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SINGLE BLESSEDNESS: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SPINSTER IN CHARLOTTE BRONTË, WILKIE COLLINS AND SELECTED PERIODICAL ESSAYS

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of PhD

at

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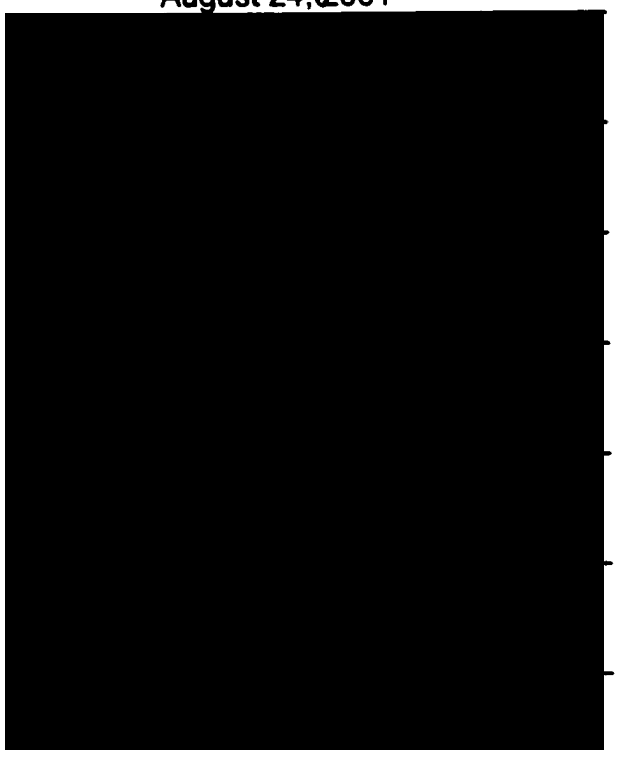

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Once again, to my parents for their love and support.

And to Darren, for his help and encouragement, and for knowing when a walk in the sunshine was the best reward for hard work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This study examines representations of the single woman as a figure simultaneously both present and absent, visible and invisible, during the period 1835 to 1875 when the spinster, a traditionally marginal creature, drew society's attention with her growing numbers. Her paradoxical presence and absence operates on three levels: family/society, text and body. The dissertation focuses on the spinster body and examines the ways in which mid-Victorian writers of fiction and social criticism figure that body as potentially powerful and often transgressive, using tropes of somatization, pathology and orality. These authors frequently isolate the hands as a synechdoche for celibate female power, and some writers express concern that female independence will result in masculine qualities. The spinster's potential autonomy thus provokes both anxiety about the single woman's disruptive power and excitement concerning new ways of thinking about women's role in society. Many of these writers therefore undertake a revision of femininity, arguing for a more comprehensive womanhood; the figure of the spinster is at the centre of this discussion. Chapter One analyzes the ways in which selected essays describe and categorize types of single women in order to identify and/or contain this diverse segment of society. At times, this classification functions as a means to redefine the conventionally unhappy marginal old maid as a vital force, an untapped resource of social power. In Chapter Two I examine the strategies the essayists employ to deal with the spinster's paradoxical position, their proffered solutions to the issue of 'surplus' women and the anxiety these apparently unnatural beings provoke as they challenge existing beliefs about women's function in society. I preface my discussion of these topics with a section on marriage, for it is the lack of marriage that constitutes the single woman as a social problem. Chapter Three examines issues of the single woman's power and the ways in which the essay writers figure the celibate female body as the repository of this power, either positively or negatively. This chapter concludes with a section on self-interest, a key quality for female independence. Chapter Four analyzes Brontë's topical treatment of the spinster as a social phenomenon in Shirley through her interrogation of gender boundaries and her exploration of illness as a strategy for visibility. In Chapter Five I discuss Villette, identifying Brontë's radical recognition of the celibate female body and her continued challenging of cultural gender distinctions. Chapter Six explores Wilkie Collins's The Woman in White and continues my analysis of the ways in which the androgynous single female utilizes her lack of visibility to her advantage while negotiating strategies for recognition as a valid visible entity. I conclude that the essay writers, Brontë and Collins interpret the spinster body, with its potential mutability, as a repository for energy and power, independence and strength, and that this dynamism anticipates the shift from faded Old Maid to vibrant New Woman.

ABBREVIATIONS

CH	=	Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage
DLB	=	Dictionary of Literary Biography
OM	=	Old Maids: Their Varieties, Characters, and Conditions (1835)
VSCE	=	The Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration

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Introduction
Negotiating Doubleness: The In/Visible Single Woman

"The country is fast losing its masculine character, and becoming daily more feminine."
Our Female Supernumeraries. In A Series of Views. The Scholastic View. Punch 1850

"The 'old maid' of 1861," writes Frances Power Cobbe confidently in her essay "Celibacy V. Marriage," published in Fraser's Magazine (February 1862), "is an exceedingly cheerful personage, running about untrammelled by husband or children....And what is better, she has found, not only freedom of locomotion, but a sphere of action peculiarly suited to her nature" (Reprinted in Hamilton 81). Cobbe, whom the Review of Reviews designated in 1894 as the "oldest New Woman now living on the planet" (cited in DLB, Volume 190, 80), presents the mid-Victorian single woman as unrestricted, happily occupied, striding purposefully towards what needs to be done. Anne Thackeray urges single women to adopt the same attitude in her article "Toilers and Spinsters" in the Cornhill Review, published in the same year as Cobbe's essay. Both Cobbe and Thackeray recognize a new era for single women, one of possibility and freedom. Similarly, Dora Greenwell acknowledges this shift in the public perception of unmarried women as it manifests itself in art in her article "Our Single Women," which appeared in the February 1862 issue of the North British Review. She states that single females

> have...gained much both socially and aesthetically in passing from the traditional type—the 'withered prude' made immortal by Hogarth and Cowper—to that which must be familiar to all readers of modern fiction,—the gentle, dovelike Old Maid, of smooth braided silvery hair, and soft speech and eye, generally, it may be remarked, dressed in grey, who is supposed to have some tender secret buried in her heart...but who, ever serene and cheerful, flits in and out between the scenes, listening, consoling, cheering, at all times ready to take up a little of existence at second hand. (34)

As to real life women, while she contends that such artistic representations can be misleading, Greenwell is, however, somewhat less ebullient and more conservative than Cobbe, believing that single women "need not so much a new sphere of action, as more perfect freedom and expansion in

that which is already their own" (34. Original emphasis). Cobbe sees single women of the early 1860s as being unrestricted, while Greenwell believes their freedom needs adjustment. Thus, though Cobbe and Greenwell do not entirely agree on the state of the single woman, a fact that will become more apparent in the ensuing discussion, what they do agree on is that the unmarried woman certainly has the potential for something other than languishing on the sidelines, the spot to which her unnatural state seems to relegate her.

Despite this point of agreement, however, Cobbe and Greenwell give us contrasting views of the Victorian single woman, as a visible participant and as an inconspicuous looker-on at life. Even in the 1860s, as the Woman Question debate was in full cry, both novels and essays present the single woman in these oppositional ways, often in the same text. Whether one interprets the phrase "untrammelled by husband or children" positively or negatively, it means that the old maid will not fulfill the only destiny Victorian society still freely allotted her, that of wife and mother. Thus her life can be seen as one of lack, a long period during which she fades, shrinks and disappears from view, a non-entity on the margins of other people's lives, often as the maiden aunt who could be genuinely invaluable at times and conveniently ignored at others. Conversely, however, as Cobbe indicates, this lack of her own immediate family accords the single woman greater freedom, the ability to realize a potential not perhaps sanctioned by her society. Cobbe's single woman moves energetically at the centre of her own life, rather than "flit[ting]" about on the perimeters of someone else's.

Both of these representations of the single woman, as a pitiable victim and as a strong survivor of cultural conventions, attest to the strange, and as Nina Auerbach has pointed out in Woman and the Demon, often subversive, position the Victorian spinster occupied in her society. As Nan H. Dreher observes, "[R]edundancy thwarted the Victorian passions for order and progress" (3). The 1851 census, reporting a statistical surplus of 400,000 women, captured public attention, so the Woman Question centred around the issue of superfluous females, those who did

not marry, and confronted the difficulties of female education, employment and emigration. To the Victorians, unmarried women seemed unsettlingly numerous, though modern scholars such as Vicinus claim that their numbers among the middle class were more conspicuous than plentiful (27). Even in this context, it seems, the single woman is more 'present' by illusion than fact. If, however, it is true that the Victorian period is an age of paradox and contradiction, then the spinster, both present and absent, visible and invisible, useless and indispensable, represents her time most appropriately.

This dissertation examines the slippery quality of the spinster's life, her simultaneous presence and absence, in both the literature and the essays of a forty-year period from 1835 to 1875. I analyze both how the single woman is rendered invisible, by others or herself, and how this invisibility operates on both a positive and negative level. Similarly, I offer an investigation into the ways in which writers negotiate visibility for an often overlooked but potentially powerful segment of society. The unmarried mid-Victorian woman occupies two spaces, resulting in a kind of dual existence. Rachel Blau DuPlessis discusses how "insider-outsider social status" causes doubleness for a woman. She is "an outsider by her gender position, by her relation to power; may be an insider by her social position, her class. She can be both" (278). The "doubled consciousness" DuPlessis speaks of is particularly apropos to the Victorian single woman, who finds herself an outsider even while being inside, since, as a woman, she exists under certain obligations or expectations--marriage, motherhood, submission to patriarchal patterns, ministering to children and men--but, as a perennial maid, she can only perform a limited portion of these from a marginal position.

The doubleness that this dissertation undertakes to analyze exists on three levels: family/society, text and body. First, the single woman's domestic position is both part of and beyond the perimeter of the family. In addition to this lack of a defined role within the family or society at large, the single woman's place in texts is often similarly ambiguous, whether the text

itself is an essay on the Woman Question or a novel. She is both inside and outside the text. Third, the unmarried woman often exists both inside and outside of her own body, so that in representing herself she conceals as much as she reveals.

The single woman's domestic role places her both inside and outside of the family unit. She is the daughter, the sister, the maiden aunt, fulfilling the functions of surrogate wife and mother and stepping up to her designated duty as self-sacrificing nurturer. Unmarried though she is, her womanhood, though by Victorian standards incomplete, demands that she execute her natural role of self-abnegation, administering to others, forgetting herself, despite the fact that her role in the family is often "ill-defined" (Jalland 260). For the Victorians, self-sacrifice is a quality common to all women, regardless of marital status; as W. R. Greg so pompously if succintly phrases it, in his remark that servants fulfill both essentials of woman's being, "they are supported by, and they minister to, men" (26. Original emphasis). As François Basch observes of Elizabeth Gaskell's old maids, "Once the most difficult sacrifice is accepted--renunciation of the condition of wife-mother --a life of abnegation and altruism follows naturally" (176). Yet even if the single woman follows this pattern willingly, she remains an adjunct member of the family, having no husband or children of her own. The assumption seems to be that she waits expectantly in the wings until called upon to perform some necessary service, after which she is to retire once again to her designated corner. The spinster, thus described, appears life-less, lacking her own independent existence, and is therefore perceived as somehow 'stable.'

However, the unmarried woman is a potentially destabilizing social force. Her insider-outsider status makes her doubly subversive, able to undercut Victorian domestic ideology from within and without. Cobbe states that the single woman is "by nature" better able to make a home for herself and live independently than is a man because she can provide for herself "the little details of housewifely comforts" (Hamilton 81). As Auerbach points out, "Cobbe turns Victorian celebrations of womanhood against the ideology of family they were intended to serve" (145). The

spinster is obliged by society to minister to the family, but she may use those very womanly skills to sweeten her own independence, to see to her self.

The spinster's doubleness also extends itself to her various textual representations, both fictional and real; she is both within and outside of the very texts that purport to focus on her. For example, I will mention briefly two works not studied in this dissertation but which nonetheless demonstrate my argument. Auerbach observes, in her discussion of Ellen Wood's Mildred Arkell (1865), that the title character, a spinster, is "tactfully offstage for most of the novel," but that she "presides over its reversals of power" notwithstanding her physical absence from the scenes of action (134). Similarly, Honora Charlcote, in Charlotte Yonge's Hopes and Fears; or, Scenes from the Life of a Spinster (1861), shifts from being the protagonist of the story to a sort of catalyst, as the children she has fostered cope in varying ways with her enveloping influence on their lives. The spinsters of these texts are both present and absent. Likewise, Lucy Snowe, the shadowy protagonist of Brontë's 1853 novel Villette, expects to be treated as a piece of furniture (162) and spends much of her time attempting to be as inconspicuous as possible in a story about her life. Indeed, Lucy deliberately removes herself to the position of observer, putting the focus on others, a manoeuvre she uses for her own self-comfort. Invisibility is also crucial to the plans of Marian Halcombe, the dark and disconcerting heroine of Wilkie Collins's The Woman in White, when she spies on her enemies.

Essay writers also employ this pattern of elision, though they, like Marian, use invisibility strategically. Dora Greenwell entitles her 1862 article "Our Single Women," apparently leaving no doubt as to the subject of her discussion, and indeed she foregrounds the spinster initially. However, she admits near the conclusion, by virtue of understatement, "We have in some degree left our subject" (47), having focussed most of her paper on the possible options for womankind generally. Thackeray, too, digresses from her treatment of single women as she goes on to describe some of the institutions established to supply impoverished women with work and support.

However, like Greenwell and Thackeray, some Victorian writers entering the fray of the Woman Question debate use their discussion of the single woman as an entry point into an examination of woman's plight generally. Greenwell feels that treating the single woman as a "class apart" would be to think of her "in too narrow a spirit" (47) while Thackeray finds that an examination of the spinster's situation takes her into broader territory. Both writers seek to decrease the spinster's special status as outcast and to reinstate her as a natural part of the legion of womanhood; thus the initial effect of this shift in focus appears to obscure the single woman, to present her as shadowy and marginal. Closer inspection, though, reveals that she is simultaneously brought to the centre, included as an integral part of the community of womanhood regardless of her marital status.

There is, however, a clear note of anxiety in some of the articles debating how best to deal with the "superfluous woman." Both William Rathbone Greg and J.B. Mayor display not merely a rather awkward grappling with the actual issue and its theoretical solutions but an obvious discomfort with the actual physical presence of these women. This is not confined exclusively to the essays. Given Brontë's own unmarried state and her personal thoughts on both spinsterhood and authorship, it is perhaps understandable that Lucy Snowe, a character whose sensitivity and melancholic frame of mind seem to mirror Brontë's own, plays a sort of now-you-see-me-now-you-don't game with her audience in her first-person narration. While Valerie Sanders discovers self-writing to be more prevalent in such texts as autobiographical novels, Lucy often appears to bear out M.A. Stodart's warning from 1842: "When we speak of ourselves, we are standing on the edge of a precipice" (Quoted in Sanders 9). In Shirley, the title character and her friend Caroline appear to share the stage, but rarely at the same time. Similarly, Collins has difficulty keeping his heroine Marian Halcombe fully in view; scholars such as Lonoff and Peters have pointed out that his own ambivalent feelings about independent women contribute to his inability to imagine a more independent position for Marian at the novel's conclusion. Marian, like Lucy, also disappears from her own story--and from her own diary--when her author relegates her to convalescing in the ruined

section of Blackwater Park after felling her with typhus. In all of the texts, the spinster is present, temporarily, marginally or spiritually, but she is often absent, invisible or sidelined. All of the selected authors demonstrate a decided desire to confront the dilemma of what to do with an unmarried woman, but often seem unable or unwilling to keep her in the forefront. Paradoxically, somatic episodes on the part of Caroline, Lucy and Marian emphasize the single woman's corporeal importance, for the fictional single women discussed in this dissertation, even if only temporarily, negotiate ways to be seen. Ultimately, each woman asserts her visibility in some way, alone or with assistance.

Thus appears the third level on which the unmarried woman is both present and absent. Much of the discourse veers toward a preoccupation with the single woman's body, either in such comments as Mayor's, who sees the "energy and force" that is held within these "unmarried female bodies" (199), or in more metaphoric references such as Greg's, where the proliferation of single women is likened to a cancerous growth which impedes the health of the social body and must be excised (11, 28). Writers focus interest on single women's hands, too, where much of their strength appears to reside, or which represent robustness of character. Cobbe exults in the strength in the hands of women artists; Brontë identifies hands as a sexualized site; and Collins presents Marian's large and attractive hands as both capable and vulnerable. Food motifs also run through much of the literature, both novels and essays, reflecting a preoccupation with orality and the maiden's ability to be a species of food and a creature of some voraciousness. Single women appear to be both consumable and consuming. Greg sees unmarried women as a dangerous devouring force; Brontë is concerned with the starvation of the unmarried female.

Although my thesis does deal with the single woman's familial and textual doubleness, my discussion and analyses principally concentrate on the spinster's body and the way in which it is perceived. Our notions of the Victorians as prudish and repressed seem to be largely unfounded when one realizes how permeated with the physical and the sensual many of their works are, an

idea Michel Foucault advances in his "repressive hypothesis." Victorians obsessively covering up piano legs and blushing about sex have more to do with the readings succeeding generations have imposed upon them and less with what their own literature and art reveals. Certainly in the texts I discuss here, images of feeding and starving, notions of health and disease, representations of strength and vulnerability, and anxiety about masculine and feminine qualities convey both subversive and often quite overt portrayals of individuals caught in the grip of sexual feeling. These are particularly poignant in light of the single woman, who frequently has no designated future partner on whom to lavish these very natural urges and feelings. Thus one finds satire directed towards the spinster's affection for pets or other people's children, as a socially acceptable and sanitized version of sexual--in effect, maternal--feeling. In the texts themselves, this preoccupation with the physical body is perhaps not surprising, given that the celibate female body is apparently so readily identifiable.

Richard Carlile, advocater of sexual intercourse and contraception, wrote of the detrimental effects of celibacy. The celibate body, unmarked by the "passion of love," he claimed was yet marked by certain physical characteristics. In his 1838 publication Every Woman's Book; or What is Love? he advocates a healthy sexual life for every man and woman, likening the "passion of love" to "as natural a consequence as hunger or thirst" (7). However, "[i]n the old maid, the passion of love, like an overflowing gall-bladder, for want of due absorption, tinges every other sensation with bitterness" (10). Carlile's phrasing, the "passion of love," is ambiguous; indeed, he seems to collapse love and sex, given the subtitle of his work: "The Principles of Love, and The Number of a Family." This allows for an interpretation that encompasses both sexual and emotional feeling. Given that Victorian society conflated the unmarried and the virginal states of celibacy, the spinster is understood to be without an object for love and thus without a proper outlet for sexual and emotional feeling. Here, the passion of love is equated with a bodily organ that, if not given its proper absorbable outlet, will metaphorically jaundice the spinster's life. This

concern with adequate drainage, which Shuttleworth discusses in fascinating detail in her chapter "The Female Bodily Economy," perhaps explains the apparent preoccupation old maids were seen to have with pets, lavishing a sort of maternal love on the only objects they had.

Carlile sees love as food and sexual intercourse as so necessary to the animal body, male or female, that abstinence from it "argues a sad mental defect." He relegates, for this reason, bachelors and old maids to "a sort of sub-animal class" (11). He does not use "animal" in a pejorative sense but rather argues that human beings, married or not, experience appetites that are healthy, natural and ought to be appeased. "The excited single man gratifies himself among prostitutes, " he observes. "The unmarried/chaste woman pines" (21). This mental defect becomes inscribed on the spinster's body:

> [W]omen who have never had sexual commerce begin to droop when about twenty-five years of age....they become pale and languid....general weakness and irritability, a sort of restless, nervous fidgettyness takes possession of them, and an absorbing process goes on, their forms degenerate, their features sink, and the peculiar character of the old maid becomes apparent. (35)

Prolonged virginity causes a woman to "absorb" herself in a sort of self-consuming, which would reduce her to the ultimate invisibility, death. As Shuttleworth aptly sums it up, "Spinsterhood, the failure to give the body's energies their natural mode of expression, was depicted as a form of physiological disaster" (199). Regular sex, however, "would remove this mass of evil" (Carlile 36). Though Carlile's "mass" refers to the discomfort the spinster experiences due to unrelieved sexual tension in an otherwise healthy frame, what immediately springs to mind is a morbid growth, attacking and consuming the celibate female body. Virginity is here presented as disease; the virginal spinster is both disappearing into herself, sadly invisible, and exhibiting a visible canker of her discontent, grossly conspicuous. As Shuttleworth notes, the body could provide the "'traitorous' function as legible indicator of the psychological state" (203). Ironically, it is not the man who consorts with prostitutes who is figured in terms of disease, but the chaste, virginal, sexually untouched female.

The celibate spinster, then, bears a resemblance to the fallen woman, that other Victorian woman, that other perilous Victorian problem, stamped with the mark of her physical and moral impurity. One bears the mark of her sexual experience, the other the mark of her lack of it. Interestingly, while there is much material available on fallen women for this period, there is an astonishing dearth of it for spinsters.[1] Linda Doan's Old Maids to Radical Spinsters offers a useful study of twentieth-century fictional single women, and Sheila Jeffreys' The Spinster and her Enemies provides helpful analyses of female sexuality in conjunction with the decline in militant feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Pat Jalland's Women, Marriage and Politics is a fascinating and highly readable book, chronicling the dilemmas of actual spinsters and married women from 1860 to 1894. Shirley Foster examines the ways in which Victorian women writers dealt with their ambivalent feelings toward both marriage and single life in Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual. Rita Kranidis offers an investigation of the spinster in light of England's imperial agenda in both The Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration: Contested Subjects and Imperial Objects: Essays on Victorian Women's Emigration and the Unauthorized Imperial Experience. Dea Birkett's Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers studies the lives of fifty women who exchanged the comforts and restrictions of home for the perils and freedom of travel. Yet while the study of the Victorian spinster appears to be gaining momentum as scholars begin to delve into the cultural and social aspects of the single female's life, there are few full-length treatments of the old maid generally and none as yet published solely for the mid-Victorian period, from 1835-1875, the period of focus of my dissertation. This is an area and a time period that require considerably more research and examination.

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[1] See Eric Trudgill. Madonnas and Magdalens: The Development Of Victorian Sexual Attitudes New York: Holmes and Meier, 1976; Tony Tanner. Adultery in the Novel. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979; Sally Mitchell. The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women's Reading, 1835-1880. Bowling Green: Bowling Green U Popular P, 1981; Amanda Anderson. Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.

During this forty-year span, the public perception of the unmarried woman undergoes a change, as writers in various genres discuss what her role, personally and socially, should be. Dreher states, "The quest for redundancy relief began in earnest in 1851" (3); certainly it had reached a peak in the 1860s. However, I agree with Shuttleworth that the Woman Question began to gather force in the 1840s, and I argue that formulating the new perceptions of the 'old maid' which Cobbe and Greenwell put forth in the early 1860s was underway some fifteen years earlier.

This shifting identity, from pathetic old maid to energetic single woman, is reflected in the numerous words used to refer to her: old maid, spinster, celibate woman, single woman, unmarried woman. Indeed, in "A Brief Chapter on Old Maids" in the September 22, 1849, issue of Eliza Cook's Journal Cook approves the shift in term from "old maid" to "the milder appellation of 'single woman,'" at least in circles "where good taste prevails" (333). I use these terms interchangeably for the most part throughout my discussion, thus playing on the very doubleness and fluid subjectivity I argue the single woman contains. However, I do try to adjust my use to include the nuances of meaning the different writers connote, however subtly, since, obviously, some of these terms are more negatively loaded than others.

Clearly, as Cook indicates, "old maid" is the most pejorative term, juxtaposing as it does the oppositions of age and youth, intimating an unnatural and ironic, and therefore unpleasant, state of withering virginity. The rubicon age, beyond which one becomes an old maid, was generally taken to be thirty, so even a relatively young woman could be classed as an 'old' maid, though more frequently the term seems to refer to an elderly, or at least no longer young, woman. I use this term when the writers refer to themselves thus or when they mean an older single woman.

"Spinster" is perhaps hardly a better designation, carrying even to this day the dark threat of an unfulfilled female destiny and thus a social stigma. Indeed, in the recent film Bridget Jones's Diary, the protagonist, a modern woman of thirty-three, begins a new journal after a series of unfortunate occurrences, writing on the flyleaf, "Diary of Bridget Jones, Spinster and Lunatic."

This coupling of spinsterhood and lunacy, however comically intended, highlights the abnormality and conspicuousness of both states even in the twenty-first century. However, "spinster" has at least historical and legal meanings that make it less negative than "old maid"; I rely on these to give the term a more neutral distinction.

"Single woman" and "unmarried woman" are the most neutral, though their very impartiality allows for a greater precision of meanings. Since writers of the period choose "single woman" more frequently, I adhere to this style myself. First, it holds a fundamental accuracy of definition, given that I am concerned only with women who have never been married. Second, it covers both young and old women, and third, it contains the positive potential writers such as Thackeray, Cobbe, Brontë and Collins draw on.

The last term, "celibate woman," emphasizes both the marital state of being unmarried and the physical state of chastity. Since, as mentioned, both of these meanings are collapsed into one for the Victorians, this term implies a statement about the single female body--that it is sexually untouched--and therefore presumes a focus on that body. This makes it a convenient term when arguing that Victorian society was preoccupied with the spinster's corporeal existence. Additionally, the word "celibate" differentiates the single woman from her fallen sister, who occupies a different category and provokes a different social concern, though, as I will show, these demarcations are not so fixed as Victorian society would have them. Thus the designation "celibate woman" can take on a certain irony, given that the state of chastity can exist both within and outside of marriage and that celibacy, like the pollution of the prostitute, can be unnatural and diseased.

The first three chapters of the dissertation examine the ways in which selected essays written between 1835 and 1875 tackle the issue of the single woman. I have chosen these particular pieces, some of which are not periodical literature, as representative of themes and motifs that appeared in much of the journal material and also in the fictional works I will discuss. Although often subtle or

easily overlooked, many of the same issues and tropes that arise in the fictional literature considered in this dissertation appear over and over in the essays. For example, the essays deal with the topical issues of female education, employment and emigration, issues which Brontë confronts in both Shirley and Villette, and which Collins alludes to in The Woman in White. I have chosen to include Greg's "Why Are Women Redundant?" among these for two reasons: first, because it is probably the most famous, or infamous, of the articles on this topic and second, because Greg verbalizes the threat single women presented to his society in a rhetoric which itself most obviously and vociferously conveys an unconscious fear of what this 'mass' of women could do to a regulated society. He somatizes the statistical information on 'surplus' women, creating images of single women as a collective unhealthy mass that must be either drained of its pollutants or amputated for the good of society at large.

Some of these essays have, of course, been collected and treated in various other contexts. For example, Frances Power Cobbe's "Celibacy V. Marriage" and "What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?" are reprinted in Susan Hamilton's 'Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors': Nineteenth-Century Writing By Women on Women. The latter essay by Cobbe, as well as work by Jessie Boucherett and Barbara Bodichon, appears in Candida Ann Lacey's Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group. My purpose here is not simply to revisit what has already been brought to light. I instead examine these articles as texts themselves, analyzing their arguments and how they so often reflect the anxiety of the time and the tendency to treat the spinster in specified ways. This analysis demonstrates that neither the essays nor the fictional texts existed in isolation; both grew out of a prevalent concern and active debate over what to do with women who did not marry, and the authors of both genres relied on a shared discourse of metaphor and imagery. Authors of essays, like the authors of fictional works, utilize metaphors of orality and disease to discuss the plight of the single woman, often, as in Greg, exhibiting their own or their

society's anxiety over the knotty problem that lay before them. As Shuttleworth observes in Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology, the rhetoric of various discourses overlaps (72).

I have broken down representations of the single woman in the selected essays into three major topics, which I treat in separate chapters: taxonomies of the spinster; solutions to the problem of the surplus woman; and the issue of power and the manner in which writers locate it in the celibate female body. Chapter One examines the ways in which essayists categorize the unmarried woman. Through this classification, these writers offer a redefinition of spinsterhood; they argue that, rather than an old woman fading into nothingness, the modern single woman, who may be quite young, has the potential for accomplishing much and that the direction of her life may be one of happy choice, not miserable unluckiness. I preface this discussion of taxonomies with commentary on marriage from J.B. Mayor, Frances Power Cobbe, Maria Grey, Dora Greenwell and W.G. Hamley, for the lack of nuptial union is what constitutes the spinster as a social problem. Within marriage, a woman fulfills her feminine destiny and performs what her culture construes as her natural role; bereft of the functions of wife- and motherhood, a woman, as spinster, requires a new role, a new place in, or outside of, the cultural milieu.

In Chapter Two I have arranged my discussion of the strategies the selected essayists use to negotiate the single woman's doubleness around their proffered solutions for the problem of the redundant woman. The situation of single women acted as a sort of lightning rod for women's issues generally; what concerned unmarried females pertained to most women. Thus for some writers discussion of the old maid becomes a catalyst for or an entryway into explorations of issues concerning the entire sex: the need for more thorough, useful education; wider employment opportunities and the training to enable them to enter the workforce; and the benefits and drawbacks of female emigration. Apprehending the spinster's concurrent presence and absence in the family and in society and using it to their advantage, the essay writers construct their arguments accordingly, emphasizing the single woman's unique visibility, drawing her from the

margins to the centre, or, conversely, minimizing her conspicuousness as a special case in order to demonstrate her commonality with all women. Essay writers consider various questions in their deliberations of what would best serve both single women and society. To begin with, what should be done with single women--transport them out of Britain or retain them? If they remain, how should society provide for them or enable them to provide for themselves? Given the apparent numbers of middle-class single women, how may society best make use of this "army" of potential labour? Their consideration of this question includes a discussion of possible work for females and touches on the concept of women as a market commodity.

In Chapter Three I examine the issue of power and the way in which the celibate female body, particularly the hand, harbours power physically; Mayor sees the single woman's body as a receptacle containing "energy and force" (199). Unrestricted by the boundaries of marital union, the single woman creates a new type of womanhood and thus raises questions concerning her own agency. How much power does a single woman have, or should she have? This chapter considers how essayists articulate her power, both the more abstract force of influence, which, notwithstanding this abstractness, still resides in her body, and her more concrete physical potency. I analyze the ways in which writers perceive this power as strength, which socially or personally is either threatening or liberating because it is often figured in masculine terms. Writers often express this emphasis on the single woman's corporeal body by associating literal and metaphoric food and disease with spinsterhood. These associations highlight the single woman's ability to provoke both anticipation and apprehension over her ambiguous but potent position.

Chapter Four explores the role of the spinster in Brontë's Shirley, a text that demonstrates both the interdependence of the essays and fiction of the period and shows the prevalence of concern about single women prior to the 1860s when the 'condition of women' issue was in full cry. Indeed, these aspects of the novel have received little critical attention; the debate about single women was already in the air at the time of Shirley's publication in 1849, two years before the

revelations of the 1851 census would launch a flurry of apprehension and provoke flourishes of rhetoric. Caroline Helstone observes the positions of the two old maids in her village and fears a similar state for herself. In her portrait of Miss Mann, who, true to her name, is possessed of a "hard, deep organ" of voice and a Gorgon gaze (193, 194), Brontë attempts to win sympathy for a creature who is pathetic in her isolation from the community, some of whose members find her an unsettling presence due to her marked masculinity. Miss Mann diminishes those in her presence with her eye and manifests her maidenly deformity in her voice; she has become a being other than female through her prolonged spinsterhood and seclusion. As I will show, Brontë embodies in Miss Mann the very real concern single women felt, that prolonged maidenhood would result in masculine qualities. Similarly for Caroline, Miss Ainley's life offers little in the way of consolation, for hers is an endless round of social generosity, of self-sacrifice and duty to those even poorer than herself. She, too, is ugly, as though the womanliness of her character has evaporated into physical homeliness in the absence of a partner, though she dutifully continues to fulfill her role as nurturer, the expected role of a woman without family of her own. With these as her alternatives to single life, Caroline is her author's examination of the spinster from a societal point of view--Caroline is poorly educated, without means and, finding herself without love, bored, restless and unhappy. Her uncle's dismissal of her concerns, his rejection of her desire to become a governess and her mother's account of her miserable experience as one highlight the dilemma of middle-class women with nothing to do and nowhere to go, with nothing but eye-destroying needlework and good works to fill their days. Caroline falls ill; her unconscious solution to her miserable existence appears to be the sort of sinking and self-absorbing process Carlile predicts, for she eats nothing and wastes away, rapidly fading, even disappearing, from life. However, I argue that this debilitation is in fact Caroline's strategy both to be seen, to be acknowledged by her guardian and uncle, Reverend Helstone, and her love object, Robert Moore, and to be nurtured. She therefore overturns societal expectations that, as a single woman without marriage prospects,

it is her duty to nurture others. Caroline thus uses her body simultaneously as a statement of self-value and as an instrument of rebellion.

Through Caroline's illness and Lucy's physicality Brontë privileges the spinster body, situating it at the centre of the surplus woman issue more radically than the essay writers. Furthermore, in the externally cool but inwardly passionate Lucy Snowe, Brontë acknowledges Carlile's pragmatic observation that "[e]very healthy woman, after the age of puberty, feels the passion of love. It is a part of her health, and as natural a consequence as hunger or thirst" (7). Brontë gives readers a sexual single woman. She emphasizes the importance of the hand, prevalent in Victorian fiction as a sexualized site (Michie 98), as Lucy gradually accepts her own physical needs. In addition, Brontë anticipates Frances Power Cobbe in her recognition of female strength as natural by some fifteen years, before writers began to advance a metamorphosis of the Victorian female from frail vine to sturdy stem. In Shirley, the feminine and masculine characteristics are essentially split between the demure Caroline and the commanding Shirley. However, in Villette, Brontë amalgamates these qualities, thus conferring upon Lucy not only a more complete womanhood but also a fuller humanity. Consequently, Lucy Snowe offers readers a radical revision of the mid-Victorian single woman.

Chapter Five, then, explores the dissertation's central work, Brontë's Villette, a novel Regenia Gagnier identifies as one of the nineteenth century's "key texts of female subjectivity" (217). In Lucy Snowe repose all three levels of my discussion: she is part of and yet removed from the Bretton family; she is the narrator and protagonist of the story but constantly finds ways to recede into the shade; and she makes a concerted effort to deny her body while simultaneously drawing attention to her inconspicuous greyness. She repeatedly describes herself in terms of insensate objects or ungraspable reflections; not only does she liken herself to a piece of furniture, but she is also a "mere shadowy spot on a field of light" (200). Yet she exists vicariously in the persons of little Polly Home and the pretty, narcissistic Ginevra Fanshawe. She even enacts the role of the fop

de Hamal in the school play, partially attired in male clothing, and scandalizes the mercurial M. Paul by coolly viewing a portrait of the fleshy Cleopatra "with the self-possession of a garçon" (277). Indeed, M. Paul recognizes the "affinity" between Lucy and himself, in their shared physical attributes (457). Of course, this marks their spiritual compatibility and indicates that he is key to Lucy's acceptance of her body as a sexual one, but it also foregrounds Lucy's uncanny ability to glide, shadow-like, between male and female bodies. In an age where "womanliness" and "manliness" were fixed in the Victorian mind, she is, paradoxically, both bodiless and mutable.

This apparent mutability underpins my argument that the single woman manages to be both present and absent, both inside and outside social structures, and that this is why many found her a threatening figure while others recognized her potential strength. Historically, the female body has claimed its changeability through biology, through its procreative function. However, Helena Michie observes that the governess, that quintessential Victorian figure which Brontë herself immortalized in the character of the puny but pugilistic Jane Eyre, inhabits two bodies, that of the ideal middle-class young lady and that of the working-class woman. Poovey takes this supposition even further; because of her work, the governess is a mother-figure but because of her wages for that work, she is like the working-class woman and the working-class man (126-63). Brontë powerfully demonstrates the extraordinary versatility of the virginal woman. Lucy's doppelgängers include not only the petite, fairy-like Polly and the robustly substantial Ginevra but also the daintily feminine de Hamal and the swarthy, exotic M. Paul. Yet, with these many 'identities,' Brontë does not create a female in danger of fragmenting into several selves; rather, these many identities are really aspects of Lucy, and it is in accepting her male and female qualities and acknowledging the needs of her body that Lucy is able to accept herself as a whole woman, spiritually, emotionally and sexually. Her love affair with M. Paul is crucial to this acceptance, for Paul is figured in physical terms, in his diminutive stature, which removes the threat of potential overwhelming, from his velvetty black head with its piercing blue-violet eyes to his generous olive

hand, which feeds Lucy even as it seeks to control her. Through her recognition of his body's allure, she is able to become aware of and to accept her own body's cravings.

In displaying Lucy's hermaphroditic capabilities, Brontë is not being merely fanciful. She gives her heroine a sexual being and resolves, at least to some extent, her own and her society's fear that a single woman was either asexual or masculine. Even later in the century there is evidence of this anxiety that an unmarried woman would somehow become 'transexed.' Beatrice Potter, who spent many years caring for her widowed father and did not marry until age thirty-four, feared that as her spinsterhood continued, she, like others, would develop "abnormal masculine qualities" (Jalland 257.)[2] Potter herself expressed this in 1884 as "a morbid horror of a certain physical deformity overtaking me," for "[t]he position of unmarried daughter at home is an unhappy one even for a strong woman: it is an impossible one for a weak one" (Diary Vol. I, 125, 153).

Chapter Six examines Collins's The Woman in White, whose swarthy and autonomous protagonist Marian Halcombe anticipates the New Woman of the latter part of the century. However, Collins does not send Marian off to find independent employment at the novel's conclusion but places her precisely where she is most subversive: within the family. Having demonstrated her intelligence and strength during the novel's hair-raising twists and turns, he thus highlights her power to upset existing cultural ideologies within domestic space. Furthermore, he emphasizes her agency, for Marian chooses to make her residence with the Hartrights.

Marian, like the other female protagonists, is an orphan, but her role as Laura Fairlie's sister, supporter and main advisor qualifies her marginal position in the family. Marian is a key player.

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[2] It is perhaps interesting to note that Potter was fond of smoking cigarettes, then an unusual habit for women to take up. Although she claimed, satirically, no doubt, that she was "an old-fashioned woman and hate[d] these mannish ways," she described women's use of tobacco as a "more fatal power" than the vote, for "[i]t is the wand with which the possible women of the future will open the hidden stores of knowledge of men and things and learn to govern them" (171).

She is the brains behind the battle of wits she and Laura must play with Fosco and Glyde, and she is crucial to both Laura's and Walter's well-being. However, Walter renders her sexually invisible because of her swarthy looks; his conservative painterly eye sees her as ugly, while Fosco finds her attractive and sees her more clearly than Walter can. Much as the French M. Paul recognizes in the supposedly drab English Lucy a fiery spirit equal to his own, so the Italian count can appreciate Marian's androgynous qualities and her less conventional beauty. Count Fosco both attracts and repels Marian, and it is in her reaction to him that Collins displays the range of her humanity, for Marian must draw upon all her resources to battle the obese Italian.

Like Lucy, Marian is androgynous, possessing both male and female qualities, and like the actual spinsters of her period, she operates as a transgressive and destabilizing force. Auerbach states that the logic of Collins's novel indicates that a woman must be either child or man, but that Marian is a woman because she moves easily between angel and demon (140). As intriguing and often helpful as Auerbach's argument is, however, I would assert that Marian is fascinating not because of her angel/demon binary but, like Lucy Snowe, because of her masculine/feminine aspects and the amalgamation of these, giving her a fuller representation as a human being. She thinks rationally, feels passionately and acts decisively; she soothes the vapid Laura, supports the teeteringly masculine Walter and unsettles the effeminate Frederick Fairlie. She is the very essence of the single middle-class woman, for she is without substantial means and resides under the roof of her half-sister as a dependent, however subtly Collins presents this aspect of her existence. Once Laura marries, Marian finds that her well-being increasingly depends on the good opinion of Laura's husband. She concludes the novel as that quintessential staple, the maiden aunt, though her position has all the marks of a subversively powerful presence, claiming for herself the role of introducing the Heir of Limmeridge and asserting that she will teach this male child to be her mouthpiece. Having seen her crucial attendance throughout the novel, mediating between Laura

and Walter, one wonders if this marriage could possibly exist, let alone function, without her continuing residence.

Marian's body is the focus of attention; her figure is shapely and womanly while her face and colouring denote her masculine tendencies and her otherness. Unlike Lucy Snowe, she does not disappear into recesses and shadows, and despite her often bitter fulminations against her own sex, Marian's is a self-possessed demeanour. Indeed, her composure indicates a certain comfort with her own body and self, an acceptance of those apparently separate qualities of womanliness and manliness; she moves her femininely curved body with grace and uses her large masculine hands with assurance. Her hands are important, for it is through them that one interprets her in all her various roles. Marian records events meticulously and faithfully with her pen, writing not only her diary but also letters of query and reference. She infuses strength with her hands and they tingle to deliver a blow when she feels that she has been treated dishonourably. Yet Marian's capable hands are also vulnerable and stand in for the accessibility of her body to disease and violation. Despite her capability, she falls prey to illness and, unconscious and silent, she is essentially absent from the text for a period. As Pamela Gilbert asserts, grotesque bodies, epitomized by the diseased body and that of the prostitute, "were defined by their permeability, and both became objects of the gaze ...in the context of policing and the reinforcement of the boundaries they threatened" (17). Marian's body, out of her control and no longer healthy, allows Fosco access to her room, if not her person, though this too may be questioned, and gives him a license over her care he has not otherwise had, at least not with such complete freedom. While it is disappointing that Collins thus removes his intrepid spinster, relegating her to an inert body, he does, with this authorial tactic, reinforce her social and cultural position as a single woman, as outside the pale. Gilbert states that the grotesque body is segregated from society (17); similarly, Marian is segregated within Blackwater Park, incarcerated in the ruined portion of the house. She is under the control, not of her own hand, but of the Count's--male, foreign and detested. In this sense, as Gilbert contends that

disease functions "as an 'othering' of the body from itself" (16), Marian is indeed othered from her own physical self; she has lost force, vitality, agency and, essentially, individuality, as typhus absents her from the action of the text. When she reappears, during the graveyard scene with Laura and Walter, she is haggard, weak and marginalized, as the dramatic focus is squarely on Laura as a kind of risen ghost. If Laura's identity is established privately in this scene, as Walter realizes that the tombstone proclaiming her demise is untrue, Marian's is altered--she performs a sort of Chorus role to the greater drama, shrieking and praying from behind her veil, and eventually falling to her knees, almost as though Laura and Walter can only 'grow' if she shrinks. She is thus set apart from her sister, relegated to the margins of family, text and her own changed and convalescing body. Her vitality has been replaced with hysteria, her force with fear.

Yet Collins allows his dark lady a triumph in the end. Marian remains, like Lucy Snowe, a single woman, a choice she makes for herself, and in this one feels a fitting conclusion, for Marian remains individual and distinct. While perhaps tied to the insipid pallor of Walter and Laura in a rather unsatisfactory way, she nevertheless resides at the very centre of the family she fought so hard to establish and preserve. Marian will exert influence as a proper Victorian woman should, but Collins has demonstrated the range and force her influence can take. Her future therefore does not carry the sense of disappointment and lost potential one feels for Caroline and Shirley as they marry, nor the bittersweet years of maidenhood Lucy faces after M. Paul's loss. If Marian opts for life as a perennial maiden aunt, it is, as Chapter Six argues, her choice. One may hope that there are other adventures that the "magnificent Marian" (468) will take into her large and capable hands.

Chapter One
The Spinsterhood of Great Britain:
Taxonomies of Unmarried Females and the Problem of Surplus Women

"[I]sn't it better to live single than to live miserable, married?"
Elizabeth Barrett Barrett to Mary Russell Mitford, October 13, 1842

Periodical literature dealing with the Woman Question in the Victorian era seeks, with increasing confidence, to redefine spinsterhood, to determine woman's role in the absence of marriage. At the very least, writers in various fields situate the single female within society, rather than abandoning her to the margins. However, not surprisingly, their own entrenched cultural expectations sometimes colour their view of the spinster so that some quite radical ideas are offset by conservative beliefs, as for example when Frances Power Cobbe argues for female strength and independence but also affirms that marriage is the best state for the population generally. Conversely, one can interpret this contradiction the other way around, seeing that even writers like Dora Greenwell who uphold a more traditional view of spinsterhood do offer new perceptions of the single woman.

