbert and Sydney's affair looms in the air throughout Kitty's birthday celebrations, and the prescriptive words of the talking doll imbue the gift-giving scene with a tension that nearly breaks Sydney, the governess's presence at and participation in the intimate family gathering suits Kitty, and, indeed, in some way "completes" the event, just as Sydney's gift in conjunction with the gifts of Herbert and Randal complete the domestic fantasy that Kitty imagines for her new doll. The birthday gathering is the last scene, however, in which this particular cast of benevolent guardians of Kitty is assembled together, as from this moment the novel turns towards imagining new domestic arrangements in multiples and fragments.²⁴

²⁴ It is tempting to shine a biographical light on Collins's narrative strategy of fragmenting and compartmentalizing the different models of domestic variance and complexity that he explores in *The Evil Genius*. Collins's own domestic life involved an extraordinary feat of

Only after Sydney rescues Kitty from the grip of typhoid fever and “takes” Herbert from Catherine is Mount Morven formally closed to tourists, and, for the first time in generations, functions exclusively as a private property under the care of “two trustworthy servants” (177). The landlord of a local tavern explains the situation to a disappointed traveler:

A complete dissolution of the family had taken place not long since. For miles round everyone was sorry for it. Rich and poor alike felt the same sympathy with the good lady of the house. She had been most shamefully treated by her husband, and by a good-for-nothing girl employed as governess. [...] The minister of the parish, preaching on the subject had attributed this extraordinary outbreak of vice on the part of an otherwise virtuous man, to a possession of the devil. Assuming “the devil,” in this case, to be only a discreet and clerical way of alluding from the pulpit to a woman, the landlord was inclined to agree with the minister. (177)

While the locals clearly take the “devil” possessing Herbert to be the governess, it is clearly left open to interpretation whether this evil female force is Sydney Westerfield for her ostensible seduction of Herbert, or Mrs. Presty for her misguided interference in the Linley household.

This ironic window into what the Highlanders are saying about the Linleys also represents one of the few moments in the novel where Herbert is reprimanded for his infidelity and carelessness; the novel’s sympathetic treatment of Sydney is markedly at odds with this local narrative of him as the unfortunate victim of female devilry. For the

compartmentalization, as William Clarke explores in *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins* (Allison & Busby, 1988), far beyond what his characters are shown to be capable of sustaining in this particular novel.

most part, though, the novel seems to take a generous moral approach to Herbert, similar to the one that it extends to Sydney: he is “sexually frail” and therefore not entirely to blame for succumbing to the charms of his young governess.

Nor does the novel ultimately understand the adultery scandal and divorce to have irreparably diminished the family. Even as everyone involved suffers profusely in the immediate aftermath of Herbert absconding with Sydney, the novel, through its generous moral approach to Herbert and Sydney, understands the event not as a single family suffering a loss, but as the fracturing of a family and creation of new familial configurations. What the landlord terms a “complete dissolution of the family” is actually Herbert and Sydney’s flight from Mount Morven, leaving Catherine and Mrs. Presty to care for Kitty in the anonymity of the Lake District. Herbert has seemingly abandoned his family to live in sin with Sydney; however, it is soon revealed that Herbert has not given up on family life. Herbert’s lawyer forwards a request to Catherine that she finds devilish indeed: that Kitty should spend one half of the year with him and Sydney. He seeks to persuade his wife that his plan will be good for Kitty with the following extraordinary reassurance: “If your maternal anxiety suggests any misgiving, let me add that a woman’s loving care will watch over our little girl while she is under my roof. You will remember how fond Miss Westerfield was of Kitty, and you will believe me when I tell you she is as truly devoted to the child as ever” (182). Catherine is disgusted: “the cruelest of all separations is proposed to me—and I am expected to submit to it, because my husband’s mistress is fond of my child!”(182). Catherine categorically objects to Herbert receiving any custody of Kitty, and frets over her options with the lawyer Samuel Sarrazin. Sarrazin,

possessed with “a curious mixture of both” French and English character traits²⁵, is unable to understand that something “French” about him vexes and alienates his English clients, as he sees himself as the happy picture of English domesticity: “His essentially English wife; his essentially English children; his whiskers; his politics; his umbrella, his pew at church, his plum pudding, his Times newspaper, all answered for him (he was accustomed to say) as an inbred member of the glorious nation that rejoices in hunting the fox and believes in innumerable pills” (184). Sarrazin’s life is seemingly in all ways blandly English, yet at “the same time the French vivacity discovered a kindred soul in Kitty. Mr. Sarrazin became her intimate friend in five minutes” (185). The attributes that Collins encodes as “French” in Sarrazin translate into the lawyer’s unprofessional tendency towards emotional outbursts and his surprisingly high tolerance for ambiguity and unconventionality—supposedly rare traits for a member of the nation that glories in the fussy banality of umbrellas and plum puddings. Kitty, in exile from her familiar Scottish battlements and told by Mrs. Presty that her questions about her situation are uncouth²⁶, identifies with and begins to interrogate her fellow outsider with relish: “Isn’t your name something like Saracen?” (185). On one level this affinity between the little girl’s and the lawyer’s personalities might be read merely as Collins getting yet more comedic mileage out of a long English tradition of portraying the French as effeminate and somewhat infantile. However, by putting the conscientious yet pragmatic lawyer Sarrazin in

²⁵ Collins was fond of creating internally-conflicted characters with multiple “national” personality traits vying for dominance, the most famous example being Franklin Blake from *The Moonstone* (1868) whose mind is divided four ways as a result of his Continental education between Italian, French, German, and English influences.

²⁶ Her Grandmother responds to Kitty’s persistent questioning, “If I hear you again, bread and water and no doll for the rest of the week.” (219)

conversation with young Kitty, who tries to invite every kindly adult in the novel to join her family (“Oh dear, how nice it would be, Samuel, if you lived with us!”²⁷ (186)), the novel persists in asking the question, voiced here through Sarrazin’s “conscience”: “Is there something wrong in human nature? or something wrong in human laws? All that is best and noblest in us feels the influence of love—and the rules of society declare that an accident of position shall decide whether love is a virtue or a crime” (194). Sarrazin formulates this question after Kitty breaks into tears while confiding to him that she misses Sydney and is afraid that—for some reason the adults have refused to disclose to her—she will never see her again. Sarrazin’s questions perhaps best articulate the central problem of the novel: what, exactly, is wrong with the circumstances in which the characters find themselves? Are the non-normative affective attachments of the characters “wrong”, or is it the legal and social constructions of marriage and family that are wrong for the characters?

Kitty, too, uses the language of “wrong” to talk about her domestic situation in the immediate aftermath of Herbert and Sydney’s flight from Mount Morven. Although the lawyer is uneasy discussing the adult affair of the divorce with young Kitty, his “kindness still encouraged her” (218) to cautiously resume her questioning: “‘Grandmamma sometimes listens at doors,’ she whispered; ‘I don’t want her to hear me.’ She waited a little longer, and then approached Mr. Sarrazin, frowning mysteriously. ‘Take me up on your knee,’ she said. ‘There’s something wrong going on in this house’” (218).

Kitty, who knows nothing of the divorce, goes on to explain to the lawyer what, in addition to the painful absences of her father and her dear governess, is “wrong” with her

²⁷ For his part, Sarrazin seems to embrace a pseudo-parental role in Kitty’s life (“I romp with my own children, why not with Kitty?” 219); Kitty later extends a similar invitation to Captain Bennydeck (243).

house—she has observed Mrs. Presty going around with a towel rubbing the name “Linley” off of the family luggage and has been informed that she is soon to refer to herself as “Miss Norman” (219). For Kitty, this renaming is just as distressing as the flight that caused it. She misses Sydney and her father, but she particularly cannot abide the symbolic erasure of her connection to Herbert. It is not the fracturing and reassembling of the important adults in her life into new units that “wrongs” Kitty: this process of familial reconfiguration begins at Mount Morven, when Herbert and Sydney cozy up during their walks in the field with Kitty, forming the pretty “domestic scene” to which Mrs. Presty ironically calls attention. Rather, it is the severing of family ties and the impossibility of mobility between units that distresses her. Familial mutation that takes the form of a proliferation of parental figures and households suits Kitty; familial splintering that restricts her access to any parental figure who cares for her, be it Sydney, Herbert, or Bennydeck, does not.

