

More Readings on the 19th Century Cult of Domesticity: The Angel in the House

Separate Spheres

Steinbach, Susie L. *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain, 2nd Edition*. Routledge, 2006.

The central tenet of gender ideology in the early Victorian period was the "doctrine of separate spheres," which developed starting in about 1780 and reached its apex around 1850. The doctrine of separate spheres stated that men and women inhabited different roles in society. Men were essentially public creatures; women were private creatures. Men went out to do battle in the world of business and politics; their identities centered on being workers or professionals, husbands and father who were good providers. Women remained at home, in the domestic sphere, where they ran their households, raised their children, and cared for their husbands. Men were fundamentally independent; women were dependent. Men were by nature sexually predatory; women were sexually passionless. Men were socially and politically dominant; women were morally superior.

Central to the separate spheres ideology was domesticity, the celebration and idealization of the home. Home was a refuge from the cruelty and rapaciousness of the workplace and the marketplace. It was a morally elevated and fundamentally comforting space. Women were responsible for the home. They were expected to confine themselves to the home, and to make those homes inviting refuges from the rough and tumble world outside. Here they were expected to focus on childrearing, an expectation that intensified with the influence of evangelical religion as the century wore on. Women were seen as naturally maternal and were expected to embrace mothering. From the late eighteenth century, mothering became more time-consuming as women bore more children and saw more of them live into adulthood than ever before. For men, on the other hand, domesticity was a highly permeable barrier, across which they traveled constantly. Men were often out of the house all day, returning only in the evening; for many families the day officially ended, and the evening officially began, when father arrived home from work. Men made the domestic sphere possible through their work, but were rarely physically present in it. Yet men were intensely domestic. Most historians agree that men came to embrace domesticity during the first part of the Victorian period, most intensely about 1840 and 1870. While men did not clean house, shop for, prepare, or serve food, or take physical care of babies or young children, they were engaged with and identified with their families and their homes. While on paper men were public and not private, in practice they were deeply invested in home, even if they were not always present or doing daily chores.

Key to men's roles was "manliness." Codes of manliness were most highly articulated in upper-class and upper-middle-class homosocial spaces, particularly elite public schools like Rugby and Eton.¹ But manliness was not restricted to the comfortable classes. It was distinguished by several traits: an emphasis on independence, individualism, and personal integrity; a strong, even punishing work ethic; a restraint on physical aggression; and a perception of the home as a compensatory refuge and reward. "Character" was highly valued. "Manly"

and "straightforward" were terms of high praise, as was the concept of "manly simplicity." Different men might express different aspects of manliness differently-- in particular, "independence" meant

¹ What in Britain are called "public schools" are called "private schools" in the U.S.

different things to property-owners, salary-earners, and wage-earners-- but most men subscribed to its core values. They valued independence, which implied an ability to support and protect one's dependents as well as oneself without turning to others-- including the state, and after 1834 its dreaded workhouses-- for help. They valued their professional identities; work was conceptualized as masculine, and men conceptualized as workers. They believed that men were defined by their work and should spend long hours at work. They earned wages or salaries with which they supported their dependents. They did not see public displays of physical violence as necessary to virility. Violence, which had been pervasive in the eighteenth century, from village brawls to duels between aristocratic men, was valued and widely practiced only by the rough portions of the working class. The rise of manliness was an aspect of the relative fortunes of the upper class (declining) and the middle class (rising) as moral arbiters. In the eighteenth century, the most admirable form of masculinity had been "gentlemanly politeness," which was characterized by elite social standing, sociability, and ease of manner. The replacement of gentlemanly politeness with manliness was a sign that middle-class values were ascendant. Manliness was constructed around the life experiences of middle- and working-class men and privileged their experiences, in particular their commitment to hard work. Upper-class men were now seen as soft and lazy rather than as admirably at ease. In the eighteenth century gentlemanly leisure and non-vocational learning had been admirable; in the nineteenth they came to seem like idleness and uselessness.

Domesticity and sexual modesty were key to women's roles. Women were expected to be private rather than public and therefore oriented around domesticity and children. Women needed to demonstrate or perform all of these qualities, but could sometimes manipulate these roles to their own benefit. Women were, ideally, not economic creatures. They were expected not to work for wages or salaries, and once married could not legally own property, make contracts, or incur debts (though accounts with the grocer meant that the latter requirement was honored most often in the breach). Lacking economic independence, women were to remain dependent on men throughout their lives, moving seamlessly from the status of daughter to that of wife. Female effort, regardless of the skill required or the effort expended, was conceptualized as not "work" but something else-- usually housekeeping. Neither childrearing, nor cooking, nor cleaning, were categorized as work when they were done for one's own family, even though they took expertise and effort, and even though many women performed similar or identical tasks before marriage as domestic servants in the homes of others.

Victorians knew that men wanted sex, and women did not. Men were expected to desire sex with their wives. They were also expected to have sufficient sexual desire that they were driven to have pre- and sometimes extra-marital sex with prostitutes, who served a regrettable but necessary purpose in society by preventing men from being driven to masturbation or sex with other men.

