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"She Is a Riddle to Them": Angela Tilton Heywood's Sex Radicalism in a Framework of Traditional Womanhood

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“SHE IS A RIDDLE TO THEM”:
ANGELA TILTON HEYWOOD’S SEX RADICALISM
IN A FRAMEWORK OF TRADITIONAL WOMANHOOD

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays State University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts

by

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ABSTRACT

Angela Heywood, a nineteenth century Free Lover, radical, labor reformer, anarchist, and ardent supporter of sexual freedom, has been relegated to the shadow of her husband by most historians. Heywood publically discussed issues such as birth control, abortion, sexuality, freedom of speech, and Free Love in an open and frank manner, yet she remains virtually absent from texts and other scholarly works. Though she was quite well known in the nineteenth century for her boldness of speech and for her active stance against the Victorian prudery, historians have largely treated her dismissively, giving her only passing mention in favor of emphasizing the importance of her husband.

Angela Heywood and her husband, Ezra Heywood, published a monthly reform journal called *The Word*, out of their home in Princeton, Massachusetts from 1872-1893. Angela Heywood contributed articles regularly to *The Word*, effusing on topics that many deemed unfit for public discussion. Heywood was a bold linguist who felt that sexuality was not a topic that should be whispered about in secret, but should be discussed publically and honestly. She strongly favored the use of plain English words to describe sexual organs and sexual acts, rather than the use of polite euphemisms. Her regular use of words like “cock,” “cunt,” and “fuck,” shocked even other sex radicals. Heywood refused to stop using bold language in her writings, even though her husband was arrested repeatedly for sending her writings through the mail. Since her language

and the sexual nature of the subject matter was deemed obscene, sending them through the mail violated the Comstock Act of 1873.

Angela Heywood and her husband were Free Lovers. The Free Love movement of the nineteenth century was a radical strain of reform, which sought to abolish traditional marriage in order to free women from the sexual slavery of their husbands. Sex radicals, such as the Free Lovers, occupied the fringes of even the most radical of reform movements. Most of the Free Lovers began their reform experience with an apprenticeship in the antislavery movement. Through their work for antislavery, they gained access to the reform impulse characteristic of the late-nineteenth century. Free Lovers noted a connection between the slavery of the blacks in the South and the slavery of women within marriage. The Heywoods both got their start through work in the antislavery movement.

Throughout the height of the Free Love movement, Angela Heywood published articles in *The Word* on issues regarding Free Love and sexuality. She was considered to be quite radical for her views on sexuality as well as her use of shocking language. However, Angela Heywood participated in her sex radicalism through the sphere of traditional or Victorian Womanhood. Though the Heywoods participated passionately in a movement that sought to destroy the institution of marriage, they remained in their own traditional marriage until Ezra Heywood's death. The couple raised four children together. Angela Heywood took on the traditional wifely duties of caring for the children and the home. She often had to put her writings aside when the demands of housework and childcare overwhelmed her time. Though the Heywoods spend

considerable time writing on the equality of the sexes, this did not mean for them that the husband should aid in household chores or child-rearing.

Angela Heywood gained income for her family, but not through the male sphere of wage-earning. She managed an inn called Mountain Home, which served as a resort for summer guests. She was responsible for all of the domestic duties associated with Victorian Womanhood for her guests as well as for her husband and children.

Neighbors described her in terms of her domesticity and noted qualities associated with Victorian Womanhood, though they were wary of her use of bold language and the radical nature of the subjects she treated in her writings. Though her writings made her a sex radical, she participated in this radicalism through a traditional marriage and through her appropriate sphere as outlined by Victorian Womanhood.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the early nineteenth century, anyone who critiqued the institution of marriage or exhibited sexual behaviors divergent of social norms was likely to receive the derisive label, ‘free lover.’ By mid-century the capitalized term Free Lover described a collective of individuals who sought to redefine and reform the “domestic and sexual lives” of American women and men.¹ Angela Heywood, a member of this group of social activists, called for frank and open discussion of sexuality. Angela was quite well known in the late nineteenth century for her boldness of speech and for her active stance against the Victorian social order. Her writings in *The Word*, a monthly reform newspaper published by her husband, Ezra Heywood, demonstrate her radical views on sex, marriage, Free Love, and women’s rights. In *The Word*, which ran from 1872-1893, Angela offered articulate critiques of marriage and Victorian prudery. She publically discussed issues such as birth control, abortion, sexuality, freedom of speech, and Free Love in a candid manner, yet she remains virtually absent from texts and other scholarly works. While most historians treat Angela dismissively, focusing their attention on Ezra, Angela contributed significantly to the Free Love movement in her own right. Her use of language and her willingness to speak openly about sexuality shocked both critics and fellow Free Lovers. Angela vehemently opposed the institution of marriage in her writings. However, she and her husband remained in a monogamous marriage until his death. Angela supported birth control for women and advocated that

¹ Jesse F. Battan, “The Politics of *Eros*: Sexual Radicalism and Social Reform in Nineteenth-Century America” (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1988), 4.

women should have the right to choose to withhold sex from husbands, yet she and her husband raised four children. Angela Heywood participated in sex radicalism through the accepted sphere of womanhood, which offered her some measure of protection against criticism and legal persecution. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the Free Lovers' critiques of marriage and Victorian sexuality through the study of Angela Heywood as well as to highlight her importance to the movement. This thesis will examine how Angela, who espoused radical views on sex and marriage, participated in sex radicalism within the confines of traditional sex roles and a traditional marriage.

Nineteenth-century Free Lovers often used pamphlets, books, newspapers, and other publications to create a dialogue about sexuality and to build a network of supporters that spanned the country. Since the Free Love movement lacked formal membership or central organization, Free Lovers "relied on periodicals to create a sense of connection to each other."² Free Lovers were diverse in their social and economic backgrounds as well as in their ideas. However, most Free Lovers of the latter half of the nineteenth century "gravitated" to the movement "after an apprenticeship in antislavery work."³ According to historian Hal D. Sears, this relationship between abolition and Free Love was no accident. In *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America*, Sears notes that Free Lovers aimed to free women of the sexual slavery imposed on them through traditional marriage. Thus, the slavery of blacks in

² Joanne E. Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 39.

³ Hal D. Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), 5.

the South provided a metaphor for the slavery of women within marriage. The antislavery work also exposed Free Lovers to the reform impulse characteristic of the nineteenth century.⁴ Angela Heywood was no exception to this. Despite her disdain for elites, as a young woman she was part of a circle of abolitionists and transcendentalists that included Theodore Parker, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott, and William Lloyd Garrison.⁵ It was through her work in the abolitionist movement that she met her husband, Ezra Heywood.

Most Free Lovers were involved in a variety of reform movements during the nineteenth century. The Free Love movement shared its membership with abolition, spiritualism, anarchism, labor reform, feminism, and host of other reform movements. Sears argues that feminism, spiritualism, and Free Love were mutually supportive of each other and that many sex radicals worked for all three causes. Sears states that of these three movements, Free Love represented the most extreme and was the least likely to be tolerated or supported by society.⁶ The Free Love movement operated on the fringes of even the most radical of reforms. Many reform groups made a clear effort to distance themselves from Free Lovers in order to avoid “alienating potential supporters” or “undermining the effectiveness” of their respective reform efforts through association with sex radicals.⁷

⁴Ibid.

⁵ Angela Heywood, “The Woman’s View of It—No.2,” *The Word* (February 1883): 2.

⁶ Sears, 8-9.

⁷ Battan, “Politics of *Eros*,” 156.

Definitions of Free Love varied during the nineteenth century. According to Angela Heywood, the movement represented “woman’s growing impulse to be *mistress of her own Person*.”⁸ She and other Free Lovers believed that women’s sexual autonomy would result in equality between the sexes, which they viewed as a necessary change from the Victorian social order. Sears argues that Free Love “simply allowed no coercion in sexual relations, whether from the legally prescribed duties of marriage or from the unrestricted urgings of libido.”⁹ Free Lovers sought to emancipate women from the “invasive sexual desires of all men, to protect them from the unwanted embraces of not only rapists and seducers but from husbands as well.”¹⁰ The group called for the right of women to control their own sexuality and the right to decline from anyone’s sexual advances, regardless of one’s supposed marital duty.

To Angela Heywood, marriage represented a woman’s loss of control of her body, identity, and property. She insisted that marriage, an institution “based on inequality, compulsion, and force” made women into slaves by granting rights to husbands and denying them to wives.¹¹ In the Free Love tract *Cupid’s Yokes*, Ezra Heywood argued that marriage destroyed “individual freedom and denied women the

⁸ Angela Heywood, “The Woman’s View of It—No. 1,” *The Word* (January 1883): 2.

⁹ Sears, 4.

¹⁰ Jesse F. Battan, “‘You Cannot Fix the Scarlet Letter on My Breast!’: Women Reading, Writing, and Reshaping the Sexual Culture of Victorian America,” *Journal of Social History* 37.3 (2004): 603.

¹¹ Jesse F. Battan, “Angela Fiducia Tilton Heywood,” in *American National Biography* V. 10 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 725.

right of self-government.”¹² The Heywoods felt that relationships between men and women required self-government, mutual discretion, and the ability of either party to dissolve the relationship at will. They argued that church and state interference in personal relationships destroyed individual sovereignty and weakened the feelings of love between two persons.¹³ The Heywoods stressed the absolute necessity of the abolition of marriage in order to emancipate women from sexual slavery and prostitution.

According to historian John C. Spurlock, Free Love “was an attack on the middle-class ideal of marriage” and their criticism of the institution of marriage “shaped every aspect of the free love ideology.”¹⁴ In *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825-1860*, Spurlock studied the major leaders of the movement and its institutional forms in relationship to an emerging middle-class.¹⁵ He states that in the early nineteenth-century Americans considered love and marriage to be the foundations of stability and happiness. He argues that by the 1840s the middle class had become increasingly confused about the question of marriage. They recognized

¹² Martin Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism: The Biography of Ezra Heywood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 103.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ John C. Spurlock, *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825-1860* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 164.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1.

that too often love faded in marriage, making the institution “as artificial as other false relationships.”¹⁶

As a consequence of the Industrial Revolution, home-based production shifted to factory or shop-based production during the nineteenth century. This meant that marriage partners no longer formed an economic partnership through their home-based productive activities. As the Industrial Revolution thrust men outside the home to work, women remained in the home to care for the children and the household. This shift created separate spheres of duty and influence for men and women. Men occupied the public sphere, while women occupied the private sphere.¹⁷ This separation of spheres subordinated women in society by validating the economic activities of the men and restricting women from activities that took them out of their place within the home such as employment, education, politics, professions, and religious leadership.¹⁸

Nineteenth-century society judged women, particularly in marriage, based on the attributes of “True Womanhood.”¹⁹ According to historian Barbara Welter, society expected women to possess and exhibit the four cardinal virtues of True Womanhood: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. These cardinal virtues secured women’s place as firmly within the home and separate from the public sphere that men occupied.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹⁸ Ellen DuBois, “The Radicalism of the Woman Suffrage Movement: Notes Toward the Reconstruction of Nineteenth-Century Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 3 (Fall 1975): 63-65.

¹⁹ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* Vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer 1966): 152.

Husbands were responsible for taking care of the economic and political interests of the wife and, in return, the wife was responsible for caring for the home and submitting to the authority of her husband. Supporters of this patriarchal system of marriage insisted that husbands had marital rights to the body of his wife and that it was “her ‘duty’ to please him.”²⁰ Free Lovers insisted that a woman had a right to deny sex to anyone, even her husband. This also meant for most Free Lovers that a woman had the right to offer sex to anyone, regardless of their relationship.²¹

Contrary to the beliefs of critics, Free Lovers were not wildly promiscuous. In an article in the *Democrat*, contributor Brick Pomeroy characterized Free Lovers as “long-haired men, short-haired women, drowsy boozers who see visions, grass widows who go hell-pestling over the land for affinities . . . luscious-lipped virgins in training for the new church, and discarded husbands.”²² However, this was not the case. Free Lovers maintained that abolishing state or religious restrictions on personal or sexual relationships would “bring about a higher state of order and responsibility in the sexual lives of men and women.”²³ The Heywoods believed that love could only flourish if left unrestricted. Moses Harmon, a friend and associate of the Heywoods from Kansas insisted that Free Love did not mean “‘unbridled passion’—unchecked and

²⁰ Jesse F. Battan, “The ‘Rights’ of Husbands and the ‘Duties’ of Wives: Power and Desire in the American Bedroom, 1850-1910,” *Journal of Family History* 24 (1999): 166.

²¹ Sears, 22.

²² Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 110.

²³ Battan, “The Politics of *Eros*,” 145.

irresponsible indulgence of the sexual instinct.”²⁴ Free Lovers argued that once society removed legal and moral restrictions from personal relationships, sexuality would be controlled by self-regulation and reason. Ezra Heywood noted that “free Love puts the sexes on their good behavior, and insists that the reproductive instinct shall be accountable to reason and conscience.”²⁵

Far from being wildly promiscuous, Angela and Ezra Heywood maintained a committed and monogamous marriage despite their calls for the abolition of the institution. The Heywoods were most clearly situated within the Exclusivist camp of the Free Love movement. This camp, which represented the majority of the Free Lovers, argued that true love exists between two people only. The Exclusivists argued that Free Love would naturally lead to monogamous relationships between a man and a woman. However, the Heywoods did argue at times for the Varietist camp of the movement which held that “love, like lust, naturally sought variety in its arrangements.”²⁶ The Varietist camp included Moses Hull, editor of *Hulls’ Crucible*, and Victoria Woodhull.²⁷ Woodhull, a fiery activist, drew plenty of attention to the movement. In front of a crowd of over three thousand people in New York’s Steinway Hall, she boldly proclaimed, “ I have an *inalienable, constitutional* and *natural* right to love whom I may, to love as *long* or as *short* a period as I can; to *change* that love *every*

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ezra Heywood, “The Law of Liberty,” *The Word* (July 1877): 2.