The novel rights the “wrongs” of the domestic plot through two legal and social maneuvers: the remarriage of Catherine to Herbert Linley and the reemployment of Sydney Westerfield as a secretary at Captain Bennydeck’s Home for Fallen Women. While we might understand both of these narrative moves as in some ways “tidying up” the unwieldy family structure caused by the divorce, there is still a remarkable amount of openness to the remarriage and the reemployment. The novel calls attention, for example, to the ways that a remarriage is not the same as a marriage: the remarriage cannot expunge the legal record nor the emotional record of the divorce that preceded it. Sarrazin is initially conflicted about condoning the remarriage: “‘Saying I do want you, in one breath - - and I don’t want you in another – seems to be a little hard on Divorce,’ I ventured to

suggest” (346). However, as he bears witness to the Linleys’ rekindled love for one another and hears Randal’s sanctimonious defense of his brother’s “sexual frailty”, Sarrazin comes around; he and Randal are the only witnesses to the discreet wedding ceremony. The “Evil Genius” responds to the remarriage with her usual contrary flair: in the wake of Catherine’s decision to take Herbert back, Mrs. Presty melodramatically rejects her daughter as an “unnatural child”, deciding to set up her own household away from gothic Mount Morven and in the company of two ghosts more modern than any who might haunt the family castle: “I have done with you, Catherine. You have reached the limits of my maternal endurance at last. I shall set up my own establishment, and live again --in memory-- with Mr. Norman and Mr. Presty. May you be happy. I don’t anticipate it” (349). Sarrazin, however, doubts Mrs. Presty’s prediction, telling his wife, “When you visit the remarried pair on their return from their second honeymoon, take Mrs. Presty with you” (349). Although Sarrazin is in good humour when he suggests that the Linleys send a wedding card to the judge who divorced them, this reference reminds the reader of the high profile divorce ruling and the scandal that followed the publication of the Lord President’s scathing remarks in the Edinburgh newspaper. The remarriage does not render the past divorce invisible to the newly re-wedded couple nor to outside spectators.

Sydney’s reemployment as Captain Bennydeck’s secretary at the Home for Fallen Women is similarly contrived, however natural a placement it might seem for her, the daughter of Captain Bennydeck’s long-lost best friend Roderick Westerfield. The ending leaves open the problem of Sydney’s liminal social position as an unmarried and “friendless” young woman who nonetheless possesses a governess’s understanding of middle-class manners. At the fin-de-siècle, secretarial work presented a new opportunity for women in Sydney’s position that dispensed

with some of the painful liminality attached to governessing. However, the uncertainty of Sydney's place in society is not much remedied by her reemployment outside of the domestic sphere as a secretary; her new place of employment proves just as torn between the professional and the domestic as she is. Captain Bennydeck's "Home" mimics a household in which he plays the role of a "father", and Sydney a "good sister-friend" to their wayward charges (335). Sydney's responsibilities at the Home keep her caught between the familiar role Captain Bennydeck describes above and an altogether more professional one: "Take the pen, my secretary, and set down his facts. Never mind his reflections" (336). When Randal and Sarrazin escort Kitty to say goodbye to Sydney before the child departs with her parents on their second honeymoon around the continent, the three find Bennydeck and Sydney taking their lunch together, dividing their tasks as a husband and wife might. Kitty, not one to miss an opportunity to ask a "strange question", interrogates the adults around her about a domestic ambiguity one last time: "When we were out on the street again, she said to her uncle: 'Do you think my nice Captain will marry Syd?'" (350). Randal and Sarrazin decline to answer her, and deflect the question by asking her instead what she thinks. Despite Sarrazin's best efforts to present the story as closed, rationalizing the unconventional domestic circumstances of the ending in his "Lawyer's Last Word", it is in fact Kitty, not the lawyer, who gets the actual "last word" of the novel: " 'Shall I tell you what I think? she said, 'I think you are both of you humbugs'" (351). Kitty's petulant last word relieves the tension of an uncomfortable reality: however surprisingly functional they are as spare parental figures for Kitty, Captain Bennydeck and Sydney may be too scarred from the tragic circumstances of their respective lives to ever leave the strange, wistful limbo between professional and familiar in which Randal, Sarrazin, and Kitty encounter them.

Prior to Kitty's comic last word, the reader of *The Evil Genius* must puzzle out the idiosyncrasies of the ending with the lawyer Sarrazin. He enjoys the most conventional middle-class family life of any character in the novel, including a domestic routine that follows a respectable English rhythm and a less stereotypical yet seemingly functional dynamic with his wife, with whom he is apparently used to engaging in lively debate, her essential "high and haughty" Englishness clashing with his perpetually conflicted bi-national temperament (345). An exchange between Sarrazin and his wife that focuses on her imagined responses to the domestic plot after its conclusion frames the novel's last pages. The narrator makes his last editorial pronouncement upon the reunion of the nuclear Linley family: "Since the miserable time when they left Mount Morven, since the long unnatural separation of the parents and the child, those three were together once more!" (344). After that exclamation, the narrator submits by way of conclusion Mr. Sarrazin's internal reflections as the latter composes a letter to his wife: "'When you force this ridiculous and regrettable affair on my attention' (I think I hear Mrs. Sarrazin say), 'the least you can do is to make your narrative complete. But perhaps you propose to tell me personally what has become of Kitty, and what well-deserved retribution has overtaken Miss Westerfield'" (349). The narrative move of discussing the ultimate happiness of the reassembled Linley family and its strange satellite unit of Sydney and Bennydeck in the epistolary voices of Mr. and Mrs. Sarrazin is significant; the conventional married couple must make sense of the domestic abnormality of the novel's ending. The questions that Sarrazin imagines his wife asking reflect the Victorian reader's narrative expectations of an adultery novel: the reader must be reassured that Kitty is happy and that Sydney has been punished. Instead, giving Kitty access to both her reunited parents and her beloved

Sydney, Collins leaves the ending open in a way by having Sarrazin remark: “Kitty accompanies her father and mother to the Continent, of course. But she insisted on first saying good-by to the dear friend, once the dear governess, whom she loves. Randal and I volunteered to take her (with her mother’s ready permission) to see Miss Westerfield. Try not to be angry. Try not to tear me up” (350). Sarrazin expects his wife to disapprove heartily of Kitty being escorted by her uncle and mother’s lawyer to visit the governess who ran off with her father and the man who almost married her mother. Indeed, Sarrazin is torn about the appropriateness of this gathering, for in addition to defending himself from his wife’s imagined wrath, he recollects the picnic scene with emotion:

We found Captain Bennydeck and his pretty secretary enjoying a little rest and refreshment, after a long morning’s work for the good of the Home. The Captain was carving the chicken; and Sydney, by his side, was making the salad. The house-cat occupied a third chair with her eyes immovably fixed on the movements of the knife and fork. Perhaps I was thinking of sad past days. Anyway, it seemed to me to be as pretty a domestic scene as a man could wish to look at. The arrival of Kitty made the picture complete. (350)

This little scene is remarkable for several reasons. It echoes the “domestic scene” featuring Herbert, Sydney, and Kitty that Mrs. Presty comments upon at the beginning of the novel, where employer and employee are controversially “pretty” together, and Kitty is blissfully spoiled. While Captain Bennydeck’s participation, as a single man, in such a “pretty domestic scene” with a “pretty secretary” is far less problematic than Herbert’s with the governess, Sarrazin’s unabashed acknowledgement of Kitty “completing” the scene is extraordinary. Collins goes so far as to insert slyly into the scene a spoiled house-cat,

accustomed to taking up a third chair at the table, her eyes “immovably fixed on the movements of the knife and fork”, who becomes a literal place-holder for the aptly-named Kitty. Only a few pages earlier, Sarrazin had justified the Linley remarriage to his wife in terms of Kitty’s happiness, which he imagines as aligned with a child’s understanding of “the Law of Nature”:

When their child brings him [Herbert] home, and takes it for granted that her father and mother should live together, *because* they are her father and mother, innocent Kitty has appealed from the Law of Divorce to the Law of Nature. Whether Herbert Linley has deserved it or whether he has not, there he is in the only fit place for him.
(348)

The only place where Herbert rightfully “fits” might be at Catherine’s side at Mount Morven; the scene at Captain Bennydeck’s “Home” suggests that this is not also true of Kitty, who actually makes “the picture complete” in two distinct sites and families (350). Moreover, Sarrazin’s vague comment partway through completing his description of the lunch table that “Perhaps I was thinking of sad past days” raises far more questions than he succeeds in answering. What past sadness forces Sarrazin to conclude that the scene with Sydney at Bennydeck’s table—wanting only Kitty to complete it—is “as pretty a domestic scene as a man could wish to look at”? The reader and Sarrazin cannot be nostalgic for any such scene featuring the newly attached Bennydeck and Sydney: none has previously occurred in the novel. Sarrazin’s oblique reference to past domestic configurations—of Herbert, Catherine, and Kitty before the divorce, of Herbert, Sydney, and Kitty after it, and of Bennydeck, Catherine, and Kitty before the remarriage—strikes the same curiously ambivalent note that is so characteristic of *The Evil Genius*, as these past configurations are

simultaneously “sad” and provide the context for him to read the scene at Bennydeck’s Home as “pretty”.

