

The Sensational Victorian Nursery: Mrs Henry Wood's Parenting Advice
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PARENTING ADVICE HAS BECOME a booming industry as well as probably one of the most contested discourses. Its proliferation and continued diversification are often considered a particularly contemporary problem, yet the virulent marketing of “expert” advice on childrearing has its roots as much in the nineteenth-century publishing industry as in the overlapping Victorian cults of domesticity, maternity, and childhood. The nineteenth century saw an explosion of advice literature on the physical, moral, and intellectual education of infants and young children.¹ Childrearing, or parenting,² rapidly created a niche market, producing specialised manuals and magazines for mothers, the precursors of the current parenting advice literature. As Victorian novelists tapped into the anxieties that these publications both addressed and further fostered, they laid bare the pressure that the childrearing discourses were exerting on mothers, yet popular authors also quickly realised how their own writing offered a vehicle for specific conceptualisations of motherhood. Harrowing scenes were used to dramatise the effects of different parenting practices; protagonists’ quarrels about such practices served both as characterisation devices and as comments on ideological conflicts between different concepts of childrearing. In the most self-consciously insightful moments, the growing supply of information came itself under criticism. Victorian novelists actively participated in shaping and circulating parenting advice in print. The sensationalised nursery fascinatingly expressed the anxieties surrounding childrearing and showed how versatile the interpellation of mothering instructions in fiction could be.

In her highly influential advice book *The Mothers of England: Their Influence and Responsibility* (1843), Sarah Ellis describes the new interest in mothering – and in instructions on mothering – in the nineteenth century. Ellis speaks of “maternal influence” as the subject “common to all writers” on childrearing, a subject apparently “admitting of no question” (56). These writers attempt to counter what Ellis describes as a “strange anomaly presented by human life”: mothers who find time for a social call, but not for the nursery. Evoking negative examples, Ellis defines what the main interest of the middle-class mother ought to be:

[T]here are women, and kind and well-meaning women too, who seem not to be aware that the sacred name of mother entails upon them an amount of responsibility proportioned to the influence which it places in their hands. There are mothers, and not a few, who appear to consider themselves called upon to do anything, rather than attend to the training of their children; who find time for morning calls, when they have none for the nursery or the schoolroom; and even make the dresses of their infants, rather than answer questions dictated by their opening minds. (57)

Writing in the early forties, Ellis elevates the mother’s moral responsibilities above practical household matters. For Ellis, the mother’s main task is to open minds and direct them. Practical management (including the making of baby clothes) is subordinated to this moral emphasis. The second half of the nineteenth century, however, saw a significant and seldom discussed shift.

Increasingly, advice manuals began to urge a more hands-on involvement in everyday childcare procedures. By the mid-Victorian period, it had become the mainstream argument that a good mother has her children “with her a great deal” during the day, seizing random opportunities to form their minds, while attending to their practical needs at the same time. As it was pointedly put in the section on “The Rearing and Management of Children” in *Cassell’s Household Guide* (1869), “a mother should seize every occasion of turning it to good account.” While stressing the importance of strengthening a mother’s “natural influence” from the earliest moments, this guide of the late 1860s argues against dividing mothering into moral and physical aspects: “There is not a single duty which a mother discharges towards her babe which may not be rendered the medium of conveying the highest principles of morality. In feeding, washing, dressing, and amusing an infant, so many lessons may be taught” (2: 38). Influenced by medical manuals as well as by increasingly systematic household books (such as *Cassell’s*), newly specialised “mother’s guides” stressed the equal importance of the physical and the emotional aspects of everyday mothering.³

The issues that were mainly of concern for nineteenth-century writers on parenting largely reflected the genres from which this newly specialised discourse emerged: Clinically precise instructions on medical issues were frequently juxtaposed with more traditional reminders of a mother’s lasting moral influence. When Ellis remarks, in a brief section on “The General Duties of A Mother,” that she might have said “perhaps too little in relation to the bodily health of children,” she revealingly suggests that some attention to this aspect might be necessary in order to prevent an “unhealthy state both of mind and body,” yet she then proceeds to stress in particular the moral implications of any overindulgence (226). Conversely, Andrew Combe’s medical manual *Treatise on the Physiological and Moral Management of Infancy: Being A Practical Exposition of the Principles of Infant Training, for the Use of Parents* (1846), for example, might add a final chapter containing “practical remarks on the moral management of infancy” (144), yet the bulk of the book details almost exclusively the physical aspects of pregnancy, labour, the care of a newborn, weaning, and teething. Symptomatically, however, even medical writers emphasise the “[e]arly influence of the mother” and how moral training “ought to begin almost at birth” (144, 124). In the course of the century, we shall see, advice writing on mothering drew together clinical expert knowledge, evangelical guides, household books, and anecdotal or fictitious cautionary tales to produce the newly proliferating genre of early parenting publications. As practical aspects – ranging from breastfeeding and newly patented baby food to the question of how to “teach” an infant to walk – increasingly predominated childrearing instructions, a mother’s informed decisions on these issues came to be regarded as an essential part of her moral responsibility towards her infant.⁴

Mrs Henry (Ellen) Wood both replicated and participated in the changing childrearing advice of the time. Promoting both standard and new ideas, she increasingly proposed her own interpretations. The growing emphasis on the importance of practical, everyday aspects of childcare

provided Wood with suitable material for her sensational narratives of mundane middle-class domesticity, while she could express her own ideas about what she considered the right kind of mothering. She took up several aspects of the new practical parenting advice, including in particular children's diet and medicine, daily activities, and the prevention of household accidents, emphatically stressing the mother's moral responsibility to manage these practical aspects as part and parcel of the children's "training." In creating sensation fiction that focuses on this responsibility, Wood revealingly capitalised on a new uncertainty about childrearing, expressing and ironically further fuelling mothers' deepest anxieties.

Wood, in fact, tended to take a specific stance towards the debated issues, while exploiting the full narrative potential of possible disasters. In her early fiction she embedded cautionary tales about everyday household and childcare matters amidst the most lurid descriptions of bloodshed, premeditated crime, and detective work. Increasingly, however, she welded these two narrative agendas together, rendering debates about childrearing central to the crimes she described. The resulting narratives showcase both how easily representations of misguided mothering could be turned into a staple of sensation fiction and, conversely, how parenting advice – through the format of the cautionary tale – encouraged sensationalist representative strategies. In reading Wood's depictions of mothering in the context of nineteenth-century discourses on changing childrearing practices as the subject of professional manuals, I aim to show how Victorian parenting publications at once traded on and cultivated mothers' sense of unease. Writers of popular fiction could expose these discourses, but frequently they also addressed specific controversies in order to promulgate a particular agenda of their own.