²⁶ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 110.

²⁷ Ibid.

day if I please; and with *that* right neither you nor any *law* you can frame have *any* right to interfere.”²⁸ She repeated this proclamation several times over in her lecture circuit.²⁹ Similarly, Free Lover Francis Barry argued that women and men had a right to freedom in their love relationships. He stated that “the heart shall decide for itself whether it will have one or more objects.”³⁰ He went on to say that “variety in love is not only natural, but in the highest degree promotive of purity, happiness, and development.”³¹ While Free Lovers did not always agree on the definition of Free Love or its practical application, all agreed that legal and religious restrictions placed on sexual relationships inhibited love in its purest form.

Historian Joanne E. Passet studied the Free Love movement in her 2003 work *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women’s Equality*. While many historians of sex radicalism show women as “abberants . . . victims of circumstance . . . or as pawns of lovers, husbands, brothers, and fathers,” Passet highlights women’s active participation in the movement.³² She studies women’s grassroots participation in the Free Love movement and shows that geographically and economically diverse women participated

²⁸ Taylor Stoehr, ed. *Free Love in America: a Documentary History* (New York: AMS Press, 1979), 39-40.

²⁹ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 347.

³⁰ Spurlock, 141.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Passet, 3.

in the movement through the readership of the Free Love periodicals in their homes.³³ Passet breaks the movement into four stages of development. During the first stage, lasting from 1853-1870, Free Lovers developed a collective consciousness as a social movement through its print culture. She notes that events such as the Seneca Falls convention in 1848 and the multiple reform efforts of the 1840s and 1850s led to the emergence of this first stage in which Free Lovers articulated their ideas in print. In the second stage, during the 1870s and 1880s, the Free Lovers met resistance in their efforts. Social purity reformers and censors such as Anthony Comstock often deemed Free Love effusions in periodicals obscene, targeting the editors of the papers. During the third stage, the 1880s and 1890s, Free Love leaders faced imprisonment for their efforts, which politicized the movement. The movement fractured and faded during the fourth stage, which lasted from the 1890s to 1910.³⁴ According to Passet's framework, the Heywoods came to prominence during the second and third stages, the height of the Free Love movement.

Passet demonstrates the importance of the sex radical press in the Free Love movement. She notes that women made up forty percent of the contributors of the sex radical periodicals. Not only did Free Love periodicals provide women with sex radical knowledge, they also allowed women a safe means of adding to the discussion about sexuality in the nineteenth century. Sex radical periodicals allowed women and men a

³³ Ibid., 5.

³⁴ Ibid.,13-14.

place to share ideas, vent frustrations with the Victorian system of marriage and sexuality, and to participate in a social movement regardless of their sex or economic status.³⁵

While Passet mentions Angela Heywood several times in her work, she does not focus on her writings specifically. In fact, the historiography of Angela Heywood is quite brief. Most historians have dismissed her, giving her only passing mention in favor of emphasizing the importance of her husband. While many note that Angela was considered to be more radical than Ezra, he still dominates their focus. Angela contributed regularly to *The Word*, published out of their home, and aided Ezra in his writings. In her writings, she discussed sexuality in a bold and frank manner. Historian Jesse Battan studied her use of language in his work “The Word Made Flesh’: Language, Authority, and Sexual Desire in Late Nineteenth-Century America.” He argues that she carried on “by far the most radical nineteenth-century critique of linguistic prudery.”³⁶ Angela called for the use of plain words, of which everyone knew the meaning, to describe sexual organs and sexual acts. Her regular use of words like ‘penis,’ ‘cock,’ and ‘fuck’ shocked even the most radical free lovers. According to their friend and Free Love leader Stephen Pearl Andrews, her “boldness of speech . . .

³⁵ Ibid., 40, 57.

³⁶ Jesse F. Battan, “The Word Made Flesh’: Language, Authority, and Sexual Desire in Late Nineteenth-Century America” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* Vo.3 No.2 (1992): 230.

frightened and repelled the conservatives on one hand, and even more their own associates in the reformatory world, who were not ready to be committed to so much.”³⁷

Battan also studied Angela as well as other prominent female Free Lovers such as Lillian Harmon, Lois Waisbrooker, Mary Gove Nichols, and Victoria Woodhull in “You Cannot Fix the Scarlet Letter on My Breast!: Women Reading, Writing, and Reshaping the Sexual Culture of Victorian America.” He argues that these women refused to “accept society’s categories of deviance” and that they openly challenged Victorian respectability.³⁸ This work focuses on the Free Love movement’s willingness to discuss the sexual experiences of men and women publically through the forum of the sex radical press. Like Passet, Battan notes the importance that the periodicals of the sex radicals played in the lives of their readers. These papers connected women and men in the movement and provided a safe means of expression for the frustrations regarding the system of marriage that many felt was not working for them. Angela Heywood also figures prominently in his dissertation, “The Politics of *Eros*: Sexual Radicalism and Social Reform in Nineteenth-Century America.” In this work, Battan examines the attempts of the sex radicals to put their ideals into practice in order to fully understand nineteenth-century sexuality.³⁹

Ezra Heywood’s biographer, Martin Blatt, examines Angela’s contribution to the Free Love movement in *Free Love and Anarchism: The Biography of Ezra*

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Battan, “You Cannot Fix the Scarlet Letter on My Breast,” 602.

³⁹ Battan, “The Politics of *Eros*.”

Heywood. Blatt treats Angela as a partner of Ezra in love and life rather than viewing her as merely an appendage to her husband. He calls her an “articulate social critic” and notes that Angela aided Ezra in his writings in *The Word* as well as the pamphlets “Cupids Yokes” and “Uncivil Liberty.”⁴⁰ Angela also provided the family with their main source of income by managing a resort home in Princeton, which allowed Ezra to publish *The Word* out of their home. She was a frequent contributor to the reform newspaper and critics blamed her regularly for *The Word*’s plain speech policy on sexuality. Many Free Lovers condemned her use of language as a detriment to the movement for sexual freedom. While she garnered heavy criticism, another camp of readers praised Angela for her bravery in use of plain speech rather than the use of polite euphemisms.⁴¹ Angela felt that it was necessary to describe sexual acts and sexual organs using plain words. This policy caused one reader of *The Word* to request of Ezra that he “keep Angela’s penis words out of the racket.”⁴² Angela wrote, “hearing, smelling, tasting, fucking, throbbing, kissing, and kin words, are telephone expressions, lighthouses of intercourse centrally immutable to the situation.”⁴³ She went on to say that “their aptness, euphony and serviceable persistence make it as impossible and undesirable to put them out of pure use as it would be to take oxygen

⁴⁰ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 70.

⁴¹ Wendy McElroy, *Individualist Feminism of the Nineteenth Century: Collected Writings and Bibliographical Profiles* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2001), 19, 27.

⁴² Ezra Heywood, “Editorial Notes,” *The Word* (January 1889): 2.

⁴³ Angela Heywood, “The Ethics of Touch-Sex Unity,” *The Word* (June 1889): 2.

out of air.”⁴⁴ Angela and Ezra Heywood both continually and openly challenged Victorian censorship of sexual discourse and pushed the boundaries of free speech in *The Word* as well as in lectures and other publications.

Angela also challenged the prevailing notion that women were passionless or devoid of sexual desires. She refused to define female sexuality in maternal terms alone. She argued that women had powerful sexual desires on the level of men’s and that it would be unnatural to assume otherwise. She asserted that women were equal partners in sexual relationships, “able to give, as to receive.”⁴⁵ Like other Free Lovers, Angela recognized the importance, existence, and positive value of female sexuality. Angela referred to sexuality as “a divine ordinance, elegantly natural from eye-glance to the vital action of penis and womb, in personal exhilaration or for reproductive uses.”⁴⁶

Though Angela and Ezra Heywood both called for the immediate and total abolition of the institution of marriage, they were married and remained so until Ezra’s death in 1893. They raised four children, Vesta Vernon, born in 1869, Hermes Sidney, born in 1874, Psyche Ceres, born in 1881, and Angelo Tilton, born in 1883.⁴⁷ Though Angela and Ezra were both adamant about their Free Love ideas of equality between the sexes, this did not mean for them that Ezra should help to perform the traditional female duties of cooking, cleaning, and caring for the home. By remaining in a monogamous

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Angela Heywood, “Sex Service-Ethics of Trust,” *The Word* (October 1889): 2.

⁴⁶ Angela Heywood, “The Ethics of Sexuality,” *The Word* (April 1881): 3.

⁴⁷ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 91.

marriage, bearing and raising children, and performing domestic duties Angela fit into the Victorian model of womanhood that she railed against. Angela also put her work aside when the demands of motherhood and family life called for it. In *The Word*, Ezra expressed that housekeeping and family chores sometimes kept Angela from contributing more articles to the paper.⁴⁸

Angela held extremely radical views, but she participated in the Free Love movement primarily through writing, an acceptable mode of female expression during the nineteenth century. Though Angela did do some lecturing, where she shocked and outraged crowds with her obscene language, she also served as a hostess for reform league meetings, another acceptable position for a Victorian woman. Stephen Pearl Andrews, a close friend of the Heywoods and a fellow Free Lover, noted of Angela that “as to her domesticity, she prides herself upon being the ‘drudge,’ . . . the mere housewife, the working woman. She provides elegant parlor accommodations for her boarders, for the reforms, for other lady visitors, yet keeps herself secluded in the basement, doing more work than three ordinary women.”⁴⁹ He comments that she is a model woman and housekeeper. Andrews also notes that Angela and Ezra were comrades in a common cause rather than merely husband and wife.⁵⁰

Though critics and comrades alike considered Angela to be extremely radical in her Free Love ideas, she did not act independently in her radicalism. She participated in

⁴⁸ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 89.

⁴⁹ Stephen Pearl Andrews, “Co-operation,” *The Word* (October 1883): 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

the Free Love movement as a partner in her marriage to Ezra Heywood. She did not always put her Free Love ideas into action as she remained in a traditional marriage. However, her marriage and participation in the roles of a Victorian woman afforded her some measure of protection from critics and even from imprisonment. Anthony Comstock chose to arrest Ezra Heywood on obscenity charges immediately following an address given by Angela to a Boston Free Love convention. He called her speech the foulest address he had ever heard.⁵¹ On another occasion, Comstock arranged for the arrest of Ezra for an article written by Angela that he deemed obscene. However, Comstock had no trouble jailing Angela's unmarried sister, Josephine Tilton, for the dissemination of obscene material written by Ezra.⁵²

Stephen Pearl Andrews wrote that Angela remained a "riddle" to many of her Princeton neighbors.⁵³ Though Angela insisted on using foul language to speak about sex and other impolite subjects, her neighbors noted her well-kept home and children who excelled in school. Andrews called her "ladylike" and "eminently domestic," yet she remained "hard as flint when her rights, or the rights of those whom she represents, are invaded."⁵⁴

⁵¹ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 113.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 113, 118.

⁵³ Andrews, October 1883, 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Lucien Pinney called Angela “the light, the life, and . . . the motive power of the establishment.”⁵⁵ He acknowledged the importance of the Heywoods’ partnership when he stated that “she is a power acknowledged here and consulted on all occasions . . . to leave her out of account in this Princeton drama would be like leaving Joan of Arc out of the history of France.”⁵⁶ Angela Heywood represents an enigma. A radical spirit who used language unfit for public discourse during this time, Angela still remained within the accepted sphere of womanhood. Though her writings make her a sex radical, her radicalism was not independent, but rather supportive of the radicalism of her husband and partner.

⁵⁵ Lucien V. Pinney, “The Man and Woman of Princeton,” *The Word* (June 1890): 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER TWO

TITLE

Angela Fiducia Tilton was born in 1840 to New Hampshire farmers Lucy and Daniel Tilton. The Tiltons chose the name for their daughter to mean “Angel of Fidelity,” which Angela claimed was an “awful load to carry.”¹ Angela, her two brothers, and her three sisters were raised in a radical household. Their mother, widowed for most of her life, was a labor reformer, Free Love advocate, and abolitionist.² Lucy Tilton taught her children to respect and study sex from an early age.³ Angela’s mother set up chairs for her children to watch as horses and cows mated on the farm and then offered to answer any questions that they might have about the acts that they witnessed. She taught sexuality to the Tilton children as a necessary part of life. “From babyhood,” Angela recalled in 1884, “I was taught to have sacred regard for the human body-form and all its belongings, to call penis ‘penis’ and womb ‘womb;’ it never occurred to me that it could be considered indelicate or ‘vulgar’ to speak, orally or writtenly, of sex organs by their proper names.”⁴ As a child, Angela said to herself “when I grow up I shall deal with men’s penises, write books about them; I mean to and I will do it.”⁵ Since Angela was raised to regard sexuality as inherently natural, this shaped her views on public discussion about sex. Even as a child Angela

¹ Angela Heywood, “The Woman’s View of It—No. 2,” 2.

