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FASHIONING MOBILITY: NAVIGATING SPACE IN VICTORIAN FICTION

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky

By
Mary Clai Jones
Lexington, KY

Director: Ellen Rosenman, Professor of English
Lexington, KY
2015

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

FASHIONING MOBILITY: NAVIGATING SPACE IN VICTORIAN FICTION

My dissertation examines how heroines in nineteenth-century British Literature manipulate conventional objects of feminine culture in ways which depart from uses associated with Victorian marriage plots. Rather than use fashionable objects to gain male attention or secure positions as wives or mothers, female characters deploy self-fashioning tactics to travel under the guise of unthreatening femininity, while skirting past thresholds of domestic space. Whereas recent Victorian literary and cultural criticism identifies female pleasure in the form of consumption and homosocial/erotic desire, my readings of Victorian fiction, from doll stories to the novels of Charlotte Brontë, Wilkie Collins, and Marie Corelli, consider that heroines find pleasure in deploying fashionable objects—such as dolls, clothes, cosmetics, and jewelry—which garner access to public space typically off limits for Victorian women. In the first chapter, girls use dolls to play in wilderness spaces, fostering female friendships. Muted dress provides a cloak of invisibility, allowing the heroine to participate in the pleasure of ocular economies in the second chapter. The third chapter features a female detective who uses cosmetics to disguise her infiltration of men's private spaces in order to access private secrets. Finally, the project culminates with jewelry's re-signification as female success in the publishing world.

Tracing how female characters in Victorian fiction use self-fashioning as a pathway, this study maps the safe travel heroines discover through wild landscapes, urban streets, and professional arenas. These spaces were often coded with sets of conditions for gendered interactions. Female characters' proficient self-styling provides mobility through locations guarded by the voices of neighbors, friends, and family who attempt to keep them in line with Victorian gender conventions. Female characters derive an often unexplored pleasure: the secret joy of being where they should not and going against

what they are told. In the novels I examine, female protagonists navigate prolific rules and advice about how to arrange and manage their appearances, not to aspire to paragons of Victorian beauty and womanhood but in order to achieve physical and geographic mobility outside domestic interiors.

KEYWORDS: Victorian Literature; Nineteenth-Century British; Fiction; Feminism; Women Writers; Travel

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Mary Clai Jones

3 August 2015

FASHIONING MOBILITY: NAVIGATING SPACE IN VICTORIAN FICTION

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"[T]he demonstration of 'femininity' has involved the arrangement of items within a system that gives them their meaning" (Bordo 24).

Each female character examined in *Fashioning Mobility* hears the words, "you should not be here," in some form or another. For example, Valeria Woodville in Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady* hears the following reprimand when she determines to travel to the home of a man she has never met: "'Do you mean . . . that you are going roaming about the country to throw yourself on the mercy of strangers, and to risk whatever rough reception you may get in the course of your travels? You! A young woman! . . . With nobody to protect you?'" (Collins 161). Yet, these cautionary words "shared the fate of most warnings. It only made [Valeria] more and more eager to have [her] own way" (Collins 267). The central question becomes how heroines move through spaces guarded with such warnings. This project maps how heroines elude disciplinary action from Victorian border patrol by repurposing objects of feminine culture. Following Michel de Certeau's notion that pedestrians rewrite the space of cities by using "tactics," through local and temporary departures from norms of conduct, this dissertation explores how heroines in Victorian fiction find flex in the system by using objects of feminine culture to provisionally elude the discipline of dominant groups (30). Female characters discover temporary agency in their deployment of fashionable objects and experience unexpected pleasure in their journeys outside domestic space.

My dissertation examines how heroines manipulate conventional objects of feminine culture in ways which depart from uses associated with Victorian marriage plots. Rather than use fashionable objects to gain male attention or secure positions as wives or

mothers, female characters deploy self-fashioning tactics to travel under the guise of unthreatening femininity, while skirting past thresholds of domestic space. Whereas recent Victorian literary and cultural criticism identifies female pleasure in the form of consumption and homosocial/erotic desire, my readings of Victorian fiction, from doll stories to the novels of Charlotte Brontë, Wilkie Collins, and Marie Corelli, consider that heroines find pleasure in deploying fashionable objects – such as dolls, clothes, cosmetics, and jewelry – which garner access to public space typically off limits for Victorian women. In the first chapter, girls use dolls to play in wilderness spaces, fostering female friendships. Muted dress provides a cloak of invisibility, allowing the heroine to participate in the pleasure of ocular economies in the second chapter. The third chapter features a female detective who uses cosmetics to disguise her infiltration of men's private spaces in order to access private secrets. Finally, the project culminates with jewelry's re-signification as female success in the publishing world.

Tracing how female characters in Victorian fiction use self-fashioning as a pathway, this study maps the safe travel heroines discover through wild landscapes, urban streets, and professional arenas. These spaces were often coded with sets of conditions for gendered interactions. Female characters' proficient self-styling provides mobility through locations guarded by the voices of neighbors, friends, and family who attempt to keep them in line with Victorian gender conventions. Female characters derive an often unexplored pleasure: the secret joy of being where they should not and going against what they are told. In the novels I examine, female protagonists navigate prolific rules and advice about how to arrange and manage their appearances, not to aspire to paragons

of Victorian beauty and womanhood but in order to achieve physical and geographic mobility outside domestic interiors.

Self-Fashioning and the Construction of Femininity

Heroines self-fashion by repurposing fashionable objects and materials of feminine culture (Sheehan and Parkins) as tactics (de Certeau) in order to access public space. Self-fashioning provides heroines with a means of mobility that works despite disciplinary threats and warnings. In counterintuitive deployments of feminine culture, heroines in each chapter use the very accoutrement meant to cultivate domesticity and relationships to men, in order to move into the public sphere and find unexpected pleasures. Throughout this project, I will use the term self-fashioning, which I define as the process of choosing and arranging material objects to present a character to the world.¹ This term refers to a system of presenting a persona to a chosen public as well as the specific action of choosing and arranging garments, accessories, and cosmetics.

My use of the term self-fashioning draws on Jennifer Craik's idea that fashion is a "technology of self-formation" (7). Reading against the notion that clothes are linked to the 'true' nature of a person, Craik defines fashion as a "bodily technique," an active process "for constructing and presenting a bodily self. . . . The 'life' of the body is played out through the technical arrangement of clothes, adornment and gesture" (1). Like Craik, I perceive fashion as an active process which presents a carefully constructed face to a historically specific social milieu. How and where women wear clothes are always signals within a coded system of conduct. Craik recognizes, in opposition to scholars like Perrot, that "techniques are not simply imposed from above (in a trickle-down process) but con-

¹ Stephen Greenblatt was the first to use this term for literary analysis in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From Moore to Shakespeare*.

stitute acquired abilities of collective and individual practical reason” (Craik 8-9). One of the underlying assumptions in this project is that self-presentation through clothes and cosmetics is a way to “fabricate” a self (Craik 16). Like de Certeau, Craik finds instances of resistance happening in the micro-political practices of daily life. In the Victorian period, fashionable objects within feminine culture are sites of daily life where women can engage in resistance.

Victorian culture envisioned a world spatially organized by class and gender. Thus, Michel de Certeau’s term tactic from *The Practice of Everyday Life* is an apt characterization of how I envision the act of self-fashioning to achieve mobility. Reworking those fashionable objects from Victorian feminine culture intended as technologies of gender, female characters repurpose them as tactics for navigating the conditions placed upon when and where women are allowed to move and be seen. Body gestures and clothing work together as a kind of symbolic language by which women can access space in nuanced ways that do not dismantle Victorian systems of patriarchal power. Drawing upon de Certeau, I analyze what users make and do with the materials and rules of space imposed upon them (31). Self-fashioning for heroines of Victorian novels is a strategy employed within regulated, planned space without corresponding to its rules. Fashion allows characters to travel past those who deter them from entering certain spaces and question their respectability and feminine duty when they appear out of place.

Drawing on Ilya Parkins’s and Elizabeth M. Sheehan’s descriptions, cultures of femininity often incorporate fashionable objects which “[take] on and [help] produce the material practices of femininity,” becoming “a vector of the kinds of significations and practices that help to constitute femininity as an ideological construct” (4). Technologies

of gender include the accoutrements and material objects implicated in cultures of femininity, but they also have the potential to disrupt “regimes of gender in modernity” (Parkins and Sheehan 4). Female characters throughout this project take the very material objects meant to cultivate and reinforce their Victorian womanhood instead revising their deployment to negotiate and manipulate the terrain of public spaces. The heroines in each chapter unsettle rather than reinforce narratives about women’s appearances, mobility, and gender roles.

Within the fiction included in this project, heroines use self-fashioning as a tactic to destabilize – even if temporarily – women’s roles as wives and mothers within marriage plots. Levine’s “Strategic Formalisms: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies,” suggests there is more flexibility in the application of separate spheres. While some characters voice the concerns of conduct literature, other characters, say heroines, respond to by repurposing the technologies of gender to unsettle conventions and create subversive pathways into contested spaces. I say contested spaces because the geographic places within Victorian culture are not always clearly marked as public and masculine or private and feminine. Although some feminist scholars urge for the rejection of the term separate spheres,² I find Levine’s characterization of private and public as ideological forms productive in my own analysis. As a result, female characters discover fluidity within and between the spaces of home and public.

The disciplinary voices that heroines encounter in fiction echo etiquette literature and conduct manuals of the nineteenth-century. Women writers such as Eliza Lynn Linton, Sarah Stickney Ellis, and Isabella Beeton discursively participated in the construc-

² Cathy N. Davidson’s and Jessamyn Hatcher’s *No More Separate Spheres!: A Next Wave American Studies Reader* call for a dismantling of the term for its overly simplistic basic assumptions.

tion of middle-class Victorian femininity and laid out the materials to fashion that femininity. Margaret Beetham's *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800-1914* explores how the women's magazine "[l]ike the nineteenth-century middle-class home . . . evolved . . . as a 'feminised space' . . . defined by the woman who was at its centre and by its difference from the masculine world of politics and economics" (Beetham 3). She argues that women's magazines "assumed a universal femininity marked by the desire to be desired," continually constructing Victorian womanhood as contingent upon roles as wives, mothers, and mistresses (Beetham 22). Women's periodicals work as a technology of gender,³ disseminating expectations about the performance and cultivation of femininity.

Victorians believed that outward appearances were a key to understanding the very fiber of a person's being, and middle-class women's exteriors were especially monitored because they were at the center of Victorian anxieties about the stability and formation of the middle class. Thus, their modes of self-presentation became increasingly visible and debated.⁴ Appearances were at once policed for excessive vanity and looked to as "a letter of recommendation" which can be "read by every beholder" (Beeton 110-11). Not only do periodicals and conduct literature construct feminine ideals in terms of behavior but they also focus on women's appearances as the signifier for the adequate performance of those behaviors. For example, *Mrs. Beeton's Complete Etiquette for La-*

³ Teresa de Lauretis's *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* describes film as a technology which deploys sets of expectations, acceptable behaviors, and self-presentations which comply with institutionalized discourses that in turn get internalized and reproduced by individual subjects. I borrow this term to refer to periodicals and conduct literature aimed a middle-class women in Victorian England that work in much the same way.

⁴ Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* identifies women writers as active participants in the formation of middle-class domestic ideology. She claims the history of the novel is tied to the formation of the middle-classes, and the novel, represented and helped form class solidarity.

dies stresses the importance of outward appearances: “Dress is the criterion by which a stranger generally forms his first judgment of our taste and habits, and sometimes our rank in society, and it therefore, demands a proportionate degree of attention, as self-love will naturally dictate the wish to make a favorable impression. And first impressions are rarely obliterated” (110). For women, their ability to dress well spoke volumes about their character. A tenuous and potentially dangerous line must be tread between vanity and “indifference to dress” and “unadorned plainness” (Beeton 111). While women must look their best, they must not let attention to appearances disrupt their roles within the home: “But a woman of cultivated understanding will never suffer her toilette to engross so much of her attention as to interfere with the higher duties of life but will make it her study to acquire skill and taste to do all that is required in personal adornment . . . and without the appearance of consciousness or effort” (Beeton 113). Sarah Stickney Ellis similarly observes that maintaining a pleasing appearance is part of what she calls “the great business of a woman's life” to “make herself agreeable” (96). Ellis claims that all women should “constantly maintain in their own persons that strict attention to good taste” because a woman’s tidy appearance conveys a well-managed home and family. She explains further that “good taste is therefore most essential to the regulation of her dress and general appearance; and wherever any striking violation of this principle appears, the beholder is immediately impressed with the idea that a very important rule of her life and conduct is wanting” (Ellis 99-100). Outward appearances, therefore, become a “law” under which women must be judged.

Elizabeth Langland’s *Nobody’s Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (1995) argues that because women played an integral part in

the formation and preservation of the middle class, women's clothing and behavior was policed to ensure ideological cohesion. She attributes the rise in ladies' magazines and conduct manuals to more policing, managing, and instructing for women's behavior and appearance fitting their social standing. In fact, she stipulates that these factors make women's presence more significant in social settings than men's presence (Langland 34). Philippe Perrot's *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century* (1981 English translation 1994) also depicts nineteenth-century dress as a technology of gender and class. Women's appearances developed as a code read on the body. Both of these accounts of nineteenth-century middle-class fashion characterize the impetus behind clothing as contributing to social solidarity. Yet, what happens when female characters self-fashion in ways that do not "merge with the group," as Perrot argues (13)?

Mobility Produces Pleasure

When Birdie Somers reunites with her old friend Florence, their memories of doll play resonate with a pleasurable nostalgia. When Lucy Snowe wanders out of the shopping district into the rush and roar of the city, she observes "At the West-end you may be amused, but in the city you are deeply excited" (Brontë 49). When Valeria Woodville is reinstated into her domestic role as wife, she laments "It is not to be disguised or denied that my spirits were depressed . . . [to] resign the one cherished purpose of my life" (Collins 499). When Delicia Vaughn dresses for her book premier, she revels in the diamonds and satin of her dress, knowing they are symbols of her professional success as a novelist.

This project extends the work of feminist scholars who claim that feminine pastimes, traditionally meant to either solidify class status or relationships to men, instead elicit pleasure. My project would not be possible without Valerie Steele's and Sharon Marcus's claims that fashion gives women in the Victorian era an avenue to explore erot-

ic pleasure and subjectivity. *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age* (1985) recognizes fashion as a technology of gender which can be read as producing erotic pleasure rather than passive, sexless femininity. Steele argues that because of the close proximity between garments and bodies clothing always expresses the body's sexuality. For Steele, clothes become objects which cultivate pleasure for women rather than disciplining devices meant to confine.

Steele is a predecessor of Sharon Marcus in the scholarly genealogy tracing Victorian women's pleasure. Marcus's *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (2007) explores how "feminine playthings" like dolls and fashion plates cultivate homosocial and homoerotic desire. However, while Steele argues that women derive an erotic pleasure from cultivating themselves as desirable objects to be looked at, Marcus evaluates the possibility that fashion plates provide women opportunities to look at other women. *Between Women* argues that women's shared activities and experiences relating to fashion simultaneously ignite erotic desire in addition to supporting Victorian heterosexual marriages. While Marcus focuses on how fashionable objects and women's relationships sustain marriage plots, I investigate the way feminine things get detached from relationships with men, providing female characters with forms of pleasure which subvert marriage plots.

Developments in consumer capitalism and the rise of department stores are another area where women use feminine pastimes to cultivate pleasure. The activity of shopping became an increasingly acceptable form of movement from the domestic to the public for middle-class women. Erika Rappaport's *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (2000) and Krista Lysack's *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shop-*

ping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women's Writing (2008) consider the rise of consumer culture as a site where women discovered pleasure and experimented with subjectivity outside the home. Rappaport claims “that public space and gender identities were, in essence, produced together. As the city became a pleasure zone, the shopper was designated as a pleasure seeker, defined by her longing for goods, sights, and public life” (5). In both Lysack’s and Rappaport’s characterizations, shoppers were made up of predominately bourgeois women, and the act of shopping procured temporary mobility outside the home. Both Rappaport and Lysack suggest that Victorian women find expressions of subjectivity through consumption of material goods outside the domestic sphere. These studies have helped me identify patterns at work within Victorian fictions, namely, how women access public spaces under the cover of feminine culture. While Lysack and Rappaport see the act of consumption of fashionable goods a pleasurable practice, my chapters follow the idea that self-fashioning as a strategy to achieve mobility yields pleasure. Pleasure is the byproduct of movement.

The Organization of Chapters

I examine fiction from the 1850s to the 1890s because these decades saw not only a proliferation of periodicals explicitly for middle-class women but also technological advancements allowing for the mass production of printed materials and fashionable objects, all of which constitute technologies of gender. The chapters in this project are organized by two trajectories: women’s life cycles and increasing visibility. I begin with a Victorian doll story and conclude with a fin de siècle woman writer in order to highlight how technologies of gender, such as dolls, are early instances of feminine training. The chapters then move to more adult arenas, examining fashionable objects which continue to construct womanhood through adult life. While my first chapter, “Fashioning Spaces

of Play in *Doll World*,” is an outlier in its examination of an object which might not directly contribute to self-fashioning, dolls function as a technology of gender meant to cultivate proper Victorian values in girls. Doll stories and their prefaces take up similar topics and tones found in conduct literature for Victorian women.

The chapters are also organized by heroines’ movements into more highly visible space. Birdie uses her doll play to access wilderness places outside the barriers of home. While her neighbor believes she engages in reckless behavior by eluding her brother’s supervision, she is nonetheless only intercepted by close friends and family. In the chapter following doll play, Charlotte Brontë’s heroine of *Villette* locates safety in urban space through her choice of gray clothing. In this chapter, Lucy Snowe’s presence in city streets is a step toward greater visibility than the wild landscapes through which Birdie travels. Chapter three explores how Collins’s heroine, Valeria Woodville, achieves even more mobility and visibility than Lucy through cosmetics. Valeria not only passes the thresholds of urban space, but penetrates the inner sanctums of men’s private offices. The first three chapters deal with degrees of increasing geographic and physical mobility, while the final chapter evaluates Marie Corelli’s move into the professional realm of writing. The project culminates in Corelli’s construction of a new ideal woman writer as well as the reconstruction of domestic space as a site of female professional production. Each chapter takes up a different object of feminine culture/technology of gender, and each heroine repurposes the fashionable object as a tactic which not only gleans greater mobility but also temporarily subverts the marriage plot in different states of women’s life cycles.

Chapter 1: Fashioning Spaces of Play in *Doll World*

My first chapter argues that doll play widens the field of girls' play spaces beyond the barrier of home. Because dolls are not surprising playmates for little girls, young heroines fashion their doll play to give their chaperones the slip and travel to unsupervised places where they find autonomous play. For example, *Doll World; or Play in Earnest* by Eleanor Grace O'Reilly contradicts official advice that doll play prepares girls for marriage and motherhood, instead offering the discovery of unsupervised non-domestic play in the wilderness without the presence of men. Dolls provide young protagonists with access to rushing streams, muddy swamps, and female friendships, none of which lead to matrimony or procreation.

Doll stories were overwhelmingly didactic lessons about the construction of proper middle-class femininity. For example, in the preface to *Memoirs of a Doll; Written by Herself*, the author asserts "Such as are the little girls of one period with their dolls, such will be the women of the world of a few years later" (Besset vi). In contrast, the frontispiece for *Doll World; or, Play and Earnest* (1872) by Eleanor Grace O'Reilly depicts the heroine, Birdie Somers, with her doll slung over one shoulder as she steadies a little boat. She stands ankle deep in water with no shoes or socks. Surrounded by cattails, tall grass and foliage, a surprised little face peeps out between the leaves. Birdie stands tall and confident in the water among the brushy, marshy banks with no adults, no buildings, no parents, and no chaperones pictured in this frontispiece. When her play is interrupted by the scolding of her neighbor, Mr. Deane promotes the presence of boys to chaperone girls in spaces outside the home. While dolls were traditionally geared toward teaching girls about the self-sacrificing care of mothers and nurses and the skills needed to efficiently

manage a household, Birdie and Florence instead use dolls to foster female bonds and discover autonomous play, both of which lead to pleasures unconnected to men or to traditional middle-class girlhood.

The focus of doll play in *Doll World* is friendship between women. *Doll World* illustrates a prototype of girlhood in its depiction of doll play, one that anticipates future New Women. Therefore, Birdie bequeaths new forms of play to her daughters paving the way for more progressive models of girlhood. *Doll World's* nostalgic conclusion plants the seeds for emergent forms of autonomy that carry through to fin de siècle womanhood. Although Birdie herself is recuperated back into domestic life in adulthood, her resonant nostalgia for girlhood autonomy sows subversive futures for her daughters.

Chapter 2: The Cloak of Mobility in *Villette*

My second chapter demonstrates how Charlotte Brontë's Lucy Snowe reverses Victorian conventional wisdom equating domestic interiors with safety and city streets with danger and uncontained desire. The walls of churches, schools, and houses threaten her health and her autonomy, while the openness of urban centers represents protection and ultimately pleasure. Lucy's sartorial choice of gray clothing throughout the novel safeguards her from unwanted attention in city streets. Her muted clothing creates a disguise, allowing her to blend into landscapes and buildings. Drawing upon Lynda Nead's claims that Victorian women participated in a range of pleasures within the metropolis, I examine how Brontë's heroine partakes in the ocular freedom of urban visual culture by disguising herself as a decorous, invisible woman.

Lucy's clothing choices become strategies to hide her physical body within urban spaces, ensuring safe passage through the most precarious of all Victorian public spaces.

Lucy's self-fashioning not only shields her from the dangers lurking in city streets but also dangers within domestic space. Throughout the novel, Lucy learns to protect herself by moving unseen through confining spaces under the surveillance of Madame Beck which threatens her health and her capacity to experience pleasure. Lucy expresses her "elation and pleasure" at the adventure of walking unchaperoned, unguided through London. As she meanders "wither chance might lead," Lucy not only experiences "real pleasure" (emphasis mine) but also travels through many neighborhoods in which women would not normally venture. Lucy locates the source of her pleasure from solitary walks within the open space of streets. She presents a unique solution to the conundrum of women's presence in the metropolis. In seeking sights while remaining out of sight, Lucy deflects the troublesome attentions of men, in turn protecting her respectability. Yet, her consumption of sights and feelings of deep excitement reveal a new avenue of female pleasure. In fact, Lucy provides an early example of what Tanya Agathocleous might call a gendered panorama. By utilizing the panoramic form, Lucy becomes the cartographer providing her particular vision of London. Throughout the novel, she learns to create and insert herself within a commanding view of both London and Villette. This skill of including herself within and creating her own view of the city becomes a means of locating safety. Once Lucy gets her bearings, the streets of Villette become safer for her than the corridors of Rue Fossette.

Chapter 3: Cosmetics as Disguise in Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady*

Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady* traces Valeria Britton/Woodville/Macallan's journey to find out why her husband, Eustace Woodville, has married her under an alias. Contrasted with Eustace's first wife, who uses cosmetics to

catch the attentions of her husband, Valeria uses make-up and clothing not only to procure details regarding Eustace's court case, but more importantly, she finds unexpected pleasure in "stepping out of her own character" (Collins 73). Assuming the role of detective, Valeria applies cosmetics as a disguise, hiding her un-submissive behaviors and unfeminine movements beneath a beautiful exterior. Learning of her husband's past puts Valeria in a precarious position. Playing within the expectations of middle-class femininity and carefully maneuvering under the umbrella of concerned wife, Valeria navigates around those who warn her to stay out of the law's way. By luring men into her confidences, Valeria creates opportunities to work on their feelings, giving her access to places from which she would normally be prohibited, such as men's private offices and legal files, thus altering women's relationship to the social geographies of home. Collins creates a character whose true self cannot be read on the surface of her appearances. Valeria emerges as the master-duper – an Irene Adler so to speak. The *Law and the Lady* problematizes the success of Victorian marriage plots, questions the confinement of women to the roles of wife and mother, and challenges women's access to masculine institutions like the Law.

Chapter 4: Corelli's Designing Fictions: Fashioning the Woman of Genius

Exceeding the book sales of both her male and female contemporaries alike, Marie Corelli was fin de siècle Britain's most popular novelist,⁵ yet popularity and monetary success was not enough to satiate her desire to be seen as a serious author. She considered herself and cultivated the persona of a woman of genius. This final chapter examines how Corelli designs a new model of the woman writer through her own self-fashioning and the construction of her heroine in *The Murder of Delicia*. Fin de siècle women writers were often characterized by their critics as ugly spinsters, bespectacled, dowdy, and unsexed. As Elaine Showalter, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and Mary Poovey have explored, Victorian women writers had to tread carefully and cleverly through the many stereotypes discouraging women's entrance into the professional world of writing.⁶ This chapter explores how Corelli carefully arranged and controlled her public image, in life and fiction, by converting objects of feminine culture to represent professional success. Her conversion of feminine space and appearances for public viewing troubles nineteenth-century notions of women's place in the white collar world. Unlike the diamonds in conventional Victorian marriage plots, the jewelry on Corelli's body and the bodies of her heroine does not signify relationships with men. Corelli revises associations of jewelry and clothing with Victorian marriage and heterosexual love, reimagining them as symbols of women's economic success.

Corelli understood the market's shift toward increased author visibility, yet rather than submit a portrait of herself to Jerome K. Jerome's *My First Book* series, she includes

⁵ William Stuart Scott, *Marie Corelli: The Story of a Friendship* reports that Corelli sold approximately 100,000 novels a year, more than any of her contemporaries (223). Teresa Ransom's *The Mysterious Miss Marie Corelli: Queen of Victorian Bestsellers*, literary biography title comes from the words of a sermon on *The Sorrows of Satan* given by the nineteenth-century monk, Father Ignatius (84).

⁶ See Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984).

photographs of rooms within her house. By including images of her drawing room, study, and library, Corelli further constructs her persona as a career woman.⁷ Closely reading images of her drawing room, library, and study, this chapter evaluates how Corelli converted home spaces into work places. To substitute domestic interiors in place of her own likeness proposes that these rooms are part and parcel of her identity as a woman writer. She rewrites her own domestic interiors as a site where literary work happens rather than domestic work. Corelli continues to revise the symbolic meanings of interiors and appearances for women in the public sphere in her fiction. *The Murder of Delicia* explores how the manipulation of clothing and jewelry helps establish a professional identity for the woman writer. Corelli designs a heroine whose sartorial styling provides a vehicle from the domestic to the public realm of fame and professional literary spaces guarded by men. By purchasing her own jewelry, Delicia converts traditional associations of diamonds with marriage to markers of her own economic agency. Written in the middle of Corelli's career at the height of her fame and celebrity, *The Murder of Delicia* illustrates a model of the woman writer who is confident in her expertise and who seeks public acknowledgement of her profession.

Conclusion

Fashioning Mobility traces the movements of heroines in nineteenth-century fiction, revealing that despite threats to reputation and safety, women were more mobile than previously believed. We know that women gained more access to public spaces

⁷ Annette Federico states in *Idol of Suburbia: Marie Corelli and Late-Victorian Literary Culture*, "Her ornate signature was published at least twice as often as pictures of her face and was even embossed on the covers of her later novels" (26).

through the century,⁸ and we know that Victorians were obsessed with things.⁹ Using this overlap between ideas as a lens for analysis provides a fresh look into the repurposing of feminine things to carry out unfeminine movements. More broadly, this project takes issue with theories that claim novels are produced alongside and in conjunction with women's role in middle-class domesticity. Instead, I offer a subtle exploration of micro-subversions existing in spite of middle-class gender roles' corralling impetus. Moving through the second-half of the nineteenth-century, this project offers a nuanced guide for the rise of the new woman and later, more explicit depictions of gender relationships at the end of the century.

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⁸ With the development of consumer capitalism, places like the West End in London aided not only the rise in department stores but also women's lavatories and clubs. See Ericka Rappaport's *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End*.

⁹ Many scholars have explored the Victorian's impetus to collect, observe, buy, and display things. See Deborah Cohen's *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions*, Asa Briggs's *Victorian Things*, and Elaine Freedgood's *The Ideas in Things: Furtive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*. While this is not a project which engages Thing Theory, it must be noted that feminine material things feature heavily into my argument. See Bill Brown's *Things*.

Chapter 2

Fashioning Spaces of Play in Victorian Doll Stories

In the preface to *Memoirs of a Doll; Written by Herself: A New Year's Gift* (1856), Julie Gouraud clearly intends for her readers to conflate doll play with future motherhood. She claims the doll is the “first child, on whose person one learns to tend, to carry, to dress, and to love those who one day will also arrive! Household talents, industrious habits, maternal skill, all awaken in the heart of the little girl who finds herself in presence of this dear head of pasteboard. . . . the tenderness of her mistress is the first ray of maternal love—a doll!” (v). If this were not an overt enough claim, Gouraud further asserts that girls’ interactions with their dolls of “one period will determine the women of the world of a few years later” and this makes dolls the “pivot of humanity” (Gouraud viii). Not only do the futures of all girls stem from their treatment of dolls but the fate of humanity is also bound up in young mistresses’ proper play.

While this chapter is a bit of an outlier within the larger project of the dissertation, it examines the role dolls play in women’s lives as a technology of gender intended – as the above preface shows – to mold young ladies into proper women. While my central text, *Doll World; or Play in Earnest*, published in 1872, falls into the middle of my project’s date range, this chapter marks the beginning of women’s training early in life. Nineteenth-century childhood was cultivated separately for boys and girls, and this shift began at the end of the eighteenth century (Simons 144). Judy Simons observes in “Gender Roles in Children’s Fiction” that “Children’s literature was supposed to prepare youthful readers to enter a society where strict, even unforgiving, codes governed male and female conduct” (146). This sentiment manifests in many prefaces and storylines, intending that girlhood was a time of training for future womanhood. *Doll World* is also

an outlier within the doll story trope. Doll stories throughout the century employ narratives which follow the adventures of a doll protagonist and her interactions with various girl owners, often warning explicitly girl audiences about the dangers of mistreatment and the rewards of self-sacrificing care and love. However, *Doll World* features a heroine who repurposes the doll as a tactic to access play spaces outside the safe circumference of home and supervision, which leads her to lifelong friendship and a lasting memory of agency that girlhood affords, even if temporarily.