Not only do I offer readings of the essays and novels that argue for this nascent revision of single female life, but I also agree with Sally Shuttleworth that the debate about single women began much earlier than has been indicated by the scholarly material available heretofore. Generally, the 1851 census has been taken as the catalyst that gave rise to the vigorous debate on the Woman Question, as Britons were suddenly confronted with the actual numbers of unmarried women. However, Jessie Boucherett declares in her paper "On the Cause of the Distress prevalent among Single Women," read at the Social Science Congress and published in The English Woman's Journal in February of 1864, that "disposing of superfluous women" is hardly a new phenomenon. She declares, "[T]he 'woman question' as it is called, is pretty nearly as old as the world itself; the only new thing about it is the attempt now made to give it a rational and humane answer." She conveys her sense of the issue's importance by adding, "[I]t is probable that the

successful solving of the problem will be one of the highest triumphs of Christianity and civilisation" (Reprinted in Lacey. 272). Conversely, Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English argue that the Woman Question arose only with the Industrial Revolution as woman's role shifted from one necessary to communal survival to one of dependence. They state that woman "could hardly think of herself as a 'misfit' in a world which depended so heavily on her skills and her work. Nor could she imagine making painful decisions about the direction of her life, for, within the patriarchal order, all decisions of consequence would be made for her by her father or husband, if they were not determined by tradition" (9. Original emphasis). Most recently, Sally Shuttleworth claims that this issue of what to do with odd, unpaired women really began to gain momentum in the 1840s (194, 195). Spinsters appeared disturbingly numerous in number and were the focus of much public awareness. Thus they were a very visible section of society. However, society equates spinsterhood with absence and with loss--of beauty, influence and standing, of maternal destiny, sexual knowledge and a viable role. To be an old maid was such a traumatic state that it apparently required much guidance. Advice addressed to old maids, in works such as The Afternoon of Unmarried Life published in 1859, directed them how to deal with the "'set grey life' of middle-aged women who walk it alone" (Penny 56); spinsterhood is a veritable quagmire of pitfalls: potential vanity, sin and egoism as one fades from view. Advice books, such as The Spinster Book (1903), Advice to Single Women (1907), and Books of Interest and Consolation to Spinsters (1904), continued to appear into the twentieth century.

Many of the essays treated in this dissertation, most of which appeared in journals, present the single woman, the old maid, as a pitiable figure; indeed, this seems to be a strategy deliberately employed to gain sympathy for women who were often poor and neglected and to galvanize the public into providing better opportunities, such as education and work. Not all writers adopted this tactic, though, and as the debate about surplus women continued, writers offer a revised perception of spinsterhood as a valid state, one of productivity, contentment and overall health. What exists,

then, is a tension between presenting the spinster as a satisfied, healthy individual, either actually or potentially, who has much to contribute to society and as someone who has regrettably missed her destiny and must simply make do with her truncated existence.

I frame my discussion of the single woman's doubleness in this chapter with a section on marriage. Any examination of the supposedly surplus woman centres on marriage, the only legitimate career open to a mid-Victorian woman, for her exclusion from the marital state is in fact what constitutes her as a social 'problem.' However, writers examine the spinster's situation in light of the conjugal institution, commenting on the scorn hypocritically heaped upon women who pursue this very goal and noting that women in destitute circumstances will marry as a means of sustenance and security. Marriages are not always entered into for love, and thus the sacredness of the communion of woman and man is besmirched. The dubious state of marriage, then, casts a new light on remaining single.

Framing the Debate: Marriage and the Single Woman

Expectations of and preparations for the connubial life were for most early to mid-Victorian women the main focus of their lives. To come to grips with the fact that this event may never be realized requires a radical shift in thinking, not only on the part of individual women but for society as well. Logically then, in trying to assess what a single woman may do if she remains unwed, writers target the state of marriage and the state of single women's lives as directly related. As J.B. Mayor points out in his "The Cry of the Women," which appeared in The Contemporary Review in 1869, women often marry because they have no other means of subsistence. Basch declares, "Still young, or relatively young, doomed to a materially difficult existence, the languishing spinster pined away during the degrading wait for a husband expected to provide her with board, lodging and a purpose in life thrown in" (105). Cobbe, like Maria (Shirreff) Grey, expresses her distress that women often think they have no choice in life other than the bonds of matrimony, that they

cannot have fulfilled lives without it. Marriage is thus often a shelter for the desperate and needy, not a state entered into by strong women who accept marital union as their best choice. However, none of the writers wants to discourage women from marrying if they choose. Indeed, Cobbe outlines the purpose of her November 1862 essay "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?" with "We shall...seek earnestly how the condition of single women may be most effectually improved; and...we shall admit the promotion of marriage (provided it be disinterested and loving) to be the best end at which such improvements will tend" (Reprinted in Lacey. 362. Original emphasis). Grey, though she asserts the possibility that single life can be truly sacred, maintains like Cobbe and Dora Greenwell that marriage is the happiest and most natural state for both women and men.

However, in "Old Maids," published in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine in July of 1872, W.G. Hamley sees distinctly that not all women are willing or able to subject themselves to marriage, whether or not others deem them impractical or idealistic. Despite this open-mindedness, however, there is some of the mid-Victorian anxiety about the power of single women hovering about the edges of the article. Though Hamley promotes the notion of choice in the "typical" old maid's circumstances, there is a sense that the woman in question has really been following a pre-ordained plan. Even recognizing her ideal, she realizes that she cannot, "constituted as she is," join with it: "In good time she makes destiny her choice" (98-9). It is her "calling" to remain unmarried (100). In fact, Hamley asserts, "No woman without a certain independence and force of character is fit to be an old maid." A feeble woman might make a "passable" wife, but a "deplorable" old maid. Feeble women, to whom "Life is all expectation," and expectation specifically of marriage, need someone to give form and boundary to their existence, indeed to their very self; otherwise, "they trail for the want of a prop, and lie huddled like some unlucky creeper, an unshapely heap for want of the vigorous stem that should hold it up" (101). Most early to mid-century commentaries see all women as the vine that must cling and twine around some "vigorous [read masculine] stem"; Hamley targets these females as feeble, lacking self-definition; they are indeed relative

creatures who can be moderate successes as wives. He suggests that the criterion for spinsterhood, however, is of a higher calibre. The old maid must be strong, strong enough to manage, to shape, her own life and to stand unsupported; perhaps, as he suggests most subtly, she is too strong for marriage, for the subsuming of her own being in the institution that many Victorians found in need of serious re-thinking. The weak woman, on the other hand, benefits from marriage, though part of her weakness is that she is unlikely to attain the desired state due to an inability to come to "a fixed resolve" (101). She thus makes a poor old maid, haunted as she is by past mistakes, her life lacking definition; "soured" (102) by disappointment and regret, she is unpalatable fare for her relatives.

However, Hamley points out in the following paragraph that often fear of such ridicule causes young women to marry without love and to rely on such devices to attract a marriage partner as result in a marked lack of rational development. He clearly agrees with 'Tabitha Glum' that the means of attracting a mate in England are beneath women and cheapen the sanctity of marriage. Glum, whose 1844 letter to the editor of Blackwood's will be discussed chiefly in Chapter Two, links the ridicule levelled against spinsters to the current state of the marital institution. When the unmarried state is treated with respect, there will be no need for husband-hunting, and marriage will again be sacrosanct.

Indeed, many writers are concerned with the way in which the marital institution has lost its sacredness. Just as Mayor argues that those who openly court marriage are only a little less castigated than "those who would endeavour to escape altogether from competition for the coveted prize by taking shelter in convents or sisterhoods" (199), so Cobbe implies, in her concern that marriage be a choice among other avenues, that the stigma adhering to spinsterhood will disappear once single women come to marital union as fully developed individuals. Marriage will then be less of a refuge for women with no other recourse and more of a freely chosen alternative for autonomous women. Although she believes that marriage is the best state for both sexes, she qualifies this: the only type of marriage that is truly beneficial to both parties is one "founded on

free choice, esteem, and affection—in one word, on love" (Lacey 356). Thus the stigma of old maidism will vanish when the attitude to marriage becomes more healthy. Both single women and the marital institution will benefit from giving women more scope in life.

However much single life is improved or approved, wives, it seems, retain the higher status. Hamley acknowledges to some extent the power of the world's opinion on this. Though the single woman is at one with herself by virtue of her celibacy, the matron is "at one with the world; she feels herself a citizeness, a transmitter of its traditions. The old maid knows herself in the world's eye a cipher—her self-possession wants the world's backing" (107). However, time may show the balance to weigh in the spinster's favour. The youthful husband may exhibit all of the drawbacks of "unlovely old age" (108), making single, independent life more appealing. That state which Tabitha Glum claims Shakespeare has mistakenly called single blessedness (200) may, in time, states Hamley, prove blessed after all.

"Old Maids: Their Varieties, Characters, and Conditions": Assumptions and Taxonomies

Writers in Eliza Cook's Journal and Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, as well as Mrs. (Maria Shirreff) William Grey, Anne Thackeray and the anonymous male writer of Old Maids: Their Varieties, Characters, and Conditions, provide perceptions and categories of the old maid. In her 1875 lecture Old Maids Grey cites a variety of political, religious and literary authorities who deem unmarried women to be "social failures," "social superfluities," or "a social laughing-stock" (3, 4). Having described these pejorative terms, Grey then points out that for Saint Paul the virgin was superior to the wife and received honour and respect for her sacrifice of renouncing human ties and hopes. She was, then, a "social dignitary," honoured, as Grey notes, for her "voluntary celibacy" (5. Original emphasis). Grey further defines what currently constitutes a spinster: her concern is with impecunious middle-class women, for she declares that no stigma attaches to the spinster of adequate fortune and that "old maids exist only in the circles that are or aspire to be

'genteel'" (6-7). In "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?" published in Fraser's Magazine in November 1862 Frances Power Cobbe states, "It is of educated women that the great body of 'old maids' consists; in the lower orders celibacy is rare" (Lacey 362-3). Clearly, the stigma is one created by class, where a fall in wealth results in a lowering of social standing. Grey, and most of the other writers here, with the exception of Thackeray, are not concerned with working-class women, a focus which implies the privileging of class distinctions: old maidism is thus a middle-class phenomenon.

Grey chooses not to fix a definite age to old maidism but determines that a woman becomes an old maid when youthful manners and amusements are no longer appropriate. The anonymous writer of the 1835 Old Maids: Their Varieties, Characters, and Conditions is more precise, designating as old maids "Ladies who have passed their thirty-fifth year, calculated either from the parish register, or, if that be wanting, from the family bible, and who remain in a state of unimpeachable maidenhood, without any appearance of a matrimonial alliance,—unless such an appearance has been of ten years standing" (27). For this writer, who styles himself as "a true knight" (3), old maids can also be classified as voluntary or involuntary, each being identified physically. The former, "with contemplative brows—eyes of subdued brilliancy—a lofty bearing" and possessing "birth, beauty, accomplishments and opportunity," conducts herself in a dignified manner, while the accidental old maids "are a species of chained wild cats" (51, 85, 133). One remains human, while the other has metamorphosed into an animal.

Having specified the types of spinster she is dealing with, Grey appeals in her lecture for the dignity of the single woman, and she argues her points with a gentle humour. She attempts to eradicate the belief that unmarried women are failures simply because they have not secured marriage. She challenges why a woman, though trained to prize only one thing, to aspire solely to that single goal of matrimony, should be castigated as a failure should she not succeed in capturing it. For society, success, at whatever cost, would have justified her efforts to garner "that magic

wedding ring" (12), which could bear without tarnish the mud from which it was plucked, for this ring is the emblem of success in the matrimonial market. It is the female's "professional prize" for the only aspiration validated by society (8). For Grey, however, what designates a woman a failure is "a habit of moral stooping" from which she cannot lift herself (8), a fall from what J.B. Mayor mentions as woman's "moral height" (208). This insistence upon moral purity appears not to have changed since the "true knight" of 1835 specified "unimpeachable maidenhood." As Grey makes clear as her lecture continues, the woman who hankers after marriage at any cost, who betrays her better self and sells that self for the muddy coronet or soiled ring, is correctly considered a failure. For Grey, then, the end does not justify the means in procuring matrimony, for the woman who betrays her integrity may be a social success but a moral failure. Yet the self-sacrifice that Grey notes of maiden aunts does not reduce the single woman to being a mere vessel or existing in a state of suspended animation. Grey's more appealing "working bee" (12) does not wait for the magic wedding ring "which raises the wearer to unquestioned pre-eminence, by marking her as the possession of one of the worthier sex." She believes, and hopes, that there are many women who will retain their "right to remain in possession of themselves," who will not enter the "market" of marriage and dispose of themselves "at a discount" (12). These women will not sell their self possession, though the right man, the one who gives "the love which makes the surrender of all sweeter than any possession," will receive it "in exchange" for that love (12). Grey does not, however, find it troubling that women must give up this possession for a marriage of love.

Single women may then sometimes be social failures, but whether they are ever superfluous is a different issue. Grey, though herself a married woman, takes up the cause of spinsterhood as a valid state and one not requiring apology or shame. Similarly, in her February 1844 satiric letter "A Bewailment from Bath; or Poor Old Maids," directed to Christopher North, editor of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Tabitha Glum, a sobriquet of the prolific novelist Catherine

Gore,[1] itemizes the activity of European women generally in such diverse fields as monarchy, literature, and astronomy--"a list of the eminent women now competing with the rougher sex for the laurels of renown" (199). Women are active and visible, a point Grey also emphasizes. Like Glum and Frances Power Cobbe, and unlike male writers such as John Ruskin and J.B. Mayor, Grey cites real women as opposed to literary ideals when she puts the question to her audience: "In literature are we to count Miss Austen, Miss Edgeworth, Joanna Baillie, as having been superfluous in their day? Are Harriet Martineau or Frances Power Cobbe superfluous now? Was Elizabeth Barrett superfluous till she became Elizabeth Browning?" (10). Shuttleworth states that "early psychological works drew repeatedly on literary texts for their 'evidence,'" Shakespeare being a particular favourite, since both literary and medical material "offer[ed] an arena where cultural meanings could be negotiated, and anxieties expressed and explored." Furthermore, these "prior cultural constructions" served the medical writers as "self-evident demonstration of the validity of their own, dependent, cultural categories" (13, 14). However, by 1875, Grey clearly finds real women more compelling evidence than literary creations. Her list goes on, naming such renowned women as Harriet Hosmer, Florence Nightingale, Octavia Hill, Miss Davies and Miss Buss.

Grey reiterates her point. What would happen, she inquires, "to girls' schools and school-rooms generally, if all our governesses and schoolmistresses are to be swept into space—or matrimony?" (11). Indeed, Grey makes space and marriage, by virtue of their proximity in the sentence, practically synonymous, so that the state of marriage is analogous to empty air. These women are needed. Grey designates single women, "our loving beloved old maids," as "our working bees" who cannot be "spared" (12). Grey's collective ownership of these necessary rather than relative creatures indicates that their social function is indispensable rather than superfluous;

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[1] I will refer to the author as Glum for the sake of clarity.

they may be "spare" in the marriage market, their numbers over and above what is needed, but society cannot "spare" them, cannot afford, to use the language of commerce, to give them up. Grey juxtaposes the usefulness of these older women, working like bees, against the existence of old bachelors, and makes apparent the double standard that prevails in society, for unmarried men are valued as highly as married ones. Grey posits that old bachelors appear to be "wholly unnecessary" (12) and goes on to state that they are, "as a rule, less amiable and decidedly less useful, without being more ornamental than old maids"; they lack the "self-forgetfulness and the self-devotion" which makes the spinster such a satisfactory confidant and so skilled a comforter in the trials and disappointments of everyday life (14, 15). Grey removes any possible sting from her words, however, by declaring lightly that "if I were an autocrat I would condemn them all to instant matrimony" (15).

Two brief commentaries from Eliza Cook's Journal, "A Brief Chapter on Old Maids" from September 1849 and "Old Maids" from October 1850 demonstrate how unmarried women may be perceived as social laughing stocks.[2] Writers navigate the dangerous waters of the doubled consciousness, the awareness of how society views the single woman and how she may see herself, and how to avoid offending that society while voicing the changing situation of women for whom marriage, for various reasons, is not an option. "A Brief Chapter" ultimately appeals to the pity of readers, though Cook opens strongly with the statement that the title of Old Maid and the ridicule associated with it "are rapidly passing away together." "Old Maid" has been replaced with the "milder" term of "single woman" (333), a linguistic alteration only fitting, since there is no need to "brand" "a respectable class of females" with a by now "ridiculous nickname." While

[2] Scholars refer variously to the writers of the journal's pieces as Cook herself or anonymous authors. Suzanne Ozment in the Dictionary of Literary Biography states that Cook wrote most of the journal herself, and, although I was unable to verify this information elsewhere, I adhere to its identification. It is also interesting to note the way in which Ozment articulates the unmarried Cook's later invisibility in the Victorian style of spinsterly fading: "However, ill health had caused her to put down her pen and lead a more retired life; thus she had faded from view" (120).

approving this shift to a less pejorative appellation, Cook persists in using the less complimentary title. The writer, however, eagerly makes a case for the superiority of old maids over married women, but this is done by presenting the single woman as a long-suffering figure of noble, if unappreciated, self-sacrifice, "stifl[ing] all her natural yearnings for a love and home of her own." "If these women be happy," --and the tone seems to imply that this is unlikely, given the ungrateful or unconscious reception of their devotion, and the societal prejudice against them-- then, pleads Cook, leave them in peace, untroubled by sneers or jests, which may "rob them of the smallest proportion of their tranquillity" (333. Original emphasis). In one short paragraph, she has portrayed old maids both as a collective unfairly "branded" like hapless animals and as figures strong enough for self-renunciation but weak enough to be crushed by a sign of ridicule.

Having made this observation, though, Cook falls back on portraying the old maid as a figure of pity in a strategic move to garner the more compassionate response of sympathy instead of contempt. Unmarried ladies are wont to lavish their affection on pets, a practice which also attracts sneers of ridicule or disgust. Cook deems this scorn unnecessary and argues to allow "our single sisters" to "expend a portion of the stifled love throbbing within their womanly hearts" on creatures which friends will undoubtedly dislike or disapprove. Clearly, Cook is struggling to allow the spinster, however apparently eccentric, a place within society, without positioning her in a strange or removed category of her own. In addition, she implies that old maids retain their feminine impulses to love and nurture. Better that pets should be the recipient of these proper and laudable feelings than that these natural female emotions be stifled. This point hearkens back to Carlile's advocation of healthy outlets for natural appetites and indicates, as Shuttleworth notes, the concern among the medical community that female functions not be blocked (77).

Although, like Grey, Cook claims that "'old maids' are neither to be pitied or despised" (333), "A Brief Chapter" has some conflicting views of spinsterhood. Cook generally appeals outrightly to sentimentality and charity for the love-starved single woman, who is portrayed as vulnerable,

delicate and defenceless, while in the final paragraph claiming that old maids are hardier than this. The spinster of paragraph two may have her tranquillity unfairly disturbed by prejudicial sneers, but the single sister of paragraph five is made of sterner stuff. "[W]e have the pleasure of knowing several excellent specimens of the class," Cook states, making spinsters sound as though they are the pick of Natural Selection; these robust creatures achieve "a solid happiness" through the direction and scope of their good deeds that is equal to any other earthly existence affords (333). Spinsterhood is thus presented as a state of health and fulfillment, not pathology and waste.

The second piece from Eliza Cook's Journal, "Old Maids," published in October 1850, points out the prejudices against "that unfortunate class of the community" (403), the old maid, including the negative portrayals of spinsters in fiction as unkind, gossipy and otherwise disagreeable. However, spinsterhood can be a state foisted upon a woman by fate. Though this piece too makes a plea for old maids to be pitied instead of disliked and does resort to plucking the heartstrings of pity in describing the unfortunate woman whose misfortunes, not faults, bring her ridicule, the article is most concerned with articulating the circumstances which prevent women from marrying, and offering a defense of the old maid. Women who have missed marital chances because of poverty, because they cared for an aging parent or lost the loved one through death, are the accidental old maids identified by the 1835 Old Maids author and deserve neither ridicule nor contempt for being single. Instead they warrant merit and "sympathizing, respectful affection" for acting in the most womanly ways--patient, devoted and unselfish (404). These women are clearly not a species of wild felines.

"Old Maids" does its best to remove the negative stigma attached to single women. The article is, however, primarily concerned with the spinster's awkward place within the domestic environment. Yet in attempting to demonstrate that unmarried life can have its rewards and is often heroic, Cook, as Basch notes of this period, makes no case for the spinster's role outside of the home. Even life within the home is presented as making the best of a sad and unwanted situation,

and the prevailing tone of the writing is one of melancholy. Cook highlights the situation of those with the fewest opportunities. While the rubicon age was taken to be thirty, after which one becomes an 'old maid,' she seems primarily concerned with those women who are actually elderly. Despite presenting the single female as a person of merely human qualities at worst, and one with admirable characteristcs at best, she obviously feels that this is a life which has missed its real role. In "Our Single Women," published in the February 1862 issue of the North British Review, Dora Greenwell states, "No woman, we venture to say, is single from choice....To be man's help-meet is woman's true vocation" (34-5. Original emphasis). Even those old maiden aunts with their youthful hearts, who entertain nephews and nieces with books and fortify them with gingerbread, are heaping affection on the children of others because their own roles as "fond mothers" have been unfulfilled (404-5). In "Old Maids" Cook has succeeded in making the old maid visible in a more realistic way, revealing her to be a person like any other, but the spinster is still veiled, her faults excused as less serious than those of other mortals, and obscured as a full entity because the rhetoric of the period works to contain her safely within the domestic sphere. Society strives to have domestic space absorb her into its midst while yet maintaining that she is not fully at home there.

While money and material circumstances affect spinster lives, advice books have an impact as well, one not particularly beneficial when their focus on the plight of single women simply encourages them to mope and pine. Twenty-four-year-old Anne Thackeray, William Makepeace Thackeray's eldest daughter, takes issue with this impact in her article "Toilers and Spinsters," a work in sharp contrast to the tone of sentimentality and pathos evidenced in the pieces from Cook's Journal and more akin to Glum's bracing letter. The article was printed in the March 1861 issue of The Cornhill Magazine, which her father had recently begun editing. Like Cook, she is realistic but eschews her sentimentality. Thackeray addresses the attitudes of spinsters themselves, and in her article she focusses not on what she thought were the appalling numbers of unwed women but on

the everyday opportunities for pleasure and productivity they fail to grasp with their own two hands. Thackeray advocates action on the part of single women themselves, not pity for them. Single at the time of writing, Anne would, at the age of forty, marry Richmond Ritchie, some sixteen years her junior. George Eliot approved the match, believing Ritchie's "solidity and gravity" would bridge the considerable age gap, and seeing Anne Thackeray's attraction to him as being "of the spiritual order" (Rose 232). However, in 1861, Anne Thackeray's concerns were of a most pragmatic and unsentimental nature. She responds to the advertised misery of the single state in a crisp, no-nonsense opening sentence that is not so much a breath of fresh air blowing over Cook's perspective but a veritable blast of cold wind sweeping onto it. "I confess," she states robustly, "that I have very little sympathy for those unmarried ladies whose wail has of late been so constantly dinning in the ears of the public, and who, with every comfort and necessity of life provided, are supposed to be pining away in lonely gloom and helplessness" (318). Greg will be unable to hear the clamouring of single women; Thackeray is deafened by it. Or, more precisely, she is deafened by the unremitting melancholy of tracts describing the solitary, useless and miserable life of the unwed woman. Thackeray confronts the visibility of the unhappy spinster with impatience; for her, singleness confers neither particular misery nor especial sympathy. "What is it," she demands with asperity, "that is to render life to them only one long regret? Cannot a single woman know tenderest love, faithful affection, sincerest friendship?" she inquires reasonably (320).

Like Cook's "Old Maids," Thackeray argues for the individuality of spinsters, but she approaches this differently. She recognizes, as does Grey, that money is often at the bottom of the way single women perceive themselves. If a spinster cannot experience precisely the same things as anyone else, then it is a lack of money, she claims, not the want of a husband, which is to blame, and she finds the former easier to procure than the latter. She suggests a concrete example--schools of art--where women can prepare for and receive adequate employment through specific training.

Cobbe, too, in her article "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?" selects art training as a viable avenue for women to try, noting, "The School of Art and Design in London is a good augury with its eight hundred and sixty-three lady pupils!" (Lacey 371). Thackeray adds that even the depressing tracts bemoaning a spinster's fate promote practical preparation: "I think the melancholy books themselves nearly all most sensibly urge upon parents their duty either to make some provision for their daughters or to help them early in life" (320).

Economics may hold one back, but the everyday world, she asserts, is as open to the unmarried as it is to the conjugally joined. "Are unmarried people shut out from all theatres, concerts, picture-galleries, parks, and gardens?" Thackeray asks acerbically. "...Are they locked up all the summer time, and only let out when an east wind is blowing? ...Are they prevented from taking in The Times, from going out to dinner, from match-making, visiting, gossiping, drinking tea, talking, and playing the piano?" (319). For Thackeray, the stigma of being an old maid is, apparently, one of the "useless little pricks and self-inflicted smarts" (321) that the morbidly morose focus on. Thackeray dismisses the portrayal of a spinster cringing at being the target of ridicule, which Cook, in "A Brief Chapter on Old Maids," finds so debilitating to the unmarried female, as a species of luxurious and useless sensitivity. "I know of no especial ordinance of nature," she claims commonsensically, "to prevent men, or women either, from being ridiculous at times," adding dispassionately, "and we should hate people a great deal more than we do, if we might not laugh at them now and then" (320). The woman who would, years later, cause her brother-in-law, Leslie Stephen, almost to "collaps[e] with the shock" of seeing her kissing Ritchie in his living room clearly has, as a young woman, a healthy appreciation for the advantages of sometimes risking appearing ridiculous in the pursuit of a full, normal life (Rose 301, n. 59).

Akin to Thackeray's active spinsters who have no time to read about their alleged misfortunes is the "highest type of old maid" (97), praised by W.G. Hamley in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine in July of 1872 as a woman who deserves control over her own life. He excludes certain

single women in formulating this type. It is not the women who refuse to marry beneath their station; [i]n fact without these vestals," Hamley opines, "society would go down." Nor is it the woman born by Nature to be independent; "marriage forms no part of [her] plan of life." The pre-eminent type of old maid, he informs readers, is the woman who "has made no sacrifices, nor is she in any sense a victim, for marriage as a state is not necessary to her idea of happiness" (97). Despite this, and it is an important point for Hamley, this single woman has no objection to marriage and she is of the number who has probably refused an offer. The highest type of old maid has an ideal, and having failed to find it, she has "never been cunningly persuaded to accept anything short of it" (97). While other women may mistake "the very commonplace mortal" they choose as embodying their ideal, drawn in by the fact that they are actually his ideal, Hamley's old maid is in no danger of such an error; she is not of that typical run of women whose judgment is muddled because they are happy to please and enjoy "finding themselves necessary to another's happiness" (98). In short, this single woman is more than capable of standing alone, unsupported by a male partner.

Hamley makes clear that a 'natural' old maid is not the highest type, but for William Rathbone Greg, she is the only acceptable kind. Originally published in the April 1862 issue of the National Review, his essay "Why Are Women Redundant?" provoked responses from Frances Power Cobbe and Jessie Boucherett, both of whom praised the kindness inherent in the work even as they disagreed with many of his points. Greg expresses his concern with the number of single women, finding it not only "quite abnormal" in itself but indicative of "an unwholesome social state." Unmarried females must lead unnatural lives, "carv[ing] out artificial and painfully sought occupations for themselves" and, denied the duties of "completing, sweetening, and embellishing the existence of others," must make do with a life of independence and incomplete existence (5). Though he describes the plight of these women with some sympathy, he is nonetheless a social

critic, concerned with society at large, and the malady, as he views it, of that society and how to eradicate it is the focus of his paper.

Greg is not wholly opposed to the celibate state, as long as it falls within the "precise percentage of women whom Nature designed for single life" (9), and he does commiserate with those who choose to eschew the admitted "lottery of marriage," acknowledging that the single woman is often more useful, less selfish and, in many cases, "after a time, more happy" (29. Original emphasis). Unfortunately, though, these advantages, which Greg implies are dangerously close to the forbidden pleasures of self-interest, do not excuse the choice of single life. The Victorian ideals of female self-renunciation and duty must prevail. "All that we wish to lay down," he declares with apparent earnestness, "is that God designed single life for only a few women, and that where he did not design it, it is a mistake, even though it be not a misery" (29). Although he recognizes that marriage is hardly a guarantee of a happy life, Greg's concern lies with the overall well-being of the state, and he cannot advocate personal happiness over public duty.

Greg and his contemporaries thus seek to categorize a figure who both embodies the cultural changes of a shifting society and makes manifest that society's concerns and insecurities. The single woman's ambiguous position raises questions of ideology and economics, and often calls forth opposing responses. The old maid is ridiculous; she is dignified. She is a social anomaly; she is an overlooked resource. Her visibility indicates a social abnormality; her lack of visibility demonstrates a proportional lack of cultural compassion. Feminists such as Cobbe and Bodichon and writers like Thackeray and Grey are less concerned with socially stigmatizing these women as failures and feeding into current perceptions of old maids as pitiable and vulnerable. Instead, they focus on encouraging single women to find useful, and, where necessary, remunerative work, to search for employment rather than husbands. They argue that an industrious woman is a happier, healthier, and thus more socially productive, being and promote the then novel idea that an

unmarried woman can in fact enjoy a fulfilled life. In devising categories for unmarried women and guiding people's perceptions of them, social theorists like Greg and feminists like Cobbe acknowledge the presence and importance of single women and the need, in one way or another, to do something about them.

In Chapter Two I examine the various means essay writers employ on the spinster's behalf as they negotiate her ambiguous social position and itemize the practical requirements necessary for her survival. Because essayists find both the spinster's visibility and her inconspicuousness can be assets when arguing for her viable social place, the strategies they use to discuss her situation vary. For example, Grey keeps the focus squarely on the single woman, presenting her as holding a unique and therefore valuable social place, while Thackeray finds an examination of spinster life takes her deeper into an exploration of the needs of women generally. Thus, textually, the writers emphasize the spinster's doubleness by replicating her simultaneous social visibility and absence in their essays. They suggest changes in education and employment and examine the issue of emigration as solutions to the dilemma of too many single women.

Chapter Two
Claiming The Unclaimed Dividend:
Manipulating In/Visibility and Offering Solutions to the Problem of Superfluous Women

"All our difficulties arise from a superabundance of females. The only remedy for this evil is to pack up bag and baggage, and start them away."
Our Female Supernumeraries. In A Series of Views. The Cynical View. Punch 1850

When not attempting to control the spinster, or perceptions of her, through labels and definitions, writers try to explain her ambiguous existence using metaphors and analogies. Since visibility or invisibility can be both an asset and a liability, writers sometimes employ strategies to manipulate society's view of the single woman's marginalized position: the spinster is both a uniquely useful social commodity and a representative of women's plight generally.

Anne Thackeray declares that the number of single women is so "alarming" that she is "afraid to write it down" (322). This alarming number, repeatedly drawn to the public's attention, accords the spinster her high visibility, yet her state is often perceived as one of lack. She therefore embodies an absence, and this absence is frequently figured in terms of fading and sinking, both physically, as the lack of "sexual commerce" (Carlile 35) leaves its telltale mark on the body, and socially, as the spinster complies with cultural expectations of self-effacement. Writers grapple with this apparent contradiction between presence and invisibility in different ways, most surprisingly by beginning their writing with the spinster as the focus and then digressing to a more general discussion on the Woman Question. This would seem to marginalize an already liminal figure. However, Greenwell and Thackeray's articles particularly note their own divergences, for they see single women as part of the larger whole. The spinster's textual absence therefore does not equate with insignificance but rather illustrates that her situation provides an entry point for a broader discussion.

In theory if not in practice, the natural location of old maids should be on the sidelines, where they can remain conveniently inconspicuous and handy. Some of the essayists I discuss here

keep the single woman on the perimeter to demonstrate her unique position; others, however, subsume her into the general population of womanhood to illustrate female community. Thus the spinster is strategically both marginalized and centralized, although sometimes this ploy is not as effective as it should be.

Eliza Cook, for example, generally presents the old maid as a pitiable figure, a strategy deliberately employed to gain sympathy for women who are often elderly, poor and neglected and to counteract an attitude of disgust or dismissal leveled against single women. These are the very women who are represented as socially and physically losing colour, flesh and substance. Celibacy subtly corresponds to a kind of death, an inevitable reclamation by the earth. Some spinsters have been the daughters of "decayed gentlefolks" who, in their poverty, have little choice but "sinking into old maidship." Loss of youth is equated with travelling "the downward path of age with feeble steps" (Greenwell 404. My emphasis). All in all, to be an 'old maid,' however heroic and genteel, is to be in decline: sagging, drooping and rotting away. Similarly, Dora Greenwell, despite her concern about the waste of single women's lives, reiterates several times that women do not prefer single life for itself. It is "alien to the whole constitution of woman's nature" to remain unwed, to "sink into an Old Maid" (35). She notes the poignancy of this sinking process in terms of losing definition:

> [I]n general, it would be curious, if it were not so touching, to watch the woman of 'no particular age' fading into a neutral tint long before the setting in of her autumn need have compelled the change, studiously obliterating herself from the busy foreground of life, taking up less and less room in the world, and seeming to apologize to it for even the little space she occupies. (36)

Greenwell's single woman has no boundaries of self. She is of undetermined age. She does not suddenly disappear but "fad[es]," a gradual process of decreasing visibility as she becomes something unspecific--a "neutral tint," an undefined, inoffensive shade, not a full-bodied, unable-

to-be-ignored colour. She "obliterates" herself, becomes idle background as opposed to being part of the "busy foreground," occupying increasingly less space (the oxymoronic phrase captures the paradoxical nature of the spinster's peculiar social existence) and exhibiting penitence for doing so. Greenwell's single woman is being subsumed into nothingness. Indeed, in her self-obliteration, she willingly enacts this removal by self-effacement, clearly aware that social approval, if it can be obtained at all, can only come from compliance with this expected behaviour.

Paradoxically, however, Greenwell works to prevent further stigmatizing of the single woman, despite her comments on the spinster's inevitable effacement. She begins her essay with a lengthy exposition on the unhappy state of the woman who will not become a wife and mother and then shifts her focus to the need for better employment and occupational opportunities for women generally. What appears to be a drifting away from the subject is, in fact, as she informs readers at the article's conclusion, a deliberate strategy to avoid setting the spinster in a class apart, thus seeing her in "too narrow a spirit" (47). Greenwell therefore opts to convert negative visibility into positive invisibility, to subvert a visibility that would stigmatize the single woman. Greenwell, then, tries to make the spinster less conspicuous for her own good.

Similarly, Anne Thackeray draws spinsters into the fold of womankind generally, eradicating boundaries that set the unmarried apart from the married. Literally tramping about London, visiting offices and residences in search of information and fact, Thackeray figuratively has wandered into realms not specific to single women. At the conclusion of her essay, she admits that she seems "to have drifted ever so far from the spinsters in whose company I began my paper." But she then questions this apparent digression and amends, "I think it is they who have been chiefly at work, and taking us along with them all this time; I think it is mostly to their kindly sympathy and honest endeavours that these places owe their existence" (331). Thackeray thus applauds the women who aid other women, the woman who "in raising herself may carry along a score of others with her" (321). Her shift in focus away from single women specifically to women generally

implies that unwed women will benefit from enlarging their own sphere, moving usefully from bemoaning their own lack to concentrating on the lack of others and the ways to relieve privation, for themselves and others. Like Greenwell, Thackeray believes marital status is incidental to the importance and influence of women generally upon society.

As do Thackeray and Greenwell, J.B. Mayor moves from a discussion solely on the single woman into an examination of woman's situation as a whole, and he too offers an explanation. It is worth analyzing his section on education, though, for Mayor claims that he focusses on educated women because "the grievances referred to, i.e., the difficulty of marriage, and the want of a fitting career for the unmarried, do not really exist in any other class" (198). Close examination of the section also demonstrates the often tortuous means Mayor uses to argue his position. In addition, he illustrates the prevalent concern in Victorian society that the distinctions between male and female could be obliterated.

Mayor manages to appear liberal-minded as he promotes women advocating change while he essentially argues that women should, through education, be raised to retain their charming feminine ignorance. Mayor ostensibly reveals himself to be an advocate of woman's rights, praising the work of female reformers and critics such as Lydia Becker, Emily Faithfull, Emily Davies, Frances Power Cobbe and Millicent Fawcett Garrett. However, he takes exception to Miss Becker's conclusion regarding female education "that there is no difference between the masculine and feminine mind" (205), thus revealing an anxiety that, intellectually, female and male may share a kind of androgyny. He asks the standard question intended to prove, if not woman's mental inferiority, then her unfitness for certain types of application: "[H]ow is it that in so many ages we have no single instance recorded of a woman who has attained the highest eminence in art, or science, or literature?" He accuses Becker of having "made a little too much parade of her scientific instruments" in this area --a species of too much visibility or at least too much display of a taboo knowledge--and likens her to the philosopher who "remains blind to the fact that the

actions before him proceed from a thousand other principles unnoticed in his philosophy" (206). Yet he himself is guilty of this very thing, for he challenges her to find any difference in the circumstances or education of any of the men he names over their female contemporaries, ignoring the entrenched socially inferior position of women in every age. He argues biological determinism and states, Ruskin-like, that if ancient literary female icons such as Homer's Helen and Shakespeare's Portia are in fact an artificial feminine type, "merely depending on education," then it is a type that should be promoted. "The advancement of science," he proclaims, "is as nothing in the balance compared with the welfare of mankind," and the preservation of this feminine type is so valuable to civilization that "we will guard at all hazards the education, if such there be, to which it is owing" (207). Mayor's feat of gymnastics is quite astounding, as he nimbly shifts between liberal sympathy for and advocacy of female rights and the conservative upholding and vowing to "guard at all hazards" the status quo. In other words, he maintains that women should remain weak and feminine, leaving the advancement of civilization to males such as Bacon, whom he quotes in Latin, the language of male classical education. His own anxiety is palpable.

Treatments concerning the spinster's position are thus problematized, for Greenwell argues for a more encompassing view of single women while portraying the unmarried state as one of eroding definition. Thackeray's handling is more positive, as she recounts the generous use single women have made of their time and skills. Mayor, like Greenwell, tends to undermine his discussion by promoting a female education system that would merely reinforce existing deficiencies.

Solutions ~ Getting Rid of Old Maids: The Pros and Cons of Female Emigration

Like Mayor, writers often betray anxiety regarding ways of dealing with "surplus" women, but occasionally they put forward suggestions in a humorous manner. Among the more satiric pieces dealing with the dilemma of distaff overpopulation is Tabitha Glum's address to the editor

of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine in February of 1844. The letter is ironically titled "A Bewailment from Bath; or, Poor Old Maids" and purportedly issues from the pen of a self-identified "lone woman" (200), although as mentioned the author is Mrs. Catherine Gore, a writer of both inventiveness and satire. In her epistle Glum reveals the scope and success of female endeavours. Expressing herself with proper, if wry, feminine humility, she disavows any wish for the visibility of public attention; her letter, she assures the editor, is not prompted by "any miserable coveting after the publicities of printing" (199). Rife with sardonic humour, the letter, however, ostensibly seeks the masculine aid of Christopher North, pen-name of then editor John Wilson, in championing the cause of old maids. Glum thinly veils her own satiric opinions and suggestions with a cloak of apparent humility and feminine dependence. In actuality, this rather acidic epistle takes a well-aimed poke at the fervour surrounding the Woman Question, manifests the unhelpfulness of the solutions being proposed and makes obvious the disturbing duality of the spinster's existence. Its sardonic tone is a welcome change from some of the other writings. Glum implores the editor's manly intervention on behalf of her sex. It is not, however, the fifty-nine-year-old editor's wielding of a youthful, soldierly sword she asks but "a punch of your crutch into the very heart of the matter" (199), hardly a formidable weapon in her cause, given that her stringently satiric letter reveals just how capable single women are.

Glum criticizes Britain's treatment of its single women by comparing it to rival countries and, like Cobbe and Mayor, critiques the marital institution by examining marriage arrangements in England. Reassuring North's readers of Great Britain's continuing masculine identity, she declares it "the very fatherland of old maids" (200), but this imperial enclave has been derelict in its paternal duty. Unlike other countries, Glum notes with black satire, England does not dispose of its superfluous female offspring by thoughtfully ensconcing them in convents, humanely drowning them or benevolently allowing them to be devoured by pigs, as do France and China, all reliable means of reducing the visibility if not the very existence of its daughters. Adding fuel to patriotic

fires, Miss Glum points out that the noblest way of dealing with the situation was arranged by Napoleon, whereby daughters and sons share in the properties of an estate. This financial security, the dowry, assures a woman of marriage. Moreover, French parents actively search for a suitable husband for their daughter and the entire affair is treated like any business negotiation. From first to last, the marriage arrangement is open, honest and forthright. Compare, the author invites, the "angling and trickery of English match-making" (200), which engenders suspicion in males and prejudices them against those very attractions to which they could succumb in an honest exchange. Clearly, England lags behind when it comes to productive ways of disposing of female offspring. Jessie Boucherett and Grey also refer to these archaic, if effective, French and Chinese methods. The threatening disposal of women in other cultures is clearly on the minds of women writers.

On a less gruesome and ostensibly more practical side, writers discuss the merits of spinster emigration. Punch advocates this option in "Our Female Supernumeraries. In A Series Of Views" (Vol. XVIII, 1850). The Commercial View hopes "that every facility will be given to their continued exportation" while the Cynical View claims, "The only remedy for this evil is to pack up bag and baggage, and start them away." The Alarmist View foresees "that most degrading of all despotisms, a petticoat government" if these numbers are not reduced, and the Domestic View contends that Mother England must send her daughters "abroad into the world." While the Scholastic View advocates, "Measures must be taken for restoring the balance of gender," the Naturalist's View states, "It is to be wished that our own redundant females were far enough north to take wing, like the hen-chaffinch." Our Own View concludes, "It remains with the Government and the country to find them wings."

For some, emigration was at least a viable solution to the problem of surplus women. Shuttleworth notes that in the 1840s and '50s emigration plans, however cloaked in rhetoric, were really about "disposing of unwanted spinsters" while those in the 1860s were more "feminist, job-oriented" endeavours (195). Maria Rye, for example, was instrumental in organizing the removal

of willing spinsters to the colonies, though in her June 11, 1862, paper "Female Middle Class Emigration" she claims it is not "the sole antidote for all this suffering." As a solution Rye states that emigration is unpopular because the number of "unsuitable emigrants"--"the illiterate, the unruly, and the ill-behaved"--have discouraged "the better class of women" from considering it as a viable option (21). Frances Power Cobbe indicates that emigration certainly has been tossed about by some as a punishment for the transgression of being single, an illegal act "like poaching in country districts and landlord shooting in Ireland" (Lacey 361). "No false charity to criminals!" she exclaims sardonically. "Transportation or starvation to all old maids!" (362).

Conversely, the writer S.C. of "Emigration for Educated Women" in the March 1861 number of The English Woman's Journal sees Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne, Canterbury and Vancouver as places where "thousands dragging on existence in penury and suffering here" could be "transplanted to the colonies to become happy and valuable members of society" (1). S.C. declares, "I never yet met with a young or middle-aged lady who did not enter into, and fully appreciate, the unpleasantness of her position as a superfluity in English society" (6. Original emphasis). As Kranidis notes in Imperial Objects, while women were "ideologically valued" because of their sex, "emigration was also mobilized as a solution to the limitations of women's employment imposed by gender restrictions" (4). The Committee of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women concerns itself with teachers, schoolmistresses and private governesses, and specifies in its circular that women must supply references and that the London Committee will offer "the protection of this organization to single ladies, with means of their own, desirous to emigrate" (2, 3). However, S.C. warns that these "gentlewomen" must fully understand that they go to work for independence, not to marry, and be idle" (8. Original emphasis). Rye stipulates, "[D]istressed circumstances alone are not a sufficient introduction to secure assistance from our Society. We demand evidence of sufficient physical capabilities to endure the hardness of colonial life, and a moral status likely to withstand the inevitable temptations which surround a woman placed under such circumstances"

(22. Original emphasis). Clearly, both Rye and S.C. require robust spinsters who are in search of work, not mates, who are willing to carve out an autonomous existence on their own.

W.R. Greg, however, is less concerned with the health of individual spinsters than with the well-being of the social body. He sees any excess over a small number of naturally ordained spinsters as the "residue" who "constitute the problem to be solved, the evil and anomaly to be cured" (11. Original emphasis). Emigration is in fact chief among Greg's solutions for the problem of this social disease; Dreher refers to his article as "the bible of conservative views on emigration" (4). Greg contends that removal of the 440,000 surplus women who crowd Britain to the vaster spaces of the colonies where women are in short supply would improve both the colonies and Britain. This "removal of superfluous numbers" would of course remove from view the disturbing sight of 'anomalies' who must live 'artificial lives.' While he readily acknowledges that the women who are redundant do not come from the class which emigrates, he likens this transportation to a beneficial medical procedure: "a removal of superfluous numbers (in whatever rank) cannot fail gradually and indirectly to afford relief to the whole body corporate—just as bleeding in the foot will relieve the head or the heart from distressing and perilous congestion" (18). For the social critic, the almost half a million women without husbands seem to constitute both the foot of the body corporate and the infected blood which clogs the system, and their transportation from the country effects a necessary de-congestion of its more important bodily parts. Greg makes an oblique reference to the actual bodies of celibate women when he declares that the ranks of women "immediately above the labouring poor"--those such as distressed needlewomen or the daughters of poor clerks and curates--are the "most extensively redundant" and also more suitable for transportation because, as he euphemistically phrases it, they have been "disciplined in the appropriate school of poverty and exertion." While he claims that their education "confers" upon them "adaptability" (18-19. Original emphasis), and that they are not as "hardy nor as well trained for the severe labours of colonial life as dairymaids," the inference seems to be that poverty and

exertion have indeed made them physically able to withstand the rigours of life in a less civilized place, and since these ranks include those who "frequently fall victim to temptations or to toil" (both appear equally objectionable, at least in England), that these are appendages without which the body corporate may survive very nicely. Given the propensity for commentators on the Woman Question to draw the analogy that the Victorians make women in the same way that the Chinese make a lady's foot, the inference is perhaps not surprising.

