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# "Brave the Stigman Manfully": Examining Professionalism, Singleness, and Femininity in Mid-Victorian Heroines

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“BRAVE THE STIGMA MANFULLY”:  
EXAMINING PROFESSIONALISM, SINGLENESS, AND FEMININITY  
IN MID-VICTORIAN HEROINES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: "Brave the Stigma Manfully":  
Examining Professionalism, Singleness, and Femininity in Mid-Victorian Heroines

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In this dissertation I examine how Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Geraldine Jewsbury's *The Half Sisters* (1848), and Dinah Craik's *Olive* (1850) represent the professional endeavors of single women who needed to provide for themselves and/or their families. I argue that these novels illustrate an understanding of the growing need for women to professionalize and were therefore advocating for a revised understanding of the domestic ideal, one that left room for singleness and professionalism.

I situate these novels in the historical context of mid-nineteenth century England by placing them in dialogue with contemporary nonfiction writers, such as Harriet Martineau, Sarah Ellis, Sarah Lewis, Marion Reid and Barbara Bodichon Smith. I have consulted the work of Elaine Showalter, Mary Poovey, Elizabeth Langland and Martha Vicinus among others in my use of a feminist literary approach.

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## CHAPTER 1

### SOME WOMEN'S QUESTIONS: AN INTRODUCTION

In March 2013, Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, published *Lean In* and provided her perspective on the small percentage of women in leadership positions. Sandberg and others like Debora Spar in *Wonder Women* (published in September 2013) and Arianna Huffington in *Thrive* (published in March 2014) address the dilemma professional women face when they try to balance their careers with motherhood. This phenomena of "supermoms" is even prevalent in commercials where women are portrayed rushing from work to ferry their children to extracurricular activities with the message that they can do it all, balance work and family. In spite of the inaccurate ease with which this is portrayed, women are pressured to strike a balance rather than simply choose to prioritize their career or their family. Spar highlights Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* (1962) as a catalyst for this change, a book that Spar says encouraged women to "have it all" (20). However, she adds that uninspired by Friedan's treatise, "Many of the housewives that Friedan condemned were perfectly happy with their lot and saw *The Feminine Mystique* as an affront to their femininity and selflessness" (22-23). From their vantage point (or Spar's), "Feminists were loud and pushy, strident and unfeminine" (27). Rather than succumb to one negative stereotype or the other--an oppressed housewife or a "shrill and aggressive" feminist (4)--women today are encouraged to attain both careers and families in spite of the lack of support that society actually has in place to make such a pursuit possible to most women. Spar suggests that the balance between work and family seemed possible with "affordable

day care” and “flexible working hours” (168), but these “solutions” were “not enough. Or . . . they never really existed after all” (168).

A little more than 150 years ago, women were struggling to find similar solutions in hopes of reconciling their professional identities with the normalized gender construct provided for them: “The middle-class ideology of the proper sphere of womanhood, which developed in post-industrial England and America, prescribed a [married] woman who would be a Perfect Lady, and Angel in the House, contentedly submissive to men, but strong in her inner purity and religiosity, queen in her own realm of the Home” (Poovey 14). The Angel in the House represented the feminine ideal, a woman who embodies the highest moral, domestic, and maternal qualities practiced within one’s home often in accordance with a man’s desire. Unable to fill only the mold of the “Angel,” the mid-Victorian heroines I examine in this study represent a redefinition of this feminine ideal, one that leaves room for periods of professionalism and singleness. In different ways, these heroines do represent feminine qualities particularly in their domestic and maternal roles. They do so on their own terms, however, not just in accordance with patriarchal strictures. Middle-class cultural ideology elevated the domestic ideal as a superior option for women by degrading professionalism and stigmatizing it as unfeminine. The novels in my study, however, represent women who revised the domestic ideal by demonstrating how women could be both professional and feminine, women who could take ownership of and empower their feminine identity on their own terms, thereby creating a professional ideal. This professional and feminine woman is not looking to be defined solely as a wife and mother, as the Angel in the

House, but wants the freedom to pursue those roles in addition to periods of singleness and professionalism.

In addition to restricting a woman's influence, the Angel in the House was also a way to minimize woman's status in the domestic sphere, to objectify and exploit her as a signifier of middle class ideology. However, this does not take account of what happens when women no longer want to be objectified, when they can no longer afford to be objectified, and when the system literally does not have enough "man-power" to accomplish it. Although there is no precise historical moment when women begin to "subjectify" themselves, this starts to happen in mid-century England when one third of the population consists of single women (Hadjiafxendi and Zakreski 1) when eligible bachelors have emigrated to English colonies (Greg 13) and left women to forge a new path that takes them away from only fulfilling the role of Angel in the House.

What does this path of subjectification look like? In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Geraldine Jewsbury's *The Half Sisters* (1848), and Dinah Craik's *Olive* (1850) this path is traversed by middle-class women whose circumstances do not lead directly to the Angel in the House; rather, they veer toward periods of professionalism and singleness alongside their fulfillment of feminine roles. These representations of single, professional yet feminine women contrast greatly with the contemporary opinion of "a woman taking part in public life" or in "unfeminine occupations," a woman considered a "she-dragon . . . fit to be neither a wife nor a mother" (Rev of *The Works of George Sand* 146). In mid-century England, this is precisely the response experienced by real professional women who sought to subjectify themselves. Likewise, each heroine also subjectifies herself by asserting her

subjectivity and humanity, by resisting objectification, by taking ownership of her work and her identity, and by prioritizing her own perspective.

As middle-class women began to extend their work beyond the domestic sphere, the Angel in the House and its corresponding ideology was challenged. The preceding citation suggests that women who took on this challenge through their singleness and ambition were stigmatized as unwomanly. The stigmatization of single, professional women is a major concern of the novels examined in this study. In various ways, Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive represent single, professional women who, despite the stigma, strived for a more balanced identity, one in which they are neither restricted by the domestic ideal prescribed by middle-class ideology nor completely divergent from it, a balance that allows women to still be considered feminine even if their occupations are not typically considered so. These heroines show that they do not need to be wives and mothers to be feminine by both redefining the feminine ideal and creating the professional ideal. The resulting hybrid is a single, professional woman with feminine qualities. Thus we have two feminine ideals--the domestic ideal prescribed by Victorian, middle-class ideology and the professional ideal honed and adjusted by different single, professional women looking for a way to express their femininity without the prerequisite labels of wife and mother. Through her feminine development as the professional ideal, each heroine empowers her own subjectivity by asserting her humanity and the value of her experience.

The women characters in each novel defend their ability to be both feminine and professional by demonstrating how the latter is not a hindrance to the former. They embody their own versions of femininity that sometimes conflict with the conventionally

feminine ideal. Each protagonist is first identified in conjunction with the conventionally feminine ideal through her feminine accomplishments displayed in the domestic sphere. She also works within the home, both in a professional capacity, as well as through her domestic and maternal roles. In spite of her singleness, her professionalism does not hinder her from developing her feminine skills further toward marriageability, illustrated in her interpersonal relationships with other single women and eventually with her future husband. Ultimately, these women prove the ability to maintain feminine identities despite their participation in professional work and their period of singleness.

My thesis is supported by contemporary writers. Sarah Ellis and Sarah Lewis who wrote conduct manuals around 1838 hint at this phenomenon. Ellis' *Women of England* (1839) and Lewis' *Woman's Mission* (1839) both agree that while a woman should pursue the roles of wife and mother, special circumstances make it necessary for single women to provide for themselves. They also note the prejudice faced by these women who were considered unfeminine because of the "masculine" role they had to pursue as financial providers.

Both writers provide a definition of the feminine ideal that may have been relevant to the Brontës, Jewsbury and Craik. Ellis begins her work by providing "some apology" for having written about the domestic nature of woman's work because it is viewed as ordinary in her time and culture (v). Ellis writes for middle-class women "who enjoy the privilege of liberal education with exemption from the pecuniary necessities of labour" and who Ellis sees as "upholding the moral worth" of England (vi).

According to Ellis, the domestic image of the country is dependent on the moral character of the women establishing that domestic image. She fears, "the women of

England are deteriorating in their moral character, and that false notions of refinement are rendering them less influential, less useful, and less happy than they were” (14). Highlighting the importance of the domestic image emphasizes the significant work of women, that Ellis hopes, will inspire them to value the part they play in “upholding” a positive image of their country and not succumb to pretenses of having more money or a higher status than they actually do. Ellis is concerned that these “false notions of refinement,” attempts to appear as upper or upper-middle class when they are really middle or lower-middle class, are holding women back from their moral duties.

Throughout her writing, Ellis outlines her ideas surrounding the domestic ideal. She describes a woman who is active, thoughtful and good humored (23), one who is able to use “the time, the health, and the means permitted” throughout the day in meeting others’ needs to the best of her ability (24). “The true English woman” (28) has strong moral feelings and purity of mind; her conversation is healing and restorative (31). She is naturally religious (34) and self-sacrificing (40). Women are first viewed as wives, then as daughters or mothers but never as independent women (36). Ellis notes the “superhuman” quality necessary for a middle-class woman to embody the characteristics she describes but seems to communicate that women can and must perform these duties even as ordinary humans (55).

Sarah Lewis proposes a similar representation of women in *Woman’s Mission*, one in which women are encouraged to value their role as disseminators of morality, particularly in their role as mothers. Once again, we see the hegemony of domestic ideology being perpetuated through the domestic ideal. If women who have been trained in domestic ideology are not marrying and raising the next generation of

ideologues, middle-class culture is at risk of deterioration. Lewis' goal in *Woman's Mission* is to encourage the continuation of this system by representing the influential power held by women who use their maternal roles to propagate morality.

In spite of the emphasis Ellis and Lewis place on woman's "natural" roles as wife and mother, they also make exceptions for special circumstances. Ellis seems to argue for middle-class women to have some skills they can fall back on for financial sustenance if faced with poverty (21). Lewis argues that in spite of the social backlash a woman may experience by working, she must choose self-sacrifice over maintaining a false sense of socioeconomic standing (53). In passing, she addresses the prejudice against women who work and the loss of social standing she experiences as a result (78). Ultimately, Lewis feels a woman may do as she needs to as long as what she is doing maintains and exercises her moral influence (153).

The novels in this study seem to agree with Lewis and Ellis and value a woman's influence. However, my writers argue that working out of necessity to provide for oneself or one's family does not diminish this influence. Rather, work represented in these novels seems to augment a woman's feminine development by creating opportunities for her to assert herself and provide for her own needs, a process antithetical to what domestic ideology had encouraged. This causes women not to be dependent on domesticity as a source of fulfillment, and thereby disrupts the middle-class ideology that has in turn depended on domestic women. Instead, a woman's feminine development continues not through her appropriation of the Angel of the House but through work that empowers her to identify her needs and fulfill them. These heroines represent ways in which women may stave off the limited role prescribed by domestic

ideology and avoid making matches society expects of them but that are ultimately ill-fitting. Instead, they demonstrate ways in which women may develop a type of femininity, one that is still maternal and domestic in some ways, but mainly because of how those qualities benefit her, her family or friends, not to suit male figures. Their singleness and professionalism takes them outside the Angel of the House mold, and thus enables them to resist the cultural expectation of immediate marriage. Rather, she is empowered to wait for a suitable partner who is equal in morality and intellect (Lewis 47).

That these heroines successfully (albeit in different ways) revise the feminine ideal through their singleness and professionalism is truly revolutionary. Harriet Martineau's *Deerbrook* (1838) serves as a useful control text to help highlight the significance of this revision. Known as a radical thinker in her time, Martineau was a nonfiction writer of issues pertaining to economics and sociology. *Deerbrook*, however, is her attempt to address these issues in the form of a novel. Like the novels examined here Martineau's middle-class characters, the Hopes, face financial hardship and must pursue socially acceptable forms of work in order to provide for themselves. Published a decade before the novels of this study, *Deerbrook* handles the issue of working middle-class women differently. The Hopes consist of a male provider, Mr. Hope, his wife, Hester, and her sister, Margaret, unlike Jane, Helen, Bianca, and Olive who must seek work because they must take the place of the male provider. Mr. Hope is already a professional, but the loss of work puts his family's financial security in jeopardy. Rather than also professionalize like the heroines of this study, Hester stays home to take care of the house and her new baby while Margaret picks up odd jobs around town. These



are just two ways Martineau deals with middle-class financial struggles, while the Brontës, Jewsbury and Craik focus on a more cohesive narrative for the working middle-class woman.

In *Deerbrook* Hester and Margaret Ibbotson are cousins of the Greys, an established Deerbrook family. They come to live with the Greys after their parents have passed away. Hester is considered very beautiful, while Margaret is described as being plain. Margaret, however, is the kinder, more patient and enduring of the two sisters, while Hester tends to be easily jealous and excitable. Mr. Hope is portrayed as the perfect gentleman and medical man. All of Deerbrook loves him initially, and it appears that he can do no wrong. The one crime he seems guilty of is loving Margaret but marrying her sister out of duty, for both women thought he preferred Hester. After voting in opposition with the majority of Deerbrook men, Mr. Hope falls prey to the prejudices of the town. Rumors about him snatching bodies from graves cause them to riot against him. His practice grows smaller and smaller, as a result, causing him, his wife Hester, and her sister Margaret to live meagerly. Amidst this difficult time, the Hopes stand firm against their assailants, those who are trying to break their resolve. The Hopes do not falter in their conviction or their “enthusiasm” (as it is often called in the novel) in spite of the stigmatization and abuse they face.

This situation gives Martineau an opportunity to propose other ways that middle-class families may provide for themselves. As a result of their reduced financial circumstances, the Hope household gradually reduces their daily practices: “One superfluity after another vanished from the table; every day something which had always been a want was discovered to be a fancy . . .” (363); they dismiss all of their

servants, and sell prized possessions including Margaret's watch and Hope's horse. Margaret then takes up some needlework that brings in a little money; she also takes on the role as housekeeper with the help of Hope and Hester. They are surprised by “the sweetness of comforts provided by their own immediate toil” (465) and find that providing for themselves with their own hands is very rewarding. The manner in which Margaret, Hester and Hope provide for themselves seems to connect to Ellis and Lewis' understanding of how middle-class families should not keep up pretenses when they are hit by financial hardship. By creating the most patient and forgiving characters (Hester becomes quite heroic in her perseverance), Martineau demonstrates that even the most noble people come upon difficult times and are none the worse for acknowledging it.

Martineau seems to have at least two messages to communicate with the Hope situation. She seems to support the idea that middle-class families should attempt to use all of their talents and faculties to pursue some means of work and income to provide for themselves. She also seems to be encouraging people to not rely on literature or art as a means for income. Maria, a governess and friend to Margaret, explains that art and literature are not wise pursuits for financial sustenance. Rather, the positions of “the tutor, the tailor, and the hatter” seem to be the only occupation open to Margaret (448), while Hester cares for her newborn child. Martineau seems to be attempting to break down the barriers of middle-class ideology by representing middle-class characters who successfully step outside their comfort zone for the Hopes do not adhere to the customs the Greys encourage them to uphold. As a result, Martineau represents what seems to be a complete break from middle-class ideology.

The Hopes are radical in the way they persevere in the face of adversity. They all rally together to maintain the household. They dismiss all of their servants and each one helps to fill the now vacant roles. Perhaps by not keeping up any pretenses of refinement they represent ways in which both men and women can face the reality of their situations even during times of financial hardship. My novels seem to communicate a similar message but not as drastically. They do not seem to sacrifice as much as the Hopes. Their work enables them to maintain somewhat comfortable living, unlike the period during which the Hopes barely have enough to eat.

Martineau's text can therefore be seen as an 'outlier' narrative for this dissertation, for the hardship faced by the Hope household occurs after Hope and Hester are married when Hope as financial provider faces financial difficulty. In contrast, the novels in my study do not have a male provider. These women are single and independent and must find resources to provide for themselves. The novels of my study and *Deerbrook* also differ in the form of occupation the impoverished middle-class women pursue. Jane, Helen, Bianca, and Olive rely on art and their accomplishments to assist with their income.

Additionally, Martineau does not insist that the professional and domestic can be reconciled; rather, she suggests that women should ignore the domestic to focus on work. *Deerbrook* and the novels I examine both attempt to dismantle the customs of middle-class ideology by representing middle-class women who step outside their comfort zone in order to provide for themselves and their families. *Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *The Half Sisters*, and *Olive*, however, represent situations in which both the professional and the domestic are able to be reconciled.

The feminine ideal defined by domestic ideology, supported by Ellis and Lewis and challenged by Martineau was mainly upheld by the middle-class. For that reason, the single, professional woman to which I refer is of the middle-class. However, I also refer to her as independent, indicating that she is both independent from marriage and from a financial benefactor such as a father, brother or other relative. The single, professional woman's independence is precisely what complicates the ideology of the Victorian middle class. Set up as a system to provide for women in a way that kept them dependent on and inferior to men, domestic ideology tells women they must conform to the feminine ideal as wife and mother in order to be considered a woman at all. Without a husband, father, or brother to rely on for financial support, many women had to seek professional means for supporting themselves. In representing such women, these novels explode the "predetermined masculine social boundaries" that unrealistically limited the options for single, middle-class women (Morrison 210-11).

I have found the work of feminist critics to be the most applicable to this subject and see my work as an extension of theirs. In addition to the numerous scholars whose work on domestic ideology informs my study, I am guided by the framework of several feminist scholars, especially Elaine Showalter. Her gynocriticism defined as a "coherent narrative of women's literary history" studies the ways "women's writing has moved through phases of subordination, protest, and autonomy, phases connected by recurring images, metaphors, themes, and plots that emerge from women's social and literary experience . . ." (xx). Similar to the narrative emphasized in Showalter's gynocriticism, there seems to be a coherent narrative in these novels that speaks to the issue of women who have been seeking an alternative path in their feminine development, one

that is not restricted by patriarchal expectations but leaves room for singleness and professionalism. This narrative is consistently woven through the experiences of heroines who face financial hardship and must rely on their own skills to provide for themselves. Along the way, they encounter opportunities to subjectify and empower themselves. The recurring elements of the four novels in this study create the backbone of my investigation and connect them to the social issues of the time in which they were published (1847-1850). Showalter's gynocriticism has also been useful in weaving together the feminist criticism that has influenced my work, particularly my understanding of middle-class cultural ideology and the glimpses of revision that I see in these novels. That is, these novels contain moments in which the heroine revises the feminine ideal by demonstrating how singleness and professionalism are not antithetical to femininity. I have followed the work of Showalter, Poovey, Langland and Warhol, among others, but am also attempting to forge my own path by examining conventionally feminine characters within the context of their time not within the context of my twenty-first century feminism that might offer a representation of mid-Victorian femininity only as limited and oppressed. Most feminist scholarship attempts to find the subversive feminist motive behind Victorian women's literature. Other scholarship seeks to admonish these women for their conventional roles and support of patriarchy. I agree with Langland's proposition that we "move beyond critical assessments that either celebrate or condemn this figure [the domestic woman] to more complex and even contradictory configurations of her role within Victorian culture" (21). My study makes this critical addition to our understanding of the Victorian domestic ideology and how it affected single, middle-class, professional women by demonstrating how she is a figure

neither to be condemned nor celebrated. I demonstrate how these heroines are “contradictory configurations” of the middle-class woman’s “role within Victorian culture” by highlighting ways in which their work and singleness conflict with the established ideal for mid-century women.

The work of Elizabeth Langland and Elaine Showalter has been especially useful for examining the dependence of middle-class hegemony on wives and mothers as signifiers of middle-class ideology. Middle-class hegemony, however, was threatened by the increasing number of single women pursuing professional means to support themselves rather than rely on the sometimes financially stable option of marriage. In *Nobody’s Angels* (1995), Langland highlights this dilemma in her description of a middle-class, Victorian culture that portrayed women as passive angels but required them to be active disseminators of domestic ideology; that is, “a mid-Victorian man depended on his wife to perform the ideological work of managing the class question and displaying signs of middle-class status, toward which he contributed a disposable income” (9). In order to create this display, a woman was responsible for executing “prescribed domestic practices” ranging from “increasingly complex rules of etiquette and dress, to the growing formalization of Society and the Season, to the proliferation of household-help manuals, to the institution of household prayer and the custom of house-to-house visiting, to cookery and eating behavior . . .” (9). In this context, it almost sounds as though a middle-class woman is hired through a marriage contract to disseminate a specific ideology that she may or may not agree with through practices she may or may not desire to exercise. Accordingly, “middle-class women [who] controlled significant discursive practices . . . controlled the dissemination of certain

knowledges and thus helped to ensure a middle-class hegemony in mid-Victorian England” (9). As middle-class hegemony depended on the display created by middle-class wives, it is understandable that middle-class proponents of domestic ideology feared the increasing number of single women seeking work outside the home. The decision, however, was not an easy one. Although this choice may appear simple to a twenty-first century feminist, choosing work over marriage (if the option was even available) was not a straightforward decision for mid-century Victorian women, for “unmarried and . . . childless [women] had . . . a certain sexual stigma to overcome” (Showalter 70).

Harriet Martineau, for example, was one woman who experienced this sexual stigma as a result of her career as a sociologist rather than a wife or mother. In her article on Harriet Martineau, Ann Hobart describes the “unwomanly display of intellectual application” that Martineau privately kept from her family and acquaintances (223). Hobart’s use of “unwomanly” to describe Martineau’s intellectual activities demonstrates her sense of how the ambition of Victorian women was viewed by their contemporaries. Hobart describes how “Martineau violated what contemporary domestic ideology defined as gentlewoman’s ‘natural’ commitments” and as a result appeared “unwomanly, unnatural--a kind of moral monster” (225). Arriving only a decade after Martineau’s later works, the protagonists of these novels represent women facing similar charges, specifically middle-class women who were violating domestic ideology through their singleness and professionalism.

In spite of the practical and basic need to provide for oneself, a professional woman was stigmatized as a “moral monster” because it prevented her from fulfilling

her “holy office” (Lewes). The professional woman who does not rely on a male benefactor, whether she wants to or not, is considered “unfeminine” because her ambition and assumed fame-seeking are questionable traits in a member of the female sex. Thus, the single, professional woman is twice cursed and an abomination to the feminine ideal defined by domestic ideology. It is precisely this definition that these novels are seeking to revise. Rather than place single, professional women outside the realm of the domestic ideal, these authors place their protagonists within it and thus revise the place of women confined to conforming to the domestic ideal. Perhaps the Brontës, Jewsbury and Craik understood the anxiety “about the possibility of appearing unwomanly” (Showalter 21) and therefore created professional female characters who prove that such women are not “vain, publicity-seeking, and self-assertive” (20). Instead, by representing aspects of the feminine ideal in single, working women, they illustrate how women could balance both the feminine and the professional.

Long before Judith Butler’s work on gendered identities, *Eliza Cook’s Journal* addresses the stigma associated with being described as a “masculine woman:” “Do not be afraid . . . of having it charged upon you that you are a ‘masculine’ woman. Better a thousand times a masculine than a weak one. Brave the stigma *manfully*” (37 “Advice to the Ladies.” *Eliza Cook’s Journal* 3 (1850). Albeit humorously addressed here, the anxiety surrounding gendered identities caused women to “face the risk that in defining their voices as female they would be excluded altogether from public [discourse]” (Carnell 8). Trapped by gender politics, women are stuck between freely expressing themselves or being considered unfeminine or unwomanly. According to Carnell, the use of male pseudonyms for some Victorian women writers “suggests the



difficulty that women experienced in maintaining their separate identities as they introduced their texts into the public sphere” (12). As Carnell and the “Advice to the Ladies” in *Eliza Cook’s Journal* indicates, women who defined their public voices as female were actually at risk of being considered manly. Ironically, by using a male pseudonym women writers were able to contribute to public discourse more openly. These novels represented here convey “feminine” women whose work brought them into a male-centric public realm. However, despite their participation in professional and thus public work, these women still maintain their feminine identities. They therefore contradicted the patriarchal notion that only women who were solely relegated to domestic work were able to maintain such womanly images.

Victorian notions of what it meant to be “womanly” appeared to be fairly concrete. At least those immersed in patriarchal ideology did not question that being womanly meant to be submissive, self-sacrificing, moral, virginal, and desiring marriage. The feminine ideal was considered normative, whereas those who did not conform to such hegemonic definitions of gender may be considered “incoherent.” Judith Butler explains,

Inasmuch as “identity” is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of “the person” is called into question by the cultural emergence of those “incoherent” or “discontinuous” gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. (23)

Unmarried and working middle-class women who failed to conform to the gendered ideal may be described as “incoherent” or “discontinuous.” Their singleness and

professionalism seem to place Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive in this category of discontinuity, at least until they reach the hetero-normative ideal of marriage to a man.

The “incoherent” femininity represented in these heroines who eventually marry connects to the “representations of gender” found in “simultaneously constructed and contested [ideological systems]” highlighted by Mary Poovey in *Uneven Developments*. The novels I examine in this study similarly use “representations of gender” to “construct” and “contest” the ideological system of domesticity and the feminine ideal (2). That is, the Brontës, Jewsbury, and Craik present a feminine revision of the single, professional woman as a way of constructing a revised professional ideal and as a way of contesting the domestic ideal valorized by Victorian, middle-class domestic ideology. According to Poovey, “the middle-class ideology we most often associate with the Victorian period was both contested and always under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations” (3). *Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *The Half Sisters* and *Olive* present such “oppositional formulations” through their representations of an alternative professional ideal that sits alongside the domestic ideal defined by middle-class ideology.

Showalter, Langland, Warhol and Poovey call attention to the different ways this construction took place. Showalter explains, “feminine writers were . . . looking for two kinds of heroines . . . inspiring professional role-models . . . [and] romantic heroines, a sisterhood of shared passion and suffering, women who sobbed and struggled and rebelled” (103). Even though Showalter thinks it “was very difficult for the Victorians to believe that both qualities could be embodied in the same woman” (103), I argue that

this is exactly what certain women writers were accomplishing--a merging of feminine qualities alongside the stereotypically unwomanly features of singleness and ambition. Langland similarly investigates “the role that the novel played in sustaining mythologies of the middle-class homemaker even as it exposed through rupture and tensions the very mythology it sedulously portrayed” (12). The novels examined in my study also uphold the Victorian myth of a feminine ideal while revealing its limitations. Similarly, Robyn Warhol presents ways in which, “Victorian women novelists like the Brontës are not so much unconsciously ‘written by’ gender codes as they are actively engaged in rewriting them” (858). Her aim is to make visible “women authors’ activism in exposing and complicating oppressive binary categories within culture. . . [including] the hierarchical opposition of masculinity and femininity in Victorian England” (858). The Brontës, Jewsbury and Craik complicate this hierarchical binary by creating women who coexist in these supposedly separate spheres by doing public work, conventionally defined as masculine, within the conventionally feminine domestic sphere.

Warhol presents a framework for examining this coexistence or “doubleness” in Charlotte Brontë’s protagonists, particularly in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. Warhol’s description of doubleness as “a trope figuring binaries not as opposed, but as coexisting” ties well to my study on single women whose professional image is synchronized with feminine qualities emphasized in the domestic ideal (858). She explains,

Doubleness is figured as both feminine and feminist, as a strategy for negotiating differences between and within male and female, center and margin, inside and outside, public and private, realism and romance. To be “double” is to resist

categorization as one thing or the other; to invoke “doubleness” is to address binary oppositions without resting comfortably in either of the two terms being opposed. (857)

This is precisely the argument I seek to make in relation to *Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *The Half Sisters* and *Olive*. Warhol clearly describes the binaries upheld by domestic ideology, the binaries which Jane, Helen, Bianca, and Olive desire to exist between or bring together.

Such a revision echoes Mary Poovey’s “border cases” which challenge the “binary logic” of domestic ideology. These novels are of great significance as border cases because they “threatened to challenge *the* opposition upon which all the other oppositions claimed to be based--the opposition between men and women” (12). By arguing for a woman’s right to become a professional and to support herself or her family financially, these novels tap into the commonly held fear that women taking on roles formerly held by men would lead to a collapse of the gender formations upheld by domestic ideology and the separate spheres. This is not however, what these women seem to have desired. Instead, they present an alternative, a border case in which women may work and still maintain the proscribed gender identity to which they have chosen to adhere.

Poovey provides the governess as an example of a “border case.” She explains, “the governess . . . constituted the border between the normative (working) man and the normative (nonworking) woman. . . . [She] was . . . deviant simply because she was a middle-class woman who had to work and because she was always in danger of losing her middle-class status and her ‘natural’ morality” (14). This is true for Jane Eyre as a

governess, for Helen during her time as a “widow” and a working mother, for Bianca as an actress, and for Olive as the sole provider for herself and her mother. As the positions of governesses began to fill, mid-Victorian women needed to look “for respectable occupations other than that of the governess, companion or seamstress” (Hadjiafxendi and Zakreski 19). These novels illustrate those expanded options. I argue each heroine proves the respectability of her occupation by demonstrating her own respectability as a feminine ideal, that is, by maintaining some measure of conventional gendered behavior in spite of her work.

Poovey highlights the governess’s ability to reside in this complicatedly dual space. The governess’s situation, however, was less than ideal. Rather than use their feminine accomplishments to train young women in the same, some middle-class women who found themselves in unexpected financial difficulties, began to use their feminine accomplishments to begin careers as actresses, artists, authors, singers and musicians. These women created ways to publicly use their “private” skills. As a result their professionalism was debased by Victorians who, rather than see their professionalism as practical and necessary ingenuity, critiqued women in these positions on the assumption that they had become professionals for fame, another unwomanly quality. Victorians felt such skills should be reserved for a woman’s family, particularly for the enjoyment of a future husband, not displayed publicly or for money as this brought a woman too close to prostitution.

Following the lead of Showalter, Langland, Warhol and Poovey, I have chosen to examine the ways in which women’s literature has provided a subversive space for women writers. My work forges a new path from my predecessors however, by delving

deeper into the nuances surrounding the domestic ideal and how it is redefined in *Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *The Half Sisters*, and *Olive*. In addition to the specific configurations of my study, I highlight the anxiety connected to the valorization of the domestic ideal and its shortcomings. My study emphasizes the positioning of the domestic ideal within middle-class ideology as a signifier of woman's accomplishments and thus normative femininity as well as its limitations in encompassing all forms of femininity that seek to exclude the gender identities of single, professional women who exist outside the norm. For Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive, the Angel in the House defined by domestic ideology is a fraction of the feminine identity they develop for themselves initially as single, professional women and eventually as married, self-actualized women. As my study will show, it is their professionalism and period of singleness, not their domestic capabilities alone that actually augments their personal growth and ultimate marriageability.

I am able to highlight these findings through the "clusters of associated themes and images" (Poovey 19) within and between these novels that have stood out and seem to emphasize a shared narrative. Even though the heroines I examine come from different backgrounds and have different experiences, they seem to have similar ways of interacting with and redefining the domestic ideal as a professional one. Their representations of "female professions" outlined by Dinah Craik in *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* (1858), Craik describes these "female professions" as "the instruction of youth; painting or art; literature; and the vocation of public entertainment - including actresses, singers, musicians, and the like" (48). That Jane is a governess

who sketches and paints, that Helen is a “widow” who paints to provide for her and her son, that Bianca is an actress who initially begins her career to provide for her mother and then continues it to provide for herself, and that Olive also paints to provide for her mother connects these heroines with Craik’s category of “female professions.” Craik’s nonfiction work adds to the conversation begun by these novels and contributes to the reconfiguring of appropriate and respectable work for women.

I am therefore specifically examining the option of art as a professional pursuit because of its accessibility to a wide range of women. According to the *Concise Dictionary of Women Artists* edited by Delia Gaze, “women of the elite classes,” including “Queen Victoria and her daughters,” as well as women of “middle classes [who] sought to demonstrate their new social mobility through imitation of upper-class behaviour and patterns of consumption” were often “accomplished in the arts” (61). As a result, if these women were “orphaned, widowed, or faced with destitution,” they had a “marginally acceptable professional option” literally at their fingertips (62). The perception of art created by men was evolving at this time as well, changing from a degraded trade to a higher standard of professional art. Women born or married into families with professional male artists often “served as amateur assistants to their husbands and fathers” (62).