Doll literature often claimed didactic ends. Countless images within doll stories depict scenes of domestic activity, and paired with instructive prefaces and introductions, a trend in advice for Victorian girls materializes: playing with dolls and reading doll stories will mold girls into exemplary middle-class women. For example, *Florence and Her Doll: A Tale* (1865) by Margaret Gatti instructs her readers that girls' playtime should not be "associated with either indolence or folly," "ought to be rational," and should "contribute materially to their improvement" (5). The idea of doll play contributing to a young person's education and improvement persisted into the late nineteenth century. In *Queen Victoria's Dolls* (1894), Francis H. Low suggests that Victoria's ability to rule the nation and be a good mother and wife was the direct result of the care she took with her dolls. Particularly, frontispieces and illustrations in doll literature mirror the educational ends dolls were intended to have on little girl's play time. In *Dolly Dear; or the Story of a Waxen Beauty* (1883) by Mrs. Gellie, most of the images depict girls in parlors, nurseries, and bedrooms embracing dolls. This particular story lauds the self-sacrificing love girls should display in caring not only for their dolls but also those less fortunate than them. Sophronia, the doll narrator, instills her owners with patience, empathy, and care-taking

qualities. In “Two New Dolls,” pictured below, Ida and Moncia cradle dolls newly gifted to them by their aunt. In this brief sketch from *The Children's Treasury* (1879), their new dolls inspire them to sew clothes, sparking an industrious spirit. Their aunt approvingly responds, “I hope it will teach you to sew well which is one of woman’s best accomplishments” (270). Their aunt’s words work in conjunction with the illustration and caption, “learning to be useful,” to convey the message that dolls should instill girls with a domestic work ethic.

Figure 1. “The New Dolls.” *The Children’s Treasury*. 1879. 269.



In contrast, the frontispiece for *Doll World; or, Play and Earnest* (1872) by Eleanor Grace O’Reilly depicts the heroine, Birdie Somers, with her doll slung over one

shoulder as she steadies a little boat. She stands ankle deep in water with no shoes or socks. Surrounded by cattails, tall grass and foliage, a surprised little face peeps out between the leaves. Birdie stands tall and confident in the water among the brushy, marshy banks while the other little face of her friend Florence remains hidden in fear of getting dirty and wet. There are no adults, no buildings, no parents, and no chaperones pictured in this frontispiece. From the outset, *Doll World* promotes a different set of aims for girls than those traditionally outlined by prescriptive prefaces and doll literature.



Figure 2. Frontispiece for *Doll World; or, Play and Earnest* by Eleanor Grace O'Reilly Illustrated by C. A. Saltmarsh London: William Cowes and Sons, 1872.

Doll World; or Play and Earnest reworks more familiar doll story plots which narrowly attend to an explicit series of moral and mannerly instructions. Rather than view

dolls as an instrument of social and cultural indoctrination, they become strategic devices used to explore nontraditional play spaces and a means to access a land of girl culture.

While *Doll World* does not overtly contradict the recommendations of more prescriptive doll stories, the bulk of the narrative focuses on Birdie's girlhood adventures instead of her formation into an ideal Victorian woman. At the center of her excursions are her favorite doll, Robertina, and her best friend, Florence. Although Birdie's adventures are bookended with domestic scenes, this story's departure from prescriptive literature depicts late Victorian girlhood as a sacred space and time for women.

Doll World represents a shift in thinking about not only the form and function of doll stories as a genre but also a change in cultural ideas about girlhood. Building upon Sally Mitchell's claims about the shifting concept of girlhood as a "separate stage of existence with its own values and interests," my analysis includes a prototypical doll story that illustrates a similar set of alternate values. (Mitchell 1). *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England 1880-1915* observes that fiction for girls before 1870 "generally emphasized home life and home duties" while fiction towards the end of the century "dwelled on the values, ethics, and interactions of girls themselves, with hardly any adults present" (Mitchell 1). While adolescent literature earlier in the century had overlapping aims with female education, later stories begin to show a change in focus from proper femininity to an emphasis on the importance of girlhood as having "value in itself, not merely a transitional stage to hurry through" (Mitchell 9). Jane H. Hunter's *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* further recognizes "changing ideas of the female self" in late nineteenth-century American literature (2). She argues that once "[f]reed from the constant scrutiny of adults, these girls created a culture which allowed

for a greater sense of fun and play” (Hunter 5). While Mitchell and Hunter examine adolescent literature primarily focused on urban school-going children, their claims about girl culture find resonance in Birdie Somers’s doll play. Birdie’s doll gives her the opportunity to escape the constant surveillance found in earlier adolescent literature (but persisting in doll stories through the century), giving her access to fun and play outside the confines of home. As an upper-middle-class girl living in the marshy country side, she is exposed to more wilderness than urban space. At the age of nine, she is not old enough to be sent to school. Regular academic schooling for middle-class girls did not begin until later in the century. While her neighbor and friend, Florence, is supported by her wealthy uncle, Mr. Deane, Birdie still enjoys the leisure time of more gentrified girls by virtue of proximity. Not many people live close-by, and Florence is geographically nearest to Birdie as a playmate. Several hours of Birdie’s day is spent in lessons from a tutor who visits the home. However, the rest of her day, according to the anecdotal division of chapters, is spent in different forms of play, all of which include her doll.

Unlike the heroines of most doll stories, Birdie is not in need of strict monitoring, correcting, or molding. Oscillating between domestic interiors and outdoor wilderness spaces, Birdie and her best friend, Florence, fluidly craft a kind of play focused on autonomy and female friendship, anticipating later cultural commentary on active, healthy girlhood. Readers are first introduced to Birdie and Florence as they play with dolls in the Somers’s household cupboard. The two girls imagine a world filled with both immediate and extended family and adventure acted out in the unsupervised play space of the cupboard. Although the initial scene of the novel depicts Birdie and Florence imagining and creating scenes from domestic life, their play breaks the pattern from traditional doll sto-

ries that seek to produce appropriate models of Victorian femininity. For example, doll play gives Birdie an imaginative way to work out feelings about her sister's wedding. She experiences a sense of loss at the thought of her sister not living in the same house. The focus of her reenactment is not so much to follow Victorian marriage plots or dream of her own future wedding. Rather, the female-centric plot about her role and feelings surrounding her sister's wedding reveal she is sad about her sister's departure to another home. The doll wedding scenario enables her to cope with losing an intimate female member of her family. The imagined wedding, acted out by dolls, is punctuated with moments of nostalgia for her big sister's life before marriage, a nostalgia the adult Birdie experiences looking back on her girlhood. Rather than merely acting out scenes from adult life, Birdie and Florence use the doll wedding as way to mark her sister's passage from girlhood into adulthood.

This narrative stresses the importance of girlhood doll play as separate from education for future domesticity. For example, one of its central anecdotes hones in on the adventure which leads Birdie to meet Florence for the first time. Birdie's older brother, Gilbert, agrees to take her down to the stream to play for the afternoon. When Birdie realizes Gilbert is not actually supervising her, she tromps downstream in search of the family row boat in hopes she can fashion a little sea voyage for her doll. When she finds the boat, she discovers someone else's doll occupying the rowing seat. Florence pops out from behind the reeds to introduce herself, and their friendship begins in a rapid exchange of doll names and histories. Their encounter, as well as Birdie's journey downstream, is interrupted by Florence's uncle, Mr. Deane, who grumbles that Birdie will drown if she does not get out of the water to dry land. When Birdie leads Mr. Deane back

to her brother, and what he deems safety, differences in the meanings of space and play emerge. For Birdie, the fens have always been a tranquil place, and her brothers are usually present to supervise her play. However, on this given day, when she ventures into the fens with her favorite doll, Robertina, her idea of the marshland collides with her elderly neighbor's interpretation of the unsupervised nondomestic space. The once tranquil marsh becomes threatening, dirty, and dangerous.

Throughout the story, Mr. Deane represents the voice of an older generation who believe that all women need supervision the entirety of their lives. Although his beliefs do not make much of an impression on Birdie, Mr. Deane feels he must convey the importance of appropriate play which leads to more than fun with dolls and new female friendships. When Birdie recovers from a dangerous fever, Mr. Deane sends her a little book about his own childhood. His preface states that it is intended to provide amusement, but the overt message of his autobiographical tale reminds Birdie that doll play will not last forever, and one day her play will be replaced by womanhood and marriage. Despite Mr. Deane's advice, Birdie resumes her own version of doll play with her favorite friend, Florence. The rest of the novel follows Birdie through adolescence and gives readers a brief sketch of her adulthood. She and Florence lose touch, but their bond and its legacy survive through Birdie's handing down of doll play to her daughters. The novel ends with an image of Birdie living a life of contentment and happiness, regardless of her strong love of dolls and her fondness for Florence. Mr. Deane's fears never come to fruition, and Birdie's story instead offers evidence that proper femininity is not threatened by a focus on girl-centrism. Birdie's life trajectory displays a keen awareness of girlhood as a separate time in life that represents a "discord with adult expectations" (Mitchell 3).

Dolls become part of what Mitchell describes as an emergent girl culture. Rather than prepare her for marriage, Birdie's doll play provides a specifically girl-centric pastime which fosters a rich imaginative life and life-long friendships.

Recent criticism of nineteenth-century doll literature has explored the subversive and transgressive play girls derive from interactions with their dolls. For example, Sharon Marcus's chapter, "The Feminine Plaything" in *Between Women*, reveals the potential doll play has to incite erotic desire between women. Marcus claims that the erotic female-female gaze was a necessary component of Victorian patriarchy, and that "heterosexual women eroticized women . . . and thus considered a woman's erotic interest in other women compatible with her roles as wife and mother" (112-113). She includes the idol worship, tender caressing, and torture of dolls within the bounds of proper femininity and normative training of young girls. Although Birdie's and Florence's play does focus on the bonds between girls forged by dolls, their story is not about the titillation that results from domination or submission. A different story about female-doll interaction emerges within *Doll World*, one in which dolls aide in the creation of girl-centric and girl-saturated play that is not concerned with and does not necessitate the (even eventual) presence of men. Dolls give heroines the opportunity to occupy a space separate from – though not challenging to – Victorian patriarchal structures of marriage and motherhood.

Eugenia Gonzalez's work, "I sometimes think she is a spy on all my actions: Dolls, Girls, and Disciplinary Surveillance in the Nineteenth-Century Doll Tale," argues that *Ethel's Adventures in Doll Country* by Clara Bradford is an exception to Victorian doll stories in its heroine's refusal to imbue her dolls with imaginary humanity and feeling. Thus, according to Gonzalez, Ethel's treatment of her dolls as objects to be owned

and collected divests them of their disciplinary powers. Situating her reading within the context of nineteenth-century educational theories with a Foucauldian lens, she suggests that nineteenth-century doll stories aim to entice little girls into good behavior with the threat of constant surveillance by mothers or the dolls themselves. Yet, instead of realizing that dolls are just passive objects to be collected as Gonzalez claims, Birdie's doll becomes the means to fashion a girlhood play integral to what Miriam Forman-Brunell calls a "process of constructing their own notion of girlhood" (223).¹⁰ Marcus and Gonzalez offer ways of reading doll tales which do not instruct girls in clear paths toward Victorian middle-class femininity. While I build upon their revisionism, my study argues that girls not only fly under the radar of behavioral surveillance, but they also find that doll play produces a kind of pleasure unconnected to homosocial/erotic desire or the desire to punish.

In my reading, dolls do not act as agents of surveillance to monitor young girls' behavior, but rather, they show heroines engaged in a "struggle to define, decide, and determine the meaning of dolls in their own lives and as representations of their own girls' culture" (Forman-Brunell 223). If readers are to identify with Birdie and mirror her behavior, then the themes and models for Victorian girls' behavior undergo a significant shift in this doll story. In fact, the narrative gives no indication that Florence and Birdie are "good" or "bad" despite the range of play they engage in while in doll world. Birdie especially feels no such prompting to monitor her behavior, and she never acknowledges that her actions are in keeping with propriety or feminine expectations. Birdie determines

¹⁰ In Miriam Forman-Brunell's examination of nineteenth-century American women's memoirs, autobiographies, biographies, and oral histories, she claims this process manifested itself in a morbid fascination with funeral ceremonies re-enacted with their dolls. In the specific example of doll funerals, she claims girls determine the meaning of dolls in their own lives.

the meaning of dolls in her own life, which at different points in the narrative collides with adult meanings. The fashioning of play with dolls leads them to tread the boundary between play as feminine education and play as uncontrolled exploration.

Published just 12 years prior to *Doll World*, George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* (1860) depicts a Victorian girlhood with similar overlaps to Birdie's experience. Both Maggie Tulliver and Birdie wander away from their families and homes to explore the countryside. However, in *Mill on the Floss* distinct differences emerge to illustrate this burgeoning cultural shift representative in *Doll World*. Maggie is continually punished for wandering off, displaying little interest in domestic activity, and coming home muddy. For example, when her brother Tom is expected to arrive home from school, Maggie refuses to let her mother smooth out her wild hair. Rather than submit to her mother's complaints and brush, "Maggie suddenly rushed from under her hands and dipped her head in a basin of water standing near—in the vindictive determination that there should be no more chance of curls that day" (Eliot 31). Not only is her hair ruined but her "clean pinafore" was soaked "from top to bottom" (Eliot 31). In another instance, she runs away from her aunt's house after pushing her prim little cousin Lucy in the mud. The narrator indicates that wandering away from cultivated landscapes near home are not so out of the ordinary for her: "She was used to wandering about the fields by herself . . . Sometimes she had to climb over high gates, but that was a small evil" (Eliot 108). Her mother fears that Maggie's life has only two paths: to "tumble down and be drwoned" or that her aunts will "never love [her] no more" (Eliot 16, 31). Through Maggie, Eliot critiques Victorian notions of girlhood as a time in life where girls trained for proper womanhood.

Maggie continually fails in these conventional Victorian feminine benchmarks. She is constantly disparaged in comparison to the pretty, neat, and tidy Lucy.

Maggie's girlhood is punctuated with humiliation, shame, and disappointment, emotions she works out in the solitary space of her attic with a rag doll:

This attic was Maggie's favourite retreat . . . here she fretted out all her ill-humours . . . and here she kept a Fetish which she punished for all her misfortunes. This was the trunk of a large wooden doll, which once stared with the roundest of eyes above the reddest of cheeks; but was now entirely defaced by a long career of vicarious suffering. Three nails driven into the head commemorated as many rises in Maggie's nine years of earthly struggle . . . But immediately afterwards Maggie had reflected that if she drove many nails in she would not be so well able to fancy that the head was hurt when she knocked it against the wall, nor comfort it, and make believe to poultice it, when her fury was abated. (Eliot 31-2)

Her treatment of the doll paired with her behavior would signify to the writers of educational doll story prefaces that Maggie will make a poor wife and mother. Yet, Caswell A Ellis's and G. Stanley Hall's "A Study of Dolls" in *The Pedagogical Seminary* (1896) recognize that mistreatment of dolls was not uncommon in many girls' doll play. They suggest that the small scale of dolls makes emotions and objects of fear in everyday life seem less terrifying and more manageable (Ellis and Hall 48). Ellis and Hall even cite Maggie Tulliver's nails in the eyes of her doll as a way "to vent [her] reaction to the parental tyranny of anger" (48). They further explain, "As the microscope and telescope bring minute and distant objects within our purview, so a doll microcosm opens up a

world of relationship so large, and simplifies things so complex as to be otherwise closed to the infant mind” (Ellis and Hall 49). Maggie’s penchant for abuse and comfort to her doll instead represents her frustrated feelings toward her mother’s disappointment in her. Disfiguring the doll gives her an outlet for her anger, and her care for the doll’s wounds provides her with an avenue of self-soothing. Victoria Ford Smith’s “Dolls and Imaginative Agency in Bradford, Pardoe, and Dickens” also recognizes the role scale plays in the doll play found in children’s stories in addition to canonical texts as Charles Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*’s. Echoing the earlier pedagogical work of Ellis and Hall, Smith argues that “fantasies of size” work as “strategies of subversion registered through the miniature and the gigantic are powerful enough to cross the boundaries of genre” and enable “alternate narratives” (Smith 193). While Smith’s central concern is for dolls’ ability to reverse class status as in the case of Jenny Wren, the doll’s dress maker, Maggie’s interactions with her doll gives her a temporary means to act out cathartic feelings of rage and indignation. Maggie sees her doll as an extension of self, mirroring the pain and punishment she feels. When she is ready to comfort herself, she in turn comforts the doll. The doll is a mediator of her feelings – a way to achieve catharsis. Marcus might argue that this moment for Maggie is an opportunity for her to experiment dominating another female form. Yet, Maggie is pivotal in highlighting the difference between hers and Birdie’s doll play.

Maggie’s treatment of her doll not only represents her frustration in disappointing her mother’s expectations but on a larger scale correspond to her intuitive sense of unjust treatment based on gender. For example, Maggie’s aunt Pullet “pitied [her] poor [sister’s] bad luck with her children” and wanted to pay to have Maggie sent to a boarding school

which “might tend to subdue some other vices in her,” namely her inability to stay clean and out of mud (131). Her brother, Tom, “was of the opinion that Maggie was a silly little thing; all girls were silly—they couldn’t throw a stone . . . couldn’t do anything with a pocket-knife, and were frightened at frogs” (43). Maggie wants to play with Tom, yet she will never gain his approval as a playmate because of gender. On the other hand, her relatives criticize her because she continually fails their standards for proper femininity, namely passivity and neatness. Her doll encounters exist separately from her outdoor adventures. While she would rather be outdoors, this departure from normative Victorian female endeavors must be shamed and suppressed through threats and warnings that she is naughty and cannot be loved. Her doll must inhabit a private space in order for her to cope with her constant trespassing of feminine boundaries.

In the decade following the publication of *Mill on the Floss*, cultural notions of girlhood began to change. While the change is most visible in the adolescent novels about school and city culture, as shown in Mitchell’s and Hunter’s studies, Judy Simons observes that divided worlds and values existed in *The Girls Own Paper* (1880), which featured the celebration of “family and home” and shows “greater respect for authority and conformity” than stories in *The Boys Own Paper* which feature expeditions and exciting adventure tales (145). Despite the continued emphasis on domesticity in literature for girls, the growing availability of more forms of education for adolescent girls and women contributed to this shift as well as increased popularity in new theories about physical activity and its connection to overall health¹¹. *Doll World* more clearly aligns with shifting notions of girlhood in its portrayals of female adolescence as a sacred time for outdoor

¹¹ See Hillary Marland’s *Health and Girlhood in Britain 1874-1920* which I more fully engage later in this chapter.

play and non-threatening unsupervised leisure, allowing for greater degrees of mobility outside the home. Snide remarks about Maggie's behavior from other characters carry implicit reprimands and the belief that girls' activities are distinct from boys and have specific goals in achieving proper femininity. In stark contrast to Maggie's upbringing, Birdie is rarely disciplined for the ways she plays or the spaces in which the play occurs. Mr. Deane's is the only voice of disapproval in the story, and the novel seems to take a critical stance against him. His point of view is never addressed by Birdie's family, suggesting he may represent a dated view of girlhood. Birdie's doll play, in contrast to Maggie's, does not happen as a result of her un-girlish behavior. Rather, she and Florence take their dolls everywhere they go. While Maggie only has temporary access to agency, Birdie's doll gives her a sustained agency throughout her girlhood, and even resonates through adulthood in the form of nostalgia. The connection of dolls to most of her leisure activities points to shifting notions of girlhood emergent in the 1870s.

Rather than promote a model of Victorian girlhood to consume and reproduce, Birdie's doll play produces adventurous, exploratory play which results in female friendship. For example, she meets Florence as a direct result of wandering away from her brother Gilbert who is tasked with watching her. Normally Birdie's older brothers accompany her to the old boathouse on the fens, and Gilbert navigates the waterways with a long pole leading their punt away from muddy banks, rocks, and the occasional rapid. However, on the day in question, Guy goes to the dentist, and "Gilbert [had] little inclination to move, still less to row his little sister 'miles and miles'" (O'Reilly 26). Thus, Gilbert's lack of interest in his sister's doll play entices him to stay in the shade of the boathouse to daydream. He attempts to impose guidelines upon her, instructing her to bathe

her doll and play with tadpoles (O'Reilly 27). He claims that Birdie may do “whatever [she] please” as long as she doesn't bother him and that she doesn't wander too far from him. He instructs, “come back every five minutes or so, to let me know you're all right; and call out every now and then, that I may be sure you're not drowned” (O'Reilly 27). Being satisfied with his “multifarious commands and suggestions,” Gilbert enters what Birdie terms “his castle” and “remembered no more the existence of his sister” (O'Reilly 27). After running back and forth between stream and boathouse a couple of times, Birdie finds he is “safe in his castle for an unlimited period of time” (O'Reilly 28). Gilbert's daydream castle provides a loophole in his supervision over Birdie, creating an opportunity for her to fashion her own play space with her doll. Her doll gives her an alibi and enables her to move more freely, tricking her brother into thinking she doesn't need watching.

Taking advantage of her brother's daydreams, Birdie wanders freely downstream. Although Birdie knows she should not play alone in the fens, her familiarity and knowledge of the place allow her to navigate this outdoor space with autonomy and pleasure:

in her wanderings, she reached the place where the sluggish, shallow water began to ripple almost imperceptibly over gravel, and there, pulled up amongst the reeds, she fancied she could see . . . the dingy old punt . . . Pulling off her shoes and stockings . . . the little girl splashed through the . . . intervening space and discovered that the punt was there sure enough, but, to her excessive surprise, occupied by a stranger. (O'Reilly 28)

Moving further away from her brother, Birdie's doll play gives her access to wilderness spaces far from the reaches of home. Uninhibited by the threat of surveillance and the scolding of adults, Birdie's imagination takes over and her doll play enables her to splash through the water. Rather than seek permission for going down stream, Birdie decides for herself that she is free to play in the mud and navigate this play space at will. Pulling off her socks and shoes and splashing in the muddy water shows a disregard for typical femininity depicted in Victorian doll stories. Her uninhibited behavior aligns her with prototypical "models of healthy girlhood" already in the works "in the late Victorian period," featuring the movement of young women out of "environments dominated by family obligations and domesticity into new roles and more public spaces" (Marland 2). In this moment, Birdie exists on the cusp of this change marked out by Mitchell and Hilary Marland in *Health and Girlhood in Britain, 1874-1920*. Her doll provides the necessary medium for moving into unsupervised spaces. The marshland and the stream are not precisely public spaces, but they are not domestic either. Playing with dolls, even though she is far away from home and moving further away from her brother, seems like a harmless girlie activity instead of misbehaving. In this way, Birdie's doll propels her range of movement further downstream and allows her brother to forget about her. Gilbert assumes Birdie is content to splash nearby with Robertina, so his thoughts drift away from his sister. The doll acts as her shield as well as her key to access unsupervised, autonomous adventure.

In Birdie's trek through the swampy fens, she expresses no semblance of shame or guilt in her actions. In fact, she moves through the muddy embankments with a clear goal in mind of finding the punt. When Birdie discovers the little boat, it is already occu-

ped by an unfamiliar doll. As she begins to maneuver the boat out of reeds away from the sticky bank, she hears a muffled gasp. A little girl, mostly hidden by cattails, anxiously watches her doll in the boat, and “the stranger” from the bank. Birdie “point[s] to her own bare feet,” as an invitation for the girl to join her in the water, but the other girl nervously “shook her head and said she was forbidden to do so” (O’Reilly 34). It is this exact moment which the frontispiece captures as the representative illustration for this doll tale. Birdie stands sturdily in the water with bare feet as Robertina balances on her shoulder. Florence peeps sheepishly out from behind the reedy fauna unsure of her doll’s fate and the reckless actions of her new acquaintance. While this meeting provides some contrast between the two girls, readers must have wondered how Florence’s doll ends up in the boat. Her curiosity and desire for adventure, although tamped down in comparison to Birdie, are still present. This wood etching provides a new illustration of doll play as its own special time in a woman’s life.

The context of the frontispiece and this key scene focus on doll play as repurposed to experience autonomy rather than reinforce her role within the home. There are no houses, adults, shops, or dresses within the woodcut illustration. Birdie seamlessly engages in both girlish doll play and boyish expedition. Although the plucky tomboy emerges as a recognizable heroine about mid-century and fashion plates depict women in sports clothing, doll stories often remained quite conservative in their emphasis on domestic roles for girls.¹² This story represents a transitional piece of fiction where the interplay between girls enacts the transition from mid-Victorian to fin de siècle stories of

¹² Sharon Marcus notes that fashion plates later in the century featured women in riding and golfing outfits (among other kinds of sporty dress). Although depictions of women in athletic clothing were a step forward, it was rare that women were shown engaging in sport. See *Between Women* chapter 2 “The Feminine Plaything.” Judy Simons observes the trend in tomboy literature rises in late-Victorian and Edwardian fiction (146).

adolescence. Even though Florence and Birdie's initial encounter portrays two different types of doll play, their lives still happily intertwine without criticism on either's part. For example, Florence remains fixed to her spot on the bank, claiming she is forbidden to join Birdie in the water. The fear of disappointing adult instruction keeps her stationary. Birdie behaves according to her own sense of play and space. She does not explicitly defy the instruction of adults or her older brother. Despite their behavioral differences in this moment, Birdie and Florence quickly establish common ground through their love of dolls. Birdie eagerly introduces herself as "Lady Silverreed" and presents her doll, Robertina. She learns that "Lady Rushwater" also known as Florence and her doll Mabel are visiting their uncle, Mr. Deane, who lives in the manor house near the fen. While the girls excitedly chatter about their doll's lives and their families both real and imagined, Birdie notices the water getting deeper and deeper. She becomes aware "that there was no boat-hook in the punt, and that the water was already deeper than she dared step into, or rather — for the depth was not formidable in itself — that it was running now over the treacherous mud, against which she had been so often warned" (O'Reily 36). As the distance between the girls continues to grow, Florence expresses her fear that "Mabel will be seasick, she is not accustomed to boating" (O'Reily 37). Birdie courageously jumps in the boat as it floats away from Florence, shouting, "'don't be alarmed . . . I will take every care of your daughter,'" to which Florence cries "'Oh! you'll be drowned!'" (O'Reilly 38). In this scene, Birdie expresses a confident heroism in navigating the boat through deepening waters and saving Mabel from danger. Her fearless reassurances to care for Mabel further illustrate two different models of girlhood. Florence maintains her proper place on the bank where her uncle instructed her to stand and not move, while Birdie's

movements through the swamp starting at the boathouse and winding downstream to this familiar bend highlight her self-fashioned play outside the guidance of adult supervision.

It isn't until her boat "swung heavily round the corner" and "Mr. Deane's harsh voice sounded in Birdie's ears" that she is confronted with a sense of transgressing proper feminine behavior (O'Reilly 39). His quick and harsh reactions abruptly end her unsupervised play. Conveying deep disapproval, Mr. Deane stares down at "her bare feet, and her two dolls. Hearing that Lady Rushwater was his own niece, and being otherwise enlightened as to all that had taken place, with many a 'pish!' and 'pshaw!' he pushed his way through the rushes and willows until he reached a spot from which he could catch sight of Florence, when he called to her to go home at once and never on any account come to the fens alone" (O'Reilly 40). Mr. Deane then turns his reprimands to Birdie, grumbling that a punt is an "utterly dangerous thing—if they wished to drown a child they couldn't find a surer way of doing it!" (O'Reilly 40). At first it seems what angers Mr. Deane is a girl alone in a boat. Then it becomes clear that Mr. Deane's complaint is not solely born out of concern for Birdie's and Florence's safety. Embedded in his response to the girls' play is a conflicted knowledge and ownership over space. He confesses that:

[b]eing a stranger to the place, he had wandered about from one group of reeds and island of rushes to another, until at last he found further progress barred by the mere, and was preparing to retrace his steps altogether when the sound of childish voices met his ear, and he had become a perplexed listener to Lady Silverreed's last words. He was now quite angry to find to

what a dangerous play-place he had himself introduced Florence, and very anxious to see her safe out of it. (42)

His concern for their physical well-being is mixed with disdain at having caught Birdie with no shoes or socks in a rushing, though muddy stream. Though he doesn't know where he is and must rely on a little girl to guide him home, he assumes she is the one who is out of bounds, a transgressor. The story notes that "Being a stranger to the place, he had wandered about from one group of reeds and island of rushes to another," so in essence, he is lost until he hears "the sound of childish voices met his ear" and he hears of boats and dolls and rushing water (O'Reilly 42). Though Birdie never admits or even realizes that she has done anything of consequence despite Mr. Deane's reprimands. He believes she threatens proper feminine behavior required of a girl her age. He expresses his authority through a default assumption of privileged gender. Despite Birdie's assurances that she knows "every inch of the ground and could come to no possible harm," Mr. Deane "steadily refused to lose sight of her until he had seen her safe beyond the marshy lands" (O'Reilly 43). In claiming to know "every inch of ground," Birdie implies she knows her own safety better than this adult male, and her hint that she knows better and more conveys a disregard for his assistance. In addition to possessing more knowledge of place than Mr. Deane, Birdie also serves to be his guide. Although Mr. Dean "steadily refused to lose sight of her until he had seen her safe beyond the marshy lands," Birdie is the one leading them toward her brother's location. Mr. Dean can only "refuse" for her to walk alone and watch her movements until she is on solid ground. In fact, it is possible that Mr. Deane needs to "see her" because he is lost without her guid-

ance. Birdie seems content to let him walk with her after assuring him of her own intimate understanding of this place when she claims to “know every inch of ground.”