Jessie Boucherett, though, begs to differ, disagreeing with Greg on the cause of superfluous women's distress, which she sees as lack of employment opportunities, not husbands. She identifies the problem as a two-pronged invasion of the female labour market, by both married women who must help financially support their families and by men taking up women's trades. In fact, she makes clear that her definition of a superfluous woman is a single female who is not in the labour market. In her 1864 paper she objects to "export[ing]" superfluous women and leaving the men at home in England for the "easy" reason that women cannot perform the physical labour required in a "wild country" (Lacey 274). In her later essay, "How To Provide For Superfluous Women," which draws upon much of the same information, she argues that as colonists are quite particular about the "quality of the servant girls sent out" to them there is no shortage of women in the New World. Thus she concludes, "[I]f Mr. Greg's plan for draughting off half a million of English women to the United States and our own colonies could be put into execution, it would be of no advantage to the women exported, as they would merely add to the numbers of superfluous women already existing there" (1869. 31). Boucherett proposes instead that upon age twenty-one men should be compelled to emigrate. This would raise the wages of the men remaining, alleviating the need for their wives to work and opening up non-traditional employment for unmarried women. "The country would at last contain a vast excess of women and a prodigious number of single women, but there would not be one superfluous woman, as every one would be valuable in the labour-market" (1869. 33). Boucherett, unlike Greg, is less alarmed by the numbers of single

women than the numbers of idle single women. She declares that lack of occupation makes girls "first miserable, and then wicked" (1869. 44).

For Frances Power Cobbe, too, numbers are less disturbing than the mental health of women, and she sees emigration as very much a matter of class that does not address the issue of what to do with the women remaining in England. She applauds the emigration plan through which a woman's "labour, of head or hands, can command an ample maintenance" and enables her to choose marriage if she wishes it. However, for Cobbe this scheme is a long term project if only thirty to forty thousand women emigrate yearly, a concern borne out by Carmen Faymonville's assertion that Rye's society helped only three hundred and two women between 1862 and 1882 (68). Cobbe is more concerned that the emigration of educated women be restricted, for these females are not so much in demand in the colonies, and they would not be benefitted by "the large selection thus afforded them among the blacksmiths and ploughmen, deprived of their proper companions." The women remaining in England are either "without capital or high cultivation" or sufficiently well off to require no financial aid (363). Cobbe points out that Emily Faithfull, Maria Rye and others help the first group, so she focusses the rest of her discussion on the second, the upper-class single women who need to learn how they can make the most of their natural gifts in order to become "useful and happy" (363).

Emigration is thus a contested solution, one seen variously as a viable alternative, allowing women to retain their class status and find employment, as a convenient social vehicle to rid England of unnecessary single women and as a sentence imposed on commodities more valuable elsewhere.

Solutions ~ Making Use of Single Women: Education, Employment and the Role of Single Women in the Economy

Glum, Cook, Thackeray and Greenwell, like Cobbe, see the numbers of celibate women not as an inconvenience but rather as an untapped resource. Dora Greenwell remarks that society has realized that these surplus women are in fact an "Unclaimed Dividend" (34). These writers point to the public and private activities in which single women engage. Cook remarks in "A Brief Chapter" that the old maids with whom she claims acquaintance are "active, cultivated, energetic, judicious, widely-benevolent" and with their well-placed and generous philanthropy put to shame the "idle, pleasure-loving matron" (333). 'Tabitha Glum' points out that women generally are very visible but spinsters are ignored. She draws Christopher North's attention to women's current activities in light of the proliferation of manuals presently available for females; these weighty tomes instruct the Wives, Daughters and Grandmothers of England on their proper moral comportment. There is some paradox in this, Glum observes, calling to North's attention that women are currently distinguishing themselves in many fields: ruling kingdoms, scaling mountains and making their mark in social, religious and literary endeavours. Using the contemporary rhetoric of regarding women as economic commodities, she notes that "woman has, of late, ris' wonderfully in the market" and "is at a premium throughout the universe." The female sex is, in fact, highly visible, "signalizing itself from pole to pole" and "this waste of sermonizing," (199) which Glum targets but does not identify as coming from the hand of one of the sex, Mrs. Ellis, has the effect of tossing a wet blanket over woman's competent and busily active shoulders.

Glum takes exception to the fact that wives should be the sole target of study when it is single women, lacking the "consolations of matronhood," who require help. Wives, as the author notes wickedly, do not need "tabby-bound volumes" of instruction, "for they have husbands to whisper wisdom into their ears," but the respectable order of single women with whom Glum repeatedly identifies herself is left untutored. "We," she points out, are doubly invisible, "left neglected in a

corner," first shunned and then relegated to insignificant space. She wonders at this and observes drily, "[I]t is mortifying indeed to find our behaviour a thing so little worth interference" (200. Original emphasis). There is a "holy army of martyrs, the spinsterhood of Great Britain," she informs Wilson, that is left like "an uncultivated waste" (201).

Having framed her appeal in terms of backhanded flattery and the need for masculine support, however feeble and superannuated, Glum now attempts to rouse Wilson with the exhortation to "act like a man!" and to speak and write for that holy if languishing and unrecognized army. She reminds him in italicized print that "the greatest of all women have been SINGLE!" From the "throne to the hospital, the spinster, unharassed by the cares of private life, has been found most fruitful in public virtue" (201. Original emphasis). From the place of the great to that of the humble, from royal to common, spinsters have compensated for the barrenness of private responsibilities by a Madonna-like feat of public fertility, which has yet retained its virtuousness, a sort of immaculate inconception. In addition to declaring single women's visibility Glum furthermore clearly states that spinsters have justified that public presence by laudable feminine deportment. Old maids not only have been in the public eye, but also have proven their right to be there.

Glum claims a lack of patience with "the selfish conceit of these married women, who fancy their well-doing of such importance." The ancients, after all, she reminds North, treated married women as beasts of burden, denied them education and found them fit only for "inspect[ing] the distaffs of their slaves, and produc[ing] sons for the service of the country" (201). Philosophers gave their lessons to the single women, not the "domestic drudges" (201). Single women therefore deserve more prestigious positions, for antiquity has proven their worth.

Anne Thackeray, like Glum, respects constructive responses, but she takes umbrage with the literature currently aimed at spinsters--for while Mrs. Ellis has not seen fit to direct advice to them, plenty of others have--and most particularly with the women themselves. Thackeray feels the

literature encourages single women to bemoan their unmarried status and sink into despondent stasis, and she is palpably irritated by women's own failure to avail themselves of the opportunities that currently exist, their deplorable tendency to "wast[e] wilfully" (321). Her words recall Glum's own observation that the spinster population is "an uncultivated waste" (201), but Thackeray makes it clear that single women have the power to change their own lives by their own efforts. She shifts the focus of visibilty; she does not deny the existence of old maids--indeed she declares, as indicated above, that the number of them is so "alarming" that she fears committing it to paper (322). Rather than illuminate the pathetically empty life of the old maid she instead targets the inertia of single women, their failure to act, to make their own lives and the lives of other women better. Thackeray's is a most unsentimental view of the celibate state. "When one sees...how much there is to be done...in industry, and application, and determination," she fumes, "...one is ashamed and angry to think of the melancholy, moping spirit which, out of sheer dulness and indolence, would complain of lost chances, go hankering after husbands, and more prosperous ways and means, and waste hours of daylight in gloomy sentiment and inertness" (321). One senses in her writing an irritation barely restrained, an energy barely contained.

Dora Greenwell agrees that single women can be more useful, but she targets their receptiveness to being of use and urges a life of purpose and consequence, even perhaps of danger and privation, over one of "a thousand unmeaning restrictions" (37). Similarly, J.B. Mayor maintains that there are single women "who seem impervious to all that the world can do against them" (200), managing to be both useful and cheerful regardless of circumstances. Like Greenwell who exhorts women to be "ready, aye ready" (39) in the manner of a British sailor, Mayor sees a comparison between these stalwart spinsters and men of battle: "As the British soldier is said never to know when he is beaten, so these, with their resolute contentment and power to see the best in everything, would somewhat indignantly repudiate the supposition that their condition is one of hardship or inferiority." Moreover, he adds, "it is with a mixture of wonder and pity, half angry,

half contemptuous, that they listen to the murmurings of their weaker sisters" (200). These are single women who are, in Anne Thackeray's designation, toilers, women who are too busy being useful to be sorry for themselves. Mayor sees a clear delineation between strong and weak, and aligns the strong with British fighting men. Busy active spinsters are a matter of national pride--their "energy and force," "centred in [their] unmarried female bodies" (199), contribute to the robustness and military prowess of the body of England.

Yet Mayor's language is subtly telling, for he says of the valiant British soldier that he goes on fighting never knowing when he is beaten, and while this indicates unmistakable valour in the warrior, Mayor's implied message seems to be that single women are beaten and are simply not aware of it. As evidenced in his discussion of female education, Mayor's article generally engages in a peculiar dance between advocating reform and defending the status quo, praising those who work for change and reiterating the arguments that are meant to keep the Victorian woman in the home and in a state of physical and mental weakness. He acknowledges and deplores the double standard that ensures that a bachelor is held in the same estimation as a married man while a woman "who has passed the ornamental age" is in an "inferior position, not only according to vulgar estimate, but according to the customs of society" (201). He decries the lack of chivalry and Christian feeling that would honour weakness. Yet, as his reference to the actual physicality of women indicates, Mayor is concerned that the distinction of gender not be crossed or tampered with by any unseemly activity. Woman's sphere of action is very much determined by her sex, by her body, wherein her "energy and force" are located.

Woman's sphere of action is restricted to her home, a specific private place. Taking on paid employment moves a woman from her secluded domestic space into a more public arena, as Helena Michie notes in her chapter "Becoming Public." Victorian women distinguish themselves in a variety of ways, both privately and more publicly, and Glum informs North that women are in fact highly visible: "The sex is signalizing itself from pole to pole" (199). However, single females can,

it seems, be both visibly active and decorously secluded if they are properly housed. Both Glum and Mayor see a "lay convent" and a "central home" respectively as a solution to superfluous women, and though Glum proffers this establishment in her usual mocking way, she states that since English parents are doing so little to ensure marriage for their daughters, it behoves the state to "protect and encourage" spinsters (200).

One form of protection--or escape--is the convent. Elaine Showalter points out that in the 1850s and 1860s the revival of Anglican sisterhoods provided many single women with this alternative (Introduction to The Odd Women xxi). Glum observes that the much needed book of instruction--"so positive a recognition of our estate as a definite class of the community," she proposes with scarcely disguised sarcasm--could lead to the "establishment of a lay convent," where perennial maids could "unite together in their meals and devotions," guided by the laws of their very own "tabby-bound Koran." Such a venture includes economic considerations as an "unprecedented opportunity for investment!" (201). Glum plays with the contradiction of visibility and invisibility of unmarried women and their proper feminine decorum. This "modern temple of Vesta," as she sees it, will lack "the tell-tale fires," will be, among other things, isolated and "chaste as Diana and quiet as the grave" (200). In other words, this enclave of spinsters, praying and eating together, will be appropriately feminine--virtuous, silent and removed, altogether inconspicuous and untroubling, but nonetheless profitable, to Victorian society. Unlike the formidable Mrs. Fry, who "like hunger eats through stone walls to call felons to repentance" (199), the old maids' hunger and feeding will be carefully regulated--and unseen. Clearly, the duties of the unmarried do not entail involvement in mainstream society, Glum sardonically implies, and, though with her tongue firmly in her cheek, she appears to wish only to comply with society's desires. Irrepressibly, however, Glum envisions activity of a learned type for these sequestered spinsters, for Elizabeth Carter will be translating Epictetus and Harriet Martineau will be revising the criminal code. In reality, Glum makes clear that instructive volumes for wives have not improved

their lot, and that a similar book for old maids would only exacerbate their wasted usefulness and opportunities. She seems to indicate either that women who can translate the classics and amend laws clearly need no such instructive manuals or that manuals to guide them in such enterprises are the only ones suitable for women who act decisively and intelligently. But Glum also demonstrates, with her own skilful brand of paradox, that women's abilities and accomplishments will manifest themselves regardless of social circumstances, wherever there is will and talent.

Mayor suggests a shelter that is perhaps more connected to the everyday world than Glum's lay convent. He advocates training and remuneration for the work that women do and suggests a central home may supply these, as well as providing a haven to which the workers may return. Like many of his contemporaries, Mayor supports charitable work as the ground upon which women may build their lives, the area "supplying the chief interest of a woman's life, and forming in fact a business or profession in itself" (211). First among his suggestions for reform is this secular home for single women, which will furnish economical and congenial shelter while allowing for the same amount of individual freedom as is usual with "common life" (212). Each woman would choose work in the field of education, charity or art, which she would then study and pursue. While Mayor stipulates that this central home should not have either a hospital or pentitentiary as part of its establishment "[f]or obvious reasons" (213), and that artistic work should include "any kind of feminine work" (my emphasis), he is genuinely concerned that the scope of women's activities be widened, however much they remain within the parameters of 'feminine work,' that which ministers to others and offers the moral ideal. He does encourage women to extend their help to hospitals and prisons, as they are needed more in the "actual haunts of misery and vice" than in pleasant and easy locations (212), and he is clear that this work should be done for payment and that, when required, training be provided. The central home he describes, twenty-five years after Tabitha Glum's send-up of its variation, seems designed, not to closet single women out of sight or to keep them safely sequestered in one place, but to offer a home and training ground to those for

whom no other recourse exists, or for those who wish to expend their physical "energy and force" in a productive and beneficial manner (199). Despite the contradictions and often entrenched conservatism of his views, Mayor offers some practical and not unsympathetic solutions to the problem of surplus women. Like Boucherett, he advocates that women should seek paid employment, though he demonstrates concern that this work should not cross traditional areas of female expertise.

Although the degree of radicalism in arguments for women's inclusion in the workforce varies, even among forward-thinking women, the fundamental point is that single women require work, as a useful activity or as life-sustaining occupation. In 1857 Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon explained why women require employment:

> Women want work both for the health of their minds and bodies. They want it often because they must eat and because they have children and others dependent on them—for all the reasons that men want work. They are placed at a great disadvantage in the market of work because they are not skilled labourers, and are therefore badly paid. They rarely have any training. It is the duty of fathers and mothers to give their daughters this training. (Lacey 63-4. Original emphasis.)

Jessie Boucherett believes women should be allowed "to engage freely in all occupations suited to their strength"; such a plan "would put an end to superfluous women altogether by converting them into useful members of society" (1869. 45). Greenwell, while adhering to women's nature as the determining factor in her work, acknowledges that women not only have a certain capacity for "moral superintendence and personal administration—'house-keeping,' as Mrs. Jameson calls it, 'on a larger scale'—in charitable, penal, and reformatory institutions" but they are also needed in these establishments (39, 38). Frances Power Cobbe praises Maria Rye's efforts in emigration, declaring, "This is doing women's work in working style truly" (Lacey 377, n.1).

Thackeray too promotes a productive life for women. She argues usefulness as the issue, not singleness, and describes the establishments about which she has learned that have been put in place to aid the growing number of needy women, particularly old maids and single women, to earn

their own bread. Here, however, she diverges from her discussion of the single woman's lack of inclination to help herself and focusses on the organizations set up by specific women who are directing their efforts to help others, women such as Jessie Boucherett, Emily Faithfull and Maria Rye, and those women, many of whom are poor or were at one time destitute, who are taking advantage of these efforts, who are working to better their situations. She describes the Ladies Reading-Room No.19 Langham Place, where working women can avail themselves not only of a modestly priced meal but also of reading journals, newspapers and "neatly stamped paper" for their letters. Thackeray notes, however, that "governesses and hard-working ladies...do not seem to frequent this strong-minded little refreshment room as much as might have been expected." Instead, country women looking to employ governesses more often avail themselves of its services (322). This location also houses the Society For Promoting the Employment of Women, and Thackeray includes a long list of women in need of immediate work, for which no particular skill or apprenticeship is required. "Can one wonder how it is that women earn so little and starve so much?" she inquires (323). Clearly, women need education and training in order to support themselves financially, and Thackeray then describes her visits to two establishments supported by the Langham Place women, a printing press and a law stationer's. While genteel ladies may find certain work a trial, Thackeray points out the practicality of money: "If a lady could earn 60*l* a-year as a cook, it seems to me more dignified to cook than to starve on a pittance of 30*l* or 20*l*, as so many must do" (326). Obviously, for Anne Thackeray, there is nothing particularly refined or heroic about starving when the means to avoid it is at hand.

Clearly, Thackeray and her fellow writers believe that single women have the capacity for work, work that is useful personally and socially. Indeed, they point out the many ways in which women generally currently employ their time and indicate the avenues of opportunity still available. Overall, these authors exhibit a readiness at the very least to consider the spinster as something

other than a family appendage and a social adjunct. Glum indicates, however wryly, that single women in numbers, housed in one place, can engage in productive occupations, an idea that Mayor implies with his suggestion of a central home. While Thackeray and Cobbe spur spinsters on to readiness for greater things than solitary pining, Greenwell observes that single women are willing to achieve loftier goals. The general consensus is that the spinsterhood of Great Britain is able to do so.

The single woman who is a productive, useful member of society, making her own decisions and living an active life, is a very different entity from the faded old maid whose best years are behind her. In promoting a type of single woman who takes the reins of her existence into her own hands, writers like Cobbe and Hamley privilege the spinster's autonomy and, consequently, her latent power. While this new womanhood is exhilarating to some, others, like Greg and to some extent Greenwell, react with a degree of apprehension, for this independent female, by virtue of both her single status and her strength to rely on her own resources, exhibits what appears to Victorian society as masculine qualities. The very essence of womanliness, as the Victorians understood and promoted it, is therefore in the process of being dismantled by the capable but dangerous hands of single women. Celibate female bodies symbolize a society in flux. Understandably, not everyone applauds the coming changes. In the next chapter, I analyze the means by which the single woman's agency gives her power over herself and her society, the manner in which writers locate this power in the spinster body, and the ways in which her contemporaries view this power variously as subversive, transgressive and liberating.

Chapter Three
"Energy and Force": Power Issues, the Spinster Body and the Hand as Signifier

"If the surplus female population with which we are overrun increases much more,
we shall be eaten up with women."
Our Female Supernumeraries. In A Series Of Views. The Alarmist View. Punch 1850

As the essayists generally acknowledge, a single woman must have means to live and if she procures this means by her own hand, she leaves the domestic arena and enters, literally or figuratively, public space. This move signals a shift from accepted feminine behaviour of passive, invisible receiver to a more masculine role, as active, visible provider. This naturally means a change in a woman's range of power. The separate sphere ideology of Victorian culture accords the female sex the power of influence, a subtle type of feminine rule for the guidance of men and children and exerted through women's moral superiority, gentleness and purity. However, single women possess a more elemental power, for as Mayor observes there is dynamism in their physical bodies. Thackeray and Cobbe urge single women to cultivate and use their strength for their own purposes, arguing that such strength and resilience make them more womanly, more completely human. Greg, on the other hand, interprets this vigour as unnatural and masculine. Whether viewed positively, as emancipatory, or negatively, as threatening, the spinster's physical power is transgressive, for it is outside the boundaries of control fixed by her society and has the potential to operate against the accepted tenets of that society. Rather than using only the (womanly) power she is allowed, the single female exercises a power derived from her own strength, a self-developed force over one conferred upon her by her culture. She therefore emphasizes her agency, but to the more conservative thinkers like Greg, she also signals her disruptive masculine tendencies.

The new definition of spinsterhood refashions the single woman's physical metamorphosis as a masculinized figure induced by her celibacy into an affirmation of selfhood and wholeness. The issue of proper womanly behaviour thus rises to the surface in its many guises, notably as regards woman as nourisher and her duty to self-abnegation, an ideological fixture that Frances

Power Cobbe and the fictional Caroline Helstone consider in some detail and which I discuss in Chapter Four. As I have pointed out in my introduction, the lack of husband and children to serve does not exempt the mid-Victorian single woman from a life of self-sacrifice, a quality seen as naturally feminine. Even as a 'redundant' woman she has an obligation to make her life of use to others. However, writers like Cobbe, Hamley, Grey and Brontë question this expectation, arguing that the unmarried female has a right to her own life, to her own choices. Thus the issue of self-interest, of a single woman's right to please herself, becomes key when assessing the possibilities open to her. Therefore, as a correlative to the female virtue of self-abnegation operates the radical issue of self-interest, which concludes this chapter. Independence requires at least some degree of concern for one's own well-being, which is counter to the Victorian woman's role of self-sacrifice. In acting self-interestedly, the spinster claims ownership not only of her life, but, elementally, of her very body. Autonomy makes of the single female a central rather than relative creature.

Bodies ~ Masculine Strength and Feminine Influence: Toward a Fuller Humanity

The debate over single women often turns on the ideological issue of woman's influence, which is frequently used in the rhetoric of the period to argue for maintaining female weakness. However, as single women must look to providing for themselves, weakness becomes a liability they can ill afford, for a woman alone in the world or determined to exist without male support must rely on her own strength, emotional, mental and physical. Thus as she takes on her own care, a single woman could fear the loss of her feminine qualities, and her strength could be interpreted as an unnatural masculine development. With women already leaving their private domestic space for more public arenas, writers therefore argue for this strength as evidence of fuller womanhood or oppose it as proof that singleness is against nature and therefore must be discouraged.

Françoise Basch notes that middle-class women's employment at mid-century was solely within the home. "The vision of woman alone and at work," she writes in Relative Creatures, "had

at that time still not been separated from the idealization of her marital and family function" (191). Society was concerned that paid work would result in the loss of the middle-class woman's essential and necessary feminine qualities and spinsters were particularly at risk, lacking as they did the natural outlet for those qualities. In "A Brief Chapter" Eliza Cook constructs a case for the single woman who, though unmarried, yet retains her maternal instincts and promptings. In the absence of "an inexhaustible provision of tenderness for some sweet infant, or maybe a whole rosy troop of boys and girls," the old maid should be allowed to expend "this objectless affection" on a suitably deserving animal: "a faithful dog, intelligent parrot, or gentle, domestic cat." Though these creatures are clearly not "legitimate outlets" for the single woman's "overflowing affection" of her "lone heart," they at least furnish a properly familial, if not utilitarian, function, being "perhaps the means of preserving in its living and purifying flow the well of sweet waters within." If the finger of disapprobation should point anywhere, adds the writer reasonably, should it not be levelled against the man who neglects his wife and gives himself up to "the selfish indulgences of masculine dissipation" (333)? The single woman who showers her thwarted maternal feelings on pets at least retains her proper Victorian domestic promptings, whereas the self-indulgent male strays from his home and husbandly role, from what W. R. Greg calls the "decent monotony of the domestic hearth" (21). The writer implies that the unmarried woman is perhaps more maternal than the matron and more loving in the lack of her legitimate outlet than the husband who spurns his wife for a good cigar.

Even some of the most forward thinking women, however, express concern that employment will necessarily affect a woman's femininity, a point acknowledged by Boucherett, who asks, "Do not many people think it better that a woman should suffer than that professions and trades be opened to them, on the ground that they would be 'unsexed' by engaging in them?" (1869. 47). Greenwell too expresses her concern that a woman engaged in seeking useful activity may become "in some degree unsexed" (38), though she believes a woman of "character and energy" can find

something worthwhile "without becoming either a lawyer or a physician" (37). Indeed, Greenwell argues for female strength in terms of woman's social influence, but she articulates this strength mainly in negatives, or in terms of passive reception rather than decisive action. Making a case for woman's influence, she states:

> It is not given to women to see, to grasp things in their wholeness, to behold them in affinity, in relation. Not one of the keys which has unlocked the mighty synthesis of creation has been turned by her hand. In imaginative strength she has proved deficient; she unfolds no new heaven, she breaks into no new world. She discovers, invents, creates nothing. In her whole nature we trace a passivity, a tendency to work upon that which she receives, to quicken, to foster, to develop. We could almost say that her influence in the world is an elemental one, so subtle is it, so continuous, so unperceived. (39)

Like the novelist George Eliot, Greenwell sees all women as having important influential power, but this power, like the single woman herself, has, as Greenwell presents it, a strangely insubstantial, ungraspable quality, a quality Eliot imbues her heroines Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke with so poignantly and frustratingly. Woman's hand creates nothing; no thing appears due to her, and yet this influence on the world is "elemental," important but subtle, unacknowledged but continuous, present but unperceived. Her influence is much like her bodily presence: it exists, but is often unnoticed. This window of influential opportunity, however, is brief, particularly for the single female, whose enforced fade-out occurs early. Though Greenwell asserts that every woman, married or not, has power over society, she captures the loss of physical acknowledgement when she states, "[A]nd her power over it is one which lasts far beyond the few short years in which youth and beauty make her a visible queen" (47). The subtle elemental influence may linger, but the years of visibility due to being young and attractive end; the queen is dethroned by her natural but undesired enemy, Time. The power of beauty, of physical attractiveness, gives way to a subtler though, as Greenwell sees it, no less potent power.

Mrs. Anne Judith Penny expresses this power of influence perhaps more clearly and realistically in The Afternoon of Unmarried Life, published in 1859. "It is true," she observes,

"that power over other minds, and power lodged in apparent weakness, is sweet." She goes on to specify how body language is the instrument used to convey this influence: "[A]nd the pleasure of swaying the conduct and feelings of another by a glance, a tone, a little curl of the lip, is seducing, not only as a gratification of the love of power, but also because it satisfies a whimsical curiosity as to the strength of the chain of influence" (39). Penny's elucidation of woman's power targets its less noble, though understandably human, aspect, but she also acknowledges that even the more subtle power of influence is lodged in the female body.

Like Greenwell, Hamley, arguing in 1872 that the old maid must deserve her special status, that she must prove herself worthy of her own independence, suggests that she be an exemplary figure. The spinster here becomes a kind of icon. It is not enough that she simply remain single; she must be commendable as an unmarried woman. This attitude is at variance with Thackeray's, who believes spinsters should toil and self-worth will come through practical use. Ten years later, Hamley desires a social role model: a woman should first possess force of character to make her deserving of spinsterhood. He anticipates Rhoda Nunn in Gissing's The Odd Women, who remains single, desiring a "grand life" that would be incompatible with legal marriage and who feels that her own single state offers an example to other unmarried women (306, 209).

Cobbe, however, while not discounting women's influence, revels in their physical and intellectual might. She relegates Sappho to the category of being "a mere name" and critiques Mrs. Hemans as " a feeble poetess." She claims that women have done nothing of artistic note until recently, when, in the fields of art, painting and sculpture, their work has been characterized by one especial quality: "This new element of strength" (370). Greenwell appears to agree to some degree, noting that certainly in literature there is in evidence a "power, a pathos exclusively feminine—feminine not in weakness, but in strength" (44). Cobbe, however, relishes her examples. Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh is as unlike the "feebleness and prettiness" that has marked female endeavours as "a chiselled steel corslet" is to "a silk boddice with lace trimmings" (366). Rosa

Bonheur's painting offers robust Highland cattle and "teams of tramping Norman horses" instead of "washed-out saints, and pensive ladies" (367). Harriet Hosmer's work in sculpture is notable for its "power and skill" (369). Women's hands are emblems of their visibility, and the work they produce has substance. Cobbe observes that this quality, "or any other power in women," is seen by many men as "distasteful" and "not quite feminine," and she draws on the oft-used analogy of Chinese footbinding as the accepted way of developing women's minds. Like Lucy Snowe in Brontë's Villette, who asserts that her intellectual gifts, "feminine or the contrary," are God-given and therefore natural (440), Cobbe states that "as God means a woman to be a woman and not a man, every faculty he has given her is a woman's faculty, and the more each of them can be drawn out, trained, and perfected, the more womanly she will become" (370. Original emphasis). While Greg advocates the natural, and thus perfectly acceptable and literal starving out of the incompetent and surplus, Cobbe uses the trope of inanition in a metaphoric sense, arguing instead that "[i]t must indeed be a mean and miserable man who would prefer that a woman's nature should be pinched, and starved, and dwarfed to keep on his level" (370). Exhorting women to develop their divinely allotted faculties, whatever they may be, Cobbe advocates not only the existence but also the encouragement of complete womanhood; women should be full-fed and strong, not ill-nourished and weak. Unlike Greenwell, she does not see a particular need for women to ask men for help; evidently, she finds women's hands to be entirely capable on their own.

Bodichon's view of female strength is more akin to Cobbe's than to Greenwell's, for she too sees this quality in women as connected to beauty and obtained through employment; female strength is an undilutedly positive feature. Although she deals with women generally and not single females specifically, Bodichon argues for a woman who is whole and healthy, active and useful. She asserts, "WORK—not drudgery, but WORK—is the great beautifier. Activity of brain, heart, and limb, gives health and beauty, and makes women fit to be the mothers of children." She adds forthrightly, "A listless, idle, empty-brained, empty-hearted, ugly woman has no right to bear

children" (Lacey 44). While the writer of the 1835 Old Maids likens an accidental old maid to a "wild cat" (133), Bodichon uses a more positive animal image as she argues persuasively for female sturdiness: "To think a woman is more feminine because she is frivolous, ignorant, weak, and sickly, is absurd; the larger-natured a woman is, the more decidedly feminine she will be; the stronger she is, the more strongly feminine. You do not call a lioness unfeminine, though she is different in size and strength from the domestic cat, or mouse" (44). To allay any concern that this useful activity goes against women's nature or that it will lessen women as appealing heterosexual creatures, she states that work will only amplify their inherent qualities. She aims at male self-interest:

> If men think they will lose anything charming by not having ignorant, dependent women about them, they are quite wrong. The vivacity of women will not be injured by their serious work. None play so heartily as those who work heartily. The playfulness of women which makes them so sympathetic to children, is deep in their nature; and greater development of their whole natures will only increase this and their natural gifts. (Lacey 44-45)

Clearly, Bodichon urges not only the formation of a new woman, anticipating the movement later in the period for a more robust, active sex, but also new ways for men to view women. She contends that encouraging and allowing women to remain half-developed at best is injurious to the women themselves, the men who marry them and the society that cultivates their sickly uselessness. She consistently reiterates that parents are responsible for preparing their girls for the world of employment, for the formation of this new breed of womanhood, but inherent in her argument is of course the natural correlative that this new breed will then produce healthier, happier and more productive women in turn.

Bodies ~ Hands and Power, Food and Disease: Marking the Spinster Body

However, Bodichon's strenuous discussion addresses the concern that woman's greater activity and visibility provokes: that woman will become masculine as she gains strength. This

strength translates into power, and both of these qualities reside in her physical body, including her voice, but most particularly her hands. Still, for many, there is a palpable anxiety that women encouraged or allowed to be independent will by necessity lose their special feminine--that is, dependent--qualities. They will become masculinized, no longer the Victorian ideal of the clinging and twining vine, but autonomous, self-reliant beings without need of men.

Nor surprisingly, the very muscle that Cobbe views as one of the positive aspects of women's bourgeoning roles Greg sees as masculine and unattractive--indeed, as abnormal. He relies on the argument of female weakness to maintain the feminine ideal of dependence, but his language again discloses his anxiety. Women's physical constitution and mental capacity are far too "delicate" to be able to withstand the rigour required to acquire "real mastery" in any profession or science (32. Original emphasis). Exceptional women who are "abnormally endowed" with a "power and mental muscle" that are "almost masculine" have "purchased this questionable pre-eminence by a forfeiture of some of the distinctive and most invaluable charms and capabilities of their sex" (32). Greg fears the woman who, far from being dependent and weak, has the masculine muscle to achieve mastery, clearly the domain of men. His sympathy for the natural limits of celibacy is somewhat lacking here, for this "questionable pre-eminence" is not ascribed to Nature but to the woman herself, who "purchases" it at the price of womanliness. Such muscular ability and activity in the commercial arena do not win his approbation as they transgress feminine boundaries; these women are clearly "unsexed." Even advocating the employment of women (and children) in factories, he cites their "watchfulness and nicety of touch"--their delicacy--over "strength and skill" (33). One may be visible if one exhibits the proper gendered characteristics, particularly if one's hands are appropriately employed.

Mayor sees the advent of women's increased power embodied in the notorious Girl of the Period, who affects Victorian culture socially and sexually. This new type of womanhood aggressively pursues marriage with a startling vulgarity and introduces an unsavoury element of

class mixing. Mayor reveals a distaste for this 'masculine' sort of behaviour, which is partly attributable to the competition for husbands and partly to the wider environs of society. "What we may loosely term educated society," he observes, "embraces now many who have not been bred up in habits of refinement, and the daughters introduce into the drawing-room the pushing and not over-scrupulous energy by which their fathers have prospered in the city" (202). It is not only the vulgarity of behaviour that perturbs Mayor, but also the infiltration of the coarse outside world and the commercial classes into the sanctity of the drawing room. In gendered terms, these aggressive, masculinized daughters, not content merely, and ornamentally, to wait for an offer of matrimony, are the instruments which bring unscrupulous masculine energy into the private home, the sanctum of female morality and spiritual superiority. The girls cross gender lines by behaving in an unwomanly, even masculine, way, and, by usurping the male province of action, facilitate the penetration of the private domain by the public sphere. Although he does not specify this new female energy as sexual, he has linked it with masculine action and led into the discussion with commentary on unnamed, un-Austen-like women novelists who produce scenes "where sentiment entirely disappears in the violence of passion." He then continues with an examination of the decline in "social morality," which he identifies as the chief reason for "the change in the manners of girls" (202).

Class politics, however, are also evident in Mayor's argument, as he notes that the unrefined are now able to avail themselves of "educated society" (202). Lower classes, then, bring in not only masculine energy but also a vulgar class element that taints the sanctity of the domestic home. Lower class women bring pollution with them, infecting other women with unsavoury qualities and thereby contaminating the domestic realm. Mary Poovey has described the middle-class governess's power to cross gender and class lines by accepting paid work like a working-class man (126-63), but here Mayor betrays the anxiety that this ability is not exclusive to a single segment of society.

Comparisons are not confined to those between classes and genders, for writers such as Thackeray compare types of women to one another. Similarly, Hamley, the author of Blackwood's "Old Maids," makes some interesting observations in comparing the unmarried female with the wife, assessing the effect of both states upon female self-definition. If the higher type of old maid chooses singleness out of the integrity of her character, she also acts towards the integrity of her 'self.' The woman who marries marks, with her matrimonial union, the next phase of life; she more formally highlights the metamorphosis from girl to woman. The spinster, however, will experience no such patent transition. She will feel "young among them who is separated from her former self by none--by fewer, at least--of the harsh breaks and dislocations which make people feel old. She carries her former self along with her, and can recall no point where the girl ended in the matron" (100). This seamlessness of self will have a physical effect, manifesting itself in the single woman's face, for the celibate woman

> will carry about an atmosphere, as it were, of her calling, a virginal overtrimness perhaps, a cheerful, paler colouring than as matron she would have assumed. Something in her face will express the fact that she has no master but her own will...some not to be defined hint of the "old maidish" may be there; but through it all the countenance of this higher type will have a certain youth about it not due to the fewness of its years. (100)

Inevitably it appears that, though a more pleasing manifestation than Carlile's "sinking" features, celibacy is still, thirty-five years later, perceived to leave its physical mark. While the married woman, too, will carry her history in her face, showing the "traces of conflict" if she has a difficult husband, the single woman "holds crow's feet and wrinkles still in abeyance from the complacency resultant on mere liberty of action." The spinster retains youth because, though she commiserates with the trials of others, she lacks such trials herself, and thus is spared the "permanent lines" that these trials "inflict on the countenance" (100). While the writer claims that both single and married women will show their lives, the effects of experience, in their faces, what is at issue is sexual experience, or the lack thereof. The unmarried woman may display a "virginal overtrimness" of

manner and the unlined face of youth because she has not experienced the marker of change--marriage, or, more accurately, sex. Her self is as seamless as her countenance, and her adult body as untouched as her youthful one. Her 'condition' is unchanged; she remains 'intact,' and that is as well-defined facially as the cares of the matron.

Hamley states that this view of the old maid is truer, if less indulgent, than the popular one, which assumes that the single woman is merely an available body. English literature patronizes her as a "useful creature," who, having no life of her own, is available to be conveniently called up when needed and equally conveniently forgotten when she is not, expected to "retreat into insignificance" until she is pressed into service again (100). Hamley's typical old maid, however, is not a woman of such willy-nilly presence; she is not content to hang about, waiting for someone else to need her, to activate her into being. She applies herself, and always has done, to the work that presents itself, so she "can never be caught in the absolutely disengaged state—like a leech in a bottle—which constitutes an essential condition of the old maid's usefulness in the world's eye" (101). The metaphor is an interesting one in light of Shuttleworth's contention that Victorian society was preoccupied with well-drained systems, feminine and social (73). Greg, as I have shown, interprets the single woman as congestion in society, or, as will soon be apparent, a type of social abscess, while this author sees the spinster as consistently productive and a part of life, not as the instrument called upon to reduce congestion in another woman's life when required, maintaining an existence of suspended animation until then.

For this single woman the concept of idle hands does not exist, nor is the worthiness, or even the mere fact, of her existence in abeyance until someone sends for her. This woman is not a leech waiting to feed upon the blood of some other woman's life. She does not need the designated activity of another with which to fill herself up, that second hand experience of life which Greenwell notes. While Hamley at first argues for an apparent disengagement from life on the part of the spinster because she lacks the trials of matrimony, he then presents the opposite case: the

unmarried woman who deserves "undisputed disposal" of herself takes on those tasks that obviously must be done without waiting to be directed to do so. This woman, though of "paler colouring" (100) than she might have been, is not fading into inconspicuousness. She manages to exist happily and usefully without the infusion of someone else's blood.

For Greg, the presence of so many unmarried women is troubling because it is a situation at variance with Nature, "Nature" being the foundation of much Victorian discourse on the separate sphere ideology. In The Subjection of Women, written in 1860-1 and published in 1869, John Stuart Mill argues that what is natural is simply what is usual, and that such customary appearances are in fact artificially imposed. He asserts that "the whole force of education" has been used by men to construct woman's nature; the supposedly female qualities of submission, self-abnegation and living only in the affections ensure that men will have "willing...slave[s]" (132). However, women without husbands may discover they are not 'naturally' obedient, sacrificial and content with living only for love. Therefore, Greg sees this surplus of women not as the plight of individuals but as a kind of social disease, an anomalous state which can--and must--be corrected if the social structure is to regain its health, its proper (and of course natural) workings. He puts forward his suggestions as long-term solutions, which will effect a "cure" for this social evil. Now utilizing the rhetoric of commerce, and again betraying his distaste over the visibility of the unmarried female contingent, he states: "When female emigration has done its work, and drained away the excess and the special obviousness of the redundance; when women have thus become far fewer in proportion, men will have to bid higher for the possession of them, and will find it necessary to make them wives instead of mistresses" (28. Original emphasis). Women must eschew frivolity and luxury in favour of more substantial pleasures and, "as they become less costly articles of furniture, they will find more numerous and more eager purchasers." "Wives," he points out sternly, must become "less expensive" (28), though this announcement is at variance with his previous statement that men will bid higher when fewer potential wives become

available. Once the superfluous women have been drained off--rather like the draining of a wound--society will have regained health, and the remaining women will be rightly viewed as reasonably priced pieces of furniture which men will pay more to possess. The unconscious flirtation of Greg's language, treating marriage as a species of prostitution, and the irony of seeing the celibate state as a sort of social disease akin to syphilis, for example, betray his inclination to view marriage as a market where the commodity to be purchased is 'Woman' and to see the proliferation of single women as a social contamination or an unrestrained and morbid growth on the state's body. Of course, Greg is not alone in using the metaphor of commerce to describe marriage, but his ease with the rhetoric indicates either that he is perfectly comfortable that this should be the case, or, alternatively, that he is pitching his argument to those he believes think in such terms.

Once again he utilizes medical discourse to argue for marriage as the condition most conducive to social health. When Nature has "prescribed" celibacy within certain limits, it is "a wholesome and not unlovely feature in the aspect of society." However, when the single state bourgeons beyond these limits, it becomes "one of the surest and most menacing symptoms of something gravely and radically wrong" (30). Understandably, Greg declares, many of a compassionate and tender nature wish to relieve the immediate suffering of single women and only consider "curing [the] disorder" later, but these efforts, while natural, are directed to short-term solutions and are not to be enjoined by "wise prescribers for the maladies of states." Solidifying the analogy of celibacy with disease, he goes on to liken these concerned, though short-sighted, citizens to incompetent physicians who relieve the "pain arising from local inflammation or congestion, instead of resorting to the depletive measures" necessary to remove the source of the pain, and to quacks who use pills and emetics "to remedy the indigestion of yesterday, and to render possible the gormandizing of to-day" (30). Greg's 440,000 spinsters constitute a gluttonous mass, which, rather than being consumed by society, upsets the digestive order of that society by exceeding Nature's limits, by feeding on its own unhealthy numbers and flourishing. This mass threatens to

consume society, not vice versa; make single life attractive to women and the numbers will only increase. Single women will proliferate, and society, particularly those who share Greg's discomfort with their "special obviousness," will die of disease and dis-ease. The numbers therefore must be reduced by the "depletive measures" so that the health of the body politic can be restored. In metaphoric terms, emigration is the leech that will drain the excess blood--redundant women--from society's congested system.

Greg's phrasing, that Nature's prescribed celibacy can in fact be a "not unlovely feature in the aspect of society" (30), betrays a desire for physical beauty and exposes a subtext of the issue of Woman's Rights, that women are most pleasing when they are attractive. Greenwell likens women generally to flowers whose blooming is of limited duration. "There comes a time," she observes, "when a woman suddenly or gradually wakens into the consciousness that a certain bloom and fragrance has passed from her life never to return" (35). Like the flower past its perfumed blossoming, living only to wither, having no socially sanctioned purpose because she has "missed her destiny" (35), the single woman must spend her remaining years in a tedium of uselessness, having been discarded by society as a spent and therefore blighted flower. Continuing the theme of women as flora, Greenwell moves her discussion briefly to the female's role as determined by Biblical origins. "In the Garden of Eden, " she states, woman was given to man to fulfill her "true vocation" as his help-meet. Created from his rib, she must return to his bosom so that the two can unite to form--Greenwell capitalizes the first letter--"One." Not only is this natural and fit but it also assumes something of a medical necessity. "[I]t is like the healing of some deep original wound," she declares. "[I]t is Reconciliation, Union, Completion." Though she does not specify whether the wound is man's, having lost his rib, or woman's, having been deprived of a portion of herself, Greenwell appears to anticipate Greg's interpretation of the numbers of single women forming an abscess on society's body which must be drained off, though Shuttleworth has noted that "[t]he preoccupation with hygiene, with cleansing and controlling, operated at all levels of

social discourse" (73).[1] Greenwell's use of metaphor and trope--woman as flower, with its implied analogy of the female as a clinging vine, and woman as damaged, having sustained a wound through separation from the male--suggests that union between men and women produces a sort of ideal androgyny, where both the feminine and masculine qualities so revered by Victorian society find amalgamation in marriage. Greg, in a similar view, perceives that too many unwed women form a diseased society. This makes the idea of feminine strength and intelligence which Frances Power Cobbe, Charlotte Brontë and Wilkie Collins promote in their writing quite radical, not to mention subversive, for its time, particularly for Brontë whose fictional women appear in the 1840s and '50s before such notions acquired more widespread articulation. But in the Victorian domestic ideology, which of course presumes celibacy for the single woman, such sharing of the physical and spiritual body is not possible. Greenwell's "Old Maid" (again capitalized) must find a way to "sink" into this state of singleness with as much dignity as she can muster for the "peculiar reproach of celibacy," for the ten-year-long "descent" (35). Instead of strength, Greenwell appears to prefer dignity for her spinster.