Gendered Domesticity as a Function of Capitalism and Industrialization

Vaid, Sudesh. "Ideologies on Women in Nineteenth Century Britain, 1850s-70s." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 20, No. 43, 1985, pp. WS63-WS67.

The problematic had been created, as is commonly acknowledged, by capitalist development in Britain, and the accelerated process of industrialisation it underwent in the nineteenth century, leading to a social structure marked by the notion and reality of clearly distinct classes as contrasted to the previous hierarchies based on rank. Capitalist production and class formations produced important changes in the lives of women as of men. We need to take particular note of how the new production processes affected women.

The special character of the production process was division of labour, specialisation, and concentration of economic production outside the home. When capitalism entered the phase of industrialisation, the family, to a great extent, ceased to be a unit of economic production. Socially, what took place at this juncture, was a demarcation of the home from the work-place. Along with economic activity, education of the young also moved out from the parameters of the family as the formal school system took roots and spread throughout the country. So did medical care as health increasingly became a national concern and the medical profession specialised. In this process, the function of the family became simultaneously narrowed as well as specialised, both for the middle and the working-class. The family thus had to adjust to the specialised functions left for it, articulated in what seems to us the shibboleth of the Victorian era, the "home."

This specialisation devolving around the domestic, the moral, and the spiritual, had reverberations for the woman question. Feminist and anti-feminist ideologies were a response, on the one hand, to the specialisation of the family with its differing impact. on the middle and the working class, and on the other, to the class struggle, figuring in the Victorian debate as the "Condition of England" question. The class-struggle, though perceived by the Victorians themselves as dangerously close to precipitating England into revolutionary upheavals in the 1830s-40s (and later in the 1880s), took the form basically of agitations for constitutional reforms, higher wages, and better working conditions. Nevertheless, taking good warning from the revolutions on the Continent, Victorian thinkers concerned themselves with the question of social change in England, and this included not only the question of change but also of stability and order.

If the economic process brought about a specialised function to the home and family, the social struggles-- the Reform Bills, the Chartist, and the labour movements-- brought upon it the political function of providing a social unit of stability, which, multiplied into hundreds of thousand units, would hold the social fabric together. Concern about prostitution as well as the factory legislation and the co-operative movements in the later part of the century, were to a great extent due to the perception of the home as a functional unit in ensuring the political stability of the country. Also related to 'home' was the question of culture. The degradation of the human spirit through mechanised work, its vulgarisation through commercialisation and urban living, its loneliness in the battle for survival, had to be fought. And this function too devolved on the home.

The Victorian concern for home was thus not an idle piety or sentimentality, though it frequently degenerated to this level (witness Dickens), but a crucial axis around which many ideological battles were fought. Would home and family, and thereby society, suffer if women, the traditional home-makers, be allowed to gain political and legal privileges, education, and employment, or would it benefit? This necessarily involved an exposition and defining of the nature, role, and status of women within the perceived needs and aims of a society undergoing rapid changes and stresses.

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Gendered Domesticity as a Function of Middle-Class Respectability

Huggins, Mike J. "More Sinful Pleasures? Leisure, Respectability and the Male Middle Classes in Victorian England." *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2000, pp. 585-600.

In supporting mid-Victorian middle-class respectability the gender dimension played a crucial part. Respectability was predominately both constructed and maintained by women, and therefore in conflict both with some definitions of 'masculinity', and notions of double standards. Certainly men apparently led, publicised, recruited and organised churches, chapels and evangelical institutions, and certainly by the 1850s ministers had the confidence to act as moral and spiritual guides. But it was the women of the congregation who largely drew up the rules of propriety, decorum and morality, and

exercised control or influence over the behaviour of their children. women acted as ideological filters and transmitters, upheld local 'standards,' developed the appropriate language and exercised class-based judgements about associational life. They defined appropriate protocols for children's behaviour, or the acceptability or non-acceptability of acquaintances. They were significant players in managing and controlling class relationships, engaged in nuanced elaborations of social distinction that subtly defined and demarcated the boundaries and internal divisions of middle-class life. Women, especially mothers, ruled the private sphere,

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acting as gatekeepers, regulating family activities in a context of fear of local disapproval which determined the mores by which families lived in the middle-class neighbourhood.

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Middle-Class Anxiety about Gender Identity

Godfrey, Esther. "Jane Eyre, from Governess to Girl Bride." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 45, No. 4, 2005), pp. 853-871.

By the mid- 1840s, the increasing effects of industrialism capitalism coincided with the processes that undermined and reinstated gender identities. In *Women, Power, and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860*, Judith Lowder Newton examines the division of the nineteenth-century labor force, claiming that the rise of factory production led to the decline of home industry and therefore to the rise of "separate spheres" for masculine and feminine work. Yet, these gendered realms of labor were inextricably bound with class economics; rather than experiencing a dramatic division of a masculine workplace and feminine domesticity, working-class laborers witnessed an increased blurring of gender division by the mid-1840s. Agrarian notions of men's and women's work dissolved as both men and women were utilized in the growing industrial economy. Moreover, the corresponding polarization of male and female realms the middle class can be read as the result of a larger societal anxiety about gender identities that emerged from the instability of working-class gender roles in the new social framework.