As they walk, Mr. Deane directs his criticisms in another direction. He compares his childhood play space with Birdie’s, asserting “Whatever treasures she found here were nothing compared with the treasure which he himself, when a boy, had found in a certain brook that had been the companion of his childhood” (O’Reilly 45). While Birdie doesn’t yet know what treasure Mr. Deane found in the brook, it is clear that her notions of play violate his expectations of girlhood play. However, Birdie remains steadfast in her proclamations of love for her muddy play space. Not satisfied with his effect on her, he falls into criticizing the kinds of things that can be found there: “‘I suppose you like this sort of thing now?’ said the old gentleman, ‘Mud, tadpoles, mess and rubbish of all kinds; delightful isn’t it? And punts. Pshaw! . . . Inconceivable folly! Child and punt—the two were never meant to go together’” (O’Reilly 43). She is unaffected by his insults and maintains her delight asserting, “she did like the place dearly, and did find there treasures of all sorts and kinds” (O’Reilly 44). In this passage, mud and tadpoles are frowned upon attractions for a little girl. As if threatened by her familiarity with a place he deems unsafe and dirty, he continually denigrates what and where she likes to play. Yet, Birdie maintains her love of them affirming her position of expertise. She also points to and names plants and animals that live near the fens, further showing her mastery of space outside the home.

Once Birdie and Mr. Deane arrive at the boathouse, Mr. Deane scolds Gilbert for letting his sister wander off to meet her possible drowning. In his defense, Gilbert says “something about a girl being able to take care of herself at nine years old,” but Mr.

Deane would hear none of Gilbert's perceived excuses: "What do years matter either? Nine, ten, twenty" (O'Reilly 49). Mr. Deane's concern for Birdie's life pivots in this instant, turning toward the voice of an older generation of Victorians who believed all women "want taking care of . . . at any age" (O'Reilly 49). This scene provides a microcosm of Victorian gender relations. Birdie and her brother shrug off Mr. Deane's beliefs that men assume the role of protector and women the protected. Birdie continues to subvert Mr. Deane's attempts to carry out his role, both by saving Mabel and by leading him to safety. According to his reasoning, it is not the rushing water, the boat, or the sticky mud which threatens Birdie's life. It is her gender left alone that poses the real threat since women always need "protection" because they cannot be expected to stand by themselves (O'Reilly 49). Yet, the irony is that despite his insistence on her supervision, it is he that needs Birdie's adept skill of navigation. To assert that women need and want protecting all the years of their life, can be read as an attempt to invalidate Birdie's autonomous doll play.

Mr. Deane's disapproval of Birdie's play and its implications resurfaces through the guise of a gift book. While Birdie convalesces from a dangerous fever, Mr. Deane sends her a book called "What I Found in the Brook." Once Birdie is well enough to sit up in bed, she recognizes the title: "It's what he promised to tell me long ago. . . . The very first day I ever saw him; the day he would keep declaring the fen was not a brook — and you know I never said it was. I've so often wondered what he found; and now he's sent it to amuse me because I've been ill" (O'Reilly 132). Despite Birdie's belief in the book's intended amusements, Mr. Deane's story further develops his old criticisms of Birdie's doll play.

While Mr. Dean's own childhood is far from typical and full of its own exceptions from the norm, his emphasis still warns about the dangers of unproductive play. Although he feels endangered while playing alone in his brook, "wading too far along the brook, far beyond the ford, where the water . . . suddenly [grew] too strong for me . . . and seemed to take my breath away," he meets a golden fairy girl who eventually becomes his wife (O'Reilly 138). His terror of the rushing water and how he overcame it is described in gendered terms:

I have only a dim remembrance of the water suddenly growing too strong for me, and of the rapid current upsetting me amongst the weeds, and of a grey sky, and a wind that seemed to take my breath away, and of a sense of loneliness and terror, with which is mingled oddly enough the harsh cackling of great white geese,¹³ though that sound changes to the sound of John's voice, as he calls cheerily to me to struggle up upon my feet again, and he does not come and help me until I have done it, and stand there manfully. (O'Reilly 137-8)

This passage shows that young boys can "manfully" wrestle rushing waters and their fears. Mr. Deane's reactions to Birdie's play in the fens alone, however, display his belief that girls should not man boats or sweeping tides on their own. Yet, while he is struck with terror at his situation, Birdie never displays any fear. She instead promises to save her friend's doll from the water. Mr. Deane assumes he has found Birdie, and therefore,

¹³ Interestingly enough, a tale about white geese is included in *A Present for a Little Girl* (1798) by William Darton. This book, written for girls, shows the "increased stratification of texts along gender lines" (Simons 144). In this story, a fox scares a group of geese. The wild geese fly away and the tame geese stay put and get eaten by the fox. Their fatal end is intended to remind the female reader that "those who forsake the state for which they are fitted by nature, will be in danger of sharing a like fate to that of the poor tame geese" (qtd. in Simons 144).

she must have been lost, unsafe, and in need of his protection. To the contrary, Birdie played in the marshy fens and the stream often before Mr. Deane arrived. Thus, she was never in need of finding, protecting, or guiding.

In Mr. Deane's story, girls are given permission to spend their leisure time in water if they play with the boys. For example, although he agrees to share candies with Joy, his fairy friend, and allows her to play with his homemade boats, she is not granted autonomy. She is granted access to his play space because she bolsters his imaginative play, eventually, becoming his wife. When he criticizes Birdie's free-ranging play, he overlooks the fact that Birdie meets Florence, like he meets his fairy-friend-wife. This passage from his childhood memories demonstrates a model of play that generates a future spouse, which neither Florence nor dolls enable. Safety and appropriate gender roles are ensured if girls play alongside boys who can protect and guide them.

Not only is Birdie's play space devalued based on Mr. Deane's perception of its inappropriateness and dirtiness, but it is also incapable of generating a future husband. His story closes revealing its true didactic ends. His mother marries the fairy's father, and when he expresses excitement about seeing the fairy more often, his sister Miss Deane predicts their marriage: "Miss Deane was right; it had been my wife and not my sister that the brook brought to me that June day long ago. Now you know why a brook is better in my eyes than a fen; why I have so often told you that your fens here will give you no treasure so great as I once found in the clear running stream familiar to my childhood" (O'Reilly 173). The fairy girl, Joy, is the product of his childhood play. While Joy is not denigrated in quite the same way as Maggie when Tom shuns her on the basis of gender, Mr. Deane indeed scorns Birdie's specific girl-centric play. Earlier in the narrative, he

refuses to carry his niece's doll back home. Read alongside his implication that what he found in his brook was better than what Birdie finds – female friendship and another doll – suggests he disdains girls things when found out of place. Therefore, his disapproval of Birdie's play with dolls is tangled up with his notions of proper femininity within designated space. The fens are barren according to Mr. Dean. Therefore, the tacit moral of his story is that dolls lead girls into unprotected and unproductive play spaces, while boys lead girls into safe, generative places. Comparatively, Birdie navigates real boats through muddied waters with a doll in place of a boy, resulting in friendship rather than marriage. Mr. Dean's childhood play compared to Birdie's reveals that all gendered play is imaginative. Mr. Dean characterizes his friend and future wife as an object of fantasy by calling her a lovely, golden fairy. However, Birdie's play uses dolls in her playful fantasies rather than objectifying people.

In the final chapter of Mr. Deane's story called "Lasting Toys" which alludes to his fairy-playmate-turned-wife, he goes on to warn Birdie that "toys lose their charm, but nature" never does. He claims, "The day will come when even Robertina will be laid aside; nay, later still, when ball dresses and jewels will cease to please; but the pebbles will shine on in the water always" (O'Reilly 174). Yet, Birdie already knows the pleasures of nature. Mr. Deane's tale of the brook reconstructs Birdie's own story about children's leisure into a gendered story about what play is capable of generating. He replaces Birdie's fens, dolls, and punt with a clear brook full of shiny minnows. Instead of dolls or boys, he meets a tiny, fairy girl who plays with his own creations of miniature boats made from twigs and goose feathers. When Mr. Deane ominously claims that "Robertina will be laid aside" and "ball dresses and jewels will cease to please" he cites objects of femi-

nine culture as culprits when used to alternate ends than conventionally conceived. In closing, he drives home a final impression: “We were quite content to join hands and float at play together down the stream of life, as we had joined hands and played together in the brook” (O’Reilly 160). The joining of play, hands, and life in this closing passage alludes to earlier Victorian beliefs that play in childhood will determine the outcome of adult life. Mr. Dean implies his own childhood play is perhaps an appropriate tale of how childhood pleasure conditions adults for domestic life. In addition, he hints that his childhood play space is one to which Birdie should aspire.

Birdie and Florence instead use dolls to fashion their own kinds of play. Birdie’s dolls lead her to a friendship with Florence and to autonomous, unchaperoned play producing pleasures unconnected to men or to traditional middle-class girlhood. In fact, unlike so many other doll stories, Birdie and Florence are rarely supervised during their doll play, and therefore, their doll play fails to produce the desired results. What Mr. Deane misinterprets in his continuous efforts to put Birdie in her place is a different model of doll play altogether – one which emphasizes the importance of girlhood in and of itself rather than a time of training for the future.

Even as Florence begins to outgrow her dolls, Birdie’s attachment to Robertina is unwavering. Her parents express surprise that Birdie continues to play with her despite entering adolescence. Birdie’s father confides to Mrs. Somers, ““She is growing a great girl . . . I thought—I fancied, that they left off dolls about her age, eh, mamma?”” (O’Reilly 245). Her mother proves to be more like the eponymous heroine of *Ethel’s Adventures in Doll Country*, claiming to have treated her dolls as “Merely toys—nothing more” (O’Reilly 235). When pressed to know why she feels this way, Mrs. Somers re-

plies “I cannot trouble myself about your dolls. But I am glad you are satisfied” (O’Reilly 235). While Birdie’s early attachments to dolls appear as positive and conventional signs of her future as a mother, the lingering desire to play with dolls raises parental concerns about her development. However, they can be read as a desire to cherish girlhood. This story critiques conventional maturity’s requirement to leave behind the freedom and autonomy of girlhood. Later in the story, the Somers lose a large portion of their income, forcing them to move to town into a smaller home. This experience is a catalyst, pushing Birdie to learn domestic responsibility at a rapid pace. She proves an adept domestic helper, mending and making all her own clothes, helping with the household duties, and yet, the narrator laments “Birdie never formed again, or cared to form, for anyone such a friendship as that which had subsisted between Florence Murray and herself” (O’Reilly 293). Once she develops into a young woman, her attention must shift to chores and the care of her younger siblings, but the nostalgia of playing with dolls and the friendship she made through them casts a golden glow around her memories of girlhood. It exists in her mind as a time apart when young women can focus their attention on development as autonomous subjects. Birdie is forced into womanhood, and therefore must leave her dolls behind, by economic necessity. It is not awareness to boy’s attentions or a burning desire to learn domestic economy which thrusts her into learning household chores. In this way, *Doll World* challenges the idea that girls will “naturally” leave behind their girlish activities which they find so satisfying and freeing.

At the story’s end, an adult Birdie observes her own daughters doll play with tenderness and nostalgia. The father and the daughters are quickly glossed over, mere additions to show the passage of time. The real focus is on Birdie’s nostalgia. She watches as

her daughters beg their father for a dollhouse. He claims to have no understanding about why such silly things are of import. Birdie says, “‘Ah! You can’t understand it as I do. Men lose a great deal by never having been acquainted with Doll-world” (O’Reilly 308). This nostalgia is kindled even more when Birdie chances to meet her childhood friend while attending a party with her husband:

It was then that [Birdie] became aware that she was the object of the fixed gaze of a strikingly handsome and very fashionably dressed lady on the opposite side of the room. The gaze was more fixed indeed than the usages of polite society warranted . . . yet the handsome lady never once turned from her purpose, but came straight to the corner where Birdie was sitting. As she drew near a smile stole over her features . . . and when she came nearer still she held out her hand. ‘I am not mistaken, I think—you are, are you not—Lady Silvereed?’ ‘The late Lady Rushwater! . . . ‘Oh Florence! how did you, how could you know me?’ They both laughed, and sitting down side by side began at once . . . to learn each other over again.

(O’Reilly 312-4)

Florence calls Birdie by her childhood doll world name to greet her, establishing a clear connection between their doll play and the lasting bonds of their friendship. Their friendship was initially forged because of Birdie’s adventures through the fens so many years ago from this moment, and yet, her autonomy led to a long standing relationship with Florence. As if to spite Mr. Deane’s predictions that toys lose their charm, the focus in this passage becomes a girlhood activity, which both adult women talk about fondly. Their reminiscence at the end of the book establishes an alternate economy of what doll

play is capable of producing. Nostalgia for childhood play, specifically girl's doll play, resonates through their lives. For Birdie, it is not only something she shared with Florence that lives on in their collective memory but it also becomes a legacy that she can pass down to her own girls. Although Birdie is recuperated back into the service of motherhood and matrimony, we can read her nostalgia for dolls in childhood as an alternate conclusion about dolls. Mr. Deane's verdict that toys (dolls) will lose their luster but nature will always be fresh does not uproot her experiences and memories with dolls. Try as he might to indoctrinate her, in her own adult life Birdie looks back with fond memories on her girlhood doll play and the friendship with Florence. In contrast to Mr. Dean, who plays the voice of social protocol, Birdie never loses pleasure in remembering her dolls. She never recants her loyalty to them or to the fens, nor does Florence. The conclusion to *Doll World* offers a view of girlhood where play has the ability to exist as a separate time in a girl's life that is not devoted to her future as a mother or wife.

Dolls not only lead girls into non-domestic play space, but they provide girls with a specific kind of female pleasure that can be passed down to daughters. Birdie and Florence's doll play produces a keen sense of pleasure, one that lingers through their lives. It becomes a secret kind of joy and knowledge that only girls can produce and own in memory. Birdie does not share her childhood joys with her future husband. Instead, she shares them with her daughters and later reconnects with the middle-aged Florence through reminiscing. Doll play produces life-long friendships and posterity for girl-centric activity. Their friendship and their nostalgia for doll play resonate through generations of future women. The focus of doll play in *Doll World* is the bonds created between women. *Doll World* is a bit of a wild card among its counterparts in the doll story genre,

but when aligned with changing notions of girlhood, it emerges as a bridge and prototype of more progressive models of womanhood found later in the century. If Birdie is the age of nine in 1873, then she raises daughters who will enter a world of changing gender relationships. Therefore, Birdie bequeaths new forms of play to her daughters paving the way for more progressive models of girlhood. *Doll World*'s nostalgic conclusion plants the seeds for emergent forms of autonomy that carry through to fin de siècle womanhood. Although Birdie herself is recuperated back into domestic life in adulthood, her resonant nostalgia for girlhood autonomy sows subversive futures for her daughters. In essence, Birdie turns Gouraud's prefatory instruction on its head. Gouraud's assertion that "one period will determine the women of the world of a few years later" intends that dolls will train women in domestic, wifely, and motherly practices, but instead Birdie's and Florence's girlhood of the 1870s anticipates values more akin to the new women of the fin de siècle (Gouraud viii).

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Chapter 3 The Cloak of Mobility in *Villette*

“Aomame resembled an insect skilled at biological mimicry. What she most wanted was to blend in with her background by changing color and shape, to remain inconspicuous and not easily remembered. This was how she had protected herself since childhood” (Murakami 13, *IQ84*).

Like the heroine of Murakami’s *IQ84*, Charlotte Brontë’s Lucy Snowe of *Villette*, employs a similar kind of self-fashioning, allowing her to blend into the landscapes and buildings through which she moves. In fact, she blends so well into her surroundings, that upon discovering the real extent of Lucy’s connections, her friend Ginevra Fanshawe incredulously asks ““Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?”” (Brontë 307). Characteristically deflecting, Lucy responds ““Who am I indeed? Perhaps a personage in disguise. Pity I don’t look the character”” (Brontë 308). Pairing her words with references to outward appearances, Lucy redirects attention back upon the speaker. She simultaneously eludes answering while providing insight into her primary *modus operandi*. Rather than offer details about her identity, Lucy points to appearances, suggesting she dons a disguise.

While scholars have argued that Lucy’s clothing is a strategy to shield her interiority from the reader and other characters, this trend obscures questions about the significance of outward appearances and their meaning in the novel. Lucy’s self-fashioning removes her physical body from the visual field, providing her access to cityscapes. In what seems to be a counterintuitive choice of drab, gray garments, Lucy’s motivation in fashion choice proves to be escaping the unhealthy and suffocating confines of domestic interiors. Lucy’s experiences travelling outside domestic bounds do not mirror conventional rationales for women’s presence outside the private sphere.¹⁴ Although some of her

¹⁴ Erika Diane Rappaport’s *Shopping for Pleasure Women in the Making of London’s West End* and Krista Lysack’s *Come Buy, Come Buy: Shopping and the Culture of Consumption in Victorian Women’s Writing*

movements might align with characterizations of the flâneuse¹⁵, these only account for her presence in urban environments. Lucy's self-styling also enables her to ramble through the countryside, as well as appear and disappear at intervals within Rue Fossette. Her clothing is more akin to Harry Potter's cloak of invisibility than the flâneuse's reversal of the male stroller. She erases her presence not only to consume visual pleasures but also to insert herself into panoramic views and street-level sketches of non-domestic space. Her ability to create mental maps of public space provides bodily autonomy and eventually economic freedom. Is it any wonder, then, that Lucy's exodus from domestic space also prevents the novel's conclusion in a marriage plot?¹⁶ In these ways, her self-fashioning and the movements that result from that styling do not align with the detached gaze of the flâneur.

Masks are a common symbol running through not only Brontë's fiction but also Brontë scholarship.¹⁷ Since Elizabeth Gaskell's account of Patrick Brontë's mask game in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, scholars have speculated about its meaning in the body of her work. In an effort to discover his children's depth of knowledge and understanding, Patrick Brontë "deemed that if they were put under a sort of cover" then they might "speak with less timidity . . . and happening to have a mask in the house, I told them all to stand and speak boldly from under cover of the mask" (Gaskell 79). Mr. Brontë's words "from under cover of the mask" become a tactic in his daughter's fiction. The mask trans-

both argue that shopping developed alongside the rise of consumer culture from the mid to late-nineteenth century giving middle-class women socially sanctioned reasons for entering public space.

¹⁵ See Deborah L. Parsons' *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity*.

¹⁶ Timothy L. Carens's "Breaking the Idol of the Marriage Plot in *Yeast* and *Villette*," argues that religious fears surrounding the worship of spouses cause disruptions of the marriage plot.

¹⁷ A range of arguments has been made about the meaning and reference to masks in Brontë. See for example, "Passionate Reserve and Reserved Passion in the Works of Charlotte Brontë" by John Kucich, *The Cover of the Mask: The Autobiographers in Charlotte Brontë's Fiction* by Annette Tromly, and *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* by Sally Shuttleworth.

forms into a sartorial strategy for Lucy Snowe to navigate public spaces, finding safety as well as pleasure there. While Janet Gezari's *Charlotte Brontë and Defensive Conduct: The Author and the Body at Risk* claims Brontë transposes the notion of masks onto Lucy Snowe as a device to hide her inner self from Foucauldian disciplinary power, this chapter examines Lucy's use of masks to cover her physical body from disciplinary power (150). Lucy's choice of understated clothes help her skirt Victorian power dynamics embedded in public space.

Throughout the novel, Lucy learns to protect herself by escaping the confinement of domestic interiors which endanger her health and threaten her autonomy. Lucy's self-fashioning shields her from dangers lurking in city streets as well as dangers within domestic space. Clothing becomes a survival mechanism. While this method of self-styling is initially a practice which allows her to locate the exits, so to speak, in dangerous spaces, she also finds pleasure in becoming invisible. Lucy's stylized outward appearance conceals her presence in city streets and large crowds, giving her fluidity of movement through a variety of coded spaces.

Walking the streets of a metropolis as a single, unescorted woman in the Victorian era is a practice packed with cultural anxieties. The Victorian metropolis, with its vast array of shifting temporal and geographic spaces, was a zone full of possible encounters, dangers, pleasures and exchanges. While the sophisticated and urban flâneur had free range throughout the city, women's presence in the metropolis carried debatable implications. Deborah Epstein Nord claims that only working-class women and prostitutes ambled as freely as the flâneur. Lynda Nead complicates this view by examining the many kinds of encounters middle-class women had in the metropolis. She examines how a let-

ter from “Paterfamilias” in *The Times* of January 1862 raised questions which provide insight into how “women of the middle classes occupied and moved around the streets of London” (63). *The Times* letter incited a lively conversation later entitled “The Rape of the Glances,” which Nead suggests is evidence that Victorian chaperonage laws were more fluid than previously thought, revising Leonore Davidoff’s earlier study. According to Davidoff, rules for upper-middle-class and aristocratic women required that “Unmarried women under thirty could not go anywhere or be in a room even in her own house with an unrelated man unless accompanied by a married gentlewoman or a servant” (Davidoff 50). Published in the same year as the “Rape of the Glances” letters, Eliza Lynn Linton’s “Out Walking” acknowledges that a number of single women find it necessary to travel the urban streets alone on a regular basis. In place of a chaperone to protect women from unsolicited attention, she recommends a working knowledge of safely travel streets paired with quiet dress. If women will inevitably be spoken to by strangers no matter their station and demeanor, then “what becomes of all the modest single women of the middle ranks, who, if they walk at all, are obliged to walk alone, yet who never dream that they are thereby reduced to the standard of social evils?” (132). Linton’s advice to women walking alone in the city is to forego the pleasures of observing in order to avoid being observed:

If she knows how to walk in the streets, self-possessed and quietly, with not too lagging and not too swift a step; if she avoids lounging about the shop window, and resolutely foregoes even the most tempting displays of finery; if she can attain to that enviable street-talent, and pass men without looking at them, yet all the while seeing them; if she knows how to dress

as only a lady can, avoiding loud colors . . . if, in a word, she does anything to attract observation, she will most likely get more of it than she wants. (133)

This passage suggests that women must exchange pleasures for safety, always anticipating the consequences of potential looks. Therefore, Linton suggests avoiding those behaviors which might draw men's gazes. In order to avoid the male gaze, women should note the presence of men in the street without giving the appearance of looking at them—or looking at anything at all except for a narrow, focused route of travel by which to anticipate and avoid interference whatsoever. Linton proposes that women who are “Unobtrusive, gentle, womanly” are just the kind to “slip through a crowd unobserved, like one of those soft gray moths in the evening which come and go upon their way, unseen by men and undevoured by birds” (Linton 136). Nead interprets Linton's advice as ascetic: “Any sign that women are enjoying the city, that they are participating in its visual culture and ocular freedom, can be taken as an index of their lack of modesty. Within this conservative discourse, lingering, attracting attention and staring are the characteristics of a new, transgressive form of metropolitan femininity” (Nead 66). Suggesting that women participated and even sought out “harmless adventures” in the metropolis, Nead argues that London was a place where women “tested and expanded contemporary definitions of femininity and respectability” (67). Extending Nead's claims that Victorian women participated in a range of pleasures within the metropolis to *Villette* reveals that Lucy both partakes in the ocular freedom of London's visual culture and remains unobtrusive as a gray moth. Unlike the women Nead describes, who did not mind being seen and in some cases even encouraged flirtations, Lucy takes pleasure in being able to see without being

seen. Her “self-possessed,” quiet demeanor and moth-gray dress serves to disguise her presence in a diverse range of spaces without depriving her of pleasures in looking and traveling.

Lucy reverses Victorian conventional wisdom associating danger with city streets and safety with domestic interiors. Her visit to London is made possible by specific events that propel her outside home spaces. First of all, her old friends the Brettons fall on hard financial times, and with no family to speak of, Lucy must find employment suitable to her station. Her work as a nurse-companion for the elderly Miss Marchmont confines her within “[t]wo hot, close rooms” which compose her entire world for a time (Brontë 37). The claustrophobic sick rooms cause her to forget “that there were fields, woods, rivers, seas, an ever-changing sky outside” (Brontë 37). Because she “[demands] no walks in the fresh air,” Lucy feels she too might die if she cannot escape the suffocating walls. Walking outside in fresh air initially represents the epitome of life and well-being. This scene of stifling interiors begins Lucy’s association of domestic space with anxiety and confinement and open public places with safety. After Miss Marchmont’s death, she determines to visit London.

Lucy’s singleness and lack of familial and societal connections uniquely position her as a prototype for the unprotected female. The publication of *Villette* and the time of Brontë’s own visits to London (1842 and 1848) precede both Linton’s essay (1862) and *The Times* letters (1862). Lucy expresses awareness of her position, which is at once precarious and freeing. Using Miss Marchmont’s housekeeper as a sounding board, who is a “grave, judicious woman,” Lucy finds approval upon communicating her plan. Though, as if requesting permission from the reader, Lucy reassures us, “I had a staid manner of

my own which ere now had been as good to me as a cloak and hood of hodden gray; since under its favor I had been enabled to achieve with Impunity, and even approbation, deeds that if attempted with an excited and unsettled air, would in some minds have stamped me as a dreamer and zealot” (Brontë 44). In an effort to downplay her transgressing of social convention, she points out her “staid manner” which works like “a cloak and hood of hodden gray.” The Oxford World Classics edition notes that “hodden” indicates the natural gray color of hand-worked wool. Before she even ventures out into the streets of London, Lucy metaphorically dresses herself in neutral tones with the explicit purpose of deflecting attention. This aside to the reader indicates her awareness of gendered codes governing certain spaces. Her “staid manner” creates a cloak of invisibility, protecting her from judging eyes. She claims that under this cloak she is able to “achieve . . . deeds” that would otherwise alert onlookers of her audaciousness in traveling alone to London at night. Going to London as a single woman, she imagines, might “[stamp her] as a dreamer and zealot.” Aware of her audience’s associations with the precarious position of a lone female traveler, Lucy reassures her reader not to worry: “In going to London, I ran less risk and evinced less enterprise than the reader may think. In fact, the distance was only fifty miles” (Brontë 45). Understanding expectations that a woman with no chaperone does indeed run “risk” and may appear enterprising, Lucy downplays her bold decision to not only travel alone but also at night. Her rhetorical disguise masks what some Victorians, including Linton, consider a danger not only to the body but to reputation. Linton suggests men might take advantage of solitary women, especially if their clothing and behavior attracts too much attention: “If I might give a word of advice, it would go against gorgeous wing-paintings in the public streets, in favour of

the soft gray neutral tints so beautiful in the puss-moths and young Quakeresses, and so suggestive of the better things in woman” (Linton 138). Lucy anticipates Linton’s advice to adopt “the soft gray neutral tints” of the “young Quakeresses” in order to avoid danger and social scrutiny.¹⁸

Clothing is not the only factor in moving through spaces undetected. Effective self-fashioning often relies on knowledge of a location in order to navigate its spaces freely. Despite her claims that she only travels a short distance and that she is safe in her cloak of hodden gray, Lucy’s initial impression of the city is disorienting: “How difficult, how oppressive, how puzzling seemed my plight! In London for the first time; at an inn for the first time; tired with travelling; confused with darkness; palsied with cold; unfurnished with either experience or advice to tell me how to act, and yet—to act obliged” (Brontë 46). Lucy’s realization that she has no former knowledge or experience of London suggests she questions her journey. New places, especially large metropolises can be disorienting and terrifying, and having no prior knowledge of London and no chaperone to guide her contributes to the confusion and difficulty she experiences. Lucy’s disorientation upon arrival in the metropolis points to a gap in the availability of resources for women traveling solo. The lack of travel guides for women amidst the plethora of etiquette books and advice manuals for women during the mid-Victorian era, suggests the implicit coding of certain spaces as off-limits for the respectable middle-class lady traveler. The first advice book about travel for women did not appear until 1889. Claiming to be the first of its kind, Lillias Campbell Davidson’s *Hints to Lady Traellers: At Home*

¹⁸ Lynda Nead’s *Victorian Babylon* includes the lithograph, *Scene in Regent Street*, featuring a middle-class woman walking alone who gets accosted by a street preacher who believes she is a “social evil” (63). Although the woman in the lithograph bears all the hallmarks of middle-class propriety in her dress, her solitary presence in a business district is what confuses the philanthropist.

and Abroad distinguishes itself from other guidebooks proffering suggestions for sight-seeing, novelty, and art viewing. *Hints* signals the rise of middle- and upper-class women's unprotected travels. It provides practical advice for stowing luggage, getting around by railway, how to secure hotel rooms and general travel etiquette. The contemporary introduction notes, "[d]istinct from personal travel accounts, such as those of Mary Kingsley and Isabella Bird, who had set contemporary high standards for travelogue-style writing, Campbell Davidson provided the first practical women's manual on the pleasures (and trials) of travel" (Macleod 9). Predating this little volume, Lucy must parse out her own way in literal and figurative darkness.

Lucy's arrival in dark of night prevents her from seeing the city clearly. In "Narrative Surveillance and Social Control in *Villette*" Margret Shaw claims "to see is to know and to know is to have power" (814). The lack of sight prevents Lucy from obtaining any knowledge of the city. This moment is contrasted with her change of heart the next morning when she looks out and sees where her inn is located: "The street on which my little sitting-room looked was narrow, perfectly quiet, and not dirty: the few passengers were just such as one sees in provincial towns: here was nothing formidable; I felt sure I might venture out alone" (Brontë 48). Yet, it also reveals Lucy's resourcefulness and curiosity in venturing out despite her initial sense of disorientation. The city takes on a different character to her in the daylight. Now that she can see her surroundings accurately, she feels more oriented and less confused. Her judgment of the street and whether or not she may enter onto it are determined after analyzing the looks of the people, the cleanliness, and noise level. After she gauges the safety of the street, she feels certain she can "venture out alone."