² Blatt, 67-8.

³ Angela Heywood, “Creative Dualism-Motherhood,” *The Word* (November 1888): 2.

⁴ Angela Heywood, “Penis Literature-Onanism of Health!” *The Word* (April 1884): 2.

⁵ Angela Heywood, “Sex Service- Ethics of Trust,” 2.

had a desire to have open and frank discussions regarding sexual matters, a desire which she fulfilled through her writings in *The Word*.

Lucy Tilton found educated and refined men and women who did not know or use the correct terms for their own sex organs so “ineffably idiotic” that according to Ezra Heywood “she has to keep herself hid for disgust of them.”⁶ Mrs. Tilton loathed the educated upper class for acting superior to working people. Stephen Pearl Andrews, a fellow Free Lover and close personal friend of the Heywoods called Lucy a “fanatical opponent of books, literature, schools, intellectual culture, and what the world deems the higher enlightenment of education.”⁷ She was, however, an ardent supporter of a strong work ethic and skilled female labor. Angela recalled that her mother “was compelled by poverty to send me and my sisters out into the world as a flock of chickens to pick our way.”⁸ In Angela’s tenth year, economic crisis beset the Tilton farm. Angela moved out of the Tilton household in order to earn a living as a domestic in the home of a clergyman. In her youth, Angela took on a variety of highly demanding and low paying jobs. Her experience as a shop girl intensified her “revolt against the literary and ‘cultured’ classes,” that she learned from her mother.⁹ Her

⁶ Ezra Heywood, *Lucifer the Light-Bearer*, (February 19, 1892): 3.

⁷ Andrews, “Co-operation,” 1.

⁸ Angela Heywood, “Love and Labor,” *The Word* (October 1876): 1.

⁹ Andrews, “Co-operation,” 1.

familiarity with being mistreated and underpaid led her to a lifelong passion for labor reform, particularly for working girls.

While she intensely hated the educated upper class that she saw as displaying a pretention of superiority over the working class, she became a voracious reader and intellectual. Despite her lack of formal education, Angela associated with prominent abolitionists and transcendentalists as a young woman. According to Andrews, Angela was well known in the ranks of abolitionists “courted and sought for, for her bright, original, daring manifestation of genius.”¹⁰ Famed transcendentalist and author, Bronson Alcott called Angela a “metaphysical prodigy” as a young woman.¹¹ Angela referred to Alcott and William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Theodore Parker, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Walt Whitman, and Ralph Waldo Emerson as her “immediate teachers.”¹² Angela carried the linguistic boldness of speech of the abolitionist and transcendentalist movements to matters regarding sexuality. Her disdain for the trappings of Victorian elites led her to a determination that people should openly discuss “what in secret they dwell on as the staple of their lives; that the hypocrisy shall be exposed; that the inflated pretense of virtue which does not exist shall be punctured and collapsed.”¹³

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Angela Heywood, “Dance of Ideas in Sex-Ethic Forces,” *The Word* (April 1893): 3.

¹² Angela Heywood, “The Woman’s View of It-No. 2,” 2.

¹³ Andrews, “Co-operation,” 1.

Angela met her future husband Ezra Heywood through her associations in the abolitionist movement.¹⁴ Most Free Lovers got their start by working for the abolition of black slaves. The Free Love Movement, a predominantly Northern based movement, attempted to emancipate women from the sex slavery of the oppressive patriarchal system. Historians have noted that work in the abolitionist movement gave way to increased agitation for women's rights. Women in the abolitionist movement drew on their experiences and resources working for the cause of the black slave to advocate for women's rights. Many Free Lovers argued that the system of slavery in the South offered a parallel to the oppression women faced through traditional marriage and sex slavery.¹⁵ Antislavery work helped women to develop a consciousness of their subjugation as well as the necessary resources and experience to call for the end of their oppression. Both Angela and Ezra made a clear connection between their work in the abolitionist movement and their work for sexual freedom for women and men. Angela stated that "as Mr. Heywood stood beside the slave demanding his liberation, so now he voices the emancipation of woman from sensual thralldom."¹⁶

¹⁴ Ezra Heywood was born Ezra Hervey Hoar. Ezra's elder brother changed the families surname to avoid the word 'whore' being associated with their name. Angela Heywood, "The Woman's View of It-No. 2," 2.

¹⁵ Stephen M. Buechler, "The Origins of the Women's Rights Movement," in *Major Problems in American Women's History*, 2nd edition, ed. Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander (Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1996), 184-5.

¹⁶ Angela Heywood, "The Woman's View of It-No. 1," 3.

Angela and Ezra married on June 5, 1865 in Boston.¹⁷ The Heywoods maintained a loving partnership and remained married until Ezra's death although they both called for the abolition of the institution of marriage. Ezra reflected in 1877 that if he could go back in time he would "tread underfoot the forms of repression," referring to marriage.¹⁸ Although he said that he repudiated the institution of marriage, he "acquiesced to it in all forms."¹⁹ He stated that the couple had felt compelled to marry, like one might feel compelled to pay taxes, an invasion he also repudiated.²⁰ Ezra corrected fellow Free Lover Francis Barry for referring to Angela as Ezra's "wife." Instead, Ezra called her "the woman with whom I choose to share a home" and his "partner in love and labor."²¹ When criticized by Barry for not putting his Free Love ideals into practice by dissolving his marriage, Ezra maintained that their relationship was based upon mutual attraction and agreement. He declared that their marriage "will be cancelled if ever experience shows that mutual choice ceases to sanction it."²² He argued that no article of Free Love thought required the dissolution of their marriage until one of the parties involved felt that their mutual attraction and agreement had ended.

¹⁷ Blatt, 68.

¹⁸ Ezra Heywood, "Mr. Heywood's Reply to Mr. Barry," *The Word* (April 1877): 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Blatt, 68.

²¹ "Mr. Heywood's Reply to Mr. Barry," 3.

²² *Ibid.*

Ezra denounced the term ‘wife’ as well as the term ‘husband’ because he felt they represented damaged words as a result of a barbarous system of marriage. He claimed that the terms repulsed him “being the relic of a tyrannic and disastrous relation of the sexes.”²³ Angela, on the other hand, did not see a problem with the term ‘wife’ itself. She declared that the word ‘wife’ never “in the three or four hundred years I have lived, seemed irrational to me.”²⁴ She believed that the term represented a relationship between a man and a woman with the term ‘husband’ representing the masculine side of a partnership and the term ‘wife’ representing the feminine side of the partnership. While she asserts that other people say that the term wife represents servitude forced upon a woman, she claims that she never “felt demeaned” by accepting the term but rather felt equal with men in the realm of service.²⁵

Six years after their marriage, Angela and Ezra moved from Worcester to Princeton, Massachusetts and set up an inn called Mountain Home. Angela functioned as manager of Mountain Home, which served as a center for reform activity as well as the family’s principle source of income. The couple also established the Co-Operative Publishing Company, which they operated out of Mountain Home. Since all of the printing, mailing, writing, and correspondence was handled in their home many of the rooms were unavailable for paying guests because they were piled with materials for

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Angela Heywood, “The Ethics of Sexuality,” 3.

²⁵ Ibid.

The Word or other publication projects.²⁶ *The Word* consistently ran advertisements for Mountain Home. One such advertisement stated “Mountain Home—A newly fitted House, with Large Airy Rooms, commanding a wide prospect. Those seeking a quiet, healthy summer resort can address Angela T. Heywood.”²⁷ Visitors to Mountain Home described its comfortable and elegant accommodations provided by Angela. Mountain Home housed a variety of guests seeking a summer resort. Angela also hosted reform league meetings in their home. By running Mountain Home, and securing the family’s principle income, Angela made the reform and publishing efforts possible.²⁸ Highlighting her importance to their joint operation, Lucien V. Pinney, anarchist and editor of the *Winsted Press*, stated that “the ‘situation’ without Mrs. Heywood would be no situation at all or worse.”²⁹

Angela frequently contributed to the couple’s reform newspaper, *The Word* throughout its twenty-one year run. Her biting critiques were written in her characteristically effusive prose. Historian Hal Sears argues that Angela did much to provide *The Word* with its distinctive style. While Ezra sometimes edited Angela’s effusions, he did not change her linguistic directness, nor did he alter her style.³⁰ Marx

²⁶ Blatt, 89.

²⁷ *The Word*, (May 1872): 4.

²⁸ Blatt, 89-90.

²⁹ Lucien V. Pinney, “The Man and Woman of Princeton,” 1.

³⁰ Sears, 172-173.

Edgeworth Lazarus, author and anarchist, called *The Word's* style “phallic and angelically voluptuous” and called Angela *The Word's* “Angelic teacher” on amative pleasures.³¹ Ezra mused in his Editorial Notes section in 1889 that a reader who sent a dollar for his copy of *The Word* “respectfully” requested that Ezra “give Angela Fiducia Tilton her say, even if it excludes a column of Free Trade nonsense every month.”³² While Ezra remained the official editor listed on the pages of *The Word*, the name Co-Operative Publishing Company suggests that the publication of *The Word* was a joint venture shared in partnership. Ezra acknowledged that many of his writings, including his controversial pamphlets “Cupids Yokes” and “Uncivil Liberty” were written with Angela’s aid. He praised her writing calling her an “oracle of what is right, best, natural, and modest in human-body life.”³³ He went on to proclaim that “it is lucky for the world that she is heard thus far”³⁴ Many who knew the couple claimed the Angela provided many of Ezra’s ideas and was the motivational push for Ezra’s work.³⁵

Two of Angela’s sisters, Josephine and J. Flora Tilton, also became radical activists committed to labor reform and Free Love. The two sisters worked as ‘lady agents’ for the Co-Operative publishing company, distributing *The Word* and other pamphlets widely. Josephine and J. Flora, like the Heywoods, were anarchists.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ezra Heywood, “Editorial Notes,” January 1889, 2.

³³ Ezra Heywood, “The Essential vs. The Transient,” *The Word* (October 1887): 2.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Sears, 173.

Josephine sent a telegram to Albert Parson on the day of the execution of the Haymarket Square anarchists that stated “Not good-bye, but hail, brothers. From the gallows trap the march shall be taken up. I will listen for the beating of the drum.”³⁶

Like Angela, Josephine and J. Flora held independent spirits and remained unwaveringly committed to reform. Josephine never married, and J. Flora eventually married Archibald H. Simpson, a fellow anarchist and her longtime companion.³⁷

Angela and Ezra stressed the necessity to hire females like the Tilton sisters as sales agents for their publishing company. They felt that single, working women were the most cheated victims of the system of labor and desired to expand and dignify their role in society. Angela argued women were oppressed by a system of male domination and also by the economic system that forced women to look to men for physical security due to the disparity in pay between men and women. She wrote, “The power of poor pay to force girls into the physical embrace of men is a stupendous and appalling fact. Girls’ lives are not matters of choice, but of persuasion and compulsion.”³⁸ For Angela, equitable pay for women was essential to women’s freedom.

By all accounts, Angela and Ezra’s marriage was loving and monogamous. Ezra stated of his wife that he knew “of no other woman, than my present partner, which

³⁶ Blatt, 70.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Angela Heywood, “Woman’s Love: Its Relations to Man and Society,” *The Word* (July 1876): 1.

whom I should prefer to live and work, or whom I should love more”³⁹ He went on to say that he had reasons to believe that “her choice of me, in these respects is equally cordial.”⁴⁰ Stephen Pearl Andrews said of the couple that they were the most industrious he ever knew, “laborious and devoted to the last degree.”⁴¹ He states that they were both ‘reared in the outspoken, audacious school of the radical Abolitionists’ and that they shared a passionate commitment to convictions outside the ordinary.⁴² Andrews notes that the pair deserved admiration in their bravery for refusing to back down from their beliefs, even when it made them unpopular. He attributes the words “peculiar” and “remarkable” to the pair of reformers.⁴³ Andrews states that Angela and Ezra were more like “comrades in a common cause” than simply husband and wife.⁴⁴

In a biographical sketch published in *The Truth Seeker* and reprinted in *The Word* Andrews, a close friend and associate of the Heywoods described the couple to their readers. He called them a “puzzle and a wonder” because they came from honorable lineage, raised a model family, and were reputable people, yet they were inclined to defend unpopular causes and use language deemed unfit for public use.⁴⁵ He

³⁹ Ezra Heywood, “Mr. Heywood’s Reply to Mr. Barry,” 3.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Stephen Pearl Andrews, “Co-Operation,” 1.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

likened Ezra Heywood to John Brown and noted his courageousness, conviction, audacity, and intellectual ability. Andrews stated that Angela Heywood was “utterly destitute of the sense of fear.”⁴⁶ Andrews said that she, like her husband, was also filled with convictions, bravery, and intellect. He described her as “mediumistic, inspirational, and prophetic.”⁴⁷ He commented on her strength of conviction by stating that “she would sooner see her beautiful home ruthlessly sacked, her children scattered, herself driven, as a drudge, into somebody’s else kitchen, than she would back down an inch from her full claim to the right to say her full thought in her own words.”⁴⁸ Although Angela was quite devoted to her husband, she made it clear that she was an independent individual “fighting her own battles” rather than a “mere wife, following the fate of her husband.”⁴⁹ Lucien V. Pinney described the bond the two shared with each other and described how their differences strengthened their partnership. “She has the same infatuation for the human race that leads her husband through the fires of persecution to ideal Liberty, but she has a more attractive and vivacious way of expression, and is as sunny and winsome in her various notions as he is solid and sedate.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Lucien V. Pinney, “The Man and Woman of Princeton,” 1.

