

UNCONVENTIONAL WOMEN IN A CONVENTIONAL AGE: STRONG FEMALE
CHARACTERS IN THREE VICTORIAN NOVELS

by

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ABSTRACT

One of the most fascinating aspects of Victorian literature is the female characters. After much analysis, modern critics have formed categories of these women based on their behavior and roles in the novels, such as the demon woman and the Angel in the House, two of the most prominent categories. However, neither of these categories, and none of the less prominent ones, represents a positive view of women in the Victorian era. The following pages propose a new categorization of Victorian women: the strong and independent woman. Ready to fill this category are three heroines. *Jane Eyre*'s namesake overcomes her passive, self-repressive tendencies as well as her anger and rebellion to become a strong, independent woman. *The Woman in White*'s Marian Halcombe defies both categories of man-in-the-woman and traditional woman and is instead a hybrid of feminine and masculine qualities. *Dracula*'s Mina Harker does not fit either the label of New Woman or traditional woman and instead exemplifies Stoker's new version of the ideal woman. These three women, among others, demonstrate the need for a new, positive view of female Victorian characters.

Introduction

Any reader of Victorian literature will eventually notice a pattern in the portrayal of female characters as well as the treatment of those characters by critics. Each woman is placed neatly into an artificial category or type, whether it truly fits her or not. Nina Auerbach suggests four significant types: angel, demon, old maid, and fallen woman. There are other, less significant categories or types to include as well. These seemingly very different ideas of Victorian womanhood all have one thing in common: not a single one of them represents a positive view of women, and they are not an accurate reflection of the variety and richness of female characters in Victorian fiction.

The Victorian woman was expected to meet very specific societal standards. She was to be very lovely, with elaborate dress and hair styles; she was to be accomplished, that is, learned in French and the classical languages, grammar, drawing and painting, singing, and playing music. When she was old enough, she was to marry a gentleman at least equal to her in social status and then was to begin having children. Her sphere was the home, and there she should stay, while her husband conducted his business in the unsavory outside world. She made the home a haven from corruption for her husband, always striving to please him. She was the Angel in the House, a term that comes from Coventry Patmore's mid-19th-century poem "Angel in the House." Auerbach explains that this imagery came from "popular Victorian angelology," which "cast angels as irrefutably female and by definition domestic" (64).

What happened to the woman who ventured outside the home? Lower-class women often left the home to work out of necessity to support themselves or their families (such as the penniless orphan Jane Eyre), but this was a sign of inferiority. As for

the middle- or upper-class woman, venturing outside the domestic sphere often indicated that she was a fallen woman. Perhaps she was a prostitute, walking the streets for money to support herself, or perhaps she had engaged in inappropriate behavior with a man. She may even have been merely tainted by association with improper people or events. This woman might also be referred to as the demon woman, a woman with a passionate, destructive nature who violently defied societal norms. Auerbach divides this into two separate types (although she argues that none of the types are truly disparate), the demon woman and the fallen woman. Either way, redemption, though unlikely, was this woman's only chance at a normal life.

If these two categories seem extreme, with little to no middle ground, that is because they are. Sue Ann Betsinger calls these two extremes “the usual categorizations of woman—whore or angel” and decides that both are prostitution because both require meeting a man's needs (84). Auerbach sees these two extremes as flowing into each other because the angel-women are also inherently demonic. There is no compromise, and neither of these two extremes represents a positive view of women. Although the angel would be seen in a positive light from a patriarchal Victorian perspective, she was trapped in her domestic sphere, easily manipulated, abused, or neglected.

Other “categorizations” of women, secondary to the angel and demon/fallen woman categorizations yet still important, include the previously mentioned old maid, the redeemed fallen woman, and the victim. The old maid never married, either because she chose not to or because she never had the opportunity. Auerbach notes that the old maid parallels the demon woman in her “exclusion from domesticity” (63). The redeemed fallen woman rose from her disgrace typically through a proper marriage, though also

possibly through the purification of death. The victimized woman shares characteristics with the Angel in the House—submissiveness and passivity—and hence the two categories at times overlap; the Angel in the House could easily become the victimized woman. JoAnna Stephens Mink notes that “there are a multitude of excellent critical and scholarly works which more than adequately support that point”—certainly enough to make the victim category a prominent one (5).

These other categorizations fill in the middle ground to an extent, giving female characters a few more options and a slightly wider interpretation, but there are still two major problems. The first problem is that these categories are artificial and stereotypical. The categories are not as distinct and disparate as they might first appear. As mentioned above, some categories overlap, such as the Angel in the House and the victim; some can be equally combined or separated, such as the demon woman and the fallen woman; and some share parallels that blur the boundaries, such as the old maid and the fallen woman. Auerbach also makes this observation: “discussing each type separately falsifies the fluid boundaries among them” (63). Indeed, Victorian female characters do not fit neatly into one category. They may exhibit characteristics of two or more categories, or they may not find a match in any of the categories. Hence, the second problem by now becomes obvious.

A realistic and thus positive view of women is still missing. Imposing these categories onto all female characters oversimplifies their personalities, essentially objectifying them and masking their complexity. These categories are also all negative. The Angel in the House could easily become the victim. Her life revolved around others, and her passive nature and self-sacrifice made her easily exploited. The old maid was

considered odd and anomalous, having failed in acquiring a husband. Fallen and demon women were inherently flawed, cut off from society and hidden away in slums, asylums, or even attics. For them, death was the only release. These categories are merely another part of the display that so permeated Victorian culture.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that men's exclusive authority as authors in the nineteenth century allowed them to create and own their texts, including the women—and representations of women—in them. Thus, men created and imposed the artificial system of categories of women, which must be “killed” as part of the process of understanding them and moving past them (17). To kill angel or demon women, though, is to acknowledge their power and perhaps even to give them more. Moreover, eradicating them completely is as artificial as imposing the categories onto women in the first place (after all, such women did exist). Keeping these types allows us to broaden our interpretations of female characters (instead of simply replacing them) and reminds us of mistakes not to make again. However, men's literary creations were not limited to the categories or stereotypes of women discussed above; both men and women created female characters that form a new, positive, realistic type of female Victorian character.

Strong, independent women existed in Victorian literature. Three notable examples include Jane Eyre from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Marian Halcombe from Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, and Mina (Murray) Harker from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. These heroines, like the novels in which they exist, stand out from others in Victorian literature. They are not artificial, stereotypical characters, yet they are very different from each other as well. These three characters come together to show not only the need for a broader view of female Victorian characters, but also how diverse and

complex a positive and realistic category of female characters needs to be. These fictional characters are, after all, fictional, but that does not mean they must be artificial. This system of stereotypical categories or types has long since been established and analyzed by critics such as Nina Auerbach and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Now it is time to expand upon and build on this system.

Jane Eyre, written by Charlotte Brontë and published in 1847, is one of the most well-known Victorian novels and is considered to be one of the first and one of the most prominent feminist literary works of the nineteenth century. Plenty of criticism exists on this topic, but what is significant here is how she sheds the different categories or stereotypes of womanhood as the novel progresses. She sheds the idea of the demon woman after her angry and rebellious childhood, sheds the idea of the angel after her time at Thornfield, and also avoids the label of fallen woman by fleeing from Rochester's temptation. In the end, Jane has no place in the system of categories—until now, when one is created that suits her.

Marian Halcombe of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, published in 1860, shows us how truly unique interesting and likable female characters can be in Victorian fiction. She is not an angel, and while she implies to Walter that she is a demon instead, her caring nature and pleasant disposition exclude her from that category as well. There are those critics who would deny her womanhood altogether, labeling her a man and overlooking her feminine qualities, but that is not accurate either. Marian, too, needs a category that suits her and frees her from a system that restricts her.

Mina Harker, from Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*, arrives at the end of the Victorian era and brings with her the gender and feminist issues of the time. The New

Woman did not represent a positive view of women because it was too often associated with the idea of the demon woman or fallen woman, even though it had a broader definition—perhaps too broad. At the same time, the age of the angel was coming to a close. Mina, then, represents neither of these categories but rather womanhood in transition, yet her transition status left her without a place. Finally, she has one, and she joins Jane Eyre and Marian Halcombe in a new category of women.

These heroines, just like their novels, are very different. During almost all of Jane's story, she is unmarried, becoming Mrs. Rochester in the conclusory chapter. Marian Halcombe remains unmarried for the novel's duration, and, if the ending is any indication, for the rest of her life. Mina Murray, on the other hand, becomes Mina Harker within the first third of the novel. Yet their independence and defiance of stereotypes brings them together while allowing them to maintain their individuality. We have the pleasure of hearing at least part of their stories firsthand—*Jane Eyre* is told entirely from Jane's point of view, and *The Woman in White* and *Dracula*, both epistolary novels, provide us with the heroines' letters and journals—an important part of their development as female characters. These women's strength and independence is what ties them together; the only other common ground they share is that they are all orphans. Jane, Marian, and Mina shatter the stereotypes and illuminate for us a new, positive category of women, one in which we hope more female Victorian characters will be placed.

“Poor, Obscure, Plain, and Little”: The Remarkable Jane Eyre

Jane Eyre describes herself as “poor, obscure, plain, and little,” and throughout the novel, similar descriptions are ascribed to her by other characters as well (216). She is constantly hiding from someone, trying not to be noticed, and “slipping away” in hopes that no one will miss her. She slips away from the Reed children at Gateshead Hall, attempts to slip out of the room of Rochester’s guests at Thornfield Hall, slips away from Thornfield in the dead of night after learning of Rochester’s secret, and even slips away from Moor House to seek Rochester. This woman, however, is not as obscure and unnoticeable as she would have herself be: she is a capable, self-sufficient woman, one uncommon in Victorian literature. However, Jane was not always this way; the trials of her life, and the active role she takes in handling them, are what makes her who she is.

Many *Jane Eyre* critics focus on the “division of [Jane’s] psyche into extreme components”—Helen Burns and Bertha Mason (the novel’s resident demon woman)—such as critic Elaine Showalter, who describes this division as “combat between the Angel in the House and the devil in the flesh” (68). Elisabeth Bronfen describes these two divisions as “extreme versions” of Jane (201). Another paired extreme is Céline Varens, representing the dangers of extramarital sex, and Bertha Mason, representing the imprisonment of marriage, as critic Sue Ann Betsinger points out (75). Still more critics identify the Jane-Bertha doubling as the central conflict of the novel (Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar). While the conflict of the different aspects of Jane’s psyche is significant, it is secondary to Jane’s journey toward selfhood, yet these “categories” inform the phases

of her journey. Jane Eyre is considered a classic example of a *Bildungsroman*, so the idea Jane's journey is not new, but what is important is how she arrives at her destination. She passes through three characteristic stages during her journey, and although each stage has its own prominent characteristic, these characteristics overlap throughout the novel. Jane is angry and rebellious, primarily as a child at Gateshead and then at Lowood school. Starved of family, friends, and affection as a child, she becomes outwardly submissive and self-repressive at Thornfield particularly, seeking the approval and the regard of others. At this point, Jane has filled both of Elaine Showalter's roles of the "devil in the flesh" and the "Angel in the House." Finally, after her flight from Thornfield and her time at Moor House with the Rivers family, Jane's strength and independence are fully developed, and she is mentally, emotionally, and (though less important) financially solid.

Jane as Angry and Rebellious

Jane's childhood is certainly an unpleasant one: her parents died before she was old enough to know them, and her kind, wealthy uncle takes her in but soon dies, leaving her with her jealous Aunt Reed and spoiled, cruel, violent cousin John. Jane is at a disadvantage from the beginning because she is small and ugly, contrasting sharply with her beautiful, blonde-haired cousin, Georgiana Reed, whom everyone immediately forgives for any fault. Even Abbot, one of the servants, holds Jane's homeliness against her: "if she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness; but one really cannot care for such a little toad as that" (21). Bessie, the one person at Gateshead

who actually likes Jane, also finds her odd, telling Jane that she is “queer” and “a strange child” (32). These disadvantages set her up for a miserable and anger-filled childhood.

Young Jane’s violent and rebellious behavior appears early in the novel. In the opening pages, John provokes Jane and throws a book at her head, drawing blood. The infuriated Jane shouts at him, only causing him to attack her. She fights back until she is carried away, struggling and flailing the entire time, while two servants attempt to restrain her. Jane is certainly justified in her anger and sense of injustice at John’s actions, but she hardly handles the situation in the best way. Her actions only spur John to more violence and cruelty and make her seem more culpable, giving John exactly what he wants.

During Jane’s punishment in the Red Room, she works herself into such a fit that she passes out, and the family physician, Mr. Lloyd, is sent for. The Reeds, particularly John and Mrs. Reed, are Jane’s primary antagonists, and she is quick to complain about them to anyone who is not a servant. Jane openly and unreservedly tells Mr. Lloyd that she is miserable at Gateshead. Surprised by Jane’s openness, Mr. Lloyd suggests that Jane go away to school, an idea that both Jane and Mrs. Reed agree to. In the weeks before Jane leaves, the Reeds stay away from Jane, with the exception of John, who can’t help antagonizing Jane every once in a while. On one such occasion, Jane punches John in the face, and when John runs to his mother, Jane yells after them, “They [the Reed children] are not fit to associate with me” (22). When Mrs. Reed scolds Jane, she reminds her aunt of Uncle Reed’s dying wish that Jane be brought up as if she were one of the Reed children: “What would uncle Reed say to you, if he were alive?” (22). Jane makes a

good point—Mr. Reed would not approve of Mrs. Reed’s behavior toward Jane—but he would not approve of Jane’s behavior either.