Before visiting London herself, Brontë imbued London with formidable, transformative powers. Elizabeth Gaskell explores Brontë's suspicions that London possessed metamorphic abilities over its visitors. This idea reveals itself through letters to Ellen Nussey. Gaskell suggests "the idea of [Nussey's] visit seems to have stirred Charlotte strangely. She appears to have formed her notions of its probable consequences . . . for she evidently imagines that an entire change of character for the worse is the usual effect of a visit to the 'great metropolis' and is delighted to find that E is E still . . . her own imagination is deeply moved by the ideas of what great wonders are to be seen in that vast and famous city" (127). In her letter, Brontë commends her friend's power to resist London's mesmerism: "Few girls would have . . . beheld the glare, and glitter, and dazzling display . . . with dispositions so unchanged, heart so uncontaminated. I see no affectation in your letters, no trifling, no frivolous contempt of plain, and weak admiration of showy persons and things" (qtd. in Gaskell 129). Gaskell states that Brontë's impressions of London were based solely upon *British Essayists*, *The Rambler*, *The Mirror* and *The Lounger*, and her letters reveal a belief that the city's pleasures are synonymous with vaporous and ephemeral things (127). However, once Brontë visited the city herself, she found its draw had nothing to do with the wonders of shopping or fashionable society. Those pleasures, which are so often associated with women and for which Linton believes will endanger women's ability to travel safely, are not the experiences which thrill Brontë or her heroine. In fact, Gaskell claims Brontë's experience was "pretty much as she has described it in *Villette*." Despite "her sense of loneliness" from making the trip by herself, she still found "strange pleasure in the excitement of the situation" (Gaskell 214). Alt-

though Brontë was relieved that London did not change her friend, the fictional city takes on a magical quality and becomes a site of discovery and autonomy for Lucy.

Brontë's own preconceived notions of London's preoccupation with "the glare, and glitter, and dazzling display" manifest themselves when Lucy feels her own appearance pales compared to that of a chambermaid at her hotel (qtd in Gaskell 129).

Throughout the novel, Lucy continually references the plainness of her clothing in contrast to other female characters. Lucy's encounter with the pretty chambermaid happens the night before she crosses the threshold of the inn and steps into the street. She continues to choose drab, plain clothing which other characters find disconcerting. Lucy feels inadequate and out of place in the hotel dining room. An "arrogant little maid" and "parsonic-looking waiter" size her up while serving her food. Lucy feels rebuked by the maid's pretty styling, throwing her own muted appearance into stark relief: "So trim her waist, her cap, her dress . . . her spruce attire flaunted an easy scorn at my plain country garb" (Brontë 46). Her quiet dress and manner make it difficult for the inn's staff to determine Lucy's station in life. Whether or not the chambermaid actually looks down on Lucy's choice of clothing is not important. Rather, it is the close attention Lucy pays to her own appearance that is significant. Brontë draws on her own previous notions of London's character in order to set up Lucy's repurposing of clothing. Rather than read Lucy's sartorial choice as anti-fashion or inept ability to properly cultivate femininity, this scene draws attention to her deployment of clothing as a tactic to access urban space.

Despite self-deprecating comments about her appearance, the "plain country garb" paired with a knowledgeable view of the city lends her mobility. Once she gets her bearings, Lucy's plain clothes allow her to move unobserved through London. In Shaw's

terms, no one can have power over her if they cannot see her. Lucy derives a sense of agency in her ability to see without being seen¹⁹. In fact, the following passage directly contrasts the experiences Linton illustrates in “Out Walking”:

Having breakfasted, out I went. Elation and pleasure were in my heart to walk alone in London seemed of itself an adventure. Presently I found myself in Paternoster-row—classic ground this. I entered a bookseller’s shop, kept by one Jones; I bought a little book—a piece of extravagance I could ill afford . . . Prodigious was the amount of life I lived that morning. Finding myself before St. Paul’s, I went in; I mounted to the dome: I saw thence London, with its river, and its bridges, and its churches; I saw antique Westminster, and the green Temple Gardens . . . Descending, I went wandering whither chance might lead, in a still ecstasy of freedom and enjoyment; and I got—I knew not how—I got into the heart of city life. I saw and felt London at last: I got into the Strand; I went up Cornhill; I mixed with the life passing along; I dared the perils of crossings. To do this, and to do it utterly alone, gave me perhaps an irrational, but real pleasure. Since those days, I have seen the West-end, the parks, the fine squares; but I love the city far better. The city seems so much more in earnest; its business, its rush, its roar, are such serious things, sights and sounds. The city is getting its living—the West-end but enjoying its pleasure. At the West-end you may be amused, but in the city you are deeply excited. (Brontë 49)

¹⁹While Lucy’s viewing practices do invoke gaze theory, her version of looking does not fit into revisions or delineations of Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” Lucy’s self-fashioning circumvents being the object of men’s or women’s gazes.

Lucy expresses her “elation and pleasure” at the adventure of walking unchaperoned, unguided through London. As she meanders “wither chance might lead,” Lucy not only experiences “*real* pleasure” (emphasis mine) but also travels through many neighborhoods of the metropolis in which women normally would not have ventured. She identifies the source of her pleasure as the solitary nature of her movement. The words “pleasure” and “alone” provide a framework for this passage, marking the start and completion of her tour through London’s streetscapes. Once she determines that it is safe to walk out from her hotel, she wanders “wither chance might lead.” In opposition to Linton’s advice that solitary female travelers should plan their routes carefully according to time and location, Lucy wanders aimlessly through many different zones. Her “plain country garb” imitates the gray moth of Linton’s prescribed style, while stealing pleasures from her boundless ambling. Lucy manages to escape the view of men as well as women. She presents a unique solution to the conundrum of women’s presence in the metropolis. In seeking sights while remaining out of sight, Lucy deflects the troublesome attentions of men which protect her respectability.

Yet, her consumption of sights and her experience of hedonistic and sublime feelings reveal a new avenue of female pleasure. Lucy’s specific brand of pleasure distinguishes itself from the amusements of shopping. Rather, she finds that when she “[mixes] with the life passing along” and “[dares] the perils of crossings . . . utterly alone” gives her “perhaps an irrational, but real pleasure” (Brontë 49). Erika Rappaport uses Lucy as an example of women’s growing presence in London’s commercial West End and attributes her pleasure to this specific female consumption. However, it is not the particular location of the West End with its reputation for shopping and commerce which gives

Lucy such joy. She claims, “I have seen the West End . . . but I love the city far better.” She gets her “real pleasure” from the “business, its rush, its roar” the more “serious things, sights and sounds” where the city center pulses with life and “gets its living.” Tim Dolin’s endnote in the Oxford World Classics edition explains “since the middle of the eleventh century, when Edward I established his court and Westminster Abbey, London has been divided into a commercial centre (the City of London) and a centre of government (the City of Westminster) (500). These two sectors of London would have been filled with business and government offices, associated with masculine endeavors and masculine space. Lucy observes her deep excitement at crossing the threshold into a part of the city whose aim is “to get its living.” The excitement of getting a living is contrasted with the mere fancy and whim of consumer culture in the West End. To earn, do, and work out in the world is the source of deep, real, and exciting pleasure rather than consumption of goods. Lucy’s experiences in the city foreshadow her final goal of becoming independent and making her own living. London, therefore, is not only a springboard for her future border crossings but also seeds her desire for economic freedom.

Lucy’s pleasure tour of London echoes those reserved for the male traveler found in *Gilbert’s Visitors Guide to London* which assures their readers of “our most anxious wish will be to satisfy his boundless desire to see and know” (iii). Gilbert’s *Visitors Guide* assumes a male “stranger” and “tourist” in London, and it offers no advice directly addressed to female travelers. Its message for male travelers is the motto of the flâneur: indulge in every part of London. No experience or place is off limits. The tone of *Visitors Guide* contrasts advice for women walking in the city. For instance, Linton’s message to women, visitors and residents alike, is take care and

beware. Do not wander aimlessly, get distracted, or lollygag. Whatever the Linton reader do, making eye-contact is unacceptable. Even though Nead illustrates instances of middle-class feminine participating in daily exchanges of urban life, Gilbert's guide displays a vastly larger range of mobility for the male visitor, temporally and spatially.

Lucy's difficulty in accessing London, according to the gaps in Gilbert's guide and the explicitness in Linton, proves to be her gender. Yet, once Lucy can picture the city for herself, she goes everywhere and takes in everything, as Gilbert's reader is instructed. In fact, Lucy engages in an early example of what Tanya Agathocleous might call a gendered panorama. By utilizing the panoramic form, Lucy becomes the cartographer providing her particular vision of London. Where once she felt lost in darkness within the confounding metropolis, she now commands a view of the entire city as far as her eye can see. Agathocleous's *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century: Visible City, Invisible World* draws on claims that nineteenth-century urban panorama and sketch held "the utopian promise of global cities" within their large "cosmopolitan populations and endless shape-shifting" making "them impossible to homogenize or control" (8). Since Agathocleous takes primarily examines male authors' as her examples, women are not implicated in the creation of London sketches and panorama – and therefore don't get to participate in making their meaning. Lucy retools Agathocleous's notion of the city providing a collective communal view of humanity. Her panorama does not revise "the semiotics of allegory and Christian brotherhood" in order to imagine "a human family" (Agathocleous 72). Instead, when Lucy "register[s] the dizzyingly new variations of life and labor that the city put on view" she includes her-

self within each street-level sketch among the rush and roar of the streets and the people getting their livings in the financial and government wards (Agathocleous 73). She becomes the painter and viewer of panorama, but she also acts a part in each neighborhood sketch. Looking out from St. Paul's cathedral, she "mounted to the dome" and "saw thence London, with its river, and its bridges, and its churches" with the "antique Westminster, and the green Temple Gardens" (Brontë 49). She isn't merely a passerby within someone else's version of the city, she partakes in creating a view of it for her readers, and by including herself within it—though no one can "see" her, the reader sees her—making her an author and citizen of the metropolis. Her muted self-fashioning gives her the freedom of movement between diverse parts of London which in turn allow her to create and include herself in a female panorama and sketch.

At no point in this walk through London does Lucy feel unsafe or "raped by glances." She gives the reader no indication that she has been observed in any fashion. Only when she leaves London from the wharfs late at night and when she arrives in Villette at the foreign bureau does she feel threatened. Her ability to, as Lynda Nead has claimed, "participate in the ocular economy of the city" is reliant on her protective grey clothing (71). However, this kind of participation would implicate Lucy's partaking in the looking and returning of "the gazes of passers-by," yet Lucy does not return the glances of those she passes in the metropolis because she is invisible (Nead 71). Deflection is not necessary when no one sees you. Therefore, she is freed up to "dare the crossings" of busy, dangerous streets and move about London's map between distant points with her reputation intact, removed from bodily harm, and full of new experiences.

Pushing the frame of her panorama, Lucy's new experiences inspire her to move even further into new territory. She boards a ship for Labassecour, again deciding to travel by night. However, this time she cannot assure her readers that the journey was inconsequential in terms of distance or safety. Her reason for traveling late is to secure a spot on the ship as per the advice of a hotel waiter. Upon whose orders a cab is called and the driver is given "an injunction about taking [her] . . . to the wharf, and not leaving [her] to the watermen; which that functionary promised to observe, but failed . . . In the contrary, he offered [her] up as an oblation, served [her] as a dripping roast, making [her] alight in the midst of a throng of watermen" (Brontë 50). Her arrival at the wharf as a single woman in the middle of the night signals vulnerability. While her journey to London is disorienting and uncomfortable, her quiet clothes and reserve cannot protect her here. Quite the reverse happens in that the cab driver announces her presence, hailing the attention of dangerous fellows rather than deflecting it. Dolin's endnotes observe that Brontë was following "Scenes from the Life of an Unprotected Female" in *Punch* as she wrote *Villette*. The note specifically directs readers to Scene 4 in which the "unprotected female" takes a cab out to the wharfs and fights with porters over her luggage. The cabman haggles over the bill, and the Porters all shout prices per item of luggage. In the cacophony of voices, the unprotected female loses track of her ship, its departure time, and her bags. Lucy's experience at the wharf appears to be modeled after *Punch's* version, especially the wily cabman's and porters' attempts to swindle her money and luggage.

Despite the real and present dangers to her physical safety (as opposed to social dangers to her reputation), Lucy finds she is unafraid: "Amidst the strange scene, with a chilly wind blowing in my face, and midnight-clouds dropping rain above my head; with

two rude rowers for companions, whose insane oaths still tortured my ear, I asked myself if I was wretched or terrified. I was neither. Often in my life have I been far more so under comparatively safe circumstances” (Brontë 51). Gaskell observes that when Brontë recounted her own experience boarding the vessel to Belgium she took “strange pleasure in the excitement of the situation” (214). Although both Lucy and the unprotected female traveler face danger at the wharf, the unprotected female can be read as reinforcing conventional wisdom that women should not travel alone, and Lucy’s occurrence reverses said wisdom. Brontë imbues her heroine with the same “strange pleasure” she herself experienced, finding less to fear than “under comparatively safe circumstances.”

While the danger of domestic space may at first sound counter-intuitive, Lucy emotionally remaps her excursions outside home places relocating safety as well as pleasure outside the walls of a domicile. Thus, it makes sense that Lucy continues to push further from home. Prior to her arrival at the wharf, Lucy crosses the boundaries between the country and the city and the divisions between neighborhoods within London. As she approaches the water’s edge and boards a ship leaving England’s national borders, Lucy crosses an imaginary as well as literal margin pushing the bounds of acceptable behavior for unmarried women of her age and her time period. The sense of strange pleasure seems connected to Lucy’s delineation between amusement and deep excitement in her walking tour of London. She finds herself “deeply excited” in places where she must dare to move across crowded thoroughfares uncertain crossings. The strangeness of this experience, which should feel dangerous to a woman alone at night, can be traced to feelings of elation in being where she should not be. Although Lucy finds herself “in a strange scene” and an “uncomfortable crisis,” she is not scared (Brontë 51). She experiences more terror

under presumably safer conditions which not only echo her claustrophobic existence with Miss Marchmont but also foreshadow her cloistered life under Madame Beck's hawk eyes in the Rue Fossette. Lucy's movement from the wharf, the imaginary edge of her national soil, to the steamer, which carries her to international waters, call for a shift in status from tourist to traveler making her position as an "unprotected female" more vulnerable. This term points both to the difficulty women may have experienced navigating journeys on their own as well as their vulnerability to hustlers. It wasn't until Davidson's *Hints* in 1889 nearly 45 years later that women's travel became easier and more acceptable. Lucy emerges as a prototype, a pioneer of women's solitary travel and simultaneously highlights a lack of guidance and resources available to women.²⁰

Therefore, Lucy's disorientation upon arrival in Labassecour resonates with nineteenth-century representations of the unprotected female. Traveling to another country triggers Lucy's sense of dislocation, an uncertainty about her new surroundings paired with a lack of knowledge of the place. Crossing an ocean transforms Lucy into a stranger in a foreign land. Once she sets foot on Labassecour's soil, her Englishness becomes the mask of alien. Lucy observes that "Foreigners say that it is only English girls who can thus be trusted to travel alone, and deep is their wonder at the daring confidence of English parents and guardians. As for the 'jeunes Miss,' by some their intrepidity is pronounced masculine and 'inconvenant,' others regard them as the passive victims of an educational and theological system which wantonly dispenses with proper 'surveillance' (Brontë 53). While continental parents perceive English women as having inordinate

²⁰ Taking a more serious tone than *Punch's* "Unprotected Female," The International Congress of Women in 1900 devoted a special panel entitled "Protection of Young Travelers" which addressed the problems solitary female travelers continued to have through the century.

amounts of freedom, Lucy addresses a presumably British readership when she attempts to assuage perceptions of impropriety as she ventures even further on her own: “Before you pronounce on the rashness of the proceeding, reader, look, look back to the point whence I started; consider the desert I had left, note how little I periled: mine was the game where the player cannot lose and may win” (Brontë 60). Exploiting her status as foreigner as well as mitigating reader’s judgments of her decision to travel to another country on her own, Lucy asks us to consider her point of origin, to visualize her autobiographical map. She beckons “look back to the point whence I started,” which is vague, for where do we mark her starting point? Should we consider the Bretton’s or Miss Marchmont’s as “the point whence [she] started?” Or does she refer to England in general? Lucy seems to forecast Agathocleous’s London of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century in which the city ceases to be “the center or even the destination” and evolves into “somewhere one finds oneself along the way,” solidifying her status as a prototype of the female voyager (26).

Brontë institutes a pattern for Lucy’s border crossings. Each time Lucy moves across a new threshold, whether London, the wharf, or her arrival in Labassecour, she must first experience hardship which eventually establishes a sense of place. Although Lucy assures readers she possesses nothing in the way of family, reputation, or money, her arrival sparks a deep sense of disorientation. Her discomfort at the customs office in Villette mirrors her first impressions of London.: “I had hoped we might reach Villette ere night set in, and that thus I might escape the deeper embarrassment which obscurity seems to throw round a first arrival at an unknown bourne; but . . . slow progress and long stoppages . . . thick fog and small, dense rain—darkness that might almost be felt,

had settled on the city by the time we gained its suburbs” (Brontë 61). Darkness, once again, signals unknowability. Lucy hopes to escape the awkward position of “obscurity” which throws its shadow over her first encounters in an unknown place at night. Her vision, needed to glean an accurate view, is prevented by “thick fog” and “dense rain” paired with a “darkness that might almost be felt.” Villettes’ streets are unknown and become “lonesome, dreary, [and] hostile” (Brontë 67). As she wanders the maze of streets in the fog and dark, two men step from the shadows and begin following her. It is only when Lucy feels she is thrown into the unknown on terms other than her own which make her feel the “[deep] embarrassment” of “obscurity.” Although this temporary setback makes her feel alienated and even in danger at times, this instance becomes a harbinger of knowledge. Her initial impression of Villettes as “lonesome” and “hostile,” is a temporal point in her trajectory. This instance only helps to strengthen Lucy’s ability to blend into cityscapes later in the novel.

Once Lucy gets her bearings, the streets of Villettes become safer for her than the corridors of Rue Fossette. In the quieter, one could even say grayer, moments of her life, Lucy moves more fluidly by orienting herself within the spaces of Villettes and disguising her movements through her self-fashioning. In fact, the more Lucy gets settled in to her new life at Rue Fossette, the more invisible she becomes. For example, when the other pupils and teachers go to town, they always mention receiving admiring glances from male suitors. However Lucy claims, “I can’t say that my experience tallied with theirs, in this respect. I went to church and I took walks, and am very well convinced that nobody minded me” (Brontë 111). When a little box filled with love letters drops into her lap from a window above her private ally connected to the garden at Rue Fossette, she in-

stantly knows it is not for her. The more familiar Lucy becomes with her surroundings, the more she blends into them. With the aid of her reserved demeanor and her grey dress, Lucy masks herself within open spaces.

Like the biological adaptations of the stick insect or the chameleon, Lucy takes on the colors and hues of surrounding landscapes. The school's holiday fête offers her an opportunity to practice using clothing to mask her presence in space and in crowds. In preparation for the fête, she envisions herself as part of a larger landscape: "In beholding this diaphanous and snowy mass, I well remember feeling myself to be a mere shadowy spot on a field of light; the courage was not in me to put on a transparent white dress . . . so I had sought through a dozen shops till I lit upon a crape-like material of purple-gray—the colour, in short, of dun mist, lying on a moor in bloom" (Brontë 131). Rather than attempt to fashion herself after the students at Rue Fossette who wear white crepe gowns, Lucy sees herself as being among them yet distinctly separate. Imagining herself as the embodiment of fog, she transforms into misty shadow traveling through the blooms unnoticed. The tone of the passage implies ambivalence about her perceived lack of beauty and bravery to wear see-through clothing. However, Lucy refuses to be literally or figuratively transparent, channeling her agency into a sartorial choice. She equates the white dress with a desire to be seen and observed. "We become oblivious of these deficiencies in the uniform routine of daily drudgery, but they *will* force upon us their unwelcome blank on those bright occasions when beauty should shine. However, in this same gown of shadow, I felt at home and at ease; an advantage I should not have enjoyed in anything more brilliant or striking" (Brontë 131). Lucy's "gown of shadow" gives her a sense of ease as well as advantage, which she could not "have enjoyed in anything more . . . strik-

ing.” Lucy’s feelings of “ease” and sense of feeling “at home” in her cloak of grey provide a contrast to her dis-ease and “deep embarrassment” upon her initial arrival to Villette (Brontë 61). Therefore, when Lucy is able to look out from underneath her “gown of shadow” to see clearly, rather than wander an unknown place in darkness and be seen by ill-intentioned lurkers, she feels “at home.”

In a reversal of Victorian notions of home, she defines her sense of home as invisibility in a crowd and mist on a blooming moor. The phrase “at home” takes on a new meaning within Lucy’s remapped context of spaces. To feel at ease or at home is to simultaneously experience comfort, safety, and pleasure in the knowledge and ability to blend into her surroundings. Lucy substitutes the conventional connotations of home with domestic bliss and safe haven from the dangerous, dirty world for distance from the closed-up space of interiors. These comparisons call attention to her counter intuitive sense of security in spaces out-of-doors. Recall her exhilaration walking through London, her suffocation in Miss Marchmont’s cramped sick rooms, and her need to walk freely through fields and see the sky.

Lucy gets another opportunity to experiment self-fashioning her visibility and invisibility when M. Paul presses on her to play in the vaudeville. Although it might seem contradictory that Lucy participates in Rue Fossette’s vaudeville, she exerts control over her appearance and uses the play to practice her ability to appear on her own terms and disappear at will. Although Lucy agrees to play the part, she refuses Zélie St. Pierre and M. Paul’s costume advice:

‘You do not like these clothes?’ he asked, pointing to the masculine vestments. ‘I don’t object to some of them, but I won’t have them all.’

‘How must it be, then? *How*, accept a man’s part, and go on the stage dressed as a woman? . . . yet something you must have to announce you as of the nobler sex.’ ‘And I will, monsieur; but it must be arranged in my own way: nobody must meddle; the things must not be forced upon me. Just let me dress myself.’ (139)

In donning both her dress of misty shadow as well as “merely [assuming] . . . a little vest, a collar, and cravat, and a *paletôt* of small dimensions,” Lucy agrees to play the part on the contention that she is allowed the freedom to style herself (Brontë 139). As she is called from the room in the attic where she has been hidden, Lucy is asked to stand in front of the crowd rather than blend into it. A few articles of men’s clothing layered over her own dress signal her role as a male character. The reason why the stage is not a disorienting space for her is that she pretends to be someone else, a character whose purpose is the blend in with the story of the play. In claiming that she “merely” added the accessories of a vest, collar, cravat and overcoat, Lucy “[retains her] woman's garb without the slightest retrenchment” (Brontë 139). Her gown of purple mist serves a dual purpose. By emphasizing the male accessories as mere additions, Lucy’s primary mask remains intact. The alterations Lucy makes to the stage costume are just enough for her to quickly blend into her role and just as quickly dissolve into the background again.

The vaudeville play can be read as part and parcel of the entire fête because it gives Lucy the opportunity to experiment with a series of disappearing and reappearing acts. Her first act of disappearance is marked by her choice to wear a dress the color of grey-purple mist. She reappears temporarily, mixing a few signature articles of men’s clothing, on stage in the role of actress. Once off the stage, Lucy casts off the accoutre-

ments of display, and disappears again into the crowd claiming she “had acted enough for one evening; it was time [she] retired into [herself] and [her] ordinary life” (Brontë 142). Lucy suggests her ability to “retire” back into daily life relies on her choice of “dun-coloured dress.” Using minimal articles to signal her role ensures a swift transition from stage to wall-flower. Lucy observes the dress “did well enough under a paletot on the stage, but would not suit a waltz or quadrille. Withdrawing to a quiet nook, whence unobserved I could observe—the ball, its splendours and its pleasures pass before me as a spectacle” (Brontë 142). Playing a role in the vaudeville is Lucy’s dress rehearsal for exploring the streets (and later fields) of Vilette. She gains necessary practice for later scenes in the novel when she must seek movement outside the Rue Fossette. Since she already possesses the staid manner of unobtrusive furniture, the fête gives her the opportunity to practice moving between highly visible positions one moment and fading into the backdrop the next. Her quiet withdrawal to a place on the periphery provides Lucy with the vantage point with which she feels quite at home: to observe unobserved.

In a similar attempt to blend into the background, Lucy alters another gown meant to be displayed in public. When Mrs. Bretton has a pink dress made for her, Lucy covers it with black lace in hopes that Graham will not believe she “[decks]” herself “out to draw attention” (Brontë 208). Both alterations are efforts to be less visible and more fluid within a crowd. Lucy’s discomfort in wearing this pink dress stems from the fear that she will be the object of unnecessary attention. In contrast to her vaudeville role where she exerts her own sense of style, the concert dress causes a loss in sense of place, more akin to her feelings of disorientation upon arrival in London and Vilette. Geographically speaking, Lucy is not lost. Figuratively, however, she loses the ability to locate pleasure

and safety from the shadows when she cannot control her appearance through her own self-fashioning. These moments of metaphoric dislocation occur when Lucy is forced to disrobe, so to speak, of her control over public appearance on other people's terms. It is the more glamorous occasions at the theater and the opera which produce a sense of disorientation and unease. When Lucy is expected to appear in public places according to other people's expectations, she alters her garments to gesture toward her own sartorial sensibility. Rather than focus on Lucy's display on the stage,²¹ her wardrobe play instead reflects her experimentation with outward appearances as she develops more resourcefulness and creativity in her ability to be viewed and be shielded from view.

The fête and the long break are crucial moments in Lucy's self-fashioning development. While the fête gives her the opportunity to practice her disappearing acts, the long break forces her outside the school's walls on long ambling journeys through Villette. Lucy must understand how to use clothes to become invisible in addition to having a good knowledge of the city in order to map herself into it. These two skills become crucial tactics for designing her ultimate economic and geographic freedom. During the long break, Lucy describes the effects of Rue Fossette's walls on her psyche: "I was sure this hope would shine clearer if I got out from under this house-roof, which was crushing as the slab of a tomb, and went outside the city to a certain quiet hill, a long way distant in the fields. Covered with a cloak (I could not be delirious, for I had sense and recollection to put on warm clothing), forth I set" (Brontë 160). Armed with a cloak and a clear vision of space far from Rue Fossette, Lucy locates her health and well-being outside

²¹ For instance, see Robyn Warhol's "Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*," Ann Weinstone's "The Queerness of Lucy Snowe," Luanne McCracken Fletcher's "Manufactured Marvels, Heretic Narratives, and the Process of Interpretation in *Villette*," and Anita Levey's "Public Spaces, Private Eyes: Gender and the Social Work of Aesthetics in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*."

domestic space. At first, she “lacked courage to venture very far from the Rue Fossette, but by degrees” Lucy gets to “the city-gates, and passed them, and then went wandering away far along chaussees, through fields, beyond cemeteries . . . beyond farmsteads, to lanes and little woods, and [she knew] not where . . . [she] often walked all day” (158). Traversing a range of different spaces, Lucy moves further and further afield, gaining ground and knowledge of Villette’s environs. Gaskell’s biographical account of Brontë’s time in Brussels echoes Lucy’s search for solace and peace: “she went out, and with weary steps would traverse the Boulevards and the streets, sometimes for hours together; faltering and resting occasionally on some of the many benches placed for the repose of happy groups, or for solitary wanderers like herself” (223). While the school is equated with a “slab of a tomb,” a “quiet hill” in a distant field becomes symbolic of her shining hope. This instruction for us to read her state of well-being based her movement and her clothing serves to reinforce the relationship between health, pleasure, and freedom with non-domestic spaces.

Foreshadowing the priest’s association with M. Beck’s suffocating surveillance, Lucy happens to wander into the very church of the priest connected to an ill-conceived plan for M. Paul. Although the priest appears kind and the little Catholic Church relieves her weariness temporarily, she quickly discerns his intent to influence her. This supposed safe haven is transformed in Lucy’s mind when she senses the priest’s potential to control her. The tranquil stained-glass and peaceful stone walls become threatening, confirming Lucy’s discomfort with enclosed spaces. Before leaving the shelter of the church to resume her wandering, Lucy points readers again to her dress: “and pulling down my veil, and gathering round me my cloak, I glided away” (Brontë 162). Once again, she must use

her cloak to escape, “gliding away” to safety. Her clothes function as necessary tactics for “daring the crossings” so to speak.