For example, in 1843 Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna published a study on the British working class: *The Perils of the Nation: An Appeal to the Legislature, the Clergy, and the Higher and Middle Classes*. In the chapter regarding the mining poor, the unsteadiness of class-based gender identities becomes central to Tonna's study. She laments at length the sinful licentiousness that pervades the mine, this "scene of deepened gloom." Men, women, and children worked in mixed company in the mines, wearing little clothing because of the heat, and created an androgynous workplace where the notion of separate spheres and often gender differences themselves did not exist. As she describes, "The dress

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of these young labourers or eight years of age naked to the waist, and frequently worn to tatters Tonna writes repeatedly, almost obsessively, of the virtually "naked" bodies sweating and writhing in the dark tunnels of the mines and concludes, "No circumstances can possibly be conceived more inevitably tending to general profligacy; and that the most abandoned vice does reign in the mines, transforming the female character into something so depraved that their language and conduct is [sic]

described as being far worse than the men's, is but too well attested." The gender ambiguities of the miners clearly offended the understanding of all gender constructions in Tonna's world, and she warns her reader that the deviancies of the poor have widespread ramifications as these androgynous figures are reborn from the mines into society: "Indeed, the transfer to the surface, of a body of females so utterly hardened in the gross depravities of the mines, must, for a time, spread contamination on all sides."

This language highlights a middle-class fear that the androgyny of the working class was infectious. Tonna's simultaneous reluctance and willingness to talk about the lack of gender affiliation in mining work reveals the anxiety of the middle-class regarding gender multiplicities and the threat of gender disruption that formed a core component of the "perils" facing British society. For social reformers, the lack of gender division among the working class justified a cultural imperialism that attempted to inscribe morals and identities upon working-class bodies in exchange for physical necessities such as healthy food and air. Tonna's work certainly demonstrates a concern for the well-being of the working poor, but the need for reform coincides with explicitly middle-class interests and allows Tonna to manipulate the middle-class fear of the workers spreading the "contamination" of androgynous identities and their perceived sexual deviancies outside of their social contexts. Like Tonna, Friedrich Engels makes similar observations of class-based gender ambiguities in his 1845 *The Condition of the Working-Class in England: From Personal Observation and Authentic Sources*. Speaking here of factory labor, he writes of "this condition, which unsexes the man and takes from the woman all womanliness without being able to bestow upon the man true womanliness, or the woman true manliness-- this condition which degrades, in the most shameful way, both sexes, and, through them, Humanity." Again, the

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welfare of the poor is addressed in conjunction interests of the middle-class to reinscribe clear gender divisions, and Engels, typically an advocate for the working class, speaks for the bourgeoisie.

Perhaps even more threatening than Tonna's gender roles are not only ambiguously androgynous but also sexually reversed. Quoting from a letter from a working-class man, Engels describes a husband sitting by a fireside mending stockings with a bodkin while his wife works at the factory. Regretfully pining for the separation of spheres that his class position no longer affords, the male-wife complains to his friend, "she has been the man in the house and I the woman." Rousing fervor for social change, Engels prompts his middle-class audience's likely response: "Can any one imagine a more insane state of things than that described in this letter?" The "perilous" condition of Tonna's mineworkers and the "insane state" of Engels's factory family suggest an equally perilous and dangerous position for the middle-class, who, seeking to help the working class with basic economic concerns, also tried to resolve their own basic gender concerns. In reaction to this unsettling ambiguity regarding gender identities, middle-class Victorians began to push masculine and feminine constructions to extremes, reinforcing the divisions between male and female spheres of power and influence.

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Fashioning Social Norms through Popular Culture

Boardman, Kay. "The Ideology of Domesticity: The Regulation of the Household Economy in Victorian Women's Magazines." *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2000, pp. 150-164.

The ideology of domesticity had become so pervasive in the Victorian period that by the 1850s debates about domestic ideology permeated literary and visual representational practices at every level. The domestic ideal centred around the concept of separate spheres which inserted women into the domestic space and men into the public. Under these terms the only acceptable work for women was domestic, it was to take place in the home and it was woman's job to oversee the regulation of the household, both morally and economically. We cannot understand the ideology of domesticity without emphasizing the importance of the growth and expansion of the middle-class in the mid-nineteenth century and much recent criticism has focused on middle-class anxiety about the maintenance of separate spheres and specifically its relationship to class identity and hegemony. The ideology of domesticity was a feature of middle-class life and helped form a cohesive identity, the family represented a secure productive and reproductive unit. Whilst men accumulated money to support home and family, women regulated household consumption in activities ranging from spending surplus income to organising servants, and the ideal domestic woman used all her time to make the home run smoothly.