Mayor too emphasizes the spinster body and, while he sees it as containing something more positive than congestion and pollution, his language recalls Greg's. Mayor is concerned with the naturalness of the single female anatomy. He targets the single woman by a curious phrase which emphasizes her very presence and conspicuousness: "Society at large is the loser to an unknown extent by refusing a sphere to all that portion of its energy and force which happens to be centred in unmarried female bodies" (199). While Greg sees the proliferation of unwed women as a social disease, Mayor declares, in phrasing that reinforces the very physicality of the single female and

[1] Shuttleworth states, "Women, with their concealed inner recesses, and harbouring of polluted blood, contained naturally within themselves the sewers which so preoccupied the sanitary reformers of the mid nineteenth century and which figured in contemporary rhetoric as the breeding ground of social disease." As she points out, ""[t]he rhetoric of drains and sewers" applied to women generally, not just to prostitutes (73).

recalls his view of the Girl of the Period's polluting infiltration of the drawing room, that there are thousands of English girls who harbour an "infection of sweetness and happiness" and live lives of unselfishness; likewise, there are as many men worthy of such treasures. While Mrs. Penny regards education as broadening the mind, urging single women "to get as much familiarity with any science, or art, or history, or even with any one period of history, as you possibly can" in order to feed the human mind "with a rich supply of interests" to stave off egoism and the sin incurred by "legionary vanities" (89-90), Mayor sees education as the potential destroyer of the natural female body. He relies on the argument that studying science will make women unnatural. "The purest specimens of language are to be found...in the conversation and letters of women of taste and refinement," he declares, a point that Hamley will echo a few years later. "[S]o it is here that we must seek for our purest specimens of natural feeling, not in some abnormal growth or starved deformity, bred up on the one-sided abstractions or the coarse generalizations with which science must perforce be content" (208). Again, the language used to discuss women who depart from the accepted social ideal is that of morbidity: growth that is abnormal and deformity that is starved.

As Mayor describes what education should in fact do, he departs from his liberal view of women's rights and the plight of single females to endorse the standard Victorian fare for girls, which prepares them for a life of influence, not of action, action being of course the sole domain of males. Mayor stands behind the contemporary belief that woman's role is to live secludedly, and to uplift the morals of man and family. He declares unashamedly that, with regard to "the advanced theory of female education, we are still bigots to the old principle," which cherishes, as "the poet tells us 'sweetness and moral height'" in its women (209, 208). The rhetoric is in itself dizzying, for women must live "secludedly," not openly, but they possess "moral height," which rather presumes some sort of recognition. Having first sympathized with the situation of the many single females, Mayor chooses to argue for maintaining current education and socialization practices for women generally so that the women of the future will not be deformed by science or perverted out

of the natural order, out of "that state of life to which it shall please God to call them" (208); nothing, it appears, should prevent women from becoming infected by sweetness and happiness. Mayor argues for biological determinism on the one hand-- "is it not a fair argument from analogy," he asks, " that difference of bodily function will be attended by inward difference of character in the 'sexes of man,' as we find it to be in the sexes of other animals?" (207)--and a religious preordination on the other, though, for many mid-Victorians, the two appear to be one and the same thing.

Mayor expresses his concern that education not deform the female body. He points out that, whatever the deficiencies of a girl's education, "a not inconsiderable number of women" have attained the same education level as any man, and he cites Mrs. Somerville, George Eliot and Harriet Martineau as proof cases. One notes that Eliot and Martineau are rather conspicuous for being regarded as quite unattractive women; Mayor seems to imply that such learnedness results in unlovely looking females. He mentions that this "not inconsiderable number" of women who have become educated have done so through "cultivation"; his use of the term is ambiguous and seems utterly to ignore the hours of self-directed study and the degree of hard work required to produce the genuine scholarship and learnedness of an Eliot or a Martineau. Next he faults the education system of boys, which provides too many diversions for the student who cares more for sports than academic learning. Men come out of this system with "gross ignorance," "hardness and indifference to knowledge," whereas the receptive young woman educated at home by either parent and whose schooling is supplemented by intelligent conversations with guests and older family members is clearly a better informed and more disciplined character. Ignorance, hardness and indifference to knowledge, brought about by the "coarser motives of competition," are lamentable in a young man but not to be borne in a young woman (209). Mayor's argument is circular: women lead secluded lives and therefore require a particular type of education, and women require a particular type of education best served by secluding them at home, where the occupations of such

empty pursuits as cricket and boating cannot divert them from acquiring moral height and cultivating the sweetness they will need for God's plan. So argues Mayor in his hermeneutic defense of the existing state of female education and his tortuous reasoning for its continuation.

Mayor sees no need for an improvement in female education, apparently dismissing or ignoring his own observation that young women in want understandably mistake marriage for livelihood, nor does he see any need for a "higher type of womanhood" than currently exists. He does, though, admit that there are defects in the "general arrangements" for girls' education. He supports the proper training and payment of governesses as well as the regular inspection of schools and examination of teachers. Having pointed out the advantages of home education for girls, however, he then allows that in "many cases" home affords too many distractions and education would be better effected at school, where girls would be given "those varied advantages which are now open to men"; he refers to supervised study and the opportunity to make "useful friendships," not, of course, to the questionable pleasures of cricket and boating. Such schools would require a more family-oriented atmosphere than those needed for men and must be established on a firm religious basis, for "[t]here must be no suspicion that it is a device of freethinkers to undermine the moral or religious principles of the students" (211). It is perhaps unkind but irresistible to observe that Mayor endorses the sort of education that discourages a young woman from thinking for herself. So much, one notes, for Eliot and Martineau.

While Lydia Becker approves of mixed classes in the schools, Mayor expresses his reservations. The "pleasant proximity" of ladies might prove "too severe a trial for the inherent frivolity of male nature"--no doubt yet one more distraction for the indolent scholar who is indifferent about acquiring knowledge or cannot resist cricket and water craft. Also, unlike Cobbe who rejoices at women's strength, Mayor believes most women would probably not possess sufficient strength to endure the physical strain of examination preparation in the more difficult subjects, such as botany and geology (211). Clearly, Mayor prefers the environs of male and

female education be kept separate in the interests of both sexes. He seems to find Becker's purported approval of a new age, when "girls shall share the sports and studies of boys, [and] the men shall be as women and the women as men" as one not to his taste or society's benefit (205). Clearly, Mayor, unlike Cobbe, does not promote the breaking down of binary opposition when it comes to distinguishing what characteristics are "womanly."

While Maria (Shirreff) Grey does not address the issue of education, she is concerned about the stunted lives that unmarried women must live, denied the "fitting food and exercise" of adults and thus "dwarf[ed] and starve[d]," perhaps made "morbid and soured" by a life of trivial pursuits and frivolous occupations (12. 13). What results are old maids who are sickly and deformed. Body and mind break down under the burden of living the lives of children (13). While Greg is untroubled at the thought of the literal starvation of women who clog the employment areas for which they are unfit, Grey is profoundly disturbed at the metaphoric inanition of women whose lives are made small and shrivelled by the absence of a husband. For Mayor, women's display of knowledge they do not need, intellectual abundance, produces bodies gone mad with "abnormal growth[s] and "starved deformity"; for Grey, the opposite is true, for women with meagre lives experience a comparable mental and physical withering. Like Hamley, Grey advocates the self-development of women, making "free and fruitful use of the talents" God has given them, without reference to men. She frames her argument within the language of feeding, fully and satisfyingly; women should live according to their own determinations, to "the wants of their own nature" (17). However, though Grey declares herself in the camp of those who believe marriage for love is the best state for both men and women, she makes it clear that believing women exist solely to serve men is one of the "old barbarous views about women's inevitable subjection" that need to be eradicated (18). She places the onus for changing this attitude squarely on the no doubt capable shoulders of "old maids by nature," the single women who have a "positive aversion to marriage." It is their "proper mission" to demonstrate that relationships between men and women are not

always premised on "sexual feeling" and that there is "a common ground on which they can stand as equals" (18). Grey urges that single women not nurture grief over disappointments and hardships until it consumes them but instead make the most of the "fruit of life," finding health and healing in the ample work which needs to be done (20). Clearly for Grey, the single woman is one who feeds on what life has to offer, drawing sustenance from it so that she need not starve, and who lives the life of a healthy adult, not the dwarfed existence of a child, or one eaten up by disappointment over what life has not supplied. Grey's unmarried female is a productive member of society, and she avails herself of food in the market of life. She is therefore both a producer and a consumer in the market, not a commodity.

In enumerating the employment possibilities for which single women are suited, Greg betrays his uneasiness with female hunger and public consumption. Though he can, as a social critic solicitous of society at large, appear untroubled by the observation that incompetent governesses would have been "neglected and starved out" had a reliable test existed to distinguish them from the competent (35), he is capable of endorsing employment that is within the appropriate feminine role, however metaphorical. He acknowledges that well-educated women are able to supply the growing demand for "literary food"; if only the competent undertake this work, "it will keep them in ample independence." "Novels," he observes, "are now almost as indispensable a portion of the food of English life as beef or beer; and no producers are superior to women in this line, either as to delicate handling or abundant fertility" (37). Visibility and approbation will be granted to the educated women who are able to perform the function of literary feeding not only competently but with plentiful fruitfulness, because these women are, for Greg, just as "appropriately sexed" as those Michie describes as eating delicately and little (17)--they feed others and are rewarded with "ample independence," whereas the too-visible incompetent governesses deserve to be deprived of "earn[ing] their bread" as educators (34) and, for contributing to an unhealthy society, rightfully warrant having bread withheld from them and being left hungry. Greg equates competence, in the

areas of education and literary creation, as worthy of the payment of autonomy; incompetence merits the punishment of starvation. For the woman who does not adequately feed others, as a proper female should, just retribution consists in being deprived herself of nourishment, of bread.

Thackeray too draws on metaphors of orality as she urges women on to independence, to seek their own bread. She lauds not only the women who tirelessly seek work and those who help them to obtain it, but those who shelter and care for them while they pursue "so wearily their scanty portion of the bread of life" (331). She does not make the battle for existence seem easy, nor does she deny that the lives of many of these women are difficult, for she describes some of them as a "dismal little procession" (329), but she assures readers that the bread they seek "is to be found," though often among thorns and stones. Given these difficulties, however, it is small wonder that women in straitened circumstances view marriage as salvation. "When the prospect of want stares a girl in the face," Mayor points out reasonably, "how is it possible to dissever the ideas of marriage, and of a livelihood?" (200). When the body's cravings make themselves felt, marriage is a viable and practical way to ensure the body's subsistence.

Preservation of the spinster body locates itself in the hands, her own or someone else's. While many of Greg's contemporaries, including Thackeray, emphasize the power in female hands, he himself believes other hands should control women's proclivity to fly in the face of their natural destiny. The British world, he states, has long concerned itself with the situation of distressed females. "Woman is the subject which for sometime back our benevolence has been disposed to take in hand," he states (4). Greg does not say that the condition of women must be addresssed but that "woman is the subject" which must be "taken in hand." The wording suggests that 'Woman' has in fact gotten out of hand--and the hand is clearly not her own--and must be reined in, as it were, much like a recalcitrant horse in need of a firm hand. The distresses of women quite rightly have "taken possession of our thoughts," he declares, "for not only do the mischiefs, anomalies, and falsities in that condition unveil themselves more and more as we study the subject, but they

are, we believe, every day on the increase" (5). Thackeray, however, sees both the power and vulnerability of female hands. She suggests that women's hands are capable, though she admits, "Only poor women's hands are bruised by the stones sometimes, and torn by the thorns" (331). Thackeray's picture of single working women is perhaps in many ways as pitiful as those of the old maids in Cook's Journal, but it lacks a certain wallowing in pathos in which Cook indulges.

Greenwell too acknowledges the potential female hands hold for the future, but because she considers female dependence natural, she argues for a mutual effort from both sexes. She believes that for women's hands to be fully occupied and useful the female of the species must acknowledge that "[t]he woman, whether single or married, can never be 'without the man,'" owing to his ability to originate and organize better than women and due to his freer movement. Greenwell fears that woman, eager but untrained in the ability to find and execute her work, "miss[es] her way." "[I]f we were a sculptor," she remarks, "we would carve her as we now behold her—the Genius of Goodwill and Help—standing with outstretched hands, ready to help herself or others, ready also to be helped" (Original emphasis). "How many women," she exclaims, "are now waiting, with empty hands and longing hearts!" (37). Clearly Greenwell believes the women of her culture are capable of much more and her belief that women and men should work together to effect greater female usefulness is an idea both practical and conciliatory. Yet the idea smacks of her own conservatism. Admitting that the unmarried woman who goes "single-handed[ly]" (37) does so against that British sense of what is the proper "groove" (36. Original emphasis), she comments that the ensuing contest with society may result in the woman becoming "in some degree, unsexed" (38). While advocating wider employment opportunities for women, Greenwell expresses a concern prevalent among single women that the female will lose that which makes her feminine influence so valuable to society. "Woman's hand," she observes, emphasizing the importance of that particular body part, "is peculiarly fitted for the finer and more delicate workings of charity" (46). For

Greenwell, the single woman's visibility is of less importance than her duration and quality of feminine influence. Her hand is the emblem of her sex and thus of her proper sphere.

Hamley, unlike Greenwell, does not argue that a single woman must have male support of some kind, but his liberalism has a catch. While he advocates independence for the woman who can hold the reins of her life in her own hands, he does append a qualification: this independence may need to be restricted. He allows that "no wise woman," having had control over "her own time and freedom to exercise her own will," would give them up to another, if she has sufficient means to retain her independence. "It would not be good for all women--perhaps for most women--to have this undisputed disposal of themselves," he warns. "[B]ut the woman who has shown herself equal to the charge of herself is the woman to do credit to the single state" (99). The woman who "feels [her own life] in her own hands" must be sufficiently competent to manage it; hers must be competent hands.

For Grey too women's hands are a metaphoric trope as she takes issue with the soiling of this female body part. She sees no reason why a woman, trained to prize only one thing, to aspire only to that single goal of matrimony, should be castigated as a failure should she not succeed in capturing it. A woman may take action, but she risks dirtying her hands, those appendages so vulnerable and potentially powerful. She observes that society will overlook the mud on a woman's hands if she has stooped into the dirt and grasped her prize, if she has stooped and conquered. If she has not, "then of course only the soiling remains visible on her empty hands" (7). A little mud does not dim the appearance of "that magic wedding ring" (12), the emblem of success in the commercial market of matrimony, the female's "professional prize" for the only aspiration condoned by society (8).

Spinster potency is not confined only to their hands; voices raised for and by women are also indicative of their latent power. Greg maintains that the suffering of society can be alleviated in part if "women went where they are clamoured for" (38), namely to the colonies. It is not the

clamouring of women that preoccupies him but the clamouring for them. Only those who are confined by Nature's limits and laws are accorded visibility and sustenance. However, while Greg hears only the clamouring for women, J. B. Mayor is only too aware of "The Cry of the Women," surely an echo of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's social commentary poem "The Cry of the Children" and one that perhaps unintentionally highlights the association between children and women often made by writers. (Contemporary Review, August 1869. My emphasis). Indeed, this is a particularly feminine plea; Mayor notes that these cries often have "something feminine in the tone in which these wrongs are urged," and even the men who raise their voices in it are feminized: "Even the masculine champions of the cause seem to speak in shriller and less business-like accents than usual" when they claim women's rights to vote, own property and choose their own employment. Mayor cautions, however, that this clamorous cry may not necessarily be justified, as so many people "make themselves conspicuous" for misguided reasons (196). But he admits that this cry issues from many quarters, which gives its vociferousness validity and its conspicuousness credibility.

Tabitha Glum is one contributing to this vociferousness in her letter to Christopher North, to whom she "address[es] the voice of her bewailment" (199), for she undertakes to speak "for the old maids of England." Although she signs her letter formally with "Your humble servant to command," it is she who has done the commanding throughout the letter (201). Under the thinly veiled guise of woman-in-need-of-man, 'Tabitha Glum' reveals the punch of the editor's crutch as the feeble weapon it is. Through her sardonically wielded pen, she shows instead that the female contingent will continue to "signalize itself" (199) without any help from male-brandished crutches, tabby-bound tomes or carefully secluded lay convents. By its very existence, her bewailment in fact publicly affirms the visibility and activity of old maids.

Taking Her Life in Her Own Hands: The Spinster and Self-interest

One of the most radical considerations of the spinster put forward in the essays included here is that the unmarried woman may personally find her own life precious to her, that she has autonomy over her body, her hands and her voice. Victorian society has been pleased to view the spinster as an "[u]nclaimed [d]ividend" (Greenwell 34) or a "leech in a bottle" (Hamley 101), a potential servant to the needs of others with first hand lives, and various writers have also discussed the ways foreign countries have rid themselves of the apparent encumbrance of female children. Like Glum, Grey refers to the Chinese propensity for disposing of female babies by abandonment or exposure. However, she notes that the current governor of a Chinese province suggests that girl children may in fact grow up to be quite useful as daughters and wives. "Any use their lives may be to themselves," Grey observes drily, " was evidently not thought of" (9). That women's lives have reference solely to themselves is a theme she develops throughout her paper.

Greg obviously does not advocate the single life generally. Yet clearly he has some sympathy for those who choose to eschew the admitted "lottery of marriage." He acknowledges that the single woman is often more useful, less selfish and, in many cases, "after a time, more happy" (29. Original emphasis). But these advantages, which Greg implies are dangerously close to the forbidden pleasure of self-interest, do not excuse the choice of single life. The Victorian ideals of female self-renunciation and duty prevail. "All that we wish to lay down," he declares with apparent earnestness, "is that God designed single life for only a few women, and that where he did not design it, it is a mistake, even though it be not a misery" (29). Clearly, Greg recognizes that marriage is hardly an unqualified guarantee of a happy life, yet, as a social critic, his concern lies with the overall well-being of the state, and he cannot advocate personal happiness over public duty. Conversely, Hamley, in Blackwood's "Old Maids," praises single women who do not solicit

approval from others: "The natural instinct to please is not strong in them," he claims. Moreover, the woman of such character does not see the necessity of cultivating this particular feminine charm. "She does not want to please out of her pale of sympathies," he declares, "and the alternative has no terrors for her" (98). The spinster of whom Hamley speaks does not shrink from choosing singleness for personal reasons, for her own happiness and satisfaction. Not only is she not castigated for a choice that opts for personal comfort rather than social approval, but her decision also implies honesty and integrity. "Our typical old maid," he observes, referring to the highest type of single woman, "is not intellectually simple, but complex, however morally she is above worldly schemes for her own settlement in life" (98).

This settlement, though, is of prime importance to her. While even such forward-thinking critics as Frances Power Cobbe imply that the single woman has some social obligation to better her world, whatever its dimensions, Hamley praises the woman who lets a healthy self-interest govern her choice and, like Cobbe, Greenwell and Thackeray, sees the woman's hands as the means of exercising that choice. "Whatever her interests and occupations, her own life, and what she is to make of it, is a present condition with her," the author states. "She does not wait for marriage to solve it; she feels it in her own hands" (98). This self-interest makes her less attractive as a marriage partner, less "bewitching" (98) than others of her sex who are more intellectually simple or more easily satisfied. She clearly recognizes that marriage has drawbacks which would severely detract from its pleasures and satisfactions: "the reality of marriage to such a one who has kept to her ideal of perfect union, grand cares, noble pleasures, and elevated usefulness, presents often a sordid, carking, worrying, threatening aspect" (99). Recognizing these drawbacks and possessing enough self-awareness to see the incompatibilities of the institution with her own needs, this woman freely chooses to eschew what many of her sex long for: marriage at any cost.

The increasing prevalence of spinsterhood presents Victorian society with a rather daunting dilemma: how to reevaluate traditional and thus entrenched beliefs about women's role, femininity and marriage; and how to accommodate single women and society as the lives of unmarried women and the face of society change. The desire to control spinsters, however benevolently, reveals itself in the fundamental attempt to categorize them. Certainly it should not be surprising that both the writers of advice books to old maids and the critical essayists produce suggestions and theories so prolifically as to how to best make use of this "uncultivated waste" (Glum 201).

Clearly, Glum's letter of 1844 demonstrates that people were concerned about the issue of surplus women long before the publication of the 1851 census, and several writers illustrate that the spinster state need not be one of loss and idleness. Thackeray exhorts those single women who have languished despondently to rally and put head, hands and heart to use. Activists like Bodichon, Boucherett, Becker, Rye and others toil for wider education and employment opportunities for women generally, increasing their ability to provide for themselves and others, to play a central role in their own lives rather than a marginal one in someone else's. Thus spinsters need not sink, fade or decay.

However, even as writers focus on the spinster and argue against her special distinction as a social anomaly, activists, critics and theorists sometimes subsume spinsters specifically into women generally. The old maid becomes invisible again, textually this time, but there is method behind such apparent madness. The celibate woman carries the stigma of spinsterhood on her body; her unmarried status is inscribed on her corporeal frame for all to see and assess, in her "puckered and wrinkled" face (OM 1835) and her sinking, fading body. Once recognized as an old maid, certain social expectations follow. However, Thackeray and Greenwell contend that marital status should not determine social use or personal contentment. Womanhood generally can accomplish great things; spinsters are part of that womanhood. The implication of course is that if not perceived to be in decline, if they are encouraged to grasp as much of life as they can, then this

may direct them and society to a new perception of their own bodies. Certainly Mayor locates "energy and force" (199) here, not physical diminishment.

Female writers like Cobbe, Thackeray and Grey seem most at ease with single women's autonomy, but Greg, Mayor and Greenwell express society's sense of anxiety that this independence will result not in healthy bodies but deformed, as in masculine, minds and frames. This fear is in direct contrast to Grey's distress that idle, miserable old maids live stunted lives and is aligned with Greg's designation of surplus women as a species of disease. This potential pathology naturally renders the single woman very present, very visible and very destabilizing. Whatever power she holds for changing society resides in her very power to be changed. She is thus beyond the control of external boundaries. Small wonder then that Greg believes women need to be "take[n] in hand" (4).

In the next chapter I examine Charlotte Brontë's treatment of these same motifs and concerns. She applies herself in Shirley to an investigation of single life: its deprivations and possibilities as inscribed upon the spinster body. Brontë addresses the same issues taken on by the essayists--education, employment and marriage--and uses the same tropes--disease, food and fading. Her spinsters can also be categorized by type as they confront that contested state, single blessedness.

Chapter Four
"Listening to nothing and gazing on vacancy": The Plight of Spinsters in Shirley

"Hands can scarcely command a purchaser, and the inquiries for hearts are very few."
Our Female Supernumeraries. In A Series Of Views. The Commercial View. Punch 1850

Published in 1849, after a year that saw the deaths of her three remaining siblings and might have arrested the hand of another writer, Charlotte Brontë's Shirley is a consciously social novel, tackling the Woman Question just prior to the 1851 census that would publicize the actual number of unmarried women in Britain and horrify the nation. Written with what George Henry Lewes, in his 1850 review of the novel in the Edinburgh Review, styled "over-masculine vigour" (158), Shirley provides readers with the paradox that manifested itself in the periodical literature: a novel that purports to explore the depressing situation of single women but in fact keeps its old maids on the sidelines. None of the single women is given centre stage; for the most part, they are invisible and silent, though Brontë is at pains to demonstrate their value to the community. In addition, while most of the spinsters remain numerically 'odd' and personally 'singular,' the two young protagonists are married off in a double wedding and have never been in any real danger of spending their remaining lives as old maids. Indeed, Brontë does with this novel what many of her contemporaries do with their essays: ostensibly makes the single woman the focus of discussion then relegates her to a marginal position. Admittedly, Brontë's presentation possesses more subtlety and craft than the shorter essay pieces; given her own life situation and her personal concern over the dilemma of single women, what Brontë does here is replicate her society's placement of the spinster, part of her plan to present to the public a realistic tale, "something as unromantic as Monday morning." In this book of starving workers and spinsters, she figures this tale as a plain and unadorned meal, suggesting that it offers only a "taste" of the less mundane and is instead "cold lentils and vinegar without oil...unleavened bread with bitter herbs, and no roast lamb" (40). It is a story of want, in which the food is inadequate to appease, though it may sustain

basic life. Thus Brontë's spinsters hunger for independence, love and freedom and instead often find themselves dining on considerably reduced fare. Brontë effectively utilizes food metaphors to express the keenness of these unsatisfied appetites.

This chapter focusses on the spinster body in Shirley, as Brontë's own text does and as George Henry Lewes does in a less admirable manner when his review of the book shifts attention from characters to author. Caroline Helstone is central to my discussion, for through Caroline's challenges to cultural ideologies of feminine behaviour and the somatization of her emotional starvation Brontë critiques social attitudes concerning the spinster's position. Caroline's voice is one of the few spinster utterances actually heard in the novel, yet the voices we hear have power, for they can offend this paternalistic society. Brontë highlights this potential through Miss Mann's masculine tones. The spinsters are frequently figured as masculine in various ways, indicating a subversive power capable of upsetting the status quo.

My analysis of these spinster lives, however, does not generally include how they intersect with or compare to the lives of the mill workers, as do the discussions of Sally Shuttleworth and Roslyn Belkin, upon whose works I draw in my reading. Shuttleworth offers an engrossing examination of the novel as one about "overstocked markets, surplus commodities and blocked circulation" (183), while Belkin observes, "[T]he men who oppress the workers are also the ones who tyrannize over the single women of the community" (50). Clearly, Brontë pairs deliberately and to good effect the situation of single women with the conditions of starving workers in Shirley, using analogy rather than plot as the "unifying principle" (Shuttleworth 184); thus her emphasis on spinster hands is particularly apt in a work concerned with the hardships of the mill 'hands' and the deprivations of old maids. Both the single women and the working class are marginalized by their society, dismissed as redundant and valueless. Without husbands and children, the unmarried women find themselves unnecessary, overlooked and ridiculed; they are superfluous beings. Similarly, as the mill machinery replaces the men and women who possess the required skills to

produce the cloth, these hands, too, become surplus. However, my intention here is not to analyze the parallels of these separate groups. I do engage in a discussion of class in my treatment of Shirley Keeldar's relationship with Louis Moore, and I would thus contest to some degree Shuttleworth's point that "[t]he love plot in this work does not straddle the class divide" (184); clearly, there is no amalgamation of the working class with the middle class as represented by the clergy or the commercial class as represented by Robert Moore. I refer to the union of Shirley as female landowner and woman of means and Louis as a middle-class tutor, a sort of reversed Jane and Rochester pairing.

Brontë's own voice is instrumental in this text about the plight of unmarried women. Given her meditations on her own single state and the limited prospects of spinsters generally, one might perhaps be forgiven for expecting a piece of revolutionary fiction from her hand. Brontë herself may be pardoned, in light of her family's swift and horrifying decimation, for capitulating in her apparently romantic conclusion to "neurotic fantasy," a term Barbara Hardy applies in her discussion of Jane Eyre's artistic weaknesses (70). Juliet Barker accuses Brontë of "lacking the courage of her convictions" regarding female independence (603). However, as Shirley Foster observes in her excellent discussion of the author's outlook on single life, Brontë's ambivalence on the issues of marriage and remaining single is reflected in both her letters and her work. Rachel Blau DuPlessis states, "The struggle with cultural hegemony, and the dilemmas of that struggle, are articulated in a voice that does not seek authority of tone or stasis of position but rather seeks to express the struggle in which it is immersed" (283). Brontë's voice, both personal and professional, does not posit solutions; instead, she speaks from within, reflecting in her art the often grim future many single women, including herself, faced. For her, this future has its advantages as well as its pitfalls. She is concerned to present reality within a fictional literary form, but she manifests her ambivalence about her subject in combining radical female characters, or female

characters with the potential for radicalism, with often conventional outcomes, as is seen when independent women such as Shirley and Lucy submit to men they regard as their masters or kings. Caroline's words that "[t]he matrimonial market is overstocked" (377) are balanced with Brontë's own in 1848 regarding the lack of employment opportunities:

> It is true enough that the present market for female labour is quite overstocked—but where or how could another be opened? Many say that the professions now filled only by men should be open to women also—but are not their present occupants and candidates more numerous enough to answer every demand? Is there any room for female lawyers, female doctors, female engravers, for more female artists, more authoresses? One can see where the evil lies—but who can point out the remedy? (Barker Letters 189)

Clearly, Brontë could not proffer solutions for her characters that she did not believe existed, but she is also at pains to show the harm this lack of scope creates in women. Similarly, in Shirley she offers both compassion and critique, juxtaposing satire and admiration in her presentations of the various old maids. In my focus on the young women who discuss their own potential spinsterhood I emphasize Brontë's point that the single life does not suddenly happen, that women pondered and fretted over this future state when they, like Brontë herself, were still young women.

Gilbert and Gubar accurately state that Shirley is a novel about impotence (375), but it is also a text about female self-abnegation, a Victorian virtue whose value Caroline Helstone questions. The key word is "self," for Shirley offers an exploration of the possibilities of identity available to a woman faced with spinsterhood and most of them involve an alarming self-effacement. Caroline's illness is the vehicle through which she asserts herself both physically and emotionally; her wasting sickness ironically enables her to be seen, first by her parental figures and then by her desired love object, Robert Moore. Brontë's strategy manifests the ramifications of spinsterly fading, but it is also a device that allows Caroline to assert her needs. She thus employs an acceptable means to voice her unhappiness and call attention to herself. However, Brontë expresses grave reservations about the state of marriage as well and serves up another paradox, for Shirley Keeldar is more visible and vital as a single woman than she is as first an enamoured and then an engaged girl.

Thus, embedded in Brontë's text is not only an interrogation of spinsterhood which examines its social and personal implications but also a serious critique on marital union and its effect on the definitions of female self, its restrictions on female autonomy.

There are six single women, including Caroline and Shirley, offered for examination in this text; Miss Mann, Miss Ainley, Margaret Hall and Hortense Moore are the actual spinsters. Each of the six corresponds to a type of old maid as defined or described by the periodical literature or other contemporary material. Miss Mann and Miss Ainley are the most frequently mentioned and represent extremes of the single state. As Shuttleworth observes, these representations "conform in large measure to the two possible scenarios offered in contemporary medical discussion of the 'arid virginity' of the 'Old Maid' who fails to fulfill her duties' as a woman, and the 'great physical end of her existence.'" The woman whose love is thwarted from its natural objects of husband and children either directs her energies into religious feelings and develops the womanly virtues of "'self-denial and humility'; or she will become a virago" (200. Original emphasis). Thus Brontë presents Miss Mann as the masculinized spinster and Miss Ainley as a sort of lay nun, inspired by religious fervour to an excess of womanly devotion to doing good works. However, the essays offer more than these two types of old maid, if one takes general characteristics into account. Eliza Cook's Journal suggests a more gentle and less artistically caricatured specimen than the conspicuously ugly Miss Ainley, implying a woman who has simply aged and become poignantly solitary. One can certainly imagine that Caroline, quiet and inconspicuous to begin with, would fall into this category; Robert envisions a single middle-aged Cary as "quietly dressed, pale and sunk" but not very much different from her present self (193). Despite her early efforts to imitate Miss Ainley's noble example, Caroline finds the spinster's round of charitable exertions admirable but wholly depressing.

Hortense Moore represents another type of single woman. Clumping about in her sabots and Belgian attire, believing fervently in her own sense of importance, Hortense corresponds to the old

maid who Maria Grey unhappily observes can be a "social laughing-stock" (4). Miss Moore is often quite ridiculous, despite her own certainty to the contrary. Like Margaret Hall, Hortense fulfills part of her womanly obligations by housekeeping for her bachelor brother, but Margaret, about whom very little is known and who remains a shadowy figure, retains a certain palpable dignity. Margaret is "learned" (272) and therefore unsuited, Brontë implies, to the chafing constraint of marriage as she presents it here. Miss Hall appears to be single by choice, if one accepts her brother's presentation of his sister's life.

In the portrayal of Shirley Keeldar, however, Brontë gives an example of the "highest type of old maid," as designated by W.G. Hamley in 1872 ("Old Maids" Blackwood's). This woman is capable of managing her own independence and therefore provides society with a role model. With her wealth, her strong will, her enjoyment of life and her business sense, Shirley appears to be self-sufficient and self-contained. However, she does not realize her potential as a fulfilled single woman.

These six women as representative types of spinsterhood are portraits of available celibacy for Caroline. Through them, Brontë crafts a critique on the limited sphere of single women. Some are more positive than others, some more rounded as characters than others. If one moves from the novel's least known single women to those more fully realized, one begins with Margaret Hall, who remains a minor figure in the landscape of Shirley but offers a model of single life of some independence and apparent content. Readers are not privy to her voice and words, and Brontë provides no physical description of her aside from the fact that she is "plain" and "spectacled." Indeed, one learns of Margaret and her brother Cyril, rector of Nunnely, only through the narrator. Margaret is kind and sufficiently acquainted with Caroline to send her a birthday gift, and has practical administrative abilities that Shirley makes use of for her charity project. Cyril Hall indicates to Caroline that life as a spinster need not be an unpleasant one. "Margaret is not unhappy," he tells her. "[S]he has her books for a pleasure, and her brother for a care, and is

content" (283). Nonetheless, this information comes to Caroline through Margaret's clergyman brother, who enjoys a vocation and the home his sister creates and maintains for him. Mr. Hall's amiability does not negate his enjoyment of the perks of patriarchal privilege, for the narrator states that Margaret makes her brother "happy in his single state; he considered it too late to change" (273).

If we take her brother's statement of her contentment as a certainty, Margaret, then, appears to be a voluntary old maid, a designation made by the "true knight" of Old Maids; Their Varieties, Characters, and Conditions (1835), choosing to share her singleness in a fraternal/sororal relationship, providing domestic tranquillity for her clergyman brother and living a life of, apparently, relative seclusion amid her books. She is a typical spinster but also a realistic representation, going about her business but generally unseen, both present and invisible. Like Cyril, she is learned but her abilities also extend to a practical knowledge of the needs of the poor in her community. She and Mary Anne Ainley are the "spinster and spectacled lieutenants" who provide "efficient though quiet aid" to the three rectors in the fund Shirley organizes for the needy (288). Thus she is an essential part of the Nunnely parish and clearly a necessity to Cyril; however, she is present mainly by reference and seems at first bodiless, a creature of the mind. Brontë, though, subtly complicates this impression. Margaret represents what society sees--or does not. Voluntary old maids, the 1835 Old Maids observes, "seldom obtrude themselves upon notice. True to their own chaste dignity, they move in a little orbit of their own" (85). Readers are not privy to her voice, yet she is one of the women who know when to keep a judicious silence, implying the power of her voice when she does speak. She is not a sexual being, as are Lucy Snowe and Marian Halcombe. The Halls, while not frequently seen together, become a sort of amalgamated unit, for Margaret's name rarely comes up without the mention or presence of her brother, so that she is almost a femme covert, a woman "covered" by a man. Both are single and spectacled, learned and kind. Margaret is not masculine--Brontë gives readers too little to go on to assume that--though her

learnedness is certainly an infringement on male territory. Rather, both she and her brother are sexless. Cyril's interest in Caroline lacks any hint of the erotic or romantic, despite Caroline's light words to Robert that the rector of Nunnely is hers; it is rooted more in affection, one that is of the paternal variety. Margaret has no suitors and appears to be out of the marriage market, apparently quite happily so, though without access to her own thoughts her life takes on a buried quality; no one seems to know Margaret, just as many of society's spinsters remain unseen, unheard and unknown.

Miss Ainley, too, whose name brings to mind "ain," the Scottish word for 'one,' remains quite indistinct, and Brontë does not reveal the generous-hearted old maid through her own words. Readers rarely see this "very plain old maid" (351. Original emphasis) in any real action, though her benevolence is, to the women of the community and to Cyril Hall, widely known. She is poor as well, the very essence of the middle-class genteel poverty that beset so many single women and agitated the concern of women like Maria (Shirreff) Grey and Anne Thackeray. Mary Anne Ainley is a "decayed gentlewoman" (196), a contemporary description that in itself implies that her means, her class position and her physical self have all systematically deteriorated with age and celibacy. In her "prim" appearance and demeanour, Miss Ainley "looked, spoke, and moved the complete old maid" (197). The phrasing indicates a state of completion, of integrity. This ugly single woman nonetheless has a certain vitality; she possesses the energy Major states exists in spinsters' bodies, for hers is a tireless round of charitable activities. Indeed, Shirley enlists her for her "administrative energy" and "executive activity," so Miss Ainley's abilities are not confined merely to the physical. In her portrayal of this unattractive spinster whom her community finds so easy to disregard, Brontë anticipates such writers as Greenwell, Cobbe and Grey, who recognize the valuable skills women could bring to administrative positions. Cyril Hall, who speaks to the unlovely spinster like a brother, is perceptive enough to recognize, literally, that it is her hand which has drawn up the charity plan. Despite her "decayed" state, however, Miss Ainley's constitution is strong, for she

sits with the sick whenever needed, fearing no infiltration of infection or disease. Mr. Hall praises her as Christ-like and designates her as more fair and good than either Caroline or Shirley. She is the type of old maid Maria Grey identifies in 1875 as winning St. Paul's approbation, serving a heavenly God over an earthly husband. However, Brontë provides a qualification to Miss Ainley's praiseworthy character. Though she is "a professor of religion—what some would call a saint"—and though the narrator makes a point of instructing readers that she is not a figure of ridicule except to those without discernment of sincerity (197), Mary Anne Ainley's regard for the religious extends to the curates, and indeed "she was blind to ecclesiastical defects" (270). Miss Ainley is, at least as regards religious authority, somewhat naïve.

However, Caroline's ruminations on Miss Ainley's life reflect Brontë's own ambivalence about and emphasis on both spinsterhood and marriage, states which target the celibate body. Despite her lauded visibility among the spiritually perceptive and the financially poor, Miss Ainley's life fills Caroline with a sort of anticipatory horror, for she sees it as "dreary," "forlorn" and "loveless" (198). Her home is, to Caroline, "a still, dim little place" (377), a description Brontë phrases ambiguously enough to indicate both quiet coziness and dark stagnation. For Caroline, Miss Ainley's cottage is clearly the latter. For her, the spinster's life is one of self-abnegation--while there is completeness in her celibate state, her life lacks real selfhood. The prospect of such an existence, walking in the steps of Christ, deferring to His pompous and cruel delegates on earth, the odious curates, providing for the poor and succoring the sick, causes Caroline to shed tears over the charity garments the older woman has cut out for her to sew. The model Miss Ainley presents, one of complete self-renunciation, is not one lived on earth; like Helen Burns's, Miss Ainley's eyes are on heaven, but Caroline's ruminations on Miss Ainley's nun-like existence lead her to a contemplation of St. Simeon Stylites, perched on his solitary pillar, and then to the Hindoo votary, lying equally uncomfortably on his bed of spikes. These images of masochism Caroline identifies as violations of nature, inviting morbidness; the word, as Shuttleworth notes, had for the

Victorians a distinctly medical meaning (201). These images are also associated with women: placed on a pedestal, solitary and out of reach, and suffering on a bed, that charged emblem of married, sexual life. Thus Caroline interprets Miss Ainley's spinster life as a perversion of a woman's life, one that produces unnatural and masochistic behaviour as the single woman complies with cultural conventions of womanly self-sacrifice. If one considers Tennyson's 1842 dramatic monologue "St. Simeon Stylites," who revels in his "pillar-punishment" (l. 60), one sees Brontë drawing clearly on an image of bodily putrefaction, as well as religious and spiritual pride, and emotional deprivation. Brontë intensifies the correlation between an unnatural life and its effects on the body in her reference to the Hindoo who prefers lying on a spiky bed to standing on a small pillar, experiencing an unmistakably ghastly sort of penetration of the flesh. Brontë thus suggests that unmarried life, for which the grievously plain and laudably pious Miss Ainley is one of the conventional Victorian models, holds nothing but martyrdom and pain, inscribed on the corporeal body, but the punishingly phallic nature of both pillar and spikes renders the marital experience equally unattractive and questionable. In a metaphoric, though none the less gruesome way for that, Brontë's very physical analogy implies that the spinster's physical life, ugliness notwithstanding, is <u>not</u> over.

Caroline does not mind Miss Ainley's lack of beauty, which is not of a specifically masculine kind, as is Miss Mann's, but it is of sufficient degree to make her, as a woman who has surpassed even the boundaries of ordinary plainness, both visible and obviously valueless in the patriarchal currency of beauty. Yet paradoxically her plainness makes her invisible as a sexual being and therefore a useful member of society under the same market system. She and her potential use can be overlooked because she is not a sexual object. Simultaneously, and paradoxically, her ugliness makes her offensive to male eyes. Yet, because she is not an object of masculine desire, she is freed in society's view for community charity work. Caroline challenges social attitudes to the old maid when she herself defends a single woman's lack of loveliness with the feeling of one who fears her

own future place. When Shirley questions whether "hard labour and learned professions...make women masculine, coarse, unwomanly," Caroline retorts warmly:

> And what does it signify, whether unmarried and never-to-be-married women are unattractive and inelegant, or not?—provided only they are decent, decorous, and neat, it is enough. The utmost which ought to be required of old maids, in the way of appearance, is that they should not absolutely offend men's eyes as they pass them in the street; for the rest, they should be allowed, without too much scorn, to be as absorbed, grave, plain-looking, and plain-dressed as they please. (235)

Cloaked in irony, Caroline's response echoes Tabitha Glum's satiric letter published five years earlier and emphasizes the unfair power men exercise over women. Single women are rejected as undesirable twice, first as unfitting potential wives and then again as social superfluities. Society accords to its male portion the determining factor in spinsterly presentableness, for old maids must be careful that they do not repulse men even during a brief passing in the street. What right, implies Caroline, do men have to scorn the appearance of those they have passed over? Like Cook, Caroline sees the detriment ridicule can wreak upon those already alienated and marginalized. She argues that since single women are rendered invisible by spinsterhood, their looks are a moot issue; only common orderliness should be required. The current social code of behaviour for old maids is clear: if an ugly old maid dresses pleasingly enough so as not to draw attention to her unattractiveness but not so ostentatiously as to attract notice to her ugliness, she will remain sufficiently on the margin of invisibility, where she belongs. She will thereby avoid the unhappy circumstance that some hapless male passerby may see her too clearly and be visually offended. If she comports herself as she should, maintaining her precarious footing of invisibility, she will experience only minimal scorn. Brontë's social criticism is evident here. The single woman's claim to a peaceful existence resides in the ability of her physical body not to offend male eyes. Furthermore, this claim relies on men's threshold for offense. Caroline articulates the very hazardous path she herself will have to walk as an old maid.

Not only old maid appearances but spinster voices are also at risk of offending males. For this reason, Miss Ainley and Margaret Hall, in whose bodies resides the energy for the charity project and in whose heads much of the information required for its implementation, maintain a judicious and strategic silence before the three rectors. On this important occasion they may be seen but not heard "unless spoken to" (273). Even Shirley knows the danger of speaking out what patriarchal society does not wish to hear; she would be "[d]ead under a cairn of avenging stones in half an hour" (343). Yet Brontë imbues their presence with a masculine cast by referring to them in military terms: they are the rectors' "spinster and spectacled lieutenants," "lady generals" in charge of the "women-officered company" for the school fête (288, 297, 299). Their work is often overlooked, but Brontë presents it as necessary work, performed with a military precision and discipline, evidenced in the women's ability to refrain from speech unless called upon. The female contingent are therefore subversive, both manipulating the rectors into thinking the project and its success are wholly their doing and maintaining an apparently submissive demeanour.

If Miss Ainley offends more intensely because of her greater ugliness, Miss Mann affronts because of her unwomanly appearance. Brontë seems to be satirizing society's fear of the mannish woman, yet her representation of this figure is firmly rooted in contemporary science. As Shuttleworth explains, "Spinsterhood, the failure to give the body's energies their natural mode of expression, was depicted as a form of physiological disaster." Medical discussions warned that actual masculine features could ensue--a beard, a hoarse voice, a man's stride. "With the Victorian emphasis on the ovarian determination of the female system," Shuttleworth goes on, "the 'punishment, or...penalty' for failure to reproduce was nothing less than a biological loss of feminine identity, figured in the physical appearance" (199, 200). Brontë's representation brings to mind George Cruikshank's "How to Get Rid of an Old Woman" (Punch 1854), which depicts a very craggy masculine-looking creature. Miss Mann is thus both a caricature and the embodiment of a very real threat for Victorian women, as Shuttleworth notes. She is also, however, a social

liability. In 1859, Mrs. Anne Judith Penny (Brown) advised an unmarried woman "to find some harmless mode of doing active service; for, if she is without it, she inevitably becomes the prey of her own egotism, especially if she is exposed to the pernicious influence of secluded life." This seclusion is "as certainly dangerous to spiritual health, as the miasma of standing water to the health of the body" (168). Miss Mann's retreat into her own resentment and grief figures her egotism. She does not serve or feed society. She husbands, to pun rather dreadfully, her meagre resources of energy, keeping them to herself.

Like the other old maids, Miss Mann rarely appears during the story and then only as a minor character, and like the other spinsters, too, her voice is appropriated. Readers do not hear her speak firsthand; her discourse is mediated through the narrator. Even during Caroline's crucial visit to her, during which the older woman confides details of her life, Miss Mann's unhappy existence is less the focus than Caroline's gentle, sensitive reaction to it. Like Miss Ainley, Miss Mann's unlovely countenance makes her conspicuous even while it effaces her, rendering her valueless. Her cantankerous nature contributes to her isolation from her neighbours.