Although Lucy’s navigational skill develops and grows by degrees during the long break, her encounter with the priest throws her off balance. Even the temporary feeling of entrapment gives her a sense of disorientation. Turning toward what she thinks is the Rue Fossette, she “[becomes] involved in a part of the city with which [she] was not familiar; it was the old part, and full of narrow streets of picturesque, ancient, and mouldering houses” (Brontë 163). Lucy describes her mental and physical state as “too weak to be very collected, and . . . too careless . . . to be cautious” (Brontë 163). The priest’s presence in this sequence can be read as a threat to Lucy’s autonomy and the cause of her dislocation. Losing her courage and her bearings, she becomes entangled in a part of the city in which “was not familiar” (Brontë 163). Lucy loses consciousness in the middle of the street, awaking to find a familiar room with familiar faces. While some might claim this moment fails to provide Lucy agency²², I would argue that this scene is necessary for Lucy’s total emancipation at the novel’s conclusion. Passing out in this street to be found by her friend, Graham Bretton, becomes a safer option than suffocation from the claustrophobic walls of Rue Fossette. Lucy lands in an apropos location of the city, one which reunites her with her godmother, Mrs. Bretton. The Bretton home provides a safe domestic alternative to M. Beck’s school. While this instance is marked by Lucy’s delirium and loss of consciousness, she attributes her fever and sickness to being cloistered and that causes her wandering into parts unknown. It is not the city itself which

²² Vera Eliášová’s dissertation, *Women in the City: Female Flânerie and the Modern Urban Imagination*, includes a chapter on *Villette* in which she claims “In the face of these unknown threats Lucy repeatedly breaks down. The novel abounds in recurrent instances of physical and mental illness that impede her ability to judge and act” (23). However, I argue these moments of breakdown are part of a learning curve and successful trajectory where Lucy gains eventual and lasting economic independence.

is dangerous, but her confinement within unhealthy domestic space. The Brettons provide care in place of surveillance. Her recovery with among god-relatives further develops her knowledge of Villette, ensuring she can recall it from memory later in the novel.

Upon Lucy's return to school after her recovery with the Brettons, M. Beck takes on a more threatening presence. Where Lucy was once amused and intrigued by M. Beck's penchant for surveillance, Lucy begins to feel trapped beneath the hawkish woman's gaze. Although Lucy succeeds in hiding her treasured letters from Graham where M. Beck cannot access them, she has more difficulty shielding her body and agency from M. Beck. As Lucy's friendship with M. Paul develops, M. Beck's controlling attention toward Lucy also grows. Tensions between M. Beck and Lucy culminate one evening when M. Beck drugs Lucy's tea, attempting to prevent her from pursuing M. Paul. While Lucy suspects she is a threat to M. Beck's romantic intentions for M. Paul, M. Beck has more calculating plans for M. Paul than love, and Lucy has the most potential to disrupt M. Beck's plans. Thus, if Lucy is incapable of mobility, then she cannot impede M. Beck's designs on M. Paul.

However, M. Beck underestimates Lucy's depth and breadth of knowledge of the school and the city as well as her adept skill at self-fashioning invisibility. At first, Lucy imagines herself trapped within the dungeon of Rue Fossette unable to access the safety of the park. Descriptions of the school stand in stark contrast to these visions of refuge. She compares the classrooms to "great dreary jails" housing "spectral and intolerable memories." The whole of Rue Fossette itself takes on the character of a "dungeon" where she hears "the prisoners moan" (Brontë 151). However, her opiate vision provides her with a solution to her entrapment. Standing at the barred windows of her dormitory, Lucy

imbues the geography of Vilette with protection. In her mental panoramic view of Vilette, Lucy discovers that “[i]nstead of stupor, came excitement,” making her “alive to a new thought . . . Look forth and view the night!” . . . She brought upon me a strange vision of Vilette at midnight” (Brontë 450). She first describes an imaginary map of Vilette with a sweeping view of the park “with its long alleys all silent, lone and safe” (Brontë 450). Her daily walking tours during the long break and her guided experiences with the Brettons through town allow her to recall Vilette from memory. Not only does Lucy access the larger view of Vilette from the vantage point of her window, she also narrows her memory-vision to the street level. She recalls “a gap in the paling—one stake broken down: I now saw this gap again in recollection . . . the narrow, irregular aperture visible between the stems of the lindens, planted orderly as a colonnade” (Brontë 450). This literal and figurative crack in the park boundary manifests itself in Lucy’s memory as an invisible door, a secret passageway leading to a space where she envisions freedom from the school’s prison-like walls. Once she mentally envisions a way into the park, her focus hones in on a familiar object: “a huge stone basin—that basin I knew, and beside which I had often stood” (Brontë 451). By zooming in on the stone basin, Lucy locates a place where she feels safe and experiences pleasure. In effect, Lucy creates her own guide via her mental sketches of the park.

Drawing further on Agathocleous’s notion of sketch and panorama, Lucy not only envisions the city streets and park paths as escape routes but also places herself squarely at the center of her own Vilette panorama. Lucy’s navigational skills have not just improved since her London journey, but she now understands the craft of making her own maps. While in London, Lucy accesses the 360 degree view of the metropolis, and then

descends into its rush and roar. She finds her bearings and feels unthreatened despite the “dangers of the crossings.” In this instance, she constructs a mental panorama and street level view from memory in order to plan her escape.

Lucy proves her adept skill at disguise when she not only unmasks M. Beck but also breaks out of the school undetected despite attempts to immobilize her through opiates. Her “garden-costume,” consisting of her wide-brim hat and shawl, provide the necessary cover to cross the prison-like doors of the school and mix with the crowd unseen. Despite her drugged state, she remembers the spring-bolt door of the school’s main entrances can be opened “noiselessly” from “within,” and after wrapping herself in a hat and shawl, she crosses the boundary: “I wonder as that great portal seems almost spontaneously to unclose; I wonder as I cross the threshold and step on the paved street, wonder at the strange ease with which this prison has been forced. It seems as if I had been pioneered invisibly, as if some dissolving force had gone before me” (Brontë 451). Lucy’s choice in clothing paired with the creation of her panoramic vision of Villettes acts as “dissolving” forces enabling her escape. Her large-brimmed hat and shawl wrap Lucy in anonymity and, therefore, enable her safe passage through streets and crowds allowing her a freedom of movement.

With a commanding knowledge of the city as well as practice in using clothing to mask her presence, Lucy attends the crowded town festival honoring its saints and patriots “devoted to spectacles, decorations, and illuminations” (Brontë 453). When Lucy manages to step into the streets outside Rue Fossette, the city of Villettes is not as sleepy as she imagines. Music, light and laughter emanate from the park, yet her goal of finding the fountain basin does not deter her despite being “plunged amidst a gay, living, joyous

crowd” (Brontë 452). The town fête offers up other people’s lives as Lucy’s spectacle and affords her the power of illumination as a direct result of her self-fashioning, culminating in a mastery of her disappearing ability. En route, she sees an “open carriage” containing “known faces.” Desiring her solitary freedom, she hopes “they could not see, or at least know” her and instinctively wraps her shawl closer around her body and “screened” herself with the straw hat (Brontë 452). Like her gown of “dun mist” and “purple shadow,” the garden costume allows her to disappear within the cityscape of this “living” crowd. Her solitary, disguised travel enables her to “follow these friends viewlessly” in addition to giving her “strange pleasure” (Brontë 452). In contrast to previous moments in the novel when Lucy rationalizes her seemingly reckless decisions to the reader, this time Lucy does not attempt to convince anyone that her actions are justified. Rather, she matter-of-factly states that she travels and mixes through the streets safely. Echoing the pleasure she experiences in walking alone in London, this scene builds upon earlier adventures, yielding new pleasures in seeing friends hidden behind her shield of protective clothing. Once the carriage passes, Lucy allows herself to be reabsorbed into the crowd musing, “I scarce could avouch that I had really seen them; nor did I miss them as guides through the chaos, far less regret them as protectors amidst the night” (Brontë 453). Casting off the notion that her friends could provide guidance through the streets and crowd, Lucy relishes being alone amongst chaos. Despite being under the influence of a strong drug and M. Beck’s fierce efforts to contain her, Lucy manages to experience freedom and pleasure.

It is not that Lucy moves where other women cannot, it is *how* she travels through public spaces on her own terms without calling attention to herself. She fluidly slips

through gates, invisibly crosses thresholds, and navigates the dangers of all these crossings with little repercussion. Her hat and shawl guarantee traveling mercies. For example, she claims “Safe I passed down the avenues—safe I mixed with the crowd where it was deepest” (Brontë 454). Repeating the word “safe” within this passage reiterates Lucy’s employment of clothing to locate freedom within the chaos of Villettes’s fête as opposed to finding safe haven within a domicile. Dress becomes forged as the primary means for maintaining her independence within a crowd. As Lucy approaches the center of the park, she discovers rows of chairs assembled around some players giving a concert:

Here were assembled ladies, looking by this light most beautiful . . . Most of these ladies occupied the little light park-chairs, and behind and beside them stood guardian gentlemen. The outer ranks of the crowd were made up of citizens, plebeians and police. In this outer rank I took my place. I rather like to find myself the silent, unknown, consequently unaccosted neighbor of the short petticoat and the sabot; and only the distant gazer at the silk robe, the velvet mantle, and the plumed chapeau. Amidst so much life and joy, too, it suited me to be alone—quite alone. (Brontë 455)

Moving outward in concentric circles, Lucy identifies the kinds of women which attract everyone’s attention excluding herself and noting her position as an outsider. The beautiful women sit like radiating suns at the center of a solar system, pulling the eyes of the crowd toward their luminous fabrics which highlight their beauty. Just as Lucy felt scorned by the pretty maid’s spruce attire in London, this scene depicts one of Lucy’s key maneuvers. She utilizes the difference between her own sartorial choices and those of more stylish women. Yet, scenes like this one also highlight the contrasting reasons for

women's choices in clothing. At this grand event, the Ginevera Fanshaws of the town want to draw in as many admiring gazers as possible. However, Lucy wants to shield herself from any attention. She is encircled and disguised among the wooden-clog wearing farmers and city workers. Her large straw hat and nondescript shawl allow her to hover on the margins of the crowd unobserved. The language of dress provides her with the necessary means "to find" herself as "the silent, unknown, consequently unaccosted neighbor" of the "[the] outer ranks." Lucy charts herself through contrast in clothing within the shifting movements of people. Locating herself on the edge of the crowd highlights her place on the blurred, fluid periphery.

Muted clothing aids in her power to inhabit space on her own terms. Her autonomy is threatened when the curmudgeonly bookseller recognizes her as he guides her to a seat in close proximity of her friends the Brettons and the de Bassompierres. Forced from the periphery to the center throws Lucy off guard. Graham turns to look into the crowd near where Lucy sits. Within a "throng, a hundred ranks deep" where "there were thousands to meet his eye," Graham's gaze rests on Lucy. His attempt to know her when she rests so comfortably in anonymity unsettles her disguise and her agency. Turning her face down and gesturing that she does not want to be approached, Lucy determines she will "not be known" (Bronte 457). Though he comes close to discovering her identity, she takes shelter "under that hat" and shawl, for these garments are the sole barrier between recognition and invisibility.

While Choi claims that "London and Vilette are portrayed as sites of alienation and dislocation" Lucy's final journal in the novel is evidence that she masters not only the ability to orient herself within public space but she also discerns the path to freedom

(96). And Dolin argues that “for once, being invisible empowers her” (xxxiv). Dolin claims that when Lucy states “in quarters where we can never rightly be known, we take pleasure . . . in being consummately ignored,” she rationalizes Dr. John’s earlier lack of recognition (Brontë 99). Yet his example is not the only instance in the novel when Lucy takes pleasure in remaining unnoticed. *Villette* maps a trajectory of Lucy’s evolving ability to mask her appearance. At the end of “Cloud,” Lucy finds herself standing behind a tree trunk observing M. Beck and her set. Disguised by her clothing and the darkness of tree shadow, Lucy overhears the little circle plot a dastardly journey for M. Paul. M. Beck’s true character is revealed, and Lucy sees past “her habitual disguise, her mask . . . a mere network reticulated with holes” revealing “a being heart-less” (Brontë 447). The knowledge she gains through eavesdropping gives her the key to her freedom. This final journey elucidates the means she needs to leave M. Beck’s employment. Before the fête, Lucy continues to find herself within other people’s confines. Seeing through M. Beck’s “habitual disguise,” Lucy pierces through her serene, polite exterior, finally perceiving the real threat to her independence, her future, and her safety. Constructing sketches of street-level views as well as self-fashioning incognito, Lucy plans her liberation from M. Beck’s control. Using both panorama and sketch, Lucy gleans valuable information regarding M. Beck’s plan to use M. Paul for her own financial gain. Overhearing this information provides Lucy with the necessary knowledge she needs to cut ties with M. Beck and her cronies.

At the novel’s end, Lucy manages to skirt past not only the disciplinary voices of Victorian culture who warn of danger lurking in every non-domestic corner but also those characters who seek to confine her within suffocating interiors which threaten her mobil-

ity and autonomy. Her friendship and eventual engagement to M. Paul provides economic independence and stability in the form of a small school. Though M. Paul dies at sea, his promise to marry Lucy before he sets out for the West Indies means she no longer requires monitoring from outside social forces since she is technically no longer a single woman. M. Paul's death prevents a marriage from happening, leaving Lucy in a state of social suspension. However, with no immediate family and her own school, Lucy gains economic independence. Weinstone characterizes this suspension period as an "indeterminate and chaste state of independent expectancy" and "half-success" where Lucy still gains "triumph in the face of the forces against it" (379). While Weinstone's argument reads *Villette's* conclusion through a queer lens, her summation of Lucy's success aligns with my own interpretation of Lucy's achievement in acquiring a profession which provides her the ability to remain independent and control her movements between spaces. M. Paul's friendship and engagement, like Lucy's gray clothes, allow her to shift status from the unprotected female to a woman of economic means. She successfully moves into a space all her own where she is no longer under the constant watch and scrutiny of other people. Though the novel ends with a death, it also launches Lucy into a new life where she is free to pursue a career and live on her own terms. While M. Paul's friendship and eventual engagement helps Lucy get setup in her own space, his death releases her from a marriage plot. While *Punch's* "The Unprotected Female" stories caution against the perils of the solitary woman traveler, Lucy proves successful in her adventure across the sea and her navigation of non-domestic spaces. Through M. Paul's death, Lucy is propelled further into the world to navigate it on her own terms and continue to embrace her journey as a solitary female traveler. Copyright © Mary Clai Jones 2015

Chapter 4

Cosmetics as Disguise in Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady*

Wilkie Collins's portrayal of marriage in *The Law and the Lady* (1875) is a sardonic commentary on Victorian culture's proclivity to take identity, literally, at face value. It begins with an epigraph from the *Book of Common Prayer*: "For after this manner in the old time the holy women also who trusted in God adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands'" (Collins 5). Referring to 1 Peter 3:5, the epigraph works as a short-hand to quickly orient readers within Victorian beliefs that outward appearances provide a map for interiority. This verse claims that submission to husbands and "the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" were the only adornments "holy women of the past" employed (NIV). From its ironic opening, this novel challenges the stability of Victorian marriage plots through the construction of its obstinate heroine, Valeria Briton. Collins creates a character whose true self cannot be read on the surface of her appearances because her conscious self-fashioning creates a surface that is both normative and purposefully misleading.

Drawing upon tropes from the female Gothic and detective fiction, *The Law and the Lady* prompts readers to be suspicious of the Victorian marriage plot. Collins creates a heroine who must disguise her resistance to her husband/villain through cosmetics, devise an escape route, and prevent her potential fatal end. The novel traces Valeria's journey to find out why her husband, Eustace Woodville, has married her under an alias. Shortly after learning his real surname, Macallan, she discovers that Eustace was accused of poisoning his first wife, Sara, but was never convicted of the crime. The jury gives him the Scotch Verdict of "Not Proven," implying guilt despite the lack of evidence needed to convict him of murder. Consequently, the Scotch Verdict threatens to tarnish Valeria by

extension. Assuming the role of detective, Valeria applies cosmetics as a disguise, hiding her un-submissive behaviors and unfeminine movements beneath a beautiful exterior. She eventually tracks down Sara Macallan's suicide letter, consisting of reassembled fragments found in a dust heap, which cites her husband's indifference toward her. The letter reveals Sara's knowledge of her unfortunate complexion and plain looks as "subjects to her of the bitterest regret" (Collins 224). She, therefore, intentionally ingests a lethal quantity of arsenic initially purchased to improve her skin. Although Valeria's discovery absolves Eustace of murder charges, Sara's letter presents an unsettling view of him as neglectful and callous. Learning of her husband's past puts Valeria in a precarious position. Valeria must claim to believe in his innocence in order to maintain her guise of wifedom, Finding out who is responsible for Sara's death is also a strategy to embark on a detective journey where she gains mobility and autonomy.

Playing within the ramifications of middle-class gender expectations and carefully maneuvering under the umbrella of "wife," Valeria wears cosmetics to navigate around those who warn her to stay out of the law's way. She claims the only way to fulfill her role of wife is to craft a hero's quest where she takes legal, and therefore, masculine matters into her own hands. In essence, Valeria simultaneously upholds and challenges a woman's place within the male-dominated legal system. Her husband, her mother-in-law, and members of her own family beg her to stay away from the court case, maintaining that it will only ruin her reputation. However, she undertakes the quest partly to find out if Eustace is actually guilty, and if he is, she might be his next victim. By continuing to pursue the truth, Valeria must engage in questionable and even dangerous methods to overturn the "Not Proven" verdict.

In her efforts to overturn the court decision, Valeria constructs her appearance in order to appeal to each of her audiences without revealing her true intentions. Her conscious repurposing of cosmetics becomes a disguise and a strategy that gives her access to space outside the home. Valeria's deployment of cosmetics as self-fashioning can be included in what Michel de Certeau calls tactics that work within regulated, planned space without corresponding to its governing rules, not unlike those codes governing Victorian women's presence in public spaces. As the novel progresses, Valeria's pursuit of the Scotch Verdict vow emerges as an exciting, and at times, enjoyable journey. Her use of appearances to sleuth, manipulate conversations, and travel through inappropriate places could be characterized as a long con, what Dagni Bredeson describes as using "womanhood as a guise in order to infiltrate" (xiv). Rather than swindling money from her marks, she gains valuable information leading her closer to Eustace's secrets.

In this first-person narration, Eustace is portrayed as a shadowy figure who refuses to reveal any slivers of his past to his new wife and makes his family and friends complicit in his silence. His attempts to control Valeria through ultimatums, the silent treatment, and eventually abandonment only strengthen her resolve to uncover his past. For instance, when Valeria unearths the court case transcription from the private office of Eustace's closest friend, he threatens, "This very day I said to you, 'If you stir a step further in this matter, there is an end of your happiness for the rest of your life.' You have taken that step—and the end has come to your happiness and to mine" (Collins 140). Running beneath the surface of everyone's pleas for Valeria to suffer and be still is a tacit warning that she veers toward the edge of impropriety by invading spaces she should not enter. Valeria's movements through the men's private boudoirs and libraries and their public

law offices threaten to destabilize her position as devoted wife and proper lady, yet her own future is threatened if she concedes and listens to social disciplinary voices.

Using cosmetics to lure key witnesses and professional men into her confidences, Valeria creates opportunities to work on their feelings, giving her access to spaces she might not normally be allowed to inhabit, thus altering women's relationship to spaces outside the home. Valeria not only maneuvers her way into private studies and the homes of strangers, but she also travels across national borders to track down evidence. She emerges as the master-duper – an Irene Adler so to speak – in her ability to travel freely through multiple spaces in a disguise that not even Sherlock Holmes recognizes as they pass in the street.²³ Approaching her marks under the auspices of love and adoration for her husband, she appears to fulfill her wifely duty. No one detects her use of cosmetics or questions her participation in beauty culture because they assume her participation in feminine culture is for Eustace's sake. Appealing to the sympathies of select audiences, Valeria plays up her status as an abandoned wife, claiming all her actions are in defense of Eustace. However, her movements and decisions throughout the novel directly contradict his wishes.

Valeria's implementation of cosmetics differs from uses outlined in Victorian periodicals and etiquette books. Contrasted with Eustace's first wife, who uses arsenic to improve her skin's appearance in an attempt to capture her husband's attentions, Valeria uses powder and paint to gain independent agency. Yet, her self-fashioning is not just a strategic tactic. Cosmetics provide the unexpected pleasure in "stepping out of her own character" (Collins 73). While her journey begins as a detective quest to discover Eu-

²³ Irene Adler is a character from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia" included in the collection *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1891).

stace's mysterious secrets, her pleasure in gaining mobility are by-products of her cosmetic self-fashioning. Although Collins's novel closes with a recuperation of Valeria back into domestic space, she becomes the sole proprietor of Sara Macallan's suicide letter. While three people become privy to the letter's contents, not including Eustace, Valeria alone stows it for safekeeping. In effect, she becomes the safe-deposit box for the sad truth of Sara's death and Eustace's negligence, reversing the power dynamics outlined in marriage at the beginning of the novel.

The Law and the Lady plays upon a range of anxieties about the role cosmetics played in Victorian culture. During the nineteenth century, a dazzling array of personal care products were gathered under the umbrella term cosmetics. Anything from soap and face cream to rouge and powder were grouped within this family of consumables. While a wide range of primary sources agreed on the benefits soap, face paints and powders had contentious meanings in the Victorian period. *The Belfast News-Letter* ran an abstract from Dr. H.S. Purdon in 1875, claiming soap as the best cosmetic for the men and women of England. Purdon contends that beside soap, the ultimate beauty tonic is "a contented mind and a healthy body" (7). *The Derby Mercury* from 1879 professes a similar sentiment, stating that fresh air and exercise are the only cosmetics women need. The use of skin creams and soap were widely accepted products in most middle-class households and fulfilled what Sarah Stinckney Ellis's calls "the great business of a woman's life" to "make herself agreeable" (96). Part of being agreeable included the upkeep of a pleasing appearance because a woman's appearance conveys her ability to fulfill her role as wife, mother, and household manager. Ellis goes further to connect women's outward appearances with their inner character: "good taste is therefore most essential to the regulation

of her dress and general appearance; and wherever any striking violation of this principle appears, the beholder is immediately impressed with the idea that a very important rule of her life and conduct is wanting” (Ellis 99-100). While middle-class women were expected to be pleasing to the eye, too much attention to exteriors signaled grave flaws in moral fiber. According to *Advice to Young Ladies* by T. S. Arthur, “If a love of admiration, and a mere fondness for appearing in gay attire, alone prompt a woman to give attention to dress, she will be almost sure to overstep the bounds of good sense and good taste. The hand of either pride or vanity always shews itself in a woman’s dress, in spite of every effort to hide it” (80). In essence, a woman’s appearance becomes the signifier of her entire character, class, worth in society, and the status of her home and future. If what Arthur claims is correct, then Valeria’s pride and vanity should be legible on her physical body, even through her efforts to hide it.

Thus, despite the emphasis on women’s responsibility to look their best, resorting to paint had dire moral implications. For example, the *Ladies' Hand-book of the Toilet; A Manual of Elegance and Fashion* (1843) instructs “In reference to the skin, we would observe, that paint should never be resorted to; it is a senseless piece of hypocrisy, betraying a mean and degraded mind; and will, in most cases, destroy that beauty it was intended to improve. Some preparations for the improvement of the skin are necessary, and may be used with advantage, but paint--never” (29-30). Echoed in the pages of newspapers and the cartoons of *Punch*,²⁴ the idea that paint “[betrays] a mean and degraded mind,” finds its roots in the belief that character and identity can be deciphered on the body’s surfaces,

²⁴ See “Fraudulent Faces” from 1864 and “Fashionable Forgery” from 1870 in *Punch*.

however unreliably.²⁵ Aviva Briefel explains that beauty manuals often warned against “the dangers that a woman might face in trying to enhance her image” yet cosmetic tragedies “simultaneously [warn] of the dire consequences of not being able to achieve physical enhancement” (465).

Anxieties surrounding women’s beauty practices and their implications were further catalyzed by the Madeline Smith and Madame Rachel Leveson cases. Both the Smith and Leveson cases raised public awareness about the harmful ingredients in cosmetic products and heightened concerns connecting cosmetics to deception and corruption. Madeline Smith, the daughter of upper-middle-class parents in Glasgow, Scotland, was accused of poisoning her lover, Pierre Emile L’Angelier, with arsenic in 1857. Smith was engaged to a man of her own class standing, and L’Angelier’s testimony had the potential to ruin her reputation. It was speculated that she killed L’Angelier to protect her cultural capital and class standing through marriage. Although she was witnessed buying arsenic the morning before his death, the court gave Smith the verdict of “Not Proven,” claiming the only evidence against her was circumstantial.²⁶ The questionable verdict of “Not Proven” and the use of arsenic in a lethal dosage²⁷ from Smith’s trial are clearly recognizable in *The Law and the Lady*. However, Collins insinuates Eustace’s guilt, re-

²⁵ Mary Ann O’Farrell’s *Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century English Novel and the Blush* explores the connotations of the blush in Victorian fiction as a sign that can be read on the body but can also be manufactured.

²⁶ For a transcript of the trial, see *A Complete Report of the Trial of Miss Madeline Smith, for the Alleged Poisoning of Pierre Emile L’Angelier*. A historical analysis of the trial can be found in *Murder and Morality in Victorian Britain: The Story of Madeline Smith* by Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair.

²⁷ While not all discussions of make-up disparage moderate usage, many warned of their harmful ingredients. For example, the first pearl powders were made from arsenic and lead. Arsenic was often taken on its own in small quantities to improve the skin’s appearance but had lethal effects if taken in large doses. The *Penny Illustrated Paper* from 1869 warns against the use of lead and arsenic, promoting the “New Pharmacy Act” which would only allow for the sale of “certain poisons” by licensed chemists (386).

versing the genders of the murdered and murderer in *The Law and the Lady*. If Eustace is meant to be read in Smith's role, then his guilt is also implicated. Rather than align his heroine with murder or poison, Collins's inclusion of recognizable details from highly publicized court cases critiques the notion that cosmetic use is feminine and instead proposes that almost everyone is capable of duplicity.

The Madame Rachel Leveson case was another sensationalized trial that linked cosmetic use to deceptive appearances and women's participation in the public sphere. Leveson was charged with swindling Mary Tucker Borradaile out of approximately £5000 in exchange for her promise to make women "Beautiful Forever!"²⁸ Fictional²⁹ accounts of this story imbued Leveson with supernatural powers to hypnotize women, feeding off their purses and their insecurities. While the Leveson trial criminalizes the use of cosmetics, it also focuses on new relationships available to women in the public sphere. Katherine Dunagan Osborn observes that "Cosmetics stories thus become cautionary tales, rooted in the anxiety about middle-class women's increasing presence in the marketplace, an anxiety that figured into fiction throughout the second half of the century" (136). While Valeria does not participate in an economic marketplace per se, she gains access and moves through geographically coded spaces where women's presence elicited similar anxieties and provoked comparable concerns. She engages in a series of transactions which rely on her outward appearance as a kind of social currency.

²⁸ A record of the complete trial is available online: <https://archive.org/details/extraordinarylif00greaiala> For scholarly commentary on Leveson see, "A 'Taint Upon Them': The Madame Rachel Case, Fraud, and Retail Trade in Nineteenth-Century England" by Tammy Whitlock and "Owning 'the dreadful truth'; Or, Is Thirty-Five Too Old?: Age and the Marriageable Body in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale*" by Lisa Niles.

²⁹ She appears as Mrs. Oldershaw in Collins's *Armadale* and inspired Madame Sara in L.T. Meade and Robert Eustace's *Sorceress of the Strand*.

However, Collins departs radically from this conventional critique of cosmetics. Valeria's deployment of powder and paint achieves a kind of mobility and agency which aligns her with a different figure from Britain's legal and literary history, the female detective rather than the murderess, the coquette, or the dupe. Maneuvering through masculine institutions and their rules for women's presence, she resembles Anne Kidderminster, one of Britain's first female detectives and "a seventeenth-century widow who doggedly solved the murder of her husband . . . despite being without monetary and legal power" (32). Like Kidderminster, Valeria proves resourceful in finding clever ways to glean information "despite her sex's exclusion" from masculine institutions (Sussex 32-3). Bredeson's *The First Female Detectives* claims that separate spheres in the nineteenth century were "more ideological than fully operative, but women were rarely represented as having associations with white collar professions apart from governesses, teachers, or companions. On this basis alone [female detectives] are important imaginative constructs" (xxiv).³⁰ Collins plays with a gender reversal by connecting Valeria to detective foremothers and linking Eustace to poisoners and deceivers.

If the opening epigraph were not enough to alert readers to Collins's subversive intent, the opening chapter title, "The Bride's Mistake," provides insight into his challenges to cultural anxieties about female adornment and marriage plots. Couching the female Gothic within a marriage plot suggests appearances of marital bliss are suspect. Sussex defines the female Gothic as confinement of a heroine within a menacing castle by a male villain, both of which she must escape using her wit. Sussex claims female

³⁰ Bredeson's introduction to *The Female Detective and Revelations of a Lady Detective* observes that book stand copies of these two novels were available in 1862. The Victorian public, at least those reading the cheap copies available in rail stations, would have been familiar with the representation of female detectives as white collar professionals.

Gothic narratives are centered on the “female consciousness, frequently under trial” (29). While it is unclear if Eustace will prove to be a Gothic villain, suspicions are raised, and the novel remains ambivalent about whether he can emerge as a hero. Tamar Heller observes that the *Law and the Lady* “centers on a female, not male, detective, in a narrative that rewrites the Radcliffean plot of the potentially murderous husband” (167). On the surface, it seems that “The Bride’s Mistake” will showcase her consciousness “under trial,” particularly the moment when she mistakenly signs her married rather than her maiden name to the marriage certificate. Her mistaken signature is scrutinized by her aunt as “A bad beginning!” (Collins 7). The “unfortunate signature” is interpreted as a bad omen, to which her aunt warns, “I hope, my dear, you may not live to regret it” (Collins 8). Her uncle follows suit, “You are old enough to choose for yourself . . . and I pray God, Valeria, it may turn out that you have chosen well” (Collins 8). In an effort to defend her actions, Valeria claims she had little information to guide her, foreshadowing Eustace’s attempts to marry her without revealing his past. She explains that “[i]n the confusion of the moment (and in the absence of any information to guide me) I committed a mistake—ominous, in my aunt Starkweather’s opinion, of evil to come” (Collins 7). Valeria’s parenthetical aside, “in the absence of any information to guide me,” undermines her ownership of any missteps, instead pointing attention to the shadowy figure of her husband. While the cautionary voices of her aunt and uncle operate much as Sussex’s description of a female consciousness under attack, they also raise questions about the stability of not only Victorian marriages but Victorian constructions of identity because at this moment Valeria unwittingly takes on an alias which she deploys for her own devices later.