Very recent focus has been on the idea of the domestic woman, a figure traditionally on the periphery of history and criticism, but now reclaimed as a multi-faceted and powerful index of the complexities of Victorian articulations of class and gender identity. Elizabeth Langland (1995) argues that for middle-class women running the household was an exercise in class management, and the control of significant discursive practices such as domesticity meant that they disseminated particular types of knowledge and helped ensure middle-class hegemony. A whole range of Victorian writ-

ing, both imaginative and documentary, has been consulted in the pursuit of a detailed discussion of her significance, but, rather surprisingly, the women's magazine has been a neglected source of much interesting material on this topic. The powerful cultural currency of the ideology of domesticity was particularly evident in women's magazines, not least because these texts formed part of a specific woman-centred discourse that represented the many facets of femininity available both culturally and textually. The domestic woman was but one facet of these representations, but she was to become an important constituent part of a discursive formation that privileged the specifically middle-class articulation of class identity and class power. I am interested in exploring just how important the construction of a gendered and classed identity was to the domestic ideal and what part women's magazines played in this process.

At mid-century, the zenith of the ideology of domesticity, a substantial number of periodicals appeared in response to the vogue for the domestic; most were cheap and many of them were aimed at the artisan section of the working class. Those aimed primarily at women included titles such as *The Mother's Magazine*, *The Mother's Treasury*, *The British Mother's Magazine*, and *The British Workwoman*. These were cheap monthly evangelical magazines which were specifically targeted at working-class women, were usually financed by religious organisations, and were characterised by a heavy didactic and polemical style. Commercial magazines aimed at the middle-class woman also demonstrated an interest in the domestic and supported the ideology of domesticity in a number of complex ways. Two of the leading mid-Victorian commercial magazines, *The Ladies' Treasury* and *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, unlike their less commercially viable evangelical competitors, covered issues of domestic management alongside fashion articles and other general interest features. *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, as its title indicates, aimed to privilege the domestic sphere and pursued a traditional and rather conservative exploration of what it meant to be a woman at home, whereas a competitor like *The Lady's Own Paper* did not explicitly aim to celebrate the domestic in the same way but nevertheless showed an interest in the middle-class woman's role in the home. The feminist reform journals of the period also devoted space to coverage of domestic

issues, but the focus was primarily on middle-class woman's responsibility to her domestic staff or on the working conditions of maidservants, rather than on issues concerning the management of the home. Journals such as *The Englishwoman's Journal*, *The Alexandra Magazine*, and *Woman's World* offered their readers an alternative construction of middle-class femininity than other competitors targeted at the same social group; however, they maintained a residual grip on the ideology of domesticity as I will demonstrate.

What all these examples serve to illustrate is that each group, whether

from the evangelical, commercial, or feminist press, responded to the ideology of domesticity in different ways, but they all shared an interest in maintaining the division of work and home by inscribing woman as the centre of the home, the supreme domestic sphere. They also played a significant role in the adjustment of the household to the new consumer economy (Rendall 1987, 212) and in the construction of the ideal household as one with middle-class values. However, the ideology of domesticity was not always a narrow and restricting imposition upon women; neither was it accepted willingly: its currency lay somewhere between the two. [...]

Both commercial magazines and evangelical magazines for women published a significant amount of material on the question of the regulation of the household economy, and in pursuit of the topic they utilised a variety of mediums and genres. Fiction, in the form of both short stories and serialised stories, soon became a popular medium for addressing the issue, and much of the fiction in these two particular groups of magazines gave domesticity specific, and often detailed, focus.

The Ladies' Treasury provided an interesting range of fiction, from racy tales of adventure from America to rather didactic homilies on the virtues of hearth and home. 'Our Mothers. A Tale of Working-Day Life' provides a good illustration of the fictionalised representation of the domestic ideal typically found in this type of magazine. It is the story of Fanny Birnie and Maria Bond, two childhood acquaintances who grow up to be paragons of virtue and indolence respectively. In their girlhoods the seeds of their future selves are sown, and in the first part of the story the contrast between the domestic habits of their mothers shows the significance of a mother's influence. Maria's mother is over-indulgent 'with very bad domestic training [...]' (10), whereas Fanny's childhood home exudes domestic bliss: her mother is thrifty and well organised, making home an exemplary refuge from the strains of public life outside:

'Now we are so hungry, dear mother', cried Fanny, Fred, and Will Prior, as, rosy with health and spirits, they came bounding into the house: 'Here are father and Peter coming up the street'. Tea was soon ready-- the table-cloth was spotless, the lamp neatly trimmed, and the china and glass glittered again-- but the repast consisted alone of brown bread, fresh butter, roasted apples, tea and milk. The father always laid the cares of business aside when he came home. Home, he thought, was the place to be happy himself, and to make others so. (11)

Here the tablecloth, lamp, china, and food are linked metonymically to the domestic woman, and, as Nancy Armstrong (1987) argues, under her supervision these domestic objects represent a form of value which enhances the value of other people and of other things. The husband wants to return home from the world of work to a world which binds the family together through affection rather than economic need. Like her mother before her, Fanny, too, has a husband who is eager to return home at night as, due to her 'systematic management, everything moves on like clockwork' (11).