The Heywoods were not only devoted to each other, but to their four children, Vesta Vernon, Hermes Sidney, Psyche Ceres, and Angelo Tilton as well. According to Ezra's biographer, Martin Blatt, the couple invested serious time and energy into the home training and education of their children. They received lessons from their parents and often stayed home to play with their parents or each other. Andrews observed that the children were welcome guests of all of the neighbors, but that they seldom visited the neighboring houses. As an adult, Psyche Ceres, later called Ceres Heywood Bradshaw, recalled that her mother "never taught us any 'liberal' ideas but always dwelt on conscience and our ability to see the right and do it."⁵¹ Andrews stated that the Heywood children excelled all the other children in Princeton in "learning, in demeanor, and in a certain reserved and distinguished bearing."⁵² He noted that Angela trained her children in "the most laborious, painstaking, housewifely artistic way."⁵³

Like her own mother, Angela Heywood taught her children about sex in a forthright and candid manner. Ceres asserted that her mother "never shut us out of any type of information."⁵⁴ Angela stated that her children Vesta and Hermes "were either present at or called in soon after the birth of my two later children, in order that they might have palpable evidence, and individually sense, at what Cost human beings are

⁵¹ Blatt, 91-92.

⁵² Stephen Pearl Andrews, "Co-Operation," 1.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Blatt, 92.

produced.”⁵⁵ She also divulged “to the minutest particulars” of the “methods, experiences” and “processes involved in creating them.”⁵⁶ Angela maintained that providing children with “explicit” object lessons on sex was “indispensably necessary” in order to give them accurate knowledge of their bodies.⁵⁷ She argued that if children are old enough and intelligent enough to provide articulate inquiries, then they have a right to honest answers from their parents. She stated that many girls’ lives were ruined because their parents did not have the character to meet their children’s inquiries with honesty regarding sexuality.⁵⁸

Angela held radical views on sexuality, including her view that sexuality should not be a subject to be whispered about in secrecy and shame. She claimed that “it is so strange that human life could have thrived on thousands, if not millions of years without intelligent, serious consideration of our body-sexed selves, of the pregnant issues involved in personal, blended Being.”⁵⁹ Angela saw sex as a natural and healthy act for women and men, an act which did not deserve the disgrace and shame attached to it by Victorian prudery. She declared that “false modesty born of timid ignorance has

⁵⁵ Angela Heywood, “The Sex-Education of Children,” *The Word* (May 1884): 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Angela Heywood, “The Woman’s View of It-No. 1,” 3.

had its day; let Truth now speak.”⁶⁰ Angela repeatedly pointed out that women’s sexual desires were on the level of men’s and decried the Victorian notion that men held voracious and uncontrollable sexual desires. She stated that women could not respect men who claimed the weakness-of-the-flesh defense to avoid taking responsibility for their sexual actions.⁶¹ She brazenly declared that man “should have solemn meeting with, and look seriously at his own penis until he is able to be lord and master of it, rather than it should longer rule, lord and master, of him, and of the victims he deflowers.”⁶² She also stated that women could not respect a man who claims his virtue “because he is impotent, attempting to hide behind the inability of his penis to have an erection.”⁶³

Angela detested prudery and the Victorian model of femininity that demanded that deprived women of sexual enjoyment. She asserted that women might pretend that they wanted nothing to do with a man, but “her lady-nature knows it is the very great *everything* she wants to do *with* man.”⁶⁴ She declared that “Lady Nature can put Madame Intellect behind the door, further than you can think while she revels with a man to her hearts content.”⁶⁵ Since Angela advocated a lack of shame in regards to

⁶⁰ Angela Heywood, “The Ethics of Sexuality,” 3.

⁶¹ Sears, 175.

⁶² Blatt, 106.

⁶³ Angela Heywood, “The Ethics of Sexuality,” 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

human bodies and sexuality, she saw no reason for women to hide their sexual feelings and thereby deny their own sexual enjoyment. She wrote that it “is insipid falsehood for woman to pretend to man that the sex-fact is not as much to her, as it is to him; or the confluent contracting parties she is an equal unit.”⁶⁶

While Angela held many radical ideals, her duties as a wife and mother superseded her role as an activist. In her article “The Sex Education of Children” she laments to the readers that she did not have time to continue her thoughts on the issue. She states “housework presses and the children’s wants plead; so . . . allow me to speak further in a later issue.”⁶⁷ Ezra made a similar comment in the editorial notes of the October 1888 issue. He writes, “A.T.H.’s article on “motherhood” is delayed; she is affluent in ideas but “much serving” hinders their getting on paper... .⁶⁸ In 1885, Angela lamented, “stress of other duties and want of space stop me here.”⁶⁹ Since Angela took on the traditional duties of a Victorian woman, her work had to be put aside when the requirements of motherhood and housekeeping demanded it.

Visitors to Mountain Home remarked that Angela was a model housekeeper and hostess. Princeton residents did not know quite what to think about her. According to Andrews, the women of Princeton found Angela to be a riddle. They noted her

⁶⁶ Angela Heywood, “Sex Service- Ethics of Trust,” 2.

⁶⁷ Angela Heywood, “The Sex Education of Children,” 2.

⁶⁸ Ezra Heywood, “Editorial Notes,” *The Word* (October 1888): 2.

⁶⁹ Angela Heywood, “Attraction, Kindred-Ties and Tries,” *The Word* (March, 1885): 2.

beautiful home and the fact that she raised intelligent children who excelled in school and behaved well. They commented on the chasteness of the dress of the Heywoods. While Angela was “lively, jovial . . . ladylike . . . eminently domestic” her use of unseemly words and the unladylike behavior of advocating for her rights to sexual freedom made her neighbors encounter her with condemnation and hostility.⁷⁰ Ezra Heywood was fairly well liked by his Princeton neighbors. Andrews states that “the people, especially the women” were strongly inclined to “lay all the blame on Mrs. Heywood.”⁷¹ Angela was considered by contemporaries to be more radical than her husband and therefore received much of the blame for the radicalism of the household.

Angela performed a crucial role in the Heywood household by performing the housekeeping and childrearing tasks as well as by securing the family’s income through her management of Mountain Home. Without the income she earned and housekeeping duties she performed, the publishing efforts of she and her husband would have been impossible, as the reform business was not profitable. Her important role, however, was the domesticity of a traditional Victorian woman. While typical Victorian women were not bold enough to use the direct language Angela used regarding sexuality, Angela always participated in her radicalism through the traditional role of wife and supporter to her husband.

⁷⁰ Stephen Pearl Andrews, “Co-operation,” 1.

⁷¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

“IF ANTHONY COMSTOCK’S MOTHER HAD HAD A SYRINGE AND KNOWN HOW TO USE IT. . .”: THE HEYWOODS AND OBSCENITY

In the November 2, 1872 issue of *Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly*, which hit the newsstands on October 28, Victoria Woodhull exposed a scandalous affair between a prominent preacher and the wife of one of his close friends and congregants.¹ This scandal brought attention to Free Love ideals and criticisms of traditional marriage and marked the beginning of the legal persecution of Free Love editors such as Woodhull, her sister, and the Heywoods. Woodhull and her sister, Tennessee Claflin, were “unfragrantly notorious as ‘free-lovers.’”² Woodhull in particular inspired scrutiny and scorn for her boldness of speech and for her Varietist position on Free Love. Though Angela and Ezra Heywood often argued for the Exclusivist camp of Free Love and did not agree with all of Woodhull’s Free Love arguments, they always ran advertisements in *The Word* for Woodhull’s publication, *Woodhull and Claflin’s Weekly*. Ezra first met Woodhull in 1872 at a convention of the American Labor Reform League.³ Angela and Ezra both defended Woodhull’s right to speak freely in the wake of the scandal.

In her newspaper, Woodhull charged Reverend Henry Ward Beecher and Elizabeth Tilton, wife of Theodore Tilton, with carrying on an adulterous relationship.

¹ Horowitz, 350.

² “The Republic Threatened!! The Beecher-Tilton Scandal and the Beecher-Bowen-Comstock Conspiracy,” *The Thunderbolt* (May 1873): 1.

³ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 79.

Both Beecher and Theodore Tilton were active as reformers and abolitionists. Beecher, a well-known public figure, nominally headed the American Woman Suffrage Association. Tilton, a lecturer and writer, served as president of the National Woman Suffrage Association.⁴ Elizabeth and Theodore Tilton had married in Beecher's Plymouth Church in 1853. The Tiltons and Beecher had a close friendship. Beecher served as Theodore Tilton's mentor and Tilton ghostwrote many of Beecher's articles that he published in the *Independent*. Reportedly by 1869 Elizabeth had confessed to her husband that she had an intimate relationship with Beecher and told him that she was pregnant with the Reverend's child.⁵ The three conspired to keep the affair a secret to avoid tarnishing their reputations when rumors began to circulate among their friends in reform. However, the friendly relationship between Beecher and the Tiltons diminished, and Theodore charged Beecher with alienating the affections of his wife.⁶

Details of the Beecher-Tilton Scandal kept readers of newspapers riveted between 1872 and 1875. The affair gained great public interest when the Plymouth Church denounced Theodore Tilton as a congregant, arguing that Tilton had slandered the Reverend Beecher. When Tilton publically accused Beecher of adulterous activity,

⁴ Horowitz, 351; Nicole Beisel, *Imperiled Innocents: Anthony Comstock and Family Reproduction in Victorian America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 77.

⁵ Horowitz, 351.

⁶ Ibid.

Beecher responded by obtaining a church committee to investigate any wrongdoing. In 1875 Tilton brought civil charges of adultery against Beecher and the scandal culminated in a trial lasting six months. The civil trial ended in a hung jury, while the church investigation deemed Beecher innocent of adultery with Elizabeth Tilton.⁷ For publishing the sordid details of the affair in *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, on November 2, 1872 United States Marshals arrested Victoria Woodhull and her sister Tennessee Claflin. The famed vice crusader Anthony Comstock had, under an alias, requested a copy of the issue, which first circulated on October 28 by mail. The marshals charged the sisters with violating state law prohibiting the sending of 'obscene' material through the mail, resulting in Woodhull spending four weeks in the Ludlow Street Jail in New York City.⁸

Upon her release, Woodhull attempted to give a speech in Boston entitled "Moral Cowardice and Moral Hypocrisy, or Four Weeks in Ludlow Street Jail."⁹ Governor of Massachusetts William Claflin, Mayor Henry Pierce, and the City Council of Boston stopped her from doing so. Governor Claflin stated that he feared she might "repeat the vile stories about Mr. Beecher or even attack some of us in Boston. . . . She is no better than a panel thief or a common street walker, and I will see that she doesn't

⁷ Beisel, 80; and Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 74.

⁸ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 74; Horowitz, 357.

⁹ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 79.

open her vile mouth in the city of which was so recently honored by Mr. Beecher's presence."¹⁰ This affront to free speech prompted Ezra Heywood and Colonel William B. Greene to offer Woodhull the platform of the New England Labor Reform League to deliver her speech.¹¹ Members of the league had to rent several small halls for the three-day convention featuring Woodhull after the owners of the Tremont Temple cancelled their contract to host the event upon hearing the news of the planned speech. Woodhull praised the league for providing her a venue to speak. She stated that the New England Labor Reform League was "perhaps the most radical and thoroughgoing body of reformer in the direction of industrial equity that there is in the world. . . . Free speech was vindicated by the action of the League. . . ."¹²

Immediately following the three-day convention a few radicals decided to form a new group whose purpose was to provide a forum for Woodhull's speeches. Founded in Boston in 1873, the New England Free Love League (NEFLL) sought the "abolition of legal and compulsory marriage and all other intuitions, laws, and customs, whereby the sexes are bound and fettered in their relations in any form or degree, and the substitution therefore of such a social system as shall guarantee to all individuals the

¹⁰ Ibid., 79-80.

¹¹ Ibid., 80. Greene served as president of the New England Labor Reform League. Both Angela and Ezra Heywood served as officers in the League, as did Angela's mother, Lucy Tilton.

¹² Ibid., 81.

power to exercise the right of freedom at their own cost in matters of love.”¹³ Angela served as one of the vice presidents of the NEFLL and Ezra served on the executive committee of the group.

The arrest of Woodhull and Claflin kicked off Comstock’s campaign against Free Lovers, using obscenity legislation already in place. In 1865, the United States Congress passed a law dealing with obscenity through print materials in the mail. This section of a post office bill attempted to protect Civil War Union soldiers from receiving obscene materials. The Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) pushed for this legislation to prevent obscene or racy materials from corrupting the morality of young men.¹⁴ After the Civil War, the Y.M.C.A., still concerned with young men’s vulnerability to corruption at the hands of obscene materials, circulated a report called “A Memorandum Respecting New-York as a Field for Moral and Christian Effort Among Young Men.”¹⁵ This report provided facts and figures regarding vice and the young men of New York City. The report pointed to licentious books and obscene printed material, widely available in parts of the city, as injurious to the morality of New York City youths.¹⁶ The circulation of the report served as a call to action for

¹³ Horowitz, 414; *Woodhull and Claflin’s Weekly* (April 5 1873): 3-4.