On the surface, Valeria seems to portray a model representation of the Holy woman of God outlined in the epigraph who shun outward embellishment and use the inner spirit as adornments. For example, Valeria observes that she “is not at all the sort of person who attracts attention in the street, seeing that she fails to exhibit the popular yellow hair and the popular painted cheeks,” she is “rather too pale,” and she “fails to strike the ordinary observer at first sight” (Collins 14)³¹. In fact, she claims “I have done my best to keep clear of the two vanities—the vanity of depreciating and the vanity of praising my own personal appearance” (Collins 14-15). Neither pride nor vanity is present in her dress, yet her uncle’s claim that her “tears will spoil her beauty” on her wedding day, paired with her mousey appearance which “studiously conceals, instead of proclaiming, that she had been married that morning,” come close to violating Ellis’s advice that women show good taste in their appearances on every occasion. This description better fits Lucy Snow’s imitation of the grey moth in its trimmings of grey silk and cashmere than a luminous bride on her wedding day. Briefel also notes “there is a strong sense in [etiquette] literature that if she cannot control her own image, a woman will not be able to perform her social functions” (465). In light of implications that women’s appearances provide “a letter of recommendation” and function as a litmus test for their success in social roles, her uncle’s warning that tears will “spoil her beauty” carries implicit repercussions on her future, as in the case with Sara, his first wife (Beeton 110).

³¹ Jessica Cox’s “Reading Faces: Physiognomy and the Depiction of the Heroine in the Fiction of Wilkie Collins” argues that Valeria’s blue-black eyes, aquiline nose, pale skin, and black hair illustrate a mix of passive feminine ideal and resistance. She claims this scene in the mirror provides a physiognomic narrative of Valeria’s temporary departure from but inevitable reintegration back into domestic space (Cox 112). While it is true that Valeria is reinstated at the center of domestic life by the novel’s end, Cox’s account Valeria’s physiognomy perpetuates the idea that outward appearances provide a map for reading interiority.

Beneath the surface of references to cultural commentary on women's appearances emerges a subtext which points to how Valeria plans to control her image and design her escape. While descriptions of her appearance demonstrate that she is acutely aware of cultural rules governing women's beauty practices, her reflection in the mirror also raises questions about Valeria Briton/Woodville/Macallan's identity. Looking closely at the phrases Valeria uses to depict herself to the reader illuminates her penchant for adaptation. She claims she "is not at all the sort of person who attracts attention in the street," she "fails to strike the ordinary observer at first sight," and she "studiously conceals" rather than announcing her presence (Collins 14). Though these phrases suggest a submissive, unthreatening picture of femininity, they also describe a well-formed mask. In Collins fashion, these phrases work as clues to foreshadow Valeria's head-turning use of powder and paint later in the novel.

However, in this novel, readers are not instructed to be suspicious of Valeria or her use of cosmetics. Her duplicity is necessary to maneuver around Eustace's fraudulence. Collins attaches anxiety to the face and figure of Eustace Woodville in a scene which features his dressing-case and toilette things as compartments for hidden secrets. In the first few days of marriage, Valeria begins to feel trapped, signaling her genealogical connection to Gothic heroines and detective foremothers: "[t]he confinement of the four walls of the room . . . [were] intolerable" (Collins 27-8). Referencing Emily in *Udolpho*, Valeria "[elucidates] the mysteries of the castle" by wandering into Eustace's dressing room and snooping through his belongings (Sussex 31). Valeria embodies the modern female detective in that she does the searching rather than being searched for, further extending the genealogy of "Emily and other Radcliffe heroines" (Sussex 31).

While Eustace sleeps, Valeria distracts herself from restless confinement by rifling through his dressing-case on his toilet-table. Unable to contain her curiosity, she confides, “Little by little I completely emptied the dressing-case. It was lined with blue velvet. In one corner I noticed a tiny slip of loose blue silk. Taking it between my finger and thumb, and drawing it upward, I discovered that there was a false bottom to the case, forming a secret compartment for letters and papers” (Collins 28). In the false bottom, Valeria is surprised to find a picture of Eustace’s mother wearing a gentle-looking expression. The face in the photo presents a stark contrast to Eustace’s descriptions of his mother as “obstinately and mercilessly opposed” to the marriage (Collins 28). Despite her curiosity, she cannot request more information about the photo because they have silently agreed not to speak of his mother, not to mention the fact that Valeria has discovered this photograph without his knowledge or permission. Discovering this unsettling clue propels Valeria closer to developing her use of cosmetics.

By penetrating the secret interiors of Eustace’s private space, Valeria brings his character into question, raising alarms about his trustworthiness. Despite Eustace’s gag order on the topic of his mother, Valeria meets her by chance the following day. She learns that her mother-in-law’s name does not match her married name of Woodville. Valeria is further baffled when she visits Mrs. Macallan with the explicit purpose of finding out why Eustace has married her under an alias. She provides Valeria with warnings in place of answers: “I cannot let you uselessly risk your reputation and your happiness without warning you before it’s too late” (Collins 265). Valeria runs into another barrier when the landlady of the honeymoon lodgings discovers the mismatched names. The landlady proclaims Valeria’s name discrepancy a scandal with the potential to ruin her

good business reputation: ““what a cruel sacrifice, I have made—entirely for your sake. . . . I have degraded myself as a gentlewoman. I have forfeited my own self-respect” (Collins 48). Yet, the mismatched names also cast doubt upon Valeria’s married status, to which the landlady cries ““A villain has deceived you. You are no more married than I am!”” making Valeria ““neither maid, wife, nor widow,”” and threatening to render her ““worse than nothing”” (Collins 49-50). Eustace’s refusal to explain his mother’s name, Mrs. Macallan’s warnings to leave the reasons alone, and the landlady’s foreboding threat that she is ““worse than nothing,”” all weave a tangled web of secrets. These secrets mobilize her and provide the catalyst for her disguise and detecting.

The question of whether Valeria is actually married becomes her first venture into the legal world and the first detective move she makes behind Eustace’s back. Since she cannot rely on her husband or her mother-in-law, and she is too prideful to contact her aunt and uncle Starkweather because of their belief the wedding had already begun badly, Valeria enlists the help of her father’s clerk, Benjamin. His lawyer explains that Valeria is indeed married since she had no prior knowledge of Eustace’s real name. While Benjamin urges Valeria to be satisfied with this knowledge, she determines ““Life, on such conditions . . . would be simply unendurable . . . Nothing could alter my resolution”” (Collins 46). When Valeria gives Eustace the opportunity to explain himself, he exhorts that digging in his past will cause ““a life of torture,”” her ““days will be days of terror”” and an ““end of [her] happiness for the rest of [her] life”” (Collins 53). His fear mongering and visions of nightmares fail to divert Valeria’s attention away from his secrets. He then resorts to gendered shaming, blaming her lack of control over womanly feelings: ““If you could control your curiosity . . . we might live happily enough. I thought I had married a

woman who was superior to the vulgar failings of her sex. A good wife should know better than to pry into affairs of her husband's with which she had no concern'" (Collins 68). Valeria issues a warning of her own: "'They are not yours only: I have my interest in them too'" (Collins 69). Not only does her husband's false name cast a shadow of suspicion over her future, his silence prevents Valeria from knowing how to navigate her current situation. If they were to keep Eustace's birth name of Macallan, they risk living in seclusion to avoid shame. If she agrees to forget the case and no longer seek out information about Eustace's proclaimed innocence, then she forfeits the opportunity to know what Eustace is hiding and how it will affect her. However, his affairs at this point have the potential to ruin both their futures, whether Valeria knows the secret or not. Running from the reach of the verdict might mean that Valeria would live in isolation from friends, relatives, and her homeland. All of these options for their marital future include solitary confinement.

While Eustace does not outright threaten to lock her up or leave her (or both), he does intimate a life made miserable should she uncover his secret. In the event of abandonment, which he temporarily enforces, Victorian coverture laws would deem her invisible, a nonentity. According to William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, "By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything" (430). If she lacks the protection of her husband, if all her property is absorbed by his estate, and if her "very being" is suspended, then the landlady's words are an ominous reminder that she might be "worse than nothing" indeed. Yet, if she

obeys Eustace's wishes to leave his secrets behind, what guarantee does she have in avoiding Sara Macallan's end?

In order to divert attention away from her true aims, she fashions a disguise by redefining the notion of cover in coverture law. Reversing the husband's role to provide protection to his wife, Valeria designs her own means of protection by performing the appearance of devoted wife while sleuthing behind his back. Pleas from friends and family to "[l]eave things as they are" for her own "peace of mind" and "be satisfied with [her] husband's affection" stir Valeria's curiosity to know what lurks behind her husband's false name (Collins 46). Appearing to be motivated by a sense of justice for her husband, Valeria devises clever ways to access information without his knowledge and in the process, achieves greater mobility. She identifies a potentially productive avenue of inquiry by discreetly tracking down Major Fitz-David, who she recalls is one of Eustace's closest friends. When Benjamin expresses concern about Valeria's plan to visit the Major alone, with no introduction or invitation, she responds "Good or bad, compassionate or cruel, the Major was a man. A woman's influence was the safest influence to trust with him, where the end to be gained was such an end as I had in view" (Collins 64). The potential clues she might find in paying a visit to the Major outweigh the possible social judgment she might receive. In a scene which echoes her wedding day, Valeria decides playing up her feminine attributes will be her best strategy in gaining an audience with the Major. Checking her face in the mirror, she finds that the stress of Eustace's secret has made her face haggard and her hair wild. Rather than steering clear of the two vanities, as she did before, this time Valeria employs the help of a chambermaid to transform her appearance:

She came back with a box of paint and powders; and I said nothing to check her. I saw, in the glass, my skin take a false fairness, my cheeks a false color, my eyes a false brightness—and I never shrank from it. No! I let the odious conceit go on; I even admired the extraordinary delicacy and dexterity with which it was all done. ‘Anything . . . so long as it helps me to win the Major’s confidence! Anything, so long as I discover what those last words of my husband’s really mean!’ (Collins 73)

In typical Collins fashion, powder and paint are described in paradoxical terms. The business of using cosmetics is at once an “odious conceit” and a skill to be “admired.” Her decision not to “check” the chambermaid points to the anxiety that cosmetics create “false” faces. Yet, Valeria claims “she never shrank from” the chambermaid’s artistry. By using the word shrank, Valeria reveals an understanding about Victorian responses to cosmetic usage. In other words, she *should* be offended at its use. Instead, she marvels at the “extraordinary delicacy and dexterity” of the chambermaid’s handiwork. While Victorian beauty manuals use of paint connote deceitful morals, Valeria’s powder and paint is deployed as concealer rather than artifice – with specific aims in winning the Major’s trust. Valeria turns her culture’s anxiety about powder and paint to her advantage. If she lets the chambermaid and the Major believe that her cosmetics usage is for enhancement, she can hide behind the idea that paint is just part of feminine accoutrement used to gain men’s attention. However, the male attention she seeks to attract proves to be a means for her own ends rather than a means in and of itself.

Recalling the famed sorceress of the strand, Madame Rachel Levenson, the chambermaid’s witchy characterization challenges conservative beauty manuals that claim

beauty comes from within, from good regimens, from self-control, and from a desire to please husbands. Once the “transformation” of her face is finished, “the chambermaid pointed with her wicked forefinger in the direction of the glass. ‘Bear in mind, ma’am, what you looked like when you sent for me,’ she said. ‘And just see yourself how you look now. You’re the prettiest woman . . . in London. Ah, what a thing pearl-powder is, when one knows how to use it!’” (Collins 55). The “wicked forefinger” directs readers’ attention to the magical work paint and powder can achieve. Her hands mold and magic Valeria into “the prettiest woman . . . in London.” Her skill in the arts of beauty requires an alchemy-like knowledge of chemical mixtures and magical applications. In *Woman-kind*, Charlotte Yonge proclaims “All attempts to pretend to beauties that we do not possess are clearly falsehood, and therefore wrong in themselves, and injurious to the genuine possessors. It is parting with all the true dignity of the virtuous woman to try to change hair or complexion” (117). However, the chambermaid’s exclamation “‘Ah, what a thing pearl-powder is, when one knows how to use it’” suggests that beauty comes from a compact and a skilled hand. Advertisements for skin enamels like Hagan’s Magnolia Balm make promises more akin to the chambermaid, ensuring “a fresh and blooming complexion . . . to conceal every blemish” (*The Deseret News* 2). Applied like a coat of paint, Hagan’s Magnolia Balm contained oxide zinc suspended in water intended for covering the entire face and neck. Valeria does not attempt to cover blemishes. Instead, her face becomes a mask donned specifically for accessing men’s private spaces and private knowledge. Unlike the victims of professional beautifiers, Valeria is the one disguising her motives.

The phrase “what a thing pearl powder is when one knows how to *use* it” takes on a double meaning in this scene because the arsenic in pearl powder recalls Sara’s inability to master its application, making her attempts to change Eustace’s feelings for her unsuccessful. Thus, she ingests a lethal amount of arsenic, committing suicide. It could be argued that Sara uses arsenic powder to take control of her own life, freeing herself of the need for Eustace’s affection. However, Valeria’s use of pearl powder proves to be about her own survival rather than a ploy to gain Eustace’s approval or attention. In contrast to the mirror scene when Valeria claims she attracted no attention in the street, this time she finds pleasure in “stepping out of her character” and being “noticed—yes, and [enjoying]—the glances of admiration” (Collins 56). Her face is what Major Fitz-David, proprietor and gatekeeper of Eustace’s secret, finds so irresistible. Therefore, Valeria’s use of pearl powder is a means to influence Major Fitz-David in hopes of accessing legal knowledge about her husband.³²

Read within the context of wifely duties and its relation to adornment, Valeria does not follow proper feminine protocol. In fact, time and again she blatantly disregards Eustace’s threats and warnings. She disguises her obstinacy as proper femininity, and uses cosmetics to manipulate men and cultivate agency. Valeria uses cosmetics as a disguise to conceal her un-submissive motives of discovering her husband’s secret for her self-preservation. Thus, her choice to employ cosmetics is linked to her ability to win the Major’s confidence. Once Valeria arrives at the Major’s home, she overhears him instruct

³² Aviva Briefel’s “Cosmetic Tragedies: Failed Masquerade in Wilkie Collins’s *The Law and the Lady*” argues that all women must masquerade, and by using cosmetics, Valeria comes into being rather than falling prey to the fate of Eustace’s first wife. She claims Valeria needs cosmetics to compensate for her husband’s shortcomings, making her a metaphoric cosmetic cover-up for his mistakes. Briefel’s argument reinforces underlying assumptions that identity is constituted by outward appearances because she relies on the assumption that women masquerade for the interests of men.

his servant to say he is not at home, but then he wonders “Is she young . . . And pretty?” To which the servant replies “[b]etter than pretty, sir” (Collins 76). Valeria is allowed in to see Major Fitz-David. She attributes her access to the decision to seek out the chambermaid’s help: “So far, one thing at least seemed to be clear. I had done well in sending for the chambermaid. What would Oliver’s report of me have been if I had presented myself to him with my colorless cheeks and ill-dressed hair?” (Collins 57). Valeria’s instincts and knowledge of her culture’s insistence on women’s beauty proves that her decision to use rouge and powder was the right one. Her question to readers about Oliver’s report of beauty illustrates how her cosmetic usage directly paves her way in to Major Fitz-David’s house.

Her visit to see the Major is her first test of skill in disguise and detection. Unlike her haphazard snooping through Eustace’s dressing case, this time Valeria purposefully crosses contentious thresholds. Valeria not only gains entrance into the house based on her appearances, he also provides her with *carte blanche* in his private study. However, it is not her looks alone which provide her with unrestricted access to his private things. She must study what kind of man the Major is so she can converse in kind and appear to be the type of woman in which he confides. In addition to understanding how various people will read her appearance, she must also assess their responses and be ready to act quickly because her entire future could rest “in this man’s hands. I studied him attentively; I tried to read his character in his face” (Collins 58). In this scene, Valeria uses both her face to gain favor with the Major and her powers of observation to read his face to get information. When she breaches the topic of Eustace’s real surname, the Major claims he cannot break his vow of secrecy. Valeria crafts a rhetorically strategic story of wifely sac-

rifice. She claims she is willing to “hear the most horrible thing . . . than be condemned to perpetual misgiving and perpetual suspense” (Collins 60). The combination of cultivated feminine appearances with the performance of feminine weakness conceals other motivating factors. For example, she appeals to the Major’s sense of pathos as a “friend of women” when she pleads for the Major’s help, ““He is the best and dearest of men But there is some dreadful mystery in his past life . . . I am only a woman, Major . . . I can only throw myself on your kindness”” (Collins 60-61). Though he refuses to speak on the subject, Valeria discerns that “he really felt” for her (Collins 80). In addition to her cosmetically disguised face, Valeria sees an opportunity to employ her “utmost powers of persuasion” (Collins 80). Her powers yield positive results, for the Major confesses ““but I would not lift a finger to prevent you from discovering the truth for yourself”” (Collins 93). The Major’s reaction to Valeria’s beauty and her powers of influence not only gain her entrance into the Major’s home without introductions or a chaperone but also give her free reign within his home. Therefore, a deal is struck between the two of them. Though he must remain silent, he offers his house to her for searching.

Valeria crosses many spatial and cultural thresholds during her search of Major Fitz-David’s study. Although the Major offers his entire house for searching, Valeria wants assurances that her efforts will result in a clue: ““Would there be any chance . . . of finding my own way to my husband’s secret in this house?”” (Collins 94). Since the Major feels Eustace has truly wronged Valeria, he offers a hint at the object’s location. He lays keys to a bookcase and small filing drawers on a table and leaves the room. She opens drawers, sifts through books, and rummages in cabinets containing gifts from women, personal letters, and business documents. Although the room is not exclusively

devoted to business, it is described as a study and masculine inner sanctum. Thad Logan observes that “While the home is gendered feminine in contrast to the masculine workplace, within the home certain rooms--the study, the library, the dining room--were marked ‘masculine.’ The parlour itself was very distinctly gendered feminine” (31).

Reminiscent of the earlier scene where Valeria discovers the portrait of her mother-in-law in Eustace’s dressing-case, this scene describes her vigorous search through the many cabinets, cases, and drawers of a man’s private space.

Although Valeria manages to skirt past the Major’s surveillance in his home, another disciplinary voice issues a border patrol check. One of the Major’s female friends scrutinizes Valeria’s presence in the private study, raising questions of social propriety. The Major’s “future prima-donna” stands at the door with her eyes fixed on Valeria. She complains, “you have been here two good hours . . . All by yourself, in the Major’s study . . . And I want to know what it means” (Collins 85). The jealous female-friend suggests that Valeria has crossed gendered, social, and spatial boundaries by occupying time and space within a man’s study. Revealing only enough truth to appear guileless, she explains “Major Fitz-David is an old friend of my husband’s . . . and he is kind to me for my husband’s sake” (Collins 86). Yet, Valeria is careful to “describe [her] employment” in his study “in terms which should tell her nothing” and simultaneously “successfully set her distrust . . . at rest” (Collins 86). Claiming to borrow a book from his study, she uses her femininity and position as wife to fly under the radar of social protocol. Manipulating social surveillance into access to secrets, Valeria turns the situation which could undermine her search to her advantage by enlisting the detractor into helping her own cause. The “future prima-donna” changes her tune, asking instead what Valeria seeks to find,

offering her services in order to help Valeria's search (Collins 85). With the help of the prima-donna, Valeria finds and reads the complete transcript of the trial, finally discovering Eustace's need for a false name.

While Valeria proves to be extremely successful in uncovering the court transcript through cosmetics, she is unable to convince Eustace that she believes in his innocence. In place of a hero to reward the female sleuth, a common featured in detective and gothic fiction, Eustace emerges as Valeria's nemesis. The trial's inconclusive "Not Proven" presents more opportunities for Valeria to continue her detective work and overturn verdict, yet Eustace maintains his adamant disapproval. When Eustace is briefed about Valeria's discovery of the trial in Major Fitz-David's office, he warns her: "'This very day I said to you, 'If you stir a step further in this matter, there is an end of your happiness for the rest of your life.' You have taken that step – and the end has come to your happiness and to mine. The blight that cankers and kills is only on you and me for the rest of our lives!'" (Collins 140). Eustace threatens to abandon Valeria unless she permanently suspends her investigation. Both his presence and absence are used as threats of punishment. When he is present, he hinders Valeria's ability to discover his secrets by cajoling family members and through angry outbursts. When he is not present, his absence threatens to destabilize her identity as his wife. Yet both of these conditions are potentially dangerous because Valeria cannot be sure of her safety until she discovers whether or not he murdered his first wife. By refusing to speak about his past and then physically removing himself from further questioning, Eustace engages in emotional blackmail, giving her the silent treatment in hopes it will alter her behavior. What he does not anticipate is her penchant for manipulating difficult situations to her own advantage. His geographic removal ensures

Valeria's continued work on the case without having to divulge the details of her movements or her discoveries. She turns his silence against him, reporting details of daily life unrelated to the case. Her own silence is deployed as a cosmetic to cover her unfeminine movements and agency.

The discovery of the trial fuels her resolve to ascertain for herself what role Eustace played in the death of his first wife. Cosmetics prove to be a successful tactic in producing insight into Eustace's history. Discovery of the trial provides Valeria with the perfect avenue to escape the confinement of domestic spaces in that it lists key witnesses from whom she might extract valuable information regarding Sara's death. Upon informing her family of her plan, her uncle inquires "Do you mean to tell me . . . that you are going roaming about the country to throw yourself on the mercy of strangers, and to risk whatever rough reception you may get in the course of your travels? You! A young woman! Deserted by your husband! With nobody to protect you?" (Collins 161). Much like the question from the Major's lady friend, Valeria's uncle Starkweather urges her to consider how traveling through masculine spaces without a companion or a spouse's permission is unfit for middle-class women. While her visit to the Major only violates social convention, an unprotected female traveler might be mistaken for a prostitute. Judith Walkowitz and Deborah Nord both explore nineteenth century consequences of traveling alone, particularly in urban areas. They claim that even middle-class women might be suspected of prostitution when out walking alone. Recalling the language of coverture, Valeria's uncle worries that without her husband's physical and legal presence, she will have no one to *cover* or shield her from "the mercy of strangers" and their "rough reception" of her.

Lurking beneath the false bottom of her family's pleas to "be content with [her] husband's love" is the warning that Valeria has overstepped her place as a middle-class woman. At the root of her friends' and relatives' advice is a message about women's mobility and its relationship to reputation. Valeria's mother-in-law repeats her uncle's counsel: "He begs me to . . . induce you to abandon your present ideas, and to make you return to your old home at the Vicarage'" (Collins 262). Mrs. Macallan and Mr. Starkweather plead for Valeria's reinstatement to her original home. Her mother-in-law's advice is unconcerned with her travel and instead focuses on Valeria's attempt to challenge the law: "'Your notion of turning yourself into a Court of Appeal for a new Trial of Eustace, and forcing the world to pronounce a just verdict on him. Do you really mean to try it? . . . But I cannot see you attempt to perform impossibilities; I cannot let you uselessly risk your reputation and your happiness without warning you before it is too late'" (Collins 265). While her family's protestations clearly take issue with her gendered challenges of space, they also work to bolster her disguise. They state her position for her so carefully, explicitly, and repeatedly, that she can always walk the line of propriety. Public opinion and reception seem to both motivate and draw the boundaries of her actions, even when she crosses those boundaries. Valeria asserts that their ploys "shared the fate of most warnings. It only made me more and more eager to have my own way" (Collins 267). The voices of other characters sound like disciplinary warnings but actually work as training exercises, providing a feedback loop in which Valeria can improve the appearance of her disguise.

As the novel progresses, Valeria's ability to put on and take off her mask develops past the needs of a chambermaid. Valeria's detective triumph over Major Fitz-David

and her discovery of the trial transcript reveal “the helpful figures of two friends on whose sympathy I might surely rely” (Collins 203). Wearing the role of abandoned wife like skillfully applied cosmetics, Valeria chooses those “friends” whose “sympathy” she can manipulate. When she claims she “might surely rely” on those who emerge from the court documents as clear allies, she implies that she can appeal to their emotions and their senses as a wounded woman. Her appearance and her story work hand in hand, creating a mask that works much like paint and powder. Whether or not she actually puts on make-up before she crosses each male threshold becomes of less importance. Her metaphoric talent for “putting on a false face” relies on her knowledge of who to become for each person. Briefel argues that Valeria is a cover-up for Eustace, but I maintain she uses her own brand of concealer, quite differently from all the other characters in the novel. Her deployment of paint provides her avenues into the public sphere while simultaneously keeping her reputation intact, thanks to the ironic use of her friends’ and family’s threats that she will be destroyed by her curiosity and mobility.

One of the trial witnesses, Miserrimus Dexter, becomes her penultimate challenge in the art of disguise. Valeria initially identifies him as one of Eustace’s allies. When Mrs. Macallan exclaims, “that the last person whom a young woman, placed in your painful and delicate position, ought to associate herself with is Miserrimus Dexter,” Valeria, of course, determines to visit him (Collins 267). These words of caution have the usual effect on her. It is precisely her “delicate position” which she uses to win Dexter’s confidence. Mrs. Macallan insists on accompanying Valeria on her first visit in hopes that his wheel-chair bound body and susceptibility to madness will change her mind. However, Valeria finds she can relate to his desire to become other than himself: “It seems to

me that he only expresses . . . thoughts and feelings which most of us are ashamed of as weaknesses, and which we keep to ourselves accordingly. I confess I have often fancied myself transformed into some other person, and have felt a certain pleasure in seeing myself in my new character” (Collins 296). This confession of seeing herself “transformed into some other person” recalls her initial pleasure that powder and paint provide when “stepping out of her own character” (Collins 56). Yet, this confession also reveals Valeria’s acknowledgement of her meeting her match in the powers of disguise.

While Dexter does not give Valeria free reign to search his house, as the Major does, he assumes a familiarity with her which she attempts to exploit to her advantage. Aware of her audience and a good reader of people, she plays along with his whims and flights of fancy. Yet Dexter strings her along and requires multiple visits in order to access fragmentary bits of information. It is on her second visit, without the protection of her mother-in-law, that Dexter begins his real work of deflection and distraction. Pouncing on her supposed unprotected position, Dexter takes great liberties with her, holding her hand, paying her intimate compliments. He monopolizes her time by weaving nonsensical, long-winded stories, cooking at random intervals, and finally parading his own beauty rituals for her like a vaudeville act. While Valeria is patient with his rambling and ranting, she becomes aware of Dexter’s attempts to manipulate and distract her from key trial information. For example, he pauses in mid-story to change outfits, as if in the theater during a scene change. After his wardrobe modification, he rolls into the parlor wearing pink silk and sea-foam green satin. In defense of this sudden alteration, he claims “I despise the brutish contempt for beauty and the mean dread of expense which degrade a gentleman’s costume to black cloth, and limit a gentleman’s ornaments to a finger-ring,

in the age I live in. I like to be bright and beautiful, especially when brightness and beauty come to see me” (Collins 312). In a scene which parrots and parodies Valeria’s employment of a chambermaid to transform her face and hair, Dexter requests the aid of his manly, female cousin, Arielle, to tend to his toilet. Ordering Arielle to bring his dressing case, mirror, and hair brush into the living room, Dexter makes Valeria complicit in his preening. He argues that women are not the only ones who should enjoy the pleasures of looking attractive. While Dexter performs a theatrical rendition of nineteenth-century beauty rituals, a key difference between his and Valeria’s masquerades emerges. His beauty ritual becomes a spectacle, while her cosmetic application is subtle and undetectable.

Dexter’s assumption of their equality in the skill of cosmetic application and his over-the-top production is what Valeria pierces with her more nuanced and expert management of outward appearances. If Dexter’s beauty ritual performance is meant to distract Valeria from her initial purpose, it fails. She plays on Dexter’s narcissism, patiently watching him perform, cook, and experience various moods until she can crack his façade without showing flaws in her own mask. She does not break character or take off her disguise, so to speak, and maintains that her reason for visiting is on Eustace’s behalf. She assumes a “new character” with Dexter. In fact, she gives the appearance of direct honesty, yet she is careful to leave out certain bits of information about herself—namely that she directly disobeys Eustace’s wishes, that he’s left her, and she plans to solve the mystery to save her own life. Dexter is dexterous in his attempts to mislead Valeria. When Valeria proposes that Helena Beauly, who witnesses characterize as a source of jealousy for Sara, might be interviewed again, Dexter is only too willing to let Valeria

follow this lead. While his certainty of Helena Beaulieu's guilt at first seems successful, Valeria's skill in the arts of disguise only grows stronger as a result. Valeria's investigation into Eustace's pretty cousin again highlights Collins's redirection of cultural scrutiny toward women and cosmetic use. Instead of blaming either Sara for her ugliness and inept application of cosmetics or Helena Beaulieu, Sara's beautiful foil, for her vanity in appearances, Collins points the finger at false-faced men whose metaphoric cosmetic usage entraps and endangers women.