The Sensational Victorian Nursery: Wood's Parenting Advice

WOOD'S NOVELS PRESENT a revealing test case of the popular culture surrounding changing parenting practices in Victorian Britain. One of the most prolific women writers in the second half of the century, Wood is now considered one of "the big three" (Phegley 91) of the Victorian sensation novelists and is compared with Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon. What these three authors shared was their intense popularity and large sales figures as well as common elements of what has come to be known as literary sensationalism.⁵ Otherwise, their juxtaposition vividly shows just how different such fiction could be. In its combination of controversial material and the evocation of sensation in the reader, the genre could accommodate a vast range of agendas, ideologies, and styles. Wood may still be best remembered for her representation of transgressive desire and its consequences in her bestselling novel *East Lynne* (1861), yet critical discussion has chiefly focused on how her "conservatism" (Mangham 249), the way she sets herself up "as a guardian of bourgeois propriety" (Maunder 69), either disrupts or is expressed through her sensationalism. In his seminal study of children in nineteenth-century fiction, Peter Coveney condemns the death of the heroine's

young son in *East Lynne* – an intensely popular scene that was set to music as well as performed in various forms on stage⁶ – as “the one last, careful, twist of the knife of the sadist masquerading as moralist” (136). More recently, some attention has been accorded to the representation of maternity in the novel (Shuttleworth, “Demonic” 44-49; Mangham 249-50), but Wood’s complex participation in Victorian childrearing debates has hitherto been elided.

Wood’s interest in and sensationalisation of parenting practices, however, explain the simultaneity of didacticism and tantalising transgressions in her novels that has continued to puzzle critics. How she managed to combine “the conventions of popular melodrama and sentimental domestic fiction” (Pykett, *Sensation* 67), or as Beth Palmer has suggested, the “two seemingly conflicting discourses of sensationalism and pious Christianity” (*Women’s* 16), has been central to discussions of Wood’s writing style. Andrew Mangham speaks of a “chameleonic quality” (245), and Lyn Pykett has evoked Bakhtin’s concept of “dialogic relation” to suggest that the result is “neither a mixing together of the two nor an assimilation of the one by the other” (*Sensation* 67). Wood’s adaptability was probably her greatest selling point (Riley 168), although some readers quickly saw through her “double bait” (Liggins and Maunder 151) and condemned her adoption of religious rhetoric as mere performance (Palmer, *Women’s* 16). Her fellow novelist Charlotte Riddell maintained that “Mrs Wood is simply a brute; she throws in bits of religion to slip her fodder down the public throat” (qtd. in Elwin 241). A 1914 *Times* article entitled “The Secret of Mrs Henry Wood” remarked that her novels were “permissible to read on a Sunday afternoon” because “there was generally, in the last page some text of scripture to which the young man or woman absorbed in the intrigue could triumphantly draw the attention of the Sabbatarian censor” (11). The “pious moralism” might therefore be “little more than window-dressing, offering a respectable cover to the pleasures that were to be had in reading of transgressive women” (Flint 228). In a recent study of Wood’s editorship of the *Argosy*, Palmer made the intriguing suggestion that Wood was appropriating sensational strategies in order to make “the point that sensation fiction could be conservative and Christian, as well as risqué and transgressive” (“Dangerous” 187). Wood was developing an alternative “model of feeling” that was premised on “the evangelical elevation of the heart over the mind in their reading habits,” and which therefore appeared to justify Wood’s own writing style: just as evangelicalism argued that faith had to be felt, the participatory experience of emotion in Wood’s magazine and novels set up emotion as the main criteria for literary value (191).

This conceptual framework of judging a work of fiction according to the emotions it evokes and how it channels them to affect behaviour offers an insightful explanation of what happens in Wood’s sensationalisation of mothering. This sensationalisation was a two-way process. Controversies about childrearing and the mother’s responsibility presented a suitable source of melodrama. Simultaneously, Wood adapted sensational strategies to aid her in the discussion of changing childcare practices at a time when middle-class mothers were increasingly urged to spend

more time and thought on their babies' practical needs. In embedding advice in fictional scenarios, Wood mixed startling effects, heavy-handed moralising, and a markedly self-congratulatory representation of what she deemed the right behaviour. Pykett has diagnosed Wood's manipulation of her narratorial addresses, in which the "intrusive, moralising and gossipy feminine narrator" creates "a shared experience and a community of values with her reader" (*Improper* 115). The "much-noted moralising of the narrator" expresses attitudes that this implied reader is understood to share, while condemning any alternative ideas on a given subject (118-19).

This rhetorical strategy of conveying advice is boosted by the inclusion of shocking scenarios that mirror the strategies of cautionary tales in the parenting literature of the time. Wood participates in this discourse, but her fictional domestic disasters increasingly function both as childrearing advice and murder mysteries. Detective plots contain practical warnings about common household accidents. Even as seeming accidents may cover up crime, the narratives work as cautionary tales dealing with everyday domesticity. At times, especially in Wood's earlier novels, the interpolated lectures might interrupt the most melodramatic moments and hence just appear to distract from a central mystery, although they can also operate as a way to punish a transgressive character. In *East Lynne*, for example, the divorced Lady Isabel, working incognito as her own children's governess, is lectured by her husband's new wife about how to deal with her seemingly motherless charges. The lengthy lecture on the right "system" of training children effectively tortures the anti-heroine:

"I hold an opinion . . . that too many mothers pursue a mistaken system in the management of their family. . . . They are never happy but when with their children: they must be in the nursery; or, the children in the drawing-room. They wash them, dress them, feed them; rendering themselves slaves, and the nurse's office a sinecure. The children are noisy, troublesome, cross; all children will be so; and the mother's temper gets soured. . . . The children run wild; the husband is sick of it, and seeks peace and solace elsewhere. . . . I consider it a most mistaken and pernicious system. . . . A child should never hear aught from its mother's lips but persuasive gentleness; and this becomes impossible, if she is very much with her children."