¹⁴ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 76; Horowitz, 358.

¹⁵ Horowitz, 359-360.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 360.

members of the Y.M.C.A. to put pressure on the New York State legislature to pass harsher legislation than the Civil War legislation regarding obscenity.

In 1868 the New York State Assembly passed “an act for the suppression of the trade in and circulation of obscene materials, illustrations, advertisements, and articles of indecent or immoral use, and obscene advertisements of patent medicines.”¹⁷ This law not only prohibited the sale or mailing of materials deemed obscene, it also included any article, device, or medicine used to restore menstruation, prevent conception, or induce abortion. This law incorporated the power of law officers to search for and seize materials of a questionable nature which were to be destroyed if found to be violating the obscenity law.¹⁸ Several other states passed similar obscenity statutes. In 1872, the U.S. Congress amended the 1865 law regarding obscenity. The new law carried little enforcement strength. However, it did make obscenity materials a federal rather than a state issue. It was under this 1872 law that Woodhull and Claflin were arrested.¹⁹

Anthony Comstock became involved with the Y.M.C.A. as a young man in New York. He personally campaigned against saloons in his neighborhood in Brooklyn and against the sale of liquor on Sundays. He also battled against sellers of printed

¹⁷ Ibid., 362.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 76.

materials that he found obscene. Comstock functioned as a quasi detective and brought police with him to arrest individuals dealing in the sale of obscene materials or goods used for birth control or abortion. During the trials of these individuals, Comstock served as a witness for the prosecution.²⁰ Social commentators of the day noted Comstock's habit of using aliases or false pretenses to trap someone whose work he deemed obscene. In an 1873 article in *The Thunderbolt*, the editor noted, "The dirty wretches who corrupt young minds by feeding them on licentious books need some little man, by nature a spy and hypocrite, to check their villainous trade. A full-grown honest soul could neither sell the books nor dodge and lie to catch those who do. In such a dilemma the earth has a Comstock."²¹

Comstock felt there was "no force at work in the community more insidious, more constant in its demands, or more powerful and far-reaching as lust."²² He emphatically claimed that lust "*is the constant companion of all other crimes.*"²³ Through this work, Comstock discovered that the sale and distribution of erotic goods and materials through the mail was a far more severe problem than the sale of such

²⁰ Horowitz, 367-370.

²¹ *The Thunderbolt*, May 1873, 1.

²² Anthony Comstock, *Traps for the Young*, ed. Robert Brenner (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 132.

²³ *Ibid.*

materials over the counter in second hand bookstores. He stated that he “discovered that there was a systematic business, systematically carried on, the extent of which was simply appalling.”²⁴ To pursue his interest in suppressing the mailing of unsuitable materials, Comstock turned to the Y.M.C.A. for financial backing.

With Y.M.C.A. support Comstock intensified his crusade against obscenity. With the creation of the Committee for the Suppression of Vice on November 18, 1872, the Y.M.C.A. gave Comstock strong support and a salaried position to continue his work to suppress vice.²⁵ Comstock and his supporters went to Congress in 1873 to push for harsher legislation regarding immoral material. On March 3, 1873, President Ulysses S. Grant signed the federal act for the “Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use,” which became known as the Comstock Law or the Comstock Act.²⁶ This act created a special position in the United

²⁴ Horowitz, 370.

²⁵ Ibid., 374.

²⁶ Ibid., 382-383.

“Sec. 148. That no obscene, lewd, or lascivious book, pamphlet, picture, paper, print or other publication of an indecent character, or any article or thing designed or intended for the prevention of conception or procuring of abortion, nor any article or thing intended or adapted for any indecent or immoral use or nature, nor any written or printed card, circular, book, pamphlet, advertisement or notice of any kind giving information directly or indirectly, where, or how, or of whom, or by what means either of the things before mentioned may be obtained or made, nor any letter upon the envelope of which, or postal-card upon which indecent or scurrilous epithets may be written or printed, shall be carried in the mail, and any person who shall knowingly deposit, or cause to be deposited, for mailing or delivery, any of the hereinbefore-mentioned articles or things, or any notice, or paper containing any advertisement relating to the aforesaid articles or things, and any person who, in pursuance of any plan or scheme for disposing of any of the hereinbefore-mentioned articles or things, shall take, or cause to be

States Postal Office, which was given to Anthony Comstock. This position granted him the power to search for and seize inappropriate materials, as well as the power to arrest. The Comstock Law made it “illegal and punishable to send through the mail six kinds of material: erotica, contraceptive medications or devices, abortifacients, sexual implements (such as those used in masturbation), contraceptive information, and advertisements for contraception, abortion, or sexual implements.”²⁷ Anyone convicted of violating the Comstock Act of 1873 by knowingly sending through the mail any “obscene, lewd, or lascivious” print materials faced up to ten years of incarceration.²⁸ The act did not provide a definition of ‘obscene.’²⁹

After many delays, the obscenity trial of Victoria Woodhull began in June 1873, months after the Comstock Act was signed into law. Judge Samuel Blatchford ruled that Woodhull was not guilty since she was arrested under the 1872 law, which did not include newspapers, only books, pamphlets, and pictures.³⁰ Though Comstock did not see Woodhull convicted for her article on the Beecher-Tilton scandal, the incident did

taken, from the mail any such letter or package, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and, on conviction thereof, shall, for every offense, be fined not less than one hundred dollars nor more than five thousand dollars, or imprisoned at hard labor not less than one year nor more than ten years, or both, in the discretion of the judge.”

²⁷ Ibid., 382.

²⁸ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 76.

²⁹ Ibid., 77.

³⁰ Horowitz, 378-9.

mark the beginning of his crusade to suppress the Free Love Movement and the Free Love press.

Victoria Woodhull criticized Beecher not for having sexual relations outside of marriage or with someone else's wife, but for refusing to stand publically by the Free Love ideas that he practiced in private. It was not adultery she decried, but hypocrisy. Woodhull challenged the notion that sexual relations had to occur within the context of marriage, for which she was publically scorned. Beecher outraged Woodhull by denying his relationship with Mrs. Tilton and by refusing to speak publically in support of Free Love. Ezra Heywood weighed in on this issue in his controversial pamphlet "Cupid's Yokes." He asserted that while a relationship between Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton was none of his business, his role as a public teacher of morals coupled with his hypocrisy in lifestyle "make him a legitimate subject of criticism."³¹ Heywood went on to say, "While his natural right to commit adultery is unquestionable, his right to lie about it is not so clear."³² Angela and Ezra Heywood defended Woodhull's right to expose the Beecher-Tilton scandal.

³¹ Ezra Heywood, "Cupid's Yokes: or, The Binding Forces of Conjugal Life," in *The Collected Works of Ezra H. Heywood*, ed. Martin Blatt (Weston, Massachusetts: M & S Press, 1985), 246.

³² *Ibid.*

An article from the *Oneida Circular*, which Ezra Heywood reprinted in *The Word*, called the Beecher-Tilton affair “an important chapter in the Trial of Marriage.”³³ Free Lovers like the Heywoods hoped the public nature of the Beecher-Tilton scandal would expose people to the problems of traditional marriage and cause the system of marriage to crumble under the weight of its own problems. Like Woodhull, Angela Heywood criticized Beecher for hypocrisy. She wrote, “Are we not morally responsible for every pleasure which it pleases our natures to accept? . . . What act in the dark, shall a man stoop to do, that may not hear the day light of common approval? . . . There is no love under heaven, that can be justified privately, which one should be ashamed to have publically known.”³⁴ Angela and other Free Lovers thought that Beecher should reject hypocrisy and openly discuss his affections for Mrs. Tilton regardless of her marital status. She condemned those in the public who claimed that no one had the right to pry in Reverend Beecher’s personal affairs but in the same breath questioned Woodhull’s relationship choices. Angela also criticized those who defended Beecher’s right to privacy while defaming Mrs. Tilton. She declared, “Those who tenderly fling the mantle of privacy over a reverent eloquent male sinner, in the same breath will ask of a

³³ *The Word* (September 1874): 3.

³⁴ Angela Heywood, *The Word* (January 1873): 3.

woman: ‘Is she good’? Why this tender regard for Mr. Beecher, when Mrs. Tilton is given over to popular damnation.”³⁵

Angela noted hypocrisy not only in Beecher’s actions versus his words, but in the public’s vilification of Woodhull and Mrs. Tilton while still holding Reverend Beecher in high regard. She rebuked Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a minister, author, and abolitionist, for criticizing Woodhull. Angela met him as a child and again as a young woman. She stated that she felt he was a trustworthy man, yet she saw hypocrisy in his criticisms of Woodhull. In an address to Higginson in *The Word* Angela asserted, “I have no desire or intention to report your private life, but knowing what your views were, and how free your relations with women have been, I ask most seriously by what authority you rank those termed ‘free lovers’ on the dark side of life, and claim yourself to dwell in light and purity irreproachable?”³⁶ In the same article Angela defended women’s rights, claiming that “if woman is capable of casting a vote intelligently, she is capable of choosing, *and refusing if need be*, her social relations with men. . . .”³⁷

The Beecher-Tilton scandal garnered much attention from the public beyond simply Free Lovers. The affair called attention, in the mind of the public, to the dangers

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Angela Heywood, “Has Love a Scientific Basis?” *The Word* (March 1873): 3.

³⁷ Ibid.

inherent in the unbridled passions and threat to the traditional family structure that Free Lovers represented. Historians credit the Beecher-Tilton scandal with strengthening support for Comstock and his supporters who advocated moral and social restrictions. Historians also credit the affair with “finalizing the split between women’s rights advocates and sex reformers, and with hardening public disdain for the arguments and goals of free lovers.”³⁸

Comstock’s attacks on Free Lovers like Victoria Woodhull prompted Ezra Heywood to pen the controversial pamphlet “Cupid’s Yokes” in 1876.³⁹ In this polemical attack on the institution of marriage, Ezra argued that marriage repudiated individual freedom and did not allow women to govern themselves freely. He felt that relationships governed by state and legal restrictions rather than by affinity weakened the bonds of love and obliterated the possibility of personal and sexual freedom. The Heywoods believed that love could only flourish if left unrestricted. They felt that two persons should remain together not because of the bonds of marriage, but because of mutual love and attraction.⁴⁰ Ezra claimed in “Cupid’s Yokes” that since women depended on men for financial security, the institution of marriage made a woman “a

³⁸ Beisel, 77.

³⁹ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 110.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 103-4.

prostitute for life.”⁴¹ Ezra included a quote by social philosopher Herbert Spencer in which he Spencer affirmed that “It is a lamentable truth that the troubles which respectable, hard-working, married women undergo, are more trying to the health, and detrimental to the looks, than any of the harlot’s career.”⁴²

Within the twenty-three pages of “Cupid’s Yokes,” Ezra Heywood attacked marriage, promoted Free Love, supported women’s rights, and personally vilified Anthony Comstock. He called Comstock a “*religious monomaniac*, whom the mistaken will of Congress and the lascivious fanaticism of the Young Men’s Christian Association have empowered to use of Federal Courts to suppress free inquiry.”⁴³ He condemned Comstock for acting with the “spirit that lighted the fires of the Inquisition” in his persecution of Free Lovers.⁴⁴

Comstock similarly despised Ezra Heywood. He called Free Love one of the “lowest and most debased forms of living.”⁴⁵ He claimed that Free Lovers take the word ‘love’ and “prostitute its meaning,” distorting it “until it is the mantle for all kinds

⁴¹ Ezra Heywood, “Cupid’s Yokes,” in *The Collected Works of Ezra Heywood*, 257.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 248.

⁴⁴ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 105.