Although Valeria is temporarily thrown off by Dexter's false clue, her detective work and skill at figurative cosmetic application develops further. In order to track information down about Beaulieu, Valeria designs a dinner party with the Major. Readers are now familiar with the Major's weakness for pretty women, so it is no surprise that Valeria calls on his services once again, proving that her decision to paint for their initial encounter continues to be productive. They conspire to invite one of Beaulieu's intimate friends, Lady Clarinda, agreeing that Valeria will use Woodville as an alias. Using Woodville to deflect attention away from her connection to Macallan and the Scotch Verdict provides Valeria with a cloak of anonymity and propriety. Arriving to the dinner under the auspices of an alias allows Valeria to converse with Lady Clarinda without raising suspicion of Eustace's trial. No one questions her appearance or her name at the Major's party, and guests assume she is an old friend. Where her coiffed hair, powder, and paint gained her initial entrance to the Major's home, now her use of a fake name works in conjunction with her convincing performance of middle-class femininity and careful distribution of information.

While the party gives Valeria practice in perfecting her disguise, she discovers that Dexter has misled her. After speaking to Lady Clarinda, Valeria confirms that Helena has a sound alibi, accounting for her whereabouts at the time of Sara's death. Despite two separate visits with him, Dexter gives her no real substantial information regarding the case. Unsure of how to proceed, Valeria remembers the next ally she identified after reading the case, Eustace's lawyer, Mr. Playmore. Venturing geographically further afield this time, Valeria travels away from her home, alone by rail, to Scotland. She confesses her awareness of spatial and gendered boundaries, recognizing her ability as a detective and disguise artist have grown: "I have observed that, in nine cases out of ten, a man will make concessions to a woman, if she approaches him by herself, which he would hesitate to consider if another man was within hearing" (Collins 364). Visiting Playmore helps Valeria see that Mr. Dexter might be withholding important facts about Sara's death. Playmore suspects Dexter knows what really happened to Sara, and he recommends Valeria pay him one last visit. When he asks "how are you to get at what he is now withholding from you? What influence can you bring to bear on him when you see him again," Valeria expresses her confidence in persuading him (Collins 377). Although Valeria's cosmetic usage has become adept, the lawyer suggests she think about a change in tactics: "And if persuasion fail—what then? Do you think you can entrap him into speaking out? or terrify him into speaking out?" (Collins 377). In order to graduate to the next level of disguise and detection, Valeria must devise an extraction plan for Dexter's withheld information. She determines to turn his madness against him much in the same way he plants Helena Beauly before Valeria's desperation to discover Sara's murderer.

Valeria graduates to master level detective, using all the resources available to her in order to solve Eustace's mystery. She not only convinces Playmore to help her, but she also leans on her father's old clerk Benjamin again, claiming he "may be of the greatest possible use." (Collins 438). Playing upon Benjamin's paternal desire to protect her and be her moral guide, Valeria pleads, "Come, give way this once, dear, for my sake" (Collins 438). Employing Benjamin's help as a scribe, they formulate a communication strategy where Valeria's earrings become codes for Benjamin, signaling when to write and when to stop: "When you see me . . . lift my hand to my earring, as if I were playing with it—write down what he says; and go on . . . until you hear me move my chair. At that sound, stop" (Collins 439). Valeria employs a conventional piece of women's accoutrement for an unconventional use. Her depth of understanding relating to codes of femininity paired with her ability to transform when needed outstrip Dexter's charade. Dexter's mental state grows more unstable during their visit, and Valeria relentlessly urges him to reveal his hidden story. His thinly veiled attempt to disguise his story of the trial leads Valeria to ask more pointed questions. In a moment of exhausted weakness, Dexter repeats the fragments of a past conversation with Sara. These fragments lead Valeria and Benjamin to a dust heap outside the Macallan's former residence. Jenny Bourne Taylor argues Dexter "plays a crucial role in achieving [the mystery's] final resolution by possessing a knowledge of the truth that he refuses to reveal, so that it has to emerge through the disintegration of his consciousness" (Collins 223). In another reversal of roles, it is Valeria who attacks the male consciousness rather than be the subject of attacks. Collins ironically twists the female Gothic trope of feminine consciousness under attack to illuminate his obstinate heroine's victory over men's duplicity. She defeats the

penultimate male performance, proving to be the expert in disguise, hiding her own identity behind a mask of Eustace's wife.

What Dexter's elaborate beauty charade reveals is his desire to distract Valeria from his illicit involvement with the deceased. Dexter's shards of memory expose his betrayal of Eustace in his love of Sara Macallan. While masquerading as Eustace's friend, Dexter discloses his visit to Sara's bedroom and his love notes to her. Dexter appears to be Eustace's ally in court, yet he omits having knowledge of the letter's existence and location – knowledge that could clear Eustace's name. However, his love for Sara and first-hand awareness of her pain and suffering as direct results of Eustace's neglect prevent Dexter from clearing his name. The disintegration of Dexter's consciousness and his disguise uncover the most successful male disguiser/cosmetic user in the novel. While Dexter utilizes a mask to conceal his love for Sara Macallan, no one proves to be more difficult to extract information from than Eustace. Throughout the novel he continues to hide behind silence and issue threats without offering explanations.

Just before Valeria, Benjamin, and Mr. Playmore venture out to excavate the dust pile, a different letter creates a diversion. Mrs. Macallan reports that Eustace has been injured in the line of duty, making him gravely ill. Mrs. Macallan presses upon Valeria that this might be her last chance to reunite with her husband, on the condition that she abandon the Scotch Verdict. Valeria feels torn because her real desire is to find the contents of the letter, but she also fears her agency is running out: "But one last victory over myself was wanting to make my happiness complete. I still felt secret longings, in those dangerous moments when I was left by myself, to know whether the search for the torn letter had or had not taken place. What wayward creatures we are! With everything that a

woman could want to make her happy, I was ready to put that happiness in peril rather than remain ignorant” (Collins 506). Being called away from her detective endeavors reveals the core of Valeria’s true desire. When forced to choose between her wounded husband and continuing her work as a detective, Valeria falters. She questions the happiness marriage can give her after tasting the freedom of working independently in the public sphere. The pleasure of knowing, the satisfaction of curiosity quenched, emerges as her deepest desire. At earlier points in the novel, Valeria dresses her real motivation with a cover story. This scene lacks those attempts to conceal her ambition by using Eustace as the excuse. Now Eustace is the reason she is called to part with the work on the case, and her real journey is exposed. The two goals have separated and become opposing desires.

The news of Eustace’s injury arrives at such a critical juncture in Valeria’s search for Sara’s suicide confession that it can be read as Eustace’s attempt to distract her. His decision to leave Valeria and join British forces in the Spanish civil war at the exact moment she reads the trial is suspicious. His injury on the front at the same time she attempts to recover Sara’s letter with Benjamin and Playmore is even more suspect. Yet, Valeria is not so quick to give up her freedom or her leverage. When Valeria reunites with Eustace, it becomes clear that he is not her primary concern. Once she arrives in France, she argues with Mrs. Macallan about giving up her “experiment” in trying to take on the law and clear Eustace’s name. Her obstinacy in her family’s persistent questioning leave her feeling defeated and worn down. She second guesses herself, pondering:

I had resisted so long and so vainly; I had tried and suffered so much; I had met with such cruel disasters and such reiterated disappointments—and he was in the room beneath me, feebly finding his way back to con-

sciousness and to life—how could I resist? It was all over. In saying Yes . . . I was saying adieu to the one cherished ambition, the one dear and noble hope of my life. I knew it—and I said Yes. And so good-by to the grand struggle! And so welcome to the new resignation which owned that I had failed.” (Collins 422)

Valeria’s word choice in this passage suggests that reuniting with Eustace and proving his innocence have taken on a new character—much like Valeria’s own powdered face, further questioning what her true motive is in challenging the law. Her “one cherished ambition” of overturning the Scotch Verdict is not merely a struggle but the “grand struggle,” a challenge which becomes the “one dear noble hope” of her life. Her goals, as they are stated here, are difficult to tether back to her original story about determination to prove Eustace’s innocence, which seemed to be about clearing his name and securing a happy future for their marriage. In *Complete Etiquette for Ladies*, Isabella Beeton argues that a wife’s duties are “obedience, complaisance, an entire surrender of her will to that of her husband, and attention to his happiness as the first consideration” (109). According to Beeton, a wife’s “cherished ambitions” should be adaptation to and anticipation of a husband’s every need. However, Valeria directly violates these rules for conduct in married women. In fact, her desire is to escape him and discover what is lost in the dust heap. Her quest has been “dear,” “noble,” and “grand.” She recognizes that detective work has provided real delight, and now that her work is nearly over, her mobility will be restricted again. This passage conveys devastating regret in being incorporated back into marital life. However, Valeria decision to give up the “experiment” is more related to her preg-

nancy rather than obedience to Eustace. This status change from wife to mother brings with it a resignation that she is now tied to Eustace by more than law.

In her last act of resistance, Valeria secretly corresponds with Playmore, asking to be informed about the letter's excavation progress. The letter reveals that Sara Macallan "sacrificed everything but [her] life to love," and when she realizes her "love is not returned, the last sacrifice left is easy" (Collins 362). Sara's letter presents a dark view of Eustace, permanently defacing him. The letter works to unveil his true face and destabilizes the image of marriage which the plot haphazardly attempts to restore. The novel closes with an ambivalent address to readers: "And so it ended! Not as I thought it would end; not perhaps as you thought it would end. What do we know of our own lives? What do we know of the fulfillment of our dearest wishes? God knows—and that is best" (Collins 559). These final lines express Valeria's uncertainty about her future with Eustace. Collins does not allow this story to end on a neat and tidy note, wiping all traces of dark shadows away. The real poison, it turns out, is Eustace's capacity for neglect, and this neglect carries the potential to subvert the picture of domestic family life at the novel's end. Valeria's question, "What do we know of the fulfillment of our dearest wishes," challenges conventional expectations that Victorian readers might have about the resolution of the domestic novel. This question disputes the validity of her recuperation back into domestic space and challenges the restoration of the marriage plot, suggesting her knowledge of Sara's letter unsettles the possibility of happiness and threatens to forever haunt them. Like the envelope containing the reconstructed suicide letter of Sara Macallan, these closing questions undermine the happy couple's restoration. Lurking in every domestic corner, there will always be a space within Valeria's memory where she

cherishes her journey away from hearth, home, and husband to take on the world of the law.

Despite the fact that the novel closes with an image of Valeria cradling their son in what should read as a scene of domestic bliss, the letter's truth penetrates the innermost walls of home in two ways. In the beginning, Eustace buries his past within locked cabinets, trusted friends, and false bottoms of dressing-cases. In the closing pages, Valeria lies in bed with their three-month-old son beside her. When she asks if Eustace will read it for himself, she says "in your son's hand," pointing to the letter resting in the tiny palm, and "With a heavy sigh, he lays the child's hand back again on the sealed letter; and, by that one little action, says . . . to his son: 'I leave it to you'" (Collins 382). The letter's very existence poses a threat to the already unstable matrimony between Valeria and Eustace. In choosing not to read his late wife's suicide letter, he uses his living wife and son as vaults for his incriminating secrets. The knowledge of Eustace's neglect and apathy toward Sara casts a storm cloud of doubt over this closing scene of domesticity, turning his family into a secret compartment, where in bad faith, he continues living in ignorance of his own deceit and negligence.

Yet, the closing image is a double-walled security measure to ensure Valeria's own future. Having a baby, a son no less, in addition to being the letter's proprietor not only ensures that she will not meet the same fate as Sara but also reverses the power dynamic between man and woman. The letter becomes a memorial to her transgressive agency and a symbol of her cosmetic disguise. Just as Irene Adler ensures her own security from the Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein by keeping a photograph of them together, Valeria possesses Sara Macallan's suicide letter to guarantee her safety in marriage.

Though her agency is temporary, to focus the novel's close so microscopically on the letter and her son unsettles the solidity of surface appearances and Victorian marriage plots. Like the resonant memory of doll play passed down from mother to daughter found in Chapter One, this letter provides Valeria with a nostalgic token of her temporary autonomy and adventure. While marriage usually reads as the reward for the detective work women do in the female Gothic genre, Valeria's reinstatement into married life is more of a punishment, ending her exciting movements in the public sphere. Yet, despite constant warnings from her friends and family that she will be humiliated for her curiosity, in the end, she is never forced to see the error of her ways. The *Law and the Lady* problematizes the success of Victorian marriage plots, questions nineteenth-century culture's indictment of women who use cosmetics, and provides alternate ways to access masculine spaces. By including men in Victorian cosmetic culture, Collins highlights his heroine's greater expertise. He constructs a heroine capable of detecting their cover-ups while remaining under cover.

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Chapter 5

Marie Corelli's Designing Fictions: Fashioning the Woman of Genius

“For a handle to one's name is a poor thing in comparison to the position of genius”

(Corelli 229).

From the outset of *The Murder of Delicia*, readers are engulfed by satin, jewels, and flowers. In fact, the profusion of conventional feminine items is a distinct pattern weaving throughout the body of Marie Corelli's work. Corelli designs her version of the ideal woman writer through the eponymous heroine's sartorial choices, deploying jewelry and clothing as tactics to access the masculine-dominated publishing world. Annette Federico's *Idol of Suburbia: Marie Corelli and Late-Victorian Literary Culture* argues that Corelli continuously tried to manage her fame on her own terms through obsessive overseeing of the circulation and consumption of her image. I build upon Federico's analysis of Corelli's celebrity within fin de siècle Britain, extending it to an examination of the well-crafted heroine, Delicia Vaughn, and the redesign of interior spaces of her life and fiction. This article argues that Marie Corelli carefully arranged and controlled her public image, in life and fiction, by converting objects of feminine culture³³ in order to represent professional success. Her conversion of feminine space and appearances for public viewing troubles nineteenth-century notions of separate spheres ideology.

³³ Illya Parkins and Elizabeth M. Sheehan's *Cultures of Femininity in Modern Fashion* considers how fashion defined broadly as feminine culture enables women to be agents of modernism.

The Woman Writer as Celebrity

Exceeding the book sales of both her male and female contemporaries alike, Marie Corelli was fin de siècle Britain's most popular novelist.³⁴ Thomas F. G. Coate's and Warren F. S. Bell's biography, *Marie Corelli, the Writer and the Woman*, claim "she is perhaps the most extensively read of living novelists in Holland, Germany, Russia, and Austria" and "[t]here is no country where her name is unknown, and no European city, where, if she chanced to pass through, she is not besieged with visitors and waylaid with offerings of flowers" (Coates and Bell 326). Her immense celebrity paired with late nineteenth century technological advancements launched her onto the public stage, and her role as an outspoken woman writer within the male dominated literary world made her a controversial figure. At first glance, Corelli's appearances might not strike viewers as out of the ordinary. Janet Gallignani argues the extent of Corelli's "feminist impulses of her work function essentially as philosophical 'dressing,' presenting little if any challenge to the Victorian status quo. In short, she managed to give her readers precisely what they wanted: the illusion of a feminist spirit couched in a fundamentally conventional ideology" (Gallignani 166). Examining the design of both author and heroine within the context of Corelli's sartorial philosophy reveals the opposite. Exploring the function of reoccurring fashionable objects, such as jewelry and clothing, illustrates Corelli's manipulation of those symbols to signify her status in the professional world of letters. Corelli converts traditional associations of diamonds and white satin gowns from their typical associations with marriage to signify the economic success and agency she has won through her books

³⁴ William Stuart Scott, *Marie Corelli: The Story of a Friendship* reports that Corelli sold approximately 100,000 novels a year, more than any of her contemporaries (223). Teresa Ransom's title, *The Mysterious Miss Marie Corelli: Queen of Victorian Bestsellers*, title comes from the words of a sermon on *The Sorrows of Satan* given by the nineteenth-century monk, Father Ignatius.

sales. Her jewelry and clothing solidify her status as a woman of renown within the publishing world defined in opposition to her relationships with men. Corelli also rewrites domestic spaces within her non-fiction and within *The Murder of Delicia* by transforming rooms that were historically associated with female domain to re-imagined interiors that highlight her work as an author.

While the fin de siècle experienced upheaval in gendered conventions for women and men, a stigma about the woman writer lingered. In *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Woman Writer*, Elsie Michie remarks “in the nineteenth century to become a professional writer was to enter a territory implicitly defined as masculine” (2). Corelli makes a similar observation in *Free Opinions* about the woman writer within the masculine publishing world: “But as a rule honours are withheld from her, and the laurel is filched from her brows by Coward [men] ere she has time to wear it” (158). Her novels and nonfiction express frustration with “ambitious little Press boys,” as she so often called them, whom she believed withheld their literary acclaim: “[while] women have arisen one after another in the various departments of Art and Literature, men have begun to fall back and look askance, and somewhat threateningly, on the fair trespassers in their hitherto guarded domains” (*Free Opinions* 158). Though she never ceased her battles with the press, her solution to their denial of admittance was to design her own version of the woman writer who reclaims the laurels of intellect for herself rather than waiting on the approval from “guarded domains.”

The nineteenth-century has a long history of women writers cleverly negotiating their entrance into the professional world of writing.³⁵ Linda Peterson, Dorothy Mermin,

³⁵ For further scholarship on the woman writer in the nineteenth century see Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer*

and Brenda Weber have suggested that women writers dealt with their complex relationship to the public space of celebrity by crafting personae which their audiences might more readily accept. Mermin examines women writers' tendency to self-efface and self-denigrate in order to avoid public recognition of their work (xiii). In her analysis of Harriett Martineau's construction of her literary identity, Peterson argues it is "the public assumption of a professional persona—not writing for the periodical market or making money or even winning literary fame—that unsettled the field" (Peterson 33). Corelli's assumption of a professional persona in public was both necessary and intentionally disruptive.

In the final decade of the nineteenth century, it became imperative that Corelli present a version of herself to her public. Technological advancements in photography and the production of printed materials paired with the market's hunger for interviews and images of the literati made it difficult for Corelli to control her public persona. From the outset of her first novel's publication, *A Romance of Two Worlds*, Corelli gained immediate recognition from adoring fans and suspicious critics. A quick scan of any nineteenth-century newspaper shows she was omnipresent. Early in her career, Corelli's name appeared in London based papers from *The Morning Post*, *The Graphic*, *Daily News*, and *The Standard*. After her first several books became international best sellers, her name began to crop up in publications across the British Isles such as *The Star* in Saint Peter Port, the *Birmingham Daily Post*, and the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*. She is featured in sections ranging from "Art and Notes" and "New Novels" to "Gossip about Interesting People" and "Ladies News." This breadth of coverage across the United Kingdom as well

and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination, Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, and more recently Linda H. Peterson's *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market*.

as sections of the papers illustrates her name's constant visibility not only to her reading audiences but to the greater public. The fact that she was the highest paid writer and the queen's favorite author made it especially tricky for Corelli to negotiate when and how to appear before audiences.

Ever in the public eye, she kept a vigilant hold on her image. While she remained indebted and grateful to her readers through her life, she expressed frustration with a certain set of well-known male reviewers' propensity to dismiss her and her works. Despite her heavy-handed style and her hyperbolic characterizations of the press, Corelli's fiction makes astute critiques of gender bias in the publishing world. However, her critics portrayed her as annoying and difficult, obscuring her aims to set men and women on equal footing intellectually. Brenda Weber examines the "complex and vexing consequences" for celebrated and ambitious women, for they were often perceived as "difficult" rather "than possessing greatness" (3-4). Fame had different connotations for men and women. Driving ambition was "in many ways . . . a gender-affirming process for men, since it reinforced a code of masculinity predicated on competition, singularity, and aggrandizement" (Weber 3). These same qualities when applied to women laid bare a sexual double standard.

The ad hominem nature of her critics' reviews echo Weber's claim that outspoken women writers were subject to harsh attacks. Her harshest and most famous critics were often sidetracked by tirades against the author's character rather than on focused review of her works. Ellen Miller Casey's "Edging Women Out?: Reviews of Women Novelists in the *Athenaeum*, 1860-1900" notes that later decades of the nineteenth century saw an increase in positive reviews of women's writing and a decrease in rigid stereotypes. She

tracks a rise in the number of women writing and the number of serious reviews devoted to their writing, an observation Corelli herself made in *Free Opinions*. However, Casey claims that some reviewers warned if women “chose to play by men’s rules” then they should not “complain about the treatment they . . . receive” (160). Like Weber, Casey points to a nuanced form of gendered criticism against women, namely a “critical resistance to female boldness” (Casey 160). Even though more women’s writing was reviewed, outspoken women who claimed equality with male artists, or as Peterson would call donning a public identity, were continually deemed unsexed. Unsexed was a dually derogatory term slung at female artists who may or may not appear masculine but who attempt to trespass into masculine spheres by doing work that was perceived as the domain of men.

David Christie Murray’s *My Contemporaries in Fiction* attributes Corelli’s success to an ability to “impose herself upon the public because she has first been convinced of her own authority” (151-2). Her real talent, he claims, was being too forceful and confident in her own “inward conviction of the authority of her own message and her own power to deliver” (152). While admitting Corelli’s popularity and even begrudgingly recognizing a degree of talent, Murray’s commentary strays from Corelli’s fiction to attack the woman herself. His primary allegation is that possessing “inward conviction,” “authority,” and “power” causes Corelli to encroach into a world where she does not belong. He questions the acquisition of her supposed authority, claiming she imposed herself on readers. Yet, her own life as a woman writer provides her with the authority to communicate the experience of trying to be a career woman in fin de siècle Britain. Murray’s eval-

uation of Corelli supports Casey's observations of how women writers were treated when they attempted to play by men's rules.

Murray was not the only critic whose quarrels with Corelli implicitly suggest she should have quietly and graciously accepted her place. W.T. Stead's "Book of the Month" pieces in *Review of Reviews* are full of personal attacks and snide editorial suggestions to cut large portions of Corelli's novels. One particular review of *The Sorrows of Satan* professes bafflement with Corelli's constant backlash against her critics. He questions her need to respond to any of her criticism when she is being paid so handsomely in book sales:

An author who has sold her books despite the critics should have a soul above such miserable rancour. There is some excuse in an author who fails, tarring and rending the critics to whose censure he attributes his failure, but from the victor, to the vanquished all this continued outpouring of malice, bitterness and all uncharitableness indicates the gangrene of a poisoned wound. (454)

Fundamental differences in definitions of success emerge. By many standards, Corelli was a successful novelist. *The Dundee Courier & Argus* reported that "[s]he gets nearly the biggest fee of any living authoress" ("Corelli Style" 6). Stead claims Corelli's book sales should be enough recognition to silence her "miserable rancour" (454). He implies success is synonymous with monetary profit. Yet Corelli strove toward the success she equated with being called a "woman-genius," a term she frequently used to describe her heroines. Focusing much of her fiction and essays on women's equality with men, Corelli

articulates the desire to occupy professional spaces and receive critical acclaim fiercely defended by male journalists.

Marie Corelli's Sartorial Philosophy

To do so, Corelli inserts herself into the masculine world of publishing while maintaining a feminine style of dress. This style appeals to her middle-class readership, mitigating the subversiveness of her message. Corelli's sartorial construction carried a philosophy: "the woman whose dress is always becoming and graceful . . . who enhances whatever beauty she possesses by exquisite manner, unblemished reputation, and intellectual capacity combined, raises herself not only to an equality with man, but goes so far above him that she straightaway becomes the Goddess and he the Worshipper" (*Free Opinions* 183).



Figure 3. Marie Corelli dressed as Ophelia. Image from Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Archive

This slippage between feminine appearances and those appearances' meanings to Corelli reveals a nuanced system of self-representation at work. Dress becomes a tool to raise woman to equality. When women pair "becoming and graceful" dress with intellect, they

have the potential to be elevated “so far above [man]” that they effectively become deities. Figure 1 depicts Corelli dressed in a way that mirrors her doctrine of dress.

At first glance, Corelli and most of her heroines appear to be demure angels. If we closely examine each component of Corelli’s self-fashioning in this picture alongside her philosophy of dress an unconventional agency emerges. The photograph of Corelli in Fig. 1 appears to follow what modern scholars outline as self-effacing, hyper-femininity adopted by women writers to appear less threatening. One of the few photographs approved for public distribution, I argue Corelli offers this image of herself not as angelic but instead as a woman of genius. Figure 1 portrays Corelli dressed as a Victorian Ophelia in white silk crepe draped delicately over her small frame. The gown’s richly embroidered train flutters forward to cover her feet, giving her the appearance of floating rather than standing. She holds a bouquet of white lilies across her midsection, and her tilted head is crowned with a diamond star. Elizabeth Campbell examines how Victorian culture’s language of flowers was used to express female sexuality: “There is no question that in nineteenth-century discourse, women and flowers were connected more inextricably than they had ever been before, and that this connection had everything to do with sex – with mating and reproduction” (608). Campbell asserts the English novel “revolves around a [girl in bloom] whose destiny is marriage and reproduction” (608). Corelli never married, so appropriating this look of bloom reassigns the flowers’ meanings. Victorian’s believed white lilies stood for purity, but Corelli holds white Imperial lilies. Kate Greenaway’s *The Language of Flowers* (1886) states the Imperial lily stands for majesty. Corelli replaces Ophelia’s bouquet of rue, rosemary, and fennel with a bouquet of large lilies which look more like a queen’s scepter of power and authority than a bride’s bouquet of

purity. Corelli illustrates how objects typically associated with feminine culture can be rearranged to signify a new model of the female artist. Wearing a diamond tiara bolsters the divine and majestic style displayed in this image, further revising Victorian associations with diamonds by placing the large stone on her head rather than her finger. Her tiara gestures toward other jeweled head-pieces, namely crowns. Corelli deifies herself through self-crowning. Choosing to dress as one of Shakespeare's heroines, Corelli's costume encourages viewers read her coronation and white robes as those of the writer and literary heroine in lieu of the bride and wife³⁶.

Renovating Domestic Interiors

Not only does Corelli recode fashionable feminine symbols in the picture above, she also reassigns typical fixtures within the domestic interiors of her own home to signify their contribution to her professional life. The rise of photography and more easily printed periodicals increased demand for visual representations of authors in the form of portraits and photographs. Peterson observes how portraits of the "woman of letters" often depict women sitting in dainty chairs, drinking tea, or doing some kind of domestic work. However, Corelli's strategies in navigating fame detach women from the domestic sphere, revising previously accepted Victorian gender codes which associated women with conventional domestic activities within home space. Her revision of home spaces can be compared to another famous woman writer. Alexis Easley examines how Harriet Martineau "designed her own floor plan to suit her activities as a professional journalist" (119). Likewise, photographs of Corelli's rooms depict their use as work rooms. Easley claims that "rebuilding and preserving domestic spaces . . . provided new and infused

³⁶ Christiane Gannon "The Sorrows of Satan: Literary Professionalism and the Female Author as Priest" claims the heroine of *The Sorrows of Satan* styles herself as a priestess.

domestic management with new political and social meanings” (113). In 1899 Corelli also purchased and restored Shakespeare’s home in Stratford upon-Avon. Here she inhabits and preserves the Bard’s creative and intellectual spirit coupled with her career drive, providing further evidence that her redesign of domestic space was a lifelong endeavor.

Corelli understood the market’s shift toward increased author visibility, yet rather than submit a portrait of herself to Jerome K. Jerome’s *My First Book* series, she includes photographs of rooms within her house. By including images of her drawing room, study, and library, Corelli further constructs her persona as a career woman.³⁷ The images of home spaces highlight their use as work places, but they also highlight rooms arranged “from her own designs, furnished with . . . the material results of her brilliant brain-work” (*Delicia* 2). To substitute domestic interiors in place of her own likeness proposes that these rooms are part and parcel of her identity as a woman writer. She rewrites her own domestic interiors as a site where literary work happens rather than domestic work.

The picture of the drawing room is the first picture to appear in Corelli’s article and documents a home space converted into a work place. At the center of the room, three significant symbols stand like an arranged still life set. A large harp sits angled behind a velvet chaise lounge. A dulcimer leans against the chaise lounge to face an easel. A canvas rests on the easel whose back looks at the viewer as if to remind onlookers that Corelli controls what they can and cannot see. Viewers of this drawing

³⁷ Federico states, “Her ornate signature was published at least twice as often as pictures of her face and was even embossed on the covers of her later novels” (26).



Figure 4. Adrian, “The Drawing-Room,” *My First Book*, ed. Jerome K. Jerome (London: Chatto & Windus, 1894), 209.

room photo are virtual guests. This triptych of instruments and canvas populate this space as symbols of expectant creation, most likely Corelli’s. Long dark drapes line the back wall, and a large vase of luscious flowers rests on a Grecian column. Framed paintings hang on the left-hand wall and bookcases line up below them. Circle-backed chairs sit in either corner of the room, empty yet waiting. Another William Morris-esque designed chair sits in the foreground. All the objects in the room point to a person who appreciates and makes art. While the room itself may seem typical, its use is not. Nineteenth-century drawing rooms were often sites where women performed for men.³⁸ In *The Victorian Parlour*, Thad Logan examines the work a drawing room does in Victorian culture: “Within the domestic structure of everyday life, the parlour’s function is a complex one. It is the most public space in the house insofar as the reception of visitors is concerned: hence (in part) it is strongly associated with decorative display” (27). While it is difficult

³⁸ For example, in *Pride and Prejudice* when Miss Bingley walks around the drawing room in order to display her figure for Mr. Darcy.

to ascertain whether or not Corelli stage-crafted the room with a photo-op in mind, my close reading of it argues that it stands in as a representation of her life's work rather than a replication of her body. This photo's presence within the context of her essay on being a writer represents her identity as an author more than any portrait could.