In spite of the women’s rights movement, Britain was reluctant to support professional women artists until later in the century, most likely a result of the “Victorian ideology [that] restricted all respectable women’s usefulness to the family, home and factory” (68). As the number of women increased, their economic demand increased, making “such ghettoisation difficult to sustain” (68). The “surplus women debate” or the

“woman question” was targeted at “woman’s innate abilities, her proper or desired roles in society generally and culture in particular, her moral probity and her intellectual worth” (68). The British woman artist’s attempt to gain artistic ground as a professional were therefore limited. This was especially true at the beginning of the century when “the upper- and middle-class woman was expected to treat creative work as a hobby or accomplishment . . . while the working-class woman was presumed to possess neither creativity nor cultural aspirations” (68). If a woman wanted to pursue training in fine arts during those early decades, she may be admitted to an institution whose classes for women had an “aura of upper-class amateurism. Relatives in the profession and private drawing teachers were the readiest source of fine-art instruction for women” (68). These avenues, however, were still fraught with “the sexual politics of Victorian society” (67), which “exaggerated sexual difference” (68) and sought to limit women’s professional artistic pursuits.

The hierarchical binary created to maintain the professional realm dominated by men as superior to female amateurs is perhaps another way middle-class ideology sought to restrict a woman’s options outside domestic or maternal roles. To label a woman’s work as “amateur” may have initially been used to stigmatize any attempt to professionalize such work. However, being trained in art as a feminine accomplishment and being able to paint and draw at home made art a likely candidate for a middle-class woman’s mode of earning a living.

The middle of the century saw “middle-class women, socialised into a feminine amateurism in artistic activities, increasingly [trying] to turn [the practice of art] to professional use. Their motivation ranged from the need of an income to the search for



greater fulfillment of independence than convention allowed them” (68). That the professional woman artist sought a breach from convention made her an ideal subject for the woman writer. As the subject of much debate, it seems natural for the woman artist to be present in novels mediating between the conflict surrounding the appropriateness of woman’s artistic work aroused by the growing number of lower-middle-class women and the pressure for women to maintain the domestic image prescribed by Victorian, middle-class ideology. The artist is thus an ideal subject for she experienced and represents the very conflict surrounding the woman question--does entering the public sphere diminish a woman’s femininity and thus her respectability and marriageability, that is, does it hinder her ability to maintain middle-class ideological markers as a wife and mother? Additionally, the woman painter was becoming an icon for professional women and for women’s rights advocacy starting around the 1840s as women painters began to advocate for equality both in art academies and in legal systems. Their advocacy created more opportunities for women, especially middle- and upper-class women, to pursue art professionally. She thus made an apt model for the fictional representations of professional women at this time.

Thus, the novels I examine represent the major issues surrounding women’s occupational options specifically in relation to art. Directly and indirectly, art acts as a catalyst for changing the economic situation of the female protagonists in these novels. The need for professional opportunities is clearly illustrated in the various social and economic statuses of the women protagonists. As middle-class women themselves, these authors depict various situations in which a lower-, middle- or upper-class woman may need to financially provide for herself and her family. They demonstrate how

professional art was an appropriate option for middle- and upper-class Victorian women who were trained in artistic accomplishments. Under the unexpected circumstances of losing a family's financial sustenance, these Victorian heroines turn to professional art. Each novel details the welfare of their protagonist and aptly incorporates art as a personal and for most a professional interest.

That these "female professions" are present in these novels in this way at this time is precisely why I have focused on these four novels. Influenced by Mary Poovey, my study focuses on "two decades" (4), 1835-1855, i.e. the years preceding and following the publication dates of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Geraldine Jewsbury's *The Half Sisters* (1848), and Dinah Craik's *Olive* (1850). By choosing to limit the time period of my study and by focusing on "one country, one class, and one race," I am able to highlight the "specific instabilities" of the Victorian domestic ideology and the ways in which these novels "revealed" and "contested" such instabilities (4).

As the numerous studies on separate spheres illustrate, there are multiple and valuable ways of examining domestic ideology. No study, however, has concerned itself with the single, middle-class, professional woman's anxiety over her exclusion from the feminine ideal. Nor has any study demonstrated how the stark similarities of *Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *The Half Sisters*, and *Olive* (all published within a four-year period) prove that an independent woman may indeed still represent the feminine ideal. My research reveals these facets of the single, professional woman, who, I argue, embodies the feminine ideal but does so in a way that fuses both the public and private sphere.

This study is important to our current understanding of middle-class, independent women of the mid-nineteenth century because it acknowledges the challenge she endured at the cost of her own identity. By focusing on the common threads found in four novels published within a few years of each other, I am able to highlight the concerns regarding women during the years leading up to the British Census of 1851, the census that reignited the fiery debate surrounding women's professional role in society. As women who were directly affected by this debate, these middle-class professional authors have perhaps intentionally or unintentionally represented the issues closest to their own experiences. The autobiographical and biographical imitation of these novels encourages the reader to view them as case studies that seem to mimic real women's experiences. The study of these novels thereby commemorates the professional woman's experience, providing us with an opportunity to learn that much more about the potential obstacles faced by real middle-class women seeking financial and social independence.

In the decades leading up to the 1851 census, Victorian England was growing anxious about what in fact the census would reveal--a surplus of single women. Before the census confirmed this reality, the prevalence of single women was becoming a controversial topic and how to provide for these women became known as the woman question. That these novels all reveal some form of tension regarding surplus women through their single, professional heroines evokes an "indistinct but persistent impression of a unifying voice in women's literature" (Showalter 5). An examination of literature written by women of similar status (white, middle class, and independent) during a similar period (1847-1850) can both acknowledge the differences between their

represented experiences and identify the unifying themes of their stories. By focusing on the “continuities in women’s writing” (7), I hope to develop a better understanding of the social issues with which they were most concerned. Showalter highlights how women “have been unified by values, conventions, experiences, and behaviors impinging on each individual” (11). I argue that this is certainly true for the women novelists, whose works are not only published within four years of each other but which share several similar themes as well. Showalter urges, “If we want to define ways in which ‘female self-awareness’ has expressed itself in the English novel, we need to see the woman novelist against the backdrop of the women of her time . . .” (9). In conjunction with this imperative, I am examining these four novels in dialogue with each other, as well as in dialogue with the social conventions and concerns of that time.

Charlotte and Anne Brontë, Geraldine Jewsbury, and Dinah Craik have created an alternative interpretation of the independent woman. Rather than view such women as unwomanly or unfeminine, I argue that these fictional representations of single, professional women challenge the exclusion of independent women from the feminine ideal and demonstrate that certain women are able to exemplify characteristics of this ideal. In each chapter of my study I examine traits that prove the protagonist’s femininity according to Victorian values while also asserting her subjectivity. Each chapter highlights how the process of subjectification contributes to the revision of the domestic ideal as each heroine resists the objectification imposed by patriarchal ideology and the Angel in the House ideal. By asserting her subjectivity, she is empowered to take ownership of her identity, her single and professional yet feminine identity. She accomplishes this by surpassing the gaze of critics, exercising her God-sent talents for

financial purposes, demonstrating domestic and maternal skills through professional opportunities, enduring a period of singleness as a means for personal growth and maturity, and finally, having a moral impact on a male counterpart. Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive enact these demonstrations of subjectivity in varying degrees, but each protagonist takes ownership of her work and identity and ultimately redefines the feminine ideal.

After her work has been assessed and approved, each heroine's professional work is discussed in chapter three. For some, her skills are considered God-sent and therefore meant to fulfill a specific purpose. Under this label her skills denote a godly "calling" and provide the heroine with a rationalization for her professionalism. Some heroines do not need this rationalization but assert their femininity in spite of their work. Some do this by demonstrating maternal and domestic skills or by demonstrating how professional skills enhance her maternal and domestic capabilities; this is particularly evident when professional opportunities are only pursued as a means of enhancing the domestic sphere. For those who represent more conventional views, ambition is checked by the professional's maternal and domestic instincts which help prove the professional woman's femininity. Even though some women of the 1840s upheld a conventional feminine ideal over a more assertive one, their temporary subversion of the patriarchal ideal upheld through the Angel in the House opened the door for future generations of women who fought for equal professional opportunities. Nonetheless, in various ways these heroines subjectify themselves by choosing to professionalize even amidst stigmatization, by asserting their femininity through domestic and maternal roles, and by laying claim to that femininity in spite of professionalism.

In addition to using professionalism to demonstrate its benefits in the domestic sphere, each heroine's period of singleness proves to have other benefits that actually enhance her marriageability. Chapter four examines the anxiety centered around a woman's singleness and how that is connected with her professionalism. Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive all represent women who are unlikely to marry (or remarry in Helen's case). They must therefore rely on their professionalism for financial security. This chapter examines how a woman's singleness is not a harbinger of spinsterhood, nor is her professionalism. Rather, the professional woman's singleness provides her with a period of growth that augments her femininity and her marriageability. This chapter additionally examines the subjectification of each protagonist as she finds value in singleness, stands firm in her position as a single woman and does not give in to marriage proposals simply because they offer financial stability, appreciates the periods of singleness in her mentors, and learns from the mistakes of those who denigrate singleness by marrying too hastily.

After dealing with the professional woman's anxiety surrounding singleness, chapter five examines the significance of her marriage. Each novel demonstrates its own rationalization for why single women should not be devalued for "making their own living" (Ellis 268). Each novel has also made it a point to defend its protagonist's femininity and marriageability in the process, demonstrating ways in which the single woman's professionalism does not negate her feminine qualities. Her marriage is then the professional woman's ultimate contradiction of any concerns surrounding her femininity or marriageability. This chapter highlights the ways in which each heroine subjectifies herself by waiting for her moral equal, by choosing a partner on her terms,

and by marrying because it is out of her desire not out of need or to follow a prescribed ideological path.

As discussed in the conclusion, chapter six, the Brontës, Jewsbury, and Craik successfully redefine the domestic ideal by representing women who veer off the path that typically lead toward the Angel in the House. Each author chose fiction to illustrate the process of this redefinition because “that form of literature offers itself to her hand as the readiest vehicle for conveying such views and doctrines to the public ear as she may be anxious to promulgate” (Rev of *Marian Withers* 920). Novel writing was becoming a more common mode for women to contribute to the dialogue revolving around social issues even if that meant “startling a crowd of men by their new opinions” or by being “bold and fearless,” qualities charged against “the present generation” of “writing young ladies” (“The Last New Novel” 377) in *The Mirror* (1847). Showalter, provides another reason why fiction was a useful vehicle for these authors: “Women beginning their literary careers in the 1840s were seeking heroines--both professional role models and fictional ideals--who could combine strength and intelligence with feminine tenderness, tact, and domestic expertise” (100). These qualities are clearly evident in the protagonists of my study. She goes on to explain, “Most women of this generation . . . depended upon literature and the circulating library to provide the sense of connectedness; fictional heroines had to take the place of sisters and friends” (101). Accordingly, it is not unreasonable to imagine how women readers may have drawn a connection between these four popular novels at that time. Certain character traits might remind them of similarities they had just read the year before in another heroine, similarities that would help to solidify the overall impression--that professional women

can indeed represent the feminine ideal. Some authors may not reveal that they completely agree with the Angel in the House image; however, they do appear to argue that independent women are fit for respected society and are still marriageable. Being an independent, professional woman does not taint her character. These works address the tension surrounding the morality and femininity of professional women, a tension that is particularly strong for middle-class women seeking to use their artistic accomplishments as a means to support themselves financially. For the authors of these novels who are members of the middle class, defending the moral integrity of professional women like themselves is a serious issue and perhaps a motivating factor for the representation of professional women in their writing.

These authors were not necessarily arguing for the training of women into Angels. Rather, they were defending the possibility that professional women were not degrading themselves and in fact were able to retain their moral compass and integrity, as well as their femininity. In a sense, they were asking, “do I have to be either an Angel or unwomanly; can’t I be professional and still feminine?” The lives portrayed in these novels demonstrate the challenges faced by real independent women and how it was possible for real women to maintain their respectability by overcoming these challenges. Independent women most likely endured countless challenges not represented in these novels. There are, however, several similarities between these novels that may represent obstacles that were common among professional women.

The real and fictional women of this study, the women writers and their female protagonists, the independent middle-class women and their idealized heroines, are all concerned with belonging. They want to belong to the society that is telling them they



must either fulfill their womanly duty, i.e. marry and reproduce, or be seen as outcasts and social failures. Perhaps these writers are looking for another option, one where they can remain single intentionally or not and still be considered part of the feminine ideal.

Throughout these novels, the protagonist's moral, domestic and maternal qualities are tested and redefined. The cultivation of feminine qualities within an independent woman establishes the possibility that the feminine ideal may exist within a professional woman, a revised, professional ideal rather than a solely domestic one. My hope is that this study will simply acknowledge that it was not one or the other for these heroines; these women represent the best of both worlds, the public and the private, professionalism and domesticity, work and family, independence and femininity.

## CHAPTER 2

## SUBJECT OR OBJECT?: SEEKING AND DISPLAYING HER BODY AND HER WORK

One way for a middle-class woman to qualify as adhering to feminine ideals was through feminine accomplishments--playing the piano, singing, painting or drawing, among others. *Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *The Half Sisters* and *Olive* represent this kind of feminine identification when their protagonists' accomplishments are assessed and evaluated, a process that compares and contrasts each heroine's conventional femininity and creates opportunities for her to subjectify herself as she asserts her humanity, resists the objectification of critics, chooses what she displays and how (both her body and her work), prioritizes her own perspective, and accesses power through her critical gazing of others.

At some point, this evaluation takes place when a protagonist is subject to the patriarchal gaze of someone assessing the value of her artwork. This critical assessment also connects the worth of Jane, Helen, Bianca or Olive to her own work. Each protagonist has a variety of experiences in which a man or woman examines her physical body or her body of work as a way of critiquing her and a way of appraising her value. Rochester Fairfax peruses Jane's sketches, both Arthur Huntingdon and Gilbert Markham critique Helen's artwork, Bianca's body and performance are evaluated by Conrad Percy, and Olive's body and sketches are examined by Meliora and Michael Vanbrugh. These moments of "scopic" critique highlight the power differential between a man and a woman and between two women (Newman 6), particularly when the single, professional woman is viewed as "lesser than" the critic. This may be because of her gender or socioeconomic status. In spite of the similar trope of scopic assessment that

takes place in these novels, the various responses from each protagonist reveal how the single, professional woman is affected by that power differential.

In *Subjects on Display*, Beth Newman combines the works of Freud, Lacan and Foucault as her central theoretical paradigm for understanding “the gaze.” I am specifically interested in how the gaze operates as a form of desire and control. Throughout the novels I examine here, characters look because they want to look, what Newman describes as “active” pleasure (6). Characters also exhibit or display themselves because they want to be looked at, i.e. “passive pleasure.” Characters are looked at even when they do not want to be, what I refer to as objectification. Lastly, characters resist being looked at through what I describe as “subjectification,” the process of asserting their humanity and subjectivity by resisting objectification, by taking ownership of their work and identity, and by prioritizing their own perspective. In order to establish the frame through which I am analyzing the “scopic” exchanges between the single, professional protagonist and her critics, I outline the relevant points of Newman’s work and then incorporate them into my study.

Before outlining the relevant points of Newman’s work, however, I will first define the five manifestations of desire within these scopic exchanges. First, “*active pleasure*” is the manifestation of one’s *desire to look*--what Newman calls, the “scopic drive.” Second, “*passive pleasure*” is the manifestation of one’s *desire to be looked at* “that is, in the activities of exhibiting or displaying oneself” and is also motivated by the “scopic drive” (Newman 10). Passive pleasure drives people to exhibit or display themselves and in the context of this study, also drives them to display their accomplishments or art work. These novels also highlight a few other manifestations of desire that I will

introduce here. Those who *do not wish to exhibit themselves* or their work are driven by a desire to remain *inconspicuous*. These people long to establish boundaries and create a private space for themselves where they may remain alone or may spy or eavesdrop on the interactions of others. This third manifestation is what I call “*private pleasure*.” In spite of one’s attempt to establish boundaries, he or she is not always successful. I use the term “*objectification*” to describe the fourth manifestation of desire, the result of one person’s active pleasure overcoming another person’s desire to not be looked at. In the context of my study, this may occur when one character’s active pleasure to view and critique another person’s body or work is unwanted. The critic’s active pleasure then violates and subdues or *in some way overcomes the desire of “private pleasure,”* thereby objectifying and dehumanizing the person longing for inconspicuousness.

Those who are able to resist the gaze or critique of “active pleasure,” those who are able to establish and maintain boundaries, those who are able to successfully assert their “private pleasure” are participants in what I term “*subjectification*,” the manifestation of one’s *desire to assert his or her humanity and subjectivity*. Newman explains how women “[operated] within a libidinal economy that defined them as objects of the look, and also as subjects who are themselves motivated by libidinal and aggressive impulses to look and be looked at” (21); thus, women who successfully assert their desire to exhibit themselves may also participate in “subjectification.” Some of these heroines show that a single, professional woman can have power and influence too, particularly in their subjectification; they take ownership of their bodies or their body of work and determine what is put on display and what remains inconspicuous despite the examination of the female corporal body.

Dinah Craik and Sarah Lewis take issue with the evaluating process that places women under scrutiny and share their perspective on how a woman gains subjectivity through inconspicuousness. According to Craik in *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* (1858), the critique's gaze may be detrimental to a woman's sense of self:

the *artiste* . . . needs to be constantly before the public, not only mentally, but physically: the general eye becomes familiar, not merely with her genius, but her corporeality; and every comment of admiration or blame awarded to her, is necessarily an immediate personal criticism. This of itself is a position contrary to the instinctive something - call it reticence, modesty, shyness, what you will - which is inherent in every one of Eve's daughters. (51)

Craik reveals her own preference for a woman's inconspicuousness and a distinct aversion to a woman's display of her body or mind. In spite of this concern, Craik admits, many women are "woman first, the *artiste* afterwards," molding "her calling to herself" rather than be molded by it (52). This is precisely what the protagonists in these novels demonstrate--an ability to control the purpose and outcome of their work rather than be controlled by it. Additionally, these women also resist their admirers attempts to control their genius and corporeality during moments of display.

In *Woman's Mission* (1839), Sarah Lewis laments, "accomplishments acquired . . . must be displayed. To whom? the possessor has no delight in them, - her immediate relatives, perhaps, no taste for them, - to strangers therefore" (23). Here she expresses concern for women who must put themselves on display, a practice she is hopeful, "will soon be exploded altogether" (23). Lewis's frustration with what she describes as a "vulgar" display connects well with the contrast illustrated in these novels

between women who put themselves on display versus the heroines who prefer inconspicuousness (23).

According to Lewis, the pursuit of usefulness is more highly valued than the pursuit of fame. Likewise, the Brontës, Jewsbury and Craik create characters who use their accomplishments and talents for pecuniary usefulness not to gain fame or attention. Rather than restrict the use of their accomplishments to the active and passive pleasure of the marriage market talent show, these heroines' accomplishments are useful in securing income when they are not otherwise provided for by other family members, particularly a father or brother. In this manner, their accomplishments are more suitable to Jane, Helen and Olive's private pleasure and desire for inconspicuousness as their paintings provide them time in solitude, mostly undisturbed by the patriarchal gaze. Bianca's acting, on the other hand, lends itself well to her passive pleasure and desire to display her talents more publicly.

Newman explains how the active looking and passive displaying are both drives toward pleasure:

In psychoanalytic terms . . . exhibitionism is more accurately understood as an expression of one of the component drives--specifically, as the passive manifestation of the drive in the visual field, a "scopic" or "scopophilic" drive expressed in its active form as the impulse to obtain pleasure through looking or seeing, and in its passive form as the impulse to be looked at. (6)

Newman examines "the relations of feminine subjectivity not only to its own 'active scopophilia' (including in its expression as surveillance) and its chafing against a 'gaze' construed as male, but also the desire to be seen--a problematically 'passive'

manifestation of scopophilia that may sometimes open spaces for female agency” (7).

Passive display may create space for female agency when women choose what is displayed and how it is displayed.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (EBB) is one mid-century Victorian poet who seems to address this idea of female agency. Linda Shires explains,

Defining spectacle narrowly in terms of sexuality, EBB agrees that female self-display, often prompted by male egotism, can be degrading. But she can also find a use for a female-initiated female self-display. As a “pure” woman and as a writer, she can confront her audience with the politics of spectacle . . . . For she makes spectacle accountable to what she perceives as an objective truth: the double standard. (205)

By confronting the double standard of active male/passive female, EBB helps to dismantle the hierarchical binary that maintains a woman’s objectification through the male gaze. A woman’s subjectification through “female initiated female self-display” empowers her to break down those oppressive limitations. Thus, both passive and private pleasure (in addition to active pleasure) create opportunities for women to subjectify themselves by placing them in positions of power and control over their bodies and their work.

According to Newman, “Nineteenth-century fiction articulates this desire to be seen, and expresses the struggle between it and the code of ideal feminine inconspicuousness, by pitting characters who embody some version of this inconspicuousness . . . against female characters who actively and sometimes aggressively court the look” (21). This is certainly true in one example Newman cites,

Jane Eyre and Blanche Ingram, as well as in other characters in my study including Helen Huntingdon and Annabella Wilmot, Alice Bryant and Bianca Pazzi, as well as Olive Rothesay and Sara Derwent. The contrast between these characters demonstrates the inconsistency of Victorian middle-class ideology which encouraged women to be both on display and inconspicuous.

In order to understand what drives these forms of pleasure, it is helpful to consider the conflicting and harmonizing ideals of those participating in these scopic exchanges. One's desire may harmonize or conflict with her or his cultural ideals. One's look (active pleasure) may harmonize with another person's desire to be looked at (passive pleasure), driving that person to exhibit herself or himself. A look that conflicts with one's desire to remain inconspicuous (private pleasure) may drive that person to hide, then spy or eavesdrop. Desire also motivates what the "gazer" sees which is sometimes different from what is actually being displayed, shown, or revealed. One's desire sometimes prohibits her or him from seeing deeply, beyond the surface of another's appearance or display. The manifestations of desire and conflicting and harmonizing ideals through scopic exchanges--active pleasure, passive pleasure, private pleasure, objectification and subjectification--establish the frame through which I analyze the power dynamics between the single, professional protagonist and her critic.

Newman explains, "a subject may internalize cultural ideals . . . and still desire objects that do not harmonize with those ideals. For example, the modest woman who cultivates inconspicuousness may be what a man desires to have, or what a woman desires to be, while contrary desires . . . continue to manifest themselves" (13-14). These conflicting desires may include having or being "the woman who displays or



exhibits her beauty, sexuality, desire, etc.” in contrast with the modest and inconspicuous woman (14). This is certainly true in the case of Jane Eyre’s desire to be like Blanche (evidenced in her drawing of her), while Rochester pretends he wants a woman like Blanche, but he really wants Jane. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* this double-desire is also present in Arthur’s lust for Annabella Wilmot but marriage to Helen. In Helen’s marriage to Arthur, she wants the attractive and wealthy young man, but she also wants him to be sober. Her courtship with Gilbert demonstrates that she has subdued her desires and is more capable of keeping them in check than she was before marrying Arthur. She loves Gilbert but is still married and therefore must resist her sexual desire for him. Jewsbury’s character, Conrad, also has a change of heart. He initially falls in love with Bianca because of her convincing performance as Juliet. Her career as an actress, however, causes him to detest her profession and prefer a more submissive and modest woman like Bianca’s half-sister, Alice. Bianca is also unsure of her desires. She initially sees Lord Melton as a brother, but that brotherly love evolves into romantic love. In *Olive*, Harold Gwynne falls in love with Sara Derwent, but she breaks his heart. He swears off women until he develops an intimate friendship with Olive whose personality and physical appearance sharply contrast with Sara’s. Most of these shifts of desire are motivated by the characters’ cultural ideals and how their desires conflict or harmonize with those ideals.

Whether courting or shunning, these women are usually eliciting the gaze from a member of the opposite sex. That is, active pleasure is most commonly seen in male characters in these novels, while passive pleasure, private pleasure, objectification and subjectification are mostly reserved for women. In spite of this trend, women participate

in active pleasure as well. In *Jane Eyre*, for example, the doctor who comes to examine Jane after her spell in the red room is the first to critique her and her body. Mr. Brocklehurst similarly judges Jane's honesty at Lowood and leaves her to stand on a stool for all to gaze upon critically. Jane is also critiqued by Blanche Ingram and her mother as a governess. St. John, Diana and Mary must also examine Jane's body and clothing as a means of judging her social station. In turn, Jane sits as observer of Rochester's guests, judging and assessing Rochester's feelings for Blanche as she watches them from the sidelines. As the artist, Jane returns her gaze on others and captures their portraits. In spite of the scopic exchanges that privilege a man's perspective over a woman, the novel concludes with Jane in a place of power. Ultimately, it is her gaze that Rochester must rely on and trust in place of his own sight even as he slowly recovers from his blindness.

The power differential that transpires in scopic exchanges is particularly evident in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. In these two novels a type of marriage market talent show presents an opportunity for women to display their accomplishments as a means of attracting a suitor. As a result, both novels are extensively filled with scopic exchanges revolving around a woman's accomplishments and her feminine identity. Sarah McNeely describes how the marriage market talent show operates for women musicians:

the image of the Victorian woman musician is most commonly one gazed upon from the privacy of the middle-class drawing room. A middle-class woman seated at the piano embodies refinement and accomplishment as she performs to friends, family, and potential husbands, who applaud and murmur their

approval to one another. Even in this private setting, the stakes are high for the woman musician: if she plays well, her performance may earn her a husband, but a discordant note could raise questions about her breeding and respectability. McNeely illustrates the pressure placed on middle- and upper-class women who were expected to display their talents and accomplishments in order to attract a potential husband. Similar to the situation described here, Blanche Ingram in *Jane Eyre* and Annabella Wilmot in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are women musicians who use their musical and vocal talents to attract Rochester and Arthur respectively. Jane is not permitted the opportunity to compete with Blanche directly, but Helen does indeed display select sketches in an attempt to compete with Annabella.

These characters are equipped for such competition as a result of their training in feminine accomplishments. Jane first hears of this training when she is preparing to be sent to Lowood school. Bessie, a domestic servant of Jane's Aunt Reed, describes to Jane "certain accomplishments attained by . . . young ladies . . . [including] beautiful paintings of landscapes and flowers by them executed; of songs they could sing and pieces they could play, of purses they could net, of French books they could translate . . ." (19-20). That young ladies are trained in feminine accomplishments is particularly inviting to Jane. She desires to be among the young women who are educated in feminine arts, for she sees school as "an entrance into a new life" (20).

In spite of Lowood's poor facilities and "unsophisticated accommodations," it appears the students are trained fairly well in feminine accomplishments. Jane explains, "in less than two months I was allowed to commence French and drawing. I learned the first two tenses of the verb *Etre*, and sketched my first cottage . . . on the same

day” (72). We will later see how these two skills in particular seem to benefit Jane’s future prospects of employment. For the time being, drawing appears to be Jane’s favorite activity. Jane usually attempted to satiate the hunger created by Lowood’s insufficient provisions by dreaming about a hearty meal. Dreaming of her own sketches now comforts her: “That night, on going to bed, I forgot to prepare in imagination the Barmecide supper of hot roast potatoes, or white bread and new milk, with which I was wont to amuse my inward cravings: I feasted instead on the spectacle of ideal drawings, which I saw in the dark; all the work of my own hands . . .” (72). Jane’s creative and artistic imagination serves as a psychological crutch as she endures the hardship of Lowood’s impoverished environment and provisions. These conditions, however, do not stunt Jane’s feminine development. Rather, by providing her with an opportunity to create art with her “own hands” in which Jane is also able to subjectify and empower herself with control over her own work, Lowood has provided Jane with the necessary tools to enliven her feminine development with a sense of agency.

When Bessie later visits Jane at Lowood, Bessie assesses whether Jane is a lady based on how well accomplished Jane is. The examination commences with Jane playing on the piano: “I played a waltz or two, and she was charmed. ‘The Miss Reeds could not play as well!’ said [Bessie] exultingly” (90). Next, Jane must provide Bessie with an example of her artwork: “‘That is one of my paintings over the chimney-piece.’ It was a landscape in water colours, of which I had made a present to the superintendent . . . ‘Well, that is beautiful, Miss Jane! It is as fine a picture as any Miss Reed’s drawing-master could paint, let alone the young ladies themselves, who could not come near it . . .’” (90). Once Jane confirms that she can both read and speak

French in addition to working on muslin and canvas, Bessie declares, “Oh, you are quite a lady, Miss Jane! I knew you would be: you will get on whether your relations notice you or not” (90). Bessie confirms that Jane’s training in the feminine has indeed qualified her as a lady.

Bessie's initial response to Jane playing the piano is to note how the Miss Reeds could not play as well. Later when she sees Jane's artwork she again compares Jane's skills to the Miss Reeds, who could not paint as nice a picture. Bessie thinks it as fine as any painted by their drawing-Master. It is interesting that Bessie is comparing Jane's artwork and performance in comparison with other people that Bessie is familiar with, other people who Bessie believes to be talented. By comparing Jane to the Miss Reeds, Bessie places Jane on the same level if not above other non-working women and thus places Jane's femininity within the context of conventional femininity.

In addition to these examples of the gazer as critic, one other major occurrence of active pleasure takes place when Rochester asks Jane to see her sketches. He then peruses through them offering his own critique. As the inferior in their power relation, Jane does not really have a choice but to concede to her employer. Jane is noticeably talented, but she does not choose to better her circumstances by selling her art, nor does she wish to put her talents on display. Jane's artwork has very intimate associations; such gifts are for private viewing only, a privilege she reluctantly bestows on Rochester after he calls upon her to show him her sketches. In this situation, Jane is unable to resist Rochester's attempt to control her.

After she adequately plays the piano for him, Rochester asks Jane to show him her sketches: “Adèle showed me some sketches this morning, which she said were

yours. I don't know whether they were entirely of your doing; probably a master aided you?" (124). Jane is insulted by this speculation and adamantly refutes it. Rochester decides he will be the final judge of her skill: "fetch me your portfolio, if you can vouch for its contents being original; but don't pass your word unless you are certain: I can recognise patchwork" (124). Jane agrees to allow him to "judge for [himself]" (124). Upon returning with her portfolio,

He deliberately scrutinised each sketch and painting. . . . "you" ([he said] glancing at [Jane]) "resume your seat, and answer my questions. I perceive those pictures were done by one hand: was that hand yours?" "Yes." "And when did you find time to do them? They have taken much time, and some thought." . . . The subjects had, indeed, risen vividly on my mind [Jane tells the reader]. As I saw them with the spiritual eye, before I attempted to embody them, they were striking; but my hand would not second my fancy, and in each case it had wrought out but a pale portrait of the thing I had conceived. . . . "And you felt self-satisfied with the result of your ardent labours?" "Far from it [Jane replies]. I was tormented by the contrast between my idea and my handiwork: in each case I had imagined something which I was quite powerless to realise." (125-127)

Jane tries to explain her process of attempting to capture the images she sees in her mind's eye, but she believes she has been "powerless" to create it. Rochester disagrees that she is completely powerless and offers his "expert" opinion then dismisses her:

you have secured the shadow of your thought; but no more, probably. You had not enough of the artist's skill and science to give it full being: yet the drawings are, for a school-girl, peculiar. As to the thoughts, they are elfish. These eyes in

the Evening Star you must have seen in a dream. How could you make them look so clear, and yet not at all brilliant? for the planet above quells their rays. And what meaning is that in their solemn depth? And who taught you to paint wind? There is a high gale in that sky, and on this Where did you see Latmos? For that is Latmos. There! put the drawings away! (127)

This interaction between Jane and Rochester illustrates his fascination with her artistic talents. Rochester later tells Jane that he was intrigued by her from the beginning.

Setting up Bessie's critique of Jane's work alongside Rochester's presents an interesting comparison that seems to highlight a class differential. One aspect in particular that stands out is their different responses after both having Jane play the piano for them and looking at her artwork. When Rochester examines Jane's work, he similarly has her play the piano, but he belittles it as good as any accomplished lady. Rochester also mentions a drawing master in connection with Jane's work. When Bessie mentions the drawing-master, she says that Jane's work is as good as the master, while Rochester questions whether Jane's artwork was aided by a drawing master. This difference highlights a very distinct difference between Bessie and Rochester's critique of Jane's work. Bessie values Jane's work, while Rochester questions the validity of it.

