

EAST LYNNE'S TRANSATLANTIC COURSE: FROM BRITISH SERIALIZATION TO
AMERICAN THEATRE

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East Lynne's Transatlantic Course:
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ABSTRACT

Ellen Wood's *East Lynne*, a popular sensation fiction, began because of its original and insatiable British readership; however, the texts immediate and drastic reception into American theater confirms that this narrative is not simply an overly dramatic and unrealistic domestic drama. Although melodramatic, Wood's text resonates with audiences because it is relatable in genuinely meaningful ways. The main protagonist, Lady Isabel, wrongfully leaves her family and spends the rest of her life in physical and emotional turmoil, however her endurance never ceases. Her character is psychologically compelling and easily accessible because she possesses truly human qualities and is a representation of British tradition and order. Further solidifying *East Lynne's* dramatic repetition in the United States is its ability to move to new media spaces. From print to stage, stage to film, and finally, in 1980 the East Lynne Theater Company was founded and is still in production.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In 1860, Mrs. Henry (Ellen) Wood's sensation novel, *East Lynne*, first appeared in Britain as a serialized magazine publication running for a total of 21 months. In 1861 it was published into a three-volume novel, in 1862 the first single-volume edition was published, and in 1864 it made its debut in British theatre. Extraordinarily, by 1864 the British sensation narrative had already captivated American theater audiences. Although potentially unrecognizable because of an altered title (its title soon reverted back to the original) the sensationalized elements persisted and the narrative continued to grow in popularity. *East Lynne* would make its 1862 debut in America under the name *Edith, or The Earl's Daughter* in the format of a play, scripted by B. Woolf¹ (Bolton 395). While contemporary British and American literary critics were on two ends of the spectrum – some classifying the story as a juvenile, junk-food sensation, and others, as an enlightening and enthralling literary work – the narrative's enduring presence, no matter its categorization, cannot be disputed. The innumerable times *East Lynne* appears in American theater confirms that this endurance is not solely because of its sensationalized content, but rather that this particular story, while melodramatic, connects with audiences precisely because it is relatable in genuinely meaningful ways.

Though British and American scholars alike have critiqued, analyzed, and offered their knowledge about the content and characters of the text, and the eccentric and charismatic Mrs. Henry Wood, there is a gap amidst scholarship that excludes an intricate exploration of *East Lynne's* – and other sensation fictions' – presence and proliferation in American theater. The fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Wood's contemporary, flourishes in this genre as well,

¹ This appeared to be the first confirmed play performance in the United States. According to Bolton, Clifton Tayleure was the playwright of an *East Lynne* performance with an unconfirmed date of January 26, 1882, possibly 1883 (395).

contributing an equally sensationalized narrative, however, the key difference between the two is the human realness associated with each female lead. Unlike Lady Isabel, Lady Audley attempts murder and commits arson and exists as a caricature of the absurd and chaotic. While my primary focus is *East Lynne*, referring to Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* as a foil will further orient Wood's narrative in regards to theater popularity and audience-to-character relatability. Although both texts are titillating and significant British novels, their content became highly universalized due to the sensationalized material Wood and Braddon presented. Typical sensation narratives include death, horrific accidents, sexual transgressions, family abandonment, and murder, and each of these components promote potential theatrical presentation or interpretation. Nicholas Daly, author of "Fiction, Theatre and Cinema," situates *Lady Audley's Secret* and *East Lynne* in the top tier of the most successful sensation novels. Although he deduces that Wood's text is periodically "lacking the mystery element," which remains consistent in Braddon's narrative, Daly claims that "*East Lynne* is the most successful of all sensation novels in terms of the longevity of its spin-offs" because "it relies instead on a form of slow-burning suspense and strong emotional appeal" (43). As both texts have striking similarities among characters and plots, the central female character from each text differs dramatically and the validity of the more popular performance directly correlates with the more relatable and complex human, Lady Isabel.

Whereas both characters add sensation to the genre by means of their questionable and detrimental behavior, Lady Isabel remains the more viable character because, as opposed to Lady Audley's criminal behavior, jealousy is defensible, not attempted murder and arson. Scholars and contemporary novel reviewers have composed individual, yet cohesive, depictions of an angelic Lady Isabel who masters disguise, and is indisputably forgivable because of her divine nature

and orphaned state of being, however, they have failed to accentuate her strikingly flawed humanness. While Lady Isabel is composed, motherly, naïve, and deserving of forgiveness for her indiscretions, she is still inherently a human with insecurities who falls victim to unscrupulous misinformation, but nonetheless accepts the consequences of her decisions and endures her remaining life. In contrast, Lady Audley is irrational, calculated, uninterested in her child, and unjustifiably criminal. These differences ultimately juxtapose the controlled and the disarranged to reveal Lady Isabel's higher degree of relatability to readers and theatergoers, and though *Lady Audley's Secret* was also a stage sensation, it was not to the extent of *East Lynne*, particularly not in the United States. Thus, this constructed ideology that composes the more relatable and human-like figure can help explain the contextual meaning and transatlantic audience involvement that surrounds *East Lynne*.

Wood's novel remains a narrative about the realm of domesticity and how easily family can be formed, shattered, and recreated. Thus the tragedy of Lady Isabel's life as it unfolds in a series of realistically cringeworthy, highly entertaining, yet thought provoking, plots provides a tangible explanation to the novel's extensive British readership; however, fixating on her relatable, and traditionally white, image offers stable grounds for the narrative's popularity and cultural work in American theater. Pairing Lady Isabel's humanness with Aristotelian and Freudian psychoanalytic concepts and audience reception theory reveals a connection between theatergoers deeper inner self and their fixation on tragic, though realistic, events and instability within family structure. Specifically, Aristotle's *Poetics* highlights the concept of catharsis where a tragedy (genre), if performed or written well, will evoke emotional insecurities from audience members and will thus be a vehicle for purging like emotions. Also, from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud's notion about the unconscious, particularly mechanisms related to projection,

or projecting impeding emotions onto some one else and judging them in place of ourselves. Additionally, applying Susan Bennett's theory of reception to the text, from her book *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, reinforces how performance is not simply accepted by audiences but ingested and interpreted based on personal history and life events. Nineteenth-century Americans were consistently in contact with social and racial unrest, and therefore sought an establishment, *East Lynne* precisely, that was not only relatable, but also a representation of societal order. Connecting these theoretical concepts with familial situations presented within the narrative stresses the complex relationships between, and representations of, men and women within *East Lynne*, which not only reveals similar complexities and anxieties within the American family, but also exposes the text's transatlantic cultural history.