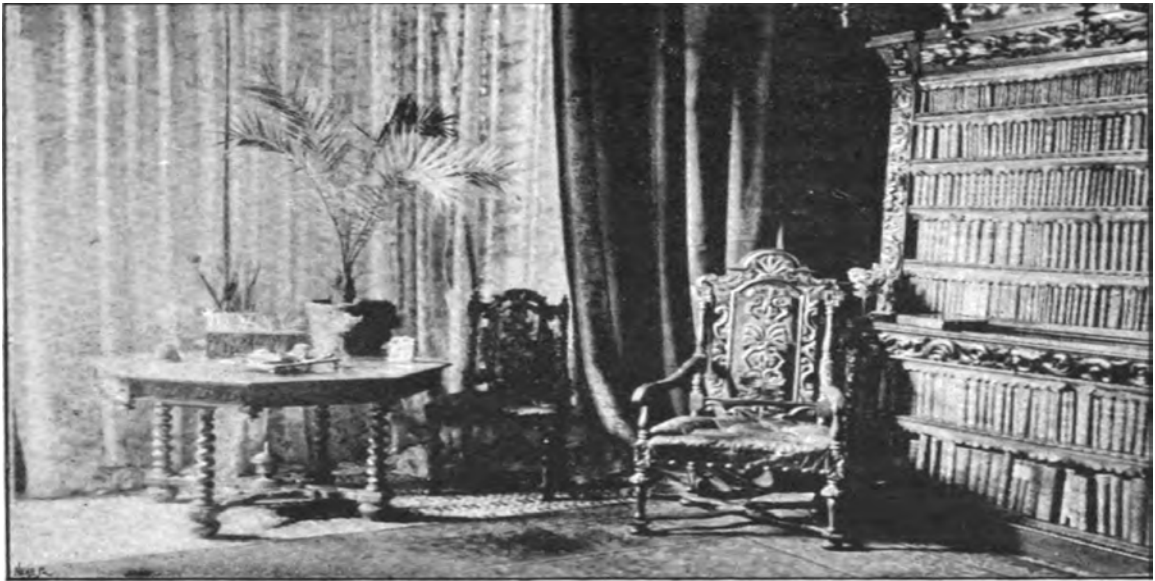


Figure 5. Adrian, "The Library," 211.

The second photograph showcases Corelli's library, where an entire wall brims with tightly-packed, bound volumes. A high-backed wooden chair sits at the center of this frame. This sturdy chair is neither entirely masculine nor feminine. The most feminine element features leafy tendrils winding their way across the top edge, echoing a Morris and Co. print. Yet the chair's high back and sturdy, wide frame feel implicitly masculine. In fact, the design of Corelli's library chair recalls a sketch in *Frasier's* magazine of Harriet Martineau sitting in, what Peterson calls, "the same style as those occupied by the male Frasierians." Peterson suggests this chair signifies Martineau's implicit belonging with male writers rather than her female contemporaries depicted in dainty chairs "whose more ornate chairs suggest the decorative cultural work of poetesses and

female novelists” (32). Though large and dark, both elements of whimsy and gravity can be detected in the open-facing seat, which turns toward the viewer. Paint brushes, leaves of paper, and palm fronds decorate the surface of an octagonal table with thick, coiled legs. The library with its rows of books, serious table and chair, and signs of creations in mid-process further communicate how Corelli’s domestic interiors represent her vocational life as an author. Logan further claims, “[w]hile the home is gendered feminine in contrast to the masculine workplace, within the home certain rooms – the study, the library, the dining room – were marked ‘masculine’” (31). Corelli recodes these masculine spaces by depicting them as places where *her* work is done. She reverses the gendered marking of the library, reclaiming it for her professional purposes.



Figure 6. Adrian, “The Study,” 213.

The final image included in Corelli’s essay displays her study. This last picture in the series focuses on the writing desk, allowing the viewer to imagine another novel in

progress. Papers and ink jars with feathered-pens are strewn across the surface, providing a tableau of Corelli's productivity. Despite the fact that no people populate the photograph, the objects within the frame prompt the viewer to imagine someone hard at work. A large painting of Shakespeare hangs to the left of the desk. His face meets the viewer/artist/worker, inspiring creative production. In another gender reversal, the Bard becomes the muse, and Corelli transforms herself into the genius. These carefully chosen images further promote her credibility as a professional artist. Constructed around her life as a writer, rather than her life as a mother or a wife, Corelli designs her rooms and the objects within those rooms as sites of "brain-work." While Easley has argued that "photographs detailing the interior of Corelli's home illustrate how her literary success has enabled her to amass a collection of beautiful objects,"³⁹ I contend that Corelli's arrangement of these objects as stand-ins for her body make them symbols rather than collections of success (Easley 148).

Designing the fin de siècle Woman Writer

Corelli continues to revise the symbolic meanings of interiors and appearances for women in the public sphere in her fiction. *The Murder of Delicia* explores how the manipulation of clothing and jewelry helps establish a professional identity for the woman writer. Corelli designs a heroine whose sartorial styling provides a vehicle from the domestic to the public realm of fame and professional literary spaces guarded by men. By purchasing her own jewelry, Delicia converts traditional associations of diamonds with marriage to markers of her own economic agency. Written in the middle of Corelli's ca-

³⁹ Easley further claims that the objects photographed for viewers become a "stimulus to consumer desire" (148). Her evidence for this stimulus is provided by the inclusion of a fan letter requesting the violin depicted in Corelli's drawing room. Easley interprets the photos of Corelli's domestic interiors as part of fin de siècle consumer culture's obsession with celebrity homes and daily life.

reer at the height of her fame and celebrity, *The Murder of Delicia* illustrates a model of the woman writer who is confident in her expertise and who seeks public acknowledgment of her profession. In Delicia's self-styling practices, jewelry is reassigned from its role in heterosexual exchanges between men and women to sole ownership with women. This transfer in the meaning of jewelry symbolizes women's career success and agency. While Delicia's work spaces of her study and library are displayed in similar ways to Correlli's photographs in *My First Book*, it is in public spaces of parties, book premieres, and shops that her identity as an author is established. When she prepares her appearances for public outings, her use of jewelry and clothing aid her movement into gendered and guarded spheres of art production.

Published in 1896, *The Murder of Delicia* charts the personal and public life of celebrated authoress Delicia Vaughan. Descriptions of Delicia's outward appearances dominate large portions of the narrative. These depictions are devoted to fashioning a heroine who remains feminine yet equal to male authors. Despite her ethereal beauty and freely-given wealth, her husband aligns himself with her critics by failing to acknowledge or appreciate her success in the world of letters as an established author. It is not the discovery of his affair or using her money to buy his mistress expensive jewelry that "murders" Delicia. His pronouncement that "'—a writer of books, you know, like my wife—is a mistake,'" is what causes her death (*Delicia* 240). The novel closes with her funeral procession. Thousands of mourning fans flood the streets to follow her casket. Their presence at her funeral procession secures her immortality, in effect making her critics obsolete. Their need to "see" her casket pass through the streets illustrates a connection between the appearance of the woman writer and their identity as authors. The sheer

numbers of grieving fans provide evidence of her fame, making her husband's approval irrelevant and recontextualizing her as a woman of genius rather than a domestic woman, much as photographs redefined Corelli.

In the preface, Corelli dedicates the book to “women who want to be clever” (*Delicia* 7). However, she warns that they will always be labeled “unsexed” (*Delicia* viii). Despite her attempts to prove she is sexed through her hyper-feminine appearances, Delicia's career is the reason her critics and her husband continue to brand her “unsexed.” Her self-fashioning serves another purpose. Delicia uses her femininity as a tactic to critique the sexism of her culture. For example, when she dresses for her latest book premiere, special consideration is given to what she wears and how she wears it. The reader's attention is directed toward her choice in gown and jewelry:

[She] soon slipped into the robe she had had designed for herself by a famous firm of Indian embroiderers—a garment of softest white satin, adorned with gold and silver thread, and pearls thickly intertwined, so as to present the appearance of a mass of finely wrought jewels. A single star of diamonds glittered on her hair, and she carried a fan of natural lilies, tied with white ribbon. (*Delicia* 84-5)

Dressing herself in layers of flowers, gems, and rich embroidery, Delicia is transformed into a walking bricolage of femininity. This description of her dress shares many details in common with the photograph of Corelli in Fig. 1.⁴⁰ Both Corelli and her heroine wear

⁴⁰ Lizzie White's “Commodifying the Self: Portraits of the Artist in the Novels of Marie Corelli” claims echo Federico's in that she argues Corelli purposefully creates heroines who resemble her in biography and appearance in order to promote herself textually rather than visually and align herself within the Romantic tradition of authorship (205 and 209).

long white gowns of satin with embroidered trains. Corelli holds a bouquet of lilies just as Delicia carries a fan made from the same flower. While her lilies and white gown indicate the purity of an angelic woman, it is not the lofty pedestal of the Angel in the House with which Corelli aligns her heroine. The profusion of white silk, diamonds, and lilies hints at divinity. Yet it is not a domestic divinity to which she aspires. Her attire in this scene is produced in direct relation to her position as a woman writer. In essence, she elevates herself and her profession by deifying her wardrobe. As I demonstrate in more detail later, Delicia's jewelry and apparel evolve through the course of the novel, developing into symbols of her economic success. It is through this economic success that she is later able to punish her husband for refusing to acknowledge her achievements.

As Delicia evaluates herself in the mirror before leaving the house, she distinguishes between her own profession and other feminine tropes, namely the dancing girl, the domestic woman, and the woman of fashion: "It is not as if I were a woman whose sole ideas of life are centered on dress and domesticity, or one of those unhappy, self-tormenting creatures who cannot exist without admiration and flattery; I am, I think and hope, differently constituted, and mean to try for great things, even if I never succeed in attaining them" (*Delicia* 82). Although it seems counter-intuitive that narrative space is used to describe Delicia's appearances since she claims she is "differently constituted" from the woman of fashion, she must devote details to illuminate how her appearances are constructed differently from other women. What makes her "differently constituted" is her desire to "try for great things." Therefore, her particular look must signify her professional desires. While Corelli calls attention to Delicia's angelic robes, her flowing

hair, her luminous eyes, and her embroidered train, she prompts readers to consider how these elements of beauty are also differently constituted.

Delicia's choice in dress also implies her accomplishments as a writer. While many women of means designed dresses for themselves, when Delicia notes her choice to wear a "robe she had had designed for herself," it is within the context of her career. The gown is expressly made for an event which honors her as writer. This scene is also the second time within the novel that the narrator observes what Delicia is in control of designing. When readers are first introduced to the heroine, Corelli makes a point of mentioning Delicia's immense wealth, all of which was "built from her own designs" and were the "material results of her brilliant brain-work" (*Delicia* 2). Adorning herself in white satin, costly beads and thread, and luxurious gemstones not only speaks to her ability to afford fine materials but also points to a new arrangement of specifically feminine success. The abundance of "thickly intertwined" threads and pearls give the appearance of wearing a "mass of . . . jewels" which suggests this luxury is a display of her own capital (*Delicia* 91-2). Her sartorial style is designed with her professional persona in mind.

What is of central importance in Delicia's construction of her professional persona is the "single star of diamonds" which "glittered on her hair" (*Delicia* 85). The context in which this precious stone is first mentioned is her appearance as a writer rather than a wife, which imbues it with new meaning. Unlike the diamonds in conventional Victorian marriage plots, Delicia's gem is not attached to her relationship with men. This context detaches diamonds from familial lineage and kinship as well as marriage contracts. Since the history and purchase of her diamonds are not mentioned, the gemstone's contractual and filial connotations are downplayed. In fact, her diamonds enter into a relationship

with her occupational persona. Rather than signify a promise made to a man or signal her husband's capital, Delicia's diamonds convey economic and artistic success.

Placing the diamond on her head highlights her "brain-work." The eye is encouraged to travel upward to Delicia's face and head rather than linger on her form. The sparkle and brilliance of the gemstone draws in the gaze further aiding her control of outward appearances. In *Gems; Notes and Extracts* (1871), Augusto Castellani classifies the diamond as "hold[ing] the first rank [among all other gems] . . . and in all ages it was most precious, and possessed an excessive value" (74). Charles King, a contemporary of Castellani, observed that diamonds possess magnetic, phosphorescent, and electric qualities. They refract light which made the ancient Greeks and Romans revere diamonds for their ability to absorb and reflect mystical powers. Her image, encased in silk and diamonds, sends a message of lasting resonance. Delicia's diamonds can be read as a stubborn refusal to let men shape how she is perceived as well as a refusal to be defined by monetary contracts with them.⁴¹

Delicia's success as a novelist not only provides the income to wear diamonds and satin but also gives her enough capital to buy jewelry for her husband. Delicia reverses the conventional order of jewel gifting from man to woman to woman to man when she purchases jewelry for her husband, Lord Carlyon: "She had a whole list of orders to execute for him, from cravats and hosiery up to a new and expensive 'coach-luncheon-basket,' to which he had taken a sudden fancy; and besides this, she was looking about in all the jewellers' shops for some tasteful and valuable thing to give him as a

⁴¹ In "Form Things: Looking at Genre through Victorian Diamonds," Stefanie Markovits notes the frequent mention of diamonds in women's poetry through the nineteenth century. Often contrasted with the ephemeral nature of tears, coal, and dewdrops within the lyric poem, the presence of diamonds in comparison connotes longevity (597).

souvenir of the approaching anniversary of their marriage day” (*Delicia* 107). In this scene, Carlyon is characterized as a fop. When Delicia shops, she spends her own money to dress her husband in fashionable attire. While browsing in a renowned jewelry shop, she is distracted by a lovely diamond pendant. Apologizing, the jeweler explains it is not for sale because it is a special commission for Lord Carlyon. Not knowing who she is, the jeweler reveals that the pendant “will cost Lord Carlyon a little over five hundred pounds. But gentlemen of his sort never mind what they pay, so long as they can please the lady they are after. And the lady in this case isn’t his lordship’s wife” (*Delicia* 109). Conspiratorially, he confesses that the pendant would be better suited for a woman like Lady Carlyon. The jeweler unwittingly exposes Lord Carlyon’s infidelity:

[a] really famous woman, and very much loved by many people . . . but, lord! her husband hardly gives her a thought! . . . and it’s rumored that he hasn’t got a penny of his own, and that all the money he throws about so lavishly is his wife’s; and if that’s the case, it’s really shameful, because of course she, without knowing it, pays for Marina’s jewels!” (*Delicia* 111-2).

Although the brooch is meant for her husband’s mistress, Delicia’s money in her husband’s hands pays for it, ascribing ownership to Delicia inadvertently. The jeweler observes the irony that her husband has chosen a “brooch with a diamond dove carrying the golden love-token, which said, ‘*Je t’adore ma mie* [sic]!’” for “La Marina,” paid for by the deserving Delicia Vaughan, also known as Lady Carlyon (*Delicia* 154). Rather than following the typical gendered order of conspicuous consumption where a man’s wealth is used to buy signifiers of status which his wife may display, Lord Carlyon uses his

wife's money to buy jewels for his mistress. Although her husband's infidelity is revealed, Delicia's economic agency is what frames this scene. Lord Carlyon is completely dependent on Delicia financially.

Moreover, despite the fact that Carlyon has commissioned the brooch for his mistress, the jeweler deems Delicia more worthy of the diamonds than "La Marina." By reassigning the worthiness of the "love token" which says "*Je t'adore ma mie*" to Delicia, the jeweler disrupts Carlyon's intentions for them (*Delicia* 154). In his attempt to apologize to Delicia for gossiping, he reasons "it is not our business to interfere with, or even comment upon the actions of our customers; but as far as our artistic works goes, it often pains us . . . to see some of our finest pieces being thrown away on dancers and music-hall singers . . . we, as producers of such a piece, would far rather know it was going to Lady Carlyon" (*Delicia* 110). By naming Delicia the rightful owner of such a special piece of jewelry, the jeweler validates her status as a celebrated author. In essence, she has the power to own the diamond brooch as a material object as well as reassign its meaning.

This scene follows Delicia's book premiere and comes before Lady Dexter's "crush." Both the premiere and the "crush" are public events which celebrate her "brain-work." Placing the shopping trip between these two public parties create a triptych in which the feminine is unfettered from the domestic. Delicia's preparations for her public appearances happen within domestic interiors; however, those interiors are designed for her professional life. For instance, early in the novel, Corelli details the space and attitude in which Delicia prepares for a highly attended book premiere. Much like Corelli's study photographed in *My First Book*, Delicia's study features a bust of Shakespeare. Rather

than consult her wardrobe and boudoir mirror first, Delicia begins her initial preparations in her study looking for guidance from books and her male muse, the bust of Shakespeare. In fact, most of Delicia's time is spent working within her study and her library. Rarely does her husband visit these spaces, and when he does he tentatively lingers at the threshold like an unwelcome guest. These spaces are designed to feature her work above her domestic role in the home. When she discovers her husband's affair, the home becomes the site of their struggle. Although her home is the epicenter of her writing life, it is in public spaces where Delicia can exercise her agency through economic freedom. Therefore, when Delicia prepares for her second book party, descriptions of her dress develop additional meaning as her appearances begin to form a critique of heterosexual relationships.

With the knowledge of her husband's affair and his misuse of her wealth, Delicia's preparations for Lady Dexter's crush, a celebration thrown in honor of her latest book, go further to revise the symbols interwoven into her evening dress. Deciding upon "the very grandest" of gowns with "embroidered train" which looks to be "sewn all over with diamonds," Delicia styles herself for the express purpose of a public appearance (*Delicia* 220). While she dresses herself in front of the mirror, Delicia begins to contemplate changing her will. Reversing previous associations of property with men and their familial lineages, she attempts to control her possessions as symbols of her success as an author:

Arrayed in the richly-embroidered dress of Indian jewel-work, with its train of soft satin to match, springing from the shoulders and falling in pliant folds to the ground she stood before her mirror fastening a star of dia-

monds among her luxuriant hair. Through the array of old lace that fringed the sleeves of her gown, her fair white arms shone like the arms of the marble Psyche, her eyes were dark and luminous, her lips red, her cheeks faintly flushed with excitement. A single branch of ‘Annunciation’ lilies garlanded her dress from waist to bosom . . . as she regarded her own fair image. (*Delicia* 222)

Delicia’s dress in this scene is almost identical to her attire for the premiere earlier in the novel. It also emulates the styling portrayed in the photo of Corelli provided in Fig. 1. The repetition of white Indian embroidery, diamonds, and white lilies reiterates the symbolism behind each fashionable object. Utilizing a similar style in a similar crowd, the fluttering gown bejeweled with pearls, the magnetic diamonds, and the bunch of lilies secure her status as a successful woman writer.

Comparing Delicia’s beauty and style to mythological stories creates an impression of goddess-like proportions. Her maid claims she looks “such a picture of ethereal loveliness” that “‘Oberon, the fairy king,’” must “‘pause in his flight over flowers to wonder at her’” (*Delicia* 220). Her form resembles Greco-Roman art. Her arms are compared to those of a statuesque Psyche. Her dark luminous eyes and red lips recall Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s painting “The Blessed Damozel,” whose hair is also adorned with gem-like stars. So too does Rossetti’s “Damozel” carry white lilies in her arms. This type of lily is often seen in paintings depicting the Annunciation of Mary when the angel Gabriel appears to announce her immaculate conception. Within the context of her pure white gown, “Annunciation” lilies, and a halo of diamonds on her head, Delicia’s ensem-

ble serves to reinforce her divine presence as well as foreshadow her own immaculate conception.

Her husband's affair gives her new insight into her possessions. Delicia realizes if she were to die before she changed her will, her possessions would go to her husband. Even though she cannot control her husband's feelings, she realizes she has the power to control her possessions:

If I were to die now . . . all the results of my life's work would, by the tenor of my present will, go to my husband. He would care nothing for my fame or honor; his interests would centre round the money only. And with that money he would amuse himself with La Marina . . . possibly my own jewels would be scattered as gifts among his favourites . . . Fortunately the law, which is generally so unjust to women has been forced into permitting our unhappy sex to have at least an individual right over our own money, whether earned or inherited; formerly we were not allowed to have any property apart from our lords and masters! (*Delicia* 220-1)

Referencing the Married Women's Property Act, Delicia claims future ownership over her wealth and jewelry by preventing her husband from squandering her fortune. Both her wealth and her jewelry solidify her identity as a professional writer in the public sphere. Protecting her property from "being scattered" is paramount. Delicia realizes that her possessions and fortune, much like her persona, are hers to control. She was already a famous and rich novelist when she married Carlyon, and throughout their marriage she has continued to sell books. Therefore, the mention of the Married Woman's Property act

foreshadows Delicia's decision to change her will, protecting her assets from falling into the wrong hands while emphasizing her own hard work which earned those possessions.

Lord Carlyon's betrayal provides Delicia with profound though painful enlightenment. As she evaluates her appearance before leaving for the "crush," Delicia distinguishes her looks from those of other women. Her own beauty becomes elevated above other forms because she disconnects her looks from those dependent on the presence of men for value and approval:

She smiled sorrowfully, mentally apostrophizing herself thus, -- 'No, you are not quite bad-looking, Delicia, but you have one horrible defect—you have got what is called an 'expressive' face. That is a mistake. You should not have any expression; it is 'bad form' to look interested, surprised, or indignant. A beautiful nullity is what men like—a nullity of face combined with a nullity of brain. You should paint and powder and blacken your eyelashes, and you should also be ready to show your ankles, '*by accident*' if necessary. The men would find you charming then, Delicia; they would say you had 'go' in you; but to be simply a student, with ideas of your own . . . and to write down these ideas in books, which gave you a fame and position equal to the fame and position of a man, this makes you a bore in their eyes, Delicia!—an unmitigated nuisance, and they wish you were well out of their way!' (*Delicia* 222)

Despite her sadness and betrayal, she recognizes that she has already won the "fame and position equal to the fame and position of a man." Thus, her self-styling takes on a higher purpose than women who "show [their] ankles" and "paint and powder and blacken

[their] eyelashes.” Her genius threatens men because beauty is not enough to hold their attention. Delicia distinguishes herself from women who use their looks and bodies to earn their living, elevating her own position as a calling on par with men.

The distinction between purposes becomes clear when she comes face to face with her husband’s mistress at the party. Two significant differences emerge in this brief introduction between “La Marina” and Delicia’s sartorial choices and their careers. When she arrives at Lord and Lady Dexter’s home, she drops off her wraps in the ladies’ room where, “standing well in front of the long mirror, so as to completely block the view for anyone else, a brilliant-looking, painted personage in a pale-green costume, glittering with silver . . . glanced up as she entered and surveyed her pearl embroideries with greedy admiration” (*Delicia* 223-4). “La Marina” introduces herself to Delicia as a “celebrity.” As Delicia introduces herself, “La Marina” gushes with adoration: ““You don’t mean to say you’re the famous Delicia Vaughan? . . . Why, all these [important] people are asked to meet you here to-night, and I’m the paid *artiste*. . . . I’d rather dance before you than the Queen!”” (*Delicia* 225). Although “La Marina” points to differences in their levels of renown, calling herself a celebrity and using fame to describe Delicia, they share a moment of understanding between women. Initially, Delicia wants to judge “La Marina” not only for her relationship with Lord Carlyon but also for her “greedy admiration” of Delicia’s garments and the use of her body on stage. However, as she talks with “La Marina,” or as she learns her real name Jewlia Muggins, Delicia begrudgingly begins to respect her. Jewlia confides in Delicia that her plan is to use her looks to secure expensive jewelry from suitors which she will later cash in to secure a modest income. She confesses, “[i]f I did not *pretend* to encourage them . . . I should lose all chance of earn-

ing a living” (*Delicia* 227). This knowledge leaves Delicia feeling ambivalent about her initial impressions of the dancer. “La Marina” uses men’s affections and their desires in order to buy things for herself. A hierarchy of wrongs begins to emerge. Delicia does indeed elevate herself above the gaudy appearance and aspirations of “La Marina.” Delicia buys her own jewelry, while “La Marina” must rely on gifts from men. Although Delicia characterizes the dancing girl’s work as more akin to prostitution than her own “brain work” as a higher calling, she does recognize that the fault of adultery lies entirely with her husband.

However, it is not his flirtations with other women which murder her. After “La Marina’s” performance, Delicia slips out of sight behind a fern to get a quiet moment alone. From her undetected seat, she overhears her husband flirting with a lady of fashion. He proclaims that, like all women who write and think they are clever, Delicia is “unsexed.” She rises to her feet, an angelic vision in white and glittering stones, and politely addresses them both to alert them to her presence. In previous moments in the novel, Delicia condemns women of fashion who black their eyes and paint their faces. In this instance, like the encounter with Jewlia, Delicia finds that women support her while her husband emerges as the true culprit. Both Jewlia and this lady proclaim their adoration of her work and deem Delicia lovely and sweet. Hearing how her husband brands her unsexed forces Delicia to acknowledge that no amount of love, beauty, or sweetness will garner Lord Carlyon’s esteem. By his characterization, her profession makes her neither male nor female. This new insight firms Delicia’s resolve to change her will the next day. Through her will, she uses legal documents and public ceremonies to realign women’s affiliations outside of marriage and family.

Cutting ties with Lord Carlyon reveals regenerative possibilities. Despite the morbid subject matter of her daydreams, a kind of rebirth is imagined:

She saw herself, so she imagined, dead—laid out in her coffin with flowers round her; but as she looked at her own stiffened corpse she knew it was not herself . . . She, Delicia, was . . . a being through whose fine essence light and joy were flowing. She fancied she heard voices murmuring in her ears . . . ‘This is not the end . . . Love is immortal, unconquerable, unchangeable, and waits for thee elsewhere, Delicia!’ (*Delicia* 271)

Not only has Delicia herself transformed from a material being into “fine essence” of “light and joy,” but heterosexual love between her and her husband is transmuted into the mutual love between an author and her fans. This metamorphosis of love further solidifies her relationship to a larger public and focuses the criticism on the heterosexual exchange within domestic relationships. Transcending the trouble and sorrows she experiences in earthly marriage, Delicia imagines her essence moving toward the “immortal, unconquerable, unchangeable” (*Delicia* 281).

Conclusion

In a conclusion brimming with poetic justice, Delicia’s funeral is the final justification she needs to prove she is a serious writer because in death she finally gains recognition “for [her] fame or honor” (*Delicia* 220). Upon completion of her last novel, Delicia dies suddenly from heart failure. When the papers report her death, her fans show their support in droves: “the great public, seized by a passionate grief for the loss of one of its favourite authors, took it upon itself to make the obsequies of this ‘unsexed’ woman as imposing as any that ever attended king or emperor. Thousands followed the coffin to the

. . . cemetery . . . hundreds among those thousands wept” (*Delicia* 281). Unlike her husband, whose “interests . . . centre round the money only,” her fans participate in her funeral by following her coffin through the streets as a sign of admiration and support (*Delicia* 220). Her funeral, attended like that of any “king or emperor,” prompts thousands to buy books and shed tears. They move en masse, providing public proof of her success through their “passionate grief.” The narrator’s choice of masculine words like “king” and “emperor” to describe Delicia’s funeral is one final gender reversal. Not only is Delicia promoted to iconic status, but the force of influence she exerts on her fans is also compared with the most powerful men in the world. Although readers and fans cannot see her body through the coffin, her death crowns her with immortality.

While some readers may have detected overlaps between Delicia’s story and that of Germaine de Staël’s *Corrine, Or Italy*, Delicia’s death is not a tragic termination of the female genius. Yet, Nickianne Moody’s characterization of Delicia’s death as “good” and “dutiful” does not account for the alternate value systems Corelli designs (192). The adoration of Delicia’s fans works to enshrine her. In fact, her will is changed so the royalties from her books are distributed to the poor: “And when it came to be publicly known that all her fortune, together with all future royalties to be obtained from her books, was left in equal shares among the poverty- stricken of certain miserable London districts . . . [m]any spoke of her with a wondering tenderness of worship and reverence as though she had been a saint” (*Delicia* 282). The disapproval of her husband and male journalists isn’t enough to keep her from the halls of fame and posterity. By donating her fortune to the poor, she economically gifts the public, creating a reciprocal return of adoration.

Delicia creates a nonconventional legacy by producing one last novel for her fans before her death. While her marriage leaves no heirs, the bequest of her novels provide a lasting memory of her work in the public mind. An alternative economy emerges in the conclusion. Delicia proves to have more value in economic and emotional terms with the public than with her husband. Improving the well-being of London's poor and prompting thousands to move through the streets to follow her coffin evinces Delicia's divine power. Without Delicia's purse strings to keep up his appearances, Lord Carlyon becomes unmemorable. Although her husband and her critics possess the ability to wound, their voices are not as adept as Delicia's ability to influence the masses. The vision of success that Corelli offers through Delicia's death eliminates reliance on men's approval altogether. Delicia's funeral, her wedding, and her book parties all work together to exemplify how her identity is valid apart from relationships to men. While Delicia desired Carlyon's love and devotion, she does not need him to validate her identity as an author. She does this in tandem with her fans.

In the world outside Corelli's fiction, it was less easy to dispense with the voices of male journalists who shaped the opinion of literary circles. However, by designing an image of the woman writer whose value is not contingent upon the opinions of the press, or men in general, Corelli retrieves the laurels of genius literally by crowning herself with tiaras and figuratively through rearranged displays of her work/home spaces. Corelli's ethereal and regal self-fashioning metaphorically elevates her above the critics allowing her to reach over them, finding approval in her readers and redefining the emblems of gendered success without dying. Unlike Delicia's performative death, Corelli lived on with a vengeance, continuing her battles against patriarch and social ills until the age of

68. Her biography and her fiction both present an image of the woman writer who offers a solution to the problem of male journalists barring women's entrance into the literary realm. Material objects become the keys to gaining access into the space of genius, projected onto a public stage. Corelli's renovated interiors and construction of the woman writer's appearances both function as projections of women in public realms, dissolving the boundary between separate spheres.

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