Mrs. Reed and Jane do not speak again until Mr. Brocklehurst arrives to meet Jane before she leaves for Lowood. During that visit, Mrs. Reed tells Brocklehurst, with Jane present, that Jane is a bad child and a liar, and that the school should be notified of it. Jane says nothing until Brocklehurst leaves and Mrs. Reed orders her from the room. “*Speak* I must,” Jane tells the reader, and she proceeds to tell Mrs. Reed how much she dislikes both her and her son John (30). Jane, of course, is not finished, and gives one of her most passionate tirades in the novel:

I am glad that you are no relation of mine: I will never call you aunt again as long as I live. I will never come see you when I am grown up; and if any one asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty...People think you a good woman, but you are bad; hard-hearted. You are deceitful! (30)

Mrs. Reed will later describe Jane’s behavior during this scene as fiendish, and as much as a reader may want to defend Jane, Mrs. Reed’s description is accurate.

Jane’s behavior is inappropriate for a child, even by today’s looser standards.

At Lowood, the “institutionalized extension of Gateshead Hall,” Jane’s angry rebellion continues, even after she meets and befriends the ascetic and extremely spiritual (even angelic) Helen Burns (Shapiro 686). At first, it is on Helen’s behalf that Jane is angry. Shortly after Jane meets her, Helen is punished by Miss Scatcherd with a beating, and Jane declares to Helen, “if I were in your

place I should dislike her; I should resist her; if she struck me with that rod, I should get it from her hand; I should break it under her nose” (46). Helen disagrees, and the two girls begin to discuss faults and punishment, good and bad treatment. Helen advocates forgiveness and the bearing of all misfortunes, while Jane adheres to her rebellious doctrine: “When we are struck at without a reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should—so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again” (48). During this conversation, Jane thinks, for the first time, that her angry outlook might be wrong, and this is the first step in a long and gradual change for her.

Soon it is Jane’s turn for punishment. Mr. Brocklehurst visits the school, and it is the first time Jane sees him since her first conversation with him and Mrs. Reed at Gateshead. Brocklehurst remembers Mrs. Reed’s warning and proceeds to announce in front of all the pupils and teachers that Jane is a liar and punishes her in a very public and humiliating way. When her punishment is over, Jane cries bitterly but is soon comforted by Helen, and then by Miss Temple, who asks Jane to tell her side of the story, particularly her episode in the red room at Gateshead. Jane follows Helen’s advice “against the indulgence of resentment,” and the affection and sympathy she receives from Miss Temple begins to take the edge off her rebellious nature (60). Jane has one more angry episode before she changes her attitude.

Although Helen is a bit too accepting of punishment and mistreatment, she is not the perfect role model that Jane seems to think she is. Helen herself admits that she makes no particular effort to pay attention during lessons and forgets to

do her chores. Nevertheless, Jane often becomes angry and upset on Helen's behalf. When Miss Scatcherd discovers Helen's messy drawers, she forces Helen to wear a sign on her forehead that reads, "Slattern." As soon as the lessons are over for the day, Jane rips the sign off and throws it into the fire, a suitable expression of Jane's fiery anger: "the fury of which she was incapable had been burning in my soul all day, and tears, hot and large, had continually been scalding my cheek" (63). Although Helen is angelic to the extreme, Jane is too angry and passionate for a child.

About a week after this final episode, Jane is cleared of Brocklehurst's charge that she is a liar, and she now prefers Lowood to Gateshead: "the privations, or rather the hardships, of Lowood lessened" (63). It is not Lowood that changes, however, but Jane. Though she realizes that Helen's asceticism is extreme and that she "must renounce this extremity", she also realizes that her own angry rebellion is no better (Bronfen 199). Most of her change in attitude she attributes to Miss Temple:

[T]o her instruction I owed the best part of my acquirements; her friendship and society had been my continual solace; she had stood me in the stead of mother, governess, and, latterly, companion...I had imbibed from her something of her nature and much of her habits: more harmonious thoughts: what seemed better-regulated feelings had become the inmates of my mind. I had given in allegiance to duty and order; I was quiet...to the eyes of others, usually even to my own, I appeared a disciplined and subdued character (71).

Jane's time at Lowood has indeed subdued her anger. She retreats into herself, hiding her passionate nature, and leaves for Thornfield an outwardly submissive and self-repressed woman, eager to please and hoping to be liked.

Jane as Submissive and Self-repressed

Although Jane's submissive stage primarily passes during her time at Thornfield, Jane's need to love and be loved can be seen as early as her childhood at Gateshead. Jane spends her time alone, primarily in the nursery with her doll: "human beings must love something, and in the dearth of worthier objects of affection, I contrived to find a pleasure in loving and cherishing a faded graven image...I was comparatively happy, believing it to be happy likewise" (23). Once at Lowood, Jane gets a taste of affection from the first friend she has ever made, Helen Burns. Although Helen believes that self-approval is all that is necessary, Jane disagrees and states she would rather die than be unloved, and describes what she would do for affection: "to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest" (58-59). Miss Temple arrives, interrupting the conversation, and invites Jane and Helen to her room, where she feeds them a treat of seed-cake. Tita French Baumlin and James Baumlin recognize this seed-cake as symbolic of the "seed" that Miss Temple plants in Jane, which will "help her produce, albeit slowly, the self-nourishment needed in her journey toward individuation" (20). Miss Temple's influence helps Jane learn

to control her emotions, though at first Jane goes so far as to suppress them, and Jane will depend upon this control later in the novel.

When Jane arrives at Thornfield, she meets Mrs. Fairfax, Adèle, and some of the other servants and is content that her time there will be pleasant. Soon, however, Jane begins to realize that there is some kind of mystery or secret at Thornfield. The indications of the Bertha secret are minor at first, but they become more and more suspicious and even obvious. Jane ignores these signs because of her growing love for Rochester, who is obviously hiding something, and her disregard for the obvious is her biggest mistake during this part of her life. At Thornfield, Jane hears strange laughter that is nonchalantly attributed to the servant Grace Poole. As she is given a tour of the manor, Mrs. Fairfax says of the third floor (where Bertha is imprisoned), “no one ever sleeps here: one would almost say that, if there were a ghost at Thornfield, this would be its haunt” (90). Mrs. Fairfax mentions Rochester’s family troubles, though he has no relatives still living, and the fact that Rochester generally stays away from Thornfield. As Jane continues to ask questions, Mrs. Fairfax becomes evasive and obviously wants to change the subject. Therefore, Jane has indications early in her stay that something is not quite right at Thornfield.

The night that Jane discovers Mr. Rochester’s bedroom on fire while he sleeps in the middle of it is an important one. Once Rochester is awake, he doesn’t want Jane to notify any of the servants of what happened and simply states that he “must pay a visit to the third story” (128). Before Jane leaves, he asks her not to say anything of the strange occurrence. He offers Jane very little

explanation, and what he does tell her he only does after he extracts from her what she has seen and heard that night. When Jane mentions Grace Poole, Rochester quickly affirms her guess, leaving Jane with more unanswered questions, yet she does not ask them. As a paid employee, and a newly-hired one at that, Jane doesn't have the right to know Rochester's private business, but she later gains that right when the two become engaged. The fire in Rochester's room is the first and one of the biggest signs of Rochester's secret, and yet Jane willingly ignores the seriousness of the situation. Instead, she focuses on the possibility that Rochester returns the feelings she has for him.

About two weeks later, while Jane is still wondering about Grace Poole's possible claims on Mr. Rochester, she overhears two of the servants talking about Mrs. Poole. When they notice Jane, they abruptly stop talking, one asking, "Doesn't she know?" to which the other responds in the negative (140). Jane finally comes to a firm realization that "there was a mystery at Thornfield; and that from participation in that mystery I was purposely excluded" (140). At this point, it is unclear whether Jane connects the strange laughter, the references to the third floor, and the fire in Rochester's room to the "mystery at Thornfield."

Soon Rochester returns to Thornfield with a bevy of "fine people" for an extended visit, and a further clue to the Thornfield mystery arrives as well: Mr. Mason. Upon learning of Mr. Mason's arrival, Rochester can barely stand and exclaims, "Jane, I've got a blow;— I've got a blow, Jane!" (173). He begins asking Jane strange questions about what she would do if others suddenly shunned him. Although Jane is concerned for Rochester, she seems to think

nothing of his alarming behavior or strange questions, especially when she sees Rochester talking cheerfully to Mr. Mason shortly thereafter.

That night, when Bertha attacks Mr. Mason, whose screams awaken the guests, Jane knows that the story Rochester feeds them is false—she knows on at least some level that he is hiding something—and dresses in preparation to help him, as she expects him to come for her. He does, and they go to the third floor, where Mr. Mason lies injured and bleeding. Rochester quickly silences Mr. Mason and warns both he and Jane—but especially Mr. Mason—not to speak to each other; both obey. Rochester has Mr. Mason treated and sent off before sunrise so no one will know what really happened. When Jane questions Rochester again about Grace Poole, whom she suspects of the attack, he simply gives a vague answer and asks Jane if she is his friend, gradually changing the subject. She replies, “I like to serve you, sir, and to obey you in all that is right” (185). However, Jane doesn’t consider what is right or wrong before obeying. She watches that morning as a chipper Rochester deceives his guests about Mason’s sudden departure. This situation is even more serious than the fire in Rochester’s room because someone has actually been injured, but once again Jane is willing to ignore the signs of trouble.

On Jane’s (supposed) last night as an unmarried woman, she sees a strange and terrifying woman in her room, who tears Jane’s wedding veil in two. Rochester gives an easily-disproved excuse and then blames Grace Poole, telling Jane that once they have been married for a year and one day, he will explain everything. By this point, Jane *knows* there is some kind of secret being kept from

her at Thornfield, and Rochester's private business is now her business, too.

Rochester has lied to her, unconvincingly, about the strange occurrences, but she accepts Rochester's proposal, and suspicious excuses and explanations, anyway: "satisfied I was not, but to please him I endeavoured to appear so" (243). Does Jane love Rochester so much, and want to marry him so badly, that she is willing to ignore all these blatant signs? It would appear so. Though Rochester is at fault for trying to illegally marry Jane, perhaps she could have avoided the scandal and heartbreak if she had been less eager to please him.

Jane's blind and eager acceptance of Rochester's lies is not her only submissive and self-repressive behavior; she exhibits several more. From the day Jane arrives at Thornfield until her eventual marriage to him, Jane refers to Rochester as "my master," even when she is no longer employed by him and the two are engaged—submissive (and therefore feminine) behavior that she will later exhibit to St. John (Warhol 868). This epithet is not entirely inaccurate—Jane is in fact employed by Mr. Rochester—but it is also not quite accurate, either: Jane is an educated middle-class lady hired as a governess to instruct Adèle and is therefore "unapproachable" to the other servants, who would undoubtedly call Rochester "master." (Poovey 169–170). Jane continues to refer to Rochester as her master after she leaves Thornfield, when she is no longer employed by him, and still yet when she returns to him at Ferndean, independently wealthy and socially equal to him. After her marriage, she seems to discontinue this practice, but that only includes the last few pages of the novel.

Not only does Jane accept Rochester's weak excuses and vague explanations about Thornfield's secret, but she also accepts his cruel treatment of her. Jane realizes early on that her relationship with Rochester is much more than that typical of a governess and employer, and she even begins to suspect (and hope) that he has romantic feelings for her. Yet Rochester carries on the charade of courting Blanche Ingram. He brings his group of gentlemen and ladies, which includes the Ingram family, to Thornfield solely so he can use Blanche to make Jane jealous. One of the cruelest things he does to Jane is to make her sit in the drawing-room, being the only non-aristocratic person there, while Rochester ignores her and "courts" Blanche, and the Ingrams and Eshtons give a scathing opinion of governesses. Jane leaves the room shortly thereafter on the brink of tears, yet she doesn't so much as mention Rochester's part in her unhappiness and only seems to love him the more for it.

Rochester doesn't merely imply that he intends to marry Blanche—he explicitly states it more than once. He first does so to Jane when disguised as a fortune-telling gypsy at Thornfield and soon after reveals his disguise to Jane (never mind his manipulative attempts to extract a confession of love from her while he is disguised). Jane asks if Rochester will be married, and the gypsy-Rochester responds, "[y]es; and to the beautiful Miss Ingram" (170). After multiple occasions of simply alluding to marriage to Blanche, Rochester once again directly refers to it. He begins to discuss with Jane that she must leave Thornfield because he is going to "enter into the holy state of matrimony—to take Miss Ingram to [his] bosom" (213). He continues, despite protests from Jane, to

discuss her possibilities—getting a new situation, perhaps with friends of his in Ireland. Of course, Rochester chooses such a far away place in hopes of obtaining a stronger and more satisfactory reaction from Jane. He succeeds. He refuses to honestly confess his love for Jane until he is convinced she returns his feelings—until she becomes so upset that she not only sobs openly, but also angrily confesses her feelings and fights him with all her strength when he tries to hug her. This is the reaction Rochester seeks from the woman he loves, and she doesn't give it a second thought once she accepts his proposal. Jane certainly “[cannot]...see God for his creature” (234).