Lady Isabel silently assented. Mrs Carlyle's views were correct. (407; ch. 40)

Wood evokes several controversies – on mothers' hands-on involvement in childcare, on the division of responsibilities between governesses, nurses, and mothers, and on the rival claims of husband and children – but the very effectiveness of the stepmother's ironically placed harangue as a way to pain the biological mother undercuts the advice. The pervasive irony has rendered this passage a much-discussed illustration of Wood's ambiguity towards her transgressive anti-heroine. As Sally Shuttleworth points out, this scene in *East Lynne* "is by no means clear cut in its ideological allegiances" ("Demonic" 48), and Cecilia Wadsö Lecaros further suggests that "the new Mrs Carlyle . . . reacts against the overwhelming goodness of the governess" (47).⁷ The second Mrs Carlyle notably commences her speech by acknowledging that she "never was fond of being troubled with children" (406), a sleight-of-hand dismissal of motherhood that is in sharp contrast to Isabel's repeatedly evoked "heart-sickness" for the children "that she had abandoned . . . to be trained by strangers," a

“longing [that] had become intense” (390; ch. 39). The text generates sympathy for the mother who now longs to be “very much with her children,” while it is additionally ironic that she spends more time with them as their governess, unable to declare herself to be their mother. In the course of her writing career, Wood perfected her narrative strategies, in particular the use of the intrusive, chatty narrator. Most importantly, she moved from interpolating to integrating childrearing advice into her fiction, and she intriguingly did so by rewriting her own novels, including *East Lynne*. While it might not be surprising that she tended to recur to plots that had proven successful – admittedly creating some pot-boilers in the process – mothering as a theme and a source of sensation became significantly more central in the process.

Wood was genuinely interested in childrearing and used her fiction as a vehicle to express her opinions. On the one hand, she may even be seen to ride on her success as a bestselling novelist in order to present her own childrearing concepts. On the other hand, she thereby thoroughly sensationalised the most intimate and putatively most protected parts of the Victorian middle-class household. In sensationalising the nursery, Wood built on parents’ fears about their children’s safety by scripting apparent accidents as murder. In *St Martin’s Eve* (1866), for example, the nursery forms the site of a stepmother’s abuse and ultimately murder of her young stepson. In a fit of insane jealousy, she closes the door on the burning child after his clothes have accidentally caught fire. In a luridly sensational scene, both “the young heir” and his “pretty and dangerous toy” – a lantern – are reduced to one “dark mass smouldering on the floor” (151; ch. 14). Yet whereas the stepmother’s guilt remains a mystery until late in this novel, in *George Canterbury’s Will* (1870), premeditated murder is deliberately made to look like an accident. While parents’ fears form the foundation of startling plot developments, Wood thereby also builds on the cautionary tale that predominated the childrearing sections in mid-Victorian household books and magazines.

Cautionary tales – narratives that convey a warning or admonition – offered a convenient format in nineteenth-century parenting advice literature.⁸ They appeared in domestic or family magazines, including the newly emergent mothers’ magazines, as well as in some of the chattier manuals, or mother’s guides.⁹ The Victorian age, in fact, saw the emergence of periodical publications specifically targeted at mothers as well as an ever-growing supply of advice manuals on childrearing. These publications were partly the result and partly the cause of a significant change in the experience of motherhood itself. Historians speak of the “modernisation of motherhood” (Branca 1) that seemed to create a need for expert advice based on systematic knowledge. “Motherhood came to be defined as a skill that had to be learned, rather than as behaviour that could be acquired simply by contact with other women who had been mothers,” and as a result the “Victorian middle-class mother was encouraged to exhibit an unprecedented amount of concern with the child-rearing process” (Gorham 65). Nineteenth-century parenting books repeatedly stressed that it could be a fatal mistake to assume that modern mothers would be able to care for their children “without knowledge or instruction of any

kind” (Gorham 65). Andrew Combe opened up his *Treatise on the Physiological and Moral Management of Infancy* (1846) with the subheading “Great Mortality in Infancy Produced by Removable Causes, and Increased by Parental Ignorance” (1). In an equally alarmist fashion, Pye Henry Chavasse prefaced his bestselling *Advice to Mothers on the Management of their Offspring*, first published in 1839, with a warning against “the prejudices and mistakes, and consequent dangers, which mothers, especially young ones, fall into, from the want of some little work to guide them” (iii). Nearly half a century later, the significantly subtitled *A Few Suggestions to Mothers on the Management of their Children; By a Mother* (1884) still condemned mothers’ assumption that they did not need to listen to instructions – or buy advice books – as “one of the popular delusions which each year claims a large sacrifice of young lives” (vi). As Dara Rossman Regaignon has stressed, “the rhetoric of childrearing advice literature interpellated anxiety as a constitutive feature of middle-class motherhood” (“Motherly” 33). Eagerly tapping into a newly perceived need for expert knowledge, the publishing industry was rapidly producing ever more specialised magazines and self-help books by mothers as well as new editions of standard manuals by medical men.¹⁰

These early parenting publications capitalised on and further fostered widespread controversies. Suitable topics stretched from discussions of maternal breastfeeding versus wet-nursing, or of traditional household remedies versus new clinical knowledge, to the still hotly debated question of how best to react to crying infants. In the diary that Elizabeth Gaskell kept during her daughter Marianne’s first years, Gaskell remarks how “[c]rying has been a great difficulty” precisely because “[b]ooks do so differ,” and how this has made her decide to “keep laying down [her own] rules” (*Diary* 52). Gaskell’s dilemma draws attention to the overwhelming onslaught of information as well as the middle-class mother’s new reliance on print media for mothering instructions. As Anita Wilson has pointed out, Gaskell’s “private voice complements the abundant public discourse of an era which bombarded mothers with advice and exhortations in newly fashionable child-care books and in the periodical press” (12). *Punch* symptomatically poked fun at the newly proliferating publications on the subject by suggesting, in the 1861 spoof advice column “Notes on Nursing” signed “A. Clown,” that the infant should be tossed and thereby deliberately provoked to tears (n.p.). Yet Gaskell’s decision to lay down her own rules also reminds us of mothers’ multifarious reactions to childcare advice in print.¹¹ Mothers not only had recourse to several sources, weighed their arguments against each other, and had to make a conscious decision about how to proceed; they were actively writing back to the dominating professional discourse. Gaskell was following a growing trend to keep “baby diaries” in which to observe and note down infants’ behaviour (Shuttleworth, *Mind* 221-22; Steedman 68). There is indeed important evidence of mothers’ wide-ranging reactions in nineteenth-century writing, including not just personal diaries or letters, but also explicit responses in magazines, alternative manuals, and the socially influential genre of the novel.