As *East Lynne* remains a popular novel and a source of critical engagement in English studies, it is important to address individual and family instabilities presented because these situations appear at the foundation of the text. Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, author of "Sensation Fiction and the Gothic," reiterates the characteristics of sensation novels as a vehicle for addressing stereotypes and inequality in domestic life. He emphasizes how "narratives link female identity and marriage, thereby recalling prototypical gothic tales which explore women's nightmarish domestic lives . . . [where] the naïve female character usually falls prey to a male villain and experiences the violence of a male-dominated world (22). Unfortunately, Lady Isabel falls victim to two men: one, an oblivious husband and the other, a deceitfully persuasive, former confidante. Accordingly, Lady Isabel marries, but what follows is adultery, an illegitimate child, rejection, feigned demise, divorce, and masked identification.

Though revealing the complexity of sensation narratives and the normative – though dramatically and sensationally presented – behavior and family situations embedded in *East*

Lynne exposes the text's enduring nature, there is an additional facet of this captivating tale that situates the novel as a respected literary work. Author Mrs. Henry (Ellen) Wood, regarded as "proper" and with a "gentlemanly demeanor," was a subtle yet smart businesswoman, who humbly aided *East Lynne's* claim to fame (Phegley 181). Though her fiction was referred to as "melodramatic and often bloodthirsty" her character was nothing less than well esteemed and morally upstanding (Sussex 158). Wood was a huge contributor to the sensation fiction genre, but also to the literary world as an executive editor of a successful magazine and as a scholarly critic. According to Phegley, "[h]er achievement is evident in the *Argosy's* average monthly circulation of 20,000 under her editorship," which "exceeded the 16,000 average circulation of Braddon's more controversial *Belgravia Magazine*" (186). Though the authorial variety presented in the *Argosy* before Wood seemed to diminish once she took over and appeared to mainly be replaced by writings from a Johnny Ludlow, circulation nonetheless increased. Ironically, Johnny Ludlow was none other than a pen name for the crafty Ellen Wood (Montgomery 525). Combining her feminine and reputable image with her obvious talent for writing and gaining readership, Wood became more than the author of *East Lynne*, but an initial and respectable valuation to the content presented within.

Although Wood effectively situates the novel's dramatic, domestic content within a respectable British context, the social context of the communities surrounding American performances is also worthy of highlighting. Jim Davis' chapter, "Melodrama On and Off the Stage," in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*, provides an outline of the components normally associated with a melodrama. He emphasizes how melodrama became a universal spectacle due to its presentation of intriguing human drama and suffering, however, narrative reception varied depending on nation origin. For example, melodramas situated in a

British context were more apt to reveal gender and class problems within society, as opposed to an American contextualization, which illuminates problems within the family (Davis 696).

However revealing *East Lynne*'s domestic drama appeared to be in regards to American audiences, audiences were also seeking the Britishness associated with the text. According to Elisa Tamarkin's preface to her book *Anglophilia*, Americans had a sort of obsession with Englishness or "an expression of the anxieties and wishes of some place else" (xxiv). Americans were simultaneously compelled by Lady Isabel's unstable family situation, but more so if she appeared in a traditionally English and white state of being.

Furthermore, nineteenth and early twentieth-century American author and literary critic, William Dean Howells appears to blend these perspectives, revealing this even more complex American connection to Lady Isabel and *East Lynne*. A passage from his 1897 short story, "An Open-Eyed Conspiracy," he manufactures fictionalized outrage at a production of *East Lynne* that was performed only by black actors, stating that the narrative melodrama was already overly fake and bad with white actors but black actors made it disproportionately, and offensively so, "more artificial[.] There was nothing traditional, nothing archaic, nothing autochthonic in their poor art" (Howells 663). Seemingly, then, Howells' fictitious character appears to desire – if need be – a traditional, British *East Lynne* that is racially monochromatic and socially controlled. Howells projects an America with anxieties related to stabilizing and maintaining the "traditional" middle-class family. An America in social and racial disorder was still inadvertently seeking a predominantly white or anglophilic establishment to focus their time on and divert their attention from current societal issues. Essentially, *East Lynne* becomes a hub for disseminating a message not only about insecurities within the American family but also

American politics, and how a white Lady Isabel is conventional, and therefore more psychologically comforting and accessible to audiences witnessing racial upheaval.

Ultimately, critical, textual analysis of the narrative and Wood reinforces *East Lynne*'s initial popularity in Britain, but also its immediate and ceaseless presence on the American stage, which includes claims of positive audience reception and interaction to the text. Lady Isabel's emotional appeal and *East Lynne*'s domestic drama is visited consistently in primary newspaper articles, theatre and film catalogs, and print advertisements, which further reveals the text as an even greater phenomenon. Though there were moments when publication, performance, or production of *East Lynne* slowed down, Lady Isabel's family tragedy never disappeared, as it simply moved to new media spaces. From print to stage, stage to film, and finally, filling its most recent space is the East Lynne Theater Company.²

² Warren Kleiwer founded the East Lynne Theater Company in 1980 in Cape May, NJ. Kleiwer named the company after Wood's novel because of its reputation as being highly popular on stage. Please see the company's website, www.eastlynnetheater.org, for more information.

CHAPTER TWO: BRITISH ROOTS AND THE ORIGINAL LADY ISABEL

While it is fascinating that a British sensation novel became extremely popular transatlantically, the narrative is still rooted and began in Britain. Before theatre and novel form, *East Lynne* established the genre of sensation fiction in serialized form because of its voracious British readership. To situate the text as a universal phenomenon, its origin and British literary context will be at the core of revealing what is so psychologically compelling about the content that it cannot help but adapt other forms and traverse other nations.

As a genre, sensation fiction appears to rediscover contemporary life within family households that are made up by a rather complex and dramatic chain of events (Pykett 134). Plots that never cease to suspend, horrify, and sadden seem a likely source of provocative and endless entertainment for everyday individuals interested in reading fiction. The excessively involved sensation narrative normally never fails to capture spontaneous marriage agreements, sexually transgressive behavior that precedes the fallen woman, and faked, hidden, or mistaken identity, generally ending in a tragic, yet foreseen, death. This combination of melodramatic content containing impulsive behavior and unpredictable plots, dispersed through 600 plus pages of prose, seems an evident fit to be published in serialized form. Patrick Brantlinger, author of “What Is ‘Sensational’ About the ‘Sensation Novel’?” reiterates that “[t]he best sensation novels are also, as Kathleen Tillotson points out, ‘novels with a secret,’ or sometimes several secrets, in which new narrative strategies were developed to tantalize the reader by withholding information rather than divulging it” (1-2). It is human nature to investigate what is unknown or enveloped in mystery; and in print, readers are aroused to feel an urgency to complete the story and discover what provoking end is behind the secrecy and suspense. Therefore, month after month,

sensationalized tales cannot help but fulfill their duty of keeping audiences on the edge of their seats, patiently – or impatiently – waiting the arrival of next month’s stimulating edition.