Once the engagement commences, Jane reaches her most angelic point yet, but she makes one thing clear: “I am not an angel...and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me—for you will not get it” (221). Rochester ignores this and soon confesses, with a little prodding from Jane, that he was trying to make her jealous by carrying on with Blanche: “Well, I feigned courtship of Miss Ingram, because I wished to render you as madly in love with me as I was with you; and I knew jealousy would be the best ally I could call in for the furtherance of that end” (224). Jane hardly objects, and only until she is satisfied that Blanche hasn't been disappointed by the whole ordeal. However, Rochester admits no wrongdoing in his confession and continues manipulating and objectifying women—though now only Jane.

On the first full day of their engagement, Rochester sends away for the Rochester heirlooms and describes to Jane how he will cover her in jewels and

expensive fabrics, despite her repeated protestations that they wouldn't suit her and that she wouldn't be herself anymore if so appareled. Soon after, Rochester takes Jane into town and immediately begins buying her brightly-colored dresses, disregarding yet more protest from Jane. She feels her powerlessness keenly: "the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation...He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched" (229). It is not the mere difference in social rank that Jane recognizes and that foreshadows doom on this relationship; it is instead the way Rochester makes a doll out of Jane, a means of displaying his wealth. Jane knows from past conversations with Rochester that the more he gives a woman, the less he respects her, and she cites Céline Varens as an example. Jane thereby decides that she will continue to work as a governess for Rochester, even after they are married, earning her room, board, and salary.

This decision is a turning point for Jane: she recognizes the danger and begins to defend herself as much as she can, though she still idolizes Rochester more and more. Jane begins to parry Rochester's advances, caresses, and even compliments by provoking him or avoiding him altogether until the end of their engagement. Once Rochester's secret is revealed, however, Jane has the dignity and self-respect to leave Thornfield, though it is a difficult decision for her. It is the difficulty of this decision that causes Beth Kalikoff to identify Jane as a "falling woman," who differs from a fallen woman in that she has not actually fallen but faces strong temptation and in that marriage now becomes "the greatest

fall possible” (358). That Jane decides to leave despite such strong temptation teaches Jane about choice—both her power over it and, according to Kalikoff, her responsibility regarding it (365). This lesson will serve Jane well in another similar situation with St. John Rivers.

When Jane leaves Thornfield and travels to Moor House, some of her submissive behavior follows her there. Just as Jane easily bent to Rochester’s will at Thornfield, so does she now begin to bend to St. John Rivers. It begins when St. John offers Jane the position of mistress at the village school. Jane accepts it, of course, because she must take the first opportunity she can so as not to be a burden on the Rivers siblings, but the decision is also one that St. John wants her to make. From this point on, he gradually increases his pressure on Jane, persuading her to live the life he thinks she should live. He warns Jane not to be tempted by the life she fled, though he knows nothing about it. Then, after Jane becomes an heiress and leaves her position at the village school to spend time with Diana and Mary, St. John openly disapproves of her decision and urges her to find some useful employment:

Jane, I shall watch you closely and anxiously—I warn you of that. And try to restrain the disproportionate fervour with which you throw yourself into common-place home pleasures. Don’t cling so tenaciously to ties of the flesh; save your constancy and ardour for an adequate cause; forbear to waste them on trite transient objects. Do you hear, Jane? (333)

For the first time in her life, Jane has family, money, and a chance to relax, but St. John would have her work herself to death, just as he himself does. Jane deflects

his warning at first, but when he responds unappreciatively to the work she has done at Moor House and scolds her for wasting her time, Jane feels the blow. She travels in bad weather at his urging, no longer complains in his presence, so as not to upset him, and when he tells her to drop what she is doing and learn Hindostanee, she agrees. But Jane is not happy: “When he said ‘go,’ I went; ‘come,’ I came; ‘do this,’ I did it. But I did not love my servitude: I wished, many a time, he had continued to neglect me” (339). As Rochester did, St. John is dominating Jane’s will, though in a different way, and, also like Rochester, St. John “objectifies” Jane, as Laura Haigwood argues, treating her not like a doll but like a tool (7).

Once St. John has sufficiently dominated Jane’s will, he begins pressuring her in a new way—to be his wife. He doesn’t ask Jane to marry him, in the traditional sense, but rather demands it: “A missionary’s wife you must—shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you—not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign’s service” (343). Jane tries to excuse herself, but St. John persists, listing her qualifications. Jane attempts a new strategy—to go to India with St. John as his sister. He easily deflects this attempt, too, but there is a significant point here: Jane has agreed to go to India. Up to this point, Jane has never expressed any interest in leading a missionary’s life in India and has always found St. John’s interest in it odd. Jane also recognizes that a life in India means an early death. She only agrees to it now because she thinks it is what St. John wants from her. Just as before, with Rochester, the last man who dominated her, St. John’s pressure is strong and unrelenting. He dominates her emotionally and spiritually

and attempts to dominate her sexually by almost forcing her into a loveless marriage, but Jane overcomes his pressure and soon leaves Moor House.

Jane as Strong and Independent

This last phase of Jane's journey occurs primarily during her time at Moor House and then at Ferndean, but hints of it can be seen throughout her story. While at Gateshead, Jane realizes that her life is far from happy, yet she also realizes that the alternative—living with poor relatives on the Eyre side—is dangerous, and she recognizes the evils of poverty. When Mr. Lloyd suggests going away to school as a possibility for Jane, she quickly agrees, not only because school means for her the start of a new life, but also because it would allow her certain accomplishments as an adult. Two things are remarkable here for such a young child. Although Jane most likely does not plan on becoming a governess at this point, she recognizes that education is a means to a better life, in contrast to her idea of poverty. Furthermore, ten-year-old Jane is willing to leave behind everything and everyone she has ever known to go away to school, starting over as a mere child.

Years later when Jane leaves Lowood, she once again finds the strength to leave behind her old life to start a new one. Just as she did at Gateshead, Jane realizes that she is unhappy and decides to do something about it. She is unsure how to proceed at first, but quickly figures out that she must place an advertisement in the local newspaper. Of course, Jane succeeds and obtains her fateful position as a governess at Thornfield. She is mostly happy with her

position there, but she soon begins to feel as though something is missing, that being in charge of one girl's education is not completely fulfilling for her:

Woman are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their effort as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or to laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (93)

Jane wants more from life, and her intellect and passion require more than just interaction with a fashion-obsessed eight-year-old girl and a kind but simple-minded housekeeper. However, Jane has trials yet to endure before she finds satisfaction.

Rochester seems, for a while at least, to provide Jane with the fulfillment she has been searching for. The two of them are always talking, sometimes playfully, and sometimes seriously on deeper subjects. Jane openly tells Rochester that she does not find him handsome, sparing him superficial flattery, and Rochester freely tells Jane, his eighteen-year-old female employee, about his affair with Céline Varens, which most likely resulted in Adèle. Perhaps most importantly, Jane is aware of the other side of Rochester's stories, both when he

explains Adèle's origins and when he explains the history of Bertha Mason Rochester (Berg 127). Temma Berg observes, for example, that Jane believes Rochester would lock her up, too, if she went mad. However, this awareness doesn't stop Jane from loving and eventually worshipping him.

When Bertha's existence is revealed literally moments before Jane is to be married, she suffers the most severe trial of her life, the dual trial of coping with loss and resisting temptation. The loss, Jane says, she can "bear and master," but resisting temptation—the temptation of becoming Rochester's mistress—proves almost impossible (253). However, by the following morning, Jane has made her decision and leaves Thornfield. The reasoning that leads Jane to this decision contrasts sharply with the philosophy she expressed to Helen Burns in her Lowood days. After Mr. Brocklehurst accuses Jane of lying, Helen attempts to comfort her: "If all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved you, and absolved you from guilt, you would not be without friends"; Jane emphatically disagrees, stating, "if others don't love me, I would rather die than live" (58). Now however, Jane's attitude has changed. When she is tempted to become Rochester's mistress, all the more because she has no friends or family to object on her behalf, she arrives at the most important realization in the novel: "*I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself*" (emphasis in original, 270). Once again, Jane sets out in the world, alone, ready to start over, although this time she doesn't have anywhere to go or anyone to help her.

When Jane leaves Thornfield, she takes nothing with her but what was hers before she became engaged to Rochester. Jane knows that this is the only way for her to get away from Thornfield. She takes none of the clothing or jewelry he bought her in Millcote, nor does she even have all of the salary that Rochester owed her up to that point. Though she grudgingly accepted his gifts when she was engaged to marry him, she feels they are no longer hers: “I left that; it was not mine: it was the visionary bride’s, who had melted in air” (273). Perhaps these items also seem tainted to Jane; at the very least, they are associated with the temptation that she must avoid.

Once Jane arrives at Moor House and recovers from her malnourishment on the moors, she immediately recognizes a likeness of herself in Diana and Mary Rivers. The sisters are educated and intellectual, teaching Jane what they know and being taught by Jane likewise, and provide Jane with the kind of companionship she wants, and the kind she had temporarily found in Mr. Rochester: “I devoured the books the lent me: then it was full satisfaction to discuss with them in the evening what I had perused during the day. Thought fitted though; opinion met opinion: we coincided, in short, perfectly” (298). This is the first time in her life that Jane has had true female friends her own age to whom she can relate, and this “sisterly solidarity...opens up paths for Jane’s intellectual and emotional growth” (Wyatt 209). As Elaine Showalter points out, during Jane’s past experiences with other women—at Gateshead, Lowood, and Thornfield—they “police each other on behalf of patriarchal tyranny” and generally cannot help each other (71). Helen Burns, of course, was a good friend

of Jane's, but the two did not have similar enough outlooks on life that they could benefit each other. Miss Temple had an important influence on Jane, but she was both a mother figure and an authority figure. Diana and Mary Rivers are Jane's peers, and their friendship improves Jane's sense of self-worth.

Jane's relationship with the third Rivers sibling, St. John, is very different. He is distant and cold, and when he begins to gradually pressure Jane to his ends, she either deflects them or does not seem to notice these strange attentions. By the time she realizes what is happening—when St. John demands marriage—it is almost too late. Jane is at first only able to make excuses against marriage with St. John, and even that is difficult for her, but she can easily refuse him when he touches on the topic of love: “undoubtedly enough of love would follow upon marriage to render the union right even in your eyes” (348). Jane knows that St. John is in love with Rosamond Oliver, the novel's angel woman (Helen Burns would have been an angel woman, too, had she survived her childhood). Moreover, Jane knows what it is to love and be loved and remembers the sacrifices she made in spite of it. Jane has always been frank with St. John, as she was with Rochester, but never in their acquaintance has she defied his self-righteousness so boldly: “I scorn your idea of love...I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer: yes, St. John, and I scorn you when you offer it” (348). St. John's grip on Jane is gone, and she soon leaves Moor House to find out what became of Mr. Rochester.

When Jane leaves Moor House, she does so not only to seek news of Rochester, but also because she recognizes the danger of St. John's dominating

will. Likewise, she had left Thornfield because of Rochester's dominating will. Lowood also housed a dominant male figure in the form of Mr. Brocklehurst, just as Gatehead was home to the cruel and oppressive John Reed. Every place Jane has lived for any amount of time (Ferndean excluded) contained a man who, despite his intentions, relentlessly imposed his will onto Jane. Each time, she takes the only option that allows her to get away from these men, yet something that most women would be unwilling to do: she leaves. This also reinforces the idea of a journey or quest because Jane is not just passively moving through life; she takes control of her fate.

Throughout her time at Moor House, Jane thinks of Rochester and wonders about his fate. She fears for his life because of the hurt she caused him when she left, and then again later when she arrives at the burnt-down ruins of Thornfield. When she learns from a local that Rochester lives, she makes an important decision and returns to Rochester on her own terms. Millicent Bell points out that because of her inheritance, Jane no longer needs to marry but chooses to (268). She now seeks out Rochester, much unlike her previous relationship with him, when *he* sought *her*. Jane is equal to or perhaps even more powerful than Rochester now, socially, financially, physically, and, most importantly, emotionally. She "has gained the ascendancy in their relationship" because she is emotionally superior now and no longer emotionally dependant on him (Sullivan 70). However, she does not abuse her power over Rochester as he did during their original engagement. Whereas Rochester intentionally feigned courtship with Blanche Ingram, Jane does not deceive him about the time she

spent away from him. She never tells Rochester anything that even implies that she had a romantic relationship with St. John; she merely answers his questions as he proceeds to convince himself that Jane is romantically attached to St. John. Although Jane lets him believe what he will, she only does so, as she says, because she thinks anger would distract him from his gloom. Rochester's motives when it came to Blanche were less honorable: he admitted to Jane that he wanted to make her jealous.

