

Abstract

Ellen Wood (or Mrs. Henry Wood, as she became widely known to the reading public) was the acclaimed author of more than thirty novels, over one hundred short-stories, and countless articles, as well as the owner and editor of a lucrative and popular periodical: *The Argosy*. Nonetheless, until recently, her multifaceted output has been largely overlooked by critics and researchers: despite her widespread popularity across social classes (which turned her into Wilkie Collins's main literary competitor), most her works have been dismissed as too sentimental, melodramatic, and sensational. By following in the steps of the few scholars who have undertaken a reassessment of Wood's oeuvre, this paper sets out to analyze a truly controversial story divided into two parts, whose plot revolves around a governess who, driven by passion and sexual desire, turns into a murderess: "The Mystery at Number Seven" (1877). As will be shown, on the one hand, Wood delved into the customary connection between violence and insanity (a recurring theme in Victorian sensation novels), focusing on her female protagonist. On the other hand, however, she also succeeded in uncovering the mechanisms of patriarchy and gender inequality.