The growing interest in childcare instructions consequently also had a significant impact on narrative form. A two-way interchange operated through interpolation and genre overlaps, generating an intrinsically interdisciplinary form of spreading parenting advice. Late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novelists had begun to experiment with specific childrearing philosophies and practices. Such highly influential eighteenth-century treatises on education as Rousseau's *Émile* (1762) or the Edgeworths' *Practical Education* (1798) had set a precedent for the literary significance of advice material and, vice versa, for literature's role in spreading childrearing philosophies. These philosophies newly conceptualised and successfully promoted the vital importance of what we would now term "the early years."¹² Conversely, references to popular fiction in advice books were likewise fairly common.¹³ The often book-length cautionary parenting narrative of the mid-nineteenth century emerged from these intersections. In her seminal bibliography of household books, Dana Attar speaks of "[d]omestic economy narratives, the original soap-operas, [which] often first appeared as magazine serials" (20). The advice books by Eliza Warren form a particularly illuminating example. With revealing titles such as *How I Managed My House on Two Hundred Pounds a Year* (1864), *How I Managed My Children From Infancy to Marriage* (1865), or *A Young Wife's Perplexities* (1886), these self-help manuals in narrative form mimic autobiographical narratives. A childless writer, Warren creates a carefully stylised authorial persona to embody the inexperienced young wife and mother who learns from her mistakes (de Ridder and Van Remoortel 318). At the same time, she consciously situates her books amidst the growing trend of manuals by mothers for mothers that offer an alternative to medical manuals. Warren explicitly aims to prevent "put[ting] more guineas into doctors' purses" (8). When a doctor has to be called in *How I Managed My Children*, it is because the mother has already made a mistake. As in the majority of cautionary parenting narratives, seemingly insignificant oversights have potentially disastrous – and easily sensationalised – consequences. Such cautionary tales indeed capitalise on the shock tactics of fictional worst-case scenarios. Wood takes up the format of these often thinly fictionalised warnings to engender fully-fledged narratives of crime and detection, while retaining the focus on childrearing advice. In creating sensational scenarios that are meant to shock the reader into action, Wood intends to persuade the mothers reading her novels to follow the embedded childrearing advice.

Read in the context of the growing publication industry surrounding the care of infants and young children in the Victorian middle-class household, Wood's rewrites of domestic disasters reveal how she sought to participate in and shape parenting discourses. In *Danesbury House* (1860), Wood's first full-length novel, mothering forms a sustained theme, although it is ostensibly subordinated to a different agenda. Wood wrote the novel for a prize-winning contest set by the Scottish Temperance Society. Yet she seized the opportunity to extend her condemnation of alcohol to debates on changing childrearing methods that include, but are not confined to, imbuing in children a taste for water. In the same novel, a habitually drunk nurse gives laudanum to a baby because she mistakes it for a cough-

mixture. *George Canterbury's Will* replicates the scene in order to rewrite it, yet it ultimately exposes the apparent accident as murder. Although the crime is traced to a scheming stepfather, medicine bottles are once again confused by an incapable nursemaid, on whose illiteracy the murderer has indeed counted. Wood here combines the cautionary parenting tale with a crime story. Using this strategy, she simultaneously produces a sensation novel involving premeditated murder and generates opportunities to insert practical childrearing advice. Lengthy discussions of the mother's responsibilities and childcare arrangements have carefully prepared the scene, ensuring that this thematic remains prominent. It is a narrative strategy that Wood deploys persistently, sensationalising everyday settings and events by letting the reader expect a startling occurrence, horrible mistake, or sinister ploy at any moment.

Wood's rewriting of the same material thus moves her preoccupation with childrearing to the foreground. She improves her strategies of integrating advice into her plots, participating in topical debates, while using them as sensational material. That these debates tend to be domestic, mundane, often involving subjects of household management and women's responsibilities as wives and mothers, rather than broader political issues, might to a great extent account for its critical neglect. New attention to the representation of Victorian parenting controversies, however, is now emerging both within Childhood Studies and in revaluations of maternity in Victorian Studies.¹⁴ A close look at Wood's childrearing advice hence also contributes to current research in these areas, while deepening our understanding of literary sensationalism.

“[T]he Responsibility Resting on a Mother”: Informed Mothering in *Danesbury House*

DANESBURY HOUSE EXEMPLIFIES Wood's early appropriation of the cautionary parenting tale. The narrative zooms in on an idealised infant, who is being carried from the night-nursery into the day-nursery: “[L]ittle William Danesbury, a lovely child of nine months old. His cheeks were flushed to a crimson damask, his pretty mouth was like a rosebud, and his eyes were large and dark and brilliant.” This picture is immediately qualified by the warning that such an elaborate system of nurseries and servants does not guarantee the child's welfare and safety. And Wood makes clear that this warning applies even to the outwardly most trustworthy nanny: Glisson is “a woman of middle age, active and slender, the valued nurse in the Danesbury family” (1; ch. 1), a “faithful, cautious, tried old servant” (13; ch. 2). That such a “cautious” nurse can be found “with a somewhat dull or stupid expression” (1; ch. 1) exposes the dangers of unsupervised nurseries as much as of alcoholism. Even a faithful family retainer cannot be trusted. Instead, “perfect confidence . . . may have tended to blind” (15; ch. 2) the most scrutinising parents.

Wood improves on this exposure by proceeding to give additional childrearing advice. When Glisson attempts to hush the “somewhat fractious” (1; ch. 1) baby back to sleep, there is an angry altercation between herself and a young nursemaid, who suggests that “[h]e wants amusing, nurse; he

doesn't want more sleep: and I dare say he's hungry" (2; ch. 1). Wood here employs her chatty omniscient narrator by tapping into her readers' familiarity with fractious infants: "[H]e seemed somewhat fractious, as infants will be on awakening from sleep, and Glisson laid him flat upon her knee and rocked the chair backwards and forwards" (1; ch. 1). Simultaneously, Wood stresses that even a long-established nurse might fail to take adequate care. Not only does Glisson prefer the convenience of putting a hungry, bored child back to sleep, but when she fails to find the baby's cough-medicine, she suspects that one of the other servants has played a trick on her by "carry[ing] off [her] nursery things" and then "clearing the direction off" the bottle (2; ch. 1). Such pranks could clearly prove fatal. Yet as a life-saving check on the main nurse, the nursemaid also spots "the missing bottle, pushed out of sight behind a child's toy" (3; ch. 1), realises that Glisson has instead given the baby laudanum, and sends for the doctor in time to save the child. The "deplorable accident," however, indirectly kills the mother, hastily summoned from a visit with her elder children (4; ch. 1). Her fatal carriage accident, caused by a drunken gatekeeper, continues the list of disasters that can be blamed on alcoholism. At the same time, in removing the conscientious mother, Wood paves the way for a minute detailing of a range of unfortunate parenting mistakes that are going to be made in her now permanent absence.