Rochester and Jane marry, and this is the end of her journey as far as the reader is concerned. JoAnna Stephens Mink argues that Jane's ending is disappointing to the modern reader; she becomes "increasingly passive," and "her final choice is conventionality" (11). Likewise, Esther Godfrey finds the ending "unsettling" and finds that it may contradict other messages in the novel (853). However, as shown above, during the third phase in Jane's journey, she moves decidedly away from passivity and toward individuation. Likewise, her final choice is not conventionality but happiness. She has overcome many obstacles and achieved her heart's desire. Having long since forgiven John Reed, Brocklehurst, and Rochester for their treatment of her, she now forgives St. John and accepts the fate that he has chosen for himself, expecting news of his death before long. Although Jane sustains no regular employment after her marriage, she stays busy taking care of Rochester and making sure that Adèle's school experiences are not as miserable as her own were. Jane is happy and fulfilled because she took an active role in her life and shaped her own destiny. She had to experience and reject the two extreme characteristics—angry rebellion and

submissive self-repression—to arrive at her destination. Women like Jane are rare in Victorian literature, even though she is one of the most well-known heroines from Victorian literature, and she deserves a positive paradigm of womanhood outside of the angel-demon dichotomy. The next heroine, *The Woman in White*'s Marian Halcombe, is another unconventional but well-liked character who also defies the standards of Victorian womanhood.

“Firm as a Rock”: Marian Halcombe

Wilkie Collins’s highly successful sensation novel, *The Woman in White*, opens with a very telling line from Walter Hartright, the novel’s main narrator: “This is the story of what a Woman’s patience can endure, and what a Man’s resolution can achieve.” The odd capitalization in the opening sentence establishes that gender roles will be a prominent theme in the novel, and most of the characters adhere to these standard Victorian gender roles. In fact, only one character deviates, and she is Marian Halcombe.

Just as Marian Halcombe, a single, orphaned young woman, is marginalized in the novel as a character with no place, so has she been marginalized into otherness by critics. D.A. Miller, for example, claims that Marian is a man in a woman’s body and denies her any sexuality, be it male or female, while Laurel Erickson connects Marian with lesbianism because of her erotic desire for Laura. On the other hand, Nina Auerbach interprets Marian as the novel’s only true hero; Susan Balée calls her an “androgynous heroine” and a “wonderful alternative version of womankind” (199). In a novel of gender roles, Marian Halcombe’s character inevitably invites debate.

After publication of *The Woman in White*, Wilkie Collins began receiving letters from bachelors who wanted to marry the real-life inspiration for Marian’s character, hoping such a woman existed (Hyder 303, Balée 199, Lonoff 103). Marian Halcombe is a female character unlike those that Victorian readers were accustomed to. She speaks her mind, doesn’t submit to any man’s will, and openly rejects the idea of marriage, which was a major life goal for most Victorian women. While she has many qualities

traditionally considered masculine, she is not manly; although she also has feminine qualities, she is not a traditional woman. Marian is a strong woman with a mixture of both feminine and masculine qualities, and her intelligence, independence, and courage make her one of the most likeable and memorable characters in Victorian fiction.

Marian as a Man

The reader's first glimpse of Marian comes through Walter Hartright's eyes. Walter arrives at Limmeridge House late at night and does not meet his pupils until the next day. He enters the breakfast room that morning, unnoticed by Marian Halcombe, whose back is toward him. Before announcing his presence, he takes a few minutes to appreciate her physical attractiveness. She finally notices him, and as she turns and approaches, Walter exclaims in his narrative, "The lady is ugly!" (21). He then describes her ugliness in more detail: "The lady's complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark brown on her upper lip was almost a moustache. She had a large, firm, masculine mouth and jaw; prominent, piercing, resolute brown eyes; and thick, coal-black hair, growing unusually low down on her forehead" (22). He refers to the "masculine look and masculine form" of her face, comparing the combination of her attractive body and masculine face to the "anomalies and contradictions of a dream" (22). Walter's description in this early scene fixes Marian for the rest of the novel as a masculine character. Like Jane Eyre, she is no beauty, and this is the reader's first indication that she will be a marginalized character.

Walter is not the only person who sees Marian as masculine; Marian herself is aware of at least some of her masculine qualities. During the stressful time of Laura's

engagement to Sir Percival, which Marian opposes, she struggles to keep herself from crying, and her reason is thus: “My tears do not flow so easily as they ought—they come almost like men’s tears, with sobs that seem to tear me in pieces, and that frighten everyone about me” (128). Later in the novel, she mentions that her hands “always were, and always will be, as awkward as a man’s” (180). While Laura generally worships Marian, she, too, mentions one of Marian’s masculine qualities, though it is an indirect association. After moving to Blackwater Park, Laura is pleased that some of her and Marian’s things have been moved into the house, making it more like Limmeridge. One of the things she notices is Marian’s “horrid, heavy, man’s umbrella” that Marian “always would walk out with when it rained” (166).

Aside from outward, physical characteristics that are described as masculine, Marian also has a personality trait that can be considered masculine. As Walter Hartright establishes in the novel’s opening line, resolution is a masculine quality, and Marian, as Susan Balée points out, is frequently described, in various ways, as “resolute” (Balée 210). In the previously discussed scene where Walter first meets Marian, he describes her “piercing, resolute brown eyes” (22). Even Mr. Gilmore, in the mere thirty pages his narrative is allotted, mentions Marian’s resolution by describing her as “resolute, clear-minded Miss Halcombe” (104). Much later in the novel, just before her excursion onto the verandah roof at Blackwater Park, Marian writes, “I was fortified in my resolution” as she prepares to eavesdrop on Sir Percival and Count Fosco (252). While listening in on their private meeting, Marian overhears Fosco warn Percival about the difficulty she presents; Fosco asks Percival, “Can you look at Miss Halcombe, and not see that she has the foresight and resolution of a man?” (256). When Marian awakens the next day,

confused and fevered, she reminds herself of her resolution for self-control and to protect Laura until they can leave Blackwater Park. Thus, Marian is established as a resolute character, furthering her masculinity.

As any reader will quickly notice, Marian constantly makes negative remarks about women, which critics like D.A. Miller interpret as connecting her to modern ideas of lesbianism (128). On Walter's very first morning at Limmeridge, he has breakfast with just Marian, while Laura nurses "that essentially feminine malady, a slight headache" in her room (22). In the course of conversation, Marian openly states, "You see I don't think much of my own sex, Mr. Hartright...no woman does think much of her own sex, although few of them confess it as freely as I do" (23). As if to strengthen whatever impression this last statement has made on Walter, Marian leaves him with, "I will give you some tea to compose your spirits, and do all a woman can (which is very little, by-the-by) to hold my tongue." Walter struggles at first to respond, which Marian notices, and she explains both her open way of speaking and her relation to the other Limmeridge residents. In doing so, she manages yet another remark: "I am as inaccurate, as women usually are, in calling Mr. Fairlie my uncle, and Miss Fairlie my sister" (23). Marian then moves on to the topic of drawing, and before Walter can get a word in, she says, "Women can't draw—their minds are too flighty and their eyes are too inattentive" (24). Whatever impression Marian has made on readers (Victorian or modern readers) at this point, she has left Walter with a favorable impression, and the two immediately become friends.

As the narrative moves forward, Marian's remarks about women become more and more harsh, reflecting her increasing anxiety. Once Marian realizes that Walter and Laura are in love, she feels it is her duty to inform him of Laura's engagement to Sir

Percival. Marian advises Walter to forget his love and to “[c]rush it! Here, where you first saw her, crush it! Don’t shrink under it like a woman. Tear it out; trample it under foot like a man!” (53). As Laura’s engagement progresses, Marian breaks down in tears, which she laments as “miserable, weak, women’s tears of vexation and rage,” much different from her previous statement that she cried like a man (141). After Laura’s unfortunate marriage has taken place, and Marian moves to Blackwater Park to await Laura’s arrival, she finds it difficult to sleep at night. Marian imagines what she would do about her restlessness if she were a man, but then returns to reality: “Being, however, nothing but a woman, condemned to patience, propriety, and petticoats, for life, I must respect the housekeeper’s opinions, and try to compose myself in some feeble and feminine way” (154). This line is perhaps Marian’s most openly sarcastic remark, as well as the most amusing. From this point on, Marian and Laura’s situation becomes increasingly dire, and Marian is too concerned about Laura to make more than the occasional disparaging remark about women. As Marian prepares to spy on Fosco and Percival from the verandah roof, her riskiest action yet, she worries about her courage, which is “only a woman’s courage” (252). Fortunately, it is enough for her to succeed. Once she and Laura are reunited with Walter, who immediately enlists Marian to re-establish Laura’s identity, Marian tells him, “[y]ou shall not regret, Walter, that you have only a woman to help you” (349).

Aside from simply berating women with her remarks, Marian frequently ponders what she would do in certain situations if she were a man. While she is at Blackwater Park waiting for Laura to return from her honeymoon, in the scene discussed earlier, Marian writes, “[i]f I had the privileges of a man, I would order out Sir Percival’s best

horse instantly, and tear away on a night-gallop, eastward, to meet the rising sun” (154). Upon Percival and Laura’s arrival, Marian also meets Percival’s friend, Count Fosco, and his wife. She is immediately interested in the Count, much more so than his wife, and the Count quickly pours on the charm. His tactics work, and Marian writes, “He flatters my vanity, by talking to me as seriously and sensibly as if I was a man” (174). Life at Blackwater Park is not as happy as Marian and Laura had hoped, and Percival and the Count quickly become the sisters’ enemies. On the night of Percival’s first attempt to have Laura sign his mysterious document, Marian defends Laura, and in response, Percival is very rude. Marian describes her reaction: “I started to my feet as suddenly as if he had struck me. If I had been a man, I would have knocked him down on the threshold of his own door, and have left his house, never on any earthly consideration to enter it again. But I was only a woman” (193). It is clear at this point that Marian’s life would indeed be easier if she were a man.

At other times, Marian doesn’t seem to think much more of men than she does of women. In describing Laura’s engagement, Marian tells Walter that “she was in the position of hundreds of other women, who marry men without being greatly attracted to them or greatly repelled by them, and who learn to love them (when they don’t learn to hate!) after marriage, instead of before” (53). Less than one hundred pages later, Marian’s thoughts on men and marriage have become even bitterer (before she has even had a glimpse of the real, cruel Percival), and she gives her most famous tirade in the novel:

No man under heaven deserves these sacrifices from us women. Men!

They are the enemies of our innocence and our peace—they drag us away from our parents’ love and our sisters’ friendship—they take us body and

soul to themselves, and fasten our helpless lives to theirs as they chain up a dog to his kennel. And what does the best of them give us in return? Let me go, Laura—I'm mad when I think of it! (141)

The married state certainly isn't one that Marian is eager to enter, and she is now fully opposed to Laura's upcoming marriage, though she cannot give Mr. Gilmore a proper reason.

All of these masculine qualities—masculine facial features, resolution, seemingly misogynistic remarks, desire for the privileges of a man, and opposition to marriage—have been used to identify Marian with manhood and masculinity. D.A. Miller flips the Victorian theory of a woman trapped in a man's body (the Victorian view of homosexual males, as Miller explains) and posits Marian as a “man-in-the-woman,” even saying that Marian personifies “the fantasy of the man-in-the-woman” (129). He also associates her loosely with modern ideas of lesbianism because of her “unwillingness to lend her full cooperation to male appropriations of her,” which the Victorian man expected from the Victorian woman, and because she “defiantly bides her time with women” (128). While Laurel Erickson discourages labeling Marian as a lesbian (the Victorians, she explains, has no such term, and our understanding of lesbianism contains many negative aspects which would skew Marian's character), she refers to Marian as an “odd woman” and describes her same-sex desire for Laura (96–98).

Despite all of the supposedly masculine qualities that Marian displays, she is neither a man trapped in a woman's body nor a lesbian. There are many different interpretations to reconsider in reaching this point. First, Marian's physical qualities that Walter describes as masculine are just that—what *Walter* sees as masculine. As Karen

Gindele points out, “[t]he shock at Marian’s appearance comes only from Walter. Fosco is unreservedly attracted to her” (70). Walter not only has the most narrative authority of all the characters, but he is also the only one to describe Marian’s appearance in any way. Even when he describes Marian’s appearance, his description is vague and more a description of his interpretation of her appearance than a description of her appearance itself. The most concrete details the reader gets are that her complexion is dark, *almost* swarthy, and that there is something dark above her lip that is *almost* a moustache. Any other masculine features are simply described as masculine, without anything more specific. Similarly, it is Walter who, in the opening line, categorizes patience as a feminine trait and resolution as a masculine one. This categorization doesn’t hold up, however, as even Laura Fairlie is described as resolute at least once, effectively making resolution a genderless trait.