This comparison seems to highlight Rochester's skepticism of the accomplished lady phenomena and Bessie's support of it. Rochester appears skeptical that a young lady can actually be accomplished. His skepticism communicates that too many women are assumed to be accomplished. Rochester appears to take the approach that the "accomplished" label is overused on most middle-class women who know how to play

the piano tolerably well and are able to sketch a decent drawing. Even though Bessie seems to have the same understanding of this label being common amongst many women, she also appears to differentiate between Jane's skill level and the skill level of the Miss Reeds. Even though Bessie is surprised by Jane's skill level, she does not question it the way Rochester does; rather, she uses it as an opportunity to confirm the success and conventionality of Jane's femininity.

The difference between Rochester and Bessie's critique of Jane's work appears to be more about social lines as opposed to gender lines. I do not think Blanche would have offered a more supportive critique of Jane's accomplishments simply because she is a woman. I think her critique would be just as harsh as Rochester's because of the social difference between her and Jane. The difference between Rochester and Bessie's critique are perhaps more related to their social status because Bessie understands Jane's situation. She understands that Jane needs to develop her accomplishments in order to be a successful middle-class woman. Bessie understands that Jane needs these skills to attain a governess position and to be considered a part of the domestic ideal that is viewed so highly in middle-class culture.

Rochester seems to take this system for granted, perhaps as a result of conflicting motivations. On the one hand, he does not appear to appreciate the amount of work that women put into developing these skills. On the other hand, he may want to undermine the system and appreciate women based on their individual worth not on their performances. This seems possible considering that Blanche Ingram is the ideal woman according to middle-class domestic ideology, particularly in her ability to perform the most excellent of accomplishments. Even though Jane is accomplished, Rochester



is disinterested in those skills. Jane's nightly conversations with Rochester appear to elicit a stronger attraction from him.

Rochester's examination of Jane's artwork also serves as an example of the active male/passive female dichotomy. Jane sits quietly by, only revealing her inner thoughts on the painting to the reader, while Rochester asserts his own analysis of her work. Jane demonstrates her feminine skills not only through her painting but also through her quiet submission to Rochester's critique, the ideal response for a woman in accordance with middle-class cultural norms. Once she passes Rochester's examination of her feminine accomplishments, Jane in a sense, wins this round of the talent show. Rochester then begins to ask for her company and conversation as an almost nightly ritual, during which Jane is apparently invited to converse with Rochester on a possibly equal plane. These frequent tête-à-têtes eventually draw Jane and Rochester closer together on a more personal level. In spite of how much she tries to convince herself of her inferiority, Jane cannot help falling in love. Likewise, Rochester has fallen for Jane, but he is not convinced of her affections for him.

Rochester then introduces Blanche Ingram and uses her to stir up jealousy in Jane and thereby attempt to confirm Jane's love for him. The head housekeeper Mrs Fairfax admires Blanche Ingram "not only for her beauty, but for her accomplishments" as well. She explains, "I am no judge of music, but Mr. Rochester is; and I heard him say her execution was remarkably good" (160). Once again, Rochester is established as the "expert" on a woman's artistic value and thus her femininity. Jane is crushed by the knowledge of Blanche's talents being so highly esteemed by Rochester. She imagines the image of Blanche Ingram based on the description provided by Mrs.

Fairfax. Jane then sketches her own plain image and tells herself to never imagine that Rochester can truly have any affection for her. She titles her own image as, "Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain," while Blanche's portrait is titled, "an accomplished lady of rank" (162). Jane's sketches reveal her tormented feelings and thoughts regarding her desire for Rochester and her fear that those desires cannot be returned because of her appearance and status. Similar to the difference emphasized in the comparison between Bessie and Rochester's critiques, the socioeconomic difference between Jane and Blanche also seems to be highlighted in Jane's sketches as Jane emphasizes Blanche's rank in the title of her sketches. Jane uses these sketches of her and Blanche to check her desire for Rochester. In the title of her own portrait, Jane emphasizes her low station as governess, her lack of connection, her low socioeconomic status, and her lack of beauty. In spite of knowing these qualities about herself, Jane seems to have forgotten them in connection with Rochester. Perhaps their nightly conversations made her feel as though these qualities did not matter, and indeed they do not. Until she is able to realize the reality of Rochester's affection for her, however, Jane must check her desire for him by emphasizing Blanche's accomplishments and higher rank.

Jane is full of self-loathing as a result of her affection for Rochester. Society has told her she has nothing to offer as a single, professional woman. Being a governess condemns her to spinsterhood and professionalism defeminizes her in spite of her accomplishments, for domestic ideology deems working women as unfeminine. As a result, any thought of marriage, let alone to a man of wealth and high standing is not an option for her. Through Jane, however, Brontë presents a revision to this feminine ideal.

Rather than support these negative options, she revises the message communicated to single, professional women by later uniting this unlikely pair.

Soon after Mrs. Fairfax's report of Blanche, Jane is able to see "this beautiful and accomplished lady" directly (161). As she places Blanche under her critical gaze, Jane becomes enchanted by Blanche's voice and accomplishments: "She played: her execution was brilliant; she sang: her voice was fine; she talked French apart to her mamma; and she talked it well, with fluency and with a good accent" (174). Jane's observation of Blanche's passive pleasure helps Jane confirm that Blanche is indeed the ideal woman in accordance with domestic ideology.

Even though Jane is briefly able to gaze upon Rochester and Blanche singing in the drawing room, it is too much for her and not a position of power she wants to hold. She attempts to slip away, but Rochester catches up with her before she gets too far. He excuses her that night because he sees that her spirits are "depressed" (183), but he insists she meet them in the drawing room every night after dinner. Rochester is in control of Jane as her employer. He commands her to sit with him and his party so that she may witness their spectacle, and so that he too may witness her presence and occupation. Jane's position of power and subjectivity is removed momentarily as Rochester forces her to become an object of his gaze rather than an active (or even passive) participant in the scopic exchange taking place. Rochester is then in the position to receive double the pleasure; he can watch Blanche perform, and he can also watch Jane watching Blanche. From this vantage point, Rochester is able to elicit Jane's feelings for him as she gazes critically on another woman. Rochester is

determined for this talent show to continue, so that Jane may feel the utmost pangs of jealousy and so that he may be convinced of her love.

While this game plays out, Rochester exhibits active pleasure while Blanche exhibits passive pleasure. She clearly enjoys drawing Rochester's attention to herself by singing with and for him and by engaging him in conversation. By taking ownership of Rochester's gaze and by commanding it, Blanche becomes the subject rather than the object of his gaze and desire. Jane, on the other hand, has the opposite desire. She longs to remain inconspicuous, but Rochester makes her join them in the drawing room nightly. Jane's private pleasure causes her to hide amongst the curtains, nearly becoming invisible while she spies and eavesdrops on Rochester and Blanche's exchanges. By taking the opportunity to act upon her active pleasure as she observes Rochester and Blanche discreetly, Jane reinserts herself in a position of power.

The contrast of Jane's gaze upon Blanche and the assessment of Blanche's accomplishments with Rochester's gaze upon Jane and her accomplishments is striking. Jane is not in a position of power to impose her will on Blanche; Jane may not ask Blanche to display her accomplishments as Rochester asks of Jane so intrusively. Jane does not need to make this request to Blanche, for the patriarchal system imparted through the marriage market talent show mandates that Blanche displays her accomplishments if she desires to be a contender for Rochester's hand in marriage. Blanche makes it clear that she does indeed desire to marry Rochester as she chooses to take on the role of passive participant in a scopic exchange with him. In spite of this passive role, Blanche actively chooses what she displays and how. This difference between her and Jane also highlights how Jane may be considered conventionally

feminine by being accomplished. Jane is not always permitted a position of subjectivity, however, in which she is able to control what and how her accomplishments are displayed as Blanche is. Thus we see a hierarchy of power unfold. Jane is afforded some power when she is given an opportunity to critically gaze upon Blanche and Rochester. Blanche is empowered to display her talents while also critically gazing upon Jane. Rochester, however, maintains the highest position of power as he gazes on both women individually and is also able to observe their critique of one another.

Jane desires to remain hidden, but Bertha, Rochester's wife hidden in the attic, desires to make her presence known. This is an example of objectification. Rochester's desire to hide Bertha overpowers her desire to be seen, thus dehumanizing and objectifying her. Throughout the novel, Bertha continues to assert her subjectivity. She asserts her presence and humanity by setting fire to Rochester's bed while he sleeps, by attacking her brother Mason, and by tearing up Jane's wedding veil. These acts of violence demonstrate Bertha's humanity because they prove her cognizance of the poor treatment she is receiving and a desire to rebel against it in spite of her apparent mental illness. Bertha's final assertion of her subjectivity is accomplished by setting fire to Thornfield Hall and ultimately in killing herself. The fire also results in Rochester's blindness, perhaps a symbolic consequence of his desire to keep Bertha out of sight. She makes herself visible, however, in her final act of resistance by permanently leaving her mark through the ruins of Thornfield Hall, Rochester's property and the symbol of his wealth and station.

Similar to his inability to see Bertha's humanity, Rochester is unable to see and understand Jane's desire for inconspicuousness. When they are finally preparing to be

married, he tries to force her toward participating in passive pleasure by exhibiting herself in grand clothing. Jane is modest in dress and in general appearance; she does not like to be on display in fine clothing as illustrated in her desire to have simple and plain wedding attire. Jane refuses to be adorned too elegantly, for she desires to maintain her private pleasure through modest and plain dress. Upon meeting Bertha, Jane finally sees the result of what happens to a woman over whom Rochester has asserted his desire. Jane refuses to allow this to happen when he suggests she become his mistress. She escapes from Thornfield Hall in the ultimate act of private pleasure, hiding herself away where Rochester will not be able to find her.

When she joins the household of St. John, Diana and Mary Rivers, Jane is not only hiding from Rochester but from her entire past as well. Again, her desire for privacy motivates her to change her name to Jane Eliot, successfully allowing her to hide her history for a time. Changing her name only allows Jane to hide so much. From their critical gaze upon her dress, St. John and his two sisters, Diana and Mary, are able to gather that Jane is of the middle class. Once Jane revives from a bout of illness after leaving Thornfield Hall and traveling alone through the rain, she is able to explain some of her story and to demonstrate her accomplishments. This confirms the Rivers' suspicions of Jane's middle-class status and perhaps even serves to gain their trust as she exhibits middle-class markers.

Jane's true identity is ironically revealed by her artwork, the vehicle for her private thoughts. Her art is almost like a diary in the way it captures Jane's most intimate thoughts and feelings. Throughout the novel we see Jane use her art as an outlet for her imagination. Jane represents a woman who continues to assert her

independence and subjectivity through her art by being able to represent her thoughts and feelings through her work. This is especially true in her sketches of herself and Blanche as well as in her sketches of Rochester and later in her piece on Rosamund Oliver.

While she is away visiting her dying Aunt Reed, Jane sketches a portrait of Rochester, once again revealing her thoughts about him. In spite of her cousin's declaration that Rochester is unattractive, Jane's attraction to him is unwavering. Jane also creates a portrait of Rosamund Oliver, the object of St. John's affections even though he desires to keep those feelings private. In this instance, Jane uses her artwork to elicit St. John's thoughts and feelings. When St. John sees this portrait of Miss Oliver, he also sees a scrap paper with Jane's proper name written on it. He rips off the piece that says Eyre and uses it to unite her with her inheritance, a significant amount of wealth that allows Jane to alter her identity once again.

Jane uses her artwork to position herself as the critical gazer, as an observer of those around her and of what is taking place around her. That she situates herself in this way through her sketches also allows her to remain inconspicuous as she maintains her subjectivity, unlike Rochester who is very assertive with his position as gazer. St. John also asserts himself as a gazer upon Jane's work. In this situation, however, he actually serves to facilitate her by observing her true name and enabling him to connect her with her inheritance.

This change in status enables Jane to return to Rochester, who has also experienced an identity change. Blinded and disabled by the fire started by Bertha, Rochester has lost the power to assert his desires over others. In contrast, Jane is

placed in the position to maintain her “private pleasure” unseen by Rochester while also controlling Rochester’s movement and experience by choosing where to bring him, what he touches and what he hears. It is not until they have a child that Rochester regains his sight, perhaps symbolizing his ability to finally see and also respect Jane’s subjectivity, as well as her humanity represented through her role as she mothers their child and as she has mothered Rochester. Their child becomes the ultimate representation of their truest desires--to truly see what has previously remained unseen. Ultimately, Rochester and Jane's desire has been to do away with the socioeconomic differences that should have kept them apart. Their child is a representation of their ability to overcome those status distinctions and to gaze upon what they have created together.

In the *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Helen manifests private pleasure similar to Jane’s particularly in her desire for inconspicuousness. Helen is trained in feminine accomplishments for the purpose of attracting a suitor. She does not wish to exploit her talents in this way as Annabella Wilmot does, but she has no choice when Arthur sifts through her private portfolio, a collection of drawings she did not want to display. Helen desires to keep these art pieces hidden, but Arthur, similar to Rochester, asserts his active pleasure and uncovers Helen’s private sketches. Helen’s connection to her artwork causes her to be objectified in this process.

Like Jane, Helen is also an artist whose sketches create an opportunity for courting between herself and Arthur Huntingdon. Helen describes the talent show that takes place and the assessment that evaluates her femininity: “In the course of the evening, Miss Wilmot was called upon to sing and play for the amusement of the company, and I to exhibit my drawings, and, though [Mr. Huntingdon] likes music, and



she is an accomplished musician, I think I am right in affirming, that he paid more attention to my drawings than to her music. . . . So far so good” (118). After the first round of this competition, Helen feels she has the advantage over Miss Wilmot, at least when it comes to winning the hand of Arthur Huntingdon. By viewing herself in competition with Miss Wilmot, Helen presents herself as an active participant in the courting game. Arthur is the object of Helen's desire, and she understands that to obtain this object she must participate in the talent show. In order to win Arthur's affections she must first win his attention by putting her artwork on display. That Helen is excited to elicit Arthur's attention demonstrates her own desire and passive pleasure in displaying herself through her artwork. Arthur's interest in Helen's artwork helps to confirm her conventional femininity, that which has successfully elicited his active pleasure. His examination of her sketches, however, is just the beginning of a painful courting game.

In a manner similar to Jane, Helen is also able to possess subjectivity through her artwork, at least for a period of time. Helen initially chooses what she displays and is thus in control of what Arthur views. In a sense, she is in control of how his active pleasure is fulfilled. This occurs only until Arthur takes control and objectifies Helen in the process. On discovering a sketch of his own face on the back of one of Helen's pictures which she had forgotten to “rub out,” Huntingdon quietly exclaims “with peculiar emphasis . . . ‘This is better than all!’” (118). Upon extracting a picture of himself, Arthur reveals his own desire to be looked at and to even look at himself.

The sketch Arthur confiscates reveals Helen's desire for him. She explains how she attempts to draw his face over and over again: “one face I am always trying to paint or to sketch, and always without success; and that vexes me. As for the owner of that

face, I cannot get him out of my mind—and, indeed, I never try” (98-99). Helen reveals her active pleasure in recalling Arthur’s image to her mind. Her portraits of him also serve this purpose as objects she can refer to whenever she desires to gaze upon him. The drawing of Arthur is one way that Helen can possess the object of her affection or at least a representation of that desire. The sketch empowers Helen and is once again an example of her subjectivity, something she can look at inconspicuously and privately without having her gaze returned upon herself by Arthur. By having control over this picture Helen maintains control over her desire. This only lasts however until Arthur confiscates it.

One afternoon Arthur once again intrudes upon Helen’s private pleasure and interrupts her painting to examine it. This is his first time providing a critique of her work. In this instance Arthur’s active pleasure takes precedence over Helen’s. He does not even ask if he may see her work; he simply intrudes: “‘Very pretty, i’faith,’ said he, after attentively regarding it for a few seconds; ‘and a very fitting study for a young lady. Spring just opening into summer—morning just approaching noon—girlhood just ripening into womanhood, and hope just verging on fruition. She’s a sweet creature!’” (122). Within Arthur’s assessment of Helen’s painting, he begins to “quiz” and tease her. His emphasis on womanhood and hope demonstrates his awareness of Helen’s feelings for him. In spite of this knowledge, he does not seem keen on changing his licentious lifestyle. Arthur continues to quiz Helen by comparing her to the woman in her painting: “My word—a very Hebe! I should fall in love with her if I hadn’t the artist before me. Sweet innocent! she’s thinking there will come a time when she will be wooed and won like that pretty hen-dove by as fond and fervent a lover; and she’s

thinking how pleasant it will be, and how tender and faithful he will find her.” When Helen suggests she may find him equally “tender and faithful,” Arthur describes such a thought as a “wild extravagance of Hope’s imaginings” (122). Despite the coded circumstance, Arthur is pretty clear that he will not be faithful to Helen, and confirms that such “imaginings” are indeed “delusions” (122). In spite of realizing that he is referring to her as someone with these “wild, extravagant delusions” (122), Helen is still unable to see Arthur with her true eyes. Rather, she sees him through the idealism of her desire for a “faithful” man.

In spite of Helen's request to keep her other drawings private, Arthur uses his own active pleasure to overpower her desire to keep the other drawings inconspicuously hidden away. Helen desires for these other drawings to remain hidden because they reveal her private thoughts and desire regarding Arthur. Rather than respect her desire for inconspicuousness, Arthur once again objectifies Helen by overpowering her private pleasure with his own active pleasure. Rather than respect the boundary that Helen has implemented by having her drawings hidden away in a portfolio, Arthur wrenches the portfolio and the sketches within it away from her grasp:

he took up [my portfolio], and coolly sat down to examine its contents. ‘Mr. Huntingdon, those are my unfinished sketches,’ cried I, ‘and I never let any one see them.’ And I placed my hand on the portfolio to wrest it from him, but he maintained his hold, assuring me that he ‘liked unfinished sketches of all things.’ ‘But I hate them to be seen,’ returned I. ‘I can’t let you have it, indeed!’ ‘Let me have its bowels then,’ said he; and just as I wrenched the portfolio from his hand, he deftly abstracted the greater part of its contents . . . (122-123)

By allowing his active pleasure to overpower Helen's private pleasure, Arthur objectifies the very woman he is courting. Helen is unfortunately too wrapped up in his games to clearly see his true and oppressive character.

Arthur finds a second portrait of himself completed so well that Helen even attempts to color it in. He is ecstatic to make such a discovery and tries to tuck it away as he did the first. Helen, however, insists she will never forgive him if he does not return it to her. He does return it, she tears it in half and throws it in the fire, an action which produces an aghast reaction. He quickly recovers and walks off. The following evening he torments Helen by ignoring her and flirting with Miss Wilmot who sings for him. This crushes Helen and, in a scene that seems to parallel that in *Jane Eyre*, Helen leaves the drawing room to cry, only momentarily for Huntingdon follows her. A much more hastier man than Rochester, Huntingdon confesses his love to Helen and proposes to her right then.

In spite of being more impulsive, Arthur shares other similarities with Rochester. An examination of their responses to the female artist highlights the pervasive nature of their patriarchal gazing. Both men do not seem to take the female artist seriously; they approach her artwork with mockery and disdain. Rochester is not necessarily forceful with Jane in asking her to display her sketches, but neither is he open for objection to his desire to actively gaze upon her artwork. Arthur on the other hand is very forceful in the manner in which he imposes his desire for active pleasure on Helen and her artwork. He is personally offended by Helen's attempt to resist his objectification and control when she throws his picture into the fire. Rather than allow these artist women to maintain subjectivity and ownership of their artwork, these men intervene and take

possession of it. They objectify these women through their gaze and through their attempts to control each woman's body of work.

Once they are married, Arthur continues to objectify and control Helen. When he learns of her plans to sell her paintings in order to save some money and escape from him with her son, Arthur burns all of Helen's art supplies:

My painting materials were laid together on the corner table, ready for tomorrow's use, and only covered with a cloth. He soon spied them out, and putting down the candle, deliberately proceeded to cast them into the fire: palette, paints, bladders, pencils, brushes, varnish: I saw them all consumed: the palette-knives snapped in two, the oil and turpentine sent hissing and roaring up the chimney. (272)

By destroying all of her art materials, Arthur is once again taking control of Helen. He is ruthless in destroying every article of her paint supplies and thus her mode of establishing her subjectivity. She is then unable to distance herself from him either on a personal level by using her art as a vehicle to express her thoughts and feelings towards him in private, or on an economic level by being able to earn money apart from his wealth. In spite of his attempts to thwart her escape, Helen does indeed manage to leave Arthur with the help of her brother Lawrence who provides her with new painting materials at Wildfell Hall in order that she may earn a living. Helen is fortunate to have a brother who is able to help her reestablish the initial capital she needs to begin painting again and to separate herself from Arthur's wealth and financial security.

It is no wonder Helen escapes to Wildfell Hall after enduring this increasingly oppressive scopic exchange with Arthur. Initially, Helen desires to look at Arthur,

Annabella Wilmont desires to be looked at by Arthur, and Arthur desires to look at others as well as himself. Helen's body is gazed upon and desired by Arthur Huntingdon. He also looks through her sketches, which become a source of teasing and flirtation with him towards Helen. But the "quizzing" and flirtation soon turn sour as Arthur asserts his control over Helen in less subtle ways. Before and after they are married, Arthur tortures Helen with his gaze upon other women. Arthur's gaze is his attempt to control Helen and her work. Arthur's burning of Helen's art supplies is a rebuke against her attempt to loose herself from his control, to leave him, to provide for herself, and to protect her son. Through this incident Arthur seems to represent broken patriarchal systems that attempt to control the fate of women by limiting their gender identity to the Angel in the House; both are unsuccessful.

In spite of leaving Arthur's control, Helen is once again subject to a man's gaze at Wildfell Hall. As much as she tries to avoid him, Gilbert Markham seeks her out. He not only gazes upon her as an object of desire, but upon her artwork as well. He even goes so far as to examine artwork that is turned away from the spectator. He is prying and intrusive; he is "impertinent." However, Helen has control over what Gilbert sees in her studio in spite of this intrusion. She did not have as much control with Arthur, which is possibly why she asserts herself that much more with Gilbert. Her subjectivity is evident in what she allows Gilbert to view and also in the artistic advice on her paintings that she chooses to accept or reject from Gilbert.

When Gilbert first visits Helen and sees her painting he examines her work closely and critiques it:

The first object that met the eye was a painter's easel . . . . It was a view of Wildfell Hall, as seen at early morning from the field below, rising in dark relief against a sky of clear silvery blue, with a few red streaks on the horizon, faithfully drawn and coloured, and very elegantly and artistically handled. 'I see your heart is in your work, Mrs. Graham,' . . . . 'You have almost completed your painting,' said I, approaching to observe it more closely, and surveying it with a greater degree of admiration and delight than I cared to express. 'A few more touches in the foreground will finish it, I should think.' (32-33)

Before she is able to either invite his examination and assessment of her work or prohibit him from doing so, Gilbert jumps at the opportunity to give his opinion without any sense that it may be unwanted. Gilbert's active pleasure does not consider Helen's desires, and thus objectifies her and her work as he takes the liberty to critique both of them.

Once again, Gilbert takes the liberty to examine another one of her paintings while she is out talking to a visitor. He offers a critique to the reader: "it was evidently some years before; for there was far more careful minuteness of detail, and less of that freshness of colouring and freedom of handling that delighted and surprised me in them" (34-35). Gilbert is taking his liberties too far, uncovering and examining hidden portraits the way Arthur did when they were courting. Burned by this experience, upon returning from her visitor, Helen assertively takes control of her artwork and hides it again without answering any of Gilbert's questions regarding it. Gilbert even acknowledges his fear that what he has done is "an act of impertinence . . . to presume to look at a picture that the artist has turned to the wall" (35). In spite of this awareness,

he still ventures to ask if she had painted it. Helen tries to subdue her frustration but cannot hide it: "It is an act of very great impertinence, sir; and therefore I beg you will ask nothing about it, for your curiosity will not be gratified . . . ." Helen attempts "to cover the tartness of her rebuke with a smile," but "her flushed cheek and kindling eye, [prove] that she [is] seriously annoyed" (35). Helen hastily returns her painting "to the dark corner, with its face to the wall" (35). Helen's behavior towards Gilbert exemplifies her new sense of ownership with her work. That she does not waste any time protecting what belongs to her is evidence that she is ready to assert her desires by subjectifying herself. Gilbert cannot deny Helen's humanity as she takes control of the situation and distances herself and her work from his critical gaze.

The portrait Gilbert picks up even though it is turned towards the wall is that of Arthur painted by Helen during their first year of marriage. Upon unpacking the portraits, that had been stowed by her maid, Rachel, Helen is surprised to see Arthur's among her other paintings: "It struck me with dismay, at the moment, when I took it from the box and beheld those eyes fixed upon me in their mocking mirth, as if exulting still in his power to control my fate, and deriding my efforts to escape" (294). Arthur's gaze continues to haunt Helen. The active pleasure he has maintained in gazing upon her and in even controlling her continues despite its inability to manifest itself in reality. That Arthur's picture stands as a constant reminder of the controlling relationship to which she belongs motivates Helen to maintain a safe distance from Gilbert's gaze on her intellectual property.



In spite of her assertiveness, Gilbert's intrusiveness becomes a constant battle for Helen. As she continues to produce professional artwork, Gilbert continues to cast a gazing and critical eye upon both Helen's body and her body of work:

Mrs. Graham was studying the distinctive characters of the different varieties of trees in their winter nakedness, and copying, with a spirited, though delicate touch, their various ramifications. She did not talk much, but I stood and watched the progress of her pencil: it was a pleasure to behold it so dexterously guided by those fair and graceful fingers. (38)

Gilbert's first person narration is significant for the way it forces the reader to identify with what he sees. In a sense, this makes the reader complicit in the masculine gaze desiring Helen and critically observing her aesthetic production. In addition to noting the "spirited, though delicate touch" by which Helen renders her drawings, Gilbert also notes her "fair and graceful fingers." Here he connects Helen's artistic skills with her femininity. His desires know no bounds; he is both critic of her work and her body. When Gilbert's gaze disrupts Helen's work, she confronts him on it: "ere long . . . [her fingers] began to hesitate, to tremble slightly, and make false strokes, and then suddenly came to a pause, while their owner laughingly raised her face to mine, and told me that her sketch did not profit by my superintendence" (38). Helen's body responds to Gilbert's gaze by gradually losing effectiveness. When Gilbert is watching Helen paint unnoticed, her fingers are graceful. When she does become aware of his gaze, her fingers become hesitant and tremble. Gilbert's watchfulness once again illustrates the pervasive nature of the patriarchal gaze, how it interferes with a woman's aesthetic production and impedes her subjectivity.

In another instance, Helen admits to disliking Gilbert watch her draw. He agrees to look at the view instead of her work, but her body distracts him from the view and attracts his desire: "I could not help stealing a glance, now and then, from the splendid view at our feet to the elegant white hand that held the pencil, and the graceful neck and glossy raven curls that drooped over the paper" (49). Gilbert's decision to describe this event as "stealing a glance" is fitting. In doing so, Gilbert's active pleasure overcomes Helen's private pleasure and thus objectifies her once again. Rather than respect her desire to remain inconspicuous, Gilbert cannot control his desire. He jests to the reader that in drawing Helen he would "make a lovelier sketch than hers, admitting I had the power to delineate faithfully what is before me" (49). Despite the fact that Gilbert acknowledges that he does not have the same artistic skills as Helen, he asserts his power and privilege by continuing to comment on and critique her work.

Eventually, Helen decides to indulge Gilbert by asking his opinion on a drawing: "she somewhat appeased me by consulting my taste and judgment about some doubtful matter in her drawing. My opinion, happily, met her approbation, and the improvement I suggested was adopted without hesitation" (50). In this instance, Helen is the gate keeper of the painting and chooses to ask his advice rather than allow Gilbert intrusively to view it and offer a critique without her asking. Helen's control over her artwork and the care that goes into creating it demonstrates her subjectivity.

The battle between Helen's subjectivity and Gilbert's active pleasure concludes when her earlier rebukes help to improve his decorum. He finally respects the boundaries she has set surrounding her work. Rather than intrusively assert his own desires, Gilbert has learned to respect Helen's private pleasure and desire for

inconspicuousness. He describes how she gradually gives him permission to come within these boundaries: “I inquired after the picture she was painting from the sketch taken on the cliff, and was admitted into the studio, and asked my opinion or advice respecting its progress” (54). Before the picture is sent off and sold, Helen allows Gilbert one more look:

give me your last opinion, and if you can suggest any further improvement, it shall be—duly considered, at least.’ . . . The picture was strikingly beautiful; it was the very scene itself, transferred as if by magic to the canvas; but I expressed my approbation in guarded terms, and few words, for fear of displeasing her. She, however, attentively watched my looks, and her artist’s pride was gratified, no doubt, to read my heartfelt admiration in my eyes. (54)

As Helen and Gilbert have learned to balance their interactions within a respectful framework, they have developed a relationship that is also respectful of one another’s desires. Gilbert has finally learned the balance of both criticism and appreciation that Helen seems to value. By respecting her boundaries, Gilbert has also gained her trust. As a result, Helen is more willing to welcome Gilbert into the private space that she has kept sacred and guarded.

As a character with strikingly different desires than Jane and Helen, Bianca’s passive pleasure is sparked in one of the first scenes of Jewsbury’s *The Half Sisters*. Bianca’s mother brings her to England once Bianca turns sixteen, hoping that when her father gazes upon her, he will want to bestow some inheritance on her. Bianca’s father had died two years prior and her mother grows sick shortly after their arrival in England. Bianca must provide for herself and her mother without the help of any family or friends

until she is assisted by a few men who she meets at the inn where she and her mother have stopped to rest upon their arrival in England.

The caretaker of the inn where Bianca and her mother are staying asks Mr. Conrad Percy and a circus manager, Mr. Simpson, to consider how they might assist her financially or in finding work for Bianca. Before agreeing to see her, however, Mr. Simpson first asks the landlord what she looks like. To which he replies, "She is rather dark complexioned. I thought at first she might have been a play-actor, for she made me understand by her looks and actions I don't know how. If you happened to have a place open in your company now, her fortune would be made" (9). Per Conrad's request, Bianca enters the room and is described as having,

the unformed undeveloped figure of a girl, but [a] face . . . full of beauty--large liquid grey eyes, that looked with an intent and earnest meaning beyond her years; a profusion of hair, of that blueish black, so rarely seen, was twisted round her head and fell in tresses over her neck, her face was deeply flushed as she entered the room, but there was a composed reserve in her manner. (10)

The exotic femininity of Bianca's appearance "so rarely seen" is emphasized by the narrator as the men whose care she must rely upon are also presented with what the narrator relays to the reader. After hearing her story, Conrad pays for their lodging, and Mr. Simmons offers her a "dumb show" position in his circus (12). This role puts her body on display, once again, without the ability to speak for herself, for she must rely on miming. As a result of her occupation, Bianca's body is constantly on display and open to examination and critique. As she gains success, however, she gains agency and is able to speak out against those who try to exploit her. Even though initially she must rely

on the inn keeper and later on the circus manager, she is eventually able to assert herself, to control her roles, and to leave a position when she feels objectified. Through this process of subjectification, she is also able to choose the best parts for herself. This puts her in the position to gain admirers, some who seek to help and others who seek to harm her.

Bianca's passive pleasure is initially motivated by her dire need to earn money in order to support herself and her mother. Without much power in the roles she receives, Bianca is objectified and exploited for her talent. She eventually realizes the worth of her skills, however, and is able to assert her humanity. She leaves the circus and starts a career as a theatre performer. Bianca continues to assert her subjectivity and maintains control over how her body and work is displayed on stage. Bianca's motivation then changes from a dire need for money to a strong desire to develop acting into a respectable art form. Through the process of establishing herself as a respectable actress in a dignified career, Bianca's passive pleasure evolves from objectification to subjectification as she learns to assert her power and maintain control over her body and the roles she chooses.

Bianca's employment under Mr. Simmons scarcely provides for her and her mother. However, in spite of her meager wages, Bianca's position in the circus cultivates her natural gifts in acting. Through hard work and perseverance, Bianca is promoted to the lead role in the circus. When she coincidentally sees Mr. Percy again, he is impressed by her talents and gives her a reference for a theater group in another town. Percy's confirmation of her talents gives Bianca the necessary enlightenment to leave the circus and its meager income. Again, through hard work and perseverance in

the new theatre, Bianca earns the favor of a highly successful actor who also recognizes her powerful gift. He encourages her to continue her hard work and promises to return to see her growth and development.