Several contemporary British novel reviewers of *East Lynne* solidify exactly why the narrative initially gained and maintained its popularity throughout the course of its serialization and later publication. Though some reviewers have called out the novel as “second class” and lacking “pretension,” the majority were transfixed by the characters and plots within the text, and eagerly anticipated the next edition (Maunder 714). Reviews were written in a diverse selection of class, political, and religion specific journals or magazines. One magazine, *John Bull*,³ repeatedly emphasized the episodic narrative’s insatiable nature where “none [were] more eagerly looked for than” *East Lynne* or those individuals who “have learned to look for the story of ‘East Lynne’ as one of the attractions of the month” (Maunder 707). Another magazine, the *Athenaeum*,⁴ though not completely in favor of *East Lynne* correctly predicts the narrative’s popular trajectory, stating “[t]his is one of the best novels published for a season . . . and will be, no doubt, a successful one” (Maunder 707). Claiming its position, a “clever” (Maunder 715) narrative, “the kind of story to attract all classes of readers” (Maunder 716) captures and sustains multi-class, multi-religion, and conservative and liberal audiences because of its thrilling and expressive content.⁵ Although sensation fiction was often associated with women, significantly, reviews revealed there to be no specific type of reader, which only emphasizes the remarkably large audience this particular narrative reached and its ability to reach across the ocean to the American stage.

³ See review 4 from, “Appendix E: Contemporary Reviews,” from the Broadview edition of *East Lynne* (2000), pg. 707-708 for full reviews.

⁴ See review 3 from, “Appendix E: Contemporary Reviews,” from the Broadview edition of *East Lynne* (2000), pg. 707 for full review.

⁵ See review 9 and 10 from, “Appendix E: Contemporary Reviews,” from the Broadview edition of *East Lynne* (2000), pg. 715 and 716 for full reviews.

In regards to *East Lynne*'s content specifically, there are a multitude of narrative moments that provoke the human sensorium, which demanded considerably enough attention for episodic printings. Captivating audiences from the beginning with the lovely and impressionable Lady Isabel is effective since she remains throughout, the core of the story. Her introduction, in fiction and Britain, prove to be similarly everlasting: "Who – what – was it? Mr. Carlyle looked, not quite sure whether it was a human being: he almost thought it more like an angel" (Wood 11). Accordingly, who can't help but *need* to know this angelic woman, especially preceding such haunting foreshadowing: "Do not cavil at her being thus praised: admire and love her whilst you may, she is worthy of it now, in her innocent girlhood" (Wood 13). As the story progresses, Wood delivers similarly provoking moments, thus through serialization participants cannot help but read on, into the life and eventual unfolding of Lady Isabel because she is psychologically enthralling and cathectic.

As the narrative continues, Wood so delicately cracks the refined, and perceivably perfect, exterior of Lady Isabel that deliberately exposes a vulnerability that captures and holds audience's attention. The following conversation is the first genuine revelation of truly baser and human behavior Lady Isabel displays:

‘Give my dear love to the darlings, Archibald. And—and—’

‘And what?’ he asked. ‘I have not a moment to lose.’

‘Do not get making love to Barbara Hare while I am away.’

She Spoke in a tone half jest, half serious—could he but have seen how her heart was beating! Mr. Carlyle took it wholly as a jest, and went away laughing. (Wood 204)

Her gracious behavior is flawed by jealousy, consequently revealing anxieties about rejection and abandonment that are truly human, not criminal or evil. However, in light of her fretful demeanor and Carlyle's flippant response, Wood is also illuminating an unequal construction of gender where women claim natural inferiority in the presence of men. Lyn Pykett, author of "Sensation and New Woman Fiction," states that sensation novels

put female characters at their center, focusing closely on women's experiences, the particular circumstances of their lives, and the relationships of these particularities to contemporary generalizations or beliefs about woman's nature and the way it shaped women's role in the family and society. (134)

Wood's agenda then provokes a certain pathos that offends readers precisely because it reveals stereotypical double standards regarding sex and gender roles often presented in real life. Young women were brought up with the impression that their sanity and happiness relied on acceptance and attention from their partner. Revealing this stereotype through Lady Isabel didn't deter readers because of her subordinate behavior but roused affirmation for her character's sustainability.

An additional resonating moment in *East Lynne* is the moment Lady Isabel falls victim to Sir Levison, who forges her way to fallenness. Again, Wood depicts truly human actions in play, where an individual who is emotionally devoted to the subject under discussion is mentally incapable of disconnecting himself or herself from the immediate exchange. Similarly, according to Susan Bennett's theory regarding reception, audiences become psychologically invested in narrative moments that involve realistic, emotional interactions because there is a high potential that such exchanges translate "their reading of that event into action" or social concerns

resembling that action (180). The following exchange takes place directly before Lady Isabel leaves the East Lynne Estate:

‘Is Mr. Carlyle at home?’ she inquired.

‘No.’ Then, after a pause—‘I expect he is more agreeably engaged.’

The tone brought the tingling blood to the cheeks of Lady Isabel. She wished to preserve a dignified silence; and did so for a few moments: but the jealous question broke out.

‘Engaged in what manner?’

‘As I came by Hare’s house just now, I saw two people, a gentleman and a young lady, coupled lovingly together, enjoying a *tête-à-tête* by moonlight. They were your husband and Miss Hare.’ (Wood 270-71)

Lady Isabel’s struggle juxtaposes external composure and internal angst, roles of wife and adulteress, inexperience and sophistication, and though she is a victim of unscrupulous misinformation, she nonetheless accepts and endures the consequences of her decision to leave. Not only does this scene bring light to sexual double standards where it is absolutely unacceptable for a wife to have an affair but not even slightly abnormal for a husband to, but also, it ambiguously faults women for choosing to leave an unfaithful marriage. However the harsh reality of the situation is not that Lady Isabel left her husband, it is that she left her children as well. Understandably, this action overshadows her decision to take a stance in an unhappy situation, misinformed or not. Though it appears that talking directly to Carlyle about her concerns might now – in the twenty-first-century – seem like the more probable option, it wasn’t then, which highlights a larger concern Wood has with power dynamics between men and women. Lady Isabel, a symbol highlighting Wood’s disagreement with male superiority, didn’t

recognize herself as having enough agency to question male authority, a probable concern of the many women who appeared to be developing a personal connection to her character.