Much of the novel's subsequent exploration of alcoholism might concentrate on gin-parlours for the working classes, but Wood's sustained focus on contrasting parenting practices in middle-class households does more than merely demonstrate how alcohol ruins lives in all social strata. The baby's poisoning is linked, by metaphorical extension, to the habitual consumption of alcohol by adults and older children, a self-poisoning sanctioned by society. Thus, the alignment of accidental doping with an intentional administering of a likewise damaging and potentially addictive substance (in the form of wine and beer) to children develops Wood's concern with childrearing. Even the initial discussion of alcohol consumption addresses different attitudes to upbringing. With almost absurd dramatic irony, it is at the very moment that her infant son is being poisoned by his alcoholic nanny that Mrs Danesbury lectures her cousin's wife on the duty of mothers to "oblige their children to drink water as their common beverage" (9; ch. 1). Wood clearly appreciates the topic's controversial nature. A concerned mother remarks that "London water is such wretched stuff" (8-9; ch. 1), yet this argument is not further pursued. The consumption of water was of course a fraught venture in mid-nineteenth-century London, which was precisely the reason that table beer or porter was given to children, although medical childrearing manuals increasingly urged mothers to offer water, as long as it was filtered and from an uncontaminated source.¹⁵ That Wood is not exclusively or even primarily interested in the respective nutritional qualities becomes clear when she has Mrs Danesbury add that water is probably better "*even* for their health's sake [*italics added*]" (8; ch. 1). Physical health is not her main interest in promoting water-drinking, although it might be considered an additional plus-point. Wood shirks controversies over water quality and instead stresses how making children like

water forms one aspect among their “training”: “As our tastes are trained in childhood, so will our after likings be.” (9; ch. 1) The term “tastes” refers both to the preference of one beverage or dish over another and to the moral as well as physical consequences of habits acquired in early childhood. To instil healthy drinking habits in her offspring forms one example of the mother’s enormous responsibilities.

In one of several lengthy advice sections in the novel, Wood outlines the late Mrs Danesbury’s exemplary system. Although Victorian parenting publications tended to stress the importance of the mother’s moral guidance well into adulthood, Wood here supports what was a still relatively new idea: the significance of early childhood. In contrast to their baby brother William, eight-year-old Arthur and six-year-old Isabel Danesbury are impervious to their stepmother’s pernicious influence. Their exemplary behaviour is the result of their biological mother’s careful parenting in early childhood. Eschewing any easy sentimentalisation of the dead mother or of the model children, Wood details what she considers the right kind of attentive mothering: the conscientious mother has accomplished this “by incessant care and watchfulness, and training of a child from its very earliest years” (58; ch. 6). It is not Wood’s intention here to eulogise the ideal (dead) mother – although the sharp contrast to the careless stepmother retrospectively idealises what has been lost – but to prompt the mothers among her readers to follow her instructions.

The advice is emphatically practical. Responding to prevailing debates on mothers’ multiple duties, Wood gives hands-on suggestions on how to implement the form of mothering that she proposes. Thus, Mrs Danesbury sets aside specific times for different forms of moral and intellectual instructions. That the busy middle-class mother should allocate a regular amount of time to her children formed a constant refrain in childrearing advice of the time.¹⁶ Parenting magazines similarly spoke up against a new remoteness in middle-class family life, in which parenting seemed to become “regarded as a dreary, onerous necessary evil.”¹⁷ Wood was clearly not alone in acknowledging and attempting to find a solution to packed schedules, which comprised household management as well as involvement in charity or the obligations of social visiting, what Wood vaguely terms “engagements”:

[The first Mrs Danesbury] would speak in a low, persuasive, loving voice, which of itself was sufficient to draw the love of the child. Generally speaking, but not so invariably as in the morning, for engagements sometimes prevented her, she would take him so in the evening. . . . She rarely failed to hear him his prayers herself, not trusting even to Glisson. . . . In the day-time she had him with her a great deal, and was always striving to form his mind for *good*. (58; ch. 6)

While it might strike a modern reader that this conscientious mother does not trust a family servant to supervise a toddler’s prayers, but lets her dispense medicine to an infant, this reflects both the novel’s underpinning purpose as a didactic piece for a specific denominational society and a general attitude to mothering that was still predominating at the time. This attitude was shifting, and *Danesbury House* dramatises this shift: Wood may preach the pre-eminence of the mother’s spiritual instructions, but the novel also showcases that mothers ought to be involved mistresses of all aspects in their

households, managing the servants and especially those engaged in childrearing. Wood inserts – and thereby promotes – up-to-date parenting instructions on practical childcare duties, before proceeding to demonstrate, in a heavily sensationalised cautionary tale, what happens if such advice is not followed.

Wood indeed participates in current parenting discourses both in stressing how intricately entangled the practical and moral aspects of childrearing are and in asserting the lasting impact of a mother's earliest influence. Maternal death, in this novel, does not create a plot that hinges on the mother's absence in order to show how the protagonists need to find their own way, as often happens in mid-Victorian fiction (Thaden 17). Instead Wood boosts the effectiveness of her interpolated instructions by inserting the detailed accounts of Mrs Danesbury's parenting practices only after killing her off. What Arthur learns in his early years guides him throughout youth and adulthood:

Before she was taken from him, Arthur's mind, naturally a tractable one, had been moulded well, and he had learned the fact that he had grave responsibilities upon him, momentous duties to fulfil, and that as his conduct was, so would his prosperity and happiness be. These seeds never could have been eradicated from Arthur Danesbury's heart. (58; ch. 6)

The mother's last words to her children are not to touch alcohol even if their hosts "may press [them] to take beer and wine" (12; ch. 1), and so they become exemplary "water drinkers." As a young man, Arthur is instrumental in setting up societies for factory workers that reduce the attractions of gin-parlours, evoking his mother in a triumphant speech at the end of the novel, or as Mangham has pointedly put it, the long-dead Mrs Danesbury "is exhumed in her son's didactic address to his manufactory workers" (250). "Some amongst you . . . still remember my mother" (271; ch. 26), Arthur Danesbury states, exhorting his workers' wives to be a good influence over their own families, while introducing his wife as a new exemplary Mrs Danesbury.

The novel's happy ending thus reinstates a good mother figure. The narrative has come full circle, expurgating the bad Mrs Danesbury. The children's stepmother, in fact, is the important negative example, and the contrasting fate of her biological children works as evidence of opposing forms of mothering. Their attitude towards alcohol offers a good test case of a much larger issue. After a scheming spinster entraps the widower, the narrative jumps forward in time to detail the family dinner: "Arthur and Isabel drank water, as was customary, but beer was supplied to the three younger boys – and there, for those young children, lay the error; for the first Mrs Danesbury's theory was right." Her successor is doubly wrong as she acts largely out of spite: "The present Mrs Danesbury had been positive on this point, it may be said obstinate. She *would not* bring them up to drink water" (57; ch. 6). A clear-cut example of Wood's intrusive moralising narrator, this stress on the right system meanwhile briefly acknowledges the novel's function as a temperance text, even though the novel quickly swerves away again to enlarge upon "the responsibility resting on a mother":

But there is other training required from a mother to a child besides that desirable one of confining its drink to water. Few are more deeply impressed with the responsibility resting on

a mother, or more earnestly anxious for her children's welfare, than had been the first Mrs Danesbury; few, let us hope, are more careless of it than was the second. (58; ch. 6)

Predictably, the second Mrs Danesbury's sons come to a horrendous end in some of the most sensationalised deathbed scenes of Victorian fiction, while the novel's overarching agenda justifies the stepchildren's open disobedience.