At this time, Bianca meets Alice who has taken an interest in Bianca's beauty and poverty. Alice is "struck with the noble expression of [Bianca's] face though it was then thin and pale . . . . 'Who is that remarkable looking girl?'" she asks the shopkeeper (191). Upon learning of Bianca's situation, "all [Alice's] sympathies . . . [are] excited for the poetical looking Bianca" (196). Alice's active pleasure in gazing upon Bianca motivates her to find and help Bianca. Likewise, "Bianca [is] fascinated by the feminine grace and gentleness" cultivated by Alice (198). Bianca is still unable to earn a sufficient amount for her and her mother, who passes away soon after Bianca meets Alice. Heartbroken and destitute without her mother, Bianca falls ill. Alice brings Bianca home with her and takes care of Bianca until her health is restored. When they are conversing in a sitting room, Bianca sees a portrait of Alice's father, and she realizes this is the same man who her mother was seeking. Bianca does not share her discovery with Alice, for she does not want to embarrass Alice or encourage a connection that would be regarded as undesirable by Alice's husband Bryant. Bianca decides to wait until she is in a more socially acceptable position as a successful actress before she tells Alice they are half-sisters: "When I have raised myself in my profession, and have made myself a place in society, I will come back to you; then, perhaps, our intercourse may be renewed; but at present, there is a gulf between us; situated as you are, you cannot continue to see me, and I do not wish it" (206). Being in Alice's company and under her gaze motivates Bianca to return to work and to continue bettering her career so that she

may one day be worthy of Alice's companionship and able to call her sister without bringing shame to Alice. Alice has acted "generously" toward Bianca, and as a result, Bianca is motivated to "never disgrace" her half-sister (206). Even though Alice is unable to support Bianca's occupation unconditionally, her companionship has become a positive motivation.

Bianca stays in town but finally returns to the theater to play Juliet. Through his connection to Alice's husband, Bryant, Conrad Percy visits them and sees Bianca once again. He is so impressed by her performance as Juliet that he instantly falls in love with her. Against his father's wishes, Conrad wants to marry Bianca. She does not feel she deserves to marry him in her current position, nor does she want to marry him against his father's will. Bianca tells Conrad to go abroad for three years while they are engaged so she may improve her social standing. Once again, the active pleasure of another's gaze motivates Bianca to better herself.

Every social advance Bianca attempts or makes is tied to her beauty and the value others place on her physical appearance. This seems to confirm her femininity even as it motivates her professionalism. Coincidentally, Conrad Percy is present with the circus manager and sets an example on how to provide for Bianca. Percy later connects Bianca to the theatre company where she meets her mentor, who she greatly admires, for he has "the soul of an artist" (150). He encourages Bianca to remain steadfast in pursuing acting as it is a finer art form than it is commonly deemed and cautions her, "on *no* pretence entangle yourself with obligations to the manager; endure any hardships, but accept no benefits from him" (152). By following this advice, Bianca is able to maintain control over her career rather than be exploited by the manager her

mentor warns her about. Percy also shares Alice's fascination with Bianca, and their attentions both serve as motivators for her. Rather than marry against his father's wishes, Bianca tells Conrad, "travel for three years, and *then* come back to me; by that time I shall have worked my way in my profession, and in the world's eye have become more your equal" (237). Similar to her claim to Alice, Bianca promises Conrad that her hard work and perseverance will help her become a more accomplished and thus more respectable actress, one who she hopes neither would suffer from being associated with. By maintaining her subjectivity, Bianca hopes to gain social power and standing as well.

Lord Melton, Conrad's friend, is also enchanted by Bianca, but their relationship takes a different form. Perhaps this difference is the result of Bianca already having attained her goal of become an established actress and therefore does not feel inferior to Melton. Now that she has established her subjectivity, Bianca remains empowered by it. In another contrast, Conrad falls in love with Bianca based on her performance as Juliet and her physical appearance, while Lord Melton falls in love with Bianca based on their conversation and the time they spend together. His love is thus highlighted as genuine, unlike Conrad's superficial feelings. As proof of this distinction between the two men, Conrad falls in love with an Italian opera singer who looks like Bianca and has an affair with her because of her similar appearance to Bianca. When Melton meets this woman, however, he acknowledges the similarity between the opera singer and Bianca but her selfish lifestyle is repulsive to Melton who focuses on the opera singer's personality not her appearance.



Conrad's superficiality contrasted with Melton's genuineness also seems to appear in their debate regarding "professional" women and the appropriateness of a woman's occupation. Conrad focuses on the appearance of Bianca's career, the falseness of it, and the rumors that surround it, while Melton highlights Bianca's moral superiority and her ability to suppress any rumors with her upstanding and flawless reputation. Melton focuses on the true Bianca, and thus the true woman, while Conrad focuses on negative possibilities and misconceptions. Lord Melton is the first of Bianca's acquaintances to accept her as she is and to not pressure her directly or indirectly to improve her social standing. Bianca's friendship with Lord Melton and his unconditional support ultimately frees her to establish her subjectivity rather than her femininity.

As has been represented through Jane, Helen and Bianca, a woman's accomplishments confirm or deny her femininity and thus require her to be on display and under the gaze of critics almost as a rite of passage into the realm of feminine idealism represented by the Angel in the House, the image glorified by middle-class cultural ideology. The marriage market talent show acts as an opportunity for women to display their accomplishments and is also an opportunity for women to display their feminine worth. Thus, it is not the patriarchal gaze per se that determines women as feminine ideals, but it does act as a qualifier. Without the patriarchal gaze's qualification of a woman as a feminine ideal, her accomplishments lose the power that has been accorded them through domestic ideology. When Bessie examines Jane's accomplishments, she understands the accomplishments that give women a certain kind of power. For Jane, Olive, and Bianca it is the power to secure an income. This is also true for Helen as Mrs. Graham but not until after her accomplishments give her the

power to become Mrs. Huntingdon. As Blanche Ingram finds out when Rochester dismisses her, however, the power afforded by a woman's accomplishments in the marriage market is only as strong as its effect on the patriarchal gazer and the active pleasure it elicits as a result. Therefore, women who diverge from this marital, maternal and domestic system must find a new source of power in their accomplishments. This is what Jane, Olive, Bianca, and later Helen do in using their accomplishments to provide for themselves and their loved ones.

Similar to Bianca, Olive does not participate in the marriage market talent show the way that Helen does and Jane is forced to. Olive's conventional femininity is not established through this process as Jane's and Helen's is. As a result of her disability, Olive has never been considered marriageable from her parents' perspective. Her talents were therefore not cultivated for the purpose of winning a suitor. Instead, Olive displays her conventional femininity through her kindness and grace, qualities evident in the other heroines but not to the degree of Olive who is literally referred to as an Angel. She cannot be on display nor under the gaze of critics, for her parents keep her out of society as a result of her disability but do not explain this to Olive. When she grows older and ventures out to make a new friend with her neighbor, Sara Derwent, the young woman is false with her affection. Olive eventually learns that she is viewed differently by overhearing Sara discuss Olive's disability with some other girls at a party. Olive is crushed by her discovery, for it causes her to question her very selfhood. In this situation, Sara is the critic who vouches for Olive's feminine identity. Other than by Sara, Olive is free from the critical gaze of others.

Olive eventually accepts her disability as a difference that has set her apart from other women. After her father's death, Olive and her mother move to London and rent an apartment from Meliora and her artist brother Michael Vanbrugh. Olive and Mrs. Rothesay soon learn of an unexpected debt Mr. Rothesay accrued right before he died suddenly of a heart attack. Olive is determined to pay off her father's debt, and she does so by selling her artwork. She first asks Meliora to look over her sketches and to provide an opinion on whether she is talented enough to earn a living through her art. Meliora agrees to provide Olive with feedback: "Let me see your sketches. I do know a little about such things, though Michael thinks I don't" (159). In spite of her brother's doubts about her critical abilities, the narrator insists, "Michael Vanbrugh's sister was not likely to be quite ignorant of Art. Indeed, she had quietly gathered up a tolerable critical knowledge of the same" (159-160). Meliora's brief reference to her brother's prejudice, however, prepares the reader for his negative opinion on women artists. Meliora is very impressed with Olive's work and insists they show her brother. In spite of the power placed in Michael's acknowledgement of Olive's skills, Meliora plays a key role in her discovery. That Meliora sees the merit in Olive's work illustrates a woman's ability to recognize aesthetic merit, despite her brother's contrary opinion.

Michael's immediate response to Meliora's recommendation of Olive's work is disbelief and denunciation: "Pshaw—a woman make an artist! Ridiculous" (160)! His dismissal of the idea that Olive may have talent is simply based on her female identity. By calling attention to her femaleness, however, Michael is also confirming her feminine identity. Olive's femininity is not established by her display of accomplishments before Meliora and Michael. Michael's extreme response to her gender however highlights her

womanhood, which puts Michael on his defenses, “he stood, flourishing his mahl-stick and palette—looking very like a gigantic warrior guarding the shrine of Art with shield and spear” (160), forcing him to guard the realm of art from encroaching women. In spite of these defenses, Michael dismisses his sister but allows Olive to remain, for she is “the only one of you womenkind who is fit to enter an artist's studio” (161).

After sneaking a glance at Olive's sketches, Michael does indeed notice her talent. Michael makes it a point to highlight her gender as the source of his surprise at her skill. His realization of Olive's abilities causes Michael to account for his hasty prejudice against women artists: “I am not such a fool as to say that genius is of either sex; but it is an acknowledged fact that no woman ever was a great painter, poet, or musician. Genius, the mighty one, scorns to exist in weak female nature; and even if it did, custom and education would certainly stunt its growth” (162). He highlights the inequality women faced in accordance with the “custom and education” of mid-century England that did not support a woman's artistic talents: “The most prestigious sources of fine-art education--the Royal Academy of Arts in London, the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh and the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin--either prohibited or did not welcome women students” in the early- to mid-nineteenth century. “A campaign to open the educational opportunities offered by the Royal Academy to women on an equal basis with men was launched by women artists, writers, and social reformers in 1859 and was partially successful by 1861, when female students were conditionally accepted” (Gaze 68-69). Michael understands his privileged position as a male artist and asserts his power over Olive by making her wait for his approval of her talent.

In addition to being prejudice against her gender, Michael is also reluctant to mentor Olive for fear that she is an amateur and not serious about pursuing art: “Usually he hated amateurs and their productions, but perhaps these might not be so bad. . . . Vanbrugh would have scorned the bare idea of her entering on the great career of Art for money!” (162). Olive is ashamed to work at art for money so she remains silent when Michael seems to question her motivation and the purpose behind her desire to develop her artistic skills.

Vanbraugh further explains why he thinks training Olive is impossible: “I said that it was impossible for a woman to become an artist—I mean a great artist. Have you ever thought what that term implies? Not only a painter, but a poet; a man of learning, of reading, of observation. A gentleman . . .” (164). He once again highlights Olive’s femaleness as an obstacle for her artistic pursuits, for only a “gentleman” may become a “great artist.” Michael assumes that if a woman prioritizes her role as a wife and mother she cannot become a painter. This is not the case for Olive, however, who does not expect to become a wife or mother at this juncture in the novel. Similar to the situations of our other heroines, we once again see a situation where a woman does not seem destined to become a wife and mother and must therefore provide for herself through her art. As a representative of patriarchy and domestic ideology Michael tries to thwart Olive's attempts to provide for herself, but he cannot deny her talent nor her need for financial sustenance as sole provider for herself and her mother. Similar to the manner in which Ellis and Lewis make exceptions for specific situations in which women must provide for themselves, we see exceptions being made for Olive.

In spite of the gendered limitations established by Vanbrugh, the narrator informs us that Olive eventually became an artist—“not in a week, a month, a year—Art exacts of its votaries no less service than a lifetime” (166). Olive has chosen to marry Art and makes this marriage a lifetime commitment. Her hard work and perseverance mirrors Bianca’s equally steadfast commitment to refining her performance art. Both women overcome male discouragements and in the end assert their subjectivity by controlling their work and the means of how they pursue it.

The narrator notes Olive’s subjectivity and reflects on this occurrence in relation to other women: “among those stars of lesser glory, which are given to lighten the nations, among sweet-voiced poets, earnest prose writers, who, by the lofty truth that lies hid beneath legend and parable, purify the world, graceful painters and beautiful musicians, each brightening their generation—among these, let woman shine” (166)! In spite of the power gained through their burgeoning art, the narrator then explains the limitations that are exclusively the domain of female artists. Even as “stars of lesser glory” than men, women do indeed have the gifts of poetry, prose, painting, and music. These gifts are limited however by a woman’s “heart and affections” (166): “These bind her with everlasting links from which she cannot free herself . . .” (166). This implies that a woman’s emotional state of mind is a peculiar gendered state that, by implication, does not affect the male artist. Additionally, certain cultural expectations act to ideologically inflect a female artist’s attitude towards her work. According to the narrator, “there scarcely ever lived the woman who would not rather sit meekly by her own hearth, with her husband at her side, and her children at her knee, than be the crowned Corinne of the Capitol. Thus woman, seeking to strive with man, is made feebler by the

very spirit of love which in her own sphere is her chiefest strength" (167). This is a significant cultural comment since "Corinne of the Capitol" is a reference to Felicia Heman's poem "Corinne at the Capitol" which alludes to Germaine de Stael's novel, *Corinne*. According to Linda M. Lewis, Germaine de Stael's *Corinne* is titled after a passionate, vivacious, brilliant artist . . . [who] desires complete liberty, public adulation, and passionate love. But in *Corinne*, Stael illustrates . . . that the woman as artist cannot have it all.

Taking the traditional view of feminine purpose and fulfillment, the Romantic poet Felicia Hemans . . . suggests in "Corinne at the Capitol" that Corinne would have been happier and perhaps better with the romantic love of one good man than with the love of all Rome. (29)

Juxtaposing the female artist with the representation of Corinne highlights how her duties at home and her desires to remain there limit the greatest that may be acquired by her gifts. After establishing this as the "norm," the narrator also accounts for special circumstances for women who do not find themselves in the position of wife and mother:

sometimes chance or circumstance or wrong, sealing up her woman's nature, converts her into a self-dependent human soul. Instead of life's sweetnesses, she has before her life's greatnesses. The struggle passed, her genius may lift itself upward, expand, and grow; though never to the stature of man's. Then, even while she walks with scarce-healed feet over the world's rough pathway, heaven's glory may rest upon her upturned brow, and she may become a light unto her generation. (167)

I have never determined whether the narrator is male or female unless there is some direct reference to his or her gender. It does seem apparent here, however, that the narrator is certainly inculcated by patriarchy and domestic ideology even while supporting Olive's attempts to professionalize her artwork. This is a fairly conservative perspective on the issue of woman's work and artistic abilities which seems to leave the possibilities of woman's artistic future to fate. When "chance or circumstance or wrong" prohibit a woman from establishing her "natural" roles of wife and mother, she may then pursue art only if she has the prerequisite genius to assist her endeavors, and even then, she will never acquire the same talent afforded to her male counterparts.

Olive's actions seem to reify the narrator's ideas about the female artist. Rather than pursue the path of artistic genius, Olive chooses to limit the sphere of her art for domestic purposes alone, that is, for the provision of domestic necessities. When Michael and Meliora later decide to move to Rome so he may continue to develop his genius, Michael desires for Olive to join them so she may continue to be his protégé. He proposes marriage so that she may do so without controversy. This act confirms Olive's conventional femininity as she is asked to complete the necessary duties of wife in the heterosexual union upheld by middle-class domestic ideology, wifely duties only capable of being properly fulfilled by a woman. Instead of succumbing to a hasty marriage, Olive prefers to provide a living for herself and her mother while she lives. Olive chooses to maintain the subjectivity afforded her by her disability by protecting her from the unwanted patriarchal gaze and active pleasure of others. Instead, she is the one who watches those around her with her artistic eye.



Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive have all endured some form of active pleasure imposed upon them by someone who has taken on the role of critic. Whether it is the protagonist's body or her work, each woman's femininity is assessed through this process of a scopic exchange that has put her on display. These women mostly represent the desire to remain inconspicuous. Even Bianca, in spite of her profession as an actress, is also modest and unassuming in her day to day interactions with her friends. Their private pleasure, however, is often overcome by those who prefer to impose their own desires to gaze upon the heroine or her artwork. This process of desire and display helps to establish the feminine identity of each protagonist.

As has been previously discussed, the process of the scopic exchange that occurs (sometimes in the marriage market talent show and other times by simply examining the heroines' talents) is one way each heroine's femininity is identified. The patriarchal gaze is often deemed as a qualifier in this process. Some male characters are fairly intrusive, some more than others, while female characters tend to be more supportive. Rochester is the first man discussed in this chapter who takes on the role of artistic critic over Jane's work. Although he takes the position as an expert and does not give Jane the option to not show him her sketches, he is not as intrusive as Arthur Huntingdon, the antagonist of the *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, who is extremely invasive. Not only does Arthur not give Helen an option to hide her sketches but when she vocally tries to stop him from viewing them, he just takes them from her. Gilbert is intrusive in a similar way but not as intentionally; he inconsiderately views a painting that Helen has turned toward the wall without realizing she intended for it to remain hidden. Michael Vanbraugh takes a different approach in establishing his authority. Rather than view

Olive's sketches when asked, he dismisses her on the basis of her gender and thus her inferiority. Conrad Percy and Lord Melton are perhaps the most supportive when it comes to the male gaze. Conrad's support is unreliable, however; he only appreciates Bianca's talents when it suits him. Lord Melton on the other hand is unconditional with his support, even when his sister Lady Vernon initially disapproves of his association with an actress.

The female characters also take the perspective of the patriarchal gaze as they assess each heroine's value based on her accomplishments; they tend to be more supportive, however. As has been previously discussed, Bessie in comparison with Rochester is much more excited to see the success of Jane's feminine training. Millicent Hargrave also acts as a support to Helen in comparison with Arthur's teasing. Similarly, Meliora is in awe of Olive's talent, while Michael tries to avoid it. Lastly, although Lady Vernon is hesitant to befriend Bianca because of her profession as an actress, she later respects her brother Lord Melton's choice in a companion and also becomes supportive.

Ultimately, the difference between the male and female approach to a woman's accomplishments is twofold. On the one hand, these men have been privileged with the position of power as a result of their gender as well as their class. This privilege empowers them to take positions of control over their female counterparts. As we see in the difference ranging from Arthur Huntingdon to Lord Melton, some men take advantage of this power and use it to oppress women while others respect their female companions and give some of that power away in order to place her on an equal level. On the other hand, these women have a better understanding of the value in a woman's

accomplishments as a tool for gaining financial security either by gaining a suitor or by gaining employment.

Each heroine has asserted her humanity in various ways by resisting the objectification of critics, by choosing what she displays and how (both her body and her work), by prioritizing her perspective, and by accessing power through her critical gazing of others. Art plays a crucial role in this process, for it empowers these women and gives them control under circumstances that they cannot control. Overcoming and surpassing the patriarchal gaze is just one step in each heroine's journey to redefining her feminine identity. Now that each heroine's talent has been established, the following chapter examines how she uses that talent for financial security and how she balances her professionalism with the societal pressure to develop a domestic and maternal identity. The subjectivity that each heroine gains through art is mirrored in the subjectivity she gains through her determination to display domestic and maternal qualities as a way of asserting her femininity amidst her professionalism.

## CHAPTER 3

### PROFESSIONAL AND FEMININE?: BEING BOTH IN SPITE OF STIGMA

As the previous chapter illustrates, the display of feminine accomplishments and artistic talents provides the opportunity for Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive to assert their subjectivity and empowers them with control in circumstances where they typically do not hold positions of power. In this chapter, I highlight how each heroine subjectifies herself by choosing to professionalize amidst stigmatization, by asserting her femininity through domestic and maternal roles, and by laying claim to that femininity in spite of her professionalism. Through an emphasis on conventional qualities, each heroine's professional identity is empowered in the face of societal discrimination. She is therefore able to pursue the professionalism necessary to sustain herself and her family, while simultaneously proving her femininity and ultimately her marriageability.

This chapter also highlights the role of art as a likely mode of occupation for women already trained in it. Even though artwork was easily completed within a woman's own home and easily stemmed from a woman's artistic accomplishments, these novels underscore an anxiety that surrounded a woman's professionalism and deemed her unwomanly as a result. That anxiety is appeased when each heroine's professionalism is counterbalanced with qualities of conventional femininity. Jane and Bianca are less inhibited when it comes to pursuing work, perhaps as a result of their lower social standing. For Helen and Olive, however, two heroines who internalize the social anxiety regarding working women, their professionalism is rationalized through their self-sacrifice and religious piety, qualities emphasized in the Victorian, feminine ideal.

Even though each protagonist comes into a situation where she must “earn a living,” some heroines rationalize their ambition under the guise of a godly duty either by fulfilling their “calling” or as a form of self-sacrifice for a loved one such as a mother or child. Often, these heroines show how their professionalism does not negate but rather augments their domestic and maternal duties. When this occurs, some prioritize the domestic and maternal over the professional. In these situations, the demonstration of domestic and maternal qualities helps the heroines prove that their femininity is indeed intact in spite of their professionalism. Anxiety surrounding women’s professionalism also led to concerns regarding a working woman’s maternal opportunities, lest her work take the place of motherhood. These novels therefore also demonstrate how professionalism prepares each protagonist for her future maternal role and duties.

*Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *The Half Sisters* and *Olive* represent the option for single women to work and “freely” pursue financial autonomy, albeit in different ways. Olive and Helen are not the same as Bianca and Jane. Jane and Bianca are perhaps viewed as possessing more liberal approaches to a single woman’s financial autonomy because of how far they stray from the ideals of domestic ideology, perhaps as a result of their minimal inclination towards motherhood, whereas Olive and Helen are more conventional. Not all of these novels show how a woman could have it all but they do represent the varied success of balancing one’s professional goals with one’s maternal and domestic qualities. There is a variety of responses in these novels; they all contain examples of professional women but how they negotiate and redefine the feminine ideal differs.

In mid-nineteenth-century England, establishing woman's public role was especially significant as women were increasingly remaining single and pursuing work to support themselves. Victorians concerned with the growing number of not only working-class women, but also middle-class women entering the public sphere to earn an income, often focused on the appropriateness of a woman's occupation, a concern illustrated in these novels. *Jewsbury* specifically reserves entire conversations between characters on the topic of whether a woman's "natural" inclination toward an art form should be cultivated in a manner that would allow her to support herself by pursuing that art form professionally. Lord Melton, in fact, heartily supports a woman's subjectification through professionalism (26-32). Albeit less directly, the other novels also contribute to the debate on how a woman may appropriately use her artistic gifts as a means of financial support.

The issue of a woman's financial sustenance is also discussed in an article on "the ownership of wealth among single middle-class women" in which David R. Green and Alastair Owens explain how the "social position of these single women was at odds with the central tenets of the ideology of separate spheres, which emphasized female dependency within the context of a patriarchal nuclear family" (512). These heroines represent women who did not have the option to be dependent on a financially stable nuclear family. In providing for themselves and their families these heroines are at odds with domestic ideology. Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive perhaps represent women who desired to redefine the feminine ideal by expanding its definition to include women who modeled domestic and maternal qualities amidst their professionalism and singleness.

Sarah Ellis helped establish the hetero-normative assumptions of how a woman was expected to care for and influence those around her. In *Women of England*, she specifically targets middle-class women because they have the most to lose. The wealth of upper-class women tended to be more established because it was connected to their family and inherited land. Women in the working and lower classes did not expect upward social mobility. Middle-class women, on the other hand, were situated somewhat precariously in their social status, for it depended on the security of their family's financial investments or business ventures. Any financial hardship could eventually wear away any "false notions of refinement" (14). Through *Women of England* Ellis has made it her duty to warn women in the middle class to not become wrapped up in their social status and forget their domestic duties, to not let their finery become ostentatious and ultimately unaffordable. This is precisely what she discusses in her final chapter of *Women of England*. Ellis encourages women to have the "moral courage" to live within their means, to not create false pretenses of having more money than is their reality, and to work to provide for themselves in spite of the social stigma that may arise. In accordance with Sarah Ellis's charge, the protagonists of these four novels find themselves in economic hardship and must face the "degradation" that awaits them when they pursue "making their own living" (Ellis 288). In spite of this "degradation," these female characters prove they still model feminine ideals in their qualities of self-sacrifice and superior morality.

In *Women of England*, Ellis predicts that there will be a schism in the middle class which will force some middle-class women into a lower middle-class. This will happen as a result of women who are unable to marry and must pursue professional

opportunities to support themselves, as well as any married women faced with economic hardship who must do the same or rely on their daughters to do so. Perhaps the single, professional woman in these novels is portrayed as a feminine ideal as a way of encouraging women in the “lower middle-class” to a higher moral code than their more leisured counterparts.

The bourgeois code of hard work is not a part of the passive Angel in the House image, even though in *Nobody's Angels*, Elizabeth Langland illustrates that such passivity was not an option for the middle-class wife managing her household. The single, professional women represented in these novels demonstrate the work ethic of the middle class and are therefore a revised image of the feminine ideal that combines both the private and public sphere ideologies of the middle class. Under the influence of the professional woman, the revised angel of the house still maintains the feminine qualities idealized by Ellis but is capable of doing so outside of marriage and motherhood.

According to Nan Dreher in “Redundancy and Emigration,” “middle-class cultural ideology forbade women to support themselves through paid work” (3). As a result, women who did support themselves through paid work were stigmatized as unfeminine. In response to “the social and economic marginalization of middle-class single women . . . early feminist critics attacked middle-class conceptions of gender and class as being incompatible with reality” (3). This critique is also present in the novels examined in this chapter, particularly in response to the idea that women who pursue professional means for financial sustenance are unfeminine. These novels present an alternative conceptualization of single, professional women who represent themselves



as a part of the feminine ideal. As a result, they create a space for themselves by blurring the gendered identities associated with professional and domestic work. For example, a professional woman may be considered feminine if she exemplifies certain qualities identified in conjunction with conventional femininity. The conventional gender identity defined by domestic ideology is not completely dismantled but is appropriated by women typically excluded from this definition. The appropriation of the feminine ideal by professional women is an extremely significant action, for it empowers each woman to identify her gender as she desires rather than passively be defined by a patriarchal ideology seeking to marginalize and oppress her.

Women who were anxious about straying from conventional femininity, however, as Helen and Olive appear to be, had to rationalize their professionalism. For Helen and Olive, this is accomplished through the emphasis on conventionally feminine qualities, such as self-sacrifice and a commitment to godly duties. Blurring the professional with the domestic is another way to rationalize “work” as socially acceptable. Bianca and Jane do not seem to feel any pressure to rationalize their need to work, while Craik seems to rationalize Olive’s work by making her appear Angelic. Anne Brontë seems to rationalize Helen’s work by emphasizing the difficulty in leaving a life of luxury (even though that life was fraught with pain). Bianca’s acting is rationalized through her work ethic and her commitment to making acting a finer art. Jane’s work is not rationalized but motivated by desire for liberty and exploration. Their professionalism required some form of rationalization because middle-class, Victorian women were not supposed to work, for it placed them outside conventional femininity.

This rationalization is also evident in the social commentary, particularly provided by Marion Reid and Barbara Bodichon, that extensively defends a woman's right to work. Reid and Bodichon emphasize the benefits of work and decry its hinderance to a woman's domestic and maternal development. In *A Plea for Woman* (1843) Reid argues:

If all woman's duties are to be considered as strictly domestic, and if God and nature have really so circumscribed her sphere of action - What are we to think of the dreadful depravity of thousands upon thousands of unprotected females, who actually prefer leaving their only proper sphere, and working for their own subsistence - to starvation? . . . allowing that it is merely an incidental evil, still it is one which affects immense numbers of women; and if it is allowed to be in a great measure unavoidable, we would ask, is it fair to continue institutions which in their turn perpetuate those absurd prejudices which make it next to a certain loss of caste for any woman to attempt earning an honest and independent livelihood for herself? (31-32)

Reid clearly articulates her frustration with the limitations of domestic ideology which bases a woman's identity on her active participation in the domestic sphere in spite of the reality of her situation and the very real need to work outside that sphere in order to provide for her family.

Writing almost fifteen years later, Barbara Leigh Smith [Bodichon] addresses the "unfeminine" stigma attached to single, professional women simply because she is not "weak and sickly" in *Women and Work* (1857). Bodichon argues, "To think a woman is more feminine because she is frivolous, ignorant, weak and sickly, is absurd; the larger-

natured a woman is, the more decidedly feminine she will be; the stronger she is, the more strongly feminine. You do not call a lioness unfeminine, though she is different in size and strength from the domestic cat, or mouse” (45). Similarly, the novels I examine here seem to emphasize the feminine qualities of their heroines as a way of proving the benefits of professionalism.

Art was one feminine option even for conservative women who saw the possibility of work that was still domestic and prepared unmarried women for the duties of marriage and motherhood. Elaine Showalter notes how “the first professional activities of Victorian women, as social reformers, nurses, governesses, and novelists, either were based in the home or were extensions of the feminine role as teacher, helper, and mother of mankind” (14). Similarly, the skills of the professional woman artist were extended from the feminine accomplishments of genteel middle- and upper-class women. The demonstration of how feminine accomplishments could be used economically is one way these authors address the social anxiety of reconciling a woman’s independence with domesticity.

If viewing professional art as an extension of her domestic duties did not permit a woman to stray from convention, she could connect her work to religious devotion. Women who had to hide or at least defend their sense of personal ambition did this by explaining their professional pursuits as godly. That is, women who felt their professional skills were bestowed on them from God felt it wrong to ignore what seemed like God’s purpose for their lives, or at least for the use of these skills. These women are then sacrificing their preference for inconspicuousness (discussed in the previous chapter) to fulfill a godly purpose. Sarah Ellis in particular attributes a woman’s sense of

domestic duty with godliness and directly connects a middle-class woman's domestic life with her sense of morality. Accordingly, developing domestic habits increases a woman's "usefulness," which later contributes to her moral and spiritual development, for "domestic habits, and relative duties, . . . materially assist the development of the Christian character" (viii). Ellis's *Women of England* highlights "the cultivation of habits . . . the minor morals of domestic life . . . because it is impossible for them to be neglected, without serious injury to the Christian character" (ix). Here, Ellis illustrates one possible motivation for why women felt pressure to connect their professionalism with godly duties.

The religious devotion of the ideal woman is also used to question society's criticism of a professional woman's career. If "any Victorian woman with the will to write . . . had to ask herself: what did God intend her to do with her life," she would be demonstrating her religious devotion (Showalter 24). A religiously devout woman may have cultivated what appeared to be innate gifts from God. This is the case for at least three of the four protagonists whose artistic skills are clearly explained as being rooted in strong feelings that come from within her. A strong impression that these gifts and passions are innate lead the reader to suspect a divine association with these skills. The remaining protagonist, Helen, shows her piety in other ways, particularly in her staunch preference for abstaining from alcohol.

In *Women and Work*, Bodichon makes a strong claim for women being able to work in accordance with their "calling." She proclaims, "Women are God's children equally with men. In Britain this is admitted; because it is a Christian country . . . . If we are God's children, we owe certain duties to Him. The life of most women [however] is a

practical denial of such duties” (40). She goes on to explain, “Women must, as children of God, be trained to do some work in the world” (41). According to Bodichon, a woman’s work is a way for her to fulfill a godly duty.

In describing a woman’s calling in *A Woman’s Thoughts about Women* (1858), Dinah Craik urges “every woman to examine herself and judge herself, morally and intellectually, by the sharpest tests of criticism, before she attempts art or literature, either for abstract fame or as a means of livelihood” (49). Craik’s advisory reveals her concern over women who she does not believe are suited for the professional realm. This is also revealed in the way her heroine, Olive, agonizes over whether she should pursue art professionally. Craik goes on to recommend, “after mature deliberation, [having] chosen her calling, and conscientiously believing it is her calling - that in which she shall do most good, and best carry out the aim of her existence - let her fulfill to the last iota its solemn requirements” (49). In this recommendation, she defines a woman’s calling as a vocation in which a woman will do the most good and will be able to best carry out the aim of her existence. Craik urges women to do well and to work hard at whatever it is they choose to do with their lives including the pursuit of a “female profession” and the “heaven-given honour of being the Workers of the world” (53).