⁴⁵ Comstock, 158.

of license and uncleanness. It should be spelled l-u-s-t.”⁴⁶ He labeled advocates of Free Love “indecent creatures . . . foul of speech, shameless in their lives, and corrupting in their influences—we must go to a sewer that has been closed, where the accumulations of filth have for years collected, to find a striking resemblance to” the true character of Free Love advocates.⁴⁷ He reserved special scorn for Ezra Heywood, deeming him the “chief creature of this vile creed.”⁴⁸

In Comstock’s 1883 publication, *Traps for the Young*, he described his first attack on the Heywoods for sending “Cupid’s Yokes” through the mail. He called the pamphlet loathsome and obscene, “too foul for description.”⁴⁹ Comstock obtained a warrant for the arrest of Ezra on the charge of using the U.S. mail system to send copies of “Cupid’s Yokes,” which Comstock found to be offensive. When Comstock went to Princeton to arrest Ezra, he learned that Angela and Ezra were hosting a Free Love convention in Boston so he traveled to the site of the Free Love League meeting to stage the capture of his target. He arrived at the meeting while Ezra was speaking and took a seat without being noticed. Comstock noted that the audience was made up of about two-hundred and fifty men and boys, and he saw lust in their faces. After Ezra finished

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 159.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 163.

speaking, Comstock writes that Angela took the stage and “delivered the foulest address I ever heard.”⁵⁰ Angela appalled Comstock with her boldness of speech and he said she “seemed lost to all shame.”⁵¹ The nature of her speech caused Comstock to become physically ill and he had to flee the building to get fresh air outside. As “the chieftain’s wife continued her offensive tirade against common decency,” Comstock had to gather “every manly instinct” to avoid “cowardly turning my back on this horde of lusts.”⁵²

Comstock returned to the lecture hall and seated himself again for the remainder of Angela’s speech, until he did not think he could sit any longer. When Ezra left his spot on the stage, Comstock followed him out and told him of the warrant for his arrest for sending obscene material through the mail. Ezra wished to address the crowd before leaving for the jail, but Comstock refused. Ezra then tried to retrieve his coat and hat from the stage before exiting the building. Comstock again refused to release his prisoner, but allowed a door attendant to retrieve the coat and hat and inform Angela of her husband’s arrest. Angela pointedly asked Comstock what he meant to do with her husband and he quietly replied that he was taking Ezra to the Charles Street Jail. According to Comstock, Angela responded that she would adjourn the meeting and go with them to the jail, which made Comstock fear mob violence from the crowd. He

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 164.

stated, “I felt obliged, out of respect to my wife, sisters, and lady friends, to decline the kind offer of her (select) company. It was about all I wanted to do to have one of that slimy crowd in charge.”⁵³ Comstock did not want to wait for Angela to inform the crowd of Ezra’s arrest so he took his prisoner by the shoulder and neck and hauled him down a flight of stairs to the awaiting carriage, which took them to the Charles Street Jail. He wrote “thus, reader, the devil’s trapper was trapped.”⁵⁴

Ezra Heywood described his November 2, 1877 arrest somewhat differently. He stated that “while lawfully and peacefully at work . . . as I had momentarily left the chair in which I was presiding over a public convention to transact business in an anteroom, a stranger sprang upon me, and refusing to read a warrant, or even give his name, hurried me into a hack, drove swiftly through the street, on a dark, rainy night, and lodged me in jail as a ‘US prisoner.’”⁵⁵ Writing from jail, Ezra lamented that “Today I am held as a criminal under United States law on the complaint, not of one who knows me or favors the beneficent object to which my life is devoted, but of a person from another state, a prominent exponent of prevailing unreason.”⁵⁶ He indignantly declared, “Knowing the purity of my life and writings, the severely chaste

⁵³ Ibid., 165.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 166.

⁵⁵ Ezra Heywood, “The Impolicy of Repression,” *The Word* (December 1877): 2.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 3.

objects and methods of my work, I *scorn* even to defend myself from ‘obscenity’ against the mercenary assassin of liberty!”⁵⁷ Heywood was arrested on two charges of mailing obscene literature. Under the false name E. Edgewell of Squam Village, New Jersey, Anthony Comstock requested and was sent copies of “Cupid’s Yokes” as well as R. T. Trall’s *Sexual Physiology*.⁵⁸

Ezra’s case went to trial in the United States Circuit Court in Boston on January 22, 1878 with Judge Daniel Clark presiding. The prosecution declared that the duty of the jury was to decide if the two publications were indeed obscene and if Ezra Heywood had put them through the mail. The prosecutor decided which passages in the two works were obscene and underlined them for the jury. However, he did not read the allegedly obscene passages in court because he determined that “they were too foul for the court records.”⁵⁹ The first time the jury saw or heard parts of either work was when they entered the deliberation process. The court hampered Heywood’s defense by not allowing his attorney to present a defense dealing with issues of obscenity. “Obscenity was a question for the jury to decide without being confused by the defendant’s

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ R. T. Trall was a prominent health reformer and hydropathist. Editor of the *Water-Cure Journal*, Trall ran a hydropathic establishment out of New York City. Trall was a sexual conservative and did not advocate contraception. Ezra Heywood regularly advertised Trall’s book *Sexual Physiology* in *The Word*. Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 115-116.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 115.

arguments.”⁶⁰ The court did not allow Ezra’s lawyers George F. Searle and J. W. Pickering to call character witnesses or to discuss the overall message or purpose of “Cupid’s Yokes.” Judge Clark also refused to allow medical books similar to Trall’s publication to be submitted as evidence, ruling that these books were irrelevant to the case with the question of obscenity. Most of the witnesses called by the defense were not allowed to testify. The judge did not allow those that did testify to speak about Ezra’s character or their opinion on whether or not the publications in question were in fact obscene.⁶¹ In his closing arguments, Ezra’s attorney Pickering defended Ezra as a reputable reformer and an educated man whose works were “moral and useful.”⁶² He reminded the jury that freedom of the press was at stake.

The District Attorney stated in his closing statement that all facts regarding Ezra’s character or the nature of his reform work remained irrelevant because the only questions the jury need consider were whether the materials were obscene and whether Ezra had put them through the mail. Judge Clark presented a biased charge to the jury, stating that Ezra’s doctrines of Free Love “would turn Massachusetts into one great house of prostitution.”⁶³ He explained to the jury that only a part of a book needed to

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 115-116.

⁶² Ibid., 116.

⁶³ Ibid., 117.

be deemed obscene for it to fall under the jurisdiction of the Comstock Law. He stated that an obscene book “was one that was offensive to decency by exciting impure or lewd thoughts or by inciting the practice of impure desires” or one that contained “immoral tendency.”⁶⁴ After deliberating, the jury found that Trall’s *Sexual Physiology* was not obscene, but “Cupid’s Yokes” was and so Ezra was found guilty of sending that publication through the mail. His sentencing was postponed until June 1878 because Ezra’s lawyers appealed on the grounds that the Comstock Law violated the First Amendment. Since the Supreme Court had ruled in *Ex parte Jackson* in 1877 that the Comstock Law was constitutional, Ezra’s appeal was denied. The judge sentenced Ezra to a fine of one hundred dollars and two years in Dedham Jail in Massachusetts.

In August of the same year, local officials in Watkins Glen, New York arrested Angela’s sister Josephine Tilton, along with free thinker W.S. Bell and D. M. Bennett, editor of the *Truth Seeker*, a free-thought paper. Officials arrested the trio for selling copies of “Cupid’s Yokes” at a meeting of the New York State Freethinkers Association. J. Flora Tilton commented that Josephine sold all six hundred copies of “Cupid’s Yokes” that she brought with her. Josephine accepted bail money posted by the abolitionist Lucy Coleman. Their case was postponed and never went to trial.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 118.

After their arrest, Bennett did not stop selling copies of “Cupid’s Yokes.” J. Flora Tilton noted that he sold one thousand copies of Heywood’s Free Love tract in New York. Using another alias, Comstock requested a copy by mail. When Bennett sent it to him, Comstock arrested him, making it Bennett’s third arrest at the hands of Comstock. Judge Samuel Blatchford sentenced Bennett to thirteen months in prison and fined him three hundred dollars. Judge Blatchford stressed that freedom of the press does not protect Free Lovers when their publications are obscene. He noted that the test for obscenity was not the intent of the author “but the effect of the words upon the reader.”⁶⁶ This definition given in the case against Bennett was the basis for obscenity trials under the Comstock Act for more than half a century to follow.⁶⁷

The National Liberal League supported Ezra Heywood and Bennett in their legal struggles with Comstock. The league, formed in 1876 at a free-thought convention, represented organized opposition to the Comstock laws. The National Liberal League used the term *liberal* as synonymous with free-thinker, particularly one who believed in the complete separation between church and state.⁶⁸ The league protested the Comstock

⁶⁶ David M. Rabban, *Free Speech in its Forgotten Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 37.

⁶⁷ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 119.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 126. The National Liberal League worked for secularism in the United States, including the abolition of official religious holidays and the repeal of Sunday liquor laws. “Other than secularism, little united the ‘capitalists and anarchists, Unitarians and atheists, materialists and spiritualists’ who formed its membership.” This eclectic grouping of liberals caused factions to form within the group.

Law and its provisions in 1878 with a petition complete with seventy thousand signatures.⁶⁹ Benjamin Tucker, a Free Lover and friend of Ezra's who was a member of the National Liberal League, helped to organize the group's effort to campaign for Ezra's freedom.⁷⁰ Tucker assumed the role as editor pro tem of *The Word* during Ezra's unfortunate incarceration. Tucker help to organize a meeting at Faneuil Hall on August 1, 1878 to discuss Ezra Heywood's imprisonment and its blow to the freedom of the press.

Tucker was also an activist in The National Defense Association. This group, whose membership attended the Faneuil Hall meeting, sought the repeal of the Comstock laws with the motto "Eternal Vigilance is the Price of Liberty."⁷¹ The group vowed to "employ all peaceful and honorable means to roll back the wave of intolerance, bigotry, and ignorance which threatens to submerge our cherished liberties."⁷² In November 1878, the National Defense Association sent numerous petitions to President Rutherford B. Hayes for the release of Ezra with the eloquent

Janet Farrell Brodie, *Contraception and Abortion in 19th-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 278.

⁶⁹ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 126.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 128-129.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁷² *Ibid.*

spiritualist Laura Kendrick.⁷³ Kendrick's strategy was to convince President Hayes to pardon Heywood on the grounds that "Cupid's Yokes" was not obscene. Angela Heywood objected to this line of defense, stating that the issue of gender was the real issue facing the American people.⁷⁴ Angela also objected to the fact that Kendrick and the league left her out of the decision making with regards to the defense of her husband. In a letter to her friend Elizabeth M.F. Denton, a regular contributor to *The Word*, Angela stated "Mr. Heywood [']s 'friends' can do whatever they please for & with him & his claims but . . . they have *so far* left me *entirely scrupulously*, unspoken to *in any & all ways*."⁷⁵ She protested that Kendrick portrayed her as a pitiable wife in need of her husband, proclaiming that she was not "a *poor little imbecile [sic] woman unfit* to live without a man."⁷⁶

Regardless of Angela's objections, Kendrick's attempts to obtain a pardon for Ezra were successful. After Kendrick convinced Attorney General Charles Devlin that "Cupid's Yokes" did not contain obscene material, Ezra sent his application for pardon to President Hayes. In this application Ezra stated that he did not commit a crime, that

⁷³ Laura Kendrick was also known as Laura Cuppy Smith. Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 79.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 129, 131.

⁷⁵ Angela Heywood to Elizabeth M. F. Denton, undated letter, Denton Family Papers, Labadie Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

his intent when mailing the pamphlet was not criminal, that “Cupid’s Yokes” was a serious expression of his ideals, that his incarceration was affecting his daily health, that his imprisonment was an outrage to free speech and freedom of the press, and that his family was suffering greatly from his jailing. President Hayes official pardon on December 16, 1878 cited Heywood’s failing health and the great number of citizens lobbying for his release as his motivation for pardoning Heywood. In his diary, Hayes noted that he did not feel that “Cupid’s Yokes” was obscene because “it is no crime by the laws of the United States to advocate the abolition of marriage,” and the material contained in the pamphlet was “not obscene, lascivious, lewd, or corrupting in the criminal sense.”⁷⁷

Comstock arrested Ezra for the second time in his home on October 25, 1882 on four charges. The first charge was again for mailing “Cupid’s Yokes.” The second charge was for mailing a copy of *The Word Extra*. This single sheet contained within the August 1882 issue of *The Word* reprinted copies of two of Walt Whitman’s controversial poems, “A Woman Waits for Me,” and “To a Common Prostitute.” The last two charges dealt with an advertisement for a vaginal syringe that Ezra satirically dubbed the “Comstock Syringe.” The advertisement claimed that the contraceptive device could be obtained at the *Word* offices. The vaginal syringe was a widely used

⁷⁷ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 132.

method of birth control in the nineteenth century. However, under the Comstock Law of 1873, advertisements for devices for the prevention of conception were prohibited. Ezra advertised the sale of the “Comstock Syringe” for \$10 and stated: “Woman’s Natural Right to *Prevent* Conception is *unquestionable*; to enable her to protect herself against invasive male use of her person the celebrated Comstock syringe, designed to prevent disease, promote personal purity and health, is coming into general use”⁷⁸ To further antagonize Comstock Ezra brazenly declared that “if Anthony Comstock’s mother had had a syringe and known how to use it, what a world of woe it would have saved us”⁷⁹

During the trial following this arrest, the court placed far fewer restrictions on the defense of Ezra. He called more than three dozen witnesses to testify to his character, his honorable work, and to testify that the charges were groundless and impeded his freedom of speech.⁸⁰ Heywood addressed the court and the members of the jury for over five hours emphasizing freedom of speech, as well as women’s right to control their own bodies. He clearly stated that he and other Free Lovers did not recommend the vaginal syringe, but that women held an unquestionable right to chose birth control methods to protect their right to their own bodies. He “likened the syringe

⁷⁸ Ezra Heywood, *The Word* (August 1881): 4.

⁷⁹ Ezra Heywood, “Editorial Notes,” *The Word* (July 1881): 3.