Chapter 3

“A Queer, Untidy, Hybrid Kind of Place”: The New Woman and Domesticity in *The Rebel of the Family*

Eliza Lynn Linton's *The Rebel of the Family* (1880) is an example of the so-called “New Woman Novel” that proliferated at the fin-de-siècle. The New Woman novel cuts across fictional genres, and designates generally any novel from this period featuring a heroine who “challenged accepted ideals of marriage and maternity, chose to work for a living, or who in any way argued for the feminist cause” (Cunningham 3). New Woman novels might praise or condemn the New Woman, or adopt a more neutral stance on their heroines' forays into the public sphere. Because many Victorian and Edwardian middle-class women who wrote New Woman novels were also active suffragists and feminist reformers, such novels tend to be studied for their thematic content, as historical feminist documents, rather than as representing a significant generic moment in the literary history of the novel. I argue that Linton's idiosyncratic New Woman novel is worth reading alongside Collins's later novels not only because these texts center around the same late-Victorian social problems, but also because the formal innovations of the New Woman novel echo some of the distinctive features of Collins's late domestic fiction.

Many second-wave feminist critics who have considered the New Woman novel generically have explored cultural issues of feminist participation in novel writing with only a minor emphasis on the formal apparatuses that facilitated this participation. More recent critics who have sought to reorient the conversation about New Woman novels around the history of the novel have dealt directly with the New Woman novel's marginalization from the discourse of literary Modernism. Such critics, in the context of a larger feminist debate of the 1980s and 1990s over the existence of so-called “high” and “low” art, (or the “relation of center and margin” in Gayatri Spivak's terms (104)), have refuted the dominant scholarly characterization

of the New Woman novel as a “literary subcultural backwater, rank with hysterical feminist fervor” (Ardis 3). Ann Ardis contends in *New Women, New Novels* that “the New Woman novelists anticipate the reappraisal of realism we usually credit to early-twentieth-century writers”, in terms of both the realistic diversity of women’s sexual behaviours that the New Woman novel depicted and the various formal conventions of the Victorian novel--including “omniscient narration” and “consistent characterization”--that the New Woman novel usurped (ibid).

Ardis’s decision to follow Spivak’s urgings towards “attending to marginality” in the history of the novel by demonstrating the formal parallels between the New Woman novel and more canonical early-twentieth-century modernist texts is echoed in more recent scholarship that takes the formal idiosyncrasies of the New Woman novel seriously. In *Feminist Realism at the Fin de Siècle: The Influence of the Late-Victorian Women’s Press on the Development of the Novel*, Molly Youngkin proposes that distinct “feminist realist” narrative strategies defined fin-de-siècle New Women’s periodical literature (and, in turn, the development of the novel at the end of the century), including “internal perspective to indicate transformations of consciousness”; “highly developed dialogue to illustrate women’s use of spoken word”; and “descriptions of characters’ actions to show how women acted” (7). The novels by Collins and Linton considered in this thesis each showcase these and other formal characteristics that Youngkin and Ardis note in their efforts to demonstrate that the “realism” of the canonical Modern novel is anticipated in popular turn-of-the-century genres.

I argue that, read together, Collins’s and Linton’s novels demonstrate the fate of the “unstable family” within a new literary genre that owes some of its qualities to sensation fiction yet operates largely within a more realist mode. Both authors tap into a similar divided internal

logic in which a wry, pseudo-conservative authorial humour simultaneously decries and delights in women's newfound domestic mobility. On a formal level, Linton also tends towards idiosyncratic sentence constructions, dialogue, and plot structure, in ways that mirror some of Collins's less tightly crafted novelistic structures.²⁸ Linton provides her reader with a specific set of narratives of who exactly the New Woman was, and what versions of domestic felicity she could potentially access that diverge in perspective from those offered by Collins in his consideration of odd women in his late fiction. While I argue that we can trace the legacy and development of the sensation novel in similar places in *The Rebel of the Family* and in Collins's later domestic novels, I am also concerned with Collins's and Linton's novels as individual texts with different politics and distinct generic tendencies. Whereas Collins's two novels rework their fractured and multiplied families into either surprisingly unconventional or curiously open-ended arrangements, Linton's novel takes a bleak and dismissive approach to various spectacles of domestic deviance that nonetheless surface as possibilities for her protagonist.

The Rebel of the Family (1880) is superficially a kind of mission novel. Often cited as an example of fin-de-siècle anti-feminist literature, *Rebel* follows the trials and tribulations of Perdita Winstanley, the unlucky middle daughter of a highborn but financially reduced London widow, as she attempts to both rescue her family from their financial crisis and break free of their oppressive Grundyist household. Perdita's "rebellion" from her mother and sisters' conservative worldview leads her to find work as a clerk at a Post Office Savings Bank and to look to the burgeoning women's movement and its charismatic though hypocritical leader, Bell Blount, for a sense of purpose and belonging. Simultaneously, Perdita befriends humble chemist

²⁸ In her Note on the Text of the 2002 Broadview Edition of *The Rebel of the Family*, editor Deborah Meem describes Linton's sentences as tending to be "exceedingly long, stitched together with what would today be called highly idiosyncratic punctuation" (19).

Leslie Crawford and his traditionalist Quaker mother. While Perdita's mother and sisters become enmeshed in various romantic triangulations, the hypocritical Bell Blount and the puritanical Mrs. Crawford, representing opposite poles of the "Woman Question" debate, each attempt to "save" the wayward Perdita. Ultimately, she is saved by her love for Leslie Crawford, whose manliness awakens what the novel understands to be her inherent womanly desire for protection, and whose rational, understanding temperament encourages her to reject as inadequate Bell Blount's terrifying "manhating" dogma, Mrs. Winstanley's Grundyism, and Mrs. Crawford's "separate spheres" mentality.

Linton is a difficult literary figure because, although she has more often than not been viewed exclusively as an "anti-feminist" and the infamous author of the "Girl of the Period"²⁹, her novels nonetheless fall within the category of the New Woman novel. Despite the undeniable presence of a vehement anti-feminist rhetoric in Linton's writing, recent critics such as Constance Harsh, Ann Ardis, and Deborah Meem read her New Woman novels against the grain, finding nuance in the ways that Linton expresses middle-class female autonomies in *The Rebel in the Family* (1880), *The One Too Many* (1894), and *In Haste and at Leisure* (1895). As Meem observes, "the heterosexual imperative is irresistible" in Linton's plots, and her protagonists generally come to terms with their latent desire for men through their forays into Victorian feminist and lesbian subculture (14). However, Linton also chooses to linger on the different paths and options open to Perdita Winstanley, testing the possibilities and limitations of a range of biological and chosen family bonds.

²⁹ "The Girl of the Period" is perhaps Linton's best-known work. In this 1868 essay, Linton bemoans what she perceives as the modern English girl's degeneration into frivolity and excess.