The protagonists’ artistic talents are portrayed in these novels as providential, or occurring by some divine intervention. Jane talks about her sketches as images from her dreams, Bianca describes her passion for acting as a strong feeling that pours out from within her, even her sister Alice describes a similar sensation with art, and Olive is also described as having innate artistic gifts. The portrayal of these gifts as innate or divinely inspired seems to provide a rationale for the financial support each woman

gains as a result of her art. This rationale fits with the feminine quality of religious devotion and therefore supports the image of these women as feminine ideals.

In conjunction with her example of religious devotion, a single, professional woman could also revise the domestic ideal by highlighting the self-sacrificial nature of her work. Martha Vicinus notes, "A single woman was trapped in a paradox: the price of independence was the reinforcement of sexual stereotyping. Her personal ambition had to be hidden from herself and society under the cloak of self-sacrifice" (16). Whether or not some women actually did enjoy making sacrifices for others is unclear. It is possible this was the case for some women, while others may have longed for an ideology that did not force single women into a life of service. Various forms of self-sacrifice are evident in these protagonists, who all appear to give of themselves willingly and happily, not as a show or out of a sense of obligation. Perhaps they represent a portion of women who did enjoy helping others, a portion, however, that by no means represents every middle-class woman. In the context of these novels, this "cloak of self-sacrifice" is represented in each protagonist's pursuit of financial autonomy through art as a means of providing for herself or her family.

In addition to her religious piety and self-sacrifice, a single, professional woman ran the risk of bringing about psychological problems if she suppressed her god-given talents. Craik expresses concern for women who are inhibited by social constructs and unable to freely use their talents and gifts: "There seems no reason why a great actress or vocalist should not exercise her talents to the utmost for the world's benefit, and her own; nor that any genius; boiling and bursting up to find expression, should be pent down, cruelly and dangerously, because it refuses to run in the ordinary channel of

feminine development” (51). She notes how dangerous it may be for a woman’s passions to be subdued, causing it to perhaps result in the tragic ennui faced by Geraldine Jewsbury’s character, Alice.

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane also laments the feelings women experience when they must suppress their natural gifts:

It is vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. . . .

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts. (140-141)

Jane argues for an occupation for women that may be used as an outlet for their individual skills.

Bianca represents this need for an outlet through the anguish she expresses to Alice in regards to continuing her profession:

you cannot change my nature, I must be what I am. The stage is to me a *passion*, as well as a profession; I can work in no other direction; I should become worthless and miserable; all my faculties would prey upon myself, and I should even be wicked and mischievous, and God knows how bad, if I were placed in any other position. You don t know what it is to be devoted to an art; it possesses one like a demon; it is a sacred necessity laid upon me, which I cannot help obeying. (205)

Even though she wants to please her sister, Bianca is compelled to obey the desire to act which possesses her. If she does not follow this inclination, the consequences of suppressing her talent and “genius” would be detrimental to her overall wellbeing.

One last argument in favor of the professionalization of single women suggests that it is a better alternative to prostitution. In her article “Conduct (Un)Becoming to Ladies of Literature” Lucy Morrison highlights conduct books acknowledging the necessity of women’s employment; they “demonstrate their authors’ acknowledgement of a transitional society’s gradual release of women from the confines of domesticity.” Such manuals also “emphasize their [authors’] concern with avoiding . . . [the] terrible fate” of prostitution. As a result, “conduct books gradually come to acknowledge the viability and even necessity of women’s employment” (213). Perhaps these novels are trying to accomplish the same task. By depicting respectable and even admirable characters of socially acceptable occupations, Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive demonstrate how single, middle-class women may provide for themselves in ways that do not negate their femininity.

Once she has established her femininity through her religious devotion and self-sacrifice, the single, professional woman examined here must maintain a delicate balance between the public and private spheres, between her professional and domestic duties. The single, professional woman must create her own space and identity that balances both public and private spaces as well as stereotypically feminine and masculine traits. She thereby represents a redefined feminine ideal, a more realistic embodiment of the new middle-class woman’s socioeconomic situation.

According to Showalter, one way women struck this balance was by “[presenting]



their writing [or work] as an extension of their feminine role, an activity that did not detract from their womanhood, but in some sense augmented it” (85). She describes several women writers who worked amidst household duties. Likewise, these heroines represent an attempt to establish a balanced identity, for the norm of women relying on men for financial security has been turned upside down. Now, these women may rely on themselves and the private sphere to which they have been relegated becomes a place where they pursue their trade intertwined with domesticity.

In her book *Professional Domesticity in the Victorian Novel: Women, Work, and Home* Monica Cohen identifies her scholarship as a “professional [discourse] that represents the home as a profession, as vocational work” (160). She examines novels in which the lines are blurred between the professional and the domestic, where domestic work takes place alongside professional work. Cohen’s framework provides a useful foundation for examining how novels represent the professionalization of the domestic sphere. By creating characters of women artists--Jane paints for herself, Helen and Olive paint professionally, while Bianca, also a professional, acts--who undermine the proscribed role of the domestic sphere, the Brontë sisters, Jewsbury and Craik are representing how the domestic sphere may be used as a place for work that can be financially rewarding for non-painters as well, as long as they have access to capital--money to buy the materials for their work.

At the point of their departure from conventional domestic roles, Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive are upper-, middle-, and lower-middle-class women. They are willing to face the consequences of lowering their social standing in order to begin new lives. They therefore use their feminine accomplishments for professional gain and financial

assistance. Rather than be mere ornaments to decorate a woman for her future husband, their accomplishments assist them in gaining financial autonomy. Ultimately, these acquirements provide each heroine with a means for income.

In addition to providing rationale for the ways a woman's professionalism serves as a vehicle for self-sacrifice and godly talents, these novels also illustrate how professionalism augments a woman's domestic and maternal qualities. Bodichon asserts that unmarried women would be happier with professions, but she predicts a challenge to this assertion, namely the question as to whether a woman's training will be of any use to her once she is married and having children if "nine out of ten do marry and have children." To this hypothetical challenge she provides five arguments illustrating the benefits of work for women who may eventually marry and have children by first correcting the statistic on married women. According to Bodichon, "women at the age of twenty and upwards, 43 out of the 100 in England and Wales are unmarried" (43). She does not give a source for her figures, but this statistic is most likely from the widely cited 1851 Census, "which revealed that there were 2.5 million redundant women--that is, one third of the labour force--who had no option but to support themselves" (Hadjiafxendi and Zakreski 1). Bodichon argues, "1stly, A girl will make a better wife for having had such serious training." She is perhaps trying to explain how managing a household and possibly managing children as well is a lot of work and serious training may prepare a woman for that. She goes on to explain, "2dly, Your daughter may not marry. It is your duty to provide for that possibility; and she will surely be ill, miserable, or go mad, if she has no occupation." This relates to the issue of idleness presented earlier. If a woman does not have any meaningful work while she

waits to marry or have children, then she may suffer from a debilitating boredom. Alice in *The Half Sisters* seems to exemplify this problem. Bodichon provides a third point: “It may be years before your daughter finds a husband. It is your duty to give her worthy work, or to allow her to choose it; and certainly she is more likely to be attractive and to get a good husband if she is cheerful and happy in some work, than if she, being miserable and longing for a change, clutches at the first offer made her.” Again, parents must protect their daughters from ennui, but in this case it may result in a daughter’s hasty marriage to an unfit partner simply because she is bored with being unmarried.

Bodichon provides a fifth and final argument in favor of woman’s work: “Your daughter may be left to act as both father and mother to children dependent on her for daily bread” (43). This is a close description to what Helen Huntington experiences. Arthur does not die in reality, but he has certainly forfeited his role as a husband and ultimately killed their marriage causing Helen to leave him and dress in widow’s clothing as if he were deceased. The other heroines of these novels are not left as widows but as unmarried orphans. This is the case for Jane from the beginning of the novel, while Olive and Bianca initially begin their careers to single-handedly support their mothers who eventually pass away. These women find themselves in situations where they must provide for themselves, a reality highlighted by Bodichon as a defense of middle-class women’s right to work.

Anxiety surrounding women’s professionalism is also prevalent in relation to a working woman’s maternal opportunities, lest her work take the place of motherhood. These novels demonstrate how professionalism prepares each protagonist for her future maternal role and duties. In his 1850 review of Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley*, George

H. Lewes describes motherhood as “The grand function of woman . . . [which] we regard not only as her distinctive characteristic . . . but as a high and holy office” (481). Lewes’s emphasis on maternity as the sole purpose of a woman’s existence sheds light on the evident anxiety of unmarried protagonists written by unmarried women writers. Those women who were unable to fulfill their supposed “holy office” were stigmatized. Motherhood is thus a frequent theme appearing in many forms throughout these novels. In addition to the women who mother the protagonists discussed later in chapter four, each heroine also acts as a mother to a young woman in her charge and to her love interest. Once again, for Jane and Bianca, this role is not a primary concern.

Sarah Lewis and Sarah Ellis in particular emphasize maternal influence as a source of power they encourage women to pursue and value. Single middle-class women without the financial support from male figures were strongly encouraged to pursue professionalism under the guise of domestic training. If a single woman pursued professionalism, she needed to doubly hone her domestic skills in order to maintain her marriageability.

In *A Plea for Woman* (1843), rather than emphasize maternal influence, Marion Reid encourages a validation of women’s domestic duties as hard work. She argues for “social equality” explaining that “the possession of this just right would not interfere in the slightest with her domestic duties or ‘woman’s sphere’, as it is called.” Instead, she proclaims, “the energy, self-reliance, and intelligence, which the possession of this right has such a tendency to foster and call into action, would be highly favourable to a more enlarged view of those duties and a more active discharge of them” (29). Reid’s explanation of how woman’s social equality and her ability to be self-reliant would

actually improve her duties connects with the novels examined here. Rather than choose work over maternal and domestic duties, these novels show how the two go hand-in-hand and similarly enhance one another. Reid goes on to explain, “All that unshackled self-dependence, all that freedom and elasticity of mind which social independence and equality . . . alone can thoroughly bestow, are not only favourable, but almost necessary to the right performance of those [domestic] duties” (30-31). Similarly, the heroines in the novels examined here illustrate how their work complements their domestic duties rather than compromise them.

Compromising maternal duties for professional ones is not an issue for Barbara Bodichon, who argues in favor of work as preparation for domesticity and motherhood in *Women and Work*. She guarantees, “Women can be trusted to do the best for their young children: maternal love is too strong ever to be weakened by any love of a science, art, or profession” (44) As a representative of liberal thought for the nineteenth century, Bodichon demonstrates how women are not fighting for second- and third-wave forms of feminism. She is not arguing for singleness to be socially acceptable; she is barely arguing for women to be permitted to work once they are married. Her number one goal is to make work accessible and socially acceptable for all unmarried women, even those who may eventually marry and have children. This also seems to be the goal of these novels, published within the decade that precedes *Women and Work*, for each illustrates the positive impact work has for women during a period of singleness discussed in the following chapter. These heroines marry in the end and thus prove their marriageability not in spite of their work, Bodichon might argue, but because of their work. She later says the same is true for motherhood: “Activity of brain, heart, and limb,

gives health and beauty, and makes women fit to be the mothers of children” (45).

Similarly, these heroines hone not only their domestic skills through their work but their maternal skills, as well.

By embodying what seems to be the contradicting qualities (according to Victorian standards) of feminine (maternal and domestic) traits alongside masculine (professional and ambitious) traits the protagonist in each novel presents herself as a revised feminine ideal. This revision places women in the role of provider outside the role of wife and mother. How women went about fulfilling that role was surrounded by much debate. Sarah Ellis and Sarah Lewis described some conservative viewpoints, Marion Reid and later Barbara Bodichon presented somewhat liberal perspectives, while Harriet Martineau’s introduced fairly radical views. According to Hobart’s description of Martineau’s nonfiction prose, “Martineau was acutely conscious of the difficulties that ‘redundant’ middle-class women encountered in a society dominated by domestic ideology and which therefore conceived of marriage and motherhood as the only fitting destiny for women” (242). As a representation of these difficulties, Martineau’s novel *Deerbrook* “idealizes a domestic sphere inhabited by rational, socially conscious women at the same time that it calls into question the ideology of gendered duties that blocked women’s access to a personally sustaining position in the public sphere” (242). While Martineau advocated for self-sustaining positions of power in the public sphere despite the cultural dominance of middle-class ideology, the Brontës, Jewsbury and Craik created characters who are working within middle-class ideology by maintaining limited power within the private sphere while simultaneously working and earning money. Charlotte Brontë and Geraldine Jewsbury seem to have taken up

Martineau's cause in representing the restrictions of domestic ideology particularly for middle-class women "whom exceptional circumstances have exempted from conventional womanly responsibilities" (242). Anne Brontë and Dinah Craik, on the other hand, provide representations of women who are not exempt from conventional duties but who are also in need of pursuing financial autonomy. Ultimately, each novel successfully illustrates ways that women can utilize both professional and domestic skills in accordance with their different situations.

If Martineau's ideas relating to women's role in society were radical, then compared to her work, these novels are seemingly conventional and thus present safer options for women. Hobart concludes, "If like Martineau's sociological writing on women, *Deerbrook* manages to refuse the temptation of womanly identification, its punishing conclusion underlines the menacing implications of a feminist politics that uncritically values liberty, equality, and *fraternity*" (249). The protagonists of *Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *The Half Sisters* and *Olive*, on the other hand, seek to embrace womanly identification while simultaneously pursuing professional opportunities. They accomplish this in many ways but most strikingly by demonstrating conventionally feminine qualities in spite of their professionalism.

The struggle to prove her conventional capabilities is least evident in *Jane Eyre* and is thus where I begin my analysis. In spite of Bessie's confirmation that Jane is an accomplished lady highlighted in the previous chapter, Jane does not use these accomplishments for the prescribed middle-class purpose of winning a suitor. Instead, Jane uses her confirmed identity as a gentlewoman to gain employment. At the end of her schooling at Lowood, Jane stays for two years to teach. In contrast with her mentor

Miss Temple's long tenure at Lowood, however, Jane decides it is no longer the place for her. She seeks employment elsewhere and obtains a position as a governess. She is hired as a governess by Mrs. Fairfax, who Jane mistakenly believes is the owner of Thornfield Hall where she will now live. Jane's confusion highlights the blurred position of both Jane and Mrs. Fairfax between the middle and lower-middle class as women who are employed by Rochester Fairfax but who are above servants. Jane is hired as a governess to Adele, a young French girl who represents Rochester's licentious past life. While she educates Adele, Jane similarly educates Rochester toward a higher moral standard, one that is not actualized until he is refined by the fire of Thornfield Hall. Jane's role in educating both Adele and Rochester also serves to blur the distinction between her role as a professional within a domestic space.

Jane may now transmit her accomplishments onto her pupil Adele who is in a more fitting socioeconomic position to use feminine accomplishments to win a suitor. Adele's socioeconomic status is established by her relation to Mr. Rochester, the actual owner of Thornfield Hall and Adele's guardian. As a result, Adele may be considered among the upper-middle class. As a lower-middle-class woman, however, Adele's mother was a performer who used her accomplishments as a source of employment and as a means of attracting suitors, like Rochester, who would give her gifts and pay for her living expenses. This method of providing for oneself was not viewed highly in mid-century Victorian England. Some of the controversy surrounding the economic options available to lower-middle-class women who pursue performing arts as opposed to fine arts is discussed later in relation to Geraldine Jewsbury's Bianca from *The Half Sisters*.



Jane's artistic pursuits also serve as vehicle to blur the line between the professional and the domestic even though she never pursues selling her art. Jane's artwork always takes place in the domestic sphere, and is mostly used in a place of a journal entry. Instead of writing about her emotions she draws what is on her mind. That the inspiration for her art also comes from her dreams, the deepest resonance of her heart and soul, connects her art with a higher calling. This often takes place in her work environment. When Jane is later employed as a school teacher, she lives in a room attached to the school. Here, she is again engaged in drawing, when St. John discovers the initials that confirm her inheritance of a significant amount of money. Ultimately, her artwork provides her enough to make her independent from all work without ever being sold.

Jane's accomplishments as a lady play a significant role in her employment at the school house after she has left Thornfield Hall. Her cousin St. John explains to her, "I mean now to open a . . . school for girls. I have hired a building for the purpose, with a cottage of two rooms attached to it for the mistress's house. Her salary will be thirty pounds a year . . . Will you be this mistress?" (273) Jane considers the position and "accepts it" (273) St. John's description of the school building mentions how the school mistress's cottage is attached. Jane is therefore living in the same place she is working. Here we see how the domestic and the professional are intertwined. Jane once again transmits her feminine training to young girls. Because they are from working-class families, however, their training is focused on domestic duties not marriage marketability.

Jane's professional roles as teacher, governess, and then teacher again are socially acceptable because these positions employ her as an ideological preserver of domesticity. Even as she perpetuates this ideology, however, Jane contradicts its definition of the feminine ideal. Jane does not follow the conventional pattern of using her accomplishments to provide for herself nor do they prepare her for marriage and motherhood. Despite her unconventional qualities, Jane does demonstrate self-sacrifice. She refuses to become Rochester's mistress, even though she would have never lacked materially. She also refuses St. John River's proposal, even though it presented her with a true marriage. Lastly, rather than keep her inheritance for herself, Jane shares it with her cousins then gives her portion to Rochester through marriage. These examples of self-sacrifice demonstrate how Jane does model some conventional forms of femininity, while her need to "earn a living" because she would rather remain independent undermines that same feminine conventionalism.

Jane's unconventionalism is particularly evident each time she leaves a place of living; she rebels against someone's attempt to control or define her and asserts her subjectivity. She rebels against her aunt's definition of her as a liar, against the confines of Miss Temple's marriage (the example set for Jane to follow by her mentor), against Rochester's presumption that she might lower her moral standards to be his mistress, and finally against St. John's pressure to be his helpmeet. Jane is constantly rebelling against Victorian ideology's prescription of a feminine ideal who marries and has children. Jane resists this until she is able to revise the script to fit her own ideals. Upon leaving Lowood she reflects, "My world had for some years been in Lowood: my experience had been of its rules and systems; now I remembered that the real world

was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements, awaited those who had courage to go forth into its expanse, to seek real knowledge of life amidst its perils” (82). Jane’s revision portrays an independent woman, seeking work for herself, and eventually gaining an inheritance which she controls.

Similar to Bianca, Jane is also very unconventional when it comes to displaying any maternal qualities other than in the role of governess and teacher. In fact, out of all the heroines examined here Jane is the least conventional in exhibiting “appropriate” behavior in accordance with domestic ideology. Because Jane is “working” in the domestic sphere, the governess role is both public and private. As a result she has to negotiate her wages with Rochester. While on the job, she also experiences strong emotional connections to Rochester, blurring the lines between her employer and lover.

Later, during her independent living with Diana and Mary, their days are filled with leisure-work. Even though they are free to do as they please, they fervently work at self-improvement through language and drawing lessons. Once again, the distinction between work and home is blurred:

Diana offered to teach me German. I liked to learn of her: I saw the part of instructress pleased and suited her; that of scholar pleased and suited me no less. Our natures dovetailed: mutual affection—of the strongest kind—was the result. They discovered I could draw: their pencils and colour-boxes were immediately at my service. My skill, greater in this one point than theirs, surprised and charmed them. Mary would sit and watch me by the hour together: then she would take lessons; and a docile, intelligent, assiduous pupil she made. Thus

occupied, and mutually entertained, days passed like hours, and weeks like days. (Brontë 269-270)

Pursuing self-improvement practices characteristic of genteel women is about as close to the domestic as Jane gets. Other than caring for others on a professional level, she does not demonstrate any domestic or maternal qualities that would render her a fit example of the feminine ideal. In the end Jane eventually returns to care for Rochester, the first instance of maternal behavior that seems to occur naturally. Jane seems to mother Rochester, then she mothers his children. Jane's evolution into a domestic and maternal woman represents the ability for all independent women to still be marriageable and able to fulfill their "holy office."

Helen Huntingdon presents another peculiar case of maternity and domesticity, for she already embodies these qualities in the closest likeness of the Victorian ideal. Helen models self-sacrifice, a quality that helps rationalize her professionalism as she strives to provide for herself, her son and her maid. Thus, her professionalism is not viewed as ambitious but as self-sacrificing. Helen is an exemplary mother, who sacrifices everything for the sake of her son's well-being. She takes on the responsibility of her son's education, but her abusive husband eventually takes that from her. When Arthur gives alcohol to his young son, it is the last straw for Helen. She packs up everything she can and steals away with her son and maid in the middle of the night. She leaves behind all forms of luxury and dresses like a widow in a rented home in order to protect her son. Helen endures many hardships in exchange for her son's safety from his father. She sacrifices her life of leisure for a run-down house in which

she works to support herself, her son, and their one maid. Helen's sole motivation for all she does is as a mother protecting her son.

For Helen, domesticity is fused with professionalism in her new home, Wildfell Hall. That she must entertain her guests in her work room illustrates the blurring of the separation between the professional and the domestic. When Helen is hiding from her husband at Wildfell Hall she uses the alias Helen Graham amongst her neighbors. Two of these neighbors come to visit her, and she welcomes them to her studio, for "there is no fire in the sitting room . . . and it is rather too cold to [show] you into a place with an empty grate," she explains. As a result, her visitors see the work she does in the privacy of her own home.

In this scene, Helen is simultaneously engaged in the professional and domestic sphere. The narrator and one of her visitors, Gilbert Markham, describes how she cannot pull herself away from her painting to fully engage with her guests:

disengaging a couple of chairs from the artistical lumber that usurped them she bid us be seated and resumed her place beside the easel not facing it exactly but now and then glancing at the picture upon it while she conversed and giving it an occasional touch with her brush as if she found it impossible to wean her attention entirely from her occupation to fix it upon her guests. (32)

Once again, the single, professional woman demonstrates her ability to blur the lines between the public and private by inviting her visitors into her work space. By continuing to engage with her work as she entertains (or ignores) her guests underscores the blurring of professional and domestic roles for Helen.

During his visit, Gilbert questions Helen as to whether she “intend[s] to keep the picture” she is presently working on. Helen replies, “No, I cannot afford to paint for my own amusement.” Her son Arthur also chimes in: “Mamma sends all her pictures to London, . . . somebody sells them for her there and sends us the money” (33). Gilbert is now completely informed of Helen’s professional artwork and how she is able to financially provide for herself and her son, all within a brief visit to her home. Here we see a female protagonist who uses her accomplishments for financial security and economic independence, after previously using them to attract Arthur.

Helen uses her accomplishments to produce artwork which she then sells as a means for providing for her and her son, Arthur. That Helen does so by leaving her husband is not only controversial for the time but also illustrates how a woman is indeed capable of thriving without a male provider. By selling her art, she gains subjectivity. Helen is empowered to take ownership of it; she determines its value rather than her suitor, and she directly reaps its financial benefits.

Helen also adheres to the conventional gender role of wife and mother motivated by Victorian domestic ideology. In the same way that Olive’s professionalism is rationalized through the dire need of financial security left unstable by her father’s death, Helen’s professionalism is rationalized through the desperate situation of having to take her son and escape from an alcoholic husband. If Helen’s husband Arthur had not turned out to be a reprobate, she would have been perfectly happy staying with him in the conventional role of wife and mother. In fact, Helen tries over and over again to be the perfect wife, the Angel in the House, in hopes of luring her husband home from his drunken excursions in London. She even endures his sexual affairs with other women.

Arthur eventually brings home a mistress to act as governess for his son, little Arthur, and to essentially replace Helen's role as little Arthur's mother. This is a breaking point for Helen. She develops a plan to escape with her son; they head to the home she grew up in before her mother passed away, a home her husband does not know exists. This unfortunate circumstance forces Helen to pursue professionalism.

Before making this courageous move, Helen lives an upper-class life. As discussed earlier, she chooses to sacrifice this life of luxury in order to protect her son. Lowering her station to that of lower-middle-class woman is also a selfless act. Helen's genteel conventionalism, evident in her domestic and maternal habits, is not concealed by her new role as a "single," professional woman. Rather, her professionalism makes it that much more important for her to uphold the highest standards of domesticity and maternity. Helen's dedication to her son's education may demonstrate the importance of women prioritizing the welfare of their children over professionalism. Alternately, as her professionalism is also motivated by her concern for her son's welfare, Helen represents a mother whose care for her child is augmented by her professional work.

Helen chooses the domestic life in the end. This is not surprising considering how clearly she communicates her desire to marry and settle down with Arthur. Upon meeting Gilbert, she is reluctant to get involved because of her hidden marital status, but she cannot help falling in love with him. Helen's preference for the domestic seems disappointing to Rachel Carnell as expressed in her analysis of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. In her article "Feminism and the Public Sphere in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" Carnell explains, "readers may find it unfortunate that [Helen] must subordinate her role in the aesthetic public sphere in order to become helpmeet and

nurturer of a husband and sons whose role in public life has yet to be proven” (17). This statement belittles the domestic and maternal work of women while elevating public and professional roles. As seen earlier in Marion Reid’s commentary on domestic duties, it is important for the work accomplished in both the public and the private spheres to be valued. Carnell’s assumed readers are certainly those who are still conflicted by the dual-roles of women who seek to combine both domestic and professional work or perhaps those women who simply prefer professionalism over domesticity and maternity. Helen did not continue painting once she left Wildfell Hall. Painting was only a means to provide for her, her son, and her maid while she indefinitely remained hidden from her husband. Helen has already given up painting before she and Gilbert marry, an event that does not motivate her decision to stop painting. Thus, it is inaccurate to view the cessation of her painting career as “subordinate” to her domestic and maternal career when the latter has clearly been stated as her preferred role from the beginning.

By creating characters who undermine the proscribed role of feminine accomplishments, Charlotte and Anne Brontë have represented how such acquirements may be used as a means toward economic independence. Similarly by creating women painters who undermine the proscribed role of the private sphere, Charlotte and Anne Brontë have illustrated how non-artists may also pursue a form of domestic professionalism similar to that of Jane and Helen.

In spite of his intrusive questioning, Gilbert does not condemn Helen for becoming a professional artist. Bianca, on the other hand, receives significant opposition for her vocation as a professional actress. Her “brother-in-law” Bryant, Alice’s husband, is particularly negative toward the subject. His opposition toward



“professionals” is shared in relation to all art forms. The term “professionals” is used to describe professional artists, authors, musicians, performers or singers. Mr. Bryant is the first to share the ill opinion of “professionals.” As a man of business, he seems to take personal offense to those who do not work at, manage, or invest in some form of manual labor. He therefore adamantly rejects the idea of Alice entertaining or associating with a woman who is employed by work that is not “industrious.”

Published in 1862, Anthony Trollope’s *North America* provides a critical view of women’s rights and education that may help to contextualize Bryant’s opposition to “professional” women. Trollope provides a comparative analysis of American women’s manners and education in contrast with those of women in England. One part that is particularly relevant to this chapter regards his experience on street cars in New York and his observations of women concerned with their rights. He is aghast at their demeanor and how they do not return the proper courtesies shown to men. This is especially obvious to him in contrast with the chivalrous courtesy he observes in American men:

The conduct of men to women throughout the States is always gracious. They have learned the lesson. But it seems to me that the women have not advanced as far as the men have done. They have acquired a sufficient perception of the privileges which chivalry gives them, but no perception of that return which chivalry demands from them. Women of the class to which I allude are always talking of their rights; but seem to have a most indifferent idea of their duties. They have no scruple at demanding from men everything that a man can be

called on to relinquish in a woman's behalf, but they do so without any of that grace which turns the demand made into a favour conferred. (303-304)

Trollope is particularly observant of the way independent women carry themselves in a manner that seems to disrespectfully ignore any man around them:

If there be two of them they talk loudly together, having a theory that modesty has been put out of court by women's rights. But, though not modest, the woman I describe is ferocious in her propriety. She ignores the whole world around her, and as she sits with raised chin and face flattened by affectation, she pretends to declare aloud that she is positively not aware that any man is even near her.  
(305)

Trollope seems to view the independence of certain women as a personal offense to men. He believes women are given certain privileges from men and should therefore repay that gift with a demeanor that demonstrates her gratitude for it. He adamantly proclaims, "Let every woman learn this,--that chivalry owes her nothing unless she also acknowledge her debt to chivalry. She must acknowledge it and pay it; and then chivalry will not be backward in making good her claims upon it" (307).

In describing the public or "free" school system in New York, Trollope has nothing but positive comments for the education provided to both boys and girls no matter their financial situation: "no fair-minded man or woman can have a doubt. That the lads and girls in these schools are excellently educated . . ." (319). He is quick to differentiate between the intelligence of the girls he observes and the behavior of the women he encountered on the street cars:

I have by no means said that an excellent school will produce all female excellences. . . . One is surprised at their pert vulgarity and hideous airs . . . .

Women of the same class in London are humble enough, and therefore rarely offend us who are squeamish. They show by their gestures that they hardly think themselves good enough to sit by us; they apologise for their presence; they conceive it to be their duty to be lowly in their gestures. (321)

In spite of how disagreeable he finds the “airs” of independent, New York women, he does not favor the “lowly” gestures of London women either. He presents the reader with a question for examining the two types of women: “The question is which is best, the crouching and crawling [of London women] or the impudent unattractive self-composure [of New York women]. . . . That there is something better than either we shall all agree;--but to my thinking the crouching and crawling is the lowest type of all” (321-322).

That Trollope’s unfavorable opinion of independent, New York women seems to outweigh his opinion of humble, London women highlights an important issue connected to this chapter--the balance between progress and conventionality. In spite of any progress that may be made for women’s rights in London, Trollope seems to hint that women must still maintain a conventional demeanor. This is precisely the conclusion that seems to arise from my study’s heroines, whose independence and professionalism does not necessarily alter their conventionally gendered feminine identity. Trollope actually connects one of his observations on a woman’s education to his belief that it makes her a better wife and homemaker: “I feel assured that she cooked her husband's dinner all the better for that knowledge, [gained through

education],--and faced the hardships of the world with a better front than she would have done had she been ignorant on the subject” (320). This argument resembles Marion Reid and Barbara Leigh Smith’s proclamation that work does the same.

As Trollope seems to have experienced with some New York women, Bryant’s disgust with “professional” women may stem from his fear that a woman’s professionalism and independence will have a negative effect on her interactions with men. Bianca’s character, however, demonstrates that this is not the case; rather, her work ethic proves beneficial to her development into a competent partner for Lord Melton.

Lady Vernon, Lord Melton’s sister, also shares a distaste for “professionals.” Her reasoning seems to be based on issues of modesty for women who are paid to put their bodies or the work of their minds on display. Her concern echoes Lewis’s sentiment: “Refinement would teach to shun the vulgar applause which almost insults its object, - dignity would shrink from displaying before heartless crowds those emotions of the soul without which all art is vulgar . . .” (23). Similar to Lady Vernon and Lewis, Conrad also comes to loathe the “vulgar” and false appearance of everything having to do with the theater, from the props and scenery to the costume and performance. He bases his strong opposition on the ideal woman he has fabricated in his mind, a woman who cannot think independently let alone live independently without the guidance of a male figure, particularly a father or husband. In the end, these concerns regarding the integrity of professionals is juxtaposed with the negative results of suppressed talent. Perhaps even more significantly, Bianca proves she is different from other actors through her self-sacrifice.

Forced to provide for herself and her sick and dying mother, the friendless Bianca begins her position as a circus pantomime. Thus, Bianca's acting career does not begin as an ambitious attempt to gain fame. Rather, she starts in a modest role as a self-sacrificing way to take care of her mother. Her natural acting gifts pour forth; Bianca finds herself excelling in this profession and attracting the man she has longed for-- Conrad Percy. When they finally become engaged, Bianca continues to better herself so that she may gain acceptance from Conrad's father; Bianca's work is ultimately for her fiancé, Conrad. Her mentor warns her this will not be enough to sustain her drive; she must be motivated to remain pure and improve the status of her profession as a result of her inner gifts and higher purpose, her godly calling. He urges her, "let no difficulties make you distrust your aspirations,-- they are the voice of God, you must have faith in them" (152). Similar to the powerful "voice of God" that her mentor explains is the source of her passion, Bianca herself describes her acting skills as powerfully providential. She is guided by a strong passion for acting out what she feels but cannot describe in words. She is also motivated by her passion to purify acting as an art form. Here we see how one's natural gifts must be prioritized; when motivated by something other than the divine, the person's talents become thwarted.