Marian’s various remarks, whether disparaging women or marriage, or expressing desire for a man’s privileges, reflect not misogyny, lesbianism, or the wish to be a man, but rather her frustration with the social position of women. Sue Lonoff explains Marian’s remarks particularly well: “she laments her inferior status as a woman even as she proves her superiority” (143). As a woman, Marian can do nothing about Laura’s upcoming marriage to Percival, which Laura clearly dreads. Once Laura and Percival are married and he begins treating her and Marian with coldness and cruelty, Marian once again can do nothing for her sister but appeal to the nearest man, Mr. Gilmore or Mr. Fairlie, and hope for help from that quarter. After the identity swap has been committed, Marian’s only recourse to help Laura is bribery and escape. Therefore, Marian does not detest *being* a woman, but the *powerlessness* of being a woman; she does not wish to *be* a

man, but simply wishes for the *power and privileges* of a man. Like Jane Eyre, Marian is unhappy with a woman's limited options in life.

Marian as a Woman

With all the discussion of Marian's masculine qualities, one thing has been completely overlooked: her feminine qualities. Perhaps her most significant feminine quality is her physically attractive body, in contrast to her ugly face. On Walter's first meeting with Marian, her face is not immediately visible and he describes her body in detail before she notices him and approaches:

The instant my eyes rested on her, I was struck by the rare beauty of her form, and by the unaffected grace of her attitude. Her figure was tall, yet not too tall; comely and well-developed, yet not fat; her head set on her shoulders with an easy, pliant firmness; her waist, perfection in the eyes of a man, for it occupied its natural place, it filled out its natural circle...The easy elegance of every movement of her limbs and body as soon as she began to advance from the far end of the room, set me in a flutter of expectation to see her face clearly. (21)

He describes her shoulders as ones "that a sculptor would have longed to model" and her hands as "rather large, but beautifully formed"; he is "charmed by the modest graces of action through which the symmetrical limbs betrayed their beauty when they moved" (22). Walter's description of Marian so far paints her as very womanly, and, as Philip O'Neill notes, "[i]t seems that once again the reader is in the process of being introduced to a standard Victorian heroine," though a

sexualized one (115). It seems that way, however, for only another sentence or two, until Walter reveals Marian's ugly and masculine face. It is worth noting, though, that Walter's description begins with her attractive feminine characteristics, followed by her masculine head (Richard Collins 139). This means that Marian's feminine characteristics are prominent and she is first and foremost a woman.

The feminine aspects of Marian's personality seep out in bits as the novel progresses. After Walter's initial shock at Marian's ugliness and his description of it, she introduces herself to him, "her dark face lighting up with a smile, and softening and growing womanly the moment she began to speak" (22). Much later in the novel, when Count Fosco reads Marian's diary and adds his thoughts to it, he seems to have particularly enjoyed Marian's "charming outbursts of womanly feeling" (266). She even resigns herself to housework toward the end of the novel, while she and Walter fight to establish Laura's identity. Marian doesn't so much as hesitate, taking on the housework on the very first day of their new living arrangements and telling Walter, "[w]hat a woman's hands are fit for...early and late, these hands of mine shall do" (344).

Marian's biggest tie to the world of Victorian womanhood is her tenacious adherence to propriety. Even as Marian laments propriety's hold on women (whom she sees as "condemned to patience, propriety, and petticoats, for life"), she refuses to violate this Victorian code, and only begins to do so when her and Laura's situations become increasingly dire. In Walter's first conversation with Marian at Limmeridge House, her sense of propriety begins to show. Although

she speaks very freely, which surprises Walter at first, she has her limits. As she compares herself to Laura, Marian cuts herself off: “Try some of that marmalade, Mr. Hartright, and finish the sentence, in the name of female propriety, for yourself” (23). Of course, shortly after Walter’s arrival, he and Laura find themselves falling in love, which the ever-sharp Marian quickly notices. She informs Walter of Laura’s engagement and separates the lovers—even though she prefers Walter over Percival as a husband for Laura—in the name of propriety once again, which she later regrets. It is propriety that keeps her from accompanying Laura on her honeymoon, from striking Percival when he is particularly rude to her, and from taking Laura out of Blackwater Park as soon as the situation becomes hostile. Instead, propriety is Marian’s guide as she humors Countess Fosco’s strange request for a walk (while the Count intercepts her letter), apologizes to the Countess when Laura calls the Count a spy, only stays in lodgings recommended by married persons, and waits for Mr. Fairlie’s approval to return to Limmeridge before planning to leave Blackwater Park. If it weren’t for Marian’s strong sense of propriety, the novel would have ended much sooner and much happier. Jerome Meckier makes an excellent point that Victorian women were the biggest adherents to the code of propriety, and “always the greatest losers by it” (114); Marian’s strong sense of propriety is essentially her biggest fault. More than just a fault, however, propriety is one of Marian’s strongest identifiers as a woman.

One feminine aspect of Marian’s character that has been entirely neglected until now is her manner of dress. When Walter is for the first time in the company

of Laura, Marian, and Mrs. Vesey at the same time, he observes that Marian and Mrs. Vesey are “richly clad,” while Laura is “unpretendingly and almost poorly dressed in plain white muslin,” making Laura look like a poor or underclass woman and Mrs. Vesey and Marian look wealthy, when the situation is actually the opposite (39). Later, while preparing to eavesdrop on Percival and Fosco at Blackwater Park, Marian comments, “in my ordinary evening costume, I took up the room of three men at least,” so she must remove “the white and cumbersome parts of [her] underclothing” (252). She also mentions that her gown is silk (compared to Laura’s muslin), as is Countess Fosco’s gown, whose characteristic rustling always reveals her clandestine presence to Marian and Laura. Therefore, despite her unhappiness with a woman’s lot in life (“condemned to patience, propriety, and petticoats”), Marian dresses in traditional Victorian women’s dress, a seemingly small and easily overlooked detail that serves as yet another tie to womanhood.

Just as one aspect of Marian’s dress reveals her femininity, another aspect of her dress takes away from it: Marian does not wear a corset. Walter points this out to the reader, in his early description of her, by describing her waist as “visibly and delightfully undeformed by stays” (21). Although the ultra-traditional Walter appreciates the lack of stays, wearing them was the standard, as well as an important indicator of femininity for Victorian women (Gomel and Weninger 34). Elana Gomel and Stephen Weninger interpret her fashion choice to show that she is “female but not feminine, alluring but not beautiful, masculine but not male”

(34). The fact that Marian wears no corset indicates her unconventionality and the lack of self-imposed restriction that she displays throughout the novel.

Even though the above qualities, overlooked until now, have feminized Marian and revealed her womanly side, she will never be a traditional Victorian woman, especially when compared to her half-sister, Laura, the novel's standard, traditional Victorian heroine—pretty, quiet, and completely submissive to the nearest and dearest male in her life, even if he is dead (as was her father when she fulfilled his wishes by marrying Percival). The novel demands that this comparison be made: Marian and Laura are the only major female characters in the novel, and they are constantly together, next to each other, perhaps intentionally juxtaposed. Marian herself invites this comparison early in the novel, before the reader (or Walter) is even introduced to Laura:

Except that we are both orphans, we are in every respect as unlike each other as possible. My father was a poor man, and Miss Fairlie's father was a rich man. I have got nothing, and she has a fortune. I am dark and ugly, and she is fair and pretty. Everybody thinks me crabbed and odd (with perfect justice); and everybody thinks her sweet-tempered and charming (with more justice still). In short, she is an angel; and I am—— (23)

Marian does not finish her last sentence and instead asks Walter to finish it. The most obvious word is “demon” or even “devil,” and so she might be seen by someone who only considered the superficial qualities she mentions. In contrast, the angelic Laura, passive and asexual, epitomizes “the Angel in the House,” the

Victorian ideal of womanhood (Christ, 146–147). Shortly thereafter, Walter meets Laura and can begin the comparison for himself.

Marian has already pointed out the most striking contrasts between herself and Laura—the difference in wealth and appearance. The next most obvious contrast is one that neither Marian nor Laura would ever point out themselves: the difference in sexuality. Neither of them is married when the novel begins, so the reader assumes they are both virgins. Laura, being the standard Victorian woman, has no sexuality, while Marian’s sexuality is much more developed. When Walter describes Laura upon first meeting her, his innocent description is limited to her face, with a brief description of her apparel (a muslin dress and scarf and a straw hat). When he described Marian several pages earlier, his description was much more detailed and included her body as well as her face. When he first entered the room unnoticed, he took a few moments to admire and describe her body, which D.A. Miller likens to a striptease (126). Walter also noticed that Marian does not wear a corset, and he appreciates the better view of her figure that this allows. Once he sees her face, however, he is no longer attracted to her and he eliminates her as a potential romantic interest. Later, Fosco is attracted to Marian, whom he calls “the first and last weakness of Fosco’s life” (491), while he contemptuously calls Laura Percival’s “poor flimsy pretty blonde wife” (256).

As the arrangements progress for Laura and Percival’s wedding, Marian is integrally involved in both the planning and the approval of the wedding and the honeymoon. Laura wants Marian to join her for the honeymoon, and Marian must tell Laura the realities of marriage:

It nearly broke my heart to dispel her delusion, and to bring her face to face with the hard truth. I was obliged to tell her that no man tolerates a rival—not even a woman rival—in his wife’s affections, when he first marries, whatever he may do afterwards....Drop by drop, I poured the profaning bitterness of this world’s wisdom into that pure heart and that innocent mind, while every higher and better feeling within me recoiled from my miserable task. It is over now. She has learnt her hard, her inevitable lesson. The simple illusions of her girlhood are gone; and my hand has stripped them off. Better mine than his—that is all my consolation—better mine than his. (145)

Marian is supposedly just explaining to Laura that a honeymoon is just for husband and wife, but Marian seems to be hinting at much more. It seems as though Marian is giving Laura “the talk,” explaining to her the responsibilities of marriage, including what to expect on her wedding night. Percival makes it clear, later on, that Laura never performs her wifely duties, on her wedding night or any night thereafter during the course of their marriage. While Percival and Fosco are having their secret conversation about their conspiracy, Fosco inquires as to the possibility of Laura leaving behind children in the event of her death. Percival replies that leaving children is something “which she is not in the least likely to do” (258). When it comes to sexuality, Laura is naïve, innocent, and sexless, while Marian is knowledgeable and more sexually developed.

Passive, asexual, weak Laura pays for her traditional woman status. She refuses to break the rules of being a woman, and her sufferings in Blackwater

Park, at Fosco's house in London, and especially in the insane asylum, in addition to the loss of her identity, serve as punishment (Barickman, MacDonald, and Stark 116). Even though Laura gets what she wants in the end, she is submitting herself to yet another man—first to “a benevolent, but deluded father, then to an evil husband, and finally to a ‘good’ husband, with hardly a murmur of protest,” as Barickman, MacDonald, and Stark observe (113). This situation is similar to Jane Eyre's in that Jane encounters a dominating male figure in each part of her life, but Jane is able to flee from them. Additionally, she is not the same Laura at the end of the novel that she was before her ordeal; she is now faded and frail, a shell of her former self, though even weaker.

Marian as a Strong and Independent Woman

Although Marian possesses some qualities that would be considered masculine by Victorian standards, she is by no means a man, or even a man in a woman's body. On the other hand, her feminine qualities are limited, and she is nowhere near the traditional woman that her half-sister Laura is. Instead, Marian is a hybrid of masculine and feminine qualities, a strong and independent woman whose unconventionality should not be shunned but embraced.

Although Marian, like almost all Victorian women, is financially dependent on others, she certainly knows how to handle the men in her life, something Jane Eyre eventually learned as well. In the beginning of the novel, Marian is dependent on Laura's hypochondriac uncle, Mr. Fairlie. Despite the fact that Mr. Fairlie owns Limmeridge and has no relation to Marian, she essentially

runs Limmeridge; Mr. Fairlie prefers to lie in his room while pushing the burden of everyday life onto Marian (Perkins and Donaghy, 398), which she notes in her journal: “Mr. Fairlie...seemed perfectly satisfied, so far, with simply having shifted one more family responsibility from his own shoulders to mine” (140–141). Marian is well aware of his nervousness and frailty and uses it to her advantage. For example, when the date for Laura’s wedding has been arranged by Mr. Fairlie and Sir Percival, Laura passively accepts, and Marian relays this message to Mr. Fairlie. Marian expresses her frustration with the situation almost violently: “As it was, I dashed into Mr. Fairlie’s room—called to him as harshly as possible, ‘Laura consents to the twenty-second’—and dashed out again without waiting for a word of answer. I banged the door after me; and I hope I shattered Mr. Fairlie’s nervous system for the rest of the day” (142–143). By the end of the novel, Marian has Mr. Fairlie under her finger, and his response to her letter is even comical: “The moment I heard Miss Halcombe’s name, I gave up. It is a habit of mine to always give up to Miss Halcombe. I find, by experience, that it saves noise. I gave up on this occasion. Dear Marian!” (269).