Concurrently, Archibald and his admirer Barbara Hare are involved in a murder mystery, and though it is virtually separate from Lady Isabel's domestic situation, it is indirectly the maddening subplot, which activates her jealousy. Though these particular plots may be classified as solely entertaining, the love triangle that unfolds between Isabel, Barbara, and Carlyle, while melodramatic, illuminates real marriage concerns deeply rooted in British ideals, which Brantlinger highlights:

Even in those sensation novels whose plots do not hinge upon bigamy, there is a strong interest in sexual irregularities, adultery, forced marriages, and marriages formed under false pretenses. But rather than striking forthright blows in favor of divorce law reform and greater sexual freedom, sensation novels usually tend merely to exploit public interest in these issues. (6)

However, Wood is not simply presenting dramatic "sexual irregularities," but more so, subtly alluding to a problematic judicial system that restricts, or severely reprimands, women from seeking a divorce (Brantlinger 6). Even after the Divorce Act of 1857,⁶ which potentially made divorce easier for couples as jurisdiction moved to civil courts, women still remained the more frowned upon gender if seeking a divorce. From the narrative sections previously mentioned arise human concerns that were, and remain, problematic. Accordingly, "[s]ubjects were broached in sensation novels that many good Victorians thought inappropriate and the fact that these subjects seemed not to be addressed seriously but merely 'sensationally' made them all the more disreputable" (Brantlinger 7). Therefore, it is not impractical, but rather very effective, to

⁶ See Gail Savage's article (1983), "The Operation of the 1857 Divorce Act, 1860-1910 a Research Note," for further details.

use sensation fiction, specifically *East Lynne*, as a vehicle for disseminating uncomfortable but still popular topics about marriage and divorce amid society.

East Lynne has proved to be more than a sensation infused melodrama where each installment is picked up for the train ride or bought at the nearest kiosk, though that clearly was a regular occurrence. The content permeated the minds of readers identifying with human concerns regarding marriage and divorce, female oppression, and family expectations but that is not the only thing that aids in the text's popularity. Ellen Wood was a talented author, a savvy businesswoman, and an invested wife and mother. Though some contemporary reviews called negative attention to the religion infused language⁷ throughout *East Lynne* and current scholars have debunked her for being too proper, her character remains upstanding. Jennifer Phegley, author of "Domesticating the Sensation Novelist: Ellen Price Wood as Author and Editor of the *Argosy* Magazine," provides a thorough depiction of Wood's family life as well as her transition into editorship. Once Wood became editor of the *Argosy*, she made it apparent what she classified as well-written work, work that genuinely resonated with readers. For example, she believed "the blending of elements of realism and sensationalism as the most effective means of developing sympathy" (Phegley 191) and "literature . . . is at its best when it is not trying to be high art but is depicting the lives of common folk in recognizable and moving ways" (Phegley 189-190). Wood's reputation and literary background paired with her personal recognition of gender stereotypes and family structures made her acutely aware of her audience, and also uniquely capable of incorporating maternal Victorian norms into her fictions. Unlike Braddon's gradual exposure of Lady Audley's disordered and irregular "secrets," Wood effectively contained Lady Isabel's narrative within the normalcy of a home. In this, Wood had the insight

⁷ See review 5 from, "Appendix E: Contemporary Reviews," from the Broadview edition of *East Lynne* (2000), pg. 709-711 for full review.

to recognize who her general readership was and that their expectation was to read something highly entertaining, or sensational, but particularly meaningful because of its underlying connotations of realistic human behavior and occurrences.

Aside from Wood's perceptive audience awareness, she was indisputably a respectable and hardworking woman. Wood chose to be recognized as Mrs. Henry Wood because although she considered herself an editor, critic, and author, above all else, she considered herself a respectable mother and wife (Phegley 181). Wood set a high standard for her children and led by example in her personal and business life. Throughout Wood's life she, similar to Lady Isabel, endured physical and emotional tolls, a claim that is further emphasized by Katherine Montgomery in her article "Ladies Who Launch: The *Argosy* Magazine and Ellen Price Wood's Perilous Voyages." According to Montgomery, Wood labored through the pain of a spinal deformity, supported herself and her children for several years after her husband's death, and succeeded at leaving a positive and everlasting impression on the literary world (524-525). Wood took over a business and made a magazine that was already a success even more successful, while still supporting a family. Her combined attributes present the image of a respected woman, thus prompting her fiction to be viewed comparably, whether enjoyed or not. Firmly endorsing Wood and her fiction, the *Daily News* (1861)⁸ reported on *East Lynne*, specifically, as being a tale of remarkable power. [. . .] The interest of the narrative intensifies itself to the deepest pathos, and shocks the feelings in spite of the judgment. The closing scene . . . is in the highest degree tragic; and the whole management of the story exhibits unquestionable genius and originality. (Maunder 706)

⁸ See review 2 from, "Appendix E: Contemporary Reviews," from the Broadview edition of *East Lynne* (2000), pg. 706 for full review.

Not only one of the most assuring reviews, echoing the enthralling, tragedy-bound complex of *East Lynne*, but also a thoughtful declaration of the artistic and delicate expertise of Mrs. Henry Wood.

CHAPTER THREE: LADY ISABEL'S NICHE IN SENSATION FICTION

While *East Lynne* has proven to be a landmark text within the genre due to the meaningfulness of its content, which unveils problematic gender stereotypes within society and marriage, Lady Isabel is the reason for the text's immediate and intense reception in America, specifically in American theater. Previously highlighted narrative passages revealed authentic and personal concerns of the ever-increasing readership of *East Lynne*, however, similar plots in other sensation narratives, though equally as revelatory in their nature, did not have as significant of a presence in American theater. One of the defining components that differentiates *East Lynne* from other sensation novels, specifically *Lady Audley's Secret*, is the level of relatability and authentic human behavior that transcends the more sensationalized aspects of both the novel and the stage. People were more apt to keep reading Lady Isabel's story because although she is ultimately to blame for her poor decision-making, her actions are defensible. She is wrongfully misinformed which leads to her departure, but her persistence to regain closeness with her family never physically harms anyone. Lady Audley commits arson and bigamy, and attempts murder, which is legitimately criminal and while she is still commendable for attempting to construct a better life for herself, her course for achieving this is irrefutably unlawful.