Upon his return to town, Bianca's theater friend provides a reference for her to join a theater group in Bath, where she again excels. Her mentor continues to guide her in developing her performance skills until she is ready to take a lead role in London. Coincidentally, Conrad returns to England the week before Bianca's opening night in London, for his father has passed away. Conrad and Bianca continue their engagement but with less fervency from Conrad, whose love for Bianca waned while he was abroad.

Ironically, Conrad becomes repulsed by Bianca's profession which is what once attracted him to her. Bianca eventually learns that Conrad does not respect her "professional" position as an actress, so she breaks off their engagement. Heartbroken and disappointed, Bianca falls ill. Her illness demonstrates her self-sacrifice and her commitment to her betrothed. Her ambition has not been for herself but for Conrad. Bianca may seem too "professional" for conservative opinions, but her hard work helps her make acting a pure art form through her self-sacrifice and dedication.

Those who oppose "professionals" are gradually enlightened to the potential hazards of what may come of women who try to suppress the inherent artistic gifts bursting from their heart and soul. On several occasions, Bianca describes the passion she exudes in her performances. Her description of the power she finds in acting illustrates the inherent quality of her acting skills. Her pupil who shares a similar sentiment is so overwhelmed by her desire to sing that she tries to run away to Italy just to hear beautiful music. Lady Vernon initially ignores Bianca's warning that this young girl's talents should be cultivated properly before their stagnancy results in some misfortune. Once she sees the extremity her pupil is heading for, Lady Vernon admits her ignorance of the powerful influence a woman's innate gifts may have on her. This power can lead to a woman's success if her talents are cultivated or may lead to her demise if those talents are suppressed.

Alice, Bianca's half sister, finds herself vulnerable to the latter outcome. The beginning of the novel shows Alice's great appreciation for art, but her mother instructs her in only pursuing art for domestically useful purposes. Alice's mother is very critical; she discourages Alice from pursuing the occupation that flows naturally from her artistic

interests. Alice is trained in domestic duties that leave her bored. As a result, Alice suffers from ennui once she is married and unable to put her natural gifts into practice. Alice herself describes her interest in art and a sense of being imprisoned by ennui. It is too late, however, for that to be cultivated, too late for such interests to save her from the prison of boredom from which Conrad rescues her. Her boredom, in conjunction with her husband's excessive work habits, cause Alice to constantly fret over Bryant's love for her. Eventually, Conrad, Bianca's ex-paramour, replaces Bryant through the constant attention he is able to give Alice, a sign of affection Bryant never has the time to show to Alice.

The objectification of Alice serves to highlight Bianca's subjectification. Alice is just a trophy wife to Bryant, and Conrad similarly objectifies her as his ideal, one with the "delicate timidity" of "a half opened rose" (275). Bianca is neither delicate nor timid but "exigeante" (280). Her work requires her to assert herself and take ownership of her work and her identity.

Bianca has a strong connection to her professional role; acting is her passion and her mode for gaining subjectivity. Giving up the stage as a result of her marriage may not have truly been her first choice. That she takes on the role as mentor and headmistress of a school that trains young women in order that they may have alternative sources for financial security may be her way of continuing her "career" but in a less public manner.

Bianca is much less conventional than Olive and Helen. Bianca is introduced as a companion to her ill and heartbroken mother. Other than caring for this woman, Bianca does not demonstrate a conventional attitude toward domesticity or maternity.

The few moments that do connect her to these conventional habits are in connection with her family, friends or her profession.

Bianca fully embodies the role of a maternal figure when she plays a mother in one of her stage performances. This experience evokes praise from Lord Melton who is enamored by Bianca's acting. She and he both share their awe of mothers, a role they both agree is of the highest calling, the same role George H. Lewes refers to as a woman's "holy office" quoted above. That Bianca plays the role of a mother "on the job" illustrates the blurring qualities of Bianca's ability to take on the role of a mother and demonstrate maternal qualities in spite of her profession.

In addition to taking care of her own mother another situation that reveals her maternal capabilities is Bianca's care for a downtrodden and depressed Conrad. He goes to visit the Bryants and is struck by the contrast between Bianca and Alice. The former he finds too coarse and independent because she asserts her subjectivity, while the latter he finds pure and graceful--the ideal woman he has come to desire and objectify. Conrad spends more and more time with Alice and confesses his love to her. Alice tells Conrad to leave, but once he is gone Alice begins to acknowledge the strong feelings she feels for Conrad. Her husband, Bryant, is too caught up in work to give any notice to Alice's declining mental, emotional and physical state. Conrad returns to Alice and they agree to elope together. Bryant catches Alice unaware, however, and she faints from convulsions caused by the shock and shame she feels at the sight of Bryant. When he reads a letter stating her plans to leave him, Bryant tells Alice he forgives her wayward affection. Alice dies at peace with Bryant who is guilt stricken for objectifying



Alice by being more focused on his business than on her, a guilt he tries to console by traveling abroad.

Upon returning to London, Conrad is depressed. Bianca learns about what has happened with Alice and calls for him. She now cares for him maternally and nurses him back to health. Soon thereafter, Conrad joins a religious order in an attempt to atone for having seduced Alice and for being the source of her illness and eventual death.

Unfortunately, upon hearing of Bianca nursing Conrad back to health, Lord Melton is not encouraged by this maternal display but envious of her seeming affection toward another man. Bianca's maternal example in this instance leads her farther from marriage rather than closer to it. Simultaneously, however, Bianca's maternal care for Conrad also contradicts his notions of the feminine ideal that he only saw in Alice.

Bianca proves that she is indeed capable of the feminine qualities that Conrad assumed were negated by her professionalism and subjectivity. Instead, Bianca's profession may have actually augmented those maternal qualities.

Bianca's maternal abilities are once again revealed as a result of her professional position. Bianca mentors a young girl aspiring to become a singer. By taking responsibility for this student, Bianca guides her in making the best choices for herself. Bianca also assists in the negotiation of this student's marriage by acting as a character reference of the potential fiancé. In this way, Bianca acts as a mother to her student by providing guidance toward the feminine ideal. Bianca's successful guidance proves her own embodiment of this ideal.

Bianca is evidently capable of demonstrating maternal qualities when necessary, not only for her profession as an actress but also for her friends. Her ability to care for

others in this way, to “perform” the role of mother both on and off the stage, also demonstrates her ability to conform to the ideal prescribed by domestic ideology when it comes time to marry Lord Melton. Thus, Bianca’s professional acting career negates neither her marriageability nor her embodiment of the feminine ideal, albeit a revised ideal.

Olive is perhaps the most conventional of all four heroines and thus concludes this chapter. Olive’s professionalism is also motivated by the self-sacrifice she exercises as she takes care of her mother. Upon her father’s death, Angus Rothersey’s debts cause Olive and her mother to auction all of his belongings and to move to a smaller abode in London, where they rent an apartment in the house of Meliora and her brother Michael Vanbrugh, an artist “genius.” Harold Gwynne eventually contacts Olive and her mother for payment of a debt Angus owed him. She and Sybilla are surprised by the information but are determined to clear Angus’s name and his debt. In order to do so without taking away from her mother’s comfort, Olive must find work. Her natural inclination toward art inspires her to pursue this mode for income. Olive’s sole motivation for becoming an artist is to clear her father’s name and his debt to Harold Gwynne. This noble cause helps to rationalize her professionalism.

Meliora, who has formed a great affection for Olive arranges for Michael to see Olive’s sketches. He initially rejects the idea of taking on Olive as a pupil because of her gender. The natural gift evident in her sketches, however, causes him to reconsider. Olive’s artistic talents are described from an early age, particularly her artistic eye and ability to recognize the aesthetic around her. These innate qualities are what enable her to successfully create marketable paintings and also help to highlight the possibility of

her skills being god-given. Olive paints with Michael Vanbrugh in the studio in his home. Michael basically lives in his studio where Meliora brings his food. That Olive produces this artwork at her home also blurs the lines between her professional and domestic roles.

In accordance with domestic ideology, Olive seeks to maintain her conventional role within the domestic sphere. Her domestic and maternal qualities overshadow her professional endeavors, rendering her a fitting example of the feminine ideal. Craik's representation of the single, professional woman through Olive seems to communicate a rationalization for her professionalism solely based on financial need. Other than her time spent standing in as provider for her deceased father, Olive remains focused on her domestic and maternal duties. Olive is domestic in her charge of the household in which she and her mother reside, and she is maternal in her care for her mother as a child.

Through an almost over-emphasis on Olive's femininity, Craik negates the idea that Olive's work could ever make her unfeminine. In fact, the emphasis on Olive's ideal feminine qualities helps to overshadow not only her professionalism but her "deformity" as well. As Olive grows older, the hump on her back becomes hidden by her long hair. Olive's womanhood overpowers that which made her unmarriageable in a middle-class, Victorian mindset, for her femininity helps to conceal both her professionalism and her bodily disfiguration.

Olive pursues professional painting as a means of complementing her care for her mother. She finds work to pay off a debt accrued by her deceased father rather than ask her mother to sacrifice any small luxuries. Craik clearly delineates between the

appropriate execution of Olive's artistic skills as an economic means for her mother's comfortable living and the artistic pursuits of a genius artist working for art's sake alone. Being a professional artist is only an appropriate occupation for Olive because its sole purpose is to pay the debt of her father. Its suitability is also rationalized as a means to protect her mother from having to give up any amenities, particularly those that maintain her health and happiness. That Olive's work is confined by her domestic duties seems to confirm an emphasis on conventional gender roles that restrict women from being too ambitious with their professional work.

Olive's move to Farnwood Dell with her mother extends this emphasis on conventional gender roles as Olive demonstrates a preference for the domestic over the artistic. Olive is given the choice to accompany Michael and Meliora to Rome, to continue her artistic education as Michael's pupil, to continue as his studio assistant, and to be passed the torch of artistic genius. According to domestic ideology, however, the only way Olive can go to Rome is as Michael's wife. She declines his offer so that she may remain in charge of her mother's care.

Olive's preference for a domestic and maternal role over professional opportunities once again seems to highlight an overall message that supports the restriction of women within conventional terms. Rather than move to Rome in pursuit of a life full of artistic ambitions, Olive moves to Farnwood Dell. Her time there comes to represent her preference for the domestic and maternal, where she cultivates the angel within. Olive comes to embody the Angel in the House in all her glory as Olive cares for everyone she encounters and even becomes an evangelist to the parson. She also demonstrates maternal qualities in relation to Ailie, Sara Derwent and Harold Gwynne's

estranged daughter. Olive begins to foster Ailie, who has lost her mother. Olive acts as a mother figure to Ailie and takes responsibility for this girl's spiritual development. Olive also ministers to the poor and comforts the mourning, even more effectively than Harold, her clergyman. For Harold, Olive becomes his only confidant, the person in whom he confides his lack of religious beliefs. From that point on, he and Olive develop a closeness that leads him back to faith in God and to faith in women. Harold eventually falls in love with Olive.

Olive uses her domestic and maternal skills to connect with the people around Fernwood Dell. As a result, these feminine qualities overshadow the professional painting that she continues while socializing with close friends and visitors. While Olive and her mother rented from Meliora and Michael, her artwork takes up a significant portion of the novel. Once Olive and her mother move to Fernwood Dell, however, her painting is rarely mentioned. Olive becomes too encompassed by her philanthropic work.

Fernwood Dell ultimately symbolizes Olive's progression from single, professional to feminine ideal, for it is here that she moves further away from painting and becomes more engrossed in her domestic and maternal duties. Olive also grows older and her bodily disfiguration is increasingly hidden. These changes in Olive's life lead her closer toward marriageability. This is proven when she is proposed to by Sara's younger brother, Lyle. Olive refuses this proposal, however, for she knows he is not the best match for her. In spite of her professionalism and "deformity," Olive's marriageability is confirmed upon her marriage to Harold discussed further in chapter five. This event also confirms that Olive's domestic and maternal qualities successfully

cancel out any unfeminine element formerly associated with Olive as a result of her physical body or her body of work.

As we have seen here, Helen, Bianca and Olive work as a means for their family sustenance, for a child or mother. It is no less admirable for Jane to work as a means of providing for herself. Showalter explains, "Work, in the sense of self-development, was in direct conflict with the subordination and repression inherent in the feminine ideal" (22). Rather than conflict with this ideal these heroines redefine it. They are not subordinate nor repressive but are conventionally feminine in other ways. By demonstrating the self-sacrifice that inspires a woman's professionalism, these characters complicate and question "unwomanly" labels. Amidst her ambitions, even Bianca emphasizes the self-sacrificing nature of her work.

Self-sacrificing or not each heroine's work enables her to gain subjectivity in various ways. Jane initially earns a living as a governess, then as a teacher. She does not seem to consider herself self-sacrificing, nor is she very domestic or maternal. Jane is the antithesis of the domestic ideal. She is an orphan and governess and does not expect to marry or mother. She is trained in feminine accomplishments. Then she seeks work in training others. She gains employment training Adele. This sequence of events seems to highlight the lack of specifically domestic or maternal training Jane receives at Lowood and the lack of training in those areas that she passes onto Adele. Even when Blanche Ingram comes to Thornfield, she is not particularly domestic or maternal, but she is a good singer. That a woman's feminine training does not even address the roles she is expected to fulfill seems to underscore the irrational stigmatization of professionalism since such an experience would place a woman in situations where

they are exercising authority and taking ownership of tasks similar to those of a wife and mother.

I am unsure as to whether Helen explicitly views her artwork and the selling of her paintings as godly, as fulfilling a calling or as self-sacrifice. Even if this is not the case, it is possible that contemporary readers might have viewed her situation in that light, particularly since she would not be selling her paintings if she did not have to provide for herself and her son, and she would not have to provide for them if she was not forced to flee her alcoholic husband and the luxuries of upper-class living.

As a woman who already embodies the utmost qualities of the domestic ideal, Helen is established as a quintessentially domestic and maternal figure. Her professionalism does not necessarily threaten to hinder these qualities from developing, since she has already acquired them. Rather, the altered use of her artistic talents from accomplishments to income symbolizes the alteration in her socioeconomic standing from upper class to lower middle class. She thus drops from a position of superior standing emulated by the middle class to a position seemingly ignored and degraded by it.

Bianca's occupation as an actress does seem to be placed under the guise of a godly calling. Rather than rationalize her professionalism, however, this seems to be more of a technique to rationalize her acting. By placing Bianca's career as an actress within the context of her special gift as a genius, Bianca's acting is less demeaning. This is also true for Bianca's motivation to pursue acting. Under the guise of having to provide for her ill mother, Bianca's career once again surpasses the Victorian cultural critique that usually places actresses on par with prostitutes.

For Bianca, acting does indeed augment her maternal and domestic qualities because it gives her an opportunity to test out such roles before marriage or motherhood. Her concentrated attendance to Conrad during his depression over Alice's death is proof of how Bianca does indeed possess these qualities.

As one of the more conservative characters, Olive's artistic gifts and desire to professionalize them are placed within the context of self-sacrifice and a godly calling. She is hesitant to pursue art for pecuniary means but is encouraged by Meliora who sees her natural talent as a gift. In spite of his transparent sexism and prejudice against Olive as a woman painter, Michael Vanbraugh cannot deny her artistic skill. Even with this encouragement, Olive does not seek to benefit from her work other than to pay her father's debt and to provide for her mother.

In spite of their professions, these heroines do indeed reveal some aspects of conventional femininity. Olive and Helen seem to accomplish this much more easily than Bianca and Jane, who nonetheless represent a revision of this feminine ideal. That they eventually marry proves that their professionalism does not negate their femininity. Instead, their professionalism provides them with an opportunity to redefine the femininity upheld by domestic ideology as limited to the private sphere. Olive and Helen illustrate ways in which their work does not make them unwomanly by demonstrating maternal and domestic qualities. Bianca and Jane who do not demonstrate maternity or domesticity in conventional ways highlight their revision of the feminine ideal that much more. In doing so, they prove that they are marriageable even if they do not fit the conventional feminine ideal. Martineau's sociological "arguments picture some women crossing from one sphere to the other, but they do not positively envision any blurring of



the boundary that would threaten the hierarchical relationship between the two” (Hobart 236). Jane, Helen, Bianca, and Olive, however, do appear to threaten this hierarchical relationship as a result of their skills in both the professional and domestic spheres, for they illustrate that the professional and domestic are not antithetical.

In a manner similar to creating art, women gain some form of control through their work. They take ownership for their own financial stability. Each heroine seems very determined to “make a living,” not for ambitious reasons but simply out of sense of contribution to her own well being and that of her loved ones. Perhaps it is this reason that professionalism is so easily replaced by domesticity and maternity, for they are all contributions to a mode of living. The following chapter shows how each heroine’s subjectivity is also established through her singleness, another difference she maintains in spite of the pressure to marry.

## CHAPTER 4

## ALL ALONE?: VALUING SINGLENES IN A COMMUNITY OF WOMEN

The previous chapter discusses the ways in which a woman's professionalism created space for subjectivity and femininity. Singleness also empowers a woman's subjectivity as she stands firm against marriage proposals simply because they offer financial stability. Singleness also provides time for reflection on the mistakes of those who denigrate singleness and marry too hastily. Lastly, these extended periods of singleness represent another way these heroines redefine the feminine ideal by not adhering to the marital standards or dominant family structure prescribed by domestic ideology.

In order for Victorian domestic ideology to motivate the dominant family structure in mid-century England, the roles of wife and mother had to hold a lot of power; married women had to be superior to unmarried women, and mothers had to be elevated above non-mothers. In *Woman's Mission* (1839), Sarah Lewis establishes the importance of a woman's impact on society through her role as mother. Lewis warns, "there is a great chance that, except they receive religious and moral principles from their mother, [a child's] whole life may pass without any attempt to impress them with such [principles]" (28-29). By implication, maternal influence affects all of society in positive ways if upheld and in significantly detrimental ways if devalued. In spite of this warning, mentors and peers take a more crucial role in each heroine's personal and feminine development than her own biological mother. Indeed, mentors are more influential than biological mothers, and single or stigmatized women are more prominent than their married or marriageable counterparts. Within each novel, women who exercise

maternal influence do so not because they are biological mothers but because they hold places of power in relation to the women they inevitably mentor and guide. The single and stigmatized women or those who would normally hold an inferior position to their married or more marriageable peers are also elevated to positions of power. By elevating single women, these novels highlight the power of women who do not need the assistance of men. Similarly, women who take on mentoring roles demonstrate the ability to exercise a certain kind of influence that differs from the maternal influence elevated by Lewis.

Each protagonist is influenced by a woman, usually single or widowed, who acts as a mentor. Each heroine is also presented with opportunities to support her peers. The elevation of mentoring roles questions the biological necessity for women to become mothers, particularly when so many biological mothers become absent. The absence of biological mothers relates to each heroine's period of singleness as the need for husbands as financial providers and partners in biological reproduction is undermined.

Additionally, some women who marry prematurely stand out as warnings against such hasty unions. Some of the biological mothers in these novels are ineffectual in their maternal roles because they have married and become mothers before developing the maturity necessary to endure those roles. Their ill-preparedness for marriage in some cases has negative effects on their eventual child who is then mentored by another woman. These women represent not only the false perception that biological mothers are automatically responsible and capable mothers, but they also represent the negative impacts of impetuous marriages. As a result, the heroine's period of singleness

demonstrates the benefits of financial autonomy as the result of one's own work, of "mothering" without childbirth, and of evading marriage until personal growth has fully prepared both partners for marriage.

One work that highlights the issues pertaining to single women is Martha Vicinus's *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (1985). This is a helpful study on the options that became available for single women who did not want to or could not marry during the second half of the nineteenth century. Vicinus's work presents women who most likely viewed marriage negatively and preferred singlehood because they felt they were better off. The gradually increasing number of "redundant" women began to find a purpose for themselves outside the separate spheres dichotomy that limited women's work to the domestic sphere and attempted to reserve "public" work for men. Vicinus's study focuses on single women who rejected or subverted the separate spheres ideology in order to make a place for themselves:

Since genteel single women could be neither mothers nor prostitutes, they were forced to redefine themselves in terms beyond those of the nuclear family. If the prostitute symbolized the extremes of unbridled passion and evil in woman, the spinster had thrust upon her absolute purity and goodness. She was supposed to remain virginal and utterly self-sacrificing for all who needed her. (5)

The ideals of "purity and goodness" and of being "virginal and utterly self-sacrificing" are the same ideals that motivate the heroines of my study. Rather than see these traits as burdensome, these characters are to an extent proud to prove that they maintain these qualities. Such proof seems to act as evidence that these women are indeed feminine

and that they do still belong to a feminine class of women. Vicinus argues, “Women did not reject the Victorian myths but reinterpreted them” (5). In a similar fashion, the characters of these novels reinterpret the limits of the feminine ideal as solely a representation of marriageable or married woman. They prove that potential spinsters may exemplify the feminine ideal as well.

In addition to being elevated above married women, I examine how single women exercise influence over the women around them. The first mentor I examine is Miss Temple who remains single during her tenure as Jane’s mentor and surrogate mother of sorts but who later marries. I then examine the significant authority Helen gains posing as a widow in comparison with her role as a wife and the lack of maternal influence she receives from the woman who is her guardian, surrogate mother, and aunt. Bianca’s mentor, Lady Vernon is also a widow with considerable authority. Similarly, the predominant mentors in Olive’s life are her nursemaid, Elspie, her Aunt Flora, who has never married, and Mrs. Gwynne, who is a widow.

After I examine the women who mentor each heroine, I also highlight the influence that each woman experiences with some of her peers demonstrating how far reaching is the influence of single women amongst each other. For Jane, this first occurs with Helen Burns, who although close in age to Jane exhibits wisdom beyond her years as she tries to encourage Jane towards forgiveness and a milder temperament. Jane’s cousin Diana also has a mentoring influence over Jane. Helen once again lacks leading women in her life, but she serves as a mentor to Miss Hargrave, her friend Mhillicent’s younger sister. Bianca similarly mentors a young girl she is tutoring. Olive develops a close friendship with Sara Derwent who Olive tries to

influence, but who is too reckless with her emotions to heed Olive's concerns. Olive also tries to mentor her half sister, Cristal, but Cristal is too stubborn and too difficult to advise for Olive's guidance to be effective. In varying degrees these heroines mentor and are mentored by other single women. The connections created through these relationships help each heroine value her period of singleness as she waits for her moral equal.

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane's mother has passed away; her aunt, Mrs. Reed, is the closest family relation who can fill this role. She rejects Jane, however, and only provides a negative experience for her. As a result, Jane is motivated to speak out and advocate for herself even amidst being sent away to the charity boarding school, Lowood. At Lowood Jane grows close to Miss Temple, the principal who mentors Jane and gives her a clean slate by believing she is not a liar. Jane models herself in accordance with Miss Temple's guidance: "to her instruction I owed the best part of my acquirements; her friendship and society had been my continual solace" (82). Miss Temple's mentorship leads Jane to believe she is more subdued:

I had imbibed from her something of her nature and much of her habits: more harmonious thoughts: what seemed better regulated feelings had become the inmates of my mind. I had given in allegiance to duty and order; I was quiet; I believed I was content: to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I appeared a disciplined and subdued character. (82)

Miss Temple's influence is therefore more powerful than the "maternal" influence Mrs. Reed ever attempted to have over Jane.

Jane attaches herself to Miss Temple until the latter is married and moves away. Her description of Miss Temple's marriage reveals a sense of regret for her mentor; Miss Temple has been "married, removed with her husband (a clergyman, an excellent man, almost worthy of such a wife) to a distant county, and consequently was lost to me" (82). This is a drastic change for Jane, for the woman who has been her "mother, governess, and, latterly, companion" is now "lost" to her as a result of her marriage. Jane expresses some doubt that Miss Temple's husband is really worthy of her, even though he is "an excellent man." Jane may be biased toward her close companion. Miss Temple seems to be a special woman, one who has maintained her position as superintendent for several years even amongst many changes and challenges. All of her skills and talents in her position as an administrator are then confined by her role as wife and perhaps eventually as mother. Upon Miss Temple's marriage and vacation of Lowood, Jane becomes restless for freedom. Miss Temple mentored Jane and provided the feminine example Jane needed while at Lowood. Now that Miss Temple is married and gone, however, Jane longs for "liberty" (83).

Jane's emphasis on "liberty" and her decision to leave Lowood directly following her mentor's marriage seems to highlight how strongly her desire for independence conflicts with Miss Temple's decision to limit her independence through marriage. The loss of this companion sparks Jane's desire for independence perhaps directly in contrast with Miss Temple's choice to marry. By example, Miss Temple guides her pupil toward marriage, but Jane resists this lesson. As a result, Brontë represents a woman's options outside of marriage as Jane flees the lesson of marriage and runs toward "making a living." Jane does not realize it at the time, but she is actually running towards

a wedding with Rochester. However, she inevitably ends up running away from that “marriage” as well.

Helen is not as fortunate as Jane. In spite of also having lost her mother and being left under her aunt’s guardianship, Helen never finds a woman who is able to mentor her in a way that educates and empowers her. Her aunt who acts as guardian and surrogate mother does not have the influential power to deter Helen from a poor marriage to Arthur Huntingdon. Helen’s aunt knows of his reputation for debauchery and drunkenness. The only other prospects she provides, however, are men of at least twenty years older than Helen. Helen is set on marrying for love, and Arthur’s flirtatious attention has captivated her. Helen’s aunt is unable to have a strong enough influence over Helen to dissuade her from marrying Arthur, even in spite of the clear signs that he is a reprobate. Once again, the “maternal influence” is undermined and proves fruitless as Helen hastily marries Arthur.

Helen educates herself through her own personal evolution but not until she first suffers through a controlling marriage to Arthur. As a married woman, Helen has no power under her husband’s authority. Arthur leaves her behind in the country, even though she wants to accompany him to London. He then brings home friends who she does not want to entertain. When Arthur brings home a mistress to take over the education of their son, Helen refuses to have this one area of authority taken away from her. Helen and her son escape with her handmaid, Rachel, and they begin a new life far from her husband.

Posing as a widow, Helen maintains more authority as a single woman than she ever did as a wife. She is free to travel as she pleases, which is usually only around the



countryside she is painting. She is also free to visit and receive visitors as she chooses, even though she prefers this to be limited as well. Helen's personal freedom extends so far that she even offends the vicar when she refuses alcohol and rebukes him for not doing the same. This instance and her reclusion mystify the other villagers who respond by ostracizing her, but this does not seem to bother Helen. She is too content with her newly discovered independence and sense of empowerment to trifle with the inconsiderateness of her neighbors. By contrasting the experience of Helen as Mrs. Huntingdon with that of Helen as Mrs. Graham, Anne Brontë highlights how much happier Helen is as the latter. Ultimately, it is her experience without a husband that empowers Helen to create the best life for her and her son.

In Jewsbury's *The Half Sisters*, Bianca's mother is alive, unlike Jane's and Helen's, but she is sick and immobilized from the beginning of the story. Her mother is an Italian woman who is characterized as being overly passionate and too zealous with her love to keep her English lover. Her attempt to find this man leaves her weak and dying, forcing Bianca to find a means to support them. Later Bianca meets Lord Melton's sister, Lady Vernon, who nurses Bianca back to health after her break up with her fiancé, Conrad Percy. In spite of all the friends she makes and whose help she receives, Bianca's biggest success comes through the hands of Lady Vernon. Lady Vernon already has a general understanding of a middle-class woman's need to work, but she is initially reluctant to associate with Bianca because of her role as an actress. While in Lady Vernon's care, Bianca learns about the school Lady Vernon has started for middle- and upper-class girls who have no skills to fall back on if their families face financial difficulties. Upon getting to know Bianca, Lady Vernon's prejudice against

performers wanes, and she eventually comes to be a significantly positive influence in Bianca's life.

The varying degrees of Bianca's closest female connections seem to reveal a distinct commentary on class and social status. Bianca's mother is her true blood relation, but her mental, emotional, and physical distress regarding her former lover, Bianca's father, prevent her from helping Bianca find support. Additionally, Bianca's mother does not have the social status that provides her with any influence or power. Lady Vernon, on the other hand, is the widowed sister of Lord Melton, who has no true connection to Bianca apart from her brother's, and even his connection with Bianca is one Lady Vernon initially opposes. Lady Vernon's widowed and upper-class position, however, give her the freedom to get to know and truly help Bianca. Bianca and Lady Vernon grow so close that Bianca eventually mentors one of Lady Vernon's students and then takes over the school Lady Vernon has started. Lady Vernon derives her authority from her social standing, but she is also empowered by the independence and authority she has gained in the absence of her deceased husband. The comparison between the influential powers of Bianca's biological mother and her single mentor once again highlights how the maternal influence is undermined by a single woman acting as a mentor.

In Dinah Craik's novel *Olive*, the first female to mentor Olive is Elspie, her family nurse. Elspie reaches out to Olive and becomes an influential guide when Olive's biological mother neglects her. Elspie's care for Olive is perhaps the best outcome for her, since Sybilla is immature and fickle with her affection. She has not developed into the feminine ideal considered appropriate for a housewife, possibly because of her

young age. Elspie, on the other hand, although not the lady of the house, seems capable of training Olive in feminine qualities by teaching her to love her parents in spite of their lack of open affection toward her. Through the character of Elspie, Craik demonstrates how women who exist outside the bounds of middle-class cultural ideology may still provide the best influence on a young girl, for it is Elspie's influence that helps Olive develop an unconditional and self-sacrificing love for those around her--one of the first signs that she is developing feminine qualities emphasized by domestic ideology.

When Elspie passes away, however, Sybilla becomes the nurses's necessary replacement; her maternal instincts awakened, she embraces her daughter: "Darling, do not cry for your poor nurse, will not mamma do instead?' . . . looking up, Olive saw, as though she had never seen it before, the face which, now shining with maternal love, seemed beautiful as an angel's. It became to her like an angel's evermore" (60). Sybilla is finally able to show motherly affection for Olive. Even though this outpouring causes her to appear like an angel, she is still not the Angel in the House, nor does she ever appear to develop into one.

Rather than be limited by the Angel in the House, Olive's Aunt Flora acts as a single figurehead to the entire Rothesay family in Scotland. When one branch of the family loses their mother, she steps in to comfort and provide for them. For Olive, Aunt Flora exemplifies a single woman who enjoys the company of a large family when it is needed. Aunt Flora also exercises freedom and mobility with the help of the financial autonomy she inherited. Nonetheless, Olive sees in Aunt Flora a potential lifestyle for herself, one that can help her escape the pain of unrequited love, for Aunt Flora has

endured the same pain and has seemingly escaped it as well. Aunt Flora's heartache and need for solitude on the day she leaves Olive to spend time alone is evidence of what Victorian domestic ideology considered womanly qualities. That Aunt Flora desired to marry a man means she is not completely void of the heterosexual feelings that help make a woman marriageable according to the domestic ideology. Perhaps, "a woman's instinct for creating a home and her rich gift of intimacy equip her for the roles of daughter, wife, and mother; more significantly, these blessed additions to her heroic capacities equip her to become none of the above, but to love as well as thrive alone" (Auerbach 145). This is certainly true for Aunt Flora who seems to have at least desired to take on the role of wife, but whose caring nature prepared her to live alone in support of those around her. Craik's Aunt Flora has come to represent a woman who mothers without having her own children and who is able to thrive without the man who she desired to marry.

Time with Aunt Flora rejuvenates Olive and provides another model of singleness for her. Aunt Flora is everyone's "aunt" because she cares for all those around her. Olive meets a group of women, distant cousins, who live closely connected with one another and with Aunt Flora. They welcome Olive into their sisterhood of sorts, and she begins to feel a part of their community. Even though Aunt Flora is a part of this community, she also appears above it, presiding over those around her. The unfortunate passing of her secret love, the death date of whom she observes in solitude, has determined her fate as a spinster. In spite of never marrying, Aunt Flora holds an elevated position as a single woman admired, respected and revered by her community.

Mrs. Gwynne is another female figure, one who is established as a feminine ideal. Not only did she marry and have a son, thus fulfilling her “holy office,” but she also exemplifies this ideal in her moral character. Mrs. Gwynne respects and supports her son unquestioningly. She is generous and hospitable with Olive’s father, Angus. She welcomes Olive and her mother to the area and develops a close friendship with them.