In my reading of *The Rebel in the Family*, I examine in depth several “domestic failures” and their tenuous solutions, focussing on how this complicated text accepts and rejects different female domestic autonomies. Whereas Perdita’s unconventional desires to work outside the home in a post-office bank and to pursue a romance with a lowly chemist are ultimately valorized, the blatantly lesbian household kept by the women’s rights activist Bell Blount and her “little wife” Connie Tracy is not. Linton’s crude characterization of the feminists in *The Rebel of the Family* as elitist, ill-mannered, and sexually perverse is unsurprising. However, her depiction of Bell and Connie’s queer household as an appealing option for her young protagonist is intriguing, as is the novel’s overarching engagement with the New Woman’s quest for a new articulation of women’s positions within the domestic and social spheres. Bell Blount’s aggressively anti-patriarchal domesticity is vilified; however, Coventry Patmore’s idealized “angel in the house” mode of female domesticity (as modeled by Linton’s comically severe Mrs. Crawford) is also ridiculed. As in Collins’s *The Evil Genius*, the most extreme of domestic possibilities in *The Rebel of the Family* are ultimately rejected and replaced with more familiar narrative configurations. Yet, also much like Collins in his late novels, Linton is compelled by a changing fin-de-siècle social context and by the increasingly “realist” strategies of her art to compromise traditional domestic resolutions and incorporate the unconventional and the queer into her family narrative.

Perdita is an awkward heroine: she is a live-wire at home with her mother and sisters, oppressed by years of ridicule and reproach from her family for being unusual, and unable to stop herself from launching into impassioned democratic tirades. She is described repeatedly as “the unlucky sandwich”, “the family disaster”, and “the Genius of the Family”. *The Rebel of the Family* is replete with all manner of botanical, meteorological, and literary metaphors for

Perdita's awkwardness: she is variously an excrescence, a sandwich, a cracked china cup, the capstone of a crooked tower, a disaster, a volcano, an *houri*, and a Caliban. This overloading of cross-categorical metaphors for Perdita's awkwardness mirrors the novel's overloading of perspectives and plotlines for this unstable character, and the hybrid, sometimes contradictory generic allegiances the novel runs through in its explorations. Perdita is in a sense an honorary governess: her place in the Winstanley household is uncomfortably liminal. Like the archetypal Victorian governess, Perdita is a woman from an upper-middle-class background fallen on hard times who must navigate the double-bind of needing to work but having few socially-acceptable options open to her. Unlike the governess, Perdita is able to step away from the domestic realm of the middle-class household; however, she is nonetheless characterized in terms of her marginal presence in the Winstanley home and her incongruent social status.

Perdita rarely descends from her room when her mother and sisters receive guests; when she does, the social consequences are invariably disastrous. Indeed, when Sir James Kearney and Hubert Strangeways come to the house to flirt with Perdita's younger sister Eva, bringing Sir James's "fossilized old Tory" of a mother, Lady Kearney, with them, all three guests mistake Perdita for Eva's governess and are accordingly scandalized by her "familiarity in daring to come into the drawing-room as if she had a right to be there" (44, 127). Eva even goes so far as to suggest that Perdita was likely swapped by "gipsys" (85), echoing the judgement of George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver, another awkward, misunderstood Victorian daughter. We are informed earlier that this view of Perdita is one that Mrs. Winstanley has not done much over the years to discourage:

She was set aside in the family calculations and treated less as a daughter than a poor relation who must needs be suffered but is never adopted—more as an excrescence

on the bole than as a branch on the family tree. Indeed, some of the less intimate among the visitors at West Hill Gardens thought that she was probably a portionless niece whom Mrs. Winstanley, good creature! had brought up for charity; and others that she was Eva's companion and governess. She had an intelligent face, they said, and was almost ugly enough to be clever. (27)

This idea of an awkward woman who is nearly ugly enough to be clever³⁰ is echoed in Collins's later *Heart and Science*, where, as we've seen, the governess Miss Minerva is described in similar terms: "Oh, dear me (as they said in the servants' hall), she would never be married—so yellow and so learned, so ugly and so poor! And yet, if mystery is interesting, this was an interesting woman" (61). The visitors to the Winstanley household who attribute a similar cleverness or talent to the comparatively plain middle Winstanley daughter are tapping into a Victorian governess trope that proves, however, less relevant to *The Rebel of the Family* than Perdita's fraught mobility between domestic and public spaces; similarly, the Crawford family's gothicized backstory is of lesser narrative consequence than the way that Leslie Crawford crosses a class-boundary and eventually becomes enmeshed in the Winstanley family's intrigues. *The Rebel of the Family* uses familiar Victorian tropes such as the misunderstood, unattractive governess and the asylum-bound Fallen Woman to propel the plot of the domestic narrative; however, the novel's almost brusque, dismissive tone tends to direct its reader's attention away from the sensational details of these plot points and towards the social problems that complicate its characters' lives.

³⁰ This trope can be traced at least as far back as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847).

The novel is sympathetic to Perdita—it makes the case that her awkwardness stems from her mother and sisters’ narrow-minded rejection of her unladylike intellectual tendencies. However, the novel also reprimands her for her lack of perspective and easy excitability. She is described as perplexingly inconsistent, despite the strength of her various convictions: “her qualities were so strangely intermixed that no one was right and no one was wrong” (286). Throughout the course of *The Rebel of the Family*, Perdita’s strangely plastic character is explained by a susceptibility to any passionate defense of the underdog as the gospel truth; it is this undue receptiveness, for example, that causes her to stray over to the row-house on Prince Christian’s Road where the feminist Bell Blount and her “little wife” Connie Tracy keep a “queer, hybrid” household. Ultimately Perdita must learn to discipline her enthusiasms, accept her “nature” as a woman, and lean on the calmer, more rational Leslie Crawford, who understands the fin-de-siècle women’s movement to be an elitist distraction from the truly democratic efforts of the labour movement.

As discussed in Chapters One and Two of this thesis, Collins’s late family novels tend to find unconventional resolutions to the problems caused by the surfacing of alternative domesticities, or else afford an unprecedented amount of narrative space for domestic transgression. Linton’s *New Woman* novel takes a more conventional approach to resolving the specific problem of the awkward, unmarried middle-class woman: unlike Frances Minerva in *Heart and Science* and Sydney Westerfield in *The Evil Genius*, Perdita Winstanley ends up happily engaged. However, she is not the only odd woman out in *The Rebel of the Family*, nor is her narrative a straightforward parable of a wayward daughter finding her path to love and security. Rather, *The Rebel of the Family* intertwines the stories of multiple women—old and “New”—whose places in the domestic sphere are all in some way called into question by the

novel. Bell Blount, Connie Tracy, Miss Long, and Mrs. Merton represent an impressive and unfettered range of spinsters and widows, all of whom remain unassimilated into conventional domestic configurations at the novel's end. Perdita, the heroine, ends up engaged, but her pending marriage to Leslie Crawford crosses class-boundaries and involves a certain degree of domestic untidiness. As I argue is also true of Collins's late social problem novels, the degree of open-endedness allowed by the ending of *The Rebel of the Family* represents an interesting departure from the Victorian moral convention of doling out concrete punishments and rewards to characters. The allegorical language that permeates Linton's novel may set the reader up to expect a moralist conclusion to the story of Perdita the lost lamb and Bell Blount the predatory lesbian; however, the ending of *The Rebel of the Family* is curiously mild in tone. Bell Blount is not punished and sent back to her husband and children, but allowed to continue on at large in London as the figurehead of her Movement. Perdita, snugly engaged to Leslie Crawford at novel's end, persists in thinking of Bell with a sympathy that may not stem entirely from pity³¹.