Unlike Margaret Hall and Mary Anne Ainley, Miss Mann is not an obvious repository for energy, for she strives for tranquillity and lethargy. Yet she is not without power and a certain vitality. This power resides in specific body parts: her ossifying eye, her unfeminine voice, her flaying tongue. Similarly, her thorough verbal dissections of her acquaintances and her petrifying stare indicate that she too has "energy and force...centred in [her] unmarried female bod[y]" (Mayor 199). Likewise her hand wields control, though her power here is dubious. Collectively, Miss Mann's anatomical pieces construct the sort of old maid by whom Greg is so repulsed thirteen years after Shirley's publication, for she represents a diseased corporeality, a cantankerous blight, figured in terms of disease, death, masculinity and even otherness, upon a society that purports not to need her but that she may destroy, infect or swallow at any time.

Despite her formidable gifts of flaying and petrifying, Miss Mann apparently is being consumed by the unnamed sickness which has "poisoned her life" (196), an illness contracted through attendance on her ailing family. Indeed, they seem to have sucked her dry in a reverse of Hamley's leech in a bottle metaphor. Her complexion is a "bloodless pallor" and she is "corpse-like (195); the narrator likens her to an "extenuated spectre," "ahungered and athirst to famine" (195-6). She is a "poor invalid" (308); the context certainly invites the double meaning implied by the ambiguous diction, for single women's needs, like discarded workers', are invalid. Though she attends the school feast, her excursion into the public sphere exhausts her, making her cross and ungracious. The trials of her life have etched themselves upon her face, leaving "deeply worn lines" (195). Miss Mann has faithfully performed the feminine duties required by society, but society gives her a poor return, casting her off as unlovely and therefore valueless. Thus embittered, she herself suffers from "canker" (195) and is therefore "a cankered old maid" (193), both blighted personally and a blight socially. In a text where women are often described as flowers or food, Miss Mann is a diseased plant, an unhealthy victual. Mr. Helstone remarks upon this kind of metamorphosis when he complains that women can shift from being as "bouncing, buxom, red as cherries, and round as apples" to being "effete as dead weeds, blanched and broken down" (204).

However much Miss Mann may be physically "shrivelled" (193), though, her voice implies uncommon, if unnatural, power; it is a "hard, deep organ," suggesting a specifically phallic quality, and it allows her to exercise her scalpel-like tongue and unwholesome conversation. Though he immediately repeats it to Caroline for amusement, Robert Moore flees her "vinegar discourse" (193); this description of her conversation conveys both unpalatable food and diseased body. Unlike Miss Ainley, dispensing healthy dollops of benevolence and thus sustaining the poor with her own generosity, Miss Mann is a poor nourisher. In fact, she performs a sort of simultaneous verbal death and autopsy as she "flays alive" her neighbours: "She went to work at this business in a singularly cool, deliberate manner, like some surgeon practising with his scalpel

on a lifeless subject:...she dissected impartially almost all her acquaintance" (195). This unhappy, solitary woman is "pitiless in moral anatomy" (195). Her skill is figured as male and medical, but this exercise in social discourse conveys a morbid state of mind. Miss Mann goes even farther than the stereotypical old maid whose unpleasantness is confined to a "harsh and vinegar expression" (OM 1835. 33). Miss Mann dispenses vinegar instead of milk; she wields a scalpel instead of a loving hand; she performs an autopsy instead of birth.

Nor are her masculine features confined to her voice and her medically precise tongue, for she possesses a mythic eye, capable of holding even the sympathetic Caroline under the spell of her "dread and Gorgon gaze" and turning Robert's flesh to stone before he flees to his cousin for a restorative kiss (194). There is nothing feminine or softening about her "formidable eye"; indeed, it is as masculine and unnatural as the rest of her--this eye does not blink and is like "a steel ball soldered in her head" (194). The image is peculiar and rather military in nature, suggesting that her eye is a pistol ball, capable of inflicting death. Yet this masculinity is profitless and unproductive, and Brontë emphasizes the unnaturalness her solitary and insular life has resulted in.

Despite these less than admirable qualities, however, Brontë is at pains to present her creation as a sympathetic figure, worthy of compassion and consideration. Granted, she does not make this easy; Miss Mann remains a quite unlikable character, but her author insists on a modicum of respect for a woman whose life has included service to others and the fulfillment of family duty. Miss Mann is strong and has witnessed suffering, experienced self-denial and self-sacrifice. While her hands perform the feminine task of knitting, those hands have also supported a profligate male relative. Having upheld her filial obligations to ailing and useless family members, Miss Mann now finds herself drained of life and vigour. She knits because it "requires the least exertion" and she aspires to "a certain lethargic state of tranquillity" (193, 194). She is drained even of her ability to be recognized as a woman. In her masculinized "goblin-grimness" (194), Miss Mann is the nightmare image that haunted even end-of-century women like Beatrice Potter.

Unlike Miss Mann, striving for a tranquillity born of lethargy and minimal movement, Hortense Moore is a body of bustling activity, though much of it is of questionable use. She is a woman of "some bulk" (526), who suffers affronts to her self-importance when neighbours do not appreciate her worth. Hortense does not enjoy being invisible; she feels herself "quite put into the background" (93) on such occasions, reduced to marginality despite how conspicuous her Belgian attire makes her in the Yorkshire community. This foreigner, like Shirley's other single women, is short on attractiveness, though her "plain aspect and appearance" win her the approbation of that ferocious dragon, Mrs. Yorke (382). At thirty-five, Hortense has passed the rubicon age and, giving herself up to doting upon her brother Robert and to an indefatigable if pathological round of duties, maintains a rigorous order in her household.

Despite Brontë's intention to present single women realistically and to garner understanding for the shocking meagreness of their lives, she creates in Hortense Moore a figure of ridicule. As usual, however, this strategy has a point, for through this foreigner Brontë critiques female socialization, although, as with her attitude toward Roman Catholicism in Villette, she reveals her own chauvinism. Hortense is an alien in the Yorkshire community. Rattling about in her wooden sabots and adhering to her Belgian attire, inflated with self-importance and confident of her often misguided instructional role, Hortense provides a species of comic relief without conveying human warmth. Brontë's ability to combine amusing ridiculousness and engaging warmth in a character will improve with her portrayal of M. Paul Emanuel in Villette.

While Hortense wishes to make Caroline into a "sedate and decorous," a "modest and unassuming" young woman with her "forming hand and almost motherly care" (94-5), she instead imposes on her young cousin a regimen of studies and needlework that is tedious and tiresome. Foster interprets Hortense's dervish-like activity as "eccentric but far from broken-spirited self-reliance" but acknowledges that Rose Yorke argues for greater outlets for such energy (95). Foster certainly acknowledges Brontë's topical argument that women need a wider scope of activity.

However, I read this presentation of spinsterhood in a less positive light. Brontë highlights the profitless waste of time Hortense deems a necessary part of a woman's day; one of Hortense's activities is the "arranging, disarranging, rearranging and counter-arranging" of her dresser drawers (104). Brontë's narrator passes sardonic judgement on Miss Moore's proclivity for stocking mending as a worthwhile expenditure of time and on the questionable duties embraced by women: "She would give a day to the mending of two holes in a stocking anytime, and think her 'mission' nobly fulfilled when she had accomplished it" (107). As an obedient sister, Hortense believes it is her "duty to be happy" where Robert is (93). Brontë gives no hint as to the possible conflicts that may arise once Hortense, whom Michie describes as "jealous"(43), is displaced as chief homemaker by her quiet English cousin. Caroline's marriage to Robert would render Hortense, however delicately, largely unnecessary.

These spinsters give Caroline little hope for a future as a single woman, though Robert helpfully reassures her that at least she will not be ugly. He envisages his cousin as an old maid and tries to buoy her spirits by telling that she will retain her features at forty; "even at fifty," he assures her, "[she] will not be repulsive." She can console herself knowing she apparently will be entitled to pass men on the sidewalk with a minimum of scorn. However, Robert includes the cheering prospect that Caroline will be "pale and sunk" (193), much as Greenwell describes her old maid, utilizing the contemporary rhetoric that articulates single women as fading from view. Indeed, with her habit of inconspicuousness and her prediction of a celibate life for herself, Caroline seems almost fated to become an <u>old</u> maid while still a youthful one. At eighteen she is already adept at fading and disappearing when faced with unpleasant tasks or unwanted company. She is ritually overlooked: Robert and Hiram Yorke do not see her "standing...in shadow, shrinking into concealment" outside Fieldhead (239); Dr. Boultby never sees her; her uncle forgets to ask after her following the mill attack; Rose Yorke ignores her during her visit to the Moores. Even during her illness, when she comes close to death, no one knows she is seriously ill.

Caroline's sickness has been variously interpreted as a strategy to be "read aright" (Lashgari 141) and a pining for the lost mother, but one can also see it as the natural extension to her existing invisibility and an anticipation of her expected 'fading' into spinsterhood. Indeed, she perceives "signs" of impending spinsterhood before she becomes truly ill: "She could see that she was altered within the last month; that the hues of her complexion were paler, her eyes changed—a wan shade seemed to circle them, her countenance was dejected: she was not, in short, so pretty or so fresh as she used to be" (192). However, paradoxically, in her decline Caroline defiantly rejects the female self-abnegation she has witnessed in the single women around her. As Emilie Babcox observes, Brontë "uses physical strength and weakness to somatize" the conflicting urges of self-effacement and self-assertion (165-7). Though her grave illness renders her physically helpless, it also gives her a "new ability to command." Both Caroline and her mother "delight in the freedom they achieve in the sickroom, freedom to love each other openly, unreservedly, and rather childishly. Caroline is temporarily again an infant in her mother's arms, supremely weak and yet supremely egotistical" (170). Her illness enables Caroline to assert her own needs and, more importantly, to have them met. She has noted Miss Ainley's selfless devotion to others; she has seen Miss Mann left abandoned and alone after a life of sacrifice; she has experienced Hortense's enslavement to a round of tedious and questionably valuable domestic duties; and she has responded with a reasoned and heartfelt rejection of the "deeply dreary" quality of such lives (198). Caroline's musing is a recognition of her right to her autonomous self and recalls Jane Eyre's staunch assertion, "God did not give me my life to throw away" (436). She ponders, "Is there not a terrible hollowness, mockery, want, craving in that existence given away to others, for want of something of your own to bestow it on? I suspect there is. Does virtue lie in abnegation of self? I do not believe it. Undue humility makes tyranny; weak concession creates selfishness....Each human being has his share of rights" (190).

Caroline's speech precedes Frances Power Cobbe's article "Self-development and Self-abnegation," published in 1866, by almost twenty years. In Caroline's meditation on feminine effacement and in the novel as a whole, Brontë interrogates what Cobbe was later to identify as the expectation for women:

> [Self-abnegation] is nearly always preached to women, and usually conspicuously adopted by them as if all other principles of action were immoral and irreligious. But, after all, the steady devotion of life to a high and worthy end is not a principle we can afford to scoff at as 'heathen,' and to yield passively to the impulse of every wave of circumstance till we are stranded at last as useless wrecks upon the shore of life, is a very strange reading of the lessons of Christ. (56)

One can clearly hear an echo of Caroline's plea for self in Cobbe's words. However, Brontë demonstrates the power of social internalization in Caroline's questions and her own sense of the "irreconcilable paradoxes" of spinsterhood (Foster 95), for even while asserting her beliefs, Caroline lacks Cobbe's certainty and is troubled by the "queerness" of her thoughts. She worries, "[A]re they right thoughts? I am not certain" (190). She likely would have gained strength from the later writer's words, which seem directed to women like Caroline. Cobbe states, "All human beings have a certain principle within them which we may call Self-Assertion. The rational free agent, be it man, woman, or even little child, recalcitrates from the very depths of its nature at any attempt to reduce it to a mere unit in a sum. It demands to be recognized as what it is—a human being, an individual. This being denied, its nature rises in disorder" (62. Original emphasis). Cobbe's forceful assertion bears out Caroline's hesitant instinct for a valid autonomous existence.

Unfortunately, Caroline, in various ways and by various people, finds herself "reduce[d]... to a mere unit." She makes an attempt at both self-assertion and -abnegation when she offers to apprentice herself to Robert's clothmaking trade so that she may be usefully employed, a help to both him and herself. Without hesitation, Robert tells her to think of herself. Her overture to her uncle to go out as a governess is equally fruitless--she is enjoined to "run away and amuse" herself, like a good child (205). Even Shirley refers to her friend as a "mateless, solitary bird" (237), as

though this renders her useless and insignificant. Being routinely dismissed, ignored or overlooked diminishes Caroline's self-definition. She lacks a meaningful life and a sense of herself as a valued, cherished individual. Her desire for change, for useful work, results in fits of weeping which "reduced her to childlike helplessness" (200). Exhibiting all the signs of fading associated with encroaching spinsterhood, Caroline, like the nameless narrator in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) who responds to imposed infantilization by crawling like a baby and going mad as a species of freedom, embraces a return to the childhood that is foisted upon her by those around her, though she fares better than Gilman's protagonist. She negotiates her assertion of self and establishes her presence through deathly illness. Sequestered in her room, hovering on the brink of death with few people knowing her grave condition, Caroline makes clear her boundaries of self in this liminal space. As Bailin notes, she "exchang[es] her experience of ontological indeterminacy for the determination of the body in distress" (266). She asserts her needs as an ailing child; this strategy brings forth the mother she has hungered for and establishes her identity as Mrs. Pryor's child. Unable to eat as she pines away, she starves herself into a state of infancy that requires the mother's metaphoric milk of maternal love. As an infant, Caroline is permitted to be egotistical; as an old maid, she is not.

Caroline's imminent disappearance into the invisibility of death, the epitome of the faded spinster, calls forth nurturing not only quite naturally from her mother but also quite unusually from the uncle who has habitually dismissed her. Helstone, whose cold guardianship has left his niece hungering for affection despite her acceptance of his meagre attention, is suddenly smitten by a spasm of parental fondness and the desire to feed his wasted charge. He prepares her tea himself, and she acknowledges its restorative property by drinking "it every drop....[I]t has made [her] quite alive" (415). He recommends port wine, game and oysters which he will procure for her, and when Caroline desires some supper "from [his] own plate," he complies by bringing it "in his own consecrated hand." Helstone provides not merely the requested food but he also lavishes attention,

even giving her "the very same little silver fork" she used when first residing at the Rectory and urging her, like a child, to "munch away cleverly" (416). As if being fed with one's own childhood utensil is not sufficient, Caroline as sick child receives his kiss, an endearment and his blessing, which prepare her for infant sleep, "circled by her mother's arms and pillowed on her breast" (417). In effect, ironically, Helstone sees Caroline for perhaps the first time after she has wasted away. Through her anorexic state, she has subtly threatened him with her untimely demise, suddenly putting herself in his range of sight. In addition, he is aware that at last she has garnered acknowledgement from her remaining parent. She is nursed, fed and fussed over like a baby, and in this childlike state of helplessness and dependence, she is finally visible to Helstone.

Thus Caroline's illness, while apparently a stereotypical female response to unhappiness, functions on a more radical level, for Caroline compels her father figure to witness the result of her inactive and directionless existence. In addition, Caroline, and, through her, Brontë, employs conservative rhetoric in a subversive way in her appeal to the "men of England" regarding the 'condition of women.' Essentially, Caroline reverses the role she forsees for herself as a spinster, the role of devoted child caring for the needy parent or parent figure. Frances Power Cobbe illustrates the perils inherent in this situation, one many single women found themselves in and which society condoned, when the daughter gives herself up to "false self-abnegation," toiling to satisfy a selfish parent. Cobbe states that duty to parents is the child's first obligation, but she insists on limits to that duty. She describes the daughter whose life is entirely dictated to by her father and who eventually finds herself "absorbed by his selfishness": "Her life is narrowed into the smallest mill-round of little cares, not one of which is dignified by any real use. It is a tread-mill, not a mill to grind any bread of life" (72. Original emphasis). Shuttleworth states that Caroline "esteems death by consumption...as preferable to the horrors of celibacy" (201); however, Caroline chooses not to be a poor server of food like Miss Mann with her "vinegar discourse" or a woman incapable of serving any bread. Instead, she opts to be nourished herself, to be

acknowledged as a body requiring food itself and thus a visible entity. Through Caroline's extended speech, Brontë makes her argument an appeal to the patriarchs' self-interest: the "men of England" should cultivate their "fading" daughters so "they will be your gayest companions in health; your tenderest nurses in sickness; your most faithful prop in age" (379). Brontë seems at her most conservative here, putting men's welfare first; however, this passage may be read in two distinctly separate ways. If English fathers wish to be cared for in sickness and in health by devoted daughters, it behoves them to prepare the ground for such devotion by first looking after their daughters themselves: by providing education to girls to equip them for a life of work and productivity. In economic terms, this would constitute good business sense, a profitable return on an investment. A woman who is able to live fully and autonomously is more likely to be cheerful, faithful and tender towards her parent. In a more humanist reading, the passage argues for equal treatment, that daughters require as full consideration for their lives as the fathers expect for theirs. In either interpretation, the result is the same: their daughters will cater to them, which is the child's primary duty. Caroline, though, has reversed this, for her father figure has catered to her. Using a passive-aggressive strategy, Caroline necessitates that Helstone see (to) her condition.

Once she has been seen and fed by her parental figures, Caroline next must become visible to Robert in order for him to consider her seriously as his mate. Like Helstone and everyone else, he has both overlooked her and starved her with this lack of attention, though Robert's manner towards her has been marked by inconsistence. When she believes he is courting Shirley--and Shirley gives a disturbing performance as a woman set upon stealing the object of her friend's love--she experiences an evaporation of self and profound hunger, all the more acute for witnessing the bounty placed before the flamboyant Miss Keeldar. They meet at Fieldhead, where Robert is unable to see Caroline from his position close beside her until, significantly, he "lean[s] back in his chair, and look[s] down on her." Even then he finds her, in the dim light, indistinct. In a scene which prefigures Lucy Snowe's inconspicuousness, Caroline sits in the shade, her dress is

"colourless," her complexion "unflushed...the very brownness of her hair and eyes invisible" (252). Caroline fades, like a stereotypical old maid. Seeing Robert and Shirley converse, Caroline believes the "generous feast" of his love has been presented to her friend and she herself "remain[s] but a bystander at the banquet" (255). She maintains to Robert that she will be invisible, never appearing where he does not want her unless he "call[s her] there" (257). However, upon his illness and her own recovery, after Shirley's refusal of his marriage proposal, she asserts her claim to him by visiting him at the Yorkes' home, where he is simultaneously nursed and imprisoned, showing a determination to see him that she did not exert when her uncle forbade her contact with her cousins.

Ironically, Robert's ability to see Caroline and her own resolve to be seen comes about in part through the auspices of the repellant Martin Yorke, one of the trio of collectively unpleasant brothers. With his professed dislike of all "womenites" (175), Martin is the strange instrument who, because he himself sees her, enables Robert to distinguish Caroline and to begin nourishing her consistently. Caroline's face, which Martin acknowledges is "very nice to look at," is "now perpetually before [his] eyes" (533, 545). Her address to him concerning Moore causes him to blush, and his machinations to contrive her visits unbeknownst to his mother furnish him with excitement and power. His efforts spring from a desire to atone for toying with her, telling her that Robert is dying, and her subsequent distress inspires some shred of finer feeling. In essence, however fleetingly, Caroline makes a man of him and that nobility causes him to refrain from demanding a kiss for his trouble. Their exchanges are resonant of Caroline's ironic speech on the appearance of old maids: she has not offended this male's eyes and finds herself exposed to minimal scorn.

Having proven herself able to call forth Martin's nascent manhood, Caroline, during her visit, produces a similar effect on the thin and exhausted Robert, who admits his desire that his cousin come to him in his illness. He is moved to tears when she encloses his wasted hand in both of hers and declares himself "unmanned" by his illness (542). Before Martin can orchestrate another

meeting between the two potential lovers, Robert, vitalized by Caroline's appearance in his sickroom and sufficiently energized by her audacity, bestirs himself to action and takes himself home.

Having each passed through their individual sicknesses, Caroline and Robert experience a new awareness of each other, and nourishing becomes mutual, symbolized by the touch of their hands. Indeed, Caroline demonstrates her newly acquired power through her hand. Happily basking in Robert's attentiveness, she "look[s] like one who had tasted the cordial of heart's-ease, and been lifted on the wing of hope" (557). This sustenance is temporarily threatened by Robert's plan to leave her by absconding to Canada, but this only causes Caroline to assert her own importance to him. "To leave me?" she repeats, clutching his arm. "To leave me?" (593. Original emphasis). Caroline's emphatic repetition and her grip on his arm are emblems of her recognition of her bodily presence as well as her right to his recognition of her importance. As she previously inverted parent-child roles, Caroline now reverses the courtship pattern by taking the initiative, and she does this physically. She literally takes Robert in hand, conveying her importance through her hand. Upon his reassurance that he has rejected his plan, she "devoured his words: she held his hand in hers; she drew a long breath" (594). Robert's words and touch are life-giving. Similarly, he recognizes that Caroline's small hands contain the power to make life palatable to him, for they "will be the gentle ministrants of every comfort I can taste" (595). Caroline's ability to feed him comes only after he is able to see her, so he can acknowledge her ability, and she is able to assert her self.

However, Caroline's emergent selfhood is then contained by the marriage plot. As Bailin and Shuttleworth observe, the novel's concluding marriages are consciously romantic. Caroline's newfound visibility prepares her, not for a life of contented and useful singleness, but wifehood. In this realistic novel, the ending appears as a species of personal wish fulfillment on Brontë's part, as she confers upon both her heroines the coveted, and socially condoned, state of marriage, and

apparently the emotional satisfaction they, and their author, desire. However, the story's "winding up," which Shuttleworth remarks takes place "with almost unseemly haste" (217), is also conscious of its novelistic conventions, and mirrors Brontë's own ambivalence about the unmarried state. She presents spinsterhood as less a choice than a relegation and accords Caroline the "ordinary destiny" she desires (190). As Foster convincingly argues, "Brontë suggests that [Caroline] will be happier with Robert than left helplessly on her own resources" (99). Brontë's happy ending, though, is qualified by the concerns about marriage she has raised, which surface as well in her treatment of the independent and spirited Shirley.

Shirley Keeldar contrasts Caroline in almost every point, but most particularly in her apparently androgynous sense of self. Caroline is always feminine and demonstrates the socially accepted virtues the Victorians admired in their women. Shirley, however, revels in her masculine persona. Dianne Sadoff states that Brontë wishes to "invert male and female" and that her "mastery of masters when not wishful is equivocal" (Quoted in Dupras 302). I would argue that Brontë wants to expand the parameters of femaleness, both in Shirley and Villette, and that her failure to follow through, as Sadoff claims, is a product of Bronte's own mixed feelings.

Initially, Shirley Keeldar appears entirely capable of feeding not only herself but also an assortment of others: the birds who visit her yard, her tenants and the clergy. She seems, according to W.G. Hamley, to be the highest type of spinster, for a woman who has "shown herself equal to the charge of herself is the woman to do credit to the single life" (99). Indeed, Shirley declares, in the language applied to single women, that marriage would prevent her independence: "Now, when I feel my company superfluous, I can comfortably fold my independence round me like a mantle, and drop my pride like a veil, and withdraw to solitude. If married, that could not be" (223-4). In her portrayal of a female who adopts a masculine persona with relish, Brontë daringly explores the potential fullness of self. Although Gilbert and Gubar rather sniffily dismiss the delineation of Shirley Keeldar, Esquire as "Brontë's recurrent and hopeless concern with transvestite behavior"

(381), through this character's shifting genders she challenges, as she will do again in Villette, the fixed boundaries of sexual self to which the Victorians so tenaciously clung. As an attractive woman, Shirley's masculinity is not the same as Miss Mann's, and as property owner, Shirley combines feminine and masculine traits, demonstrating the uses of "[d]oubled consciousness[,] [d]oubled understanding" (DuPlessis 278) when she assumes her male character of Captain Keeldar.

This ability to think and act like a man is most apparent in the chapter "A Summer Night," when Shirley and Caroline witness the mill attack. Suzanne Keen has analyzed this section as a narrative annex, in which both women enter outside space at night, freeing them from their daily boundaries (110). While other young women sleep, they exit the Rectory after midnight, Shirley with cocked pistols at the ready. This is not, of course, Shirley's first foray into male space; as land and mill owner--and being of age she is in control of her property--she reads newspapers as men do, whistles and shoots. In fact, she offers her masculine self for Helstone's use as the protector of his women when he goes off to the mill, asking for and receiving a pair of pistols; while sword play would be beyond her, she admits to the management of a carving knife. Her distinction is an intriguing one, for while the carving knife is a domestic implement, associated with the female role of feeding, it is also one usually wielded by the male and thus connected with the masculine role of provider. However, upon learning from Helstone that his carving utensil is a peculiarly feminine one, "a lady's knife, light to handle, and as sharp-pointed as a poinard," Shirley assigns this weapon to Caroline and requests something weightier, "a brace of pistols" (326). All three items, sword, knife and pistol, are, however, suitably phallic and when the rioters stop by the Rectory Shirley takes up the guns as she issues from the safety of the house into the yard.

During this interlude, Shirley demonstrates her "'masculine' decisiveness" (Keen 111), electing to cross the fields to warn Moore and leading Caroline, who exhibits admirable courage

but at first falls and trips like a child, though she does refuse her friend's offer to carry her, bride-like, over the plank bridge. Keen reads this scene as one that introduces Shirley's "freedom from the constraints of gender-bound decorum and her power over Caroline" (111), in which Shirley seduces Caroline and offers herself as a substitute for Moore (115). Certainly Shirley irritably declares later that Robert "keeps intruding between you and me" (264). Her ability to think not as a desiring woman protecting the male object of her desire but as a male in the thick of a battle indicates her sexual duality.

However, Brontë demonstrates the extent to which marriage can truncate that daringly full self. To Louis Moore goes the dubious distinction of usurping Shirley's independence and curtailing her gender-bending behaviour. Keen observes that Louis, whom Deirdre Lashgari describes as "pompous, arrogant" and "insufferably self-satisfied" (149), is hardly worthy of Shirley Keeldar, though clearly Brontë prepares readers for Shirley's union with him when she expresses her desire for the mastery of a superior. Scholars generally cite the scene in which Shirley confides in him about the dog bite as the occasion when Louis exercises his power over his former pupil. However, Brontë signals the shift in autonomy earlier in an interplay that operates on several levels, using the central metaphor of the hand to indicate Shirley's reduced control and the dog Tartar, Shirley's "ruffianly" (430) mastiff-bulldog mix (211) who dotes upon her, as the mediator figure.

Indeed, Brontë makes fascinating use of the dog in this scene as a multi-symbol figure, indicating romantic attachment, spinster love object, power shifts and class union. This scene is therefore significantly more layered and complex than the one in Villette, where the spaniel Sylvie acts chiefly as a conduit through which Lucy and M. Paul's passion manifests itself. Tartar, too, mediates the latent attraction between the man and the woman, but in addition, his position here as a 'spinster's pet,' upon whom Shirley can safely lavish maternal affection, undergoes a dual shift. As a married woman, Shirley will not require the dog in the same way, for she will have the proper

Victorian outlets for her love. However, Tartar is not to be cast off; the animal's devotion to his single mistress expands to include her chosen partner, which signals Louis' inclusion in Shirley's life and his fitness as her mate. The narrator has previously made known that Louis Moore is a favourite of little old ladies, small children and dogs, a detail intended as a mark of benevolence and given resonance here.

Furthermore, Louis' ability to re-direct Tartar's partisanship indicates his power, not just over the dog but over Shirley as well. As Foster points out, Shirley has stated in an earlier conversation with Caroline that she desires a man, not a boy she can "pin...to [her] apron"; she prefers a master, someone she can both love and fear (514. Original emphasis. Foster 100). Louis uses his affinity to Tartar to demonstrate his ascendancy over her. Here, Shirley notices that her faithful pet, who is wont to enjoy her hand resting upon his head when she reads, has left his place at her feet and established himself instead at Louis' side. Her attempt to woo him back by extending her hand and speaking softly fails; Tartar remains with Louis and allows the tutor to draw his head onto his knee. Later, Louis "fascinate[s]" the animal again, luring him to his caressing hand and away from Shirley's side with a single word and gesture. On both occasions, Louis smiles "one little smile to himself" (430) at his demonstrable ability to invoke Tartar's defection. Shirley's "white hand," which has fearlessly and effectively broken up a dog fight without assistance and which Tartar has licked in thanks as she tended his wounds, has proven too weak compared to the power Louis' hand wields.

Louis's act of domination heralds Shirley's later reduction of power and visibility. She likens the tutor to the mastiff, identifying him as her "mastiff's cousin...as much like him as a man can be like a dog" (575), a point that may not be entirely in Louis' favour, given the narrator's varied if humorous description of Tartar as formidable looking, "very ugly," "honest, phlegmatic" and "stupid," with a "stubborn canine character" (211, 277). Louis acknowledges the rapport that exists between the young woman and her canine companion and the affection she lavishes upon

him, including kisses on his brow, and he teases her that such identification has its dangers: "it suggests to me a claim to be treated like Tartar" (576). However, Louis is not content merely to commune with birds and beasts, and he has no desire to fawn at Shirley's feet, lapping up her caresses. Louis wishes to master. He demonstrates his power further by pointing out that the whistle with which she summons Tartar is one he, Louis, taught her and states that on her rambles she replicates the very songs she has heard him sing. Clearly, he is pleased that her voice is replaced with his own, but Brontë also indicates that Louis is Shirley's complement, for he will not be crushed by her strong will.

In winning the affection and loyalty of the stalwart Tartar, Louis demonstrates his fitness for patriarchal rule and his qualification as Shirley's "master" (514). In an earlier scene, a precursor to a similar one in Villette, Louis has rummaged through Shirley's desk, soliloquizing on the differences between the tame, lamb-like Caroline and the spirited Shirley. Louis prefers that which needs a firm hand, a creature that will require guidance so that his "patience would exult in stilling the flutterings and training the energies of the restless merlin. In managing the wild instincts of the scarce manageable 'bete fauvre,'" says Mr. Moore with relish, "my powers would revel" (490). Louis wants to tame, and he observes that Shirley needs a strong hand to "bend" and "curb" her (491). It is not surprising then that Louis welcomes Shirley as his "leopardess," whom he will master and whom he declares as his. Shirley states that she knows her "keeper...only his hand shall manage me" (579). It appears that Shirley, not Louis, is akin to the fierce but tractable Tartar; certainly, she is a single woman whom both she and Louis recognize as requiring management. Consequently, although she playfully collapses the identities of dog and man when she addresses her lover as Tartar and enjoins him to "lie down," her position as mistress quickly evaporates when she conflates the roles of mistress and pet: "Dear Louis," she entreats, "be faithful to me: never leave me. I don't care for life, unless I may pass it at your side" (579). However, Foster correctly observes that though Louis takes "arrogant delight in achieving ascendancy over the female spirit,"

he also "shares with [Shirley] a sense of the dichotomies of women's nature." He is therefore capable of appreciating Shirley's dual impulses for independence and submission, for strength and protection (100).

Their relationship anticipates to some extent that of Rhoda Nunn and Everard Barfoot in Gissing's The Odd Women, although for Gissing's couple class is less the difficulty than personal obstacles. Again, Shirley's dog is symbolically significant. Everard observes of Rhoda, "She had great qualities; but was there not much in her that he must subdue, reform, if they were really to spend their lives together? Her energy of domination perhaps excelled his" (307). However, Rhoda refuses to be quelled by a man who desires to prove himself the master. Their mutual attraction collapses in the struggle for power, for neither one of them is willing to give any up. Shirley, on the other hand, willingly surrenders her autonomy in order for Louis to assert himself. Shirley's power derives from her class position. Whereas Caroline sees herself as "poverty and incapacity" (362), as poor and therefore powerless, Shirley has wealth, property and position to accord her dominion, authority and agency. Her personal androgyny, which enables her to think and sometimes act like a man, amplifies her male social status; she makes good use of her affluence. Louis, although he possesses masculine power, is like Caroline in that he lacks financial standing. He is also similar to the governess figure, a liminal, oppressed (Belkin 55), marginalized social entity. In choosing a man who is not of the ruling class as her mate, Shirley recognizes the need to relinquish some of her power, and, as she once did with the clergymen, she utilizes manipulation to guide Louis. Therefore, lastly, Tartar's role in the interplay between Shirley and Louis is to bridge the class divide, for the dog moves from obedience to Shirley's upper-class hand to Louis' middle-class one; his faithfulness to the tutor signals Louis' usurpation of Shirley's 'property.' Thus, in choosing the tutor as her mate, Shirley elevates him to her level, a reversal of the standard fairytale plot in which the male raises the lower-class female.

Shirley's last act as a single woman is to cease to govern so that Louis will learn to rule. She demonstrates this in an act of physical weakness during the confrontation with her uncle over her choice of Louis as husband. Sympson's insults, prompted by both Shirley's autonomous choice of marriage partner and the social standing of that partner, induce a typically feminine response in his niece and a typically masculine one in Louis. She is overcome by weakness, requiring Louis to place her on the couch; he kisses her, then bounds across the room to strangle the offensive uncle, after which violence he, not Shirley, orders Sympson to leave Fieldhead. Kissing the supine but divinely smiling Shirley infuses Louis with murderous strength; Marian Halcombe will perform a similar service for Walter Hartright in Collins's The Woman in White. In this scene, Louis' actions align him with Robert's workers, those 'hands' who resort to violence to demonstrate both dissatisfaction and power. However, despite Louis' likeness to Tartar, this time Shirley does not jump into the fray and separate the antagonists with her own hands--she requires no dog bite to bring her under Louis's sovereignty. Although she has earlier instructed him not to make her his text (474), she is already branded with his mark of ownership on her readable forehead: "'Not at home to suitors' was written on her brow," Louis notes smugly (581). She tacitly approves his rough assault upon her uncle, as Lucy will approve M. Paul's physical rebuff of Madame Beck. If she deliberately abdicates her rule in Louis's stead in order to prompt his masculine reign, it is clear that he equally re-feminizes her with his aggressive response.

Shirley flirts briefly with a return to her former autonomy when she, not Louis, makes the proposal of marriage in what could be read as a reassuring blend of appropriate womanly reliance and Shirley-style independence, as she asks Louis to be companion, guide, master and friend. She prevaricates on the marriage date, avoids him and altogether takes on an ethereal, spirit-like quality that renders him insecure and prompts him to kneel before her to detain her. He interprets her aloofness as a longing after her "virgin freedom" and responds by commanding her to decide on a

date. She reacts by evaporating: "She breathed a murmur, inarticulate yet expressive; darted, or melted, from my arms—and I lost her" (584, 586).

Certainly, Shirley seems lost, both to Louis and reader alike. As his betrothed, she is already affixed to him and marked as his. She has lost her vibrant, passionate essence--and her appetite when Louis is absent. She has already been amalgamated. She and Louis face her uncle Sympson as a unit, rising from their close sitting positions as one person, symbolically asserting their personal, romantic and social union. Her engaged state is inscribed upon her body. Rejecting food in her intended's absence, she feeds, apparently on him, in his presence; Shirley presents her husband-to-be to her relative as fruit, a "crimson-peach," "ripe, sun-mellowed, perfect," while his brother Robert sees him as "daily bread...nourishing for the poor, wholesome for the rich" (582, 597). However, although Brontë signals Louis' suitability for Shirley in these various ways, one can question Louis Moore's ability to provide sustenance, for instead of nourishing Shirley he reduces her, containing her "masculine vigour," or removing it, until she is barely recognizable. Lashgari contends that Louis "has swallowed her up" (149), but rather one is reminded of Alice in Wonderland, eating cake and shrinking. Shirley's greater visibility and substance as an unmarried woman affirm that she is fitted to be single, a sign of Brontë's ambivalent feelings about both marriage and spinsterhood.

Brontë's own emphasis on the body of the celibate woman in her novel is mirrored in a rather unsavoury way by her critics. Contemporary reviewers of the novel speculated on the sex of Shirley's author in ways that focussed on Brontë's own body. Praising the delineation of Caroline's story, the Daily News reviewer in October 1849 arrived at a certainty concerning Currer Bell's gender: "[T]hat Currer Bell is petticoated will be as little doubted by the readers of her work as that Shirley Keeldar is breeched" (Reproduced in Barker Letters 247). However, George Henry Lewes goes considerably farther in his pronouncements. In his 1850 review of Shirley in the Edinburgh Review, Lewes finds the portrayals of both Caroline and her mother "untrue to the

universal laws of our common nature" (164) and lays this deficiency of character at the door of Brontë's own spinsterhood. His writing is full of references to her sex, a point which enraged her, and to the abilities of her woman's hand, which he describes as "certain" in its delineation of character (163). However, Lewes contends that in her depiction of Caroline and Mrs. Pryor, Brontë's hand has faltered; these two might have been "drawn by the clumsy hand of a male: though we willingly admit that in both there are little touches which at once betray the more exquisite workmanship of a woman's lighter pencil" (164). The point on which Lewes focuses his flabbergasted umbrage is Mrs. Pryor's abandonment of her daughter, and he launches himself into a wounding personal attack. Having earlier asserted the Victorian rhetorical staple that "the grand function of woman...is, and ever must be Maternity," and that "All women are intended by Nature to be mothers," Lewes is at pains to point out to Brontë her warped unnaturalness (155. Original emphasis). "Currer Bell!" he exclaims theatrically; "if under your heart had ever stirred a child, if to your bosom a babe had ever been pressed,--that mysterious part of your being, towards which all the rest of it was drawn, in which your whole soul was transported and absorbed,--never could you have imagined such a falsehood as that!" (165. Original emphasis). As Juliet Barker has noted, in a chapter aptly titled 'No Longer Invisible,' Lewes's public divulgence of the generally unknown details of Brontë's life was "little short of disgraceful" (613). Barker correctly observes that Lewes's statement on woman's "grand function" imbues his personal attack on her spinsterhood with a "peculiar nastiness" (614).

Lewes is not content only to inform the public of Brontë's gender; rather, his purpose is to establish her singleness, and he does so with specific references to her physical body: to her heart, her bosom and, obliquely but unmistakably, to her womb. His phrasing, "that mysterious part of your being," is rather tantalizingly unclear, but he obviously draws on the contemporary fascination Shuttleworth notes the "internal mysteries of the female body" held for the Victorian medical community (76). Woman's existence was entirely subordinated to her reproductive system;

her uterus was the centre of her being. This belief was used as proof of the harm that would follow from educating girls; withdrawal of "physiological energy from the reproductive organs, and directing it instead into intellectual pursuits would lead, physicians argued, to a complete breakdown of female health" (Shuttleworth 77). In such terms, then, as a spinster and an author, Brontë's internal circulation has not found its natural outlet of marriage, sex and motherhood. This blockage of her destiny is indicated by the blockage of her imagination: her childlessness produces an obstruction of truth, as Lewes sees it. He links the failure of her hand to the barrenness of her womb; in her celibate state, as Barker notes, she falls short as an artist and as a woman because she has not fulfilled the "grand function" of her sex (614). Motherhood would "transport" and "absorb" her soul, performing a kind of holy consumption. As it stands, however, she has offered the public unsavoury fare by sinning against both art and nature. In effect, while Brontë does not experience a complete breakdown of health through her unnatural celibacy, she does, as Lewes implies with his focus on her physical and maternal lack, suffer a breakdown of imagination, art and truth.

Lewes concludes his review by quoting Schiller's criticism of Madame de Stael's Corinne--"'She steps out of her sex—without elevating herself above it.'"--and states that this "pregnant criticism" applies equally to Currer Bell (173). Both Schiller's and Lewes's language attract one's attention. Brontë is not only a spinster but also one with masculine tendencies, as evidenced in the clumsy male hand with which she has drawn unrealistic characters, by the book's "over-masculine vigour" (158) and by her stepping out of her sex (the sex he accuses her of failing to fulfill). Added to this, however, is Lewes's odd choice of the adjective "pregnant" for criticism, which has the effect of investing if not him then certainly Schiller with the maternity she lacks. The tone of the review at large is unpleasantly personal and malicious, especially considering that Lewes would later take as his mistress and partner author George Eliot, a woman who, while acting as 'Mutter' to his own sons, produced no children of her own. Small wonder that Brontë wrote to Lewes after

reading his review, "I can be on guard against my enemies, but God deliver me from my friends!" (Barker Letters 262).

Roslyn Belkin states,

> As an artist, (not an historian or a social scientist), Brontë offers no solutions to the problems of the impotent classes in her society, noteably [sic] the working poor and impecunious, single women. Instead, she shapes her material in such a way as to highlight the immorality of the affluent and powerful members of nineteenth century England, who wilfully shut their eyes to the pain of the weak and powerless. (65-6)

Brontë's own conflicted feelings about being an old maid infiltrate her novel. However, this text paves the way for a more daring treatment of the unmarried woman in her next work, for Shirley sets up Villette in two important ways. The former is a self-consciously social novel, examining the liminal space of the spinster and her position as her culture sees her, as well as the ramifications of a life of singleness and celibacy. The unpaired women of the novel remain on the margins, where society deems they belong, and the two protagonists, as Shuttleworth notes, are "reduced" to Mrs. Robert and Mrs. Louis (218). Villette, on the other hand, is an intensely interior novel, as Brontë focalizes the plight of spinsters through the perspective of a woman who has internalized her society's prejudices against and codes of behaviour for single women. Lucy Snowe, despite her agile endeavours to the contrary, is at centre stage, the sole protagonist in a text that investigates the freedom and loneliness, the presence and absence of a spinster. This time, however, Brontë does not provide matrimony as the romantic and inevitable conclusion. Understanding, even before her own belated experience of the marital state, how much marriage could restrict a woman's life, she brings her heroine only to the brink of matrimony. Having assessed the state of wedlock, she leaves Lucy Snowe single and celibate.

Chapter Five
"Full-handed, full-hearted plenitude": Looking for the Spinster Body in Villette

"I wish every woman in England had also a hope and motive. Alas! There are many old maids who have neither." Charlotte Brontë to William Smith Williams, July 3, 1849

If Shirley reveals the life of the single woman from a societal point of view, Villette is that story told from the inside out, from an intensely personal point of view. One of the period's most intriguing single women, and, to many readers, most maddening characters, is the prickly, evasive Lucy Snowe, protagonist of Brontë's 1853 novel Villette. Lucy is the very woman social critics such as Greg, feminists such as Cobbe and reformers such as Boucherett write of: a single middle-class female with no family to offer her a home or support and little opportunity for marriage. Lucy must live by the work of her own head and hands, work that allows her to retain her genteel status. Furthermore, like Brontë's friend Mary Taylor, who emigrated to New Zealand and became a reasonably successful businesswoman, Lucy chooses to leave England, though unlike her real-life counterpart, she opts not for a British colony but for utterly foreign soil. In her teaching capacity at Madame Beck's Pensionnat de Demoiselles and later in her own school, Lucy achieves the autonomy to which Thackeray, Cobbe and Grey urged women to aspire, despite the difficulties. So real is Brontë's depiction of a sensitive woman's struggle to retain her integrity of self both physically and emotionally that Harriet Paine wrote in The Unmarried Woman in 1892 that "we can only account for it by supposing that the description was written with Charlotte Brontë's own blood" (38).

Unlike the central characters in Shirley, Lucy remains unmarried, retaining her single status and achieving greater independence at the story's conclusion. She becomes, then, an accidental old maid upon Paul Emanuel's death, though one senses that after his loss she never again considers marriage, thus becoming, in a sense, W.G. Hamley's highest type of old maid, finding "marriage as a state...not necessary to her happiness" (97). Brontë's cool maiden is the essence of simultaneous

presence and absence; countless critics have tackled the issue of her invisibility, for Lucy revels in being unseen and yet continually draws attention to this state. She most fully embodies the central paradox of the spinster as I have defined it on all three levels: family/society, text and body. She is an orphan, without family and yet constantly placed on the fringe of other families where she enacts the role of confidante. She deliberately places herself in the position of observer, eschewing notice, withholding information from her readers and all the while recounting a tale that makes her visible and present. She is a shadow, dressing in muted shades, moving inconspicuously through her days, yet she affirms her body's hunger and her soul's needs.