In addition to these feminine qualities, Mrs. Gwynne presents herself to Olive as an example of a single woman with influence and authority. She is the woman who confronts Cristal after she has attempted to kill Olive. The power of her influence gives her the strength to calm and confine Cristal in her passionate state. She then finds Olive unconscious and nurses her back to health. As Harold’s mother, Mrs. Gwynne also reserves the right to act as gatekeeper to her son; she is perhaps especially protective over him as a result of the pain caused by his first marriage. When Harold is ill and his death appears imminent, Mrs. Gwynne prohibits Olive from seeing him. She fears the power of Olive’s presence could be detrimental to Harold.

It is perhaps during a time of Olive’s illness and sleepy murmurs that Mrs. Gwynne’s suspicions of Olive’s affections for Harold are confirmed. As one of the first people to realize Olive and Harold’s love for one another, Mrs. Gwynne demonstrates her understanding of the bonds that link people together in a way that prepares a woman for the fulfillment of her womanly duties--marriage and reproduction. In spite of having fulfilled these duties herself, Mrs. Gwynne maintains her influence and authority even without her husband.

The impact of each heroine’s mentor varies, but she is nonetheless empowered by this connection as she endures this period of singleness. Jane Eyre, for example, is

mentored by Miss Temple from whom Jane eventually veers away as she gains her own sense of subjectivity from the freedom she pursues. Helen does not have a mentor that is able to hold a lasting impression but she too gains subjectivity through the freedom she gains as a separated wife and single mother. Bianca's own mother is incapable of providing a supportive role, but she draws strength from her mentor, Lady Vernon. Olive is perhaps surrounded by the most mentors who support her in different ways; Aunt Flora is the most powerful among these role models as a single woman with a significant sphere of influence. By acting as mentors, these single women demonstrate singleness as a viable option and thus another aspect of the domestic ideal that is open to redefinition.

In a similarly mentoring way, each heroine also experiences support from or provides support to her peers. When Jane is moved to Lowood, she becomes close with Helen Burns. Helen exemplifies religious superiority and tries to teach Jane to let go of her anger and to be more forgiving. Friendship with Helen is the first influential relationship for Jane that inspires her to change into someone capable of being subdued, even if she is still not the typical feminine ideal. Helen seeks to understand Jane even as she encourages her to conform to domestic ideology's model of religious and moral superiority.

In addition to Helen Burns, who acts as a moral compass for Jane, Diana and Mary are two other women by whom Jane is influenced. Diana and Mary display feminine ideals, but their circumstances have required they seek work as governesses. Their relationship with Jane excludes their brother St. John and keeps him at a distance. Diana in particular acts more like a mother than a cousin in the way she cares

for Jane and looks after her. In addition to appreciating her care, Jane also values and respects Diana's vivacity and the impressive amount of knowledge she shares with

Mary:

In her animal spirits there was an affluence of life and certainty of flow, such as excited my wonder, while it baffled my comprehension. I could talk a while when the evening commenced, but the first gush of vivacity and fluency gone, I was fain to sit on a stool at Diana's feet, to rest my head on her knee, and listen alternately to her and Mary, while they sounded thoroughly the topic on which I had but touched. (359)

These moments of intimate connection between Jane and her cousins are frequent and serve to strengthen their bond. During one of these intimate moments, Jane shares her artistic gifts with her cousins as she later shares her inheritance. Both enable Mary and Diana to be in control, the same control Jane models when she refuses to be bullied into marriage by St. John. It is perhaps her connection with her female cousins that encourages Jane to subjectify herself, for they empower her to resist the fate prescribed by domestic ideology--marriage to St. John--particularly by following Diana's example in standing up to St. John.

Helen is one heroine whose experience is starkly different from that of the other heroines, for she is not affectively mentored nor is she able to significantly mentor others. Rather, Helen's singleness serves the purpose of rejuvenating her sense of subjectivity after an abusive marriage. It also serves as a time in which she develops an understanding of her moral equal, who eventually proves to be Gilbert Markham.

Once again, Helen does not have the same resources of female empowerment as Jane. Milicent Hargrave is a friend to Helen, but her quiet nature is no competition for Arthur's assertive affection toward Helen. Milicent is thus unable to warn Helen of any misgivings she may have regarding Arthur's poor character. Her support for Helen is more subtle by admiring Helen's drawings after Arthur has abandoned her to flirt with Annabella Wilmot, Helen's rival. Once she is married to Arthur, Helen is separated from the rest of society and prevented from maintaining any female companionship. Unfortunately, Milicent marries a friend of Arthur's who also treats women poorly. The two women try to support each other through letters, but it is not enough. Once Helen fully grasps Arthur's cruel nature, she forms a bond with Milicent's younger sister and does her best to develop a maternal influence over her; Helen tries to mentor the young woman against poor marital decisions; eventually Miss Hargrave marries Helen's brother Lawrence.

When Helen moves to Wildfell Hall, she is once again devoid of positive and empowering female relationships. The women in the village make a show of inviting Helen to join them. They begin to gossip about her, however, and eventually alienate her from their society. They create rumors regarding her sexual activities, causing even the vicar to ostracize her. Helen does not seem to miss their company, however, because she wants her identity to remain hidden. Similar to Helen's premarital understanding of Arthur, these young women seem only capable of making superficial judgements of people based on what they see on the surface. Arthur hinted at his true character numerous times to Helen, but she ignored these warnings because she thought she could change him. Helen similarly hints at her past experience as her



motivation for keeping her son away from alcohol, but they are incapable of imagining the distress Helen has endured with an alcoholic husband. In spite of the poor treatment from the other village women, Helen's poor marital experience motivates her to pursue empowerment through this period of singleness.

Rather than ostracize Bianca because of her profession as Helen is ostracized, Lady Vernon turns to Bianca for help with a student who tries to run away. The student wants to be an opera singer in Italy, and Lady Vernon believes Bianca can have a positive influence on her. Through what becomes a close relationship with Lady Vernon, Bianca is able to save one girl from ruining her reputation and prospects. She actually acts as a personal reference for the young girl's suitor and voice coach. This brief anecdote between Bianca and her student illustrates how the maternal influence is crucial for a woman's success and education, not just in the feminine ideal but also in supporting and protecting herself financially, emotionally, and physically, and perhaps even mentally. Bianca is then able to use her knowledge and experience to educate several young women when Lady Vernon eventually bequeathes her school to Bianca.

For Olive, the influential connection she forms with the first girl of her age proves to be an intensely emotional and possibly even sexual one. This significant bond for Olive is formed with Sara Derwent, her neighbor. Before Olive even knows her name, she admires her from a distance. Olive watches her neighbor through the window. Olive recalls Sara's face every evening finding her face to be very "picturesque" and only needing "a little romantic imagination to make it positively beautiful" (75). Upon sharing her infatuation with her mother, Olive refers to Sara as "my beauty next door" (76). When Olive and Sara finally meet, Olive sees Sara as her "Lady love" (77). She is

disappointed to find that Sara is not familiar with Coleridge, but Sara's beauty makes up for this deficiency: "as soon as she looked again on the charming face, with its large, languishing Asiatic eyes, and delicate mouth . . . Olive felt her interest revive. Never was there any girl over whom every form of beauty exercised more fascination. By the week's end she was positively enchanted with her neighbor . . . (77)." Olive clearly has a very strong physical, if not sexual, attraction to Sara indicated by the romantic descriptions used to describe Olive's feelings for her.

In spite of the strong sexual overtones of Olive's attraction to Sara, the narrator unsuccessfully attempts to write it off as "that romantic friendship peculiar to sixteen" (77). This is perhaps the result of Craik's own ambiguous sorophobia which she describes in *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* (1858):

For two women, past earliest girlhood, to be completely absorbed in one another, make public demonstrations of the fact, by caresses and quarrels, is so repugnant to common sense, that where it ceases to be silly it becomes actually wrong. But to see two women, whom Providence has denied nearer ties, by a wise substitution making the best of fate, loving, sustaining, and comforting one another, with a tenderness often closer than those of sisters because it has all the novelty of election which belongs to the conjugal tie itself--this, I say, is an honorable and lovely sight. (159)

Craik's description of two women who are dearer to each other than sisters relates them to the "conjugal tie" of marriage, even though she seems to oppose women being openly absorbed in one another. In spite of the potential for two close friends to have a conjugal connection, Craik tries to gloss over the potential for lesbian love between

Olive and Sara. In doing so, however, she ultimately highlights this possibility: "There is a deep beauty--more so that the world will acknowledge--in this impassioned first friendship, most resembling first love, the fore-shadowing of which it truly is" (77). For Olive, her attraction to Sara does not seem like any fore-shadowing of first love but the actual manifestation of it. The narrator goes on to describe how a woman may

call to mind some old playmate, for whom, when they were girls together, she felt such an *intense love*. How they used to pine for the daily greeting . . . . Or, in absence, the almost interminable letters--positive *love-letters*, full of "dearest" and "beloveds" and *sealing-wax kisses*. Then the delicious meetings--sad partings, also quite *lover-like* in the multiplicity of tears and embraces--embraces sweeter than those of all the world beside . . . . (77, italics mine)

The "intense love" between these two young women, their "love letters," "sealing-wax kisses," and "lover-like" embraces cannot be trivialized into a mere friendship. Martha Vicinus presents a framework for examining Olive's affection for Sara. In her article "Distance and Desire," Vicinus explains the context in which a woman describes her love for another woman: "a woman who loved another girl or woman always spoke of this love in terms that replicated heterosexual love. The strong emphasis on the power of the emotions suggests an understanding of what we would now label as sexual desire" (602). Olive's love for Sara is similarly described in terms that replicate heterosexual love and therefore presents the possibility of Olive's same-sex desire for Sara.

Olive continues to develop a strong affection for Sara, who merely sees Olive as "an amusing companion" (79). Olive, on the other hand, not only feels strongly toward

Sara but also reserves her feelings for Sara alone: “feeling little interest in any other girl, and none at all in the awkward Oldchurch ‘beaux’” (88). Olive is reluctant to socialize with or make friends with other teenagers. Sara eventually moves away, however, and does not make any effort to keep in touch with Olive. The evidence of Sara’s “falseness” becomes Olive’s “loving, heart’s first blight” (194). When her love is not only unrequited by Sara but also unappreciated, Olive is “unable to build the shrine of a second affection on the ruins of the first” (194). She is deeply hurt and forever scarred by Sara’s false affection, further implicating Olive’s same-sex attraction to Sara.

Olive’s ambiguous feelings for Sara mark her as ineligible for marriage, at least until she develops and proves her heterosexual feelings for Harold Gwynne. Judith Butler’s notion of gender (and I would argue sexuality), “a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time” may serve as a helpful framework for understanding Olive’s early feelings for Sara and later feelings for Harold (22). The totality of Olive’s assumed heterosexuality is perhaps deferred until she is fully developed into the feminine ideal, at which point her sexuality draws her to Harold.

After Sara betrays her, Olive never finds another female companion close to her age. She does, however, develop close connections with older women who reach out to Olive in a mentoring way like Aunt Flora and Mrs. Gwynne previously discussed. Even before she meets these women, she encounters Meliora Vanbrugh from whom Olive and her mother rent an apartment in London after Olive’s father Mr. Rothesay passes away. Meliora grows fond of Olive and takes her into the studio of Meliora’s brother where they admire his work together.

Meliora plays a significant role in Olive's life because she is the first to recognize the artistic quality of Olive's sketches. Perhaps more significantly, Meliora unknowingly unites Olive with her half sister. A woman named Miss Celia Manners models for Michael, then grows sick. Meliora asks Olive to take some food to the woman, and they meet a young girl named Cristal Manners who believes her parents were aristocrats lost at sea. Upon Miss Manner's death, Meliora enrolls Cristal in a Parisian boarding school. Several years later, Cristal returns to Meliora, the only person she can think of as a relative. Meliora and Michael eventually move to Rome and Cristal accompanies Olive and Mrs. Rothesay to their new home, Fernwood Dell, where Mrs. Rothesay eventually passes away. A few months after her passing, Olive recalls a letter from her father addressed to her with instructions for it to be opened after both parents were deceased. This letter reveals Cristal is Olive's half sister, the result of her father's affair with Celia Manners. He charges Olive to find Cristal and take care of her. Once Cristal's pride in being the heir to aristocrats is shattered, she bitterly attempts to kill Olive. She is confined until Olive gets better, then she runs away back to the Parisian boarding school where she begins teaching. The school mistress is suspicious of Cristal's unusual circumstances, however, and instigates her removal from the school. In spite of the pain Olive feels regarding her father's infidelity and Cristal's abuse toward her, she continues to reach out to Cristal in an attempt to help her find peace. With the help of Harold Gwynne (Olive's close friend and the vicar from the village near Fernwood Dell), Olive helps Cristal find refuge in the convent of St. Margaret's.

The positive influence present in some of the peer connections also serves to highlight the positive impact of female relationships. Other than Olive's experience with

Sara and Helen's interaction with the village women, the connections between each heroine and her peers are fairly positive. Jane's friend Helen and her cousins, Mary and Diana, influence her; Helen attempts to connect with Milicent Hargrave and her younger sister. Bianca mentors and helps establish her protegee; after a period of friendship that grows estranged, Olive attempts to reconnect with her half-sister Cristal. That each heroine is able to influence or be influenced by other women so consistently underscores the positive benefits of such relationships for single women. These female connections empower each other to thrive for a time without the companionship of a man and thus undermine the marital pressure of domestic ideology, once again redefining the domestic ideal by not rushing into marriage. Rather, each heroine's period of singleness becomes a time in which she waits for her moral equal.

Perhaps due to the combination of positive connections and associations with single women in addition to the apparent fate of singleness as a result of their socioeconomic status, all four women initially seem resigned to spend the rest of their lives without a husband. Jane is an orphan and a governess, Helen has left her husband and the financial security he provided to live in obscurity with her son, and Bianca is an actress of illegitimate birth. Olive's apparent marriage ineligibility, however, is perhaps the most socially stigmatizing. The curve in Olive's spine causes her to be considered "deformed." As a result, neither she nor any of her friends or family expect her to marry. Her parents mourn this unlikelihood of marriage. Olive's parents seem more distressed by her inevitable spinsterhood than any displeasure they find in her physical appearance. The emphasis on Olive's potentially lifelong singleness clearly represents the anxiety surrounding woman's purpose as wife and mother according to

the views of Victorian domestic ideology. Additionally, Olive is impoverished by the debt of her deceased father. As a result of their resolution to remain single, both Bianca and Olive even consider what it would be like to join a convent. These heroines do not view marriage (or remarriage in one case) as a viable option for financial stability.

Notwithstanding these seemingly predetermined classifications for stigmatization, these heroines actually come to overshadow their more marriageable and even married counterparts. As a result, each novel provides a conflicted representation of the feminine ideal established through a comparison between the protagonist and her foil. The comparisons between these female characters introduced in the beginning of each novel and those developed throughout highlight the feminine qualities in the single, professional protagonist who has been stigmatized as incapable of modeling the feminine ideal defined by domestic ideology, while married, middle-class women for whom the ideal was created seem to fall short of that ideal in various ways. Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre and Blanche Ingram, Anne Brontë's Helen Huntingdon and Annabella Wilmot, Geraldine Jewsbury's Bianca and Alice, and Dinah Craik's Olive and Sara are just a handful of female characters who show the contrast between the commonly held feminine ideal and the revised ideal represented in these novels. This contrast illustrates the problematic nature of the feminine ideal defined by domestic ideology and highlights the single, professional woman as a new and revised perception of that ideal.

Jane, typically the least conventional of the heroines appears quite conventional in comparison to Blanche Ingram. Jane is more sympathetic and pious than her counterpart. Jane is able to show pity by connecting with Rochester and empathizing

with his past emotional anguish. Blanche, on the other hand, seems reluctant if not incapable of showing pity for other people who are less fortunate than she, particularly Jane whose position as governess Blanche finds loathsome.

Helen is more devoted and self-denying than her foil, Annabella Wilmot. Helen remains committed to Arthur because of their marriage, while Annabella is incapable of the same fidelity. Even after she has left Arthur, Helen returns to nurse him on his deathbed. Annabella, on the other hand, is untrue to her husband during her affair with Arthur, then abandons Arthur when Helen threatens to reveal their affair.

When Bianca eventually meets her half sister, Alice, they are unaware of their relation. Alice becomes a foil to Bianca, whose feminine qualities are highlighted in spite of Bianca's occupation as an actress. In comparison with her half sister, Bianca demonstrates a stronger ability to be honest with herself and those around her. Through her commitment to that honesty, Bianca assertively changes her circumstances while her half sister, Alice, is unable to take action due to her married status. Even though Alice is not a loveless investor in herself, her marriage does ultimately appear loveless. Bianca, on the other hand, is willing to sacrifice an opportunity to marry Conrad for three years of self-improvement so that she may be a more equal match for him.

Sara Derwent, Olive's foil, is indeed a loveless investor, who destroys her marriage and herself. She is dishonest and unfaithful with her affections, causing the downfall of her health and her marriage. Olive, on the other hand, models conventional femininity. She is unceasing in her care for her mother and friends. She supports the moral struggle of her clergyman and future husband, Harold Gwynne, and is willing to



suppress her love for him in order to encourage him to move to America if it is in his best interest.

That Olive marries Harold Gwynne, the same man who was previously married to her childhood friend Sara, seems to highlight the contrast between these two women and their personal growth. Sara is fickle with her love and rushes into a marriage. Olive takes her time for she never considers herself worthy of it. Olive's extended period in singleness provides her with ample time to develop into the feminine ideal. Even though Olive eventually takes residence in the same neighborhood where Sara has decided her fate, Olive's growth and maturity seem to take root during her time in London, where Olive learns the responsibility of caring for her mother both domestically and financially. London provides the rite of passage experience for Olive's womanhood, an experience neither Sara nor Sybilla received. Thus, Olive arrives at Fernwood Dell already a woman based on her age and experience, and she continues to grow and develop as a woman of strong domestic capabilities and moral character as discussed in chapter three.

Similar to Sara Derwent, one last character who seems to act as a foil is Cristal, Olive's half sister. Cristal represents everything an Angel in the House is not; she is arrogant, vain, and vengeful. Even though Cristal and Olive are both independent women, Cristal does not understand how to be financially responsible. After riding their neighbor's horse, Cristal wants to buy her own horse without considering the extended expense it would cost to care for it. Olive tries to bring her attention to these factors in addition to the consideration that although she has money to live off of, it will not last long with excessive expenditures. Cristal arrogantly resists Olive's reasoning but

decides against purchasing a horse in the morning and never mentions it again. This is just one way Cristal and Olive greatly differ in their feminine qualities and the understanding of financial responsibilities.

Whether compared to her friends or to her foes, the protagonist of each novel becomes more and more clearly defined as a revised ideal. Her socioeconomic status as lower-middle class and her need to “make a living” place the heroine as a single, professional woman outside the boundaries of the feminine ideal defined by Victorian domestic ideology. Her interactions with other women, however, pull her back in from the margins as she models the qualities typical of the feminine ideal. Without the juxtaposition of her counterparts, these women might not stand out as representative of that ideal. Jane for example describes her *appearance* of being subdued. Her flight from Thornfield Hall on her wedding night and then her return to Rochester after rejecting the proposal of St. John Rivers highlights a side of Jane that is not subdued but is assertive and in control. Helen follows Jane’s example in fleeing from a situation that she cannot control--her marriage to an alcoholic husband. Leaving her husband, however, does not exactly match the ideal Helen presents in her otherwise flawless fidelity. It also seems paradoxical for Bianca, an actress constantly putting her body on display for the public’s pleasure, to be esteemed more highly than her puritan, half sister, Alice. Olive is the only heroine who represents the most seamless ideal other than her disability. For some characters, these inconsistencies seem to indicate a resistance to the ideal altogether, while others seem to support or subvert it.

Another significant comparison that highlights the value of singleness recurs between an early marriage and a later one. As a result of the early marriage, a woman

marries too young and is thus too immature or too unprepared to make a good match for herself. The character (or in some cases the heroine's younger self) who marries too early is contrasted with the heroine (or her older self) who marries later but who is wiser for the wait.

Jane's initial wedding contrasted with her eventual marriage to Rochester accomplishes this comparison. When Jane first agrees to marry Rochester, she is unaware of the past he has hidden from her including a wife to whom he is still married. Upon learning this information, Jane refuses to be Rochester's mistress and eventually runs away from Thornfield Hall. Jane's experience as a young woman preparing herself for what turns out to be a false marriage comes to represent the immaturity of someone who is ill-prepared to fully sacrifice herself to another person, someone who proves to be an unfit companion.

Helen's first marriage to Arthur and her second marriage to Gilbert also serves as a comparison between her immature and matured self. In the former situation, Helen does not fully understand the commitment she is making nor does she fully understand the man to whom she is making that commitment. In the latter situation, however, Helen has taken a great deal of time getting to know Gilbert in order to fully understand who he is as a person. She also takes this time to reflect on whether she is ready for another marriage. Ultimately, the contrast between Helen's first marriage and her second demonstrates the difference between her younger, ill-prepared self and her older, more mature self who is able to choose a more fitting partner.

The eager to marry village girls in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* also present their own anxiety surrounding spinsterhood. Eliza Millwood's flirtation with Gilbert Markham

and her friend's attempt to attract Mr. Lawrence reveal their fear of remaining single, especially in a village lacking many options for male suitors and potential husbands. Their eagerness, however, also represents the pressure on women to hastily marry before they become spinsters leading to poorly matched spouses.

Bianca's half sister, Alice, also provides an example of why a woman may consider singleness over marriage. Alice's mother is greatly concerned that her daughter will not secure a husband. She constantly tries to refine her daughter into a more ideal woman. When Alice does find a husband, her life does not seem to improve as she makes an early marriage to Bryant. He is constantly distracted by his business and has no time to spend with his wife let alone show her much affection. Why Alice never bears a child is unclear, but her husband's neglect and extended business trips leave him little time to help his wife fulfill her "holy office." The lack of children to care for adds to Alice's ennui. It may be this boredom or the lack of sexual intimacy that leaves Alice vulnerable to another man's affections. Thus, even marriage does not necessarily provide a woman with the opportunity to reproduce, nor does it always protect a woman from potential scandal.

Perhaps if Bianca's half sister was able to have a positive maternal influence in her life, she might have fared better. Marriage seems imprisoning for Alice or at least the Victorian domestic ideology of marriage that prohibits her from pursuing her passion for art. Alice does have a mother (who also passes away), but her maternal influence is limited. Her mother confines Alice's education to that of domestic ideology and reprimands her artistic interests. Without an outlet for her energies, Alice's marriage is plagued by her ennui. Conrad's attentions, however, eventually create an outlet for her

passion and lead her to consider running away with him. Alice's husband, Bryant, finds her writing her goodbye note and causes her to faint; Alice never recovers from this fatal shock.

On the surface, one may read Alice's death as a rebuke against women contemplating adultery. The events leading Alice to the brink of infidelity, however, are also placed under scrutiny, namely the ennui caused by domestic ideology's restrictions on women's occupations both professionally and recreationally. Perhaps a more positive maternal influence in Alice's life might have encouraged her to pursue her passions and might have encouraged her to wait for a partner with whom she may have had a mutual respect and appreciation. Instead, her mother encouraged her to marry the first eligible bachelor in whom she was interested and who returned that interest, but who was ultimately more attracted to his business ventures.

Olive's young mother, Sybilla also seems to represent anxiety surrounding marriage and motherhood, an anxiety that stems from a woman's unpreparedness for both duties. Sybilla marries before she is able to learn the responsibility of caring for her husband and child. Instead, while her husband is away, Sybilla not only forfeits her maternal duty but her wifely one as well. The night of his return, Angus expects to find his wife caring for their child and lamenting his absence. Rather, he finds her dancing the night away with her arms encircling the neck of another man. In spite of being a teenage bride and mother left to her own devices for five years, Sybilla receives no sympathy from Angus. His family warned him against marrying at twenty-five a girl of merely seventeen, but Angus did not heed them: "forgetting that at thirty-five he should need a sensible woman to be his trustworthy sympathising wife, the careful and

thoughtful mistress of his household” (122). This is perhaps one definition of the Angel in the House, but it does not describe Sybilla, “a very child” (123). Angus is disappointed in his wife’s immaturity and too proud to educate her, according to the narrator’s account. Sybilla has failed as Angel in the House, and for that mistake, Sybilla’s marriage and domestic life begin to fall apart.

The fallout of Sybilla’s unpreparedness for her early marriage questions domestic ideology’s stigmatization of women who do not marry in their prime. That Sybilla is ill-equipped to take on the role of dutiful wife and doting mother clearly highlights a flaw in the ideological system of Victorian domesticity. Her experience seems to be a warning against the marriage of a woman who is uneducated in her duties as wife and mother. Such a warning is not shared with Sara Derwent, however, for she finds herself in a similar position with an even worse outcome.

Sara has betrothed herself to Charles Geddes, a young man at sea. Olive seems to notice Sara’s wayward feelings and warns her against hurting her betrothed. Instead of keeping her word, however, Sara enchants Harold Gwynne and marries him. Perhaps if Sara had endured a period of singleness, she might have escaped the heartache of an immature marital choice. Her false love is eventually revealed, ruining her marriage. Her regret for not waiting for Charles destroys her health, and she dies shortly after giving birth to Ailie, her daughter with Harold. That Harold later marries a starkly more mature Olive seems to underscore the imperative message for women to stave off hasty marriages.

The poorly matched spouses highlighted above who stand as warnings against impetuous marriages are just another reason why women should remain single. If she

does not remain single for life, a period of singleness may at least provide a woman with the time necessary for personal growth and maturity. Being able to take time in singleness to hone her feminine skills and to continue her moral development is evidently a great benefit for the single, professional woman. In the end, each heroine's experience of growth and maturity during a time of solitude and singleness ironically weakens the threat of spinsterhood and leads her closer to marriageability.

In her article "Redundancy and Emigration" Nan Dreher argues, "the debate about middle-class female emigration eventually challenged not only redundancy, but also broader ideas about class and gender by establishing work and singlehood as acceptable for middle-class women" (3). Even though *Jane Eyre*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *The Half Sisters*, and *Olive* do not directly address redundancy and emigration, they are certainly addressing the domestic ideology that marginalizes single, professional women of the middle class. As a result, these novels seem to be contributing to the debate that promotes work and singlehood as acceptable for middle-class women.

Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive all experience a time of solitude in which they reflect on their womanhood and a future of singleness as a result of their socioeconomic status. These periods of reflection often highlight the cultural tension surrounding spinsters as women who have failed in their "holy office." Single women were typically considered unwomanly as a result of failing to secure a husband. These novels suggest an alternative view of the single or spinster woman by presenting negative representations of married women. Each novel also highlights the benefits of singleness by emphasizing a period of personal growth and maturity for its heroine.

The extended period of singleness that is rewarded with feminine maturity is illustrated in Jane's time with the Rivers. The unveiling of Bertha shows Jane her unpreparedness for marriage. Her time away, however, provides her with a period of growth and time to develop her feminine qualities.

Jane becomes an independent woman by leaving the safety of Thornfield Hall; she survives on her own, she advocates for herself, and she secures a home and income with the help of St. John Rivers. She then becomes financially independent when her last name is recognized on a piece of scrap paper from her sketch book. Her time of independent living and learning with St. John and his sisters is another form of growth for Jane. She also grows in her familial connections by discovering Diana, Mary and St. John are her cousins. She eventually comes to a place where she is able to refuse St. John's proposal, hear Rochester's call for her and heeds it. When she finds Rochester, his dependence on her and her independence from him put them on equal terms.

For Helen, her period of singleness occurs in the middle of her marriage. She married too young to understand the horrible choice she was making. She was too immature to be able to discern Arthur's lack of character and integrity. During her time away from him in an alternate form of singleness, Helen demonstrates the maturity she has developed as a result of the hardships of her marriage. Gilbert Markham essentially begins to court her, but both her time in an abusive relationship and her escape from that relationship provide her with new guidelines for a feminine ideal. She is still a strong-willed woman, but instead of using that force to blindly enter a poor relationship Helen uses her strength of will to keep her eyes open to Markham's true character and



intentions. This new approach to a potential husband also demonstrates Helen's growing sense of self-sacrifice. She is in love with Markham, as she was with Arthur, but this time she is willing to wait and receive the wise counsel of those who care for her well-being.

While she is apart from Arthur, Helen is able to reflect on her past as a naive young woman who thought she could change her husband. There is a significant contrast between the stern and reserved "widow" at Wildfell Hall and the excited and hopeful young woman being courted by Arthur described in her diary entries. Helen's growth and maturity as a woman is confirmed by her time in solitude at Wildfell Hall away from Arthur. When she returns to him, he is also in a place of dependence on her and Helen is also independent from him putting them on equal ground, as occurs with Jane and Rochester. Helen is thus finally able to influence him enough for him to repent his moral degradation.

Bianca also experiences a time of solitude that allows her to mature. She intentionally sends away her fiancée, Conrad Percy, so that she may continue her time as a single woman as a means of bettering her career. More significantly, however, she is also attempting to better her station in society so that she may be of equal worth with Conrad. As a result, Bianca's hard work and determination help develop her rise above the stigma associated not only with single, professional women but especially with actresses as she continues to live on her own.

Bianca is initially separated from Lord Melton when she is cared for by his sister Lady Vernon. During this time, Bianca grows in her knowledge of how to help young women aspiring to follow her path in pursuing a profession if they come upon hard times

financially. This period helps to give her a higher purpose and to separate herself from Conrad, but it does not help to draw out her love for Lord Melton. She still views him as a brother. It is during Lord Melton's time away in Europe and particularly during his time without writing to her that Bianca begins to feel the loss of his love. She also matures in her ability to separate her emotions from Conrad by forgiving him, taking pity on him, and nursing him back to health. In this story, Conrad is the one who becomes dependent on Bianca, an event that puts them on equal ground as brother and sister or even mother and son, but not as lovers.

Olive's period alone and her growth as a single woman is very beneficial to her; as a result of this time, Olive is able to gain maturity that other women who marry at a younger age are unable to attain. She is thus able to support Harold in his endeavors until he is able to return to her from Europe as her moral equal. During her time of growth and singleness, Olive's "deformity" becomes increasingly unnoticeable and is perhaps symbolic of her feminine maturity and increasing marriageability as her feminine qualities help to overshadow her disability. According to Showalter, Olive's "deformity represents her very womanhood" (28). If by "womanhood" Showalter means the feminine capabilities characteristic of domestic ideology's ideal of womanhood, then this appears possible. Olive's disability seems to initially disqualify her from that ideal, however. In addition to increasing her marriageability and overshadowing her "deformity," Olive's exemplary femininity connects her to Harold in a strong and equally-respected friendship that eventually leads to their marriage.

Each heroine is surrounded by single and widowed women with some form of power or influence that makes remaining single or avoiding a marriage altogether seem

like a viable option. Helen's Aunt actually serves as an antagonist similar to Jane's Aunt Reed. Instead of exercising some form of maternal influence over their nieces, these women are not only incapable of connecting with them in a positively influential way but actually push their nieces toward the opposite outcome each aunt is hoping for. Helen eventually gains maturity for herself, but Jane fortunately connects with a few women who maintain a positive influence on her. Jane is influenced by Helen Burns, Miss Temple, and later by her cousins Diana and Mary. Bianca develops a strong connection to the widowed Lady Vernon, and Olive similarly admires the single Aunt Flora and the widowed Mrs. Gwynne, Harold's mother.

Ultimately, singleness is affirmed through the elevation of single women who also act as mentors with significant influence amongst their peers. Indeed, even those who are married or marriageable become overshadowed by these single and typically stigmatized women. Those who marry prematurely stand as warnings against such impetuous unions. Rather than feel pressured to find a husband, these novels seem to encourage women to take their time and to not be afraid of singleness but to value it as a period of personal growth. As a result, that time may serve to prepare a woman for lifelong singlehood or at least sustain her until she chooses to marry her moral equal.

These female protagonists model feminine qualities in spite of their singleness and therefore contradict the assumption that a woman's marital status determines or represents her gender expression. Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive desire to have their womanhood recognized and acknowledged as normative and not stigmatized as unwomanly just because they are not marrying. These novels illustrate how a woman's femininity and womanhood are not compromised by singleness. Rather, a woman's

extended singleness empowers her to wait for the right partner and provides her with the time and experience to mature necessary to becoming suitable for marriage when that partner appears. As discussed in the following chapter, this marriage will only occur if it promises to be one of mutual respect and affection, as well as mutual morality.