In this chapter, I discuss Linton's novel's preoccupation with the placement of the liminal "New Woman" in a fitting household, reading the generic hybridities of this fin-de-siècle text as working in a similar way to those found in Collins's late novels. In addition to considering the peculiar discourse of rebellion and moderation surrounding the protagonist Perdita, my reading of *The Rebel of the Family* also focuses on the women in Linton's novel who exist precariously in limbo between social spheres, and whose problematic domestic positions the novel does not see fit to resolve. Though tenuously attached to one another, for example, both Bell Blount and Connie Tracy are, respectively, transgressively and vulnerably adrift in London in ways that

³¹ In "Eliza Lynn Linton and the Rise of Lesbian Consciousness", Deborah T. Meem situates Bell Blount's character within a larger pattern of attention to queerness in Linton's works.

trouble the narrator of *Rebel*. Miss Long, Bell and Connie's housekeeper, is, like the classic Victorian governess, "neither servant nor lady": thus, she, more than any other character, including Leslie Crawford, triggers a kind of class anxiety in Perdita that the novel appears to both sanction and critique. Mrs. Merton, Mr. Brocklebank's sister and a fashionable widow styled after the members of Linton's notorious "Order of Mature Sirens"³², occupies an altogether more secure niche in society than the three residents of the queer row house on Prince Christian's Road; however, she too causes ripples. Mrs. Merton is simultaneously a threateningly manipulative free-agent and a pathetic single woman, and the novel cannot decide whether to envy or feel sorry for this self-declared "happiest woman in London" (38). There is little novel about Mrs. Merton: her roles as glamorous widow and "Mature Siren" do not suggest the same domestic anxieties that "New Women" like Perdita and Bell Blount embody. Nonetheless, the space afforded to her in the novel suggests some interesting strands of continuity between the plight of a single woman from the old guard and that of the New Woman. The life and death of Florence Crawford, by comparison, Leslie's unfaithful, asylum-bound wife, seemingly amounts to a sensational footnote in what is a novel largely concerned with Grundyist balancing acts and the fin-de-siècle problem of middle-class women's activities outside of the domestic sphere. Although Florence's story does not significantly subvert the conventional narrative of the seduced victim of the aristocratic cad, the novel fails to sew up the hole in the domestic narrative created by her death, maintaining instead a curiously harsh family dynamic in which Leslie Crawford refuses to love his late wife's illegitimate child (who is also his blood relative) despite the fact that he is the child's guardian and father in the eyes of the world. This stubborn denial of

³² Linton's piece "Mature Sirens" (*Saturday Review*, 9 January 1869, 46-47) describes the middle-aged woman as empowered by a unique combination of worldly wisdom and beauty.

sentiment lies at the heart of *The Rebel of the Family*, which refuses to fully endorse or condemn any of its varied iterations of family or household.

Indeed, *The Rebel of the Family* strikes an interesting balance between condemning class-conscious characters for their shallow, worldly concerns and their hypocrisy, and critiquing new domestic arrangements where class-lines are uncomfortably blurred, such as the role of Miss Long in Bell and Connie's home. The novel refers often to the issue of class consciousness but ultimately disenchants all possible remedies to this problem that it entertains. Thomasina, the eldest Winstanley daughter, is an expert practitioner of the sort of gendered social forensics in which the novel is especially interested. The "passionless," level-headed Thomasina, like Linton's narrator, pays close attention to material class indicators and to various predictable elements of human behavior, applying her shrewd observations towards redeeming her family from genteel poverty and remaining strikingly indifferent to emotional appeals. Interestingly, although the narrator judges her harshly in several places for valuing material comforts over the "Love which alone makes our life divine" (397), the tone of the novel is more often than not aligned with Thomasina's perspective, which is one of fierce pragmatism tempered by only a modicum of compassion for the rebellious Perdita. Thomasina is no "New Woman": in some ways she represents the old guard more than her Grundyist mother does. Although she is certainly driven by a desire for financial security and the material comforts to which her high-born family was once accustomed, no one could accuse her of being a "Girl of the Period"³³; in fact, she is one of few women in the novel who do not pursue any pleasure or individual passions

³³ In her most famous essay, Linton characterizes the "Girl of the Period", a subset of New Woman, as having given herself over to "the love of pleasure and indifference to duty" (414).

outside of the conventions of family and home. (The devout Quaker Mrs. Crawford is another such figure.)

Just as Collins's Samuel Sarrazin in *The Evil Genius* occupies a specific, multivalent perspective that weds the judicious character of the English lawyer with an avuncular emotional side, Thomasina Winstanley similarly plays the part of a self-contradictory and flawed moral compass in the novel, caught as she is between her practical desire for the industrialist Mr. Brocklebank's wealth and her sisterly understanding of Perdita. Thomasina is praised on more than one occasion for her "just mind":

Her one passion ran parallel with her mother's—the rescue of the family from the slough of debt and impecuniosity into which it was plunged; and to this all personal considerations and affections were subordinate. As then Mr. Brocklebank so evidently favoured their democrat—and as he was the family trump-card for the present—it was not wise in mother to gird so continually at poor Perdita. And after all, though the girl was so dreadfully tiresome, she was not intentionally bad, and, if judiciously handled, might be made something of. The passionlessness of Thomasina's character had this good result—it left her reason absolutely free and unclouded; and a just mind sometimes supplements a cold heart. (116)

Despite this apparent narrative sanction of her clear-sightedness, Thomasina is "punished" perhaps more than any other character in *Rebel*: although she rescues her sister Eva from the ruinous plot of the caddish Viscomte de Bois-Duval and tries to get Mrs. Winstanley to sympathize with Perdita, the eldest Winstanley daughter is ultimately afforded a large dose of the sort of harsh indifference that characterizes the novel's approach to morally ambiguous characters. Thomasina's critical "flaw" amounts to prioritizing her family's financial rescue over

her own marital happiness and potentially that of her sisters. Yet while Mrs. Winstanley, Eva, and Perdita are all rescued from the troubles their respective character weaknesses get them into--immoderate spending, vain flirtation, and political zealotry, respectively--Thomasina alone is thrown to the wolves, in the form of an affectionless marriage to the rich but insufferable ironmaster Mr. Brocklebank. Far from being rewarded for resisting the temptations of romance and social transgression, the "passionless" Thomasina is the subject of the following speech from the narrator, delivered in the novel's distinctively ironic tone: "Poor Thomasina! There was no help for it. She had vowed herself to the service of a master who demands the living sacrifice of love and maidenhood in return for wealth and worldly position; and there was no question with her of drawing back or of refusing to obey" (376). The case of Thomasina represents one of several confusing moments in which the novel takes a step back from its criticism of the New Woman--a criticism which hinges greatly on the notion that the New Woman, if permitted to move through the world unchecked, will abjure heterosexual marriage and seek to subordinate men--and considers instead the perilous fate of the woman who is "the impersonation of gentleness and well-bred content" and makes the pursuit of the safe and the conventional her life's goal (390).

In a narrative so preoccupied on the one hand with belittling queer domestic configurations, and holding a magnifying glass to the seamy side of the superficially respectable British household on the other,³⁴ the cookie-cutter Gothic plot of a mad, unfaithful, asylum-bound wife standing in the way of the hero and heroine's love is both fantastical and jarring;

³⁴ The language of "visible seams", "seamy sides", and seamlessness is important in *The Rebel of the Family*, as much of the Winstanley's narrative about their class position is told through discussions of clothing; we are told, for example, that Thomasina is gifted with an ability to read millinery "with a quickness that was genius in its own way" (268).

however, Leslie Crawford's wife is the specific plot device Linton chooses to complicate the romance of Perdita and Leslie in *The Rebel of the Family*, despite the clashing class backgrounds of this pair of lovers being already rather full of potential for non-sensational dramatics. *The Rebel of the Family* cannot dispense with Sensation; the novel seemingly cannot tell Perdita's story without the accessories of a madwoman in an asylum or a melodramatic dual against a conniving Frenchman jerking its reader away from the harsh realism of a desperate family of women struggling to rescue themselves from debt and treating one another with casual cruelty and indifference. In addition to this contrasting dynamic between gothic vignette and domestic melodrama on one side and grim downwardly-mobile family narrative on the other, *The Rebel of the Family* also features its diverse supporting cast of odd women, the aforementioned widows, suffragettes, and wayward wives who model different domestic possibilities of varying levels of viability for Perdita. Read alongside Perdita's narrative of rebellion, seduction, and salvation, the stories of these five relatively awkward women characters tug at the domestic threads of the novel, and further the novel's exploration of women's liminality outside of gothic and "mission novel" conventions.