Marian has a similar ability when it comes to both Percival and the Count, although the Count is a much more difficult man to handle. Once Marian and Laura are reunited at Blackwater Park after the Glydes’ long honeymoon, Marian sees the true Sir Percival, particularly his short temper. She immediately sees his temper as his weakness and uses it to her advantage. All Marian has to do is anger Percival, because any time Percival’s temper reaches boiling point, the Count interferes and the matter is put off. Although this interference seems to make the

Count a potential ally, Laura confides in Marian that she does not like him. Marian has already seen the Count's influence over Sir Percival and warns Laura, "[w]hatever you do, don't make an enemy of the Count!" (194, 199). Shortly thereafter, Percival catches Laura meeting secretly with Anne Catherick after a tip-off from the Count. Laura's situation deteriorates even more, and she angrily calls the Count "the vilest creature breathing" and "a miserable spy" (233). The Countess overhears, and Marian bemoans Laura's remark: "Oh Laura! Laura! We shall both rue the day when you called the Count a spy!" (233). Marian is right of course, but so is Laura, as Walter discovers later in the novel.

Marian and Laura are very close, as we have seen, and they spend a majority of the novel together (and the same goes for the rest of their lives, too, as one can assume from the novel's ending). Marian is constantly trying to protect the poor, weak Laura, and Laura's weakness emphasizes Marian's strength (Auerbach 138). On the very same day that Walter arrives at Limmeridge, he shares with Marian his strange encounter with the woman in white the night before, and the two immediately begin investigating—which they actively hide from Laura because it concerns Laura's late mother. Laura's mother, however, is also Marian's mother, but Marian is somehow better able to cope with the strange circumstances involving her.

As the novel progresses, the sisters increasingly interact with men, mostly due to Laura's marriage. Marian almost always speaks or acts on Laura's behalf, as if in some attempt to protect her from hurtful and unpleasant things. D.A. Miller points out that the men in Laura's life conduct almost all their interactions

with her *through* Marian (124). Marian is the one who explains to Mr. Gilmore Laura's hesitation about her marriage, breaks the news of Laura's engagement to Walter, makes wedding arrangements with Percival and Mr. Fairlie, and requests that Mr. Fairlie allow Laura to return to Limmeridge after her unsuccessful stint as Lady Glyde. These things are all Laura's business, yet Marian handles them for her weak and childish sister. On the rare occasion that Laura speaks for herself, she must precede her speech with the claim, "I speak from my own thoughts, not from [Marian's]" in hopes of being taken seriously (130). On the other hand, Laura is able to interact regularly with other women, such as Anne Catherick, Mrs. Vesey, and the female servants at Blackwater Park.

Once Marian moves to Blackwater Park and Laura returns from her honeymoon, Marian is no less protective (she may even be *more* protective) of her now-married sister. As Marian and Laura continue to investigate the secret of Anne Catherick, Marian insists on secretly following Laura when she walks out to meet Anne. After Percival discovers his wife's activities, he locks her in her bedroom. While Laura can say little more than, "I was alone with him—what could I do?" (235) about Percival's treatment of her, Marian reminds Laura, "you are not quite helpless so long as I am here with you" (237). Marian angrily confronts Percival, and, on the Count's advice, Laura's door is unlocked and her gaoler-housemaid sent away. Marian writes in her journal that she has "no such fear of Sir Percival" and that "any woman who is sure of her own wits, is a match, at any time, for a man who is not sure of his own temper" (244). Shortly thereafter, Marian makes her boldest and most courageous move yet—her

excursion onto the verandah—which would have been a success, but for one detail: Marian becomes dangerously ill as a result.

At this point in the novel, Marian has investigated the mystery of Anne Catherick (albeit an unfinished investigation), confronted Percival about his treatment of Laura, appealed to the Fairlie family lawyer for help, and outwitted Fosco and Percival by climbing onto the roof to eavesdrop on their secretive meeting. She has been able to keep Percival at bay regarding the signature business as well as his cruel treatment of Laura. For the novel to continue, Marian must be stopped: “Collins can prevent her physical and mystical prowess from ending the novel prematurely only by striking her down with a violent illness just as she is about to spoil the suspense” (Auerbach, 138). Marian’s illness provides the Count with multiple windows of opportunity. The first thing he does is read her journal—her whole journal, as Ann Gaylin points out, to which the reader doesn’t have access—which fills him in on all the progress Marian has made and hopes to continue making, a clear advantage for the Count (320). The next opportunity is that of getting Laura away from Marian long enough to complete her identity switch with Anne Catherick by shutting Marian up in the unused wing of Blackwater Park. The feeble Laura, helpless without Marian to guide and protect her, is easily exploited by Fosco and Percival.

By the time Marian recovers, the switch of the two women has already been made, and Laura has been confined to an asylum. Although she believes Laura to be dead, Marian continues her investigation of the mysterious Anne Catherick. Marian doesn’t know the location of Anne’s asylum, but “that

important omission cast no difficulties in Miss Halcombe's way" (333). She knows it is a private asylum, and she also knows the general location from her conversation with Walter Hartright earlier in the novel. Marian goes to the asylum, recognizes Laura as the supposed Anne Catherick, and immediately begins working to free her, selling her property and using the money to bribe one of the asylum nurses into assisting with Laura's escape.

The day after Laura escapes from the asylum, Marian and Laura see Walter at Limmeridge House while Marian is there attempting to establish Laura's identity and Walter is paying his last respects at Laura's grave. The three begin living together in London while Walter seeks legal advice and digs up what he can about Sir Percival and Count Fosco. Although it seems as though Walter is doing all the work, earning the trio's meager living and conducting a dangerous investigation, Marian continues to prove herself capable. She has already freed Laura from the asylum, and now she "supervises her half-sister's rehabilitation; she eludes the Count by switching their residence; and, at the end of the novel, she takes Laura to claim Limmeridge without Walter's knowledge" (Donaghy and Perkins 399). Walter is absent, for one reason or another, during each of these accomplishments.

When Walter is around, he interacts primarily with Marian, as though she were the one he eventually marries, instead of Laura. Walter and Marian discuss all their plans and risks together and correspond regularly when they're apart, but they keep Laura in the dark and treat her like a child, taking her for walks and entertaining her with children's games. While Walter risks his life pursuing

Percival and Fosco, and Marian runs the household and protects Laura, Laura draws “dim,” “faint” sketches that Walter and Marian dupe her into believing people actually buy (356). After Percival’s death, Walter worries about breaking the news to Laura, although he shares the gruesome details freely and immediately with Marian: “In the case of any other woman, less courageous and less reliable, I might have hesitated before I ventured on unreservedly disclosing the whole truth” (416). When Walter returns from Knowlesbury after Percival’s death, he and Marian continue to keep Laura in the dark: “when Laura had left us...we could speak to one another without restraint” (436). Laura is unaware of her husband’s death, the real reason she and Marian had to move, the danger Walter has been putting himself in, and the real buyer of her drawings. Even the decision for Walter and Laura to resume a romantic relationship is Marian’s, as she speaks to each of them about it separately before they speak to each other. Laura is not completely oblivious to her situation, though, and remarks to Walter, “You will end up liking Marian better than you like me—you will, because I am so helpless!” (381).

In the end, Walter gets to keep both women. He has Laura, the pretty, angelic, perfect Victorian child-bride; and Marian, the sexy, intelligent, independent, dark woman to be his companion and his child’s aunt. While Marian described herself (implicitly) as a demon or a devil during her first conversation with Walter, he now describes her as “the good angel of our lives” in the novel’s closing line. Marian herself hasn’t changed over the course of the novel, but Walter’s view of her unconventional qualities has.

Just as Walter's view of Marian has changed over the course of the novel, so has the reader had a chance to see how her unconventional qualities make her a strong, independent, and admirable woman as well as an unforgettable character. Instead of being used to marginalize her, Marian's intelligence, independence, and courage should be embraced as desirable feminine qualities in any time period. As Susan Baleé puts it, "[c]learly, the moment for a new ideal of woman had come," and Wilkie Collins created just such an ideal when he created Marian Halcombe—just as Bram Stoker also created an ideal woman when he created Mina Murray Harker, our third heroine (199).

***Dracula's* Mina Harker: The Ideal Woman**

Most modern critical analyses of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* focus on one of two things: the underlying sexuality throughout the novel or the ways gender roles are subverted once a character has been transformed into a vampire. Because *Dracula* was published in the 1890s, a time of emerging feminism and New Woman writers, its heavy gender issues cannot escape close scrutiny. Some critics, such as Stephanie Demetrakopoulos, have interpreted the novel as being feminist, or at least exhibiting "Stoker's brand of feminism" (104). On the other hand, Carol Senf and Phyllis Roth interpret it as anti-feminist and critical of women's sexuality, primarily through identifying *Dracula's* three female vampires as New Women. The characters of Lucy Westrena and Mina Harker, the novel's two main female characters, have undergone similarly varying analyses. Mina, especially, has been the center of much gender discussion; as one of the main characters, if not *the* main character, Mina has been labeled (and criticized) by readers as both a traditional woman (by Judith Weissman) and a New Woman (by Stephanie Demetrakopoulos). However, she fits in neither category, but is a mixture of both: Mina Murray Harker is not only intelligent, hard-working, independent, and resourceful, but also nurturing and comforting, and thus loved and praised by everyone around her. She is Bram Stoker's version of the ideal woman and belongs in a new category of women.

Mina as the New Woman

The New Woman arrived in the late nineteenth century, primarily in fiction but also in real-life society, and threatened the Victorians' traditional idea of female gender roles. The term "New Woman" could refer to an actual woman, a fictional woman in a novel or story, or a female author who depicted such women (although women weren't the only authors to create these characters). According to Valeria Pedlar, the New Woman could represent any of several non-conventional views about womanhood. The most common stereotype of the New Woman is a negative one by Victorian standards: she would enjoy and even initiate sexual relationships outside of marriage; other less prominent characteristics were that she might pursue a career of her own (whether married or not), refuse marriage for various reasons, or accept the idea of marriage but assert her own sexuality and sexual rights within the marriage (226–227). Most critics identify Dracula's three vampire women as New Women because of their voluptuousness and sexual aggressiveness toward Jonathan Harker during his stay at Castle Dracula, and these women do indeed display a sexual freedom obviously associated with the New Woman. Unfortunately, this is typically where the discussion of the New Woman in the novel ends. Many critics focus only on the prominent stereotype of the New Woman as sexually open and ignore her other characteristics, as well as the other characters in the novel who exhibit them—particularly Mina Harker. However, a few critics, such as Jean Lorrh and Stephanie Demetrakopoulos, interpret Mina as the New Woman, with Demetrakopoulos directly stating that Mina "represents the 'New Woman' of the 1890s" (109).

Mina Harker, or Mina Murray, as she is in the beginning of the novel, could easily pass for a New Woman. Her primary New Woman quality is her employment as an assistant schoolmistress—similar to Jane Eyre’s employment as a teacher at Lowood and then as a governess. According to her letter to Lucy, she works very hard, saying that she is “simply overwhelmed with work” (67). Mina supports herself financially and doesn’t need a husband to do so for her. As Carol Senf puts it, “[b]y providing Mina with a responsible profession and a means of economic independence, Stoker reveals that she is a modern woman” (45). Though engaged, she is a working woman and at least shows some desire to develop herself professionally. Mina states in her letter that she is learning shorthand so that she can help Jonathan once they are married. She also keeps a journal, supposedly to keep up with Jonathan and give herself a chance to practice shorthand, but her comments to Lucy hint at something else: “I shall try to do what I see lady journalists do: interviewing and writing descriptions and trying to remember conversations” (67). She states, just a few lines earlier, that this journal is not intended for anyone’s reading (unlike Jonathan’s journal, which is originally written to share his experiences with her), but is more of an “exercise book.” What, then, is she practicing for? Perhaps she wants to work as a journalist. Mina doesn’t say, although there is the implication not only that she wants to be able to help her future husband in his work, but that this development has personal and intellectual benefits for her as well. Prescott and Giorgio notice this, too, and interpret Mina’s journal-keeping as “an attempt to establish a strong sense of self” (490).

While Mina mentions the New Woman in her journal, she doesn’t identify with this new idea. Her first comment is neutral. After an excellent lunch with Lucy, Mina

comments that they “should have shocked the New Woman with [their] appetites,” indicating that even a liberated woman would balk at their vigor (110). This benign comment merely shows that Mina is aware of the New Woman concept and brings it to the front of the reader’s mind. Later that day, as Mina watches Lucy sleep, she ponders, “[s]ome of the New Women writers will someday start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting” (110–111). She is likely referring to post-coital sleep (in an indirect way that is probably the only acceptable one), echoing the idea that New Women believe in sexual freedom. She has more to say: “But I suppose the New Woman won’t condescend in future to accept; she will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it, too! There’s some consolation in that” (111). Most critics, including Carol Senf, Phyllis Roth, and Rebecca Pope, interpret this as a sarcastic remark intended to criticize the New Woman, and Mina does indeed seem to disapprove of the New Woman’s sexual forwardness. However, as Jean Lorrh points out, sarcasm wouldn’t be consistent with the reading of a nineteenth-century text, or with Mina Harker’s character (32). So why would Mina find consolation in the idea of women proposing marriage? According to Stephanie Demetrakopoulos, this remark indicates that Mina sees women’s initiative as a good thing and believes that women should be allowed to choose a spouse (110). As we will see later on, Mina has much more choice when it comes to marriage than her friend Lucy does. Therefore, the remark is actually ambivalent, which coincides with the argument that Mina (Murray) Harker both is and isn’t a New Woman.