⁸⁰ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 145.

to a toothbrush or towel,” instruments in personal hygiene useful for health and cleanliness.⁸¹ He informed the jury that he would not have advertised for the syringe if Comstock had not made contraceptive devices illegal, limiting women’s freedom. On April 12, 1883 the jury delivered a not guilty verdict after deliberating for two hours.⁸²

Angela Heywood railed against Comstock in articles in *The Word* in the months following Ezra’s arrest. She protested that “United States officers should, again & again, burst in upon us, seize, carry off the sire of my children & cage him with so-called criminals!”⁸³ She charged that Comstock “incarnates the intermeddling tendencies of ignorant, invasive Individualism & Collectivism, of the hell-bound purpose of vindictive ecclesiasticism” Angela asked of the reader, “Shall we submit to the loathsome impertinence which makes Anthony Comstock inspector and supervisor of American women’s wombs?”⁸⁴ She satirized the power of Comstock to search for and seize devices used for contraception. Angela mocked the situation, stating that women should vote that men could only emit semen when a woman says so, “that he must keep his penis tied up with ‘continent’ twine; that he shall constantly have, near by, specified strings to assure ‘virtue,’-the which if he is found without, he

⁸¹ Ibid., 146.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Angela Heywood, “The Woman’s View of It—No 1,” 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

shall be liable, on conviction by twelve women, to ten years imprisonment and \$5000 fine.”⁸⁵ She called for a “feminine Comstock” to “go about to examine men’s penises and drag them to jail if they dare disobey the semen-twine ‘law’!”⁸⁶

In the following issue of *The Word* Angela declared that it was not Ezra who “lifts the Syringe Question to public view, but the U.S. Government, by ill-luck of allowing itself to become basely subservient to ecclesiastic, church Intrusion; the wily sinister, bigoted exponent of perverse churchism, Anthony Comstock” subjects “Woman to male supremacy, by forbidding Liberty & Knowledge.”⁸⁷ She satirized his powers of search and seizure again by saying that the courts “empower one man not merely to search houses as they do in Russia, but to enter bed-chambers to look for semen in woman’s person!”⁸⁸ In the same article, Angela lamented her position as Ezra’s wife in this drama. “The wife of a scholar & reformer again threatened with imprisonment for alleged ‘obscenity.’ Who, what am I? Literary men’s wives are histories as flies in the amber of their husband’s genius. . . ‘Fools,’ ‘scolds,’ ‘imps,’ ‘sluts,’ ‘no housekeepers,’ ‘no associates.’”⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Angela Heywood, “The Woman’s View of It—No 2,” 2.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

In a telling paragraph Angela summed up her feelings on her position: “The woman in this male ‘obscenity’ case, one who has persistently kept the words Penis & Womb travelling in the U.S. Mails, perhaps it is for me to set the compass of human thought so it will not be giggled into future lies about ourselves. They say ‘Mr. Heywood is the pink of perfection in physical-self, culture, books, wit wisdom; but for the sayings of his wife’, which means *me*, ‘he is a pattern of propriety & fidelity.’”⁹⁰ She went on to say, “But, possibly Nature ordered just such a man as he to stand, by his own choice, with a woman impelled to be & do like me.”⁹¹ She refused to be placed in the shadow of her husband and was frustrated that she was not considered a major player in the obscenity cases. By stating that nature ordered a man such as Ezra to “stand, by his own choice” with a woman like her, Angela recognized their partnership and mutual support of each other. While Angela’s words were considered to be far more ‘obscene’ in nature, Ezra was the one who was pursued by Comstock. Much to her dismay, when it came to the public battle over obscenity in print, Angela filled the role of a traditional wife and mother whose place was in the private sphere while her husband occupied the public sphere.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Anthony Comstock arranged for the arrest of Ezra Heywood for mailing obscene material in violation of Massachusetts state laws shortly after his acquittal from the federal court trial in 1883. While he had no formal jurisdiction over state laws, Comstock had allies in vice suppression societies in different states. This time, Comstock had Ezra arrested for mailing a tract written by Angela, part of her “Leaflet Literature” series in which she defended women’s right to birth control and spoke directly of sexual organs. Ezra’s state trial was postponed four times, partly due to Angela’s pregnancy with their son Angelo. While awaiting Ezra’s trial, Stephen Pearl Andrews organized a defense committee and gathered signatures for a petition supporting the dismissal of all charges against Ezra. During the postponement, Judge Robert Pitman replaced a more hostile judge as the presiding judge in the case. Judge Pitman, a veteran reformer, dismissed the charges against Ezra in May 1884, declaring that “prosecutors must charge and prove a willful intent to corrupt the morals of youth, and that he did not believe that Ezra Heywood had any such intention.”¹ Ezra faced his fourth arrest in 1887, but U.S. District Attorney George M. Stevens “vetoed the obscenist plot” so he did not serve any time in jail.²

On May 17, 1890, Comstock and his allies had Ezra arrested for a fifth time on federal charges for mailing obscene materials. Ezra also faced state charges of a similar

¹ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 147-148.

² *Ibid.*, 148.

nature initiated by the New England Watch and Ward Society (formerly the New England Society for the Suppression of Vice). The Federal Courts indicted Ezra on three charges of printing obscene materials. The first charge involved the printing of a letter called “A Physician’s Testimony” by pro-anarchist Dr. Richard O’Neill in the April 1890 issue of *The Word*. The second count dealt with an anonymous letter to *The Word* from a mother that Ezra printed in the March 1890 issue. The final count was for reprinting an article by Angela in April 1889 that she had written for *The Word* in 1883.³

Kansas-based Free Lover Moses Harmon first published “A Physician’s Testimony” in the February 14, 1890 edition of his newspaper *Lucifer the Light-Bearer*. In this letter, the New York physician Richard O’Neill discussed the sexual abuses he witnessed in his nineteen years of medical practice.⁴ While Harmon faced charges for printing a different obscene letter, Ezra took up the cause of exposing sexual abuses and printed the O’Neill letter in *The Word*.

In the letter, O’Neill asserted that “thousands of women are killed every year by sexual excesses forced on them.”⁵ He also discussed husbands who forced oral sex upon wives. He informed readers that “A woman once came to me with her mouth and throat full of chancres (venereal ulcers) caused by *her husband’s* doing as above

³ Ibid., 162-164.

⁴ Sears, 110.

⁵ Richard O’Neil, “A Physician’s Testimony,” *The Word* (April 1890): 3.

intimated; there seems to be no limit to the brutality of many men.”⁶ O’Neill described one man’s lust for oral sex with other men in his article. He offered a “stern protest” to the “malicious persecutions” of Free Lovers like Harmon and the Heywoods by the “enemies of freedom.”⁷

The second charge of obscenity against Ezra concerned a letter written to *The Word* by an anonymous mother, describing a conversation she had had with her daughter. The twelve-year-old came to the mother inquiring what the word “fuck” meant. She explained to her mother that a classmate had said to her earlier in the day “Mamie, won’t you fuck me?”⁸ The mother proceeded to engage in a full explanation of sex to her daughter, using plain English terms for the sex organs. The mother enlightened the daughter about her own body and the changes she should expect as she aged. She also utilized a “well-executed photograph of the male organ in state of erection” to demonstrate clearly the act of sexual intercourse.⁹ She sought to make her daughter thoroughly understand the subject of sex until the daughter felt “no uneasiness.”¹⁰ The mother warned her daughter that twelve was too young to indulge in sexual acts, but she wished to prepare her for when she was physically and mentally ready.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Mother,” “Correspondence,” *The Word* (March 1890): 3.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Like this anonymous mother, Angela Heywood urged parents to use plain language regarding sexuality even when instructing children on the subject. She felt that parents must provide honest answers to their children's thoughtful inquiries on the subject of sexuality. Angela stressed that honest sex education provided children with accurate knowledge of their own bodies and prepared them for future sexual lives. She asserted, "In all these matters nothing is *secret*, all is SACRED."¹¹

The third federal count of putting obscene materials through the mails concerned Angela's article "The Woman's View of It.—No 1." This article, reprinted in the April 1889 issue originally appeared in 1883 after Ezra's second arrest. Angela attacked Comstock and the Comstock Laws, which imprisoned her husband. She argued that not just the books were on trial, "but a Syringe is in the fight; *the will of man to impose vs. the Right of Woman to prevent conception is the issue.*"¹² Angela also discussed sexuality and sex organs in a frank manner. She stated "how hath Natural Modesty forgotten herself if the Penis and Womb be not elegant organs of the Human Body, equal, in ability to entertain us, with the eye and tongue."¹³ She maintained that no other "function is endowed with such befitting elegance as is the persuasive teasing power of the penis and the womb, of the eye and hand."¹⁴

Angela directly challenged Comstock's authority over sexuality and women's right to prevent conception. She scorned those who gave Comstock the power to make

¹¹ Angela Heywood, "The Sex-Education of Children," 2.

¹² Angela Heywood, "The Woman's View of It—No. 1.," *The Word* (April 1889), 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

him “inspector and supervisor of American women’s wombs.”¹⁵ Here she mocked Comstock’s power by stating that women should vote to decide when men may expel semen and that men should have their penises bound with “continent twine.” She called for a feminine version of the vice crusader to inspect the men’s penises to ensure that the twine remained intact. If men disobeyed the “semen-twine” law, Angela mused, they would be subject to ten years imprisonment, and a fine of five-thousand dollars upon conviction by a jury made up of twelve women.¹⁶

Ezra’s trial began less than a month after his arrest, on June 10, 1890, affording Ezra little time to prepare an adequate defense. Judge Nelson was slated to hear Ezra’s case but he fell ill. This was unfortunate for Ezra because Judge Nelson had presided over Ezra’s 1883 case in which the jury had acquitted him. In Judge Nelson’s place, Judge George M. Carpenter presided over the case. A justice from Rhode Island, Judge Carpenter supported the Comstock laws and “was openly hostile to Heywood.”¹⁷ According to Edward W. Chamberlain, a supporter of Ezra, Judge Carpenter made no effort during the trial to be honest “nor any willingness to be fair.”¹⁸ The conduct of the trial resembled Ezra’s 1878 trial in which the judge prevented Ezra from presenting

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 164.

¹⁸ Edward W. Chamberlain, ‘United States vs. Heywood—Why the Defendant Should Be Released. Mr. Chamberlain’s Letter to Mr. Harrison,’ (New York: National Defense Association, 1891), 6.

much of a defense. Chamberlain felt that the prosecutors and Judge Carpenter made an orchestrated effort to “get Mr. Heywood into prison, by any means, fair or foul.”¹⁹

As in the “Cupid’s Yokes” trial, the judge did not allow the jury to hear the allegedly obscene materials in open court. Although the articles were submitted as evidence in the trial, the jury did not hear or see the three articles until they retired for deliberations. Also as in the “Cupid’s Yokes” trial, the judge prevented defense attorneys George Searle and J.F. Pickering from calling character witnesses as a part of Ezra’s defense. When Angela took the stand she testified that she wrote “The Woman’s View of It—No.1,” but Judge Carpenter prevented her from testifying regarding the motives behind writing the article. The judge ruled in accordance with the decision from the 1879 D. M. Bennett case that showing the motive or purpose for the article was irrelevant and inadmissible in court.²⁰ Ezra could not discuss his motives for printing the materials in question, nor could he discuss why he felt they were not obscene. Judge Carpenter only allowed testimony regarding the mailing of the issues of *The Word* that contained the three articles for which Ezra was indicted for mailing.

Judge Carpenter said in his statement to the jury, “It is right for us to hold that no person should think that purity, manliness, and virtue could be promoted by sending through the mail a lewd, lascivious and obscene paper. We have before us an example of a person who apparently, with the education of a respectable man, yet believes it.”²¹

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 164-165.

²¹ *The Truth Seeker*, (June 28, 1890): 405.

Carpenter called the offense for which Ezra was charged “monstrous,” and declared it “the foulest, meanest, lowest offense of which a human being can be guilty.”²² He informed the jury in his statement that “we ought to punish him for any wrong and indecent acts which he may be guilty of or has done.”²³

The jury found Ezra guilty of the charges of putting through the mail the anonymous letter from a mother and Angela’s article “The Woman’s View of It—No. 1.” Searle and Pickering successfully petitioned to have the charge of mailing the O’Neill letter dropped because the name of the person who requested the material did not match the name listed on the indictment. Comstock had either misplaced or forgot the alias he used to request that issue.²⁴ At the sentencing hearing on July 24, 1890, the district attorney asked Ezra if he wished to say anything about the terms of punishment. Before he could finish, Angela’s sister Josephine Tilton jumped up, moved to stand by Ezra, and exclaimed “Men of Massachusetts, in the name of the rights of man, I protest against these proceedings. I ask if you countenance a Court that does not weigh equity?”²⁵ Judge Carpenter immediately ordered her removal from the courtroom. Josephine shouted that the court “did not countenance liberty.”²⁶ After Josephine’s ejection from the court, Angela stood and requested permission to speak. Judge

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 164.

²⁵ Ibid., 166.

²⁶ Ibid.

Carpenter denied her request. Ezra tried to speak as well but was interrupted by the judge who told him he may only speak about the terms of punishment. Ezra replied, “I certainly am not here to ask for mercy.”²⁷ At that, Judge Carpenter sentenced Ezra to two years of hard labor at Charlestown State Prison, where he was immediately taken.