Bell Blount is certainly the loudest and largest-looming of the odd New Women in *The Rebel of the Family*, and, as such, this "walking rainbow" (48) has been the focus of much of the most recent scholarly attention to Linton's novel. For example, Deborah Meem and Nancy Fix Anderson both read Bell Blount as a fascinating and rare Victorian example of an explicitly queer character in fiction written by a woman, although it is worth noting that Linton's own language for her literary character is somewhat veiled in euphemism. Bell is an attention-seeking and power-hungry leader of the early feminist movement who, having abandoned her husband and children and run away to her hedonistic den on Prince Christian's Road, seduces

more vulnerable women and recruits them into the suffrage “Cause” that Linton dismisses as little more than Bell’s personality cult. Bell is condemned by the novel as a hypocrite who takes up a feminist mantle only in order to claim the freedom to smoke, drink, and womanize, and is thus revealed to have none of the truly “democratic” values that define Perdita. Perdita is perplexed by Bell throughout their relationship: the younger woman is simultaneously repulsed and intrigued by the former’s extreme familiarity and non-conformity. From the moment Bell Blount crosses paths with Perdita, the reader is made to appreciate the paradox of this person who is at once maladroit and confident, commanding and pathetic:

She was dressed with evident desire to be dressed well, and with as evident want of taste. Her artificially whitened hair floated about her face and down her back in a breezy, girlish, unconventional way, of itself sufficiently noticeable in a woman whose age was nearer fifty than forty, and she wore a kaleidoscopic arrangement of colours that was simply barbarous. She had the look of a dummy in a third-rate shop-window: but her dress was expensive and she was evidently a Somebody. (48-49)

Through this description of Bell’s wardrobe, Linton’s narrator shows the reader what Perdita will eventually realize: although she holds very different values than Mrs. Winstanley, Bell is similarly more surface than substance. Bell is “breezy”, “girlish”, “unconventional”, and “artificial”. She values pleasure and individuality over hard work and duty, and thus cannot offer the serious Perdita what she yearns for as she matures and further rebels against her family.

There is nonetheless a weird affinity between Bell and the middle Winstanley daughter. In a remark to her son about pedigree and respectability in reference to Perdita and her sisters’ background, Lady Kearney reminds Linton’s reader that “bishops are sometimes men of very queer social antecedents” (119), a comment which also highlights a small connection between

Bell and Perdita, the queer burls on the family trees of the morally upright. Perdita and Bell represent the inverse of Lady Kearney's statement: a clergyman may also produce very queer social relations. Like Perdita, Bell is the restless, impious relation of a member of the Church of England: her abandoned husband is a country vicar. Like Perdita, Bell has felt restless and suffocated while under the same roof as her "real" family:

doing her unexciting little duties to the poor of her husband's parish was sorry work for one whose special glory and delight lay on the platform, and who would open all careers, without exception to women as to men; but smoking cigarettes, drinking bitter beer for breakfast and B and S at all hours of the day, acting like a man and forgetting that she was a woman—that was an existence worth having, and to make others like herself an object worth pursuing! (247).

Because of their queer affinity with one another, the novel suggests that Bell's lifestyle could easily become Perdita's lifestyle; Perdita seeks purpose and identity, two things that Bell, whatever her flaws, clearly possesses in abundance. The lonely Perdita seeks to become an "us", to belong to a couple or a group in a way that she has never belonged to her blood relatives. Thus, after her whirlwind second encounter with Bell Blount, Perdita's stream of consciousness runs as follows:

Who were 'us?' To what noble band of secret Illuminati did this kindly-mannered, odd-looking woman belong? What grand acreage of thought and endeavour was about to be thrown open to her, rusting as she was in idleness, starving for want of an object in her life, eating out her heart for want of something to do and someone to love? (50, emphasis mine)

Here, in one of the novel's many elaborate, mixed images, Perdita is simultaneously rusting like a factory cog, farming fallow land, and devouring herself out of starvation. While she rusts, starves, and eats her own heart out, Bell seemingly belongs to a "grand acreage of thought and endeavor". Perdita's phrase, "Who were 'us?'" is only partially an expression of interest in Bell's profession and Cause: the knowledge that her new friend is "the Lady President of the West Hill Society for Women's Rights" does not adequately answer Perdita's question. Perdita senses that Bell might be able to offer her "something to do and someone to love" (50), and the latter does her best to encourage these hopes:

'I can give you all you want—work, love, freedom and an object. I want nothing in return but your love and that you will let me guide you till you know your ground and can guide yourself.'

[...]

Again that indistinct glimpse into the vast Unknown! Perdita's imagination burnt up into a sudden flame at the suggestive vagueness of her new friend's words. (51)

Perdita is enflamed by Bell's "suggestive vagueness," and by her promise of love and independence.

Following this fervent moment of abstract promise and seduction, the rest of Perdita's encounters with the Lady President are punishingly concrete, replete with repulsive physical details: Perdita is made to witness the disorder of the dirty, half-finished glasses of brandy and soda strewn across Bell's sitting room, and to smell her Spanish cigarettes (140). Linton's reviewers likewise reacted viscerally to Bell Blount when they considered her character. One contemporary reviewer declared "the masculine lady who inveigles Perdita into her friendship is a character too odious, and the scenes in which she

appears too repulsive, even for comment” (*The Academy*, 131). Another anonymous reviewer writes that the “scenes in which Bell Blount figures cannot possibly be pleasant, in the sense in which a pretty landscape is pleasant, and some of their features are markedly unpleasing” (*The Saturday Review*, 650-51). These two critics both discuss their disgust with Bell in terms of “scene”. An important part of how Bell functions in the novel relates to the way that she interrupts a comfortable scene, such as the Winstanleys’ social evening at the theatre that Bell spoils with her “disease” of a presence³⁵, or, conversely, how the messy, “queer” and “hybrid” scenery of Bell’s domestic life, complete with subjugated “wife” seems to contradict her utopian narrative of women living and working together harmoniously (271, 288).

It is significant that Bell’s political views are inextricably linked to her embodied presence in the novel³⁶. The “Champion of Her Sex” begins her campaign for Perdita’s loyalty with a surprise kiss that culminates in her first declaration of man-hatred in front of Perdita: “Mrs. Blount put her arms round the girl’s slender, loose, and stayless waist. ‘I knew what was in you!’ she said caressingly; and bending her face forward she kissed her. ‘That is my kiss of adoption,’ she added with fervor. ‘I claim you now as one of us!—the friend of woman and the enemy of man’” (52). The presence of gender and sexuality that we might today call “queer” functions in some ways similarly to vivisection in Collins’s

³⁵ Even the democratic Perdita, who professes to judge on character alone, admits to some social discomfort with the queer physical appearance of Bell Blount: “Oh mother I cannot give her up! I have no reason! She is very, very good, *though she has queer taste in dress*; and she was so kind to me in the summer while you were away!” (277, emphasis mine).

³⁶ There is, of course, also an intellectual dimension to Perdita’s gradual disillusionment with Bell: as the suffragette begins to teach her new recruit her shocking feminist ideology and eventually reveals her conservative position on labour, Leslie Crawford offers a more compelling argument for political moderation and class-consciousness.

Heart and Science: certain “unspeakable” things are heavily implied but never made explicit. Again, there is an awkward textual balance between displaying the “real” nuts and bolts of how a form of deviancy actually works domestically, and alluding to it as an unspeakable, almost Gothic, horror that represents a strange, quasi-sensational generic move. Linton’s narrator does not come out as so unambiguously disgusted with Bell’s implied lesbianism, though, as Collins’s narrator does with vivisection in *Heart and Science*. If Bell’s home is “queer” and “hybrid”, she is nonetheless at home with queerness. Although disgusted, the narrator admits that certain masculine qualities that would be homely on many women are “natural” and in fact the best fit for a person like Bell: “she had a certain flourish of masculinity about her that made a cigarette between her full hard lips infinitely more natural than a knitting-needle in her hand” (143). Bell is at home with female masculinity, and the novel’s curt, unenthusiastic concession that this is the case is ground-breaking.