Although Mina is already engaged and can’t propose, as she imagines a New Woman would, what Mina does is hardly less assertive. After hearing of Jonathan’s

“brain fever,” Mina travels to meet him, care for him, and marry him. At the time she receives news of Jonathan’s illness, he is so ill that he cannot write and one of his caregivers writes for him. Mina takes the initiative to not only travel—alone—out of the country to meet him, but she plans their marriage as well (Lorrah 33). When Mina arrives at the hospital in Budapest where Jonathan is being cared for, she immediately arranges for their marriage, which takes place the next day as soon as Jonathan awakens. He is still so ill at the time of their marriage that he takes his marriage vows in bed, “propped up with pillows” (129). Clearly, Mina is in control here.

Perhaps the most important indication that Mina is *not* the New Woman is the change she undergoes once she is married. Her marriage itself does not negate her New Woman status, but the way she reacts to her new situation does. Once married, Mina leaves her job, and is thus no longer economically independent. She then takes on a much more supportive role, serving the men supper or tea and helping Jonathan with his work. Mina also clearly identifies with the more traditional role of the mother. For example, after Lucy’s staking, Mina sees that Arthur needs comfort and offers it to him. Arthur breaks down, and Mina embraces him, comparing him to a “wearied child” and comparing his head to “that of the baby that some day may lie on [her] own bosom,” commenting that “[w]e women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother-spirit is invoked” (272). Shortly thereafter, Mina says that “[n]o one but a woman can help a man when he is in trouble of the heart; and he had no one to comfort him” (273). She obviously identifies with the traditional role of nurturer and even becomes a mother at the end of the novel. Although she displays some

characteristics of the New Woman, her allegiance to tradition preempts her from actually becoming a New Woman.

Although Mina isn't a New Woman, Stoker's novel does provide us with a sample of this phenomenon. Dracula's three vampire women can be classified as New Women, or at least as "the image [of the New Woman] distorted through masculine fear" (Lorrah 32). The first time we see these women, they approach Jonathan Harker during his stay at Castle Dracula. Harker describes them as "fair" and "voluptuous." The women are very beautiful and easily seduce Harker, who is both enthralled and repulsed by them. The scene is blatantly sexual, and although the women are going to bite Harker, they refer to their actions as kisses, saying, "there are kisses for us all," making the sexuality of this scene more explicit (49). Readers don't see Dracula's women again until the end of the novel. Mina and Van Helsing are camped near Castle Dracula as Harker, Seward, Holmwood, and Morris pursue the Count. The three vampire women approach Mina and Van Helsing, beckoning Mina to join them: "Come, sister. Come to us. Come! Come!" (431). Although Mina has been bitten by Dracula several times at this point, her eyes are full of "terror," "repulsion," and "horror" at the sight of them, much to Van Helsing's relief (431). That evening, Van Helsing sets out to destroy these women. As he is about to do so, he gazes upon them, and they are "so fair to look on, so radiantly beautiful, so exquisitely voluptuous" that he almost cannot bring himself to strike. Van Helsing thinks of Mina and is able to finish his task. Although the vampire women only represent part of the New Woman idea, Stoker presents Dracula's demonic vampiresses as New Women, and he doesn't include Mina in this group.

Mina as the Traditional Woman

At times, Mina seems terribly traditional. After her marriage, her role changes to one of support for the band of vampire-hunting men. She no longer works, thus giving up meaningful employment in favor of marriage, but instead supports the men, serving tea and acting as a sort of clerk or secretary to them. Mina also provides emotional support to the men, particularly Arthur (when she consoles him and compares him to a child) and Dr. Seward, the two who seem to have taken Lucy's death(s) the hardest. Furthermore, when the men decide to exclude her from their grim business, supposedly for her own good, Mina passively accepts, even though "it was a bitter pill for [her] to swallow" (287). As Carol Senf points out, Mina abides by the wishes of the group rather than by her own (48).

Mina also acts as a kind of nineteenth-century cheerleader for the band of vampire hunters. After each grueling day, the men return to Seward's asylum to see Mina as smiling and cheerful as she can be despite whatever suffering she is experiencing herself. Even though Mina is upset about being left out, she is still expected to be a morale-booster for the men; for example, Van Helsing goes to "cheer [himself] with a few happy words with that sweet soul Madam Mina" (302). The next day, the men return home from an excursion, and Jonathan observes that "Mina was looking tired and pale, but she made a gallant effort to be bright and cheerful" (315). In the passive role that she has accepted, she can do little more than please the men with sweetness and smiles.

If the stereotypical New Woman believes in sexual freedom, then a traditional woman has virtually no sexuality at all. This is the case with Mina. After his encounter with the highly-sexualized vampire women at Castle Dracula, Jonathan briefly compares

these women to Mina: “I am alone in the castle with those awful women. Faugh! Mina is a woman, and there is nought in common. They are devils of the Pit!” (66). This statement, though meant to praise Mina, also implies that she lacks the sexuality of the vampire women. Shortly thereafter, the couple is married. Clearly, Jonathan and Mina do not immediately consummate their marriage—Jonathan cannot even stand up to take his wedding vows, but is instead lying in a bed, propped up by pillows. Mina’s physical appearance is also de-emphasized (though not to the extent that Jane’s plainness and Marian’s ugliness are emphasized), in contrast to Lucy, whose beauty is her most prominent characteristic. However, after Lucy’s death, and perhaps when a comparison of their beauty can no longer be made, Mina’s appearance begins to receive a little attention. For example, Dr. Seward describes her as “sweetly pretty” (263). Even at this point, Mina’s appearance remains her least important feature. However, there is at least some evidence of Mina’s sexuality in the novel. Several times, usually in Jonathan’s journal, it is mentioned in passing that Mina was sleeping next to Jonathan or that Mina woke Jonathan and was clearly sleeping in the same bed. The only other evidence readers have of a sexual union between Mina and Jonathan is their little Quincey.

However, Mina’s sexuality (what little there is of it) isn’t limited to interactions with Jonathan; her interaction with Dracula, the “baptism of blood,” as Van Helsing calls it, is highly sexual. This scene, though, should be considered rape or coercion more so than consensual: “he held both Mrs. Harker’s hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom” (333). The feeling of rape intensifies when Mina reveals that Dracula threatened to kill Jonathan if she did not comply. Although the sexuality of this scene has

been interpreted in many ways, such as Mina imitating fellatio or Dracula's wound representing a menstruating vagina, Demetrakopoulos interprets the scene best when she says that it presents Mina's sexuality as "prepubescent" and "infantile" because of the comparison to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk (109). Stoker included this comparison for a reason, and that reason is to reduce Mina's sexuality.

The only other major female character in this novel is Lucy Westrena, Mina's close friend who serves both as a sort of double and as a point of comparison. The structure of the novel, with the first half focusing on Lucy and the second half on Mina, forces this comparison to be made, just as Collins's juxtaposition of Marian and Laura forces that comparison to be made as well. Judith Weissman lumps Lucy and Mina together as characters, claiming that they are "perfect objects of...chivalry. Young, beautiful, chaste, coy, they revel in their passivity" (398). But these two women are actually very different from each other. While Mina works hard as a schoolmistress, Lucy, clearly of a higher class than Mina, lounges about and ponders her possible love interests. Lucy does not need to work, but at the same time, this means that she must marry, and must marry well, because there is no other point to her existence. Additionally, her family expects such a marriage, and the family's estate is entailed, meaning that Lucy will not directly inherit it. In fact, of her three suitors, Lucy chooses Arthur Holmwood, who later inherits his father's title of Lord Godalming, the richest and most aristocratic of the three and thus the most able to give her the lifestyle she has been enjoying. This makes Lucy, in fact, useless—a traditional Victorian angel woman with no purpose in life other than to marry. Mina, as mentioned before, works initially to support

herself and then to help her husband in his line of work, recording information and memorizing train schedules; her existence has much more purpose than Lucy's.

Just as Lucy's choice in a husband reveals that she is a traditional woman, Mina's choice in a husband shows that she is more modern and independent. When Mina becomes engaged to Jonathan Harker, he is merely a solicitor's clerk. Just before his trip to Castle Dracula in the beginning of the novel, Jonathan receives news that he has passed his exams and is now a solicitor. He is a working man rising up through the ranks of society, not a titled and wealthy aristocrat like Arthur Holmwood. Like Mina, Jonathan is also an orphan, which probably contributes to his appeal for her. Mina is a busybody who likes to work and feel useful; she would languish in a role like Lucy's where she would be useless and have no contribution to make.

Furthermore, Mina's beauty isn't emphasized, and her physical appearance is hardly mentioned. On the other hand, Lucy, parallel to Laura Fairlie as a character, is constantly described as sweet or lovely, and these qualities are emphasized more than any other (indeed, one wonders if she has any other qualities). Many critics, such as Carol Senf, Charles Prescott, and Grace Giorgio, also interpret Lucy as a sexualized female, a foil to Mina's lack of sexuality.

Lucy is clearly attractive to men, as indicated by the three marriage proposals she receives in a single day. After receiving these proposals, Lucy writes a letter to Mina, asking, "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it" (73). This line is almost always interpreted to show that Lucy has an unusual sexual appetite, and she is often classified as a New Woman. Carol Senf, for example, says that this line reveals Lucy's "latent

sensuality which connects her to the New Woman of the period” (42), while Judith Weissman asserts that Lucy “feels able to handle three men sexually” (400). Alan Johnson interprets this line to mean that Lucy has a “genuine sexual attraction to Seward and Morris” (27), and Maria Mulvey-Roberts refers to Lucy’s “desire for polygamy” (84). All these interpretations, however, fail to consider Lucy’s other thoughts on her three proposals. First, this line itself clearly shows that Lucy only wishes to marry three men for *their* sakes, not for her own. After all, Lucy asks why a girl can’t marry “as many as want *her*” (emphasis added), not as many as *she* wants. Earlier in her letter, Lucy describes each proposal. After describing the first from Seward, she says, “[b]eing proposed to is all very nice and all that sort of thing, but it isn’t at all a happy thing when you have to see a poor fellow, whom you know loves you honestly, going away and looking all broken-hearted” (71). Later that day, Lucy receives proposal number two from Quincey Morris, and she asks, “why are men so noble when we women are so little worthy of them? ...I really felt very badly” (73). Lucy is upset over having to reject and disappoint two men who are so noble, to use her word, and not because she wants to have sex with all of them. She does not even mislead these men, stopping them before they finish their proposals to tell them that she loves someone else. She is upset because she is unable to give these men what they want. This is not the thought process of a New Woman, but that of a traditional woman.

Another indication of Lucy’s traditional-woman qualities is her very own name, as William Hughes notes. The name “Lucy” comes from *Lucis*, meaning “light,” and he argues that “her character is an embodiment of the positive feminine qualities of ‘sweetness and light’...” (141–142). Hughes also points out that during Lucy and Mina’s

visit to Whitby, the old men are attracted to Lucy (143): “I [Mina] noticed that the old men did not lose any time in coming up and sitting near her when we sat down” (Stoker 80). These men, who can be interpreted to represent the traditional man, are drawn to Lucy, the traditional woman, and not Mina. While some critics assert that Lucy’s staking later in the novel is punishment for her New Woman qualities, it can be equally if not more strongly argued that it is instead punishment for (or warning against) weak and old-fashioned qualities, similar to Laura’s punishment in *The Woman in White* (Lorrah 33).

Lucy is the first character in the novel to be attacked by Dracula, and this attack serves as a catalyst for the entire plot. But Lucy’s reaction to Dracula is also very telling. Lucy becomes vulnerable to Dracula when she begins sleepwalking in Whitby, which is also the same time that he arrives in Whitby. She is asleep during the first attack, and subsequent attacks, and never even realizes what has happened to her, although she had to have invited Dracula into her London home for her to be attacked there. She only knows that she has bad dreams and fears falling asleep unless someone is watching her, ready to wake her at the first sign of a nightmare. Also significant is the fact that Lucy is completely bed-ridden from Dracula’s first attack until her death. Unable to fight against Dracula’s influence, she is just “of too super-sensitive a nature to go through the world without trouble,” as Mina puts it (109). During the course of the attacks, Lucy’s teeth become longer and sharper, a sign of her near-vampire state. Shortly before her death, she also becomes voluptuous. Arthur arrives at the Westenra home after being away due to his father’s death. Lucy calls him to her, asking for a kiss, in a voice that Dr. Seward describes as “a soft, voluptuous voice, such as I had never heard from her lips” (192). Van Helsing also notices the change in Lucy’s voice and shoves Arthur away from her,

after which she soon dies. She never becomes aware of her illness's cause and never even questions it. Instead, Lucy dies just as passively as she had lived. After her death, she becomes a vampire, leaving her tomb at night to prey on small children. Vampire Lucy is described as wanton and voluptuous and once again directs her seductive qualities toward Arthur—until, of course, the men stake her and restore her to “unequaled sweetness and purity” (257). Therefore, the Angel in the House (Lucy) can easily become demonic.