Key to Lucy's identity, and the focus of this chapter, is her growing awareness of her physical self, not just in its deprivations but also in its satisfactions. Scholars, for example Tony Tanner and Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble, have tended to interpret Lucy's intentional self-effacement as a complete denial or rejection of her body (Introduction to Villette 26. Victorian Heroines 58-9). However, while I agree that repression is one of Lucy's main coping skills, I argue that she gradually comes to terms with herself as a physical entity. In order for Lucy to achieve some sort of peace with her own corporeality, she must accept her body and its appetites. What Brontë in fact gives readers in Villette is a sexual spinster; she meticulously draws a skillful tale of a repressed young single woman's sexual awakening.[1] This portrait of the unmarried female overturns the stereotypes some of the essay writers present, for while Lucy Snowe is demure, inconspicuous and fading in certain ways in the manner of the conventional old maid, she expresses her considerable inner passions, sexual and otherwise. Her two love objects, Graham Bretton and Paul Emanuel, play important roles in Lucy's coming of age as Lucy chronicles her attraction to each of these men, and M. Paul's for her. The spinster body in Villette, then, is very much at the story's centre, and Brontë, like many of the periodical writers, highlights the hands as a crucial

[1] Susan Watkins has identified Lucy's sexual self as part of one of her two distinct selves; however, she does not particularize Lucy's sexuality within the context of her spinsterhood as I do.

part of the anatomy of this single woman. For Lucy, hands are not simply the means for attaining health and independence, though of course they are important for that reason. Brontë demonstrates that Lucy's hands, and those of her friends, serve as a sexual site--characters' erotic feelings and urges manifest themselves through the action of the hands. Frequently, the hands offer nutritive support, indicating Brontë's amatory connection between hands and sustenance. Often, especially as Lucy's relationship with M. Paul grows and deepens and her association with Graham Bretton changes, food, both literal and metaphoric, becomes increasingly important, as M. Paul nurtures and feeds her, something Graham, despite his medical calling, is unable to do. Lucy progresses from a starving old maid to a dignified, well-fed woman.

As in Shirley, in Villette Brontë interrogates gender boundaries, subverting cultural beliefs about the separation of masculine and feminine qualities. Although Lucy's masculine side is less flamboyant and dramatic than Shirley's Captain Keeldar persona, it is more fully integrated into Lucy's character as a whole; Brontë is more assured in her handling of this issue in Villette. The element of androgyny and the cultural construct of what is feminine and masculine play key roles in Lucy's concept of herself as a physical being. In this respect Brontë anticipates Frances Power Cobbe in her ability to accept the entirety of a woman's character without breaking down the qualities by gender. Brontë offers the portrayal of a complex woman who is not threatened by playing a fop on the stage or intimidated by the fulminations of an irascible man who tests her mettle by continually trying to cast her into his mold of feminine behaviour.

Although Lucy's connections and interdependencies with the various female characters have been adequately covered by scholars, her doublings with the male characters have, in fact, received

little critical attention.[2] Scholars have discussed in some detail Lucy's association with Ginevra Fanshawe and Polly Home, both of whom act out, in contrasting ways, differing codes of ideal womanly demeanour. However, Lucy discovers the ease with which she traverses gender boundaries when she adopts Colonel de Hamal's identity during a play, recognizes her likeness to Emanuel and cultivates qualities that are to the Victorian mind distinctly masculine. These she defends as natural; "Whatever my powers—feminine or the contrary—" she states with authority, "God had given them, and I felt resolute to be ashamed of no faculty of His bestowal" (440). Lucy does not need to cast off her masculine aspect, as Shirley does at the conclusion of the earlier novel, because Brontë illustrates, through Lucy's doubling with the male and female characters, that both her masculine and her feminine qualities contribute to her wholeness of self.

Despite the fact that Lucy views herself in mirrors several times, she never describes herself except in general terms. She is slender and brown-haired but beyond that, she does not elaborate. She feels herself to be plain, yet one wonders if her features are as displeasing as she intimates or merely lost in the shadows of her unhappiness, if she judges herself too harshly as a "wan spectacle" (96) or a "mere shadowy spot on a field of light" (200). Given the symbolism of her name, Lucy as light, she seems to imply that she is simply an indistinct reflection of her own self. She is light ("Lucy"), but she is also a "shadowy spot" on it. Although she perceives light as 'other,' in the choice of name Brontë therefore prepares readers for her character's gradual recognition and acceptance of her own light. Initially, however, Lucy, as a young woman, already seems to be 'fading' in the accepted mode of anticipated spinsterhood. Indeed, as Keryn Carter

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[2] For example, Gilbert and Gubar analyze Lucy's connections with Paulina, Miss Marchmont and the handicapped student, and note that Lucy, Polly and Madame Beck are linked through their attraction to Graham Bretton. They also discuss Lucy's similarities to M. Paul, as does Janet Freeman, who examines Polly as Lucy's double. Janet Carlisle reads Polly and Ginevra as Lucy's doubles under the conventions of autobiography. While scholars generally acknowledge Lucy and M. Paul's similarities in light of their romantic suitability, none offers the type of detailed analysis I produce here, which takes into account the androgynous tendencies of both.

observes, Lucy as narrator, repeatedly reporting that she sees "nothing" when she looks in the mirror, withholds "textual representation" of her appearance in "a novel whose plot relies so much upon the heroine's appearance (or rather, upon her lack of conventional sexual attractiveness)" (2. Carter's emphasis). Lucy takes refuge in the shade and in representing her identity over and over again as an image. She wears a "dress of French gray" (177) and even to others she is "a being inoffensive as a shadow" (403). Lucy works hard at being a reflection, yet she is not wholly one without connection. She refuses to become a paid companion to Paulina de Bassompierre because, she states, "I was no bright lady's shadow" (382). Lucy Snowe chooses the body she will reflect and, as odd as it seems, the being she insists on reflecting is her own. During the course of her story, while never losing that reserve which makes her seem secretive and elusive, Lucy becomes able to acknowledge her body, and her body's passion. Her ability to move between a 'feminine' self and a 'masculine' self is crucial to her eventual acceptance of her physical existence and her body's mutability, as is her relationship with M. Paul, who, like Lucy, is capable of this androgynous existence, and who really sees Lucy, and accepts her, as a warm, passionate woman. As Janet Freeman makes clear, Paul Emanuel is crucial to Lucy's affirmation of her own visibility.

For Rachel Brownstein, the "repellent Lucy" is "faceless" (169) and bodiless, yet she sees Brontë taking a new approach to the conventional emphasis on the female form:

> A woman's body is a complex sign. Beauty fades; virginity, that physical token of a heroine's purity, the seal ensuring her value on the marriage market, can be surrendered only once. Her gender determines the plot which obliges a heroine to seize a very brief day, and covertly. To take a dim view of the heroine's body, as Charlotte Brontë did in Villette, is to begin to imagine a radically new kind of novel. (167-8)

Brownstein's comments on the brief day for the heroine recall Greenwell's remarks on the short time a woman has to bloom and the shift in her influence from the physical to the more abstract (Chapter Three 64, 74). Both are correct in the implicit statement that there is danger in making a woman's body her only measure of value, the belief that to be without beauty is to be without

value, to be, virtually, without self. However, Brownstein and other scholars have overlooked a crucial point: Brontë does not take a dim view of the body, particularly not the spinster body. Juliet Barker has noted the author's own propensity to (an understandable) hypochondria; it would be hard to imagine a Victorian woman writer, aside from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who was more aware of the physicality of the self than Charlotte Brontë. Rather than dismissing the female body, she complicates the apparent disregard for it by privileging a character who repeatedly deflects attention from her corporeity; Villette is about a woman who does initially try to "take a dim view" of her own body, who tries to deny her own physicality but who, in order to live fully and maintain her own integrity, chooses to adjust herself to being a sensate, corporeal entity.

Lucy's spinsterhood is especially significant, for the celibate female body has conventionally been sexless, indeed lacking appetite generally. The selected essay writers I have discussed grapple with this lack in various ways: Eliza Cook advocates tolerance for the lavishing of thwarted maternal feelings on pets, while Anne Thackeray and Maria Grey urge single women to develop an overall appetite for life. However, Brontë's focus on the spinster body includes its sexual needs. She thus situates the spinster body at the centre of the surplus woman debate more radically than do the essay writers. What Brontë makes clear by the novel's end is that Lucy's attempt to disown her own bodily requirements results in a false sign, an effort to simplify the complexity of the physical self, not to decipher or deal with it. Lucy cannot become a wholly integrated person, emotionally, spiritually and sexually, until she acknowledges the body, her body. Whether a woman is pretty or plain, married or single, she is still a physical being.

However, Lucy's own physicality is complicated not only by her initial attempts to be inconspicuous, shadowy or invisible, but also by her ability to 'inhabit' different bodies, regardless of gender, to glide, shadow-like, between beings. Lucy's maddening ungraspability, then, becomes not a mark of her lack of self but instead the sign of her complexity and potential for completion. Brontë explores the spinster body's shifting variety and dimension; thus Brontë's celibate female

body must be acknowledged as a body like any other with its various natural needs but possessing that multiplicity and fluidity that Irigaray argues in her theories of female identity and under which Carter reads Villette. Brontë therefore illustrates that the woman's body does not acquire this plurality, this changeability, only through the married state, through "sexual commerce" (Carlile 35).

Fusing these aspects of the spinster body is the motif of nourishment. Like the essayists, Brontë uses food imagery once again to emphasize the physical self and its needs and to argue for the feeding of the entire self, as she does repeatedly in Shirley. While the slender Lucy does consume food during the course of her story, usually when she is galvanized into some sort of physical or emotional challenge, receiving sweets from M. Paul and sharing portions of her meals with Ginevra Fanshawe, she more frequently seeks, and is often denied, metaphoric nourishment in the form of letters or companionship. She often describes her emotional state in terms of hunger, for example when she has received no communication from the Brettons for weeks, as she looks for nourishment from those who can not or will not give it. Carter, following Irigaray's theories of women's existence in phallocentric gaps, states the reason for Lucy's lack of her own physical description: "Lucy fills this absence with her voice and her emotion, rather than with the conventional representation of her physical presence" (5). I would argue, however, that until Lucy can acknowledge the needs of her body in all of its appetites and receive sustenance from the proper, generous hand, she hungers, starves and thirsts. She craves to be fed by Graham Bretton, as she devours his fond but impartial letters, while ignoring the overtures of the splenetic M. Paul, whose hands, she eventually realizes, bear the food of friendship, life and love. Lucy ultimately eschews a vicarious life on the margins, where her emotional needs are repeatedly subordinated to those of others, and instead chooses to privilege her self. She does not so much place herself in M. Paul's hands as accept the nutritive value his hands offer her, the "full-handed[ness]" that indicates his "full-hearted[ness]" (594).

Particularizing this importance of the physical is Brontë's emphasis on this very body part, the hand. Jack B. Moore has analyzed the significance of the hand/heart motif in Great Expectations, giving a close reading of the thematic connection between these two physical and symbolic parts. "Hand imagery, " he explains, "characterizes many of the novel's personages, usually demonstrating their relationship to the world and the people about them" (53). Helena Michie explains the importance of the female hand in Victorian novels, as a representation of something higher: hands

> form a synecdochal chain where the heart represented by the hand is in itself a synecdoche for more obviously sexual parts of the body that enter into a heroine's decision about whom to marry. Asking for a hand is an entrance into the female body, the touch of a hand frequently the first touch between lovers. (98)

Like Dickens's emphasis, Brontë's focus is on both female and male hands; moreover, in keeping with Michie's comment, between Lucy and Paul this body part is sexually charged. Hands also signify friendship, tenderness, nurturing and, in one instance with M. Paul, a threat. Brontë's use of the hand imagery is perhaps more complex than Dickens's is, for Lucy discovers that a kind hand is not necessarily an effectual one, as in the case of her godmother, Mrs. Bretton, and that an effectual one is not necessarily kind, as is the case with Mrs. Bretton's son, the physician John Graham. A hand can give, but not be especially generous, as Lucy discovers with his letters. It is M. Paul's hand to whom Lucy eventually, willingly and rightly joins her own.

At the outset of her autobiography, Lucy does not have her life in her own hands. Her story opens, not with a declaration of her own place in the world, or in her family, but with the placing of her godmother, Louise Bretton, a handsome, kind, but not sentimental or particularly demonstrative personage, who is widowed when young and left to raise her only child, a son. Lucy's relationship to the Brettons, then, is not one of blood, though there is affection between herself and her godmother; Lucy is "in a quiet way...a good deal taken notice of by Mrs. Bretton" and she enjoys

the tranquillity of her twice-yearly visits "at [her] godmother's side" (61, 62). Lucy's actual home remains uncertain and her other relatives shrouded in mystery; one assumes the orphaned girl is shunted around from relative to relative, for she states that Mrs. Bretton came in person "to claim me of the kinsfolk with whom was at that time fixed my permanent residence" (62). Whoever these kin are, they do not merit more than a cursory mention here and Lucy's sardonic tone when she remarks that having been absent six months, "It will be conjectured that I was of course glad to return to the bosom of my kindred" (94) says much about her less than happy life with these unknown relations. When disaster strikes, when the "unsettled sadness" of her home (62) is realized, Lucy has no one to turn to and remains silent about her loss: "Indeed, to whom could I complain?" she asks, informing the reader that she has no contact now with Mrs. Bretton (94). This loss of contact is perhaps not surprising, because, despite Lucy's evident affection for her godmother, as Keryn Carter points out, Lucy's "substitute mother" lacks real substance, for she is marked by the "patrilineal world in which the name of the (deceased) father resonates, and the mother-figure is a guest, a substitute, a 'godmother.'" Mrs. Bretton's own history is absent; she lives in the house of her husband's family, in the town named for his fathers (4). She is an influential but not formidable force in affecting Lucy's life. Clearly, then, Lucy has no real family, and her connection with the Brettons, who themselves fall on hard times, is not strong enough to withstand the vissicitudes of life. Even during her sojourn with her godmother, her place in the household is apparently unfixed, for Lucy is not informed that she will be sharing her room with little Polly; she simply finds extra furniture added to her own room. As Janice Carlisle notes, Lucy's place as a favoured child with her godmother is usurped by Polly; "This quaint child takes Lucy's place, and Lucy is forced to watch as Mrs. Bretton lavishes her attention on Paulina" (271). Indeed, the reserved Mrs. Bretton, who is "not generally a caressing woman," is moved to kiss this "mere doll" (64). Lucy's potential as the sole beneficiary of her godmother's kindness evaporates with Polly's appearance; it seems as though Lucy's place on the sidelines as a spinster

is already cast. However, petted Polly does not fare any better than the rootless Lucy, for the Brettons lose touch with both Lucy and the Homes over the coming years.

The death of her people, however remote her attachment to them, leaves Lucy alone in the world, not only outside her own family but bereft of it entirely, a typical spinster. In her mourning dress, she describes herself as "a faded, hollow-eyed vision," a "wan spectacle," but assures the reader that the "blight" is only external, for "I still felt life at life's sources" (96). Having portrayed herself as a rather unearthly thing, Lucy then re-anchors herself to the world of substance and flesh and blood. The strategy is subtle but effective, for Lucy indicates what society sees when they look at her but then reassures the reader that externals do not tell the whole story. As a real woman, though, however other-worldly the stamp of loss makes her appear, Lucy requires employment and, like one of Anne Thackeray's toilers, she takes action. Lucy shoulders the care of Miss Marchmont, a spinster and invalid, in the intervening years before she becomes reacquainted with the Brettons, and finds herself in one of the most typical situations of the unmarried woman who must work: caring for someone who relies on her and living in the sort of intimacy one would expect with a family member, yet existing outside any family unit. Miss Marchmont is an accidental spinster, a woman who withers and fades after the death of her lover and whose experience foreshadows Lucy's own. Although she exhibits a certain fortitude in the face of her situation, Miss Marchmont also demonstrates passivity, a sort of emotional inertness. Lucy's life narrows to the dimensions of the older woman's existence: "Two hot, close rooms thus became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all." Lucy's time with Miss Marchmont is dreary; she shares the invalid's food, the "small, dainty messes" the cook prepares for them both, which leaves each of them without appetite (109), both in a state of metaphoric hunger for a more fulfilling, less lonely life. Yet Miss Marchmont is a species of family to her, a woman of virtue, passion and logic, and Lucy clings to her, to this woman who becomes "her little morsel of human affection" (97), and who calls her "my child" (101). After the death of Miss

Marchmont, however, Lucy is once again on her own, and turns to the only person she can for advice: her old nurse, who is "a last and sole resource" (101). This former family servant can offer comfort, but no suggestions as to what the solitary Lucy should do, but Lucy declares herself borne up by the energy of her own youth. Needing to gain "my own bread" and "ready to turn my hand to any useful thing" (127), demonstrating once again the practical sense Thackeray would later praise in real-life spinsters, Lucy Snowe journeys to London. Here, in contrast to the claustrophobia and inanition of Miss Marchmont's home, she feels, for the first time in years, "such healthy hunger" after exploring the city and experiencing "a still ecstacy of freedom and enjoyment" (109). Revelling in a sense of emancipation and independence, Lucy feels the reawakening of her natural appetite.

Lucy's move to Belgium, while offering the possible extension of freedom and autonomy, also highlights her precarious position and potential danger. She is an impecunious single woman, in straitened enough circumstances to require immediate work, with no companion and no connections in the country, acting only on the thoughtless comment of a complete stranger and relying on the help of a man who does not recognize her and whom she claims not to know herself at this stage. She is fortunate to find employment at the Rue Fossette, when M. Paul, "this vague arbiter of my destiny" who "gaze[s] steadily" at her (129), "read[ing her] countenance" (128), advises his cousin and the directress of the girls' school to engage her, thus saving her from a return to the "lonesome, dreary hostile street" (129). Lucy is a wanderer in Villette and while the streets of London excited her with a sense of freedom and pleasure, the streets of this Belgian town offer a clear threat. Though Lucy's last name is indicative of coldness, symbolic of her frosty personality as Brontë of course intended, it also conjures images of purity, which are here contrasted with an implication of prostitution--or the threat of it--should Lucy be required to return to the 'hostile street,' where one expects a prostitute to ply her trade. M. Paul saves her from that fate; John Graham Bretton, despite Lucy's fulsome praise of his kindness, has taken her only part way to the inn he

recommends and then has left her to fend for herself. Indeed, she is followed by two men whose sexual threat is conveyed by their smoking of cigars, that most phallic of objects, and the resultant anxiety causes her to lose her way and arrive at the door of the Pensionnat. Though Graham Bretton is not her blood relative, and not aware of her identity at this juncture, his failure to look after her, an unescorted female, is an indication of his later inability to recognize Lucy and to care for her as, in whatever capacity, a kinsman should. Thus even at this stage of their reacquaintance the spinster Lucy is invisible to Graham even as she is highly visible, being a solitary woman, as a sexual commodity to the men, later revealed as professors, who follow her. With this episode of the middle-class single woman alone and vulnerable, Brontë hints that very little may in the end separate the genteel and chaste woman from her fallen sister.

If London sharpens Lucy's hunger, her arrival at the Pensionnat signals an appeasement of that craving, where, by her own hands and those of others, she will gain independence. Lucy is immediately fed bodily, a meal she describes in detail as she recognizes the opportunity for independence ahead of her. She is also nourished over time by the challenges of teaching English. She is introduced to the employment when Madame Beck, in need of an instructor, literally leads her by the hand to the classroom door and inspires her with what Lucy designates as a man's "aspect"; Lucy feels herself to be a coward in the presence of Madame Beck's masculine authority, although she acknowledges that Madame's power is specifically "not my kind of power" (141. Original emphasis). Lucy chooses to rise to the challenge, not to return "to nursery obscurity" (140). Between her willingness to turn her hand to a useful activity and Madame Beck's hand of direction--"'Will you,' said she, 'go backward or forward?' indicating with her hand, first, the small door of communication with the dwelling-house, and then the great double portals of the classes or schoolrooms" (141)--Lucy experiences an introduction to "all the undercurrent of life and character" (142) that the school can offer.

Like any socially useful single woman, Lucy keeps busy, but she is both a part of and removed from the school's family and cliques, thus leading a doubled existence of simultaneous presence and absence. Janet Freeman notes that when Lucy is reunited with the Brettons after her nervous collapse during the long vacation, she finds her mornings pleasantly filled with activity, just as everyone else's are (493); this indicates her place, however delicately positioned, in the Bretton family. Similarly, once ensconced in the Pensionnat, Lucy enjoys the fact that her "time was now well and profitably filled up" (145). Yet Lucy does not make of this French school a home; she eventually feels sufficiently comfortable to allow herself to appear "singular" in her frequenting of the alleé défendue, but she escapes to live "my own life in my own still, shadow-world" (174, 185). She is both present, fulfilling useful duties, and absent, occupying secluded space. She rejects the proffered intimacies of each of the other female teachers in turn, preferring solitude and the "companionship in her own thoughts" (194, 198). However, Lucy does form a strong attachment to little Georgette Beck, and this relationship illustrates two aspects of Lucy's spinster life. First, Lucy's feelings of love for the child indicate her maternal urges, which conform to the portrait Cook provides of an old maid retaining her naturally feminine feelings. She confides, "[T]o hold her in my lap, or carry her in my arms was to me a treat." When on one occasion the child, wishing that Lucy's head share her pillow, nestles to her, Lucy is smitten with "a tender pain" (189). Second, clearly, Lucy's attempts to remain outside and unaffected, content to experience that secondhand existence as a spinster should, are unsuccessful here. Her attachment to Georgette is slightly reminiscent of her taking the tiny Polly into her bed when they both lived with the Brettons as children. Indeed, she replicates her earlier position, being both a part of and yet removed from the actual world she inhabits.

However well Lucy has fit into the family, real and metaphoric, of the Pensionnat--and despite her singularity she seems reasonably comfortable there--the long vacation leaves her solitary and desperate. This experience emphasizes Lucy's unmarried status and her marginality. Although she

has enjoyed inclusion in the Pensionnat's daily routine during the school year, when her acquaintances disperse for the eight-week holiday in September, she is left without connections or companionship. Not surprisingly, she articulates this horrific period in tropes of food and disease.

Left alone in the school with only a servant and a deformed mentally handicapped student, a "crétin," Lucy contemplates her life and sinks into despair. Her description of her anticipated future contrasts sharply with that of the later breakfast in the country hosted by M. Paul the following spring. She sees her future as empty and hopeless, "with no green field, no palm-tree, no well in view" (228). Conversely, the rural meal with Emanuel and the Pensionnat students takes place amongst the May greenness, at a well surrounded by lime-trees (471). The bounty of the country breakfast is in proportion to her blossoming friendship with M. Paul; the vacation, however, highlights Lucy's terrible solitude and friendlessness. Even the crétin provides little in the way of interaction, and Lucy finds this handicapped pupil's behaviour rather distressing: "As she very rarely spoke, and would sit for hours together moping and mowing and distorting her features with indescribable grimaces, it was more like being prisoned with some strange tameless animal, than associating with a human being" (229). Interestingly, though somewhat disturbingly, given the collapsing of illness, deformity and sin, Gilbert and Gubar read the crétin as one of Lucy's doubles, a "nightmarish version of herself—unwanted, lethargic, silent, warped in mind and body, slothful, indolent, and angry" (414). In addition to the lack of interaction with this individual, Lucy experiences a fall in gentility, for not only must she provide the crétin's meals and comfort but she also must attend to her personal needs, "which required the nerve of a hospital nurse" (229). This caregiving is more demanding and draining than her previous ministrations to Miss Marchmont. The effect on Lucy's sensitive nature is somatic: she loses her appetite, craving only water and fresh air after such duties. While Lucy's reaction to this situation is understandable, one can also interpret her rejection of food as an attempt to control her body as the crétin cannot. Furthermore, this experience recalls certain other details of her time with Miss Marchmont. Lucy's lack of

appetite contrasts with her desire for more food during the earlier caregiving period, and although the school is much larger than Miss Marchmont's "[t]wo hot, close rooms" (109), Lucy's incarceration with the helpless pupil recalls her earlier claustrophobic experience caring for the invalid.

Unfortunately, once the student's aunt has collected her, Lucy's distressed state, both emotional and physical, only increases. She contemplates her various acquaintances' circumstances as compared to her own in terms of fertility and pathology. All of her colleagues and friends are with family, though she believes Ginevra to be best off, envisioning her friend's sightseeing tour as one of endless bounty, "fertile plains" of maturing "harvest and vintage" (230). Realizing that she has romanticized Ginevra into a "sort of heroine" by projecting her own desires onto Miss Fanshawe, Lucy identifies this thinking as the symptom of a diseased mind. However, Lucy somatizes this mental anguish as a physical fever, a state exacerbated by her prolonged lack of food. Her refusal, or inability, to eat smacks of anorexic behaviour, an attempt not so much to die as to exert control over her body during a time when her emotional control seems tenuous. Her sense of marginality and her powerlessness are only heightened when she dreams that her deceased family has forgotten her, that she is "no more loved, no more owned" (232). Lucy's self-reliant independence--the very essence of her identity--disintegrates under this dreadful isolation, forgotten, she supposes, by both living and dead. She characterizes her suffering as an unpalatable beverage "drawn from no well" (231).

In the midst of this physical and emotional crisis, however, Lucy exhibits a glimmer of that very self-reliance that seems to have deserted her and she locates this power in her hands, the emblem of spinsterly competence: she believes she must alter "the trial God had appointed me...by my own hands, hot, feeble, trembling as they were" (232). Requiring some sort of religious sustenance, Lucy discovers the Roman Catholic Church offers devotional bread. This impulse for spiritual succor again emphasizes Lucy's spinster status, convents having been, as Glum and Grey

point out, traditional shelters for single women; Lucy herself recognizes that her desperation and the priest's kindness make her genuinely vulnerable to the church's appeal. Furthermore, Lucy has no doubt that the compassionate father, a species of parent figure to whom the Protestant Lucy turns for aid, would have "stirred up the zeal of good works" (235), the natural outlet for a single woman's energies. The priest offers her his kindness, and despite his efforts at conversion, Lucy declares, "[H]e did me good" (235).

Lucy's marginality undergoes a change, however. Shortly thereafter, she is returned to her mother figure, Mrs. Bretton, for Graham rescues her, again only knowing her as the English schoolteacher and not his former childhood companion, when he finds her unconscious on the steps of the church. It is typical of Lucy's position that she falls into Graham's hands (257) again without his recognizing her--she is unknown as the godchild to both Brettons upon Graham's depositing her with his mother. Graham's lack of recognition symbolizes his inability to see Lucy as she really is; as time goes on, he seems increasingly bent on foisting on her a role she designates as "not mine" (404). Even the giddy Ginevra appears to see this tendency in the attractive doctor, for she complains that "he expects something more of me than I find it convenient to be" (155).

However, upon first waking up in the pleasant room at La Terrasse, Lucy experiences not only a pleasant return to her childhood as she views the familiar furniture and objects but also feelings of security, which prompt a renewal of physical appetite. Carlisle observes that La Terrasse offers refuge in the past: "In the womblike 'submarine home' of memory, one is protected from the storms of adult experience" (268). Lucy feels secure and protected; Freeman states that she determines to be part of the "small community" of the Brettons' "sheltering household," a reaction to her isolating situation at the Pensionnat during the vacation (493). Like Caroline's, Lucy's illness provides her with nurturing, with motherly care. As her fever recedes, Lucy "experienc[es] a craving for nourishment" (244) and, as Freeman notes, Lucy prefers her nourishment from Mrs. Bretton's own motherly hand, a symptom of her new-born status as part of

the Bretton household (510). Lucy herself, ill and in that state of childlike reliance one enjoys when being ministered to in poor health, states that she is waited on not by servants but by her godmother herself, the neatly dressed Mrs. Bretton, with her "motherly braids of hair" (243), who brings Lucy's food "with her own active hands" (253). The detail recalls Reverend Helstone's meticulous attention to Caroline's meals during her convalescence. Lucy confides, "Food or drink never pleased me so well as when it came through her hands" (253). Lucy craves not just the actual sustenance but also the feeling of nurturance this gives her. She is a child being fed by her mother; she is a wanderer taken in; she is present; she is seen.

Unfortunately for the solitary and lonely Lucy, Mrs. Bretton's hands are not always active or necessarily effectual on her behalf, for Lucy's godmother evinces the ability to forget her for long periods of time, though there is no evidence of deliberate unkindness in her leaving Lucy alone after little Polly Home re-enters the Brettons' lives in the person of Paulina de Bassompierre. Having been used to weekly trips to La Terrasse, Lucy then experiences seven long weeks without communication of any sort from the Brettons. She feels ignored, invisible, as she did during the long vacation. She has already warned herself not to set too much store by her association with Mrs. Bretton and her son, for she identifies them as friends, "Friends, not professing vehement attachment, not offering the tender solace of well-matched and congenial relationship," but those of whom "moderate demand of affection was to be made" (251). In a state of tedious waiting, she figures her tortured anticipation of some communication in terms of food. She advises that a hermit such as herself will "swallow his own thoughts," but then confides, "I suppose animals kept in cages, and so scantily fed as to be always on the verge of famine, await their food as I awaited a letter." Lucy sustains herself by reading the five letters she has already had, but she finds that this "crust from Barmecide's loaf...did not nourish me: I pined on it, and got as thin as a shadow" (350). When the longed for letter finally arrives, however, Lucy does not recognize the hand, the "pale female scrawl," as her godmother's until she opens the billet itself.

Overall, Mrs. Bretton's regard for Lucy seems both sincere and detached. She is fond of her goddaughter yet leaves her without contact for two months. While she feeds Lucy with her own hand, indicating the maternal care she provides, her hand produces only a formless, faded penmanship that Lucy does not recognize. However, Mrs. Bretton gives Lucy the pink dress that makes her so visible to M. Paul, though this seems to be done out of a general generosity than with any specific intent. The overall effect of the Brettons in Lucy's world, then, is one of fond but rather disinterested attention. The Brettons periodically draw her into their activities, but Lucy occupies a marginal rather than central place in their lives.

Situated as she is, by choice or not, on the perimeter of other people's existences, Lucy's self-described stance as observer affords her a position of power, not only to observe others but to 'penetrate' their lives. This kind of sexually inverted imagery occurs throughout the novel and can be seen clearly in Lucy's relationships with other characters; as mentioned, her doubles are both female and male. Brontë explores the roles of both sexes and blurs the distinctions between them. Lucy's manifestations run the gamut from representing herself as a piece of furniture (162) to playing a man on stage. Brontë associates her with a variety of other physical beings, from the plumply attractive and giddy Ginevra to the swarthy and mercurial M. Paul. Given Lucy's propensity for insubstantiality, it is appropriate, if ironic, that the figure linking her many 'selves' and her numerous doppelgängers is an apparition.

The nun's function in the novel as a symbol of repressed passion is complicated by the fact that this female role is played by an effeminate male figure, the excessively feminine Colonel de Hamal, Ginevra Fanshawe's suitor, who shares her capacity for the fluff and froth of life. Lucy's description of him mincing and preening before the portrait of the voluptuous Cleopatra fairly drips with contempt:

> I had caught a glimpse of a head too pretty to belong to any other than the redoubted Colonel de Hamal. What a very finished, highly-polished little pate it was! What a figure, so trim and natty! What womanish feet and hands! How daintily he held a glass to one of his optics! With what admiration he gazed upon the Cleopatra! And then, how engagingly he tittered and whispered a friend [sic] at his elbow! Oh, the man of sense! Oh, the refined gentleman of superior taste and tact! (281)

Clearly, Lucy finds this effeminate man an object of scorn, indicating that she dislikes both his very prettiness and the artificiality of his overly refined demeanour. Yet Lucy will share with this character the ability to 'be' both of the sexes. This "young fop in search of a sex life" (Keefe 181) uses the nun's disguise to pursue Ginevra, donning the clothing of a virginal, religious woman to gain himself, if not a sexual partner, at least his sexual likeness. The nun represents both Lucy's suppression of her passion and its very existence. A nun can be seen in a dual light: the sexuality she naturally possesses as a female must be repressed, shrouded and driven inward so that she may serve her God most purely; conversely, because the passion is redirected or sublimated to religious fervour, it becomes more charged. Brontë herself readily acknowledged the "comfort and security...the Catholic religion could provide," but her antipathy to the Roman Church was also a reaction against its "sensual and emotional appeal" (Peters 160). Thus, in offering a literally bodiless nun, a religious apparition, to represent Lucy's repression, nun-like seclusion and dormant sexuality, Brontë captures Lucy's emotional and physical complexity as well as both the virginal and the sensual aspects of the spinster. The empty spectre is therefore a many-layered symbol.

However, by the time Lucy finds the nun's habit abandoned by the male-who-appears-female de Hamal on her bed, "a pre-eminently sexualized site," as Christina Crosby notes (708), she has begun to come to terms with her own hermaphroditic self. Lucy describes the heap of women's clothing as an "incubus" (569), a term which, Crosby points out, was "current" in Brontë's day (708). This "sexualized male spirit" is "both his [de Hamal's] spirit and her [Lucy's] double...the most potent of men is also the most feminized. The rake who takes the veil to further his courting is also a little fop, characterized so as to emphasize, while confusing, sexual difference....Both male

and female are present in their quintessentially sexualized forms in the specter, but neither can take precedence. Thus the nun 'is' nothing" (Crosby 708, 709). While Crosby may be correct in stating that the nun is actually nothing, neither male nor female, a mere bodiless spectre, Brontë implies that the nun may have become nothing more than a pile of garments because Lucy has by then begun to recognize her own body, and, most interestingly, her hermaphroditic ability to shift from female to male forms. Conversely, then, the nun is everything.

The doubling between Lucy and the natty de Hamal-as-nun is doubled earlier when Lucy plays a fop on the stage during Madame Beck's fête. To further the strangeness of the blurring, she acts opposite her friend and the Colonel's own alter ego, Ginevra Fanshawe, wooing her away from the sincere lover in the play and John Bretton in the audience. Dressed with only enough male attire to identify her as a man, Lucy embraces her part, "longing to eclipse the 'Ours:' i.e., Dr. John." She becomes the fop, ardent and intent on winning both Ginevra and Dr. John for herself: "Ginevra was tender; how could I be otherwise than chivalric?" Lucy describes her zest for the altered role in terms of food: "In went the yearned-for seasoning; thus flavoured, I played it with relish" (210). As Kate Millett observes, Lucy "makes love to Fanshawe on stage in one of the most indecorous scenes one may come upon in the entire Victorian novel" (141). Millett sees this interplay between the two women as disturbing:

> The dialogue between the two young women is brutal; Fanshawe parades her beauty with the double purpose of making Lucy capitulate before it, acknowledge herself an ugly woman and therefore inferior; or propose herself a suitor to it and therefore a captive through desire. For Ginevra knows the critical Lucy would be the best catch of all, the biggest conquest. (141)

Lucy, Millett claims, can only achieve maturity and success by "renouncing a masculine lust for

Fanshawe" (141).[3] However, while Millett's reading of this scene illuminates the sexual interplay between Ginevra and Lucy, I interpret the passage as one in which Brontë's explorations of sexual identity are at their most daring and layered, for she illustrates how multifaceted desire can be. If Vashti's later performance will "hush Desire" (341), Lucy finds her own acting arouses hers as she "trie[s] her own strength" (210). The performance sparks her warmth, interest and courage; it reveals her enjoyment of attention and her ability, dressed as she is as both male and female, to play to both a man, Dr. John, and a woman, Ginevra, simultaneously. Lucy therefore unleashes her three-fold desire, directed to John Graham, Ginevra and her own self. Thus Millett's reading of Lucy's "masculine lust" for her friend is too simple for Brontë's intended complexity.

However, Millett is not the only critic to see a distinct capacity for the 'masculine' in Lucy, for Putzell-Korab comments that "Lucy makes love to Ginevra with amazing and—for a fop—inappropriate virility" (188). Ginevra herself sees Lucy as a means to snub Dr. John and, clearly, both of them are playing to him. Yet there is some sort of 'chemistry,' to use a modern, if not entirely precise term ("affinity" in Victorian parlance) between these two young women. Despite Lucy's often harsh criticisms of her fluffy blond associate, one senses that there is some genuine fondness in the austere Miss Snowe for the self-absorbed Miss Fanshawe. Obviously, Ginevra, for her part, affixes herself to Lucy for reasons that are often heartlessly transparent. Ginevra habitually sees Lucy as a kind of foil for her own beauty and as a chaperone figure of either sex, for she calls her by a variety of names, including Diogenes (576), Timon (312, 316) and Grandmother (574). She persists in taking Lucy's arm when they walk together and leaning on her with her full, not insubstantial, weight, something Lucy objects to, for, "as I was not a gentleman

[3] Millett consistently refers to Ginevra by her last name, though all the other characters, including the males, are given their first names or the address of marital status, as in the case of Mrs. Bretton and Madame Beck. The effect is to 'masculinize' Ginevra, for though Millett sees "masculine lust" for her friend in Lucy, it is Ginevra who is identified through her surname, as men usually are.

or her lover, I did not like it" (393). Yet, as one critic remarks, Lucy "strides along like a courtier all the same....The denial of masculinity cannot erase its assertion" (Keefe 174-5), though it is interesting to note that Lucy uses a typically feminine implement, a pin, inserted in her undergarment to deter Ginevra's tendency to lean. Lucy indulges the younger woman even as she criticizes her vanity and capriciousness. She hurries off to procure a shawl for Ginevra, declaring, "She shall wear this if I have strength to make her" and "folding it well round her muslin dress, covering her neck and her arms," much as a fussy chaperoning aunt, or a strong solicitous lover, might do.

While this act of concern may arise more out of Lucy's desire to assuage Dr. John's hurt at Ginevra's criticism of his "coddling and admonishing" (218) when he requests the garment to ensure Ginevra's health, nonetheless there are other instances where she allows Ginevra liberties. She shares her food only with this student at the Pensionnat, "though many others used to covet the superfluity" (312), and often they use a single cup. Indeed, Lucy not only divides her drink and food with Ginevra, but also admits to preferring to let her "take the lion's share, whether of the white beer, the sweet wine, or the new milk." Though Ginevra designates Lucy an "old lady," she finds her a comfortable companion, a "dear crosspatch" (155); Lucy declares that though they "wrangled daily," they "were never alienated" (313). Lucy is conscious of Ginevra's beauty and, though critical of her, there is a sense in her feeding of Ginevra that she is nourishing the denied part of herself, allowing Ginevra to "become quite plump" with cheeks "as round as apples" (312). Lucy continues to impose a rather spartan existence on herself but she appeases her own appetite by feeding Ginevra. Ginevra can act in ways that Lucy appears to disapprove of, yet Lucy seems to condone the other young woman's actions by rewards of food, which the greedy Ginevra eagerly if somewhat mindlessly gobbles up. Gilbert and Gubar note that, in "[c]arrying on two secret love affairs right under Madame's nose, it is Ginevra who best embodies Lucy's attraction to self-indulgence and freedom." They add that there is a resemblance between "Ginevra's satiric wit and

Lucy's sardonic honesty" (409, 410). Certainly it is her outspokenness, the "honest plainness to her very fibs" that is "the salt, the sole preservative ingredient" in the giddy Ginevra's character (394). She is free in ways that Lucy and even Paulina are not: free in her beauty but freed, too, by her very narcissism. While this trait of course also restricts Ginevra, not least from attaining any sort of real maturity, it also prevents her from the kind of mental anguish that both the reserved Lucy and the child-like Paulina encounter. It is her egotism which attracts Ginevra to de Hamal, for, as Lucy sarcastically observes, in their doll-like suitability to each other is the added convenience of the dainty Colonel being able to wear Ginevra's gloves "at a pinch" (217). Ginevra's lover is as close as she can get to courting herself.

Brontë's subversion of binary gender distinctions is quite radical, given the anxiety one sees in Mayor's article concerning female education and the general cultural fear that employment would unsex women. However, not all critics find the Lucy-Ginevra friendship or Lucy's ability to play the male role in a theatrical production sexually suspect. John Maynard's reaction to Lucy's role as a male on the stage clearly holds less anxiety than Millett's response to it. He states that Lucy's assumption of the male part during the play reveals, rather than any lesbian tendencies, "simply strength of character, force that has been hidden by her general introversion." Further, he adds, "Lucy shows no erotic attraction to her friend Ginevra offstage" (200). Lucy's relationship with the vain blonde student is certainly open to interpretation. However, it is important that Lucy is so aware of Ginevra's physical beauty and responds to it with an almost sensual pleasure. Her recognition of and response to Ginevra's physical appearance demonstrates her awareness of the physical, at first in others, then gradually in herself. She finds Ginevra "fascinatingly pretty" (207) and her comments are sincere and untainted with envy. She views Ginevra's comeliness in each of her features and observes that even the school uniform "gave her charms a triumph: enhancing by contrast the fairness of her skin, the freshness of her bloom, the golden beauty of her tresses" (312). Lucy seems to enjoy, in this foreign environment, the very Englishness of her friend's

appearance, revealing her own xenophobia. She may, as Crosby believes, "see her pretty companion with male eyes" (707), but Lucy's description is also an acknowledgement of beauty without sexual bias. Or, more correctly, it is a view that, woman-like, is capable of spanning both the male and female perspectives, for Lucy sees in Miss Fanshawe both herself, in happier, more pampered circumstances, and the Other, that which is not herself or, in Carlylean terms, the Not-Me. By virtue of her larger body and her undeniable beauty, Ginevra is clearly present, but Lucy establishes her own presence by actively nourishing that body with her own rations. Thus Lucy makes herself seem less visible in contrast while she is in fact enjoying a vicarious existence through Ginevra.

Her intense identification with Ginevra is nowhere more obvious than when she rails at her for spurning Dr. John, for whom she herself cares, in favour of de Hamal, "[t]he doll—the puppet—the manikin." Accusing Ginevra of torturing the doctor, she bursts forth with a passionate demonstration of her own feelings: "Have you power to do this? Who gave you that power? Where is it? Does it lie all in your beauty—your pink and white complexion and your yellow hair?" Ginevra's is no muted beauty, but one Lucy, the shadowed woman of light, sees in terms of vibrant colours: pink and yellow offset by white. Her description of Ginevra's toying with John Graham Bretton is anchored in bodily terms: "Does this bind his soul at your feet, and bend his neck under your yoke?...You are not in earnest; you love him; you long for him; but you trifle with his heart to make him more surely yours?" (218-19). One feels from this heated, desperate, almost breathless outpouring that Lucy expects Ginevra to act for her, as she once looked to young Polly as the conduit for her feelings. Both Ginevra and Polly function as alternative identities for Lucy, as do the male figures of de Hamal and M. Paul. If Lucy is both herself and her various selves, with the identities constantly crossing in and out of each other, she can be both self and other, being and reflection, at once. Similarly, she can cross gender lines, playing a man on stage and off, while still retaining her own feminine body, her own female self because that self is not limited to the body. I

argue that the spinster manages a double existence, a mobile subjectivity that completes rather than fragments selfhood.[4]

Lucy's own changeable identity finds a kind of kindred spirit when she attends the theatre performance with the Brettons. Lucy the amateur actress sees in the professional actress she calls Vashti both a transcendence of sex, "something neither of woman nor of man" (339), and a sexual power that transfixes her. As Joanna Russ mentions, Lucy compares the actress "to no less a personage than Lucifer" (26). Seeing her as "[f]allen, insurgent, banished" from Heaven, Lucy finds that the wasted performer, the "shadow of a Royal Vashti" (339), eclipses the portrait of the insufficiently clothed, fleshy Cleopatra. Though she declares that Vashti's acting "hushed Desire," her description of the woman's power is couched in sensual, sexual terms: Vashti's force, though descending, is "like a deep, swollen, winter river, thundering in cataract, and bearing the soul, like a leaf, on the steep and steely sweep of its descent" (341). Graham Bretton responds to the performance with "a branding judgment" of Vashti as a woman (342), directing his language to her body. As Russ states, "[T]he immorality of actresses was still a myth" even in the 1890s, almost forty years after Villette's publication (26); it is small wonder that Lucy vows never to act again, for what she takes to be a freeing experience, allowing her to cross gender lines and to express her 'masculine' side, is judged by society as immoral and fallen. For the reserved Lucy, taking to the stage, especially in male garb, risks unleashing her own sexual power, her own "inappropriate virility." In addition, acting on stage makes her visible. The threat Graham's

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[4] Christina Crosby, employing the theories of Lacan and Barthes, captures this blurring and doubling in her explication of the mirror scene when Ginevra and Lucy stand before the glass together, each seeing herself reversed, each viewing her "symmetrical opposite" (712). Crosby's interpretation is intriguing, but it implies a passive doubling of identity that ignores the deliberate control Lucy exerts over her own fluid subjectivity. Keryn Carter responds to Crosby's reading, using Irigaray's theories; she sees Lucy as evading reflection, that she is an "absence" (4). However, she interprets this evasion as a strategy to subvert patriarchal definitions. This analysis accords Lucy agency, but it does not address her multiple, shifting identities. See pp. 712-713 in Crosby's "Charlotte Brontë's Haunted Text" in Studies in English Literature. 24.4 (1984) for her analysis of this scene and p. 4 in "The Blank Space of Lucy Snowe's Reflection" in AUMLA 76 (1991) for Carter's reading.

branding judgement poses, however, is that it fixes identity, imposing an external marker that defines, confines and restricts identity. For women with power that transcends gender, Graham's narrow perspective constitutes danger.

Nevertheless, Lucy is masculinized in the novel, by herself and others. Wearing the portions of male attire she chooses for the play and rearranging the "lavish garlandry of woven brown hair" (199), clearly an alluring feminine feature, done especially for the fête, Lucy elicits the contempt of Zelie St. Pierre. Though she is irritated by the Frenchwoman's response to her costume, she answers in her male character, in a Victorian version of method acting: "[I]f she were not a lady and I a gentleman, I should feel disposed to call her out" (209). This comeback and her repugnance to have Zelie dress her in male garb, in addition to Zelie's obvious desire to do so, may be complicated by the advance the Frenchwoman has made to Lucy earlier in their acquaintance, an advance one scholar interprets as specifically sexual (Putzell-Korab 190-1)[5] and which Millett would no doubt interpret as "masculine lust."