Likewise, Linton’s narrator cannot quite turn its gaze from the masculine, unconventional women who seemingly embody the grotesque culmination of what the novel condemns as a Women’s Movement that is at best misguided and at worst a concerted attempt to recruit an army of man-haters by a set of leaders keen to usurp male power and prerogative for themselves. In a scene at one of Bell’s rallies, the narrator records the presence of various odd and unlikely women, pausing to linger on the shocking image of one woman “with close-cropped hair, a Tyrolese hat with a cock’s feather at the side, a shirtcollar and a shirt-front, a waistcoat and a short jacket. In everything outward she was like a man, save for whiskers—which, however, she simulated in a short kind of cheek-curl; and for moustaches—which were more than indicated” (185, 188). Indeed,

unlike the unilaterally repulsed anonymous reviewers of *The Rebel of the Family*, the novel itself does not quickly dismiss Bell's attractiveness or divinity, nor does it discount the possibility that these qualities might be shared by others such as the moustachioed woman in the Tyrolese hat:

Half attracted and half repelled—fascinated by the woman's mental power and revolted by something too vague to name yet too real to ignore—Bell Blount was to [Perdita] one of those living enigmas the true value of which we cannot determine—one of those sphinxes which are beast and human in one, divine for the one part and satanic for the other. (174)

This reference to an elusive quality of Bell's, that which is "too vague to name yet too real to ignore", is one of several ways that the novel describes her as a woman who is ostentatiously and showily queer. The fin-de-siècle critics who reviewed *The Rebel of the Family* want Bell to recede into the scenery of the novel's central family drama so that she can be ignored. Bell, however, is more spectacle than scenery: she is always staging her own scenes. Although Perdita and the narrative resist Bell's power—her efforts to choreograph dramatic scenes according to her own queer vision—they are nonetheless at certain moments seduced by it.

Linton uses the character of Connie Tracy to demonstrate what might happen to Perdita should she succumb to Bell Blount's sphinxlike advances and agree to live with her at Prince Christian's Road. The portrait Linton paints of Connie and Bell's relationship is somewhat complicated. Connie Tracy is a nervous, severe, and submissive person who waits on Bell hand and foot—despite the enigmatic presence of an actual servant, Miss Long. In addition to Bell's reaction to Leslie Crawford, in which her agitated resentment of her male rival causes her to

reveal her classist politics, Connie represents the other aspect of Bell's hypocrisy, as the narrator critiques Bell for embodying the same controlling dynamic with her "little wife" that she publically denounces in men:

[Connie] was everything that one woman could be to another—lady's maid, milliner, house-keeper, amanuensis, panegyrist in public, flatterer and slave in private; and Mrs. Blount thought the arrangement honourable to both as things were; when, had it been a husband to whom her friend had been devoted and on whom she had been dependent, it would have been a degrading institution and the sign of woman's shame and destitution. (56)

Connie's position can be understood as a precarious one: the narrator notes later on in the novel, after Bell has all but openly declared her intentions towards Perdita, that Connie is very much in the same boat as a gentleman's poor mistress. Should Bell take a shine to another woman, no marriage contract would protect her first "little wife":

Connie Tracy was as much Bell Blount's creature as if she had been a man's mistress to be discarded, without a pension, at pleasure and for sake of a new face. Bound to serve and to obey—to take no other "friend" from among her own sex, and to abjure the love of man as an unspeakable crime against herself, her vows, the Cause and her woman—"husband"—giving body and soul for maintenance in the present, and the hope of a permanent provision in the future—in what was her position different from that of any other woman whose temporary wifeness rests on nothing more solid than fancy, to be dissolved for nothing more serious than satiety? (173)

On the one hand, then, the novel uses Connie to drive home a point that is also well illustrated by the "queer" furnishings of the rowhouse: beneath all of her bombastic rhetoric, the good of

“Women’s Rights” in Bell’s eyes really begins and ends with her personal liberty to vote, drink, smoke, and remain personally unaccountable to anyone. On the other, though, Connie is still the visual aid Bell selects to sell Perdita on her brand of feminist revolution. Bell is most insistent that Perdita meet Connie and see the house that the two women have set up together at considerable personal cost, in defiance of a patriarchal world:

“I want you to know Connie. She is my little wife, as I call her, and you shall be our friend. [...] You cannot have any objection to come and see two working women of good character and a social position equal to your own!” she said lightly. “We are not men in disguise, I promise you; and we have none of the odious creatures about us! Had we, then indeed you might hesitate; and ought! As it is, I want to introduce you into a very safe kind of sheepfold—warranted well defended against wolves. Come!” (54).

When Perdita arrives with Bell at this “sheepfold”, she witnesses an incredible display of affection: “They kissed each other fondly; as friends who had been parted for as many months or years as they had been parted hours” (55). There is undeniably something viable about this arrangement, unequal though Bell and Connie’s partnership may be.

The idea of women living and working together (only, of course, in anticipation of later marrying men) appeals to Perdita as much as the unchartedness of such a domestic configuration frightens her:

She left, her head on fire and throbbing with the arguments and entreaties of “Bell Blount” as she preferred to be called, urging her to take her life in her own hands; to get some work to do that should make her independent of her mother; to leave home

and go into lodgings by herself—unless, indeed, which would be better, she could arrange to make one of the household here. (56-57)

The “queer, untidy, hybrid kind of place” (288) that forms Bell’s household might work for Perdita on some level, offering as it does an imperfect remedy to such dysfunctional parts of her home life as her mother’s disapproval of women’s work outside the home and her efforts to limit Perdita’s mobility out on the town in London. As Bell explains: “with us you will be entirely independent. You shall have a latch-key—we each have a latch-key; no one will interfere with you—no one will ask where you have been or what you have done. [...] In fact, you will live as free a life as a man; and there will be no one to question or spy after you” (141). For Perdita, whose activities have been limited severely by her overbearing mother and sisters, such physical autonomy is as seductive as it is terrifying.

In addition to the very physical “mess” of Bell and Connie’s home which gives rise to Perdita’s first doubts about the virtuousness of the Cause, there is also the social untidiness of this queer household comprised of two New Women and their mysterious servant to consider. Miss Long can in some ways also be read as a cautionary example for Perdita, although the latter’s reaction to the former is consistently one of guilty repulsion, so she never draws a connection between her own liminal class position as a highborn woman engaged to a druggist and that of the “odd-looking woman, neither servant nor lady, dressed in an alpaca down much betrimmed, without a cap, but with her hair arranged in an ugly and elaborate manner” who cohabitates with Bell Blount and Connie Tracy in an ambiguous capacity (55). The narrator of *The Rebel in the Family* suggests that Perdita’s resentment of Miss Long is at least partially justified by the servant’s offensive “air of condescension, of patronage which meant standing on the defensive, belonging to a person who holds herself superior to her work” (139). However, the

novel's position on Miss Long is one of its most slippery. Perdita reveals her own class-bias when she finds herself viscerally perturbed by the event of sharing tea with a servant:

Perdita was a democrat, impassioned for equality, furious against injustice; nevertheless, when this woman who was evidently the servant for all that she was called 'Miss,' sat down to tea with her new friend and herself, she did experience something that might be called a moral douche. It was quite right, she thought—quite! but how odd and how unpleasant! The old Adam of conventionality asserted itself against her better reason; and practice and theory warred together, as they often do in the lives of men. The oddity of the incident, however, soon came to an end; and, the tea being ended, Miss Long took out the tray and left the three ladies to themselves. (56)

It is unclear whether the novel approves or disapproves of Perdita's discomfort around Miss Long. The two scenes featuring Miss Long at Bell and Connie's residence might simply demonstrate that Bell (who in reference to Leslie Crawford declares that Perdita "ought not to make friends out of your class" (288)) is championing a revolution that does things by half-measures and thus leaves women like Miss Long and Connie stuck in an awkward position demonstrably worse than where they were without the hand of the Movement. Alternatively, such scenes may perhaps be more illustrative of how Perdita is, like the wealthy Bell and Connie, merely playing at a "democracy" she will not be able to truly access without transcending her discomfort with "low born" individuals like Miss Long and Leslie Crawford.