But the dead mother's influence is most strikingly dramatised through the more complex fate of her youngest son, William. Brought up with his stepbrothers, he is not bound by his older siblings' promise. But his biological mother's lasting power saves him. This arguably renders this power almost metaphysical, yet Wood is careful to supply tangible evidence of the opposing influences that shape William's childhood. There is the example and advice of his elder siblings as well as the involvement of a paternal aunt who supports the dead mother's theories, and who repeatedly acts as Wood's mouthpiece in the narrative. Conversely, Wood blames the three younger boys' interest in pubs both on their early consumption of alcohol and on the second Mrs Danesbury's failure to make "home pleasant to their boys" (108; ch. 11). While Wood proceeds to supply practical mothering suggestions beyond early childhood, this sustained importance supplements rather than undermines the novel's central stress on infancy. While a mother should not at any time stop her involvement in her children's lives, it is too late – as the narrator frequently reiterates in a sepulchral tone – to try to gain any influence over older children if crucial moments in their babyhood have been missed.

The widely held belief that mothers could thus singlehandedly ruin their children was one of the most unpleasant and unfair outgrowths of this idealisation of motherhood. It generated enormous anxiety and, of course, contained the germ of sensational narratives.¹⁸ Wood elevates women's significance, while she emphasises their "training" as mothers. Most fascinatingly, the second Mrs Danesbury's worst fault is her failure to be an informed mother. Neither malicious nor wilfully neglectful, she is fond of her children, but she is inconsistent in her parenting practices because she never gives them any serious thought:

[She] had about as much notion of this sort of training as the man in the moon. She was certainly anxious for the welfare of her children, but all in a temporal point of view. . . . She was very fond of them, and indulged them much; but she took no pains, except wrong ones, to correct their tempers. . . . Sometimes she did not check them at all; and sometimes, if she was in an ill-humour herself, she would punish them with inexcusable harshness, beating them with severity. (59; ch. 6)

Unlike her predecessor, she does not study childrearing and decide upon specific principles. Hence she is faulted for not attempting to remedy her ignorance as middle-class mothers were increasingly encouraged to do. It is, therefore, misleading to dismiss the first Mrs Danesbury as an impossible paragon who instinctively knows how to be a perfect mother, in contrast to her unsuitable successor. Wood promotes the ideal of an attentive, informed, even anxious mother who manages everything, from her children's diet to their daily prayers, and thereby follows current childrearing advice.

In *Danesbury House*, the overarching metaphorical connection between the accidental doping of a sick infant and the systematic poisoning of children's minds as well as bodies acts as a frame for an extensive investigation into different attitudes to childrearing. Wood may have sneaked into her temperance novel what was to become a recurrent hobbyhorse in her fiction. At the same time, however, rendering the nursery a sensational site also effectively served to startle the reader. Wood thereby drew on several highly topical issues of the time, including the infant doping controversy. Outrages over the routine dispensing of opiates, including so-called "soothing syrups" such as Mrs Winslow's Soothing Syrup, Godfrey's Cordial, and Street's Infant's Quietness, to fractious infants heightened awareness of prevailing ignorance, alerting specialists and parents to the need for servants' appropriate supervision (Regaignon, "Infant" 127). The laudanum given to little William Danesbury, it is true, is administered by accident, but Wood's choice of words in describing a "fractious" infant who "wants amusing" and a nurse who intends to hush him back to sleep because she herself is in a stupor is suggestive of Wood's awareness of the controversial discourse on soothing syrups. Simultaneously, the scene also raises larger questions about dangerous household substances.¹⁹ The prevention of such accidents, advice manuals regularly stressed, was part of household management. A good mother was familiar with antidotes.²⁰ Wood was to recur to accidental – or seemingly accidental – poisoning of children in subsequent novels as part of her increasingly specific advice on childcare arrangements.

Maternal Carelessness and Murder in *George Canterbury's Will*

GEORGE CANTERBURY'S WILL replicates much of the character constellation of *East Lynne*, while returning to the sensationalised household accident in *Danesbury House*. Wood kept recurring to the same material, had recourse to similar plotlines, repeated character types, and even reused favourite names. The repetition of good men called Thomas and of baby Williams (including William Danesbury and perhaps the most famous of them, the dying William Carlyle in *East Lynne*) alone is striking.²¹ Yet while many of her earlier novels insert childrearing advice at random moments, in *George Canterbury's Will* Wood simultaneously produces a cautionary tale about household accidents and a murder mystery. Wood indeed contrives to have it both ways. A young child's seemingly accidental death from laudanum – again administered instead of his cough-syrup by his nanny – is exposed as premeditated murder. The rewriting of the poisoning scene in *Danesbury House* demonstrates how Wood repeats sensational incidents while putting parenting advice firmly in the foreground. The cautionary parenting tale becomes transformed within a fully-fledged sensation novel for a more general target readership without obscuring the embedded parenting instructions.

Simultaneously, Wood perfects a strategy that defines her sensationalisation of the everyday. Happy family scenes portend disaster, and whenever a character seeks solace in a particular person or situation, we know the loss of the source of consolation is imminent. Intense motherly love creates sympathy for Wood's probably least likable anti-heroine, Caroline Canterbury née Kage, yet when

Caroline considers her boy her only remaining source of happiness, this idolisation signposts his impending death: “One balm amidst it alone remained, and that was her little boy. Her love for him approached idolatry” (268; ch. 22). Conventional warnings against idolatry work as ominous hints, while Wood simultaneously taps into the reader’s parental anxieties within a culture that fosters “baby worship.”²² It remains significantly unclear where exactly Wood draws the line between all-encompassing maternal love (Caroline’s only positive trait) and an infant idolatry that may be a sin. In fact, Wood plays a double-game here. Having rejected the novel’s almost preternaturally good hero, her cousin Thomas Kage, Caroline marries rich, elderly Mr Canterbury. After the birth of an heir, whom she names Thomas, she refuses to listen to advice about the will that her already senile husband makes, leaving the property to the infant, while cutting out his grownup daughters. As her cousin cautions, “above all, do not be the inheritor contingent on the boy’s death,” although as a lawyer, he rather unprofessionally argues that this contingency is “like a haunting shadow” and “as bad as a nightmare” (188; ch. 14). Wood routinely evokes superstitions, creates omens, and plays with the supernatural within the most mundane settings.