Another example of domestic fiction from *The Ladies' Treasury* is 'The Saturday Night's Sixpence'. The story centres around a self-made and self-taught man, Will Eliot, who teaches a young

working-class couple, Tom and Jane, the rudiments of the philosophy of self-help. Complaining about the habits of his peers he states,

They know no medium between a fast and a feast; and the larger portion of the workmen's wives, instead of buying a joint of good meat, cooking it properly, and eking it out through the week, provide simply from hand to mouth, feed their families on such wasteful viands as chops and steaks, consider that quantity is better than quality, and thus live through the first days of the week, whilst their ready money lasts, and are often more than pinched during the remainder. (139)

According to Will, 'working people have no greater enemies than themselves [...]' (140), and it is no accident that he addresses his advice to Jane, who as housekeeper is responsible for the household economy and the saving of the symbolic Saturday night's sixpence. The encouragement to emulate middle-class discipline and thrift drives home the point that women of both classes had the responsibility of making the home a secure haven. As a result of Will's expert advice, Tom and Jane become desirable models of thrift and self regulation. 'The Saturday Night's Sixpence', although aimed at a middle-class or aspiring middle-class audience, is not substantially different than the fiction found in cheap evangelical magazines and improving family weeklies. In didactic narratives of this type the representations of working-class women remain straddled between the noble and the feck less. The ideal working-class woman such as Jane is one who aspires to a middle-class definition of respectability by being completely dependent upon her master, and through careful regulation of the household economy manages to avoid the need to go out to work and stays on the right side of

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respectability. Although the domestic ideal was far harder for poorer people to maintain, it was nevertheless offered as a potent ideal as narratives such as this so clearly demonstrate (Zlotzky 1991). [...]

Articles and features on domestic economy consistently focused on the need to regulate the house, the family, and the servants in accordance with the domestic ideal. The home was a place of both work and leisure for middle-class women and as such was both a site of women's work and a denial of that work (Ballaster 1991, 89). Part of that denial was that working class women, as servants, performed many if not all of the domestic tasks in the middle-class home [...]. Connected to this also is that housework, when performed by the house wife herself, was to be rendered invisible, '[...] idleness was less the absence of work than a conspicuous labor of leisure' (McClintock 1995). Women's work in the home became almost a symbolic or representational task; the cult of domesticity demonstrated that the domestic middle-class woman's role had meaning because of what it represented rather than because of what she actually did. The commercial magazine's interest in the domestic economy was consistently apparent; the practical advice on management of the home remained as much an example of Langland's 'class management' as it did do the actual tasks associated with running the home. [...]

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For middle-class Victorians, the home and the management of it was central to their perceptions of themselves as a social group. The house hold was significant in terms of display, what it represented, and what those representations meant to the complex network of class allegiance, and hegemony remains a useful point to consider in exploration of the question of subject formation in

Victorian England. The middle-class domestic woman was as powerful in terms of what she represented as she was oppressed in terms of her social, political, and legal status, but her role was central to the ideological formation of the middle-class.

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Social Contexts for *The Angel in the House*

Freiwald, Bina. "Of Selfsame Desire: Patmore's *The Angel in the House*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1988, pp. 538-561.

Patmore's midcentury narrative poem engages with ideas that came into a particularly sharp focus in the 1840s, ideas vital to the debate over the Woman Question. Underlying the more immediately social and legalistic issues at stake in the controversy (issues such as women's right to vote, to enter institutions of higher education, and to dispose of their own property after marriage), the debate was fueled by more fundamental disagreements regarding the nature of "woman." Broadly sketched, the controversy could be seen as occupying a discursive spectrum ranging from an unequivocal affirmation of essential difference between the sexes, to an assertion of a deep and broad basis of likeness between men and women. Sufficient evidence exists to support a view of the former as the dominant (or hegemonic) position-- a position generally held and consistently argued in both fictional and nonfictional works of the period-- and of the latter as a direct challenge to the dominant perception of woman as "other" (or different). In the Victorian traditionalist conception of woman, to which Patmore's *Angel in the House* clearly subscribes, women inhabited a "separate sphere," a sheltered private sphere (sheltered by men against other men) that was kept at a distance from men's public domain (forever inaccessible to women). As Françoise Basch has demonstrated, "Even before Victoria's reign, reactionary conservatism, which at the turn of the century reacted alike against the freedom of aristocratic morals and the French revolution's threat of subversion, created a climate favourable to traditionalist conception of woman under the sway of man and enclosed within the family." The Victorian traditionalists thus promoted an idealization of woman even more disarming than any previously more misogynist concepts, for

When a woman is denied all capacity for creation, action and

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authority, her contribution in the masculine world becomes the emotional and moral guidance which are her vocations as wife and mother. On the basis of her physical and intellectual weakness, a theory of her power was constructed which commanded general assent perhaps just because of the paradox.