For John Graham Bretton, whom Crosby designates "the most determinedly masculine character in the book" (708), Lucy's sex is a barrier to what might have been a close relationship. He believes that if Lucy had been a boy, "we should have been good friends." Their opinions, he tells her, "would have melted into each other" (401), though it seems that what Graham Bretton constantly seeks is his own reflection mirrored in Lucy's eyes. M. Paul, however, who chooses Lucy to act the fop's role in the play, recognizes her ability to cross gender boundaries; he states that she may don his bonnet-grec, "turn garçon for the occasion, and benevolently go to the Athénée in his stead" (412). Later, he will see their physical "affinity," casting back on these words Lucy's own sardonic ones concerning the sharing of gloves between de Hamal and Ginevra. M.

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[5] Each of the teachers at the Pensionnat has offered Lucy "overtures of special intimacy" (194) but while Zelie St. Pierre's has excited Lucy's curiosity, it has also provoked her wrath. Lucy consistently refers to the Parisienne as a "snake."

Paul's reaction at this juncture to her potential assumption of his male attire and gender is considerably calmer than his nearly apoplectic response to her viewing of the Cleopatra. "How dare you, a young person," he raves, "sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a garçon, and look at that picture?" (277. Original emphasis). M. Paul appears affronted and shocked at Lucy's ability to view, alone and with equanimity, what is clearly to him a shocking (for a woman) piece of art. Seeing his reaction, Lucy then applies herself to "keeping cool and working him up" (277). One begins to see the interplay between these two which will eventually show itself to be first merely warm and then sexually charged.

The gender slippage between de Hamal and Ginevra that Brontë uses to parody the notion of two lovers so close as to be one person is a comic version of the closeness that slowly develops between the chilly Lucy and the fiery M. Paul. Lucy's relationship with the irascible little Frenchman goes through many stages, from antipathy to teasing to love. Rebecca Fraser claims that "Lucy's relationship with M. Paul is remarkably cerebral, almost asexual in its exalted passion. He twice calls her 'petite soeur' and she says she can think of him as a brother" (220). This concise assessment of their affinity seems not to apprehend, or to misapprehend, the intricacies and complexities of their relationship, one in which Lucy's awakening sexuality and their physical attraction become increasingly important. To Millett, not surprisingly, he is a dangerous male who sees Lucy "and hates her" (141); to Brownstein, he is "intense and unbalanced" (175). However, Maynard, correctly appreciating the more manifold nature of the relationship, states, "[Brontë] clearly pre-figures Freud in her continual insistency upon seeing family relations as the origin of patterns of later love and sexual relations" (213). Helene Moglen touches on this when she notes Emanuel's "androgynous nature...complex and whole." He is vulnerable, "tender and nurturing," a "father-lover who...is also a maternal figure—and, in his stubborn impulsivity and petulance, a child. To Lucy who has no relationships, he offers all" (215-16).

Millett, Brownstein and Fraser's interpretations ignore both the increasing sexual awareness between the mercurial M. Paul and the inwardly burning Lucy and Brontë's recognition that the celibate woman experiences not only maternal feelings but also sexual ones. As with the other characters in the novel, Lucy describes M. Paul in careful detail, but there is added dimension in her picture of him. She seems as aware of the beauty of some of his features as she is with Ginevra's. His hair is shorn close to his head, "close as raven down" (277), giving it a "velvet blackness"(205); the words invoke a desire to touch. Reversing the role of the male poet who sees his lady's brow as marble, Lucy finds M. Paul's made of "sallow ivory" (205); he has blue or violet eyes with deep Spanish lashes (583), and at one point, his glance at her "seemed to have been borrowed from Vashti" (379). While the actress's performance "hushed Desire," Paul's Vashti-like glance fans it. Lucy compares Vashti with Lucifer; Paul bedevils her: he rants at her, working himself to fever pitch while she eggs him on, each increasing the sexually charged atmosphere; he, "the sudden boa-constrictor" (404), hisses in her ear, as the serpent hissed in Eve's, if not penetrating her aural organ then at least pouring his words and breath into it. He covers her sleeping form with warm shawls (it is Lucy who now receives the solicitousness, rather than she who bestows it); she meticulously embroiders a watchguard for him, finishing it with the gold clasp from her only necklace. Through all of their encounters trails the smoke of his cigar, its blue wreath curling in the air, its odour long-lasting and unmistakable, inhabiting the contents of her desk. He invades her space and is present through scent even when he is physically absent. Lucy is very aware of him, and aware of her own sensate reactions to his influence.

M. Paul's cigar is never a more sexual symbol than when Lucy actually discovers him "smoking into" this desk (431), a scene in which Brontë foregrounds the hand as a sexualized site. His hand is already "on intimate terms" with that particular piece of furniture, and when she comes upon him, he is painstakingly turning over its contents "with a gentle and careful hand," an "olive hand" that moves her things "almost as familiarly as my own" (431, 430). The physical connection

between Lucy and M. Paul becomes clear when one recalls that Lucy has earlier likened herself to an unobtrusive piece of furniture which Dr. John can easily ignore. Now, Lucy, the inconspicuous woman in grey, is symbolized by an ordinary desk which knows the intimate contact of M. Paul's exploring hand, for the sexual imagery that so closely associates these two is not confined to the cigar, Emanuel's "Indian darling," which is being exhaled into the open desk. Lucy provides a precise description of his swarthy fingers in contact with the objects therein, touching them, knowing them as Lucy herself does. Under his auspices, her desk, a symbolic womb, becomes a place of fertility and nurturance. He shares not only his cherished bons-bons with her, leaving "many a paper of chocolate comfits" (434), but "freely" lends his books. As is her habit, Lucy uses food metaphors to characterize events and things. The books Paul loans her "magically grow" between her own copies, sometimes a new work or a classic, "mellow and sweet in its ripe age." She likens Paul to a housewife's "strange elfin ally busy in the dairy at the untimely churn" (430, 431). As she bends over him from behind, he turns suddenly; "I think he heard me breathe," she says (432). She has been breathing behind his shoulder while he has been exhaling the pungent smoke into the cavity of her desk.

Brontë layers the symbolic resonances of M. Paul's erotically charged cigar when Lucy wins a cigar-case as a prize at the concert she attends with Graham and his mother and which she refuses to exchange for the lady's head-dress Graham garners. Robert Keefe argues that Lucy must reclaim the 'masculine' portions of her self in order to become a whole woman (175); here, though M. Paul possesses the cigar, it is Lucy who retains the receptacle for it. The case is also a male object, and in this blending of female ownership of a male item, Brontë demonstrates Lucy's androgyny and her affinity to, and fitness for, the hermaphroditic Paul. He may, through the sexual symbolism of the phallic cigar, penetrate her, know her in the biblical sense, yet her proprietorship of the case for that phallic object indicates the reciprocity of the sexual act, for her case will

enclose his cigars, and, by implication, her womb will enclose his phallus. Further, if M. Paul can be nurturing, maternal and tender, Lucy, as one sees, can 'play the man.'

Brontë's sexual imagery accumulates, deepening the association between Lucy and Paul in physical and spiritual terms. As an observer, Lucy has seen into the lives of others and she is eventually able to "penetrat[e]" (440) M. Paul's motives in his sometimes harsh instruction of her. His mind becomes her library; when it is opened to her, she enters "bliss" (472). He desires her to be his amanuensis, but she fears he would be angry "if my pen did not keep pace with his lips" (473). When he proposes to her and offers his gift of the school, she feels herself to be "penetrated with his influence" (592). Upon their first meeting, he had read her countenance; as they become closer, he recognizes a rapport between them, despite their differences. "[W]e are alike," he tells her, "—there is affinity. Do you see it, mademoiselle, when you look in the glass? Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine—that your eyes are cut like mine? Do you know that you have many of my looks?" (457). This declaration of shared physical appearance recalls Charlotte Brontë's own observation of G. H. Lewes's resemblance to her sister: his face was "so wonderfully like Emily—her eyes, her features, the very nose, the somewhat prominent mouth, the forehead—even at moments the expression" (Fraser 368). While Fraser points out that the myopic Brontë was wont to see similarities between the least likely people, her use of the effect here shows her belief in such occurrences. Indeed, Brontë was delighted by her visit to a phrenologist with George Smith in 1851, and Barker observes that it was Lewes's similarity to Emily that "told in his favour" (641).[6] Although Villette is interpreted as an autobiographical novel in some repects, one wonders if her strangely taciturn and 'masculine' sibling, shy and stoic, tall and slender, striding across the moors with her dogs, may not have been a model of sorts for the introspective and often prickly Lucy

[6] Barker also notes Lewes's own description of Charlotte as "cruelly dismissive," for he saw her as "a little, plain, provincial, sickly-looking old maid" (641).

Snowe as much as for the stalwart and independent Shirley Keeldar. Both Emily and Lucy demonstrate an inner core of identity that maintains its own integrity, regardless of external forces.

Contrasting with Lucy's masculine aspects are her sartorial choices, which quietly but surely make her visible and indicate deliberate intent on her part. Habitually dressed in inconspicuous grey, even for a special occasion wearing a "gown of shadow" (200), Lucy eventually dons a pink frock, the gift, appropriately, of her godmother, for an outing with the Brettons. Her initial reaction to the present is not only to reject it but also to state its inappropriateness. "I knew it not," she says of the dress. "It knew not me. I had not proved it" (283). Reynolds and Humble accurately observe that Lucy "fears the colour for its ability to draw attention to her presence: to make her bodily by making her visible" (58); Lucy herself declares, "[T]he light fabric and bright tint...scared me" (284). Initially believing that "no human force should put [her] into [the dress]" Lucy later ascribes her wearing of it entirely to her godmother's influence (283), portraying herself as without will. However, we have previously seen that Lucy cannot be coerced into all-male attire when she does not choose to be; similarly, we can assume that the "human force" that gets her into the pink garment is in fact her own. That she later selects another pink dress reinforces this argument.

While Graham takes little notice of the raiment other than to acknowledge that it is satisfactory, M. Paul reacts to Lucy's increased visibility, insisting that the frock is " a <u>scarlet gown</u>" (419. Original emphasis). Although Lucy later describes the shade as pale pink, clearly the colour fans M. Paul's certainty that she is as fiery and passionate as he; indeed, her denial of his imputations seems only to convince him further. As Moglen observes, Paul "responds to the spark of her being instead of the shadow of her seeming" (217). Lucy lacks a "natural rose of complexion" (200) and her choice of pink as the shade for her clothing suggests Ginevra's own natural pink and white bloom. Persistently, M. Paul designates Lucy's gown scarlet, bringing her into a light banter in which she reiterates that the dress is "Pink! pink!" and he admits of its "<u>looking</u> rather well" (420. Original emphasis). However, when he takes the students and teachers

to the country for breakfast, Lucy once again wears a pink dress, this one of cotton print and of her own procurement. He claims she has made herself pretty for his fête; she says her clothing is only neat. "J'aime la propreté," he tells her, pleased at her appearance (471). One senses they are both gratified; he approves of her appearance, something the pale inconspicuous Lucy is not used to, and she has dressed as simply as is her habit, but, one suspects, in a colour calculated to catch his attention. M. Paul clearly notices Lucy, her face, her appearance, her manner. Both her choice of attire and his observation of it draw her from her marginalized position on the perimeters of other people's lives to the centre of her own.

I have already shown how symbolic is Paul's olive hand as it turns over the contents of Lucy's desk, but this symbolism is not confined only to this scene. During his breakfast in the country, amidst the fecundity of a circle of lime trees and the green swell of ground that surrounds them (471), Paul says a prayer before everyone begins to eat. Seeing Lucy's smile, he returns it and stretches "his kind hand" out to her, asking for her own (474). She has earlier been unable to refuse his rapprochement over his harsh teaching, when he extends his hand "with amity" (441). His hands again move in tenderness when he takes her fingers with one and pushes her bonnet back with the other in order to study her face. During their visit to the Faubourg Clotilde and the house he has rented for her school, where the tendrils and green leaves of the vines at the window "kiss the glass" (584), Lucy caresses "the soft velvet of his cuff" and the gesture recalls her description of the velvet blackness of M. Paul's head. It also brings to mind her other contact with a man's coat, when she turned her face to Graham's black sleeve in order to avoid Paul's eye at the concert. On that occasion, the sleeve offered "pleasure and comfort" (299). Lucy's stroking of Paul's cuff continues to the hand within it, a hand she presses to her lips when he raises it to brush at her hair. Maynard refers to this interchange as a "symbolic wedding of bodies" (208), and certainly the entire scene is suffused with a tender, reverential, but no less sexual for that, atmosphere. As Lucy and Paul share their sacramental meal, they gradually achieve the proximity of their bodies when

his chair touches hers and then "his hand, quietly advanced, turned" her towards him (590). Not only does his gift of the school offer her solid sustenance and practical support in self-employment and independence, but also his letters to her from Guadaloupe are "real food that nourished, living water that refreshed," written "in full-handed, full-hearted plenitude" (594).

The contrast with Graham's treatment of her over his lost letter is marked: M. Paul's hands receive Lucy, accept her and support her. There is power in Paul's hand to rebuff as well, though he raises it, not against Lucy, but to warn off the omnipresent Madame Beck, who attempts to intervene in a tender moment between these friends turned lovers. The movement "did not seem violent; it kept the form of courtesy; he gave his hand; it scarce touched her," thinks Lucy (581). Even in rebuff, his hand lacks the cruelty of Graham's "sleight of hand" (328). Nevertheless, M. Paul's confrontation with Madame Beck, when his ire is provoked, does spark a dual response in Lucy; "I loved him in his wrath with a passion beyond what I had yet felt," she declares. She hears a music in his angry tones to his cousin, a music she finds "life-giving" (581). His masculine violence, however restrained, occurs on her behalf and Lucy responds most elementally to this protective act: she finds it arouses and enlivens her. M. Paul illustrates the power of both his voice and his hand.

Hands also feature largely in the exchange between Lucy and Paulina, when Paulina confides her feelings for Graham Bretton. Throughout the novel, Paulina, too, acts as a double for Lucy, for she, like Ginevra, serves as a sort of medium between Lucy and Graham. As Paulina talks, she possesses herself of her friend's hand; she strokes it and "play[s] with the fingers unconsciously, dress[es] them, now in her own rings, and now circl[es] them with a twine of her beautiful hair; she pat[s] the palm against her hot cheek."[7] Lucy's hand functions symbolically as both a male appendage, standing in for the absent but discussed Graham, and as a symbol of female intimacy,

[7] I am grateful to my colleague Reina Green for drawing my attention to this passage.

for these two young women are genuinely fond of each other. Paulina settles herself against Lucy's arm, "resting gently, not with honest Mistress Fanshawe's fatiguing and selfish weight" (463-4). Lucy's relationship with Ginevra's cousin has not the spark and agitation that is associated with that young person, yet by Lucy's own admission her admiration for Miss de Bassompierre runs deep. As a young girl in the Bretton household, she lived her feelings for Graham through the child Polly and took the shivering youngster into her own bed at night. Lucy's physical closeness with Polly appears to be of a different sort than that which she shares with the narcissistic Ginevra. Lucy rejects Ginevra's attempt to kiss her early in their relationship, but she accepts this intimacy from Paulina when they become reacquainted; in fact, she "hasten[s]" to her when she hears Paulina calling (460). Lucy claims that while others may see her incorrectly, "[i]f anyone knew me it was little Paulina Mary" (386). Paulina herself declares that Lucy's identity has always been unequivocal for her. "You were always Lucy Snowe," she says and when Lucy asks, "And what am I now?" Paulina responds simply, as though the answer is obvious, "Yourself, of course" (368). Paulina's answer contains both complexity and simplicity, recognizing both Lucy's multiplicity and her consistency.

However, it is less a comparison between the two cousins that marks Lucy's acceptance of the kiss than the gradual progression towards her acceptance of her own physical self and her ability to show affection. When Madame Beck announces M. Paul's imminent departure to Lucy's class, one student weeps uncontrollably and Lucy rebukes her in an effort to keep the others under restraint. Rather than let the girl harbour ill feelings, Lucy makes amends: "I did what I had never done to one among them before--pressed her to my heart and kissed her cheek" (536). Similarly, when the unquenchable Ginevra returns from her honeymoon and pays Lucy a visit, Lucy reports that she "rushed into my arms laughing." Commenting on Ginevra's beauty once again, Lucy adds with customary control that she "gave her only the crust of my nature" (575, 576). Yet this is what Ginevra expects from her "dear crosspatch"; Lucy's crustiness does not deter her, nor does Lucy

mention eluding the embrace or outrightly rebuffing her. Tanner declares, "[I]t is surprising how few direct physical contacts there are [in the novel], apart from such minor intrusions as Ginevra's insistence on taking Lucy's arm or leaning on her" (24). I would argue that there are many contacts, and that they are key, as we see in her physical connections with M. Paul. Additionally, Lucy has folded Ginevra in a shawl, shaken her in a fever of frustration and borne her weight, however unwillingly, as they walk together. The reserved Lucy's friendship with the sensual Ginevra includes much in the way of physical contact, presuming that, whatever Lucy's complaints, Ginevra occupies a rather special place in Lucy's thoughts, if not in her affection. Lucy has previously denied any knowledge of Ginevra's initial escape from the Pensionnat with de Hamal. Although she disapproves of Ginevra's self-absorbed actions, Lucy's denial indicates that a certain fondness causes her to refrain from reporting her friend's flight to Madame. This fondness also enables her to receive the joyful Ginevra in her arms. When she questions M. Paul as to whether her looks "displease [his] eyes much," she receives for a reply "a short, strong answer—an answer which silenced, subdued, yet profoundly satisfied" (583. Original emphasis). Apparently, the reserved Lucy has been silenced and satisfied with a kiss, though it is clear by her failure to say so outright that a kiss from one's suitor is different than one from a female friend. The telling word is indeed "satisfied," which implies that Lucy has received what she desired, a physical, erotic confirmation of her attractiveness and, in his turn, M. Paul's satisfaction with it.

Lucy's feelings for M. Paul are eventually able to find expression and reciprocity, as Paulina's are for Graham. However, Lucy's own feelings for Graham Bretton are unrequited; she buries his letters as a symbolic act of relinquishing any hope of returned affection. For the child Polly, her adoration for him was open and expressible; for the teenage Lucy, it was hidden and repressed. The only means of recognizing or in any way acknowledging her feelings came through studying his portrait, holding it in her hand and searching the beautiful features, or lifting little

Polly up so that she could study the picture too. Only through the child could Lucy convey her attraction to young Graham (Maynard 186. Williams 85).

Though Lucy, in the end, gives her hand, literally and symbolically, to M. Paul, her physical attraction to Bretton never passes. Even after she has buried both his letters and her hopes, she admits that she keeps a place in her heart for him, but she articulates this by identifying her hand as the crucial body part. "I think it was like the tent of Peri-Banou. All my life, " comments the white-haired Lucy, "I carried it folded in the hollow of my hand—yet, released from that hold and construction, I know not but its innate capacity for expanse might have magnified it into a tabernacle for a host" (555). Here, the sexualized hand becomes the controller of response, making sure that Lucy's feelings for Graham do not literally 'get out of hand.' One cannot help but consider Lucy wise in her restraint, for Graham's generosity seems of a rather cool variety. Ultimately, Graham's hands, though undoubtedly as handsome as the rest of his person, prove ill-suited to Lucy's needs, and disturbingly representative of a rather unkind streak in the otherwise good doctor.

This is apparent on the occasion of a letter and it is worth recounting in some detail, for it is a scene which reveals much about the lauded Graham, but has received little critical attention. Upon returning her to the Pensionnat, after her convalescence with the Brettons at La Terrasse, Graham impulsively promises to write to Lucy in order to alleviate her loneliness. This he does: a letter bearing her name "in a clean, clear, equal, decided hand" arrives at the school for Lucy and she views it as "a morsel of real solid joy." In fact, she waxes enthusiastic about it, designating this communication "the wild savoury mess of the hunter, nourishing and salubrious meat, forest-fed or desert-reared, fresh, healthful, and life-sustaining." She delays the reading of this letter, choosing not to "consume the venison at once and with haste" (318), instead squirrelling it away in a locked box and increasing her appetite with the anticipation of its contents by unlocking the box to "feast" her eyes, bestowing a kiss on the "untasted treasure" and replacing it unread (318, 319).

Eventually, Lucy reads her letter, which M. Paul likens to a peach, in the garret--or, more accurately, she describes it as a species of feeding--delighting in its length and its kindness, in "this taste of fruition," in this "bubble—but a sweet bubble—of real honey-dew" (321, 324). So enamoured of this epistle, this venison-turned-honey-dew, is Lucy that the loss of it, due to the appearance of the nun in the very garret where she sits, sends her into a fit of near hysteria. Graham is present at the Pensionnat when Lucy races downstairs to report the news of the apparition's presence, and it is he who retrieves her letter from the floor where it has fallen. However, in one of the most distressing scenes in the novel, he does not immediately tell her that he has found it.

For a doctor, whose concern should be human welfare in all of its forms, Graham toys heartlessly with Lucy's feelings. He watches as she scrabbles about on the floor, frantically searching for her lost property. "'My letter! My letter!'" she cries pathetically. "I panted and plained, almost beside myself. I groped on the floor, wringing my hands wildly. Cruel, cruel doom!" she exclaims. "To have my bit of comfort preternaturally snatched from me, ere I had well tasted its virtue!" (326). Entreating her not to "cry and distress yourself so cruelly," Dr. John takes her chilly fingers in his own warm hand and asks her why she cares so very much for his letter; he then smilingly scoffs at its importance, even though Lucy answers that she has so few letters to care for. She has not said what she actually feels: that she prizes these sheets of paper "like the blood in my veins." Graham gives her back her letter. "Lucy, Lucy, my poor little god-sister (if there be such a relationship)," he says to her, "here—here is your letter" (327), as he removes it from his hiding place in his waistcoat. Lucy makes light of his deception, though she remarks that she is fortunate to have gotten it back: "Tears of temperature one degree cooler than those I shed would only have amused Dr. John" (327-8. Original emphasis). The charming Graham has deceived her with his quickness of hand, and he further teases her with his ability to repossess the hidden letter at any time with his "sleight of hand" (328). Graham Bretton's capable doctor's hands

here are the tools that bring distress to one he claims to have a medical interest in--he notes her pale cheek, bright eyes and shaking hands--and he sullies them in this mean-spirited and petty act of power. Though he is not to know of the manner in which Lucy fed on the pages he wrote, he has clear evidence of her state of mind when he sees her crying uncontrollably, wringing her hands and crawling about on the floor like a "grovelling, groping, monomaniac" (326). He immediately tarnishes his apparently kind reference to her as his godsister by questioning the existence of such a relationship. What Lucy sees in his eyes as he takes his leave--a light "not hostile, but not reassuring" (329)--is a fair indication of what lurks in the charming doctor's heart. Despite the food metaphors Lucy uses to describe his letter and the visceral reaction she experiences with its temporary loss, it is clear that Graham's hands are not capable--or worthy--of nourishing Lucy. He is more correct than he knows when he tells Lucy much later, "[Q]uiet Lucy Snowe tasted nothing of my grace" (403).

Even Paulina notices a distressing distance in her adult relationship with Graham. As a child little Polly had full freedom to touch his face and hair, but as a young woman, she lacks this boldness: "To me he seems now all sacred, his locks are unaccessible, and, Lucy, I feel a sort of fear when I look at his firm, marble chin, at his straight Greek features" (519), a description which recalls the statue-like St. John Rivers in Jane Eyre. Lucy is only too aware of Graham's attraction, but she has no wish to hear Paulina's confessions in the manner of a maiden aunt. She tells her that, in order to preserve her sight, she herself cannot look at him. "'I never see him,'" she tells Paulina. "'I mean that I value vision, and dread being struck stone blind.' It was best to answer her strongly at once," Lucy goes on, "and to silence for ever the tender, passionate confidences which left her lips, sweet honey, and sometimes dropped into my ear, molten lead" (520. Original emphasis). As Judith Williams observes, "Paradoxically, the language in which she describes this attempt to numb her senses is full of sensory metaphors... Lucy's answer [to Paulina] evokes sight, touch, sound and taste" (92). Lucy is painfully aware of Graham's physical attractiveness and her

own response to it--looking at him causes a sensual, bodily reaction. Moreover, she must listen to the object of his love recount that love while her own feelings for him are unrequited. However, Lucy does not play the conventional spinster confidante, for she refuses to be the repository of Paulina's painful disclosures.

Graham's physical inaccessibility for Paulina, and for Lucy, however, counterpoints the later scene between Lucy and Paul, when the declaration of their love gives way to physical touch. While Lucy refers to Paul as her "King" (587), he is warm and approachable, unlike the "[c]ool young Briton" (341), marble and out of reach. As Williams notes, Graham's material and egotistical nature is demonstrated when as a boy he buys Polly's interest in the contents of his desk (93). This contrasts with the generosity inherent in M. Paul's smoke-filled forays into Lucy's desk: the young Graham buys a kiss from Polly with a picture of a spaniel, while Paul leaves books, though often carefully edited, in Lucy's possession. Paul's hand gives freely; Graham's expects reciprocation or payment. Paul's hand touches Lucy; Graham's holds Paulina at a distance, as it once did when he held her aloft over his head. At the time, the movement seemed to offer the little girl "freedom" (75); instead, it prefigures inaccessibility. Paul's hand feeds Lucy while Graham only appears to do so. Indeed, Graham appears at one point to allow the seventeen-year-old Polly to sip ale, "letting her taste from his hand," but prolonging his gratification by delaying hers, by "so regulating the position of the cup that only a drop at a time could reach the rosy, sipping lips." Paulina urges him to give her more: "your wrist is so stiff, and you are so stingy" (365). Even allowing for the fact that the beverage is alcoholic, one wonders if the good doctor can put aside his own ego long enough to sufficiently feed anyone.

If Paulina was once bought with a picture of a spaniel, and indeed looks like one herself, a spaniel in live form also has its place in the relationship between Paul and Lucy, acting as a sort of medium for affection and desire rather than, in the stereotypical manner of old maids, as an object of Lucy's thwarted maternal urges. Sylvie, the "small spanieless" (505) of the Pensionnat, whose

name makes one think of 'silver,' light and, in a sort of natural progression, Lucy and light, claims Paul as her own and keeps him company in the garden as he works amongst the shrubs and flowers, watering and tending. M. Paul's sojourn in the garden on one occasion results in Lucy being deprived of a lesson and she watches him through the glass of the classroom. The entire scene is charged with a displaced eroticism. Paul returns "the sun's animated kiss with an animated smile"; he smokes his cigar as he works in the blooming garden and "its blue wreaths curled prettily enough amongst the flowers" (505). When Sylvie demands his attention, he "fondl[es] the spaniel in his bosom, call[s] her tender names in a tender voice." He "tast[es] the sweet breath of dusk" only a moment before he suddenly looks for Lucy, sitting in the class, with "a keen beam out of his eye" (506).

On the following evening, Paul digs in the garden in the rain (as Lucy will receive in letter form from his hand, so the earth receives from the sky "living water"), accompanied by the faithful Sylvie. Unable to garner his attention this time, however, she turns to Lucy, once again seated in the classroom, and begins barking. Paul pushes open the glass door and the dog leaps onto Lucy's lap and, "with her paws at my neck, and her little nose and tongue somewhat overpoweringly busy about my face, mouth, and eyes, flourished her bushy tail over the desk, scattered books and papers far and wide." M. Paul restores the items and captures Sylvie, holding her "under his paletôt." Lucy likens the spaniel, with her silky long ears and "the finest dark eyes in the world" (510), to Paulina and certainly the connection is made with her desire for the picture. Yet here, it is clear that the movement from Sylvie to M. Paul to Lucy firmly establishes that Sylvie's caresses, given and received, are the physical bridge between the man and woman, while he works in the garden and she sits in the classroom. The imagery is sensual, targeting the fertility of the garden, the embrace and kisses of the spaniel and the bodies of all three players. Physical, bodily attraction, a kind of displaced but acknowledged desire, suffuses the scene. Brontë makes it clear that the

attraction between Paul and Lucy is shared, and that it includes, though is not limited to, a physical one.

However, perhaps because Brontë's vision of her own future was bleak, Lucy's love affair does not conclude in marriage. Although Brontë couches the melancholy of Villette's conclusion in ambiguous phrasing, certain clues point unmistakably to M. Paul's death and Lucy's continuing spinsterhood. The house and furniture that M. Paul arranges for her in the Faubourg Clotilde are of small proportions; indeed, Emanuel himself refers to the house as a "nutshell" (585). The lack of room and absence of the nut itself--the food--foreshadow Lucy's sole occupancy of the tiny rooms. Furthermore, there are violets in water, a sign of death despite their fragrance, for Lucy has an antipathy to picked flowers. "I look on them as rootless and perishable; their likeness to life makes me sad," she remarks on the occasion of M. Paul's birthday when she alone carried no bouquet for him. " I never offer flowers to those I love; I never wish to receive them from hands dear to me" (424). Thirdly, M. Paul leaves his plans for his life with Lucy unarticulated, providing a textual absence that prefigures his own bodily one. He tells her, "'...and when I come back—'" and Lucy finishes, "There he left a blank" (587).

Lucy's ensuing single life, however, while not given in much detail, is not a blank, and the images of life and work provided in the description of her house are positive. As one critic correctly observes, managing her own school gives Lucy control over her life, as well as providing the "challenges of both work and intellect" (Edwards 164). Frances Power Cobbe and Anne Thackeray hope for no less for their single women. While her home may be small, the schoolroom is "good sized" (585); money from Miss Marchmont's cousin enables her to enlarge her externat to a pensionnat by taking the house next door. Lucy's original rooms contain flowers in pots and the yard has its vine, while surrounding yards have trees and roses and a nearby garden sports a fountain, the water rising from Lucy's sign of nourishment, a well. What she has said of Graham and Paulina's life may in fact be applied to Lucy herself: "Some real lives do—for some certain

days or years—actually anticipate the happiness of Heaven; and, I believe, if such perfect happiness is once felt by good people..., its sweet effect is never wholly lost" (532).

Lucy explains the paradox of the three years of Emanuel's absence being the happiest of her life in terms that contrast with her description of the long vacation, that period of bleak friendlessness and isolation. The solitary despair of those long dark weeks with no human connection is counterpointed by the promise of her altered situation: "a new state of circumstances, a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart" (594). In addition, her love for M. Paul has deepened and she feels he is "more my own" than when he left (595). She refuses to share Paulina and Graham's life, declaring, "I have my own sort of life apart from yours" (520). Thus Lucy has moved from the perimeter of other people's lives to the centre of her own.

Fully nine years before Frances Power Cobbe puts a spinster's autonomy in a positive light, Charlotte Brontë offers an industrious, independent single woman as a heroine, and places her squarely in the foreground. She deals with several levels of the surplus woman issue, incorporating the topics of emigration, employment, and the construction of selfhood in a society that sees single women as marginal figures. While highlighting the difficulties plaguing the single female life as it is lived on the margins of society and family, in Lucy Snowe Brontë provides an examination of the life of an ordinary, individual single woman, thus contrasting the social critics' view of supposedly redundant women en masse as an undesirable cultural body.

Lucy's agency is key to Brontë's portrait of this single woman, and prefigures the self-help Anne Thackeray will later urge spinsters to undertake. Undoubtedly, Lucy does receive help on her journey to selfhood. Despite her determination to live independently, various fortuitous events turn things in her favour: an old friend guides her toward a place of employment; her initial placement with Madame Beck relies on M. Paul's assessment of her countenance and Madame offers her the opportunity to move up on the employment ladder; Emanuel's role in her life helps her to actualize

her potential for personal and professional success; and she receives enough money from Miss Marchmont's estate to make possible an extension of her school. However, these advantages do not mitigate Lucy's agency in her own affairs. She has the courage to go abroad in the first place, not knowing her relatives are in the city she chooses, and she accepts Madame's challenge to raise herself from a lady's maid to a schoolteacher. Although she desires Graham Bretton, she eventually realizes that M. Paul has more to offer her, and she accepts both his affection and the gift of the school that he arranges for her. As Edwards points out, this legacy is unlike Jane Eyre's "bolt from the blue" in that it is at least partially "a rational outcome of her relationship with M. Paul, and it allows her to fulfil her ambition." Similarly, the money she receives from Miss Marchmont's cousin enables her to execute a step she could conceivably have taken later with her own money (164, 165). As Lucy says of this windfall, "chance threw into my hands an additional hundred pounds" (593), but it is her own skillful hands that make wise use of it. Furthermore, her ability to carry on after M. Paul's death indicates her strength of mind and purpose. The success of her school lies entirely in her own ability to direct the course of her life. Lucy's capacity to accept aid and to make the best use of it recalls Greenwell's envisioned sculpture of the mid-Victorian single woman, "ready to help herself or others, ready also to be helped" (37. Original emphasis). Lucy proves that she can accept assistance, but more importantly, she demonstrates that she can then carry on single-handedly. Thus I would argue that although Lucy receives support, this help is to a large extent the kind that could come to any individual who is willing to grasp opportunity.

Brontë's treatment of the spinster is also radical because not only does it focus on the celibate body but it also acknowledges that body as a sexual one. M. Paul declares early in their relationship that others think Lucy is "a colourless shadow" (226), but he sees her as a vibrant woman, a body, not merely the reflection of one. When she declares that her physical hunger is not appeased by Miss Marchmont's meagre meals--"my appetite needed more than the tiny messes served for the invalid" (97)--Lucy establishes her hunger for more than food, for companionship,

independence, sex and love. In addition, Brontë also refines her treatment of the androgynous body in this later novel. Shirley Keeldar possesses a dramatic male aspect, which almost seems separate from her feminine character, as evidenced by the distinction of 'Captain Keeldar.' However, in Lucy Snowe, Brontë creates a more amalgamated blend of 'feminine' and 'masculine' qualities. Lucy does not seem 'unsexed' by her independence, her intelligence, or even her role as a man on stage. Indeed, Brontë makes clear that Lucy can only achieve her sexual awakening through her recognition of both the 'masculine' and 'feminine' facets of herself. Brontë thus anticipates Cobbe, Bodichon and Thackeray, who argue for a more complete and stronger womanhood.

Due to their combative relationship, M. Paul is crucial to Lucy's recognition of her whole self, for, like Madame Beck, he rouses her to accept challenges. This self-realization is effected through the synecdochic hand, which signifies not only sexual attraction but also nurturance and power. In M. Paul she sees her kindred spirit, the person who in his complexity is capable of seeing her and accepting her in all her selves. Despite her passion for Graham, life with the "cool young Briton" would not have afforded her the opportunity to embrace these sides of herself and to feel the fire that smouldered in her soul and body. Lucy must come to accept the hands that can truly nourish her and sustain her, even in their physical absence, but ultimately, she must, and does, take her life in her own hands. Left without M. Paul, Lucy is like Hamley's single woman of 1872 whose "own life, and what she is to make of it, is a present condition with her....[S]he feels it in her own hands" (98).

In the next chapter, I discuss another strong spinster who also proves to have capable hands, and an intelligent head on her shoulders. While Brontë provides in Lucy a woman who is very aware of her lack of beauty and presents herself as apparently colourless, Wilkie Collins goes further and makes his heroine dark and ugly, although Marian Halcombe's lack of attractiveness is a contested point among scholars. However, Marian too must grapple with both her androgyny and her precarious social position. Like Lucy, she exhibits an inner certainty of her own worth. Her

courage and independence are of a different sort than Lucy's, but she, too, is a single woman carving out an existence for herself in often galling circumstances, and, like Lucy, she demonstrates she is capable of rising to the occasion.

Chapter Six
"Plain Marian Halcombe, Spinster": The Woman in Black

"Mr. Have-your-own-way is the best husband, and the only one I'd ever promise to obey."
Priscilla Lammeter in George Eliot's Silas Marner

Wilkie Collins's The Woman in White began its serialization in All The Year Round in November of 1859, six years after the publication of Brontë's Villette, and concluded in August of 1860. The novel thus appeared as the debate on the Woman Question generally and the issue of the surplus woman specifically gained momentum. Collins, like Brontë, places a single woman at the centre of his story, highlighting the ambiguous status of a figure who is at once very visible because of her physical appearance and inconspicuous due to her marginal position as half-sister to her prettier, wealthier relative. Like Lucy Snowe, Marian Halcombe is middle-class and, except for Laura, nearly without family. However, despite her own modest financial situation, Marian, as Laura's sister, confidante and friend, is attached to wealth, while Lucy is not, so that her economic position is different from that of Brontë's protagonist. Although Marian's employment in the East End flat is not paid and occurs within domestic space--she does not seek work as many unmarried women had to do--she exemplifies the precarious position of single women, particularly those who challenge entrenched cultural expectations of woman's sphere with their apparently unfeminine looks and actions, for she is often in a dependent position.

Of the varieties of spinster types outlined in the first chapter, Marian Halcombe fits into my established paradigm of the potentially powerful unmarried female, for she is the textual embodiment of the masculine single woman, the spinster who becomes mannish due to her maiden state and unfeminine intelligence. Collins's novel also illustrates both the overlapping concerns of fiction writers and social critics regarding the spinster and their shared strategies for dealing with her. In her independence and determination, Marian is Greg's nightmare of a woman "abnormally endowed" with an "almost masculine power and mental muscle" (32) come to life and then some.

Noting Carolyn Heilbrun's recognition of Collins's boldness in creating "the ugly heroine that even homely or plain women writers like George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë dared not portray," Kathleen O'Fallon observes the importance of physiognomy in reading Marian's character as an unconventional blend of both masculine and feminine traits (229). However, Marian's masculinity, her threatening dark presence, resides most tellingly in the small space above her lip, for Collins, not content to signal her deviation from the purely feminine with her dark colouring and strong features, dares to give his heroine--for in truth Marian is The Woman in White's heroine--"almost a moustache" (58). Yet despite such marked physical presence, such there-ness, if you will, her place in the text is ambiguous. What scholars have overlooked is that Marian's alternating presence and absence, her simultaneous visibility and invisibility, replicates that found in the periodical essays which debate the dilemma of single women, where the spinster is first in the forefront of the articles and then obscured for one reason or another. Modern scholarly criticism, however, does recognize the single woman's peculiar ambiguity, for Alison Milbank captures Marian's position in the novel by designating her "an absence" while also describing her as "all body, a whole person" (73).

Scholars collectively applaud Collins's creation of an ugly, intelligent spinster as a heroine while also castigating his withdrawal of her power. Collins clearly mirrors his society's dual reaction to this new type of womanhood; he is at once excited by and apprehensive about the potential power of a strong single woman. Both Sue Lonoff and Catherine Peters remark on Collins's ambivalence regarding autonomous women, though Peters mentions his own insistence on Marian's reality: he declares that she is not an "'abstract personification of my own ideas' but originated in 'my own observation of many women who personally, morally, and mentally resemble her....There are many 'Marian Halcombes' among us—and my Marian is one of the number'" (King 217). Indeed, Peters comments that Hartright's description of Marian is remarkably akin to Henry James's of George Eliot, whose real name was also Marian. Furthermore, Peters states that

Marian's "instant popularity" and male readers' interest in her as a potential bride "showed that her feminist attack [on men's treatment of women] reflected a contemporary mood" (224). Susan Balée reads the novel as a promotion of new Victorian sex types and, like Heilbrun, recognizes in Marian a bold new venture. Balée declares that Collins's "extremely positive" portrayal of the anti-angel goes beyond other sensation novelists and creates a new Victorian icon: "the androgynous heroine" (211, note 5. Original emphasis). Balée situates the character of Marian squarely in the midst of the surplus woman debate, though she is less troubled by Marian's relegation to aunthood at the novel's conclusion than many other scholars. Catherine Peters laments that Collins's strong females often follow their self-assertion with a retreat ("Invite" 12), while feminist critics such as Auerbach and Lonoff read Marian's illness as an authorial device to deprive her of power, of her ability to threaten "male supremacy" (Milbank 74). Collins, it seems, is of two minds about the strong women he creates. However, even his female contemporaries, such as Greenwell, express their concern that women not lose their womanliness as they undertake employment outside the home or engage in new useful activities. Whether the ultimate retreat of Collins's independent and transgressive female characters reflects a failure of artistic nerve, his own ambivalence toward them or as a critique of Victorian sexual roles cannot clearly be determined. While he is bold enough to pen a woman whose looks are not conventionally beautiful in the style of blond and pale, he is not bold enough, as Brontë and Cobbe are, to allow the masculine traits to be perfectly natural and acceptable as such. What is obvious is that he shares his society's concern and ambivalence about the place these women occupy and what, ultimately, should be done with them.

I read this novel more vigorously than Balée does against the background of contemporary periodical literature, though with a focus more concentrated on Marian's physical androgynous form, for, like Lucy Snowe, Marian herself is very aware of her body and its sensations, and this body is both masculine and feminine. Collins reflects cultural concern and anxiety about the spinster by replicating a focus on the body, particularly, as both the essay writers themselves and

Brontë do, by concentrating on hands. For Collins, though, this body part serves not so much as a sexualized site but more as an indicator of Marian's feminine and masculine qualities; it is through her hands that her character becomes apparent. For many essayists, spinster hands contain the potential for usefulness, for strength and independence, and this can be disruptive as women take greater control over their own lives. Marian's hands are all of these things; synechdochically, they represent her power as a single woman. However, they are also vulnerable and an entry site for disease. Marian transgresses gender boundaries but finds her own corporeal boundaries assailed by threatening forces.

Ultimately, though, Collins gives us a woman of substance who remains in the domestic arena. While this placement of his potent single woman may seem like a lamentable retreat on the author's part, there is nonetheless a satisfying aptness to the novel's conclusion, for Marian chooses her future and has spent the preceding pages demonstrating her various gifts of intelligence, strength and determination. She thus retains her subversive power, happily ensconced in her shared home and ready to impart her strong opinions and ideas to a younger generation of Hartrights.

Collins puts the focus on Marian's body, the most feminine part of her, during the eavesdropping scene. Here, the intrepid Miss Halcombe is most notably both visible and invisible, there and not there. Lucy Snowe rejects future theatrical excursions because they would make her too visible, and too alive, too aware of her own emotions and sensations; her single appearance on stage has made her conspicuous, dressed as she is partially in male attire. Marian, too, grapples with the concrete aspect of visibility when she takes on her most daring 'performance,' venturing out on the verandah roof at night in order to eavesdrop on the conversation of Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde. This event requires her complete invisibility to ensure success, and it is one that also requires her agility, courage and stamina. This combined strength anticipates Cobbe's praise,

two years later in 1862, for the women artists who are producing work of substance and power, when she specifically identifies strength as the new and key element.

Marian is at her strongest and most present textually at this time because the reader is so aware of the necessity of her act, her boldness in carrying it out and the precariousness of her physical position, as she perches there against the railing over the heads of her enemies. Peter Thomas correctly identifies this as her major act of self-reliance (194) and Tamara Heller observes that in this episode she ventures "outside... her proper gendered position," which of course is "inside," an act that is later reversed by her housework in the East End flat (137). Indeed, her own undertaking as a species of spy, which is Fosco's occupation, reveals Marian when she is most "outside," literally and figuratively, transgressing domestic space and womanly propriety, and very nearly the limits of gravity. She is literally out of doors and beyond the interior perimeter of the house and metaphorically outside, in her flouting of conventional feminine/female behaviour. It is an act, therefore, that can be constructed, in the Victorian manner of binary oppositions and pigeon-holing, as 'masculine,' though Lucy Snowe might disagree.

To perform her gymnastic manoeuvre, Marian must alter her attire. She removes her noisy silk gown, for a rustling gown would clearly signal her feminine presence, as does the Countess Fosco's earlier outside Laura's door; she also divests herself of the "white and cumbersome parts of [her] underclothing" and dons instead "a petticoat of dark flannel" and her "black travelling cloak," pulling up the hood (342). Her clothes now silent and dark, Marian is set for action; in this novel to be garbed in white is to be weak or passive, for though Anne Catherick tries in her way to be of use she is hampered by her heart condition and her own ignorance of being ignorant of the secret of Glyde's birth. Reynolds and Humble provide further insight into Marian's change of clothing in a fascinating reading of how her "curious textual strip-tease combine[s] with almost ritual assertions of modesty" (54), explaining both the eroticized and repressive nature of the petticoat, notwithstanding its functional dark colour and practical flannel fabric. In their reading,

Marian, like Lucy, refrains from adopting completely male attire to avoid the actual eroticization that arises due to the masculine elements in female appearance. Both adopt a "hybrid costume" (55) in order that their androgyny be neuter rather than inclusive, neither masculine nor feminine instead of both.