While Comstock chose to arrest Ezra for Angela’s writings, some speculated that Angela was the real target of Comstock’s loathing. Jesse H. Jones, a contributor to *Foote’s Health Monthly* commented that “Sending Mr. Heywood to the penitentiary a few years was not a fair deal; but the real object was to punish indirectly Mrs. Heywood for a dreadful speech which she made in Boston, which the authorities had not the courage to deal directly with her for.”²⁸ In the article, which *The Word* reprinted, Jones referred to the arrest of Ezra following the speech Angela delivered to the New England Free Love League. Referring to Ezra’s subsequent arrests, Jones argued, “it would appear again that the authorities have attempted to punish Mrs. Heywood who is really the guilty person, by arresting her husband.”²⁹ In another issue of *Foote’s Health Monthly*, the editor remarked that “If the Vice Society is disposed to proceed against Mrs. Heywood herself on the charge of insanity, and can make out a good case, perhaps

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Jesse H. Jones, “Cross Grained,” *Foote’s Health Monthly*, September 1892, reprinted in *The Word* (October 1892): 2. *Foote’s Health Monthly* was published by Dr. Edward Bliss Foote from 1876-1896. Sears, 184.

²⁹ Ibid.

they might succeed in putting her into the madhouse, but we would pity Comstock . . . if she lived to get out.”³⁰

In September 1892, *The Word* printed a letter received by Angela in its section called “The Opposition.” This letter, written on June 14, 1890 (during Ezra’s trial) by Laura C. Eldridge, railed against Angela for her plain speech policy in *The Word*. Eldridge lambasted “You foul mouthed, disgusting thing! You ought to be tied to a whipping post until you promised to use decent language. Your demented old idiot of a husband would be half decent if it wasn’t for you.”³¹ She argued that Angela was capable of making any prostitute blush at her use of indecent language. Eldridge claimed that “no old prostitute that walks the streets of our city can *begin* to equal your vulgarity.”³² She indignantly stated, “Of course Heywood will go to prison where he ought to go, only you ought to be there too.”³³ Eldridge felt that not only should Angela be incarcerated, but that the prison should keep her in isolation to prevent her nasty tongue from corrupting the other felons. She spared no mercy when she wrote, “you vilest *thing* in the country! . . . Your children ought to be taken away from you and very likely will be.”³⁴

³⁰ *The Word* (August: 1883): 1.

³¹ Laura C. Eldridge, “Copy of a Letter Received by Angela F. Heywood—Boston, June 14, 1890,” *The Word* (September 1892): 2.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Another reader of *The Word* blamed Angela for Ezra's repeated persecution from Comstock and his allies. In a letter to *The Word* she wrote, "Does she wish to send you there again? It is cowardly to court danger and defy law when the suffering falls on another. . . . if she wants so much to say words that offend decent people, let her go to a brothel and say them over and over until she is satisfied."³⁵

Even fellow Free Lovers and reformers criticized Angela for her use of language. Moses Hull wrote in *The New Thought* that he wished to inform Angela "that she can never elevate womanhood or sexhood with her gospel of nastiness. If the world can take her radical theories at all it will only take them when stripped of pot-house language."³⁶ Hull went on to comment that "such cranks as she hav [*sic*]done the cause of reform more harm than all its enemies could ever hav [*sic*] done."

While Angela vehemently defended the necessity of using plain English, four-letter words to describe the sexual organs and their associative use, she too felt that Comstock imprisoned Ezra to punish her. She based this argument on a statement made by Comstock in a letter to President Rutherford B. Hayes urging him not to pardon Ezra. After a sworn statement of what Comstock thought Angela said at the New England Free Love League convention in Boston, he exclaimed, "This is what she said in open meeting: if you let Mr. Heywood out of Dedham Jail he will open the Free Love

³⁵ Rachel Campbell, "Correspondence," *The Word* (May 1887): 3.

³⁶ Moses Hull, reprinted in "Editorial Notes," *The Word* (May 1887): 2.

Conventions and *Mrs. Heywood* will be talking again.”³⁷ Angela further explained her point by stating, “So you see that the *he* was imprisoned in part to shut up the *she* tongue-pen-wise.”³⁸ She informed readers that the legal persecution of her husband would not stop her from engaging in frank discussions of sexuality using plain English terms: “I am still at it; penis, womb, vagina, semen are classic terms, well-revered in usage; other words, of equal dignity and trenchant familiarity form the clear-cut vocabulary in common use.”³⁹

Stephen Pearl Andrews noted that Angela remained “vexed and annoyed to the last degree that it is Mr. H. who is attacked, not herself. She regards this as her fight, as the woman’s fight for freedom.”⁴⁰ Andrews commented that Angela “will not have it understood that she is a mere wife, following the fate of her husband, instead of a free individual fighting her own battles.”⁴¹ Comstock arranged for Ezra’s arrest more than once for articles penned by Angela. Martin Blatt, Ezra’s biographer, argues that Comstock chose to arrest Ezra rather than Angela “because he did not see women as significant actors in the world.”⁴² However, Comstock did arrest Angela’s unmarried sister Josephine Tilton as well as the unmarried Tennessee Claflin and divorced Victoria Woodhull. Blatt acknowledges that Comstock arrested women, but argues that given

³⁷ Angela Heywood, “Sex-Nomenclature—Plain English,” *The Word* (April 1887): 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Andrews, “Co-Operation,” 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 147.

the choice between a woman and a man, Comstock chose to arrest the man.⁴³ Angela's status as a wife and mother in Victorian society offered her some measure of protection against legal action under Comstock's authority.

Whether Comstock intended to punish Angela by imprisoning her husband, Angela faced hardships due to Ezra's repeated arrests and incarcerations. While the Heywoods lived on the verge of poverty for most of their career, Ezra's imprisonment in 1878 "had a disastrous impact on the Mountain Home's value as a summer resort."⁴⁴ Due to their low income, the family failed to make payments to Ezra's brother Samuel Heywood, who financed their resort home, during 1875 and 1876. After authorities imprisoned Ezra, Samuel visited his jail cell to inform Ezra that he was taking legal action against the Heywoods' debt. When Mountain Home sold at auction on July 26, 1878, Angela, Vesta, and Hermes "were turned out of the house."⁴⁵ Ezra's sisters Mary and Delia Heywood and Angela's sisters Josephine and J. Flora Tilton cared for Angela and her children while Ezra remained in Dedham Jail.

Generous creditors and the financial contributions of sympathizers allowed the Heywoods to repurchase Mountain Home on April 28, 1879. Samuel Heywood pressed old financial claims to Mountain Home during 1881-1882 and Angela and Ezra faced the constant threat of foreclosure. To avoid this, Angela and Ezra sold Mountain Home

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 125.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 123.

to the newly created joint-stock company Mountain Home Corporation, which consisted of friends, family, and other supporters.⁴⁶

Ezra's arrest irreparably damaged Mountain Home's business as a summer resort. During the foreclosure, no paying guests visited, and thus Mountain Home did not generate any income for that year. Even after the Heywoods repurchased Mountain home, business was never the same. Stephen Pearl Andrews commented that Mountain Home "was in prosperous operation under their management, until its success was much disturbed by the scare of Mr. Heywood's repeated arrests; since the first of these its fortunes have been varied."⁴⁷ The Heywoods relied on the financial generosity of friends and readers of *The Word* to meet their needs. *The Word* had to occasionally lapse in publication during times of financial distress, incarceration, or illness. Ezra reported that "Mrs. Heywood's severe and protracted illness, followed by Hermes' and Psyche's sickness compelled cessation of printing. . . ." for three months in 1885.⁴⁸ Ezra admitted that since they were on the verge of destitution, *The Word* would appear when possible. Until its cessation in 1893, *The Word* "suffered occasional lapses," including complete silence during Ezra's second imprisonment.⁴⁹

During Ezra's last incarceration, an impoverished Angela made several appeals to the readers of *Lucifer the Light-Bearer* for monetary donations to cover the cost of

⁴⁶ Ibid., 124.

⁴⁷ Andrews, "Co-Operation," 1.

⁴⁸ Ezra Heywood, "Editorial Notes," *The Word* (December 1885): 2.

⁴⁹ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 126.

food, fuel, and the necessary repairs to allow her to board summer guests to generate an income. *The Word* was not published during his imprisonment because he could not find an editor willing to risk his own reputation to publish it or to commit to the two-year term. Ezra noted that Angela was “too overwhelmed with trying to sustain” Mountain Home as a summer resort and was “totally preoccupied with survival issues.”⁵⁰ Angela could not fully step into the public sphere of writing and editing during Ezra’s imprisonment because of her duties and responsibilities as a traditional wife and mother. While she put aside her writing and reform efforts to care for her family, Angela dealt with the enormous pressure of supporting herself and her four young children with her husband away in prison.

After Ezra’s release from prison on May 13, 1892, friends noticed his weakened physical condition. Life in the hard labor Charlestown Prison took its toll on Ezra’s health. Ezra caught a cold in New York during the American Labor Reform League convention in May 1893, a year after his release. This cold lingered and “was probably a recurrence of the tuberculosis contracted while” serving his sentence in prison.⁵¹ After struggling with the illness for a few days, Ezra retired to bed in the care of Andrew Jackson Davis, his spiritualist friend and a physician. He stayed at the home of Josephine and J. Flora Tilton who, along with Angela and their daughter Psyche Ceres,

⁵⁰ Ibid., 168.

⁵¹ Ibid., 171.

cared for him until his death. Ezra passed away on May 22, 1893 at the age of sixty-four.

The family conducted funeral services in both Boston and Princeton, Massachusetts. Josephine noted that Ezra was buried in a plain pine box “as fitting his life of poverty and his thought.”⁵² In his eulogy, Dr. C. H. Sims commented on Ezra’s hard work and devotion to reform. “He believed in peace and plenty, but toiled in the cause of liberty through difficulties and poverty from himself and family. . . . He was the disciple of love and liberty, the victim of hate and oppression.”⁵³ To conclude the eulogy, Dr. Sims quoted Ezra’s daughter Psyche when she said of her father, “He is beyond our prisons, don’t need our prayers, nor even those of his pious persecutors.”⁵⁴

After Ezra’s death, Josephine and J. Flora Tilton continued in their work for reform. J. Flora lived until 1918 and Josephine died four years later.⁵⁵ Angela was unable to keep up her reform efforts nor could she afford to keep up *The Word* or the Co-Operative Publishing Company. Ezra’s death left her with great debts and four children to support on her own with no tangible assets. Unfortunately, there is little historical record of Angela Heywood after the death of her husband. As an adult, Psyche Ceres recalled that her mother was a “very strong person” and that she “thought

⁵² Ibid., 172.

⁵³ *The Truth Seeker* (June 10, 1893): 358-359.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 175.

clearly up to her death at the age of ninety-five.”⁵⁶ Though she outlived Ezra by more than forty years, Angela did not publish any more of her writings or participate publicly in reform movements after his passing.

The Free Love Movement also began to fracture and die between the 1890s and 1910s. Historian Joanne E. Passet notes that by 1910 the Free Love Movement’s ranks that got their start in the abolitionist movement “were decimated by infirmity and death, making it impossible for those who survived to sustain it or its press.”⁵⁷ Gender and generational differences that developed among sex radicals subverted the Free Love Movement. “New Women” who embraced the sex radical movement in the 1890s were shaped by “different cultural milieus” and thus had less in common with the sex radicals who formed out of the abolitionist ranks.⁵⁸

The Free Love Movement and the Heywoods’ Free Love ideas held both liberal and conservative aspects. Historian Stephen Nissenbaum described this duality in Free Love advocates: “On the same page they were capable of rhapsodizing about sexual life and castigating it, of condemning marriage in the name of sexual freedom and condemning the exercise of sexual freedom in the name of health.”⁵⁹ Martin Blatt, Ezra’s biographer, noted that “this paradoxical stance constituted the central

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁵⁷ Passet, 14-15.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁹ Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism*, 157.

contradiction in nineteenth-century” sex radicalism.⁶⁰ Historian Taylor Stoehr argues that this paradoxical stance developed as a manifestation of a gulf in the “culture itself—the classic dualism of Victorian sexuality, its prudery and its prurience, its chastity and its license, pornography and prostitution side by side with saintly virgins and wives of alabaster.”⁶¹

Angela Heywood embodied the paradoxical duality of the nineteenth-century Free Love Movement. She held radical ideas and used language deemed obscene by even other sex radicals, yet she fulfilled the role of a traditional wife and mother. Although she did garner the majority of the family’s income, she did so not in the public sphere of wage earning, but in the private sphere of managing her home. She was a sex radical, but she participated in this movement through writing, an acceptable mode of nineteenth-century female expression. Angela bore and raised four children, who all lived into adulthood. She put her writing and reform work aside when the demands of housework and childrearing overwhelmed her time. Stephen Pearl Andrews called her “womanly ladylike” and “eminently domestic,” yet at the same time he noted that she “is hard as flint” and must not be mistaken as a “weakling.”⁶²

Lucien V. Pinney noted that the notoriety gained by *The Word* had just as much to do with Angela as it did Ezra. He called her the “light, the life, and . . . the motive

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Stoehr, 62.

⁶² Andrews, “Co-Operation,” 1.

power of the establishment.”⁶³ Pinney also remarked that Angela “is the most loyal of wives and loving of mothers.” He commented that “in impromptu expression she is amazing, in all things she is feminine, and the courage and fortitude she displays under the trying conditions of her life must win admiration from all who are acquainted with the facts.”⁶⁴ She participated in the Free Love movement through her role as a traditional wife and mother. In the end, Angela Heywood clearly embodied the traits of Victorian womanhood while immersing herself in sex radicalism.

⁶³ Pinney, “The Man and the Woman of Princeton,” 1.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

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