An exemplary articulation of the early-Victorian hegemonic position on "woman" can be found in a didactic text which enjoyed great popularity throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Thomas Gisborne's *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797). A closer scrutiny of Gisborne's text will help us develop the contextual framework necessary for a critical appreciation of the "ideal of Victorian womanhood" that was celebrated by Patmore and his critics. Gisborne, who, like Patmore, combines an authority grounded in religious precept with the more modern idiom of historical/sociological observation, asserts that differences in the physical constitution of the sexes-- differences instituted by divine intervention in accordance with "the tasks which the different sexes

were respectively destined to fulfil"-- have their parallel in "a corresponding plan of discrimination between mental powers and dispositions of the two sexes." Gisborne hastens to list these different mental powers and dispositions, and it soon transpires that while he reserves the entire scope of human endeavor for the one sex, very little is left for the other. To man, Gisborne argues, the Creator gave "the science of legislation, of jurisprudence, of political economy . . . etc," blessing him with a mind capable of close and comprehensive reasoning. Women, he contends, the Creator has endowed with "sprightliness and vivacity" and "quickness of perception," qualities that do not so much benefit their owners as are indispensable for the well-being of other men, being peculiarly "adapted to unbend the brow of the learned, to refresh the over-laboured faculties of the wise" (21-22). In Gisborne's scheme of things, then, power is joyfully relegated to the "naturally" (by divine law) superior, while, by a twist of logic (male) fantasy becomes divine precept as he thus reasons: "to protect weakness from the oppression of domineering superiority, those whom He has not qualified to contend, He has enabled to fascinate" (20). In Gisborne's "explication" of the divine precept, men are not only endowed with a natural "superiority" over the weak and vulnerable other sex but are also ensured continued gratification of their desires (pleasure) by this same superiority. While Gisborne denies women all other talents (with which to acquire power), he "benevolently" grants them the ability to please and "fascinate." He thus

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posits a self-perpetuating cycle by which the threat of men's "domineering superiority " forever compels women to "fascinate," that is, give pleasure to men. While man's *power* also entitles him to *pleasure* woman's *powerlessness*, dictates Gisborne, forever renders her the instrument of *another's pleasure*. The stability of this structure that passes itself off as eternal-natural, we note with Cixous, is contingent upon the subordination of the feminine to the masculine order in such a way that the subordination constitutes the very condition for the machinery's functioning. In total conformity with the traditionalist conception of woman, Patmore's philosophy of love preaches female subservience (to male power and desire) under the guise of celebrating sexual difference. In a later work, *Religio Poetae*, Patmore writes:

Now it is high time that it should be plainly declared that there are few more damnable heresies than the doctrine of the equality of man and woman. It strikes at the root of the material and spiritual prosperity and felicity of both, and vitiates the whole life of society in its source. (160)

Patmore's rhetoric easily slips from an affirmation of woman's difference ("inequality") to a declaration of her virtual nonexistence as a subject ("she is herself nothing"):

To maintain that man and woman are equals in intelligent action is just as absurd as it would be to maintain that the hand that throws a ball and the wall that casts it back are equal. The woman has an exquisite perception and power of admiring all the man can be or do. She is the "glory" of his prowess and nobility in war, statesmanship, arts, invention, and manners; and *she is able to fulfil this, her necessary and delightful function, just because she is herself nothing* in battle, policy, poetry, discovery, or original intellectual or moral force of any kind. The true happiness and dignity of woman are to be sought, not in her exaltation to the level of man, but in a full appreciation of her inferiority and in the voluntary honour which every manly nature instinctively pays to the weaker vessel. (162- 63; emphasis added)

Accordingly, Patmore greatly dislikes "emancipated women" who forfeit their "womanly" nature-- who choose "likeness" over "difference"-- and charges them with emancipation from the Christian faith.

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Women as Moral Examples

Jordan, Ellen. "'Making Good Wives and Mothers'? The Transformation of Middle-Class Girls' Education in Nineteenth-Century Britain." *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 1991, pp. 439-462.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the emergence of industrial capitalism, the separation of work and home that this necessitated, and the development of a new gender ideology, now usually called the "domestic ideology," which legitimated the new relations between the sexes caused by the separation of work and home. Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have traced the development of the domestic ideology from its early expression in the works of William Cowper and Hannah More, where it was argued that quiet retirement in the home was the best way to live out a Christian life, to its transformation in the 1840s into a belief that men and women should occupy "separate spheres," that women's sphere was the home and men's sphere the world, and that women's lives should be dedicated to serving the needs of their husbands and children."