Emphasizing *East Lynne's* theatrical endurance is directly revealed by the psychological appeal of Lady Isabel's relatable character and her resilience through complex family situations. She has no mother figure in her life and thus no guidance during her transition into womanhood. She never learns the proper way to manage a home and family of her own, she is unable to manage money because she had no concerns with it while her father was alive, and she knows close to nothing about courtship and marriage because she never lived in the presence of a marital partnership. Lady Isabel essentially is left an orphan with a large debt and no life skills,

aside from her class status and her beauty, which eventually is what propels her into an unforeseen marriage. After marriage she is incessantly controlled by those in her life; a husband who decides what's best for her well-being, a sister-in-law who disallows her the opportunity to competently manage a home, and an adulterer who methodically hinders her mental capacity. When marriage acts as a financial safe haven, there will inevitably be emotional hesitation from one or both parties involved. Thus, Lady Isabel in this case, an already fragile and immature human, enters into a marriage simply because she has no other choice but to acknowledge the financial debt her father's death left her in.

Similarly, Lady Audley also has a very complex family situation where she marries, has a child, and is left by a husband with good intentions of earning a large sum of money for their well being; however, she handles her situation by faking her death, abandoning her child, and knowingly commits bigamy. Once her secret begins to unfold, she doesn't take responsibility for her actions – or her abandoned family – but does everything in her power, from coercion to attempted homicide, to remain high class and financially secure. This behavior reveals the main difference between Lady Isabel and Lady Audley, which is, one is defensible and the other is not. While it is possible to state that some individuals may actually relate to Lady Audley, her conduct is still morally and lawfully wrong and much less realistic as a normal occurrence. Aside from sporadic marriages both women behave rashly, which eventually and unfavorably alters the path of their existence. Similar in this way, a stark contrast forever remains between the two because when Lady Isabel wrongfully leaves her family, she spends the rest of her life endeavoring to make amends for her transgressions, unlike Lady Audley who, without remorse, abandons her husband and child and chooses crime and endangerment of others to selfishly

protect herself. Ultimately, theater popularity directly correlates with the more real, forgivable, and apologetically flawed character.

Lady Isabel easily positions herself as a hub for exploring the female role within the home. Vicky Simpson, author of “Not-So-Happy Homemakers: Women, Property and Family in Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne*,” offers a critical examination of the female character and their role as homemaker. Simpson resolves to “explore the female characters complex relationships with money and property . . . to highlight how these financial relationships intricately affect family structures and roles” (585). Because Lady Isabel is never educated in family management she is inevitably viewed as a lesser-valued asset than other female characters; for instance, Cornelia, Barbara Hare, and even Lady Audley are all well-practiced in household management. Lady Isabel’s advantages allowed her to never learn the skills necessary for running a household, and though she tries, it is not her husband who solely hinders her competency, but Cornelia as well. Ultimately, Lady Isabel’s family management problems stem from her lack of independent social and financial stability because her background never required or allowed her this opportunity, however, what is maddening is that she had the perfect teacher living under the same roof as her. Simpson highlights how in all patriarchal domestic situations “commodification of family” is destined to occur, which is seen through Carlyle’s treatment of Lady Isabel (Simpson 586). Audiences witness women being treated as property but they also watched as Cornelia repeatedly belittled Lady Isabel’s inexperience, when she had the background and the skills to teach her successful home management. Adding to Lady Isabel’s pathos then, she is not only commodified within her household but also sorely mistreated by the one woman who could have helped her.

While Simpson encapsulates a side of Lady Isabel that correlates her lack of financial and social independence with her absence of female role models and lack of knowledge about

familial responsibilities, Anne Marie-Beller provides another, more sympathetic depiction of her. In her article, "Suffering Angels: Death and Femininity in Ellen Wood's Fiction," she discusses the connection between death and femininity within Wood's novels, *The Shadow of Ashlydyat* and *Verner's Pride*. Beller states how these two texts provide an alternate, more favorable reading of Lady Isabel's death, one that is not "a punishment . . . [for] adultery," but a "heavenly reward" (220) for a "suffering angel['s]" (222) acceptance of death. Beller differentiates between a ladylike and unladylike procession into death where an individual either accepts death or resists it. This acceptance or rejection of death highlights a clear juxtaposition of the chaotic or defiant character and Lady Isabel's tolerant and patient character. While she accepts her fate gracefully, she doesn't resemble a perfected, angelic other-being, but a broken and defeated human who has fought relentlessly to regain her lost sense of self. At the narrative's closing her persistence cannot be disputed, but she nonetheless dies "poor lost Isabel," forgiven, but never truly found again within herself (Wood 617).

Though Lady Isabel has shown herself to be vulnerable and flawed, she eventually claims a fierce independence that subconsciously prohibits her from asking for help. In order to rightfully make amends with her life altering decisions she suffers through economic hardship, physical pain, and emotional turmoil completely alone, and internally she accepts a solitary existence because she cannot justify leaving her family. During an exchange between her and Levison, she is offered help: "Why, how can you live? You have no fortune: you must receive assistance from some one" (Wood 295). She is unflinching in her response: "I will not receive it from you. If the whole world denied me, and I could find no help from strangers, or means of earning my own bread, and it was necessary that I should still exist, I would apply to my husband for means" (Wood 295). The most prominent declaration of independence from her is revealed

here. She is fully aware of her failure as a wife and mother and deliberately deciding to rely solely on herself proves to be a starkly moral foundation for starting over. Ellen Rosenman's article, "'Mimic Sorrows': Masochism and the Gendering of Pain in Victorian Melodrama," describes how melodramas are all about emotional suffering, where normally the victim is doing so because he or she inadvertently chooses pain over inaction to maintain a moral image. Specifically, Rosenman states how *East Lynne* "punish[es] its heroine severely for illicit sexuality to retain sympathy for her" (26). Wood is not punishing Isabel because she thinks she is bad, she is finally allowing her agency to maintain her morality in the face of her transgressions. Audiences need to witness a revival because that is the character they are comfortable relating to, they do not want to associate with the lost and dependent that goes insane from despair.