Mina's reaction to Dracula is very different. Although like Lucy, Mina is unaware of Dracula's first two attacks, much of the blame falls on Renfield, who has invited Dracula into Seward's asylum, where Mina is staying and where she is attacked. Unlike Lucy, however, Mina is aware that something is happening to her and that something is wrong. On the night of her second attack by Dracula, Mina awakens to see the room filling with mist. She remembers shutting the window before going to bed, though it is now open, and “suddenly the horror burst upon [her] that is was thus that Jonathan had seen those awful women growing into reality through the whirling mist in the moonlight” (306). She then loses consciousness, either by falling asleep or fainting. The next night, Mina asks Dr. Seward for an opiate to help her sleep, but after taking it, she realizes her mistake: “I may have been foolish in thus depriving myself of the power of waking. I might want it” (307). Mina is at least vaguely aware that something happens while she sleeps.

During her third encounter with Dracula, however, Mina is awake and fully aware of what is happening to her. Jonathan is also in the room, though Dracula has put him in some kind of stupor on the bed. Not only does Dracula drink Mina's blood in this scene, but he also forces Mina to drink some of his blood from a wound on his chest. He then

performs a kind of mock marriage, saying to Mina, “and you, their best beloved one, are now to me, flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood; kin of my kin; my bountiful wine-press for a while; and shall be later on my companion and my helper” (339). In binding himself to Mina in this way, he recognizes her capability and takes her on as his equal, unlike the way he merely used Lucy and moved on. Dracula tells Mina that he can now summon her to him, but he either never exercises this power, or Mina is able to guard herself against it. Even though Mina has been bitten three times at this point, there is “no sign of [her] teeth growing sharper,” she never becomes voluptuous, and, of course, she never becomes a vampire, all of which happen to Lucy (347). Comparing Mina to Lucy shows that while Mina possesses some traditional-woman qualities, she is by no means the traditional woman that Lucy is. It is Lucy, not Mina, who represents Stoker’s version of the traditional Victorian woman.

Mina Harker as the Ideal Woman

If Mina isn’t a New Woman, and she isn’t a traditional woman, then what kind of woman is she? She is a mix of the traditional and the new, the best of both worlds—Mina is Stoker’s ideal woman. One of the very first indicators of this is her relationship with Jonathan. Jonathan clearly admires his wife, and their mutual respect is evident in their egalitarian marriage. Although, as Phyllis Roth claims, their relationship is “spiritualized beyond credibility,” there is equality in their marriage that goes beyond their overly-spiritualized conversations (33). In Jonathan’s very first journal entry of the novel, he talks about getting recipes for Mina from the various places he visits, but also about his journal serving as a record of his experiences so he can share them with her. As he

recovers from his brain fever, he offers to let Mina read his journal, although he doesn't want to be reminded of the experiences it contains. Mina, of her own accord, stashes the diary away and refrains from reading it, as a gesture of trust, until circumstances demand it. Once Mina is excluded from the hunt for Dracula, both she and Jonathan lament in their journals that they must now keep things from each other. During this time, Jonathan thankfully observes, "the ceasing of telling had made no difference between us" (315). During Mina's second exclusion from the group, Jonathan keeps meticulous records of everything that happens in his journal so that Mina can read it once she re-enters the group. Even after Dracula's third and most horrific attack on Mina, neither she nor Jonathan blames the other for the attack; instead, it seems to draw them closer. While Mina blames herself and moves away from Jonathan, he simply pulls her to him and calls down the punishment of God "if by any act or will of [his] anything ever come between [them]" (335). Shortly after Mina's attack, as the men are setting out to find the boxes of earth, Jonathan ponders Mina's fate and his own: "To one thing I have made up my mind; if we find out that Mina must be a vampire in the end, then she shall not go into that unknown and terrible land alone. I suppose it is thus that in the old times one vampire meant many...the holiest love was the recruiting sergeant for their ghastly ranks" (350). Jonathan is so devoted to his wife that he is willing to become a vampire if she does.

Mina's first of many contributions to the group is the compilation of journals, phonographs, memos, and newspaper clippings that forms the novel. It all starts after Lucy's death, when Mina decides to read Jonathan's journal from his trip to Castle Dracula. She makes the connection between Jonathan's experiences and Lucy's illness and transcribes the journal. Shortly after the vampire Lucy is destroyed, Mina discovers

that Dr. Seward keeps his diary on a phonograph and insists on transcribing it. She wants to hear what he recorded about Lucy's death and speculates that he might provide some clues as to the group's suspicion that Dracula is behind Lucy's death, but one wonders if she is also curious about events from which she was excluded. Dr. Seward is reluctant at first, but Mina uses his reluctance to convince him to let her transcribe the journal.

Although it is Van Helsing who sets forth the theory of vampirism and starts asking questions of the people closest to Lucy, it is entirely Mina's idea to start compiling all the information. She not only initiates the process, but she is almost wholly responsible for the finished product as well. At the beginning of this process, Van Helsing represents the embodiment of knowledge and Mina is just an information-gatherer (Case 172). But Mina isn't satisfied with merely a supportive role. She gives Van Helsing her own journal to read, but it is in shorthand, which she knows Van Helsing can't read; thus Mina "inserts herself, as an active, thinking force, between Van Helsing and the passive data provided by her diary," establishing early on that he can't proceed without her help (Case 172–173). She even admits to her intentions in her journal: "I could not resist the temptation of mystifying him a bit—I suppose it is some of the taste of the original apple that remains still in our mouths...." (218). As the compilation evolves, she gets some help from Jonathan for the typing and compiling, but it is essentially Mina's project.

The men are clearly impressed with Mina's work, particularly Van Helsing, from whom most of her praise comes—reminiscent of the praise Marian receives from Walter. After receiving Mina's transcribed copy of Jonathan's journal, Van Helsing calls her "one of God's women, fashioned by his own hand to show us men and other women that there is a heaven where we can enter, and that its light can be here on earth. So true, so

sweet, so noble, so little an egoist” (224). As Dr. Seward tells Van Helsing of Mina’s idea to transcribe his phonographic journal, and its usefulness up to that point, Van Helsing replies, “Ah, that wonderful Madam Mina! She has a man’s brain—a brain that a man should have were he much gifted—and woman’s heart. The good God fashioned her for a purpose, believe me, when He made that so good combination” (278). Her man’s brain allows her to solve the group’s problems—putting all the information in one place, for example—and her woman’s heart provides support and comfort to the men during the grievous hunt. Van Helsing also refers to Mina as “our star and our hope” (287). Jonathan, too, is quick to praise her “man’s brain,” observing, as he goes to bed one night, that “her forehead is puckered up into little wrinkles, as though she thinks even in her sleep” (316). Even Renfield is drawn to her on her first visit to the asylum; he and Mina have a surprisingly sane conversation, which Dr. Seward attributes to “some rare gift or power” of Mina’s (277). Later in the novel, Renfield dies trying to protect her from Dracula, showing a major shift in his alliance from Master to Mina.

It is not long into the pursuit of Dracula, however, before the men decide to exclude Mina entirely from the vampire hunt, supposedly for her own protection. Mina is obviously very upset about this, though she quietly abides by the group’s decision. She is so used to being treated like an equal by Jonathan over the course of their relationship, and by the group of vampire-hunters for the last several months, that this new situation is difficult for her to accept: “It is strange to me to be kept in the dark as I am today...” (303). That night, in her journal, she laments her exclusion and admits that she has cried about it several times, although she has “never cried on [her] own account” before (304). The next day, she writes in her journal that she has been crying again, stating, “[t]his is a

new weakness, of which I must be careful” (306). Mina is a strong woman who is not disposed to the usual feminine display of weakness—crying. Both Jane and Marian also express a disinclination to tears and the other typical female emotional response, fainting.

Ironically, it is at this exact point in the novel, when the men have excluded Mina from their group and begin treating her like a traditional woman who requires protection, that Dracula first attacks her. According to Rebecca Pope, this imprisonment, this assignment of traditional, passive female gender roles, is what makes Mina susceptible to Dracula (73). Mina has essentially been reduced to uselessness, much like the role Lucy plays throughout her entire life, short though it is (Spear 183). Lucy was useless all along, and thus became Dracula’s first victim in England. Mina, on the other hand, with her “man’s brain” and near-equality with the men, only becomes a victim when these qualities have been stripped away from her. Fortunately, the men quickly realize their hunt for Dracula has come to a grinding halt without Mina’s help.

Once the men decide to allow Mina back into their circle, she shows extraordinary strength of character and cleverness. She knows that she has some kind of connection with Dracula after her “baptism of blood,” and that he can summon her to him, so Mina promises the men that she will kill herself before she would harm them. Of course, the men are appalled at this and insist that she fight to stay alive and thus stay human. Shortly thereafter, Mina proposes that Van Helsing hypnotize her. Aware of her strange mental connection with Dracula, Mina discovers a way to use it to the group’s advantage, relaying Dracula’s sensory perceptions of his surroundings to the group. Without this unusual method of spying, Dracula would have easily made it back to his castle and thus to freedom and safety. Worried that her connection with Dracula may work both ways,

Mina now excludes *herself* from the hunt and asks the men to destroy her if her transformation into a vampire becomes complete. Though the men dread that occurrence, their devotion to the fate of her soul prevails, and they each make the promise. As the men prepare for their trip to Castle Dracula, Mina informs the group that she will be going with them. Van Helsing objects at first, but Mina explains what he has overlooked: because Dracula can summon her at will, both she and the men are safer if she is with them. Van Helsing agrees: “Madam Mina, you are, as always, most wise” (384). Even in her seemingly useless state, Mina finds a way to be helpful: her knack for memorizing train schedules allows the men to catch an early train on their way to Castle Dracula.

Yet again, the vampire hunt takes a hopeless turn without Mina’s inclusion.

Jonathan describes this situation in his journal: “the first thing was to consult as to taking Mina again into our confidence. Things are getting desperate, and it is at least a chance, though a hazardous one. As a preliminary step, I was released from my promise to her” (411). This time, Dracula’s own situation has become so dire that his connection with Mina is all but severed as he desperately flees to Castle Dracula. Van Helsing gives her the notes and papers that have accumulated during her exclusion, and while the men rest, Mina pores over the information, hoping to come to a useful conclusion. Almost immediately upon her re-inclusion, Mina deduces Dracula’s itinerary, both his methods and his routes of travel, and writes out her conclusions in a well-reasoned memorandum (Garrett 134). The men are impressed by and grateful for this contribution, and Van Helsing praises Mina yet again: “Our dear Madam Mina is once more our teacher” (415). Her quick thinking allows the men to cut off and catch Dracula as he nears his castle and

the sun nears the horizon. She even gets a gun as the men arm themselves and prepare for their journey.

While Dr. Seward, Quincey, and Arthur were all devoted to Lucy and distraught over her death, these three, in addition to Jonathan and Van Helsing, are even more devoted to Mina, “their best beloved one,” as Dracula observes (339). Once Dracula leaves England, the men are safe from Dracula, and pursue him seemingly only for Mina’s sake, even though she never shows many of the symptoms Lucy showed early on in her “illness.” Of course, the men catch and kill Dracula, but not without the loss of one of their own, Quincey Morris, whose smile and dying words echo the group’s devotion to Mina: “Now God be thanked that all has not been in vain! See! the snow is not more stainless than her forehead! The curse has passed away!” (443). He can die in peace knowing that Mina is safe. Van Helsing expresses similar sentiments years later as he plays with little Quincey: “This boy will some day know what a brave and gallant woman his mother is. Already he knows her sweetness and loving care; later on he will understand how some men so loved her, that they did dare much for her sake” (444). It is Mina that bonds the men together and drives them to their goal of destroying Dracula.

A close analysis of Mina Harker’s character shows that she is not fully a traditional woman, nor does she fit the mold of the New Woman in which so many critics have tried to place her. Instead, Mina falls in the largely-neglected middle, combining “the best of the traditional and the new” (Senf, 49). Especially when compared to Lucy, the novel’s only other major specimen of femininity, Mina is intelligent, hard-working, and resourceful. At the same time, she often falls into a supportive and wifely role. Therefore, on the one extreme, we have

Dracula's three vampire women as examples of New Women in the novel, while Lucy Westenra rests on the far opposite end as the traditional Victorian woman. Both extremes, then, are demonic—Dracula's vampire women are demons from the start, and Lucy quickly and easily succumbs to her demonic transformation. Mina therefore belongs in the middle due to her strength, independence, and, significantly, her humanity. She is Bram Stoker's ideal of womanhood.

Conclusion

These three novels—*Jane Eyre*, *The Woman in White*, and *Dracula*—all show heroines being marginalized because of their unconventionality. All three women are strong and independent but have to rise above Victorian literature's typical categorization of women, none of which suit Jane, Marian, or Mina. Jane, a heroine from the early Victorian era, must overcome more conservative views of women. Marian appears in the mid-Victorian era and thus takes a few more liberties. Mina comes at the end of the era and faces new ideas of womanhood—feminism and the New Woman. These women were “others” by the societal standards of their time and also by modern critics' categorization of Victorian women. None of these women did anything morally wrong (fallen/demon woman), yet they are also not the angelic trophy wives that Victorian society wants them to be (Angel in the House). They need to have their own category, one for strong, independent women, and there are more heroines out there to join them; Jane Eyre, Marian Halcombe, and Mina Harker are just a start.

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