In support of this latter point, the novel witnesses the erstwhile "Rebel of the Family" finding herself in an unusual position indeed in the presence of Miss Long. Perdita finds herself approving of her mother's way of doing things over that of her new friends:

The bell was rung and Miss Long was asked to bring the tea in a certain apologetic manner that struck Perdita as both uncomfortable and peculiar. Her own mother was a martinet, in fact, but always well-bred to servants in manner. She never commanded, she always requested; but she did not speak as Connie Tracy did, as if half afraid and half ashamed to ask a favour of an equal. All the same, the tea was brought, and Mrs. Blount was served first by her 'little wife;' then Perdita; and then Miss Long, who sat down and drank her tea in company. (56)

Miss Long is one of Perdita's first few indicators, even before she is able to take in the slovenly bachelor pad décor of the rowhouse, that all is not as fair and fine in the Cause as Bell would have her believe. Miss Long's "air of condescension", the mark of her refusal to apologize for the discomfort her unconventional status in the household causes, is the catalyst for Perdita noticing what she describes as a great "unlikeness" between her concept of home and what lurks behind the door at Prince Christian's Road:

Never had the unlikeness between her own home and this struck her more forcibly than it did to-day. At West Hill Gardens every thing was laid out for show and kept in perfect order. Litter of any kind was a crime in Mrs. Winstanley's eyes, and work did not excuse snippets. Here in Prince Christian's Road beauty, arrangement, order, were conspicuous by their absence, and the room had a queer hybrid look, as if tenanted by men who owned some of the furniture of women and not all of their own. (139)

This paragraph lingering on the "unlikeness" between Perdita's home and the household into which Bell seeks to seduce her is yet another example of this novel's attention to scene and staging. Bell is forever ordering things on her own model, which is a conspicuously queer hybrid

of class indicators. She deliberately stages a living space in which she houses various upper-class luxuries of which Mrs. Winstanley would approve--expensive clothing and slippers, silver, tea, even a house servant--in a state of intentional disorder and alongside various universal bachelor-pad effects such as cigarettes and beer bottles that announce her freedom and privilege to her guests. Miss Long is a surly, free-thinking individual who rounds out Bell's stage illusion of a cozy den of liberated women; however, her presence is paid for by Bell, and her role in the household fluctuates according to Bell's whim.

In marrying Leslie, Perdita faces a similar kind of frustrated social mobility to that experienced by Miss Long. The Perdita who is attached to the Chemist and Druggist of High Street can no longer move in the same circles as her genteel mother and sisters, nor attend the weddings of the latter, although she retains a degree of contact with them designed by her "superior" family and in-laws to be at once apologetic and condescending. In fact, Mr. Brocklebank's bitter stance on Leslie and Perdita's class-boundary defying union is very similar to the tone that the narrator takes with regard to Miss Long's intermediate place in Bell and Connie's household. Mr. Brocklebank attempts to remedy the blurring of boundaries that has occurred through the engagement of his new sister-in-law to a druggist by maintaining in his "unfathomable contempt" that, although he might be able to regard the couple charitably from time to time, he "need not receive them" socially (396).

The Rebel in the Family ends on a strange, slightly astringent note. Financial recourse ultimately comes to the Winstanleys through an unlikely source: Leslie Crawford. Leslie, though a man of humble beginnings, is, it turns out, a canny businessman. He and Perdita are engaged, but must wait to marry until enough time has passed for Mrs. Crawford to believe her son has had a sufficient period to grieve the dead wife for whom, unbeknownst to the elderly Quaker

who raised him, he no longer feels any affection. Against the emotional backdrop of the prolific casual cruelty with which Mrs. Winstanley, Thomasina, and Eva treat Perdita for the bulk of the novel, affection is feigned by various otherwise upstanding characters in *The Rebel in the Family*. By the end of the novel, for example, Perdita does not seem to care that Leslie cannot feel any love for the small child in his care (who, though the product of his cousin-wife's adulterous affair, is still his blood relative and, in the world's eyes, his daughter) and instead continues to perform a feeble facsimile of paternal affection: "With strange want of spontaneousness, Leslie bent down and kissed the child's soft cheek. He was quite gentle and courteous, but he was neither loving nor playful, as a man generally is when he caresses his child; and he seemed troubled, almost annoyed, as if ill at ease" (157). There is no redemption for Leslie as a father, no suggestion that his love for Perdita has cured him of the heartache and resentment fostered by the betrayal of his late wife, nor any intimation that, now happily engaged, he will finally be able to feel for his nominal daughter Lily and integrate her into a happy home with Perdita. In this sense, Florence Crawford, having played the highly sensational part of the mad adulteress in the asylum, leaves a drearily realist legacy in this novel.

The sensational subplot of Eva and the French Viscomte likewise gives way to a dull, realist ending: after rescuing Eva from potential ruin, Thomasina ends the novel trapped in a performance of domestic affection for her new husband, Mr. Brocklehurst, a man "whom personally she loathed and intellectually despised" (261). By protecting her youngest sister's reputation and by marrying a wealthy man, Thomasina has fulfilled her perceived duties to her mother; however, she receives no other reward than financial security. Like Leslie with his child, she is destined for a family life soured by the presence of someone she cannot make herself love, but must pretend to do so in order to stage an acceptable domestic narrative. That two characters

motivated by such disparate sets of ideals meet such a similarly disenchanting ending is emblematic of the novel's overall refusal to offer fairy tale rewards to any moral imperative.

At a moment in the final scene of the novel when Perdita and Leslie are fondly recounting to one another the events that led to their engagement, Perdita blurts out: "Poor Bell Blount! I wonder what has become of her?" (397). Leslie laughs and does not share her curiosity: what matters to him is that Perdita has been saved from the clutches of the New Woman. However, that the novel offers this final, spare moment of lingering attention to the New Woman who is surely still at large, apprehended, and thriving on "the excitement of liberty", suggests that domestic happiness might not only be accessible to those who limit themselves to "the quiet restrictions" of a conventional home (397).

Conclusion

Read together, Collins's and Linton's novels demonstrate the development of the domestic plot within a hybrid new literary genre that draws partially from the conventions of sensation fiction, yet also anticipates a more realist mode of representing familial and domestic experience that deviates from the domestic narratives and ideologies prevalent in Victorian novels. *Heart and Science*, *The Evil Genius*, and *The Rebel of the Family* all showcase a conflicted narrative impulse that fluctuates between including and excluding the newly mobile middle-class woman from a range of family constructions. In their common exploration of the versions of domestic felicity accessible to the New Woman and her odd antecedents, these novels blend reworked elements of gothic and sensation fiction—between the three novels there are two asylum-bound wives, two amorous governesses, and two conniving Frenchmen—with a newly realist approach to the domestic upheaval that attends more to how a family might remake itself following a destabilizing event rather than to the scandalous elements of a divorce or separation.

The loose approach to characterization and curiously blasé inclusion of various established sensational tropes work together with the hodgepodge of old and new domestic tropes that feature in each of these three texts to create new domestic narratives that are open to exploring new possible configurations of family and household. Such an exploration of new possibilities does not necessarily entail a full-blown rejection of Victorian domestic convention: although *Heart and Science* concludes with two female characters unassimilated into any family arrangement typical for women in their social positions, both *The Evil Genius* and *The Rebel of the Family* reject the most extreme of domestic possibilities in their consideration of household formations that make sense for their wayward characters. However, the space each novel allots to

the experimenting with different domestic resolutions and family configurations represents a departure from earlier Victorian articulations of unconventional domesticity, particularly as it applies to middle-class women's mobility.

Collins's late domestic fiction employs a combination of sensational and realist modes to imagine new possibilities for familial happiness or, at least, functionality. In *Heart and Science*, the narrative ultimately partitions the family into unconventional units that adequately serve the interests of all characters: the Gallilee daughters are cared for by their father, step-brother and sister-in-law, alongside the unlikely addition of the governess; their mother remains alone in the family home, free to pursue her academic interests unmissed by and without missing her family. Although *The Evil Genius* reassembles its splintered biological family into a conventional arrangement, it does not dispel other possible parental figures or domestic configurations, and ends with the notion that another assemblage of parental figures might together stage a similarly happy family for Kitty Linley. Linton's *The Rebel in the Family* approaches domestic deviance and convention alike with a uniformly disenchanted outlook. Yet for all its stern disapprobation, this New Woman novel allows the irrepressible suffragette Bell Blount to stage a queer household and to live quite as happily on her own terms as Collins's emancipated Mrs. Gallilee. Addressing such pressing social problems of the fin-de-siècle as divorce, child-custody, and women's work outside of the home, *Heart and Science*, *The Evil Genius*, and *The Rebel of the Family* each combine the sensational and melodramatic tropes long-associated with the Victorian novel with a realist exploration of new domestic possibilities that anticipates later Modernist forays into psychological realism and feminist themes.

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