Femininity, as defined by the domestic ideology, did not imply sexuality. In fact, female sexuality was regarded as an aberration, and purity, modesty, and "shamefastness" were seen as the end to which the socialization of girls should be directed. Even male sexuality was regarded as something to be deplored and repressed. A "feminine" woman was not, therefore, defined as the object of a man's desire, but rather seen as having a supportive function in establishing his identity as subject-- what Frances Power Cobbe was to call the theory of "Woman as an Adjective." By the 1860s it could be asserted that woman was, in the words of Margaret Oliphant, man's "inferior-- that might or might not be true-- but his servant, yes-- his minister, the natural second, the born solace

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and consolation," who would "serve him though all the world interfere to prevent her"; and in the words of Charlotte M. Yonge, "one made to learn; to lean; to admire; to support; to enhance every joy; to soften every sorrow of the object of her devotion." A woman expressed her femininity through her self-denying, supportive relationship, as daughter, sister, wife, or mother, to some man.'

Yet in its denial of autonomy, this view of women as existing primarily to serve men created an uneasiness in intellectual, religious women throughout the nineteenth century. It conflicted with what their religion laid down as their highest duty of all: serving God and fitting their souls for heaven. Women with intellectual leanings began to argue that women, as well as men, should be morally autonomous, able to make their own moral judgments. Only a tiny group of protofeminists, mostly connected, like Mary Wollstonecraft, to the broader radical movements, extended this demand to political and economic autonomy, but there was a considerably larger group of upper-middle-class women prepared to criticize the position, and particularly the education, of women from the standpoint of the need to develop their full spiritual potential. [...]

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As the domestic ideology gained a firmer hold, this demand for moral autonomy began to seem at odds with the belief that a woman should be a "natural second" dependent on her husband for advice and direction. Yet advocates of intellectual education for women found a way to justify their demands by linking them to the domestic ideology's definition of femininity as living in a supportive relationship to some man. They began to argue that intellectual education made women better wives and moth-

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ers. During the first half of the nineteenth century a moral dimension was added to the conception of separate spheres: women's primary function was to make of the home a holy sanctum where, under the influence of their purity and piety, men's moral nature would be refreshed and refurbished.' The bluestockings' identification of intellectual education with moral excellence thus made possible the development of a rather neat syllogism justifying intellectual education in terms of the domestic ideology: the main role of wives and mothers was to influence their husbands and children for good. But only an intellectual education made a woman truly moral. Therefore an intellectual education made women better wives and mothers.

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Working Class Women's Shift to Non-Salaried Domestic Work over the Course of the 19th Century

Bourke, Joanna. "Housewifery in Working-Class England 1860-1914." *Past & Present*, No. 143, 1994, pp. 167-197.

We all know that there are serious problems in attempting to quantify the movement of married women in and out of the paid labour force. Census statistics are inadequate and most certainly understate the number of women who were employed. However, whether we base our conclusions on census statistics or on other

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sources, most historians agree that the access of married women of all classes to paid employment was increasingly restricted. In 1911, 90 per cent of wives were not engaged in paid employment, compared with only one-quarter in 1851. With the collapse of the home-employment system, and the development and expansion of industrial, commercial and factory systems outside the home, working-class married women were hardest hit. Although most such women continued to spend some time engaged in paid employment (usually at the lower echelons of the market and frequently on a part-time or casual basis), they increasingly came to define themselves primarily as housewives. Furthermore many seemed pleased to do so. [...]

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First, if full-time housewifery entailed a reduction in the power of the individual woman, why did so many working-class women from the end of the nineteenth century wholeheartedly embrace this new identity? What is striking is the fact that many women thought that housewifery was a good--

even the best-- option. The intensification of the two spheres of labour was acceptable to women in this period because it was seen as a better and less risky way of increasing their power over their own lives and lives of their families. This is not to argue that the search for better life was what motivated women moving into full-time housewifery; rather that it was not against their interests to make the move. There was a price to pay for the movement; but the benefits were perceived as being cheap at the price.

Secondly, there were serious risks involved in devoting one's time to unwaged housework. The family is a confrontational unit; husbands may beat up wives; women may get a smaller share the household goods. By not earning a wage, women were more vulnerable to the power of wage-earners within the home. Housewives tackled these risks directly. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, working-class housewives attempted to cosolid-

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ate their power within the home. They did this by adopting and adapting a language of domesticity and by domestic education. Married women in working-class homes attempted to recreate the world in their own image. Their actions involved a consciousness of themselves as a group with shared values and special needs. The actions of these housewives to improve their status from within the domestic sphere have been ignored or belittled by historians for a number of reasons. To begin with, there was no revolutionary change. Then, their actions do not coincide with the class-based analyses many historians find congenial. Furthermore historians do not generally share the values of the housewives they are studying, and they have trouble taking these values seriously. We need to ask what is the meaning of house-work to housewives; they did not disparage it as we do.

Thirdly, these quiet, individualist and educational attempts to create a powerful, comfortable space for women-as-housewives were not unambiguously successful. Married working-class women forced to earn a wage because of the collapse of household finances entered the employment market from a worse position. Many husbands continued to act in oppressive, domineering ways. Working-class housewives maintained their neighbourhood-based consciousness of their group as a group and actively resisted male power over them. Strategies for asserting one's power within the household ranged from passive methods of subversion to physical violence. Whatever the strategy employed, the site of conflict was the home: the kitchen, the bedroom. Domestic production is intimate; it is not surprising that housewives should want to protest in personal, individualized ways. This said, the striking feature about the resistance of housewives was the degree to which the conflict was arranged around a set of values shared by women-as-housewives and either opposed or ignored by men-as-"breadwinners". [...]