Revival is a finite term in regards to Lady Isabel because although she gains independence and a semblance of control of her life and her children's upbringing, she can never again be the lovely and doted on Lady Isabel. In order to achieve even the smallest level of fulfillment she has to take on the identity of another far less noticeable individual. Elizabeth Steere, author of "'She Had Her Role To Play': The Performance of Servanthood in *East Lynne* and Other Sensation Novels," addresses how female sensation novel characters become more mobile in their homes by disguising their true identity and taking on a secondary one. Lady Isabel is able to achieve more mobility within the East Lynne estate once she returns masked as Madame Vine, however what draws her apart from other masters of disguise is that her masked identity allows her movement down the social class ladder. Steere's article is evidence that readers, although sympathetic to the fallen woman, were more apt to pity a woman falling down a class level than someone falling up one. Clearly, Lady Isabel appears to have success in her

“new” role within family due to her more mobile state, however her differentiating factor is the motivation behind her disguise. Lady Isabel emphasizes her selflessness; to her class status doesn’t matter, as long as she can be in the presence of her children. While Steere addresses her servanthood role as a mechanism to gain closeness with her children, she doesn’t emphasize her undeniable motherhood, which she performs automatically upon being reunited with her family.

As scholars have formed multifaceted and distinct images of Lady Isabel, what is surprisingly under promoted is her indisputable humanness. There is a complexity behind Simpson’s, Beller’s, Rosenman’s, and Steere’s perspectives that is keenly aware of Lady Isabel’s delicate and redemptive qualities that make a strong case for her absolution. Combined here is a naïve, financially dependent, and inadequate, yet forgivable, housewife turned selfless and mobile, under-class servant, who is rewarded an ethereal end for being compliant with death. Theology, sociology, and psychology aside, Lady Isabel in layman terms is, and remains, distinctly human and thus, normatively imperfect. She is not forgivable because she is an orphan left helpless or an angelic being filled with goodness, she is forgivable because she is an individual who is deeply flawed and insecure, and who has a uniquely original effervescence to amend her wrongdoings without hesitation. *East Lynne* resonated with readers because it bared real anxieties about marriage, divorce, and family, but Lady Isabel’s candid human behavior was what stage adaptations revealed. Audiences wanted to witness her persistence, especially when they were presented in normalized family situations that truthfully could occur off stage.

CHAPTER FOUR: BRITISH SERIALIZATION TO AMERICAN THEATER

Clearly *East Lynne* has been critically read in scholarship as an example of British sensation fiction, however its theatrical presence adds another dimension to scholarship that considers a larger spectrum of voices and interpretations regarding theater adaptations, actor roles and stage presence, and audience reception. Sensationalized content that reveals meaningful concerns regarding gender roles within family appears a probable fit for theater but the fact that *East Lynne* was being performed in American theater two years before it began performance in British theatre provides evidence of this particular stories meaningful content. Previously mentioned Jim Davis, highlights how *East Lynne's* British focus on class and society morphed into a tragedy about family dysfunction in America. Though *East Lynne* inevitably addresses class problems, there was nothing more prevalent to theater audiences than Lady Isabel's familial instability.

East Lynne's theatrical success is due in part to its literary form, which models the structural foundation of a classic tragedy. Its form appears rooted and blooms from Aristotle's *Poetics* that combines components of drama necessary for composing a successful text. Aristotle states that drama stems "imitation," which infers that "the reason why men enjoy seeing likeness is that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring," which provides gratification (55). According to Aristotle's categorization a successful tragedy, *East Lynne* precisely, provides audiences with replicated versions of inherently familiar or known scenarios that offer a release from an environment filled with uncertainty. Aristotle expands further on human imitation by asserting that "[t]ragedy is an imitation not only of a complete action, but of events inspiring fear or pity" (70). Pity, which is "aroused by unmerited misfortune" and fear, "the misfortune of a man like ourselves" (Aristotle 76). Lady Isabel effectively elicits both pity

and fear from her viewers because despite being on the brink of losing all that is dear to her, she is fundamentally the individual most at fault, motivated by relatable, human behaviors like jealousy and love. Combining dramatic form and catharsis with concepts from Freud reveals that the presence of undesirable emotions – pity and fear – demand a release of “[c]athectic energy” (36)⁹ by means of “projection” (35), attributing unfavorable behavior or thoughts to someone else, to essentially rebalance the human sensorium. Although Lady Isabel elicits an emotional response from audiences, the fact that this response is intensely recognized as uncomfortable requires an internal release from psychologically hindering emotions.

Combining Aristotelian and Freudian philosophical concepts, Jean-Michel Vives, author of “Catharsis: Psychoanalysis and the Theatre,” provides further examination of cathexis as it relates to theater. Vives addresses catharsis and emphasizes the connection between personal identification and tragic occurrences by claiming, “if that has happened to my fellow-man, it can also happen to me” (1012). He links tragedy and theater, displaying how audience members who see dramatic or tragic events unfold on stage provokes their unconscious, thus allowing a release, “cleansing, purifying, purging,” of similar internal feelings (1010). Theatergoers were obsessed with the dramatic domestic situations occurring in Lady Isabel’s life because they were real and human occurrences that were intensely provoking because of the uncomfortable closeness of that particular reality. Her sustainable nature throughout such trying events is predominantly what captivated audiences; she fell victim to misinformation but she accepted her fate and endured until her very last day, until she had finally made it back into the presence of her children. In the meantime, audiences were witness to her abandonment of healthy children and a faithful husband, to her birthing of an illegitimate child, and to an accident with irreparable damage, all

⁹ Freud defines cathetic energy as a build up of internal energy projected onto other “elements” within the environment (38).

the while internally torn between awe and anxiety. As Vives states, “[t]he affect felt during catharsis is purified because the spectator recognizes the forms of the frightening and the pitiable from the position of one who has been cleansed” (1013). Thus, upon observing Lady Isabel’s adversities, audiences applauded her captivating performance while simultaneously breathing a sigh of relief because, fortunately, this *was* happening to my fellow woman, therefore I will recognize that and never let this happen to me.

Furthermore, for theatergoers, Lady Isabel acted as an escape from reality, not in the sense that people wanted to be in her situation but because if they potentially were – and likely could be but were hoping never to be – she would act as the embodiment of perseverance that the majority would aspire to replicate. Her character remains forever memorable, in defiance of all that had gone wrong she remained sane in a situation that would drive most to madness. Aiding her defense, Aristotle highlights how “[t]here remains, then, the character between these two extremes [pitiful and terrible] – that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty” (76). Correspondingly, her fortitude through misfortune is admirable and ceaseless and though train accidents and disguise tactics sensationalize the text because of their improbability, there is nothing unrealistic about a woman leaving her family and sorely regretting it. For that reason, she becomes an outlet to project unclaimed, but internally existent, dangerous behavior, while synchronously providing motive to purge whatever risky impulses or complicated ruminations Lady Isabel’s actions truly bring to the surface. Everyday, unremarkable apprehensions normally are not actively seeking an outlet to dispel negative energy, however, in a Lady Isabel-esque scenario that has the potential to severely disrupt the human equilibrium, the release of volatile energy clarifies the mind and restores the senses.