## CHAPTER 5

ALL FOR ONE?: FINDING AN EQUAL PARTNER THROUGH MUTUAL ATTRACTION  
AND MORALITY

Traditionally, a woman's critical gaze upon a man was not afforded much power because it was assumed that she had to make any decent match as soon as possible in order to secure financial stability. This is not the case with these heroines. By holding out for an equal match, their gaze gains power and puts them on an equal plane with their suitors as they return the assessment of one's worth and marriageability. By surviving singleness, women are able to hold out for an equal match. If he does not appear, she will simply continue on with what she has already known. Likewise, her professionalism has already been tested as a means of financial stability; she does not need to secure just any tolerable match (as Helen's aunt tries to encourage and as is discovered by the women discussed in the previous chapter who hastily marry). Coming to terms with their singleness and professionalism empowers Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive to hold out for specific marriageable qualities in men, specifically the display of equal morality and mutual affection. With the subjectivity she has gained by waiting for her moral equal and by choosing a partner on her terms, each heroine is empowered to marry on her own terms, to marry because it is out of her desire not out of need or to follow a marital standard prescribed by domestic ideology.

Martha Vicinus explains one way this marital standard may have been redefined: "feminist writers . . . were strong advocates of a higher marital standard, based upon love and mutual interests rather than on male sexual desire and female economic necessity" (18). These novels uphold this marital standard by concluding with the

heroine's marriage to her moral equal, a man with whom she appears to share a mutual respect and admiration. Such marriages seem to validate the redefined feminine ideal represented by Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive. These women do indeed find their ideal match in the end. Jane reunites with Rochester after the fire that burns down Thornfield Hall has refined him. Helen accepts Gilbert Markham's proposal after he travels a great distance to prove his love to her; even Arthur repents to her in the end. Bianca marries Lord Melton, who also travels a great distance first to try to forget his love for her and then to return to her. He is described from the beginning as being an ideal man, and he demonstrates as much in his appreciation for women's issues. Harold is also refined by a fire from which he saves Olive. Like Lord Melton, Harold also travels abroad to try to forget his love. He then allows Olive to use him for a special office to prove she can trust him; he also goes through a moral and spiritual rebirth as a result of Olive's influence.

These marriages only occur, however, after a period of singleness and professionalism prepares her for mutual affection, the best possible union according to Barbara Bodichon: "The happiest married life we can recall ever to have seen is the life of two workers, a man and a woman equal in intellectual gifts and loving hearts; the union between them being grounded in their mutual work" (44). This type of marriage is made possible after a period of growth as single and separate individuals.

A nineteenth century writer, Bodichon, argues in favor of women's work as preparation for a union built on mutual respect and affection: "Suppose the man she may love is poor, by her labour she can help to form their mutual home. Birds, both cock and hen, help one another to build their nest" (43). The heroines I examine appear to

develop a similarly mutual affection with their husbands. Bodichon highlights how this is easier for men who are “poor” or in the case of Rochester, Gilbert Markham, and Harold Gwynne have either suffered a financial loss, are not from an upper-class family or who do not have a high-income vocation. Shortly before their marriages, however, each heroine inherits a significant amount of wealth or property, which also enables her to prove her worthiness of mutual affection. My textual examples indicate that mutual affection is more likely to occur in a heterosexual union when the man’s position is brought low while the woman’s status is elevated.

In *Woman’s Mission* Sarah Lewis notes the importance of both men and women (in a hetero-normative culture) to find their equal in moral integrity. Accordingly, the protagonists in these novels model that feminine excellence; they wait for their moral equal in a partner, then stand firm while looking for a partner who appreciates that in a woman. Lord Merton and Harold Gwynne openly discuss their value in a woman’s moral superiority, while Rochester and Gilbert only begin to value this quality after losing the women they love. Lewis emphasizes the high standard of morality expected of the feminine ideal and encourages women to only marry her moral equal, a man who values and respects her and is able to be influenced by her.

Several modern scholars have commented on this phenomena of middle-class women as morally superior to their male counterparts. In her essay, “Women Writers and the Double Standard,” Elaine Showalter describes the high standards by which middle-class women were expected to live in mid-century England:

Women were created to be dependent on men; their education and training must prepare them to find and keep husbands. Their mental qualities, therefore,

should be . . . modesty, delicacy, liveliness, and sensibility. Women should be truly religious, in order to influence their husbands and children; they should be ignorant of the evils of the world, in order to preserve their purity of spirit; in short, they ought to present in every way a contrast to and an escape from the harsh intrusive realities of human vanity, greed, and sensuality. (Showalter 329)

Mid-century Victorian women were held to a demanding ideal of moral superiority and it was pointless to let those ideals be wasted on a partner who did not equally value morality.

Martha Vicinus also provides a perspective on middle-class Victorian women's moral and religious roles in the family: "within the home women were assigned a special position as caretakers of morality and religion"(2). The moral and religious superiority of each heroine is especially relevant at the end of each novel, when Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive marry the men upon whom they have had a moral or religious impact. In conjunction with this idea of moral superiority, Ann Hobart explains how "the altruism of the domestic sphere . . . offered a much-needed corrective to the frequently callous pursuit of self-interest characteristic of the male-dominated market" (225). Women were viewed as the self-sacrificing examples for ambition-focused men and were therefore elevated as morally superior.

A woman's impact on her husband is represented in each heroine's moral influence over her future partner. As Mary Poovey indicates, "Maternal instinct was credited not only with making women nurture their children, but also with conferring upon them extraordinary power over men" (7-8). She goes on to explain, "Women may have been considered physically unfit to vote or compete for work, but, according to this



representation, the power of their moral influence amply compensated them for whatever disadvantages they suffered” (8). Before the marriages that conclude these novels take place, it seems prerequisite for the heroine to prove her moral influence over her future partner.

Jane’s moral superiority becomes clear when she leaves Rochester rather than become his mistress; she thus exemplifies a higher moral code in addition to demonstrating self-sacrifice. Jane also demonstrates a high moral compass by refusing St. John’s proposal, a marriage that she perceives as a sin against God. She also demonstrates financial selflessness in sharing her inheritance with her cousins.

Helen’s morality ultimately has a humanizing affect on her lovers, but she is first tested in her resolve when faced with the battle of Arthur’s alcoholism. When they first marry Helen thinks she can influence Arthur and help him develop a moral compass. However, she is unable to have any power over him. She later returns to Arthur after her period of growth as a feigned widow. This time, Helen is more effectual in getting Arthur to repent, perhaps as a result of her self-sacrifice in returning to nurse him. Helen’s influence over Gilbert occurs more easily. Rachel Carnell highlights the humanizing effect Helen has on Gilbert after he reads her diary, and “he remembers his duty to apologize to Frederick Lawrence” (15). Helen’s diary serves to awake Gilbert’s moral self and motivates his apology to Helen’s brother. It gives Gilbert a glimpse at a man who refused Helen’s moral influence and makes him realize that he does not want to lose Helen’s love like Arthur has. He would rather earn and maintain her love by proving his own moral worth through his apology to Lawrence.

Bianca's moral superiority is initially questioned as a result of her profession. Her ability to avoid scandal, however, helps to prove her moral worth. She shows her maturity by making Conrad wait to marry her; she then breaks off their engagement when he does not meet her standards of a supportive partner. After breaking off her engagement with Conrad, Bianca grows ill. She is cared for by Lord Melton, a friend of Conrad's who has fallen in love with Bianca. She is too absorbed by the unrequited love of Conrad to feel anything more than brotherly love for Lord Melton. He goes abroad in hopes that time and distance will alleviate his affection for Bianca.

According to Conrad, Alice appears to be the woman of a higher moral standard, but she is actually willing to leave her husband for another man. Even though Conrad thinks Bianca's profession puts her in a morally dubious position, Bianca in fact never compromises her morality with men. In the end, it is Bianca's "goodness" and forgiveness that nurses Conrad back to health after Alice's death. However, it is also his shame for compromising Alice's goodness that leads him to become a monk.

When Lord Melton is first introduced he is comparatively a better person and of a higher moral standard than Conrad. As a result, even though upper-class men dating actresses is discouraged, it is not an issue with Melton and Bianca because they are both of high moral standards. Melton's moral superiority is evident when he helps a young, orphaned boy reunite with his mother, an Italian opera singer who Conrad had an affair with during his engagement to Bianca. Even though rumors say that Melton is now having an affair with her, he is actually repulsed by her immorality. His only connection is to reunite her with her son. Melton is also contrasted with Conrad through their connections to Alice's husband, Bryant. Conrad has seduced Alice, and tempted

her to leave her husband, which subsequently leads to a fatal fainting spell and Bryant's depression. Melton, however, is the one who nurses Bryant back to health and helps him see the goodness in Bianca, Alice's half-sister.

Olive's morality is contrasted with both Harold and Sara. Olive is able to console the father who lost his son when Harold is unable to do so, and Sara is morally negligent. She is too young to marry and is therefore irresponsible with her affections. As a result, she marries a man she does not love and spurns a man she does love. Harold's marriage with Sara leaves him scarred and resistant to connecting with women, and Olive's disability makes her an unlikely candidate for Harold's affections. They are thus able to build a friendship and an almost sibling-like bond. As a result, Olive develops a strong moral influence over Harold who shares his crisis of faith with her. Olive's period of singleness and maturity enables her to have a greater ability to influence Harold positively than Sara was able to do. Harold eventually develops into a man of moral equality with Olive, particularly in the way he cares for Olive's half-sister in Paris and reaffirms his faith in God.

As women of high moral standards, they have been waiting for men of equally high morality. In her article "Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Redundant Women," Pauline Simonsen explains why a significant number of women in the 1800s may have still hoped for marriage: "Desire for affection and companionship, if not love, were obvious motivations. . . . [And] marriage hopefully meant motherhood . . . . Being a mother granted higher status in the community, as moral and religious values were seen to be fulfilled" (510). In spite of their evident desire for affection and companionship, Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive are not impetuous with their decision to marry. Before finding

their match in a man who shows he is capable of mutual love, respect and morality, these women first face and surpass poor matches. Jane nearly escapes an illegal marriage to Rochester then refuses St. John's proposal because she does not love him. Helen unfortunately does not heed the counsel of her aunt and marries a man who fits none of the qualifications of a suitable husband; Arthur elicits neither love nor respect for Helen while he openly disdains her morality. Bianca is initially engaged to Conrad who she eventually releases from this obligation because he no longer loves or respects her equally. Similar to Jane, Olive refuses Michael Vanbrugh's and Lyle Derwent's proposals because she does not love them.

Part of finding the right match seems to be first refusing a poor one. Despite the stigma of spinsters, Jane is unwilling to marry without love. St. John appeals to her sense of diligence and hard work but she refuses his proposal for her to join him as his wife so that she may be his missionary helpmeet. Without love, Jane views such a marriage as a sin against God. That same night, Jane hears Rochester's voice calling her in the wind, crying out for her return and luring her away from potential spinsterhood.

Helen attempts to remain single through her appearance as a widow after her marriage to an alcoholic and abusive husband. The rumors produced by her neighbors regarding her sexual activities, however, provide proof of other setbacks of singleness. Helen is exposed to slander which damages her reputation when she is left "unprotected" by a husband. She is thus happy to remarry a man who has proven to be of a much better character.

Carnell applauds Helen's representation of a woman who "refuses the gender role dictated to her by her culture, insists on her status as a professional painter, . . . and challenges the economic subordination of wives." In spite of Helen's subjectification as a woman who takes ownership of her work and her identity, Carnell seems to feel that Helen's marriage to Gilbert Markham inhibits her from fully transgressing "the bounds of her status quo" (23). I argue that instead of seeking to fully transgress Victorian domestic ideology, Anne Brontë has created a character who seeks to combine the separate spheres of this ideology, specifically domesticity and professionalism. That Helen is able to overcome the social stigma associated with professional women and remarry is revolutionary in itself, for women were typically limited to pursuing either a domestic or professional career and often ostracized for considering the latter.

Bianca initially sets her mind on marrying Conrad Percy. She is so hurt after their engagement is broken that she does not think she can ever love another man. She even considers joining a convent. Bianca is saved from ever having to consider how she will live out her life alone when she eventually acknowledges her love for Lord Melton.

Michael proposes to Olive in a manner similar to St. John Rivers's proposal to Jane Eyre. They both appeal to the common interest they hold with their potential wives. The refusal of both women is based on the unholy union of two souls who lack love for one another. Michael and St. John see Olive and Jane as helpmeets, tools they hope will guarantee their success. Olive and Jane, however, cannot reduce themselves to marrying for the sole purpose of being a socially acceptable helpmeet, even if this means they will never marry at all.

Olive proves her commitment to finding a moral equal again when she is faced with the proposal from Lyle Derwent, Sara's younger brother. Lyle attempts to woo Olive, but the maturity she has gained through her experience providing for her mother creates a divide between them. Later, the fickleness of Lyle's young love is revealed. He professes his love to Olive and proposes to marry her. She does not return his feelings and declines his offer. He kneels at her feet and cries in her lap apparently crushed by this information. About a year later, however, Olive learns of his marriage to another woman. Once again, Olive has avoided an ill-befitting marriage. Her personal experiences have helped her develop into a revised feminine ideal, one who is able to make wise decisions regarding marriage and holding out for someone who returns her respect and values.

In describing the power a woman held in the moment between receiving a proposal and giving her response, Stephen Kern explains, "A *no* could mean avoiding a bad match, but possibly spinsterhood and barrenness; a *yes* could mean comfort and security, but also obedience and dependency" (15). These are perhaps some of the major issues considered by the heroines in these novels, but they also focus on mutual affection and mutual morality. Kern describes a "moral code of love" as "a standard of right and wrong that lovers maintained toward one another that required honesty, fidelity, and commitment to make love flourish" (16). The deciding factors for these heroines are perhaps more closely connected to this standard of love. Jane accepts Rochester because she loves him, but then leaves when he tries to make her his mistress. She rejects St. John because they do not love each other which she views as equally immoral. When she returns to Rochester, he has experienced a moral

transformation and is thus a more equal partner. The young and inexperienced Helen accepts Arthur's proposal because she loves him but is blind to his true character. The older and more experienced Helen assertively protects herself from Gilbert's advances until he proves himself as her moral equal. Bianca is also inexperienced when she accepts Conrad's proposal, but her desire to be accepted by his father leads her to separate herself from him during a period which leads to her personal growth and maturity. She eventually breaks off the engagement with Conrad and is more careful with her emotions when Lord Melton proposes. She does not accept him until she is sure of their love for one another and their moral equality. Perhaps as a result of Olive's disability she is more reserved when it comes to proposals. She rejects Michael Vanbrugh's attempt to lure her to Rome away from her mother so she may remain the protegee of his "genius." She then rejects the proposal of Lyle Derwent who she does not love and who does not truly love her. Once they are finally united, Olive confidently accepts Harold's proposal because she is sure of their mutual love and mutual morality.

As each heroine overcomes obstacles and poor suitors, her moral equal must also prove his worth. This is perhaps another reason Jane refuses St. John Rivers and Olive refuses Michael Vanbrugh. St. John and Michael show no inclination to be refined by these women. Rochester and Harold, on the other hand, certainly express such desires, and even seek out the influence of their future wives as sources of moral strength, inspiration and wisdom.

When Rochester asks Jane to be his mistress, he clearly demonstrates he is not her moral equal. Jane leaves in an act of self-sacrifice (and perhaps self-preservation). Rochester follows Jane's example and also proves he can demonstrate self-sacrifice

when he attempts to save Bertha from the burning roof of Thornfield Hall. As a result, Rochester is severely burned in the fire causing him to lose ability in his arm and his sight (temporarily). This show of self-sacrifice demonstrates Rochester's moral growth. After being separated from Jane for some time, they are eventually reunited. He shows that he values and respects her and is therefore a fit partner for her.

Even Stephen Kern emphasizes this aspect of Rochester's evolution as a focal point in his summary of the novel: "*Jane Eyre* is about a man who rises toward a woman's higher moral standard but only after a tragedy causes loss of sight and leads to a spiritual conversion with her help" (89). That he barely acknowledges Jane in the novel written as her fictional autobiography is characteristic of Kern's separatist approach to understanding women as the *subject* of a male gaze. He nonetheless highlights the core change that must and does take place in order to qualify Rochester for marriage to Jane as her moral equal.

In *A Literature of Their Own* Showalter explains, "the recurring motif in feminine fiction that does seem to show outright hostility, if not castration wishes, toward men, is the blinding, maiming, or blighting motif" (150). She provides Rochester, "blinded in the fire at Thornfield [who] also loses the use of his hand" as an example (150). She goes on to explain, "feminine novelists . . . believed that a limited experience of dependency, frustration and powerlessness--in short, of womanhood--was a healthy and instructive one for a hero" (150). According to Showalter, this is perhaps one way these men have become equal to their female partners, through a type of metaphoric castration: "Men these novels are saying, must learn how it feels to be helpless and to be forced unwillingly into dependency. Only then can they understand that women need love but



hate to be weak. If he is to be redeemed and to rediscover his humanity, the 'woman's man' must find out how it feels to be a woman" (152). The tragic situations that bring loved ones together in the end seem to illustrate this logic. Cora Kaplan describes "Rochester's injuries" and "Jane's inheritance" as their "social parity" (16). Accordingly, it is only after Rochester has been maimed by the fire and rendered in the feminine dependency described by Showalter and only after Jane has inherited enough to be able to shirk that feminine dependency that they are fit to be married. Rather than view Rochester's experience of a woman's dependency as their great equalizer, it is also possible that Jane's subjectivity is what places them on an equal level and balances the power differential between them.

Helen also fails in finding her moral equal the first time around in her husband, Arthur. He is finally reformed by Helen's upstanding moral character on his deathbed. Gilbert Markham, on the other hand, is not a reprobate like Arthur. He has good qualities but does act out violently towards Helen's brother, Lawrence, after mistaking their familial relationship as a romantic one. Gilbert makes this mistake after he initially disputes rumors that Helen is romantically involved with Lawrence. Gilbert apologizes once he realizes the mistake he has made. He then stands up to his neighbors once again and vouches for Helen's character. After a period of separation, Gilbert travels a great distance to find Helen. They too are reunited and eventually marry after these events prove his moral worth.

In Bianca's case, she does not know how strongly she feels for Lord Melton, who professes his love for her. She tells him she does not feel for him more than as a brother and close friend, so he goes abroad in an attempt to forget her. While he is

away, Bianca sends Lord Melton a letter chronicling Conrad's return to London after Alice's death and her caring for him. Melton misunderstands the letter and thinks they are reunited romantically. He does not write to Bianca for some time. During this time, Melton is able to confirm his worthiness of Bianca and his loyalty to her. His integrity is tested in the same way Conrad's was, but Melton remains faithful to Bianca. Instead, he uses his power to help others in different ways because they remind him of Bianca. He eventually learns the truth about Conrad's situation and returns to England in hopes that Bianca can love him. As a result of the silence on Lord Melton's part, Bianca realizes the affection she does have for him and does indeed return his love upon seeing him. Likewise, once they are reunited, they marry.

Olive's romantic hopes, however, are deferred much longer than the other heroines. She and Harold go through a heart-wrenching span of miscommunications and prideful silences on the topic of their love for each other. Finally, in a self-sacrificing act similar but more successful than Rochester's, Harold saves Olive from her burning home. That Harold physically saves Olive from a life-threatening fire, the cause of which is unknown, renders him a more suitable partner for the woman who has symbolically saved him from a spiritually, life-threatening heresy. Craik seems to use this device to throw these now suitable lovers into each other's arms. The stress of almost losing Olive causes Harold's lung to rupture. He gradually recovers but still fears that death is imminent. These circumstances cause him to finally suppress his pride and confess his love to Olive. She reciprocates his feelings, and they marry.

Olive's angelic nature is already refined, but Harold is refined and purified by the fire, rendering him fit for the companionship of such an angel as Olive. Harold's

symbolic purification seems to be a commentary on the perfect match for a perfect woman. Other than his weakness for Sara's beauty and his heretical beliefs, Harold is described as a perfect man in appearance and character. His physical appearance is described by Meliora when he coincidentally visits Michael Vanbrugh with his friend Lord Arundale before ever meeting Olive. Harold's upstanding character is also constantly referred to by his mother. Thus, in appearance and in outward character, Harold seems the perfect man. His two flaws, his lack of faith in God and in women, are both remedied through his connection with Olive and culminates in his surviving the burning of her house.

Once each heroine finds her moral equal, Showalter highlights one final act of self-sacrifice: "To get a great deal of money and to give it to a man for his work was the feminine heroine's apotheosis, the ultimate in the power of self-sacrifice" (84). Poovey describes the early-nineteenth-century understanding of the "maternal instinct" which "accounted for the remarkable fact that women were not self-interested and aggressive like men, but self-sacrificing and tender" (7). The protagonists in these novels demonstrate this valorized quality of self-sacrifice in many ways but most commonly by sacrificing their inheritance to their husbands.

After examining these marriages, two points stand out from these romantic endings; first, they end in marriage, and second, the marriages occur at the very end of each novel. The marriage seems to indicate the upholding of middle-class, hetero-normative values, i.e. that the value of marriage was assumed as a "normal" end point for heterosexual individuals. That this marriage takes place at the end of a novel presented as the memoir, autobiography, or biography of a single, professional woman's

life indicates both a confirmation of marriage as an end point but also challenges domestic ideology's feminine ideal. That these women marry in the end is proof of their revolutionary femininity and ability to prove their womanhood in spite of their singleness and professionalism.

## CHAPTER 6

### SOME WOMEN'S ANSWERS: IN CONCLUSION

Middle-class domestic ideology in mid-century England maintained a man's superiority by keeping a woman dependent on his financial provisions. A woman was rewarded for her inferiority with the promise of financial security as long as she fulfilled the role of the feminine ideal: a marker of middle-class status. As a result of this system, a man was relegated to the public sphere, where he earned the means of providing for his wife, while a woman was relegated to the private sphere, where she upheld the image of a middle-class status within the home and through her accomplishments. A single, professional woman disrupted this system and the hierarchical gender binary it upheld by fulfilling both gender roles.

Some middle-class women face circumstances that cause them to pursue work. In spite of the tendency for these women to be stigmatized as unfeminine or unwomanly, these authors represent single, professional women who embody feminine qualities valorized in the domestic ideal. Their lives are in fact very similar to other middle-class women except for their singleness and professionalism. These representations seem to argue for the acceptance rather than the stigmatization of single, professional women, particularly those who model feminine qualities and prove their marriageability.

These heroines have redefined the feminine ideal. They have made room for singleness and professionalism within this ideal by showing how their femininity and subjectivity has been augmented by their experiences. Victorian middle-class ideology asserted that a woman's power came through marriage and motherhood. As a result,

single, professional, Victorian women of mid-century England were commonly stigmatized for not fulfilling the conventional roles prescribed by this ideology. This study, however, has shown how Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive represent ways middle-class women may have reconciled their identities as both professional and feminine by redefining the feminine ideal and by asserting their subjectivity. This subjectification first takes place in the scopic exchanges that present each heroine with opportunities to assert her desires. She accomplishes this through her passive pleasure by choosing whether her body or her body of work is displayed and how it is viewed by others. For Jane and Helen who are evaluated based on their feminine accomplishments, this process places them alongside other conventionally feminine women. Even though Bianca is not initially considered conventionally feminine because of her occupation as an actress and her illegitimate birth, she holds herself to those standards. As a result, her character is repeatedly deemed flawless even though her position as an actress places her in a questionable light. Olive is quite conventional but does not develop feminine accomplishments for the purpose of gaining a suitor. Olive's disability protects her from the critical gaze of men but not from the gaze of Sara Derwent. Sara is Olive's childhood friend who is the first to reveal Olive's difference to her. Olive then views herself as unlikely to marry as a result of this discovery. Once Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive are found in accordance with conventional femininity, each heroine's professionalism challenges the limits of that identification. She asserts her subjectivity by wholeheartedly earning a living while simultaneously proving that her professionalism has augmented her feminine development. In different ways, their feminine qualities protect them from stigmatization in spite of their professionalism. For some, their

domestic and maternal capabilities help to confirm their marriageability. Before finding her lifelong partner, however, each heroine experiences a period of singleness in which the need for a husband is questioned altogether. The maternal influence exhibited by each protagonist and by the single or widowed women who mentor the protagonist challenges the idea that women need to be biological mothers to manifest maternal influence. The absence of biological motherhood within a woman's feminine development negates the need for a husband as a partner in biological reproduction. In spite of the benefits of singleness, each heroine does find a lifelong partner. On her own terms, each heroine finds a husband who is her moral equal and who shares her mutual respect and affection proves to be the only acceptable alternative to singleness for these heroines. Each protagonist gains subjectivity through an unconventional feminine development by taking ownership of her body and her body of work, by utilizing her feminine qualities to defend her professionalism, by demonstrating her marriageability through the execution of domestic and maternal responsibilities in addition to her professional work, by considering the benefits of singleness and exercising maternal influence amongst her peers, by waiting for her moral equal and by choosing the terms on which she marries him. These experiences of subjectification demonstrate the ways in which Jane, Helen, Bianca and Olive have indeed redefined the feminine ideal by asserting their subjectivity and humanity, by resisting objectification, by taking ownership of their work and identities, and by prioritizing their own perspectives.

What is the significance of these redefined ideals? How might women writers who publish after mid-nineteenth century have continued this process of redefinition? Elizabeth Ammons provides one explanation for how this occurs across the pond. In

*Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century*, she highlights the difference between women who wrote for the sake of art at the end of the nineteenth century versus previous generations who wrote out of economic necessity. Without the preliminary steps taken by early woman novelists, women writing at the turn of the twentieth century would not have had the same freedoms. Similarly, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Geraldine Jewsbury's *The Half Sisters*, and Dinah Craik's *Olive* pave the way for examining the femininity and subjectification of single, professional women and for redefining the Angel in the House just as Harriet Martineau's *Deerbrook* may have laid the groundwork for them.

Elizabeth Langland provides an insightful examination of how different generations of writers may have attempted to continue this process of redefining the Angel in the House, albeit in conflicting ways: "Sensation novels that emerged in the 1860s portrayed a different kind of middle-class woman. Indeed, what made them sensational depended in part, on depictions of devilish corruption beneath an angelic demeanor . . . (233). Thus, the sensation novel attempted to redefine the feminine ideal by representing women with both angelic and devilish qualities. Langland also describes "new women" novels that "resolve the paradox of the managing angel by investing her traits in her two characters: one, a reinscription of the passive, dependent angel and the other, an independent, self-reliant woman who is represented as a mannish, aggressive, proto-professional" (23). In contrast with sensation novels, the new woman novel does not attempt to balance these seemingly antithetical identities in one woman.



In researching novels that use feminine accomplishments or artistic talent as a means for women to earn a living, many seem to follow this trajectory of conflicted stories. Perhaps in an attempt to push their heroines toward greater freedom, these authors find there is no system in place to support unconventionally ambitious women. Thus, the representations of single, professional women that are provided in these novels appear thwarted. Anne Thackeray Ritchie's novel *Miss Angel and Fulham Lawn* (1870) is a fictionalized representation of a real eighteenth-century artist, Angelica Kauffmann. By looking back to a period when women with means were more free to pursue art, Ritchie seems to lament the restrictions of 1870s England. The artist character in Charlotte Yonge's *Pillars of the House* (1874) is disabled and a support to her brother. Her disability seems to serve the same purpose as Olive's, an opportunity to pursue an artistic career while marriage seems unlikely. Without this disability, however, one wonders whether Yonge's character would still remain single and professional. Rather, her disability seems to enable her professionalism in a conventional society that still stigmatizes professional women. Mrs. Humphry Ward's female artist in *The History of David Grieve* (1892) is in an open relationship and seems to confirm that such an unconventional occupation is only befitting of an unconventional relationship. Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894) represents a woman artist who is subject to a conventional marriage and whose genius is thwarted as a result.

These representations of single, professional women who rely on their feminine accomplishments or artistic skills in a manner similar to Jane, Helen, Bianca, and Olive present an interesting contrast, particularly in the way they continue to represent conflicting stories. Rather than be neat revisions of the domestic ideal, these heroines

differ in their love and hate for this prescription, both within themselves and in comparison with each other.

When I first began this study it was precisely these contradictions and inconsistencies that continued to surprise me. Langland notes, "Authors, like books, bear the marks of their historical moment with its particular tensions and contradictions" (20), making it particularly difficult to label these novels as purely feminist or anti-feminist. Rather, they all contain proponents of change in various and sometimes conflicting ways. These novels are not necessarily solutions to the patriarchal system in place but may perhaps be viewed as stepping stones toward alternative ways of expressing femininity. I hope that if I were to extend my examination of the single, professional woman through the century, that I would continue to leave room for these diverse representations. In addition to extending the period in which the novels of my study are published, there is also room to examine those protagonists whose professionalism is unable to be reconciled with a marriageable identity. This would leave room for an even more "discontinuous" femininity (Butler 23).

From a twenty-first century perspective, we now understand that women may not want to marry at all, and if they do, they may not want to partner with a woman. However, it is important to value the progress these nineteenth-century women were making in the context of their time and culture. In spite of the "progress" we have made, it is still difficult in some circles (in 21st-century America) for some women to remain single and for other women to choose a female partner, or a transgender partner, or gender ambiguous partner for that matter. Needless to say, we are still progressing when it comes to understanding gender and sexuality, and it does a disservice to these

women of the mid-nineteenth century to presume that we understand the struggles they endured to gain and maintain power and influence. I have attempted to create an account of their experiences and the possible motivators from the perspective of a nineteenth-century woman. I agree with Langland's proposition that we "move beyond critical assessments that either celebrate or condemn this figure [the domestic woman] to more complex and even contradictory configurations of her role within Victorian culture" (21). Rather than uncovering hidden acts of feminism (as we understand it today), I believe it is important to value the subtle acts of subjectification that have empowered subsequent generations of women. The New Woman is comparatively more radical than the mid-century single, professional woman who eventually marries, but the New Woman might not have made the same progress without the initial steps taken toward professionalism by women in the mid-century.

My hope is that this study on the assumptions enforced by the gender binary present in Victorian domestic ideology, the problems it created and how women writers attempted to resolve those issues will cause people to reflect on the functions of the gender binary in today's society. I hope people will ask themselves, how am I affected by the gender binary? How do I support it? How do I undermine it? My own personal experience has shown me that in spite of the incredible advances inspired by feminism and queer theory, advances in our thinking on gender roles, gender expression and sexual orientation, we are still very much restricted by the masculine/feminine gender binary. I do have faith that these advances will make a greater difference in the lives of my children, two people born of the opposite sex, who will be able to express their gender in a way that makes them comfortable in their own skin, to be both emotionally

expressive and purpose driven, to balance the professional and domestic with or without partners of their choosing, and perhaps to even consider an alternative relationship model where they are able to share parental responsibilities with loved ones.

To me, these heroines represent a feminine development that veers off track. In spite of the difficult terrain beneath them, they follow that path to a “subjectified” identity and learn to balance that which had previously seem irreconcilable. Perhaps I connect with these heroines so strongly because I have similarly veered off track down a path that has led me through a feminist development. In spite of my conservative, fundamentalist upbringing, I have been able to reconcile my identity as a feminist Christian. This journey began in the fall of 2008, when Dr. Chris Orchard (assisted by Lois Tyson) helped me conceptualize my patriarchal experience. Empowered by feminism, I finally felt like I had the tools to subjectify myself and my experience. My graduate assistantship with Dr. Chauna Craig in the Women’s Studies Program led me to another crucial personal development--helping to plan and then chair the *Gender and Sexuality Symposium*. This experience helped me to once again reconcile two formerly antithetical identities as I came to understand the cohesion of my Christian and ally self.

Dr. Orchard may not recall this instance, but I remember being so exhilarated by feminism, I told him I wanted to create a language that would dismantle the hierarchical binary that prioritized men and anything male or masculine above women, female and feminine. I did not become the “theoroid” I initially envisioned, but I have to admit I am pleased with how this journey has concluded even if the idea of “subjectification” is my only contribution. When I sometimes question the value of my graduate education as

someone who may not use my doctoral degree in higher education, I often remind myself of this feminist journey. I believe the same may be considered for these representations of single, professional women. Rather than dismiss their accomplishment of veering off track and thus redefining the feminine ideal because their stories conclude in marriage, I hope readers will focus on the journey that led them to more subjectified selves.

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