By the end of the nineteenth century, many working-class women had come to view full-time housewifery as an ideal, and one

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which was increasingly attainable. Most working-class married women did not want paid employment. While it is true that alternatives to housework were often unattractive and that working for an exacting mistress or a grumpy overlord may not confer a good deal of self-esteem on any worker, women were not moved to toil within the home as a result of reading a stirring tract on blissful domesticity. There were advantages and disadvantages in both unwaged domestic labour and paid employment; and many women decided that paid employment was worse.

Working-class women gave many reasons for their reluctance to enter the employment market. Employment doubled their workload. Mrs Hook, the wife of a carter in Sanderstead (Surrey) in

the 1860s, explained, "It never answers for a woman to go out to work; if you earn 1s. you lose 1s. 6d. I used to go to work, and then had to sit up at nights to wash". Furthermore employment could be more expensive than not being employed. Besides paying for wear and tear on clothing and shoes, child-care costs had to be considered. [...]

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The "free" child-care provided by older children was often unacceptable. The fear that one's child would be injured through carelessness or ignorance was prevalent, and this fear grew with increased investment in children. [...] When all the costs of wives and mothers working for money were calculated, it was frequently decided that female labour lowered the household's standard of living. Poor women in a number of different counties repeated the saying, "Between the woman that works and the woman that doesn't there is only 6d. to choose at the year's end, and she that stays at home has it". [...]

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Working Class Women Pushed Out of the Labor Market

Secombe, Wally. "Patriarchy Stabilized: The Construction of the Male Breadwinner Wage Norm in Nineteenth-Century Britain." *Social History*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1986, pp. 53-76.

With the exception then of the skilled trades, other (initially rural) streams in the great proletarian conflux bore a deeply ingrained sense of family members as contributors to a joint production unit. The status of men as househeads did not rest on the attainment and control of a family wage. Consequently, the initial response of pre-industrial proletarians to women working for wages was over-whelmingly positive. It was widely remarked that no working man would marry a woman who was economically dependent (Pinchbeck, 1930, 1-2; Hewitt, 1958, 3). [...]

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Here then was a conception of the family wage economy and an attitude to women's employment, strongly articulated by proletarians of both sexes in the early nineteenth century, which stands diametrically opposed to the dominant conception of the male breadwinner wage and vigorous opposition to women's employment, which came to prevail later in the century. How can we account for this reversal?

The traditional conception of a woman working for pay was predicated on her subordinate but essential place as a productive member of a *family* unit. If she could earn money at home, this conception was preserved. If she worked *outside* her home, she must work as a member of a *family* labour team (as women often did in fields, mines and textile factories) in order to conserve the traditional sense of a woman's place.

However, as family hiring declined and women found it increasingly difficult to obtain these kinds of employment, a rising portion of those that did work for pay were hired as individuals. They worked outside their homes, competed with men on an open labour market, and took home their own wages. *These* practices were beyond the bounds of patriarchal stricture. They conferred on women, if not yet in reality then at least potentially, a public presence and economic independence which flouted all traditional norms of women's place in the family households of their fathers and husbands. When

these employment opportunities began to predominate, and the more traditional types declined, strong sentiment arose against wage labour for women in general.

The critics had several complaints which registered alarm at the dissipation of patriarchal power and paternalist protection (Hewitt, 1958, 48-6i; Humphries, 1981, i6-i8). Married women in particular were extremely vulnerable to the accusation that they had deserted their duties at home and jeopardized the well-being of their children to 'steal men's jobs' in industry. But working girls (as single women were called) were also targeted: how could they grow up to be competent wives and mothers without essential domestic socialization at their

mothers' sides or in the households of their social superiors as servants? It was the frequent refrain of many, especially Factory Act commissioners, that women were toiling at rough work in hot sweaty environments in close physical proximity to unrelated men; they were being unsexed and morally degraded in the process. Yet working women had traditionally done rough, dirty and often dangerous work at home; no one had worried about their delicacy or morality there. The danger these commentators perceived did not arise from the work itself, but from the new social relations within which it was being done. Increasingly, factory employment took women away from the protection of their fathers and husbands, fostering extra-familial sex-mixing in anonymous urban settings. Many were offended by the dress and cheeky demeanour of proletarian women, not only at work but getting to and from work, and in their leisure-time as well. What would become of factory girls who used their wages to live away from home in rented accommodation of their own choosing, cohabiting with one another in rough neighbourhoods and commercial districts in rooming houses which were not adequately supervised? Who could say where all this might lead? Yet it was difficult to preserve a firmly paternalist conception of women's wages when working-class men were enjoying their new-found prerogative to spend a part of their wages as they wished in their own leisure time. In sum, the transition from a joint to an individual wage, together with the widespread employment of women outside their homes, was profoundly unsettling to patriarchal norms.