While Lady Isabel and her domestic situation largely influence the audience's reception of and connection to the text, there remain societal factors that appear to reveal an even more psychologically complex reason audiences were interacting with her and the text. Tamarkin's observation about Americans fixated on British ideals highlights how people often felt anxious about their current social situation and longed for a place that maintained order and social control. A country fresh out of a civil war, dealing with controversies regarding slavery and disorder, envisaged a community that appeared orderly and controlled. Ironically, although America appeared to be attempting small steps toward democracy, a monocratic social makeup revealed itself as comforting because of its imagined grasp on societal control and order. Tamarkin's notion of anglophilia aids in establishing why Americans had an extreme fascination with British novels, and one especially revolved around white families. Essentially, Howells' portrayal of characters outraged by black actors performing *East Lynne* appears not so out of place in an anglophilic society who indirectly endeavor to divert attention from a racially mixed and problematic social situation. Considering the social and political context of communities and social revelations prevalent in scholarship about *East Lynne* only emphasizes Lady Isabel's conventionally white attractiveness in a chaotic American context. Ultimately, Lady Isabel was not only psychologically compelling because of her ability to endure suffrage but she was a focal point for audiences dispelling racial anxiety by seeking comfort in her traditional white female body. This additional resonance with people disperses true cultural anxieties regarding race and class as they relate to and influence political and social dynamics within American communities.

When *East Lynne*'s original edition revolves around white families unassociated with racial diversity, this particular narrative attribute seems to appeal to other nations who problematically seek comfort by this. Bennett offers a critical examination of audience reception

that emphasizes how theatre performances are viewed differently depending on individual histories. She reinforces how performance is not simply accepted by audience but ingested and interpreted based on “social, economic, and political structures” within communities (Bennett 2). Individuals who were viewing *East Lynne* brought their own personal histories to a production, which if a long term resident of America, consisted of an upbringing socially dominated by white males who were severely discriminatory of other races and women. Although Howells’ short story is fictional, there were clearly apprehensions about *East Lynne* being performed by black actors that he was alluding to. In that, anger at black performers seems a normalized response due to a society who has shown an obsession with a narrative about the white, middle to upper class. Incidentally, two of the most prominent Lady Isabel actresses – and the other, less publicized actresses – were white so it appears this was the norm for *East Lynne* productions. Considering this, in instances when this preferential image of white actors was disrupted, it made viewers uncomfortable because it only brought more attention to race in an already racist community.

Referring back to Tamarkin, America furthers this claim of racial avoidance and replaces it with a controlled and “normal” (or predominantly white) environment. Tamarkin states

if Anglophilia functions as an imaginary geopolitics – a desire by Americans to claim a transatlantic affiliation – it also speaks materially to a life closer at hand. So what passes as international is more often an attraction to Englishness for the way it articulates the idiom of a traditionary, local culture over and against the abstract interests that internationalism demands. (xxxiii)

In this frame, *East Lynne*, the image of a more elite English society, parenthetically becomes a source of British attachment for American theater audiences. Within this context, theatergoers

with a mentality similar to Howells, were not only focused on Lady Isabel's endurance, but also the whiteness or "Englishness" surrounding her (Tamarkin xxxiii). There surfaced a large concern as to whether or not her superior role was performed by a white woman interacting with other white actors in economically and racially comfortable situations. Even if scenes were performed poorly they should still be performed traditionally in order to effectively appeal to the psychological state of American audiences.

Furthermore, the female actresses in *East Lynne* and the sheer number of times certain women were performing *East Lynne* solicits further exploration and far more emphasis regarding the narratives theatrical popularity. In the narrative when Lady Isabel leaves Carlyle he has no qualms with Barbara as her replacement because to him they essentially played the same role. In similar fashion, the women who played Lady Isabel on stage were as quickly replaced in theatre as they were in the narrative. Literally, when one leading actress died, another simply and immediately replaced her. Fortunately, according to primary American newspaper publications, actresses portraying Lady Isabel were continually – in life and death – praised and applauded for their heartfelt and true depiction of her. The women actresses in this role were beloved because of their affinity to Britishness, to family strife, and to psychologically accessible content that maintains audience approval and attention. Accordingly, *East Lynne* became more than a play performance but a permanent part of their history that was remembered for many years even after their departure. Although remembered, the sentiment "the show must go on" rings true and raises concerns about women in the theatre industry. While performing Lady Isabel was a large part of how several women became recognized as talented actresses, there was an aura of female replaceability, not only resonating within the narrative, but also surrounding *East Lynne's* continuous production.

Leading lady Lucille Western, the first and one of the most loved actresses to star in *East Lynne*, played Lady Isabel from 1862 to 1876. Ending her career in 1877, “Miss Pauline Lucille Western died suddenly of pneumonia at the Pierrepont House, in Brooklyn, at 7:10p.m. yesterday. . . One of her most successful engagements . . . she played in [was] . . . ‘East Lynne’” (*Evening Star* 1877). According to *America’s Historical Newspapers*, Western’s name was linked to *East Lynne* several hundred times in American print publications from her first 1862 production until the year 1927 where she was remembered as a “praised” and “in favor” actress (“Famous Old Plays Are Recalled As Rambler Studies Records”). Further emphasizing Western’s compelling portrayal of Lady Isabel and the narratives popularity, the *Evening Star* printed this: “‘East Lynne’ is perhaps the most popular play that has ever been introduced to the Washington public. And yet it is not surprising that it should be so, for it is intrinsically meritorious and the prominent characters portrayed by such artists as Lucille Western . . .” (“Famous Old Plays Are Recalled As Rambler Studies Records”). Accordingly, Western appears very similar to Lady Isabel because she leaves a truly meaningful and lasting impression on her audience and even though she died in 1877, her name, in the presence of *East Lynne*, remained in newsprint 50 years after her death, as Lady Isabel still remains in scholarship today.