Caroline’s most detrimental mistake unsurprisingly involves a seemingly small oversight in her nursery arrangements. The two false steps – concerning the will and the nurse – are linked through the interference of Mrs Kage, Caroline’s own mother. Mrs Kage dictates the will and summarily dismisses the current “nurse to the little heir . . . a superior woman . . . very respectable, almost a lady” (182; ch. 14), whom she overhears remarking on the will. Despite her misgivings, the young mother listens to a housemaid who comes forward in this “emergency”: “But Mrs. Canterbury felt dubious as she listened to the request; a common housemaid (so she phrased it) could scarcely be fit for the post of nurse” (185; ch. 14). The housemaid may assert that she cannot “see that a nurse need know how to write,” but in ominously hinting that the servant’s illiteracy will have something to do with the child’s untimely end, Wood at once elevates the role and underscores the parents’ responsibility in choosing a “superior” nurse. Originally hired “[w]hile [they] look out for another” (186; ch. 14), the uneducated housemaid remains baby Thomas’s only other caretaker. Caroline is guilty of not remedying the situation, and this is scripted as maternal neglect. Although part of the blame rests with Mrs Kage, the resultant doubling of erring mothers reinforces lasting maternal influence through a perpetuation of childrearing mistakes.

In pointed contrast, Thomas Kage displays laudable nurturing qualities. In a scene that foreshadows little Thomas’s death, Thomas Kage “turn[s] nurse” when the life of his sister’s son “depends upon the care and nursing” (143; ch. 11). The parallelism with Thomas Canterbury’s last illness suggests how this motherly man would have been a comfort and practical help instead of desiring and ultimately helping on the child’s death, as Caroline’s second husband Major Dawkes does. Ironically, that Dawkes first gains access to the rich widow through the ignorant nurse additionally demonstrates Caroline’s irresponsibility for not installing a better-qualified servant: “It

began by his taking a fancy for my boy. He made acquaintance with him and his nurse in their walks, and the child grew so attached to him, nothing was ever like it” (254; ch. 20). When the boy recovers from a dangerous illness, the stepfather is so disappointed that he poisons him by substituting the laudanum bottle for the medicine, which is then used by the illiterate nanny. The murder metonymically stands in for neglect, for carelessness in childcare arrangements.

Wood critically assesses changing childrearing theories and practices while exploiting maternal failure as sensational material. The juxtaposition of the two Mrs Danesburys in *Danesbury House* is pointedly straightforward: a contrast between the informed mother who reads up on childrearing methods and the unmethodical and therefore irresponsible mother. *George Canterbury’s Will* fuels as well as trades on mothers’ anxieties about seemingly insignificant omissions or oversights. In transforming a cautionary parenting tale into a full-scale sensation novel, Wood demonstrates how small mistakes can have unexpected repercussions. Wood’s most significant contribution to Victorian childrearing discourses can, in fact, be found in her depiction of anxious mothers in need of reliable expert knowledge. Wood helps popularise this new ideal of the attentive mother. Simultaneously, the sensationalised nurseries she creates in her novels showcase how nineteenth-century childrearing controversies not only featured in, but also helped to shape popular fiction.

Victorian fiction’s complex engagement with the burgeoning parenting publications of the time not only alerts us to genre crossings – with the thinly fictionalised cautionary tale on one end of the spectrum and the embedded advice column in fiction on the other – but also shows how much more versatile the Victorians’ representations and discussions of motherhood were than the best-known literary mother figures and their iconic, largely sentimentalised babies might lead us to expect.²³ As Wood moves from interpolating to integrating specific childrearing advice, her novels offer a fascinating case study of fiction writers’ creative as well as critical participation in debates on childrearing. Victorian parenting literature formed a rapidly growing, influential phenomenon. Its lasting and profound impact on popular culture manifested itself in often unexpected, startling ways.

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¹ Although conduct books had become increasingly popular since the eighteenth century, the second half of the nineteenth century generated an unprecedented proliferation of “self-help” manuals. A new interest in the practical aspects of childrearing helped produce a market for “mother’s guides.” See Armstrong on the development of conduct books and their much-discussed relationship with the novel form (ch. 1); Attar on the changing genre of household books, especially how the “output of books on childcare continued to expand” (50); and Nelson on the “boom in advice manuals, and particularly in advice manuals aimed at women” that promised mothers that “they could ensure their unborn children’s vitality by following guidelines for health laid down by the male medical establishment” (*Family* 26, 49).

² The Victorians chiefly spoke of “childrearing” or “motherhood.” In this article, I necessarily refer mainly to mothers as the parents more directly in charge of children at the time. I shall use “parenting” interchangeably with “mothering” and “childrearing.”

³ Whereas evangelical childrearing discourse remained fairly constant in the nineteenth century, in the second half of the century, the majority of parenting publications attempted to bring together clinical advice on physical aspects and the moral or emotional aspects of mothering. A seminal overview of the changing childrearing manuals can be found in Attar (passim). Compare also Regaignon, “Motherly.”

⁴ Both the household book and the medical manual significantly shaped Victorian childrearing ideas and their presentation as expert advice. The main format largely persists in parenting publications today. Nineteenth-century mothering manuals are divided by topics, often presented in the form of frequently asked questions. While maternal breastfeeding was increasingly promoted over wet-nursing, several commercially commissioned childrearing handbooks explicitly advertised specific patent infant food or feeding bottles. The inclusion of instructions for how “to teach” an infant to walk exemplifies both the growing importance of practical issues and the new stress on mothers’ responsibilities. While *Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management* echoes still prevailing practices by describing this task as the duty of under-nursemaids (1013), medical guidebooks make it the mother’s responsibility to ensure “Self-Regulated Action,” which benefits muscle development and furthers independence (Combe 91).

⁵ Victorian sensation novels commonly feature adultery, illegitimacy, bigamy, insanity, violent crimes (especially domestic violence), and dark secrets, while evoking a sense of sensation in the reader. As Brantlinger stresses, “many imply by their very structures that domestic tranquillity conceals heinous desires and deeds” (3).

⁶ In *East Lynne: A Domestic Drama in a Prologue and Four Acts*, Palmer coined the much-repeated lines, “[M]y child dead, dead, dead! and he never knew me, never called me mother” (390; Act 3, Scene iii).

⁷ Shuttleworth further argues that this scene exemplifies how in sensation novels, “overt agreement with dominant ideological projections, expressed directly by the narrator or in the conformist endings adopted, is often undercut by the sympathies generated, or implicit critiques offered, in the course of the narrative” (“Demonic” 44).