After Western’s death, actress Ada Gray transitioned into the newest edition of Lady Isabel, which she performed from 1874 until her death in 1902: “A dispatch from New York yesterday says: Ada Gray, the actress, who is best known to the theater-going public by her personation of Lady Isabel in ‘East Lynne’ is dead . . .” (*Evening Star* 1902). The article further addresses both Gray and *East Lynne’s* prominent presence in American Theatre, claiming, “she made her first appearance in ‘East Lynne’ in 1885, and during the next ten years gave over 2,000 performances of that piece” (*Evening Star* 1902). While this is an impressive number of

performances, according to *America's Historical Newspapers*, Gray had to have performed even more than that because she was starring as Lady Isabel long before 1885. An article printed in 1874 states, "A small house greeted Miss Ada Gray at Girardey's Opera House... [t]he play of 'East Lynne,' which was presented..." and further identifies the difficulty of playing Lady Isabel's "dual character" was a job that Gray performed flawlessly ("Article 47"). If Gray had performed *East Lynne* over 2,000 times herself, what does that say of one of the most famous Lady Isabel's, Lucille Western, number of performances?

To the theater patron whose memory reaches back a decade or more the recollections of Lucille Western . . . will naturally associate the greatest triumphs of these splendid artists with the character of Lady Isabel . . . [Her] part became known as peculiarly [her] own, both by the right of creation and the popular verdict of approval which [her] impersonation commanded. On this account all actresses attempting the rendition of "East Lynne" must suffer the ordeal of a comparison with [her], and it would be exacting too much to require an equal degree of merit in performances otherwise highly commendable. Miss Ada Gray is an actress of no mean qualifications, and her conception of the part of Lady Isabel presents many excellent features . . . [s]he, however, lacks those strong movements of passion to which we have been accustomed. ("Theatrical")

Although that number is yet to be confirmed, a safe assumption would be that she performed at least at the same capacity.

While Lucille Western, Ada Gray, and others were praised for their work, Western was a clear favorite among the public. She did more than perform the role of Lady Isabel and Madame Vine, she *became* those characters and she presented "the intense passions, the highly wrought

jealousy, the overwhelming pathos and the heartrending culmination of a blighted career” perfectly to her audience (“Theatrical”). Although acting is a replication of something meant to reverberate with audiences, Western possessed a certain authenticity unique to *East Lynne*’s original material, which speaks to the ability of an actress to immerse herself in the story and depict authentic qualities of the characters being performed. American audiences were looking for Lady Isabel’s genuine relatability and they found that with Western: “she has a fine field for the display of passion and remorse, intense and natural in all its points, the illusion is forgotten, so rapt do we become in her life-like impersonations (“Music and the Drama”). Western had the ability to present the realistic performance that bared interpersonal anxieties and showed endurance through hardship that people were looking for, which is precisely what reverberated with viewers.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

After my first read of *East Lynne* I had often asked myself why and how does a story, which originated in Britain, demand dramatic repetition in the United States? If not for the sole purpose of entertainment, why was *this* story one of the most, if not *the* most, performed play in late nineteenth, early twentieth-century America? It would have been a hasty and extremely generalized claim to state that all Americans are obsessed with seeing the “good” woman fall (or fail), but more perceptible appeared to be the idea that these shocking, highly entertaining and sensationalized plots, *could* – maybe even have – realistically happen. Though morality and femininity are prevalent topics within Victorian studies, from them stems the all-encompassing idea of family stability, or lack thereof. Thus, the perfect hub to disseminate this message about the American, but decidedly white, family can be none other than the story that emanates Britishness and a most unstable model of domestic life. Though some argue this claim and refer to *East Lynne* as merely an unrealistic melodrama about a woman’s inexcusable decision to abandon her family, I see an obsession where audiences cannot get enough of Lady Isabel. They did not want to hate her or fault her, but instead wanted to witness her reaction during a tragedy and still remain steadfast in an attempt to make amends. She was the epitome of every human who felt insecure in a partnership, who was jealous, or who simply couldn’t find his or her footing within family, however she was also the outlet to ease those anxieties.

Lady Isabel’s connection to audiences was particularly meaningful and lasting, but it was not the only reason Americans were interested in *East Lynne* productions. Howells’, particularly, emphasized a seemingly intense need not to disrupt tradition and even if a production was bad then at least it deserved its customary, white characters. This perception exposed a monochromatic social system, which was relieved to be viewing a “traditionary” British

theatrical production of *East Lynne* (xxxiii). Traditional, in a sense that to Americans then resembled Shakespeare, and now, resembles Britain's fictional Hogwarts or William and Kate, thus essentially, people were, and seem to be still, pursuing societal order.

East Lynne revealed its cultural history and its network of connections amongst multi-national audiences. It proved persistent in print and on stage; however, aside from these forms *East Lynne*, naturally, also made its way to film. While it didn't appear in film until 1908, from then until 1931, six film versions of *East Lynne* were professionally produced; two in 1908 and one in 1916, 1921, 1925, and 1931 ("East Lynne"). Although *East Lynne* appeared to have its most popular years in theatre from 1860 to 1900 – according to Bolton there were significantly less theatre productions from 1900 to 1930 – film appeared the more popular mode of presentation from 1900 to the 1930's. It is interesting that when one form of media fades out, another one makes an appearance. Whether or not the film and theatre productions were favorites with the people, *East Lynne* had to have left an impression amongst American audiences to remain a source of entertainment for 70 years. Noticeably, audiences were receptive to *East Lynne* and were able to interact and relate to the domestic situations presented within the narrative. Though film proved not to be the narratives most favorable format, theatre has proven otherwise. Founded in 1980, the East Lynne Theatre Company residing in Cape May, New Jersey, has been successfully producing and performing classic theater for almost 40 years.

Ultimately, the fundamental connection between sensation fictions, like *East Lynne* and *Lady Audley's Secret*, and their immediate transatlantic presence and persistence among readers and theater viewers alike, is the psychologically captivating content. Because so, it does not seem limited to one specific form as long as the material being presented preserves its originality, then it continues to appeal to audiences and thus remains accessible to the public.

Originality in a sense that questions gender equality and highlights domestic disturbances, but also appears to devalue racial diversity. However, what set *East Lynne* apart from other sensation fictions is not that it was more sensational or more entertaining, but that this particular story possessed a certain human quality that permeated the minds and lives of individuals. Lady Isabel, specifically, offers a character whose tragic story solicits an uncomfortable – shameful and fearful – response from people because what happened to her could realistically happen to anyone. In this sense, she served as the cathartic release necessary, and precisely what audiences were seeking, for a sensation fiction to remain so everlasting. Essentially, Lady Isabel remains a female heroine who recognized her flaws and endured emotional and physical pain; someone who flawlessly represents human authenticity in a highly sensationalized and tragic fiction.

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