⁸ The *OED* defines “cautionary” as “[o]f the nature of, or conveying, a caution or admonition; warning, admonitory. Freq. in phr. cautionary tale.” Cautionary tales formed a standard format in self-help books as well as in educational literature. Childcare advice in Victorian magazines regularly employed thinly fictionalised or anecdotal case studies to demonstrate common forms of mismanagement before offering remedies and solutions.

⁹ The first group of parenting magazines, including the *Mother’s Magazine* (1834-62), the *British Mothers’ Magazine* (1845-64), the *British Mothers’ Journal* (1856-61), and the *Englishwoman’s Magazine and Christian Mother’s Miscellany* (1846-54), predominantly consisted of evangelical material. The 1860s saw a new interest in childrearing in domestic family magazines, notably the Beeton’s *The Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*, in which the highly influential *Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management* was first serialised in twenty-four monthly parts from 1859 to 1861. Periodical publications later in the century reflected the changes that concepts of mother- and babyhood had undergone: *Baby: A Magazine for Mothers* (1887-1915), which subsequently became the *Mother’s Nursery*, *Babyhood* (1884-92), and the *Baby’s World: The Practical Magazine for Mothers* (1910-12). Religious magazines of course continued and indeed benefited from this second wave of magazines addressed to mothers, but there was a general trend towards scientific discourse as well as practical issues. Compare Shuttleworth (*Mind* 286).

¹⁰ Compare Gurjeva’s study of “scientific child care [as] part of the everyday life of the middle classes” (105). Gurjeva shows how different editions of Chavasse’s *Advice to a Mother* were published with changing recommendations of infant food brands until in 1906 Thomas David Lister “substantially reorganized Chavasse’s text” and added an advertising appendix (110).

¹¹ Regaignon adds that this explicit rejection of contradictory advice demonstrates that the “anxious, docile mother who emerges from [advice manuals] is an ideological fiction that justifies the giving of advice” (“Motherly” 34).

¹² Compare Steedman (68).

¹³ Discussing how the “current cultural dominance of Freudian theory has tended to obscure the interesting pre-history of child psychiatry in Britain,” Shuttleworth mentions several examples of Victorian doctors and scientists who drew “on a complex tradition of debate which extended across medical, literary, cultural, and even religious texts” (*Mind* 18).

¹⁴ Ten years ago, Shuttleworth urged in a discussion of “Victorian Childhood” that it was high “time to add age, and more specifically childhood, to the triumvirate of class, gender and race” (108). Meanwhile, Childhood Studies has begun to influence new interdisciplinary approaches, including Shuttleworth’s *The Mind of the Child* (2010), which discusses the rivalling and often “elastic” definitions of infancy, boy- or girlhood, and adolescence (10). Compare Shuttleworth (*Mind* 10), Rosenman and Klaver (11).

¹⁵ *Cassell’s Household Guide* advises on the “dietary in early childhood” that “toast-and-water or simple water should be a child’s beverage only,” specifying that it should “be filtered” and that one need to “be very careful whence it comes. Spring-water from a moderately deep well is best. Beware of it from leaden cisterns, and from

land-springs, which are often contaminated by drains” (2: 342). *Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management*, by contrast, invokes Florence Nightingale’s caution not to “treat your children like sick. . . . [D]on’t dose them with tea. Let them eat meat and drink milk, or half a glass of light beer” (1016).

¹⁶ Heated debates continued to rage whether an affluent mother’s abdication from routine tasks (“children’s bathing, dressing, feeding, bedtime, and so on”) “magnified her influence,” or whether this only further reduced her “hourly activities of childcare” (Nelson, *Invisible* 34).

¹⁷ An essay on “The Duties of Fathers” in the *British Mother’s Magazine*, for example, faults both parents for delegating childrearing: “[If] such upbringing is regarded as a dreary, onerous necessary evil, we may not wonder at the distaste of the parent for such engagements. But surely, the father, too, when released from the cares of business, can respond to his playful child and take pleasure in influencing it” (June 1864: 122). Leavy has traced how the *British Mother’s Magazine* responded not only to the absence of the middle-class father, but also to the related problem of the way parenting altogether became perceived: as part of household management, with an emphasis on physical care and hence as onerous (14).

¹⁸ As Shuttleworth has pointed out, “[w]ith the emergence of sensation fiction, faulty mothers, ruined children, and suicidal young men become a fictional staple” (*Mind* 94).

¹⁹ In his *Advice to A Mother On the Management of Her Children and on the Treatment on the Moment of Some of their More Pressing Illnesses and Accidents*, Chavasse significantly treats the accidental swallowing of laudanum or a soothing syrup such as Godfrey’s Cordial together, giving detailed instructions about how to prepare an emetic and how to keep a young child from falling asleep while waiting for the doctor (127-28). The section is followed by advice not to grow poisonous plants in the garden.

²⁰ Tincture of opium was commonly kept in Victorian households, used for self-medicating purposes. Accidents involving medicines were widespread. Discussing “the link between the role of women as home-makers and accident prevention” in nineteenth-century manuals, Cooter and Luckin suggest that such manuals often “accepted the inevitability of home accidents and provided ‘antidotes’ for a range of household mishaps from choking to burns to poisoning” (198).

²¹ These include Thomas Ashley in *Mrs Halliburton’s Troubles* (1862) and Thomas Godolphin in *The Shadow of Ashlydyat* (1863), whereas Archibald Carlyle, in starring in a “bourgeois fantasy of ascendancy” in *East Lynne*, may “be read as an endorsement of the new-style hero promulgated by his namesake, Thomas Carlyle” (Jay xxix).

²² In *Barchester Towers* (1857), Trollope notices in provocative contradiction to warnings against turning an infant into “the object of [the mother’s] idolatry” (123): “[I]f the worship of one creature can be innocent in another, let us hope that the adoration offered over the cradle . . . may not be imputed as sin” (17).

²³ A close look at Victorian literature reveals that fiction writers were often self-conscious, even provocatively ironic in playing with the pervading sentimentality in which baby- and motherhood were indisputably enveloped. Dickens counterpoises his production of the suffering infant à la the bricklayers’ babies in *Bleak House* (1852) or Little Johnny in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), whose death scenes combine social criticism with symbolic functions, with such grotesque creations as “Moloch” in *The Hallowed Man* (1848). Anthony Trollope depicts “Baby Worship” (ch. 16) with a wry sense of comedy in *Barchester Towers* (1857). On the well-known commodification of childhood, including the use of Millais’s *Cherry Ripe* (1879) and *Bubbles* (1886) for Pears’ Soap advertisements, see Brooks (60).

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