While this is a compelling interpretation, it overlooks two major points. First, Marian, unlike Lucy, does not deck herself out in any male apparel, and second, while Lucy may be striving for as little conspicuousness as possible by combining her clothing pieces, she knows she will be visible on the stage. Marian, on the other hand, does not anticipate being seen by anyone; she takes great pains that this should not happen. Her choice of dress, or lack of it, is therefore more of a practical, rather than aesthetic or theatrical, nature, so that she will not be seen. The "hybrid" factor lies not in a male/female combination but in a lessening of conventionally female apparel. As Reynolds and Humble assert, Marian is not setting out to play "with the rich complexities of gender roles in the manner of a Shakespearian heroine" (55)--though Collins himself is--but the crossing of gender lines is implicit in Marian's own assessment of her change of dress. "In my ordinary evening costume," she observes, "I took up the room of three men at least. In my present dress, when it was held close about me, no man could have passed through the narrowest spaces more easily than I" (342). While it may be tempting to see Marian as "neuter" here, her own specific gendered comparison to her allotment of space when dressed for company inside and when partially undressed for a clandestine activity outside keeps her masculine and feminine qualities in the forefront, thus making her not neuter but very much dually gendered. As Reynolds and Humble themselves acknowledge, "It is this partial masculinity that allows her to occupy her curious dual role as both Laura's girlish confidante and Walter's detective sidekick" (54). Nowhere is this more apparent than here, with her sartorial evaluation of female and male space.

Ironically, while it is her positive androgyny and transgression of proper female space that make Marian so much herself and so present in this passage, at the same time she must reduce

herself and occupy a minimal amount of that outlawed area to pull off her daring enterprise. Unlike the spinsters of Glum, Cook and Greenwell, who are relegated to corners and expected to shrink in order to be even marginally socially acceptable, Marian's decrease of space is necessary for her endeavour to be successful. She must be able to move between the flower pots without disturbing them; she must be able to be silent in order to remain undetected. Her presence during Glyde and Fosco's conversation is crucial to further plans for her and Laura's safety, but that presence must not be known, so she must willingly shrink into smaller space and obscure herself for this to work. Marian blends in with her background not for social acceptance but for social transgression. However, this trespass is one on which depends the survival of both herself and her sister.

The very darkness of her colouring in skin and hair that makes her so conspicuous among the washed-out women in white heightens Marian's invisibility during this nighttime adventure. She exchanges her white underclothing for the dark petticoat and the black cloak, covering her already "coal-black" hair with the hood. Marian's hair grows "unusually low on her forehead," her upper lip is adorned with "dark down" and her skin is "almost swarthy" (58). She blends in with the "black, blinding darkness of the night" (342), with the shadows of the house, and is as invisible as she can be, crouched in her confined space against the railing. Although she appears to be part of the house and thus maintaining her proper gendered space, ironically she is both flagrantly and secretly trespassing its boundaries. The proximity of the flowers on either side of her, one of which brushes her cheek, both contrasts the unnaturalness of the cramped position she must adopt and reinforces the natural--that is, normal--qualities of the character that allow her to be there, performing an act of courage, initiative and strength.

Inevitably, though not the less disappointingly for that, Collins reduces and compromises Marian's strength. She cannot go on to spirit Laura away in the dead of night and solve the mystery single-handedly, but instead she loses her formidable power by becoming, however temporarily, merely an inert, diseased body, and then, upon recovery, a wasted version of her

former robust self; one may say a shadow of her former self, in preserving the rhetoric used to discuss single female bodies. Marian's formerly healthy body is nonetheless, as Milbank notes, a "femininely susceptible body" (74), which succumbs to illness, typhus, brought on by crouching in the rain. Both Lonoff and Peters read Marian's voluminous skirts as protective clothing; without these female garments, she exposes herself to the debilitating fever that prostrates her and to the machinations of evil males, as Lonoff implies when she points out that Marian is spying on "two cigar-smoking men" (146). While this is true, I would argue instead that the episode illustrates Marian's 'manly' qualities of strength, determination and courage as well as both her physical mutability and careful strategy for necessary invisibility. Clothed in her skirts, she could no more attempt her brave feat than she could convince Glyde and Fosco to let her and her sister walk out the front door.

However, Collins hints that something weakening is in store for the intrepid Marian when she must crawl to her position on her hands and knees. This infantilized motion anticipates her coming helplessness and ironizes the childlike qualities Laura herself displays, qualities which call forth both Marian and Walter's protectiveness, but which are so utterly useless in an active heroine. Though it at first appears as though Marian is felled suddenly and without warning, Collins does foreshadow this indispostion during the episode concerning Laura's signature. Having received a response to her letter to Mr. Kyrle the lawyer which justifies her apprehension about the need for the signature, and with Count Fosco's looming presence taxing her nerves, Marian's suspicions have heightened to a pitch. Unable to look for the absent Laura because her "strength was so exhausted by the trials and anxieties of the morning that the heat of the day quite overpowered" her (294), Marian must lie down and rest. A second attempt to go out results in a giddy head, trembling knees and a return to her recumbent position (295). Her body has become susceptible to weakness, a condition further underscored by her visceral reaction to the Count's voice, which she declares "trembled along every nerve in my body, and turned me hot and cold alternately." This

convention of the Gothic genre in which the female body is so sensitive to 'sensation' is amplified by Fosco's ability to delve beyond the perimeter of the physical body, for his eyes "seemed to reach [her] inmost soul" (310), violating Marian's most private inner spiritual space. On this occasion, her emotions heightened by the prophetic waking dream of Hartright she experienced during her time of weakness on the drawing room sofa, Marian responds in a way that makes her conspicuous and then compensates for this by disappearing. Overcome by dread and fear, Marian kisses Laura with passion, exciting stares of astonishment from the assembled company, and then rushes out of the window "to hide from them in the darkness, to hide even from myself" (310).

Thus, even before the Count reads Marian's journal and contributes his own effusive and egotistic lines to it, an act which many scholars, including Miller as well as Kendrick and Brooks, "identify as a violation of her text" (Heller 134) and which Balée interprets as "a kind of psychic rape" (203), Marian's body begins to manifest its somatic susceptibility and to foreshadow her later invisibility and confinement. In addition, she pleads a bad headache on the evening following these events; while Laura falls prey to "that essentially feminine malady, a slight headache" which requires her to be sequestered in her room and plied with restorative tea by the flaccid Mrs. Vesey (59), Marian suffers an intenser version of this particularly female indisposition. Likewise, she requires voluntary confinement, "safely shut into [her] own room," choosing to forego dinner and retire early to bed (338). Fosco may "literally make a woman of her when he reads her diary" (Balée 203), but the process appears to be well on its way before then, and it is one that continues while Marian lies ill, for the Count visits her sickroom and, as Milbank notes, takes pleasure not only in the violation of her private text but also in his presence in this room where she is helpless and initially insensible (12). This invasion of Marian's space recalls M. Paul's meticulous inspection of Lucy's desk. However, though both authors utilize the exotic foreignness of the male characters in a sexual manner, Brontë's effect differs from Collins's in key points. Lucy is aware of M. Paul's regular rummages amongst her desk's contents--she does in fact catch him in the act--

and his penetration of the desk is associated with both nourishment and the sexual frisson that Lucy and M. Paul enjoy. Lucy benefits from Emanuel's invasion, even finding it amusing, and her failure to put a stop to his forays into her private space implies acquiescence and even approval. Marian, on the other hand, is metaphorically infected by the Count's entrance; his moral taintedness besmirches her sickroom, making it doubly diseased. Furthermore, she is unconscious, helpless, and thus lacks the awareness and the control that belong to Lucy.

In addition, Fosco's threat is potentially sexually threatening, giving this episode much darker overtones than the desk scene in Villette, which is associated with sensuality, orality, the potential of sexual fulfillment, and even humour. If the Count symbolically penetrates Marian's womb by invading her room and inscribing his own writing on her diary page (Balée 203), then his presence in her sickroom is a further macabre metaphor for this, as he argues her treatment with Mr. Dawson across her unconscious body. Though the housekeeper Mrs. Michelson, herself infatuated with Fosco's deferential awareness of and respect to her class position, sees no neglect or harm perpetrated against Marian, she notes that Marian's removal to the uninhabited section of Blackwater Park occurs when she was "in a deep sleep...whether naturally or artificially produced she [Marian] could not say" (418). Given the Count's admission that he would have aided Anne Catherick's demise at a more convenient time than it occurred, Marian's suspicion intimates that he may in fact have violated her body with a sleeping draught, a possibility he vigorously denies in his written confession; at the time of the removal, he asserts that Marian "lay in the deep repose of convalescence" (622). A contemporary reviewer writing of the novel in the Guardian in August of 1860 noted the Count's possible interference, observing, "[W]e cannot help supposing that Count Fosco's share in Marian's illness was meant to be more direct than it was found convenient to make it afterwards" (CH 91).Collins, however, keeps Marian's status as a single woman and her place in the Woman Question debate in the minds of readers: she is "transport[ed]" to this isolated part of the house. The choice of words reminds one of Greg's desire that the disease of surplus

women forming the cankerous sore on the social body be transported to the colonies and their troublesome presence therefore removed from sight. Marian's diseased body must, in the contingencies of plot progression, be moved to be kept hidden from Laura, but she is also in a sense punished for the crime of eavesdropping, for transgressing domestic space and womanly propriety. "Transportation or starvation to all old maids!" Frances Power Cobbe cries sardonically in response to this solution to the problem of redundant women which sees spinsterhood as a species of criminality (Lacey 363). Marian's convenient fever and subsequent convalescent sleep make it much easier to move her, bed and all, out of sight, thus solving the problem of this particular surplus woman.

Marian's illness literally leaves its mark on her body, wasting her face and arms in particular. Her "dark, clever, gipsy-face" (235) is sadly "worn and wasted" by the fever and the ordeal that befalls Laura (431). When she and Laura are reunited with Walter, she uncovers her face by raising her veil and he observes, "Pain and fear and grief [had] written on her as with a brand," marking her physically, a mark unrelieved in its harshness by the softening of coming dusk, but his own assessment is as "branding [a] judgment" as Graham Bretton's is of Vashti (342). Marian's eyes are no longer bright and intelligent but "large and wild" and filled with "a strange terror" (430); though her voice is the same as ever, it speaks now with fright, not anger or resolution, and its purpose is not to plan action but to pray, at first softly and then in a rising tone, "affrightedly" and "despairingly" pleading for Walter not to look at the approaching still-veiled Laura. Though it is indeed Laura with her hidden face whose presence is crucial here, coming to stand as she does next to what is ostensibly her own tombstone, Marian too is very present in her changed looks and manner and her visible though ravaged face. Yet, as her half-sister moves inexorably closer to Walter and faces him standing across the inscription that proclaims her own death, Marian is relegated to that erstwhile perimeter position. She is "left by herself, standing by herself," and, replicating her former position on the verandah roof, she "sank on her knees" (431) in a slow

gradual diminution of stature which heralds Walter's masculine ascendence in the unfolding plot and the balancing of the story in terms of action and gender that Symons and Pykett respectively observe.

Marian has boldly and bravely rescued Laura from the asylum by literally removing her bodily, but Marian herself is about to be usurped in further transgressive adventurous activity by Walter; her capitulation to prayer and near hysteria signals this shift, as does her position "by herself," relegated to the sidelines of the drama of Laura's return from the dead and Walter's transfixed attention. Marian's voice raised in prayer provides a kind of background music to the dramatic focus on Walter and Laura. Deprived of any active role, shunted to the margins of the scene, Marian, at this juncture, could be compared to the "leech in a bottle" that Hamley will refer to in his 1872 Blackwood's article "Old Maids," twelve years after The Woman in White's publication. Marian is currently caught in a "disengaged state" (101). Paradoxically, however, her position as a deprived and hungry leech works in reverse of this rather unattractive image, for the conventional spinster allegedly plumps up by feeding off others, by temporary usefulness, whereas here Marian has provided sustenance to both Laura and Walter at various crucial points and has been by now metaphorically weakened by their needs, as instances mentioned below indicate. Collins complicates any straightforward reading of Marian as occupying completely any one position. As with her dual gender, she is never simply one thing.

The strength that Marian has been able to offer to others is most often evident in her hands; though Collins provides a lesser emphasis on her eyes and voice, he, like his contemporaries, focusses on the spinster's actual body. However, while Brontë uses the hands to signal sexual feeling between her characters, Collins represents Marian's entire character in this part of her body. Her hands are not only strong and practical, but also vulnerable. They are the symbol of Marian's self and demonstrate who she is in both her masculine and feminine qualities.

Like her masculine head, which is fixed with "pliant firmness" on "shoulders that a sculptor would have longed to model," her hands are indicative of her hermaphroditic qualities, for they are, as Walter observes, "rather large, but beautifully formed" (58, 59). Marian herself deems them "as awkward as a man's" (253) and states that she writes "with a heavy hand," a trait that makes it likely Mrs. Fosco, her own presence outside Laura's room betrayed by the rustling of her silk dress, would have heard her writing with her quill pen (330). Marian's masculine hands employ themselves, not in drawing and music, at which Laura's feminine hand can sometimes be "feeble" (455), but in such male hobbies as chess and billiards, and though she denigrates her skill at the latter as having "the inevitable female drawbacks," she claims to be a match for Walter at the former, as well as at backgammon and écarté (61).

Despite her fulminations against womanly weakness, Marian's confidence and decisiveness are clear; Milbank declares that she "has the heroine's awareness of her own value, strength of character, intrepid curiosity and intellectual resource" (72). Like Lucy Snowe, while she has internalized some of her culture's beliefs about spinsters, she has an inherent integrity of self. Her hands manifest this confidence both metaphorically and literally. She capably takes the "business of talking into her own hands" when Walter first becomes acquainted with her but is equally authoritative enough to forestall any answer of his "with a raised hand" when she tells him he must leave Limmeridge house (77, 94). She mixes this unwavering certainty and decisiveness with kindness. "Shake hands," she instructs him during this unhappy interview. "—I have given you pain; I am going to give you more, but there is no help for it—shake hands with your friend, Marian Halcombe, first" (95). This compassion and forthrightness provoke both Hartright's gratitude and emotional breakdown. His feminine weakness of tears is offset by Marian's firmness and sturdy comfort, administered physically through the grasp of her hand, offered in friendship, in his. As she tells him of Laura's engagement, she delivers what feels to him like a mortal wound. Her hand is now "firmly" on his arm and her eyes "rooted" on his face, but unlike Shirley's Miss

Mann, whose eye Robert Moore fears will ossify him, it is Marian's hand which paralyzes Walter. Her words wound him in the heart but he no longer feels her physical grip: "My arm lost all sensation of the hand that grasped it." He does not feel her hand again, though it has continued to rest on his arm, until she tightens her hold once more and speaks with "suppressed vehemence," in gendered language that equates male violence with courage and female timidity with cowardliness: "'Crush it!' she said. '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!'" Walter feels Marian's strength of will in her look, fixed on his face, and in her hand, fastened on his arm, and this strength infuses the weeping Walter with manly self-control; he "justifie[s] her generous faith in [his] manhood" by getting a grip on himself by virtue of Marian's protracted hold on his arm (96). The passage has a strange sexual quality, for it is not simply that their gendered roles are reversed but as though Marian's phallic look and touch re-masculinize the feminized Walter. He feels the strength of her hands again days later when the time for his departure arrives and he again reacts with tears. On this occasion, Marian catches both his hands in hers and "presse[s] them with the strong, steady grasp of a man"; Walter sees her as beautiful, with her dark eyes and brown complexion lit up by pity and generosity, and he calls her a "fearless, noble creature." Once again she lets her courage flow into him through her hands, which draw him to her, and through the chaste "sister-like" kiss which she places on his forehead. This time, however, she leaves him alone to "master" himself before Laura enters the room (148). Though Marian's hands are man-like in their grasp, conveying her habitual strength, courage and forthrightness, Marian's face becomes more womanly, with its glittering eyes and blushing skin; her kiss, though platonic, is thus sexualized. She establishes further intimacy by calling Hartright by his first name. The ambiguity of this scene is striking and leaves one to ponder who Marian may be standing in for, whether she is a mediary figure for Laura or Walter, or both.

Marian uses her hands for purposes other than infusing courage and she does not shrink from distasteful duty. She enacts a necessary though unpalatable obligation when she divests Laura of her childish belief that they will always be together. In this scene, the work of her hand is metaphorical and closely associated with her knowledge and her voice. Catherine Peters rightly interprets Marian's conversation with her sister as being of a sexual nature, whereby Marian educates her sister on the upcoming wedding night (King 221). Though she retains her female identity, Marian casts herself in the role of rival to the odious Glyde as she explains to Laura that no third person should come between a husband and wife. While certainly comfortable playing an intermediary, even a guardian, role between Laura and Walter, Marian draws the line with regard to the nuptial state, realizing that the continued company with her sister depends on her staying on Sir Percival's good side. As she previously poured courage into Walter through eyes and hands, she now tackles the miserable duty of sullying Laura's naivété: "Drop by drop I poured the profaning bitterness of this world's wisdom into that pure heart and innocent mind." As she herself will be prey to contamination later, she performs a necessary contamination of Laura in order to fortify her for life as a married woman. Sadly, she acknowledges the alteration, declaring, "The simple illusions of her girlhood are gone, and my hand has stripped them off." She consoles herself with the certainty that her hand has performed the cruel duty with more kindness than Sir Percival's would: "Better mine than his" (208). While Marian's willingness to besmirch Laura's innocence for her own good demonstrates her trust in her own judgment and illustrates again her ability to act even though the action be difficult, Peters' reading of the passage casts Marian in a sexual masculine role; her words literally and her hand figuratively deflower Laura, removing her

innocence, prior to Glyde's ability to do so.[1]

Marian's hand thus acts with a kind of ruthlessness when required. The violence that she conveys in her exhortation to Walter to act like a man does not confine itself to that instance. U.C. Knoepflmacher notes her aggression when he points out that she wishes the lumpish grinning housemaid Margaret Porcher--"the most unintelligent servant in the house," as Mrs. Michelson designates her (396)--had been shot instead of the spaniel. He observes that neither does she shrink from the thought of murdering Sir Percival when she sees the bruises his fingers have left on Laura's arm (365). It is Fosco who observes to Sir Percival, as Marian ironically perches over their heads, that Percival has both Marian and her sister "under [his] thumb" (354). Marian herself wishes for such power to be concentrated in one digit when she chafes under Frederick Fairlie's abdication of his guardianship responsibilities concerning the marriage date, for she declares that if it were possible to "transport" Fairlie and Glyde "to the uttermost ends of the earth by lifting one of my fingers, that finger would have been raised without an instant's hesitation" (204). The incident, despite being serious, has a comic element, particularly as Marian vents her anger with Fairlie by raising her voice to him "harshly" as she dashes into his room and by banging the door loudly on her way out of it (205). Again, Collins's word choice is not accidental as he inverts the notion of emigration as a solution to redundance; Marian, the supposedly surplus single woman whom Greg would like to remove to the colonies, wishes to "transport" the feminized bachelor Fairlie and the as yet unmarried Glyde who threaten their women's lives.

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[1] Though Peters believes that Glyde leaves Laura as physically virginal as he found her, Laura herself later makes a marked distinction between married and unmarried women when she tells Marian, "If you were married yourself, Marian—and especially if you were happily married—you would feel for me as no single woman can feel, however kind and true she may be" (280. Original emphasis). This difference in marital status presumes the difference in sexual condition; Laura implies that only a married woman, with the knowledge of sexual experience, could properly understand her situation. One could read this, in light of Peters' contention of Laura's continuing virginity, without the sexual overtones, interpreting Laura's words as her new awareness of the trap that an unhappy marriage can create for a woman. The main point is that there is now a barrier between the two sisters, and Marian is clearly outside of Laura's realm of experience.

Marian's urges for violence are nowhere more clear, however, than in her complicated reaction to the sixty-year-old corpulent Italian Fosco, with his grandiose statements, enormous ego and steely manipulativeness. His infatuation with her makes him no less deadly. Marian's feelings comprise both reluctant attraction and virulent repulsion, an aversion perhaps born precisely because of her unwilling regard for him and the effort she must make to avoid succumbing to it. She experiences this aversion as physical sensation and as disease, her woman's body prey to penetration and contamination. Knoepflmacher states that Collins assigns these two characters as the "true protagonists" of the novel and that it is Fosco's invasion of her diary that distresses and repulses her. This causes her to repress "her own asocial impulses," for she cannot bear to have him recognize in her her affinity to his "counterworld" (366). However, as pointed out earlier, Marian's physical aversion to the Count occurs long before he invades the privacy of her journal, and as she was capable of infusing Walter with manly strength earlier, she herself experiences a less positive exchange later with Fosco. Having walked out of the grounds at Blackwood Park to meet Mr. Kyrle's messenger, she reads her letter and then turns to find the Count before her "as if he had sprung up out of the earth" (292). As they walk back together, Marian realizes that he has invaded her private letter and thus her purposes, and she acknowledges that she is "woman enough, notwithstanding my dread of him, to feel as if my hand was tainted by resting on his arm" (293). It is not that Marian secretly wishes to belong to the Count's dark underworld but that she must enter it to an extent in order to elude him. This taint that she experiences is immediately followed by her weakness in the drawing room when she must take to the sofa. Though, as argued previously, this indispostion clearly prepares readers for her later fever, Collins implies that Fosco has infected her through their physical contact.

That Marian experiences contagion at the Count's touch indicates that she does not desire an underworld existence as Knoepflmacher contends, though he is correct in recognizing her affinity for it; she "adopt[s] the lawless tactics of the outsider" (364) more easily because of her already

marginal status as a darkly ugly woman and a spinster, and Fosco himself is likened to an old maid in his affection for his cockatoo (243). Clearly, the Italian threatens both her autonomy and her person, a point she herself remarks on when she observes the Count's effect on his devoted wife: "If he had married me, I should have made his cigarettes, as his wife does—I should have held my tongue when he looked at me, as she holds hers" (239. Original emphasis). Married to Fosco, she too would have become a femme covert, with her actions restricted, her voice suppressed and her opinion swallowed up by his. However, Marian is single, and thus freer to act and speak, and as Peters points out, her ability to confront and deal with the dangerous situation she and Laura are in is directly attributable to her lack of innocence, for innocence, Peters states, "becomes almost culpable" because it "lacks survival value" (King 222). Marian must therefore be capable of meeting the Count on his own terms, adopting some of his manoeuvres, as when she spies from the roof, while not becoming an outsider of the lawless variety. As discussed below, she is tempted to violence against Fosco but is thwarted by being cast back into the more female role of waiting at home. Collins does seem to subscribe to the notion, as does Greenwell, that, married or single, women still need men, although the Gothic situation in Collins's novel in which this female reliance comes about can hardly be what Greenwell had in mind.

Marian is not the only spinster figure to experience the contagion Fosco carries, though she is certainly the one to feel his full infecting potency. Frederick Fairlie, whom one reviewer of the novel described as a "selfish and nerveless vegetable" (The Times. Cited in CH 100), finds his own "delicious single blessedness" disturbed by the Count's unhealthy appearance when he comes to inform him of Marian's illness. "He looked like a walking-West-Indian-epidemic," says the fastidious and alarmed Fairlie. "He was big enough to carry typhus by the ton, and to dye the very carpet he walked on with scarlet fever" (369, 373). Marian's fear and apprehension are not curtailed by further contact with Fosco, for he compounds his penetration of her correspondence with his ability to see into her soul, and, as previously noted, his voice causes her to quiver through

to her nerves and turn first hot then cold. The Count's eyes have the capacity to render her speechless, as she makes apology for Laura's accusation that he is a spy, but his "poisonous lips" on her hand truly arouse her greatest "horror of him," and the effort to hide her repugnance of him she identifies as a "degrading self-control." Marian must meet the Count on his own duplicitous terms, and she feels not akin to him but infected by both the physical touch of him and the enforced deceit she must succumb to in order to elude his plans. She deems herself to be guileful, "as false as the worst of [deceitful women], as false as the Judas whose lips had touched [her] hand" (328). Marian's hand here assumes its more vulnerable female cast: she must suffer it to be subjected to being kissed by a villain with poisonous lips who infects her with falseness, a trait she identifies with females. Her hand becomes assailable, defenceless and exposed, a prey to a species of weakness and the point of entry for disease. Her association at this juncture with masculinity only lies with negativity, for her composure, a male trait, is "degrading" to her and her only connection with a male biblical figure is with one who is treacherous and who aligns her with the infectious and feminized Fosco. Filled as she is with dread, horror, disgust and degradation, this must surely be one of Marian's worst moments, and it emphasizes her repugnance not only for the Count but also for the unsavoury role she finds herself playing for survival. Unlike the Italian, she does not revel in this counterworld.

If Marian's hand as a site of victimization reveals an aspect of weak femininity, her masculine strength and desire for violence reassert themselves when the Count has the effrontery to write to the "magnificent Marian," in whom he recognizes the "foresight and resolution of a man," and to command, under the guise of "affectionate warning, of paternal caution," that she behave as a proper conventional woman by remaining invisible, sequestered in retirement, seclusion and home (468, 346). Her reaction signals the desire for lawlessness that Knoepflmacher identifies, one which manifested itself earlier when, insulted by Sir Percival, she states, "If I had been a man, I would have knocked him down on the threshold of his own door" (268). Walter notes her loss of

self-control in response to the Count's communication, as "her hands clenched themselves in her lap"; the anger also manifests itself in the brightness of her eyes and cheeks, and she asks that Walter, if he ever has to choose between punishing Fosco or Glyde, let his wrath fall upon the Count (469). Fosco's subsequent visit to her excites her to a second longing for male violence. "My hands tingled to strike him, as if I had been a man!" she tells Walter (566). Her desire cannot, of course, be realized, and the blow she wishes so passionately to deliver that her skin tingles with the appetite for it dissolves into a hidden activity of less brutality, as her hands instead employ themselves in tearing Fosco's card to shreds beneath her shawl. Despite the displaced violence of shredding the card instead of Fosco's person, the passion and deliberation with which she performs this useless task suggest her ability to perpetrate a violent act if sufficiently motivated. However, although she experiences a visceral need for action, Marian becomes the victim either of her author's capitulation to cultural convention or of his lack of artistic imagination--she must succumb to feminine passivity and rely on the now re-masculinized Walter to actualize her revenge on the Count for the insolence of his "horrible admiration" (568) and for reducing her to the unwholesome behaviour of duplicity.[2] Marian's susceptible feminine body, like her hand, is vulnerable to the Count's effect on her, for his appearance at their London location recalls her experiences at Blackwater Park as "[a]ll the old loathing cre[eps] and crawl[s]" through her when she meets him (566). Her body, in conventional Gothic manner, registers her aversion in visceral terms.

However, her response is more complex than the standard Gothic reaction, for Collins anticipates Greg's 1862 article, which interprets the single woman as a diseased body and

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[2] The revenge, however, cannot be meted out on Marian's behalf, as Walter coolly points out when she, her face flushing up with "[a]ll the woman" in her, exhorts him to force a confession from the Count for her sake. Hartright declares that their efforts must be successful for Laura's sake, so redress for the Count's insults to Marian have less priority (470). Walter thus rather heartlessly relegates Marian to the sidelines. The Count's effect on Laura's married identity is more overt than the threat he presents to Marian's single one.

reproduces contemporary focus on the spinster's corporeal self. Greg, in order to effect a healthier society, wishes to excise the mass of spinsters whose numbers proliferate so unnaturally. Similarly, Collins must remove the capable Marian to prolong both suspense and the story, for her body interferes with the Count's plan and Collins's plot. As a robust being, she is the interfering agent in Fosco's scheme, but she is also prey to his evil machinations precisely because she cannot maintain her bodily health. By emphasizing her physical aversion to the Italian, Collins registers not only Marian's moral superiority but also her feminine corporeal inferiority. In order to deal with her, Collins, like Greg, reduces the single woman to an infirm body, one that must be removed so that the plot can advance. Furthermore, Collins's authorial reduction of Marian recalls George Henry Lewes's criticism of Charlotte Brontë's ineptitude in Shirley, with its implication that a woman who misdirects energy from her proper sphere is either diseased, unnatural or both.

In spite of her desire for and courage to commit violence, however, Marian's hands strike no one. Rather than undertaking male brutality, they take up female work. Heller observes, "Whereas it is Marian's unexpectedly intellectual-looking head that synecdochically represents her in her meeting with Walter Hartright, this metonymic emphasis shifts to her hands once she is relegated to domestic labor" (188-89). She is once again confined to the home, less stringently than during her incarceration in Blackwater Park's half-ruined wing but no less effectively barred from further adventures outside domestic space. Her feminine position is reinforced by the visible weakness of her hands, which tremble as she displays them to Walter, the breadwinner who supports the household, as he proclaims, by "the work of my hands" (572), hands which do not tremble. Marian cannot spend her days sleuthing outside using her masculine head, so she puts her female hands to use doing housework. That Marian is properly gendered in Victorian terms Collins makes evident not only in her work and palsied hands but also in her large silent tears. Heller declares of Marian's confinement in the domestic arena, inside: "That this is her proper place is underscored by the

image of Walter literally holding her back when she wants to go with him to confront Fosco with evidence of his crime" (137).

While I agree with this reading, I would expand upon it by drawing attention to the way in which the interplay between the characters emphasizes Marian's desire for autonomy and control. The passage also serves once again to highlight Collins's own conflicted response to female strength and independence. Marian's hands, capable and practical but also vulnerable and an entry site for disease, serve not merely as synecdoche for her domestic position but as the representative anatomical part that reflects contemporary concern over the place of single women, who chafe to take their destinies into their own hands. Marian's energy and her eagerness to exact revenge, or at least be present during it, are curbed by Walter as he forcibly restrains her. The scene is one of almost parodic embrace, for she first holds him "by both hands," then he holds her, preventing her from racing ahead of him to the door. He responds to her impassioned pleas to accompany him by removing her clutching hands--those hands which paralyzed him during his moment of emasculation--and casting her in an infantilized role, by placating her with the request for a kiss and urging her to demonstrate her courage by waiting for his return. The most masculine behaviour she is allowed to engage in is to take Walter's place by sleeping in his wife's room during his absence (603). Walter thus prevents her from moving outside by physically overpowering her strength and confines her not just to the house but to a single room by force of her loyalty and obligation to Laura. In order to prove her courage, she must remain enclosed within the home, marginalized from the centre of the action like a good single woman, and seal her acquiescence to her own imprisonment with a kiss.

This detail that Marian should sleep in the room with Laura is significant, suggesting Marian's corporeal mutability as she acts as a kind of male stand-in for Walter himself and as a female companion for Laura. That she has what some scholars suggest is a lesbian attachment to her half-sister loads this episode with various sexual meanings, which I believe Collins himself is

intrigued by but has not committed himself to. I do not read Marian's relationship with her sister as a sexual one, preferring instead to ascribe to Rich's theory of the lesbian continuum, which argues for "a range...of woman-identified experience." Clearly, Marian shares with Laura " a rich inner life"; she also encourages "the bonding against male tyranny, [and] the giving and receiving of practical and political support" (Rich 648, 648-9). Marian's emotional investment certainly lies more with her half-sister than any male figure. While her attraction to the effeminate Fosco could be read as further evidence of her erotic lesbian tendencies, I instead interpret Marian as an intermediary figure between the inhumanly angelic female and her equally caricatured masculine counterpart; therefore, Marian is one of Collins's explorations of the suppressed potential of female life. This reading allows for Marian's androgunous possibilities as a bourgeoning New Woman.

As shown, Marian's power, though not always fruitful, is invested largely in her hands. However, as the spinsters in Shirley illustrate, single women also have power in their voices. During this intensely emotional scene, Walter has the last word and betrays the latent power in Marian's voice, for he makes his escape before she can argue with him further. "I dared not allow her time to say a word more," he confesses (603). The woman who once infused him with strength through her look and touch has the power to sap that strength with her voice. Hartright's only alternative is to prevent further utterance. Collins mitigates Marian's power further at the novel's conclusion when she opts to remain with the Hartrights rather than forge an independent life of her own, though readers are perhaps prepared for this by Walter's editorial note that clarifies that passages have been omitted from her journal which had no bearing on Laura's case. In conveying her choice to remain with them, Marian relinquishes her own speech in favour of that of future offspring. "I will teach them to speak for me in their language," she tells Walter, "and the first lesson they will say to their father and mother shall be—We can't spare our aunt!" (641. Original emphasis).

Collins provides as ambiguous an ending for his dark Marian Halcombe as Brontë does for her icy Lucy Snowe, yet in both cases the situation of the spinster is more fulfilling than a first reading may reveal. Marian's deferral of speech and giving up of her own voice--at least to adults--certainly can be read as a disappointing conclusion for such an outspoken and singular woman, and seems to bear out critical opinion that the magnificent Marian is diminished, relegated to the traditional spinster role of maiden aunt. Indeed, Milbank sees her reduced to an "appendage" (74), an apt description given the importance of her hands throughout the text and Greg's conviction that diseased limbs on the social body may be removed without harm. Similarly, Peters claims that she has "dwindled into an aunt" ("Invite" 11). Barbara Fass Leavy declares, "Her life reflects Collins's own dead end in disposing of his strong female characters" (221), modern phrasing which raises the question: why should these women be disposed of as though they were indeed surplus? At the same time, however, scholars have also remarked on Collins's subversiveness at work in the final scene, where Marian and not Laura holds up the Hartright child and properly identifies him to his father, but they have overlooked the prior detail that the baby is seated on Marian's lap and she herself is ensconced in the chair Walter sat in when he worked. His debt to Laura is clear, for his new wealth and station come to him through marriage and even this resides not so much in him as in his child, the heir to the property. However, Marian's occupation of his chair further and subtly undermines his position. That he may not work in it again due to his new status is less relevant than that Marian continues to usurp male space, an element given fuller significance by the facts that she holds the baby as though he came from her womb instead of Laura's and that the child she is holding is male, the heir and one she will teach to speak for her. One can, then, interpret her voice as being amplified, rather than lost, an indication that the clamouring of the single woman will be taken up by a new generation, as indeed it was as the century progressed to include the New Woman.

Like Charlotte Brontë, Wilkie Collins creates a Victorian spinster who is more of a complete being than the cloyingly feminine angel or the masculine old maid, and also like Brontë, he locates this naturalness in the celibate female body. Despite his disapproval of the work of the Pre-Raphaelite painters, Collins shared their appreciation for a woman's unrestricted waist. Peters observes that Collins "had a fascination with the uncorseted female figure, amounting almost to an obsession" (King 119). While Milbank declares that sexually, "despite the full waist" that contributes to her womanly figure, Marian is "an absence, a sign which will not deliver," she notes on the other hand that her "retreat into blankness" at the novel's conclusion may be less a failure of artistic nerve than "the only possible liberation from [patriarchal authority's] reach" in a world where that authority is established by "the control of writing" (74, 79). Both she and Heller see Marian as losing control of her pen and narrative, becoming increasingly covered by Hartright's usurpation of and editing out of her words. Milbank interprets Marian's continuing spinsterhood as marginally positive, though she sees this as due to the text's inability to "assimilate her" (78). All of these readings are perceptive and accurate. What is clear, too, not only in Collins's text but also in modern approaches and reactions to it, is the recognition of Marian's ambiguous position and the continuing difficulty that ambiguity creates for readers trying to interpret her. She is present by virtue of her singular looks; she is absent because she is too manly to be female and too womanly to be male. Yet these very features work in reverse because her ugliness simultaneously makes her invisible and her hermaphroditic qualities are what identify her as the unique person she is. She is all body and visibility because she transgresses domestic space; she is shadowy and/or diminished because her place there is as an adjunct, an ancillary role. However, while it is perhaps unsatisfactory to modern readers that Marian, in the end, occupies conventional spinsterly space on the sidelines, poor and dependent, she remains single and visible. Collins apparently felt no compunction to "dispose" of her in marriage, a point, Lonoff notes, the 1948 Warner Brothers version of The Woman in White sought to rectify when the film makers capitulated to Marian's

popularity by marrying her to Walter at the end of the movie. Lonoff observes, that, at least for Collins's Victorian society, a "'grand creature' with the courage of a man does not often make a comfortable wife" (143, 144). I would add that marrying Marian off may in fact be moot, given her indispensableness to the Hartrights. Neither does Collins send her off to the colonies or have her literally fade into the background by turning his daring brunette into a grey shadow. Like Lucy Snowe, she remains distinct. She chooses to remain with Laura, in whom her emotions are clearly invested (Lonoff 144) and who has begged her to "promise you will never marry and leave me" (235). Collins, like Brontë, seemed to feel that marriage threatened his spinster's autonomy, and while Marian winds up in the apparently conventional maiden aunt position, enclosed in the domestic arena rather than scaling Himalayan peaks, she has demonstrated that, despite her formidable talents, this is where she chooses to be; she enacts the freedom of choice that Frances Power Cobbe advocates. She will also subvert Walter's patriarchal authority by teaching his (male and female) children to speak her words. Collins therefore invests his spinster with agency and situates her in the end in the space where she is most subversive. Thus in Marian resides all of the ambiguity that her society sees in the single woman--her potency and her domesticity. Despite his personal ambivalence about independent women, Collins, like Brontë in Villette, was daring enough to allow his heroine to retain her single status.

Conclusion
Remaining Visible: Looking Ahead to The Odd Women

"So many odd women—no making a pair with them. The pessimists call them useless, lost, futile lives. I, naturally, being one of them, take another view. I look upon them as a great reserve."
Rhoda Nunn in George Gissing's The Odd Women

In "A Bewailment From Bath," her 1844 letter to the editor of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Tabitha Glum describes the spinster population as "an uncultivated waste" (201). Almost twenty years later, Dora Greenwell styles it an "Unclaimed Dividend" (34) in "Our Single Women" (1862). Thirty years on, in 1893, novelist George Gissing's fictional Rhoda Nunn designates the single women of whom she is one as "a great reserve" (41). These three writers, over a span of fifty years and across two genres, essays and novels, express in quite similar ways a single idea: that unmarried women are an overlooked resource. These descriptions, with their juxtaposition of positive and negative terms, encapsulate the spinster's doubleness as I have discussed it here, an existence of simultaneous presence and absence, visibility and invisibility. The single woman is a "waste" left "uncultivated;" she is "unclaimed," a "reserve," of women who, as Rhoda states it, substitute for those who "vanish into matrimony" (41), as though the single woman herself lacks individuality and can easily be replaced. Thus spinsters appear unwanted, unused, in the background, while at the same time they can be harvested; they are a "dividend" to be utilized to advantage, a vast store to be drawn upon. Thus the spinster is present but invisible, both an object for sympathy and an unrealized boon to society.

One may perhaps be forgiven for expecting a more dramatic shift in the attitude to single women over half a century. The situation for unmarried women certainly had improved, as they had access to better education and wider employment opportunities in the 1890s than they did when Brontë's Caroline Helstone wished to go out as a governess because that was the only position even remotely open to her. Gissing does indicate the changes in the lives of single women by creating spinsters of various generations in The Odd Women. Alice and Virginia Madden

represent the stereotypical old maids, left financially and spiritually destitute by their deceased father's failure to prepare them for a self-reliant existence. Unable to support themselves, they are ineffectual, hungry, unhealthy, flattened to inertness by their poverty and lack of education. Alice has "resigned herself to spinsterhood." Her blighted existence manifests itself in her pimpled skin and her encroaching masculinity reveals itself in her thinning hair and her voice, "which had contracted an unpleasant hoarseness." Virginia's prettiness has "faded" (10, 12). Their younger sibling Monica represents a transitional figure, situated as she is between the lives of her pitiful sisters and the vocational training and employment opportunities Mary Barfoot's school can offer her. Monica, however, sees the Barfoot school as "an old-maid factory" (55) and remains uninspired by Rhoda's admittedly rather intimidating enthusiasm. Her marriage to the older Edmund Widdowson gives her not the security she seeks but instead suffocating restriction as she must submit to his patriarchal authority, styled as it is upon Ruskinian separate sphere ideology. Conversely, Rhoda Nunn is the New Woman, valuing her single state and working to prepare other women for a life of self-sufficiency. However, Gissing problematizes Rhoda's singleness, for her autonomy and power appear to come at the expense of her femininity. Furthermore, her relationship with Everard Barfoot complicates any straightforward reading of her as a model single woman, for as she and her suitor wrangle over the issue of marriage, each seems entirely focused on enforcing the other's capitulation. Everard's unworthiness and Rhoda's own need for manipulation thus obscure the choice between the advantages of independence and the satisfactions of marital union. Celibacy, with its inherent gender issues, therefore continues to be a thorny issue even at the end of the century, and the spinster remains a problematic figure.

This thesis has explored the single woman's doubled existence as it exists on three levels--family/society, text and body--as it is represented in selected essays and in novels by Brontë and Collins. I have demonstrated that writers in both genres share not only concerns about the topical issues of female education, employment and emigration but also the tropes of orality, somatization

and pathology. Additionally, their representations of the spinster reveal mid-Victorian society's preoccupation with her as both a dangerous new form of womanhood, capable of upsetting the established order, and as the arbiter of female emancipation, creating new avenues of usefulness and power. In an effort to redefine the single woman as her liminal position comes under increasingly closer scrutiny, some essayists offer taxonomies that can be also be applied to the novels, particularly in Brontë's work, where the various single women she presents correspond to specific types.

The essayists and the novelists emphasize the significance of the celibate female body, for her potentially subversive power resides in her physical frame. As Philippa Levine states, the spinster's childlessness elicited a dual response from her society: "Whilst the unmarried woman herself became the focus of disdain or pity, she also invoked fear and disapproval for her perceived unwillingness to conform. She was both the passive recipient of misfortune and simultaneously willfully defiant of orthodoxy" (45). The celibate female body thus contains the potential to upset the social body with its ability to transgress boundaries, even its own sexual ones.

As I have shown, writers negotiate the visibility of their single women in sometimes paradoxical ways. Contemporary essays often focus on the spinster at the outset of an essay and apparently efface her by the end, though many of these writings succeed in bringing to the centre a marginalized figure. Collins uses this strategy at the conclusion of The Woman in White when he provides Marian Halcombe with a central role in raising the Hartright child and thus not only gifts her with a sort of ancillary maternity but also associates her directly with male power. Though one may easily dismiss this power simply as that of the Victorian mother's sphere of moral influence over children and men, Collins's very text stands as a testament to the uses Marian can make of her strength and resolution. Thus, despite his own ambivalence about strong, autonomous women, Collins's positioning of his dark spinster in domestic space subverts rather than reinforces her apparently conventional role as attendant maiden aunt and the Hartrights' "good angel" (646).

Similarly, Brontë's Villette challenges the boundaries of the novel by placing at its centre a single woman who remains 'on stage' throughout and unmarried at the conclusion, while Shirley is peopled with a variety of unmarried women who represent a contemporary social problem. Lucy Snowe is Brontë's ideal old maid, comporting herself usefully and to the best of her abilities. Lucy achieves independence through self-employment, and while readers may feel this autonomy is undercut by having been attained in part through M. Paul's auspices, Brontë credits her spinster with the ability to carry on after her suitor's death. Unlike Miss Marchmont, Lucy does not retreat into invalidism and melancholy, nor is she plagued by the inertia of Alice and Virginia Madden. The old maids of Shirley, on the other hand, do not attain Lucy's independence, though they are no worse off than before. Miss Mann in fact benefits from inclusion in the community through Caroline's efforts. Hortense Moore befriends her and Robert feels sufficiently immune to her petrifying stare to bring her a plant by the novel's conclusion. This association of living plant and bitter old maid implies a more congenial life for the lonely spinster. However, through Caroline's unhappiness and illness Brontë emphasizes the devastating effects a life lacking in autonomy can have. Caroline's prospects as a spinster in her community, where unmarried women are ridiculed and shunned, and whose only outlets for usefulness are confined to charity and religious work, are clearly limited. Emily Shirreff believed middle-class women undertook charity work less out of a spirit of altruism and more out of "a desperate need for occupation" (Levine 131). Caroline rejects this prospect, opting instead for what appears to be a conventional lapse into sickness but is really a radical bid for visibility. Furthermore, while the spirited and autonomous Shirley chooses her own mate and thus avoids spinsterhood, one senses a reduction of her character in marriage. By focussing on spinsters in Shirley and making a single woman the protagonist of what would be her last novel, Brontë demonstrates her personal concern for the spinster. Furthermore, through these artistic choices, she effectively foregrounds the condition of single women as it existed in her society.

Brontë also reveals her own radicalism by introducing sexuality into her novels in two ways. In Lucy Snowe she creates a spinster with what Showalter correctly designates as "insistent sexuality" (xxi). As Kranidis points out in her discussion of spinster emigration, "Spinsters were seen as asexual because they were detached from the patriarchal processes that granted middle-class women some semblance of a sexual identity" (VSCE 171)[1]. However, as I have argued, Brontë makes it clear that Lucy must come to terms with her self as a sexual being. Furthermore, she employs animals more extensively and in a far more sexualized manner than does Eliza Cook, who replicates cultural ideas of pets as acceptable outlets for thwarted maternal feeling. Brontë, in her use of the spaniel Sylvie in Villette and the mastiff Tartar in Shirley, provides mediary figures who act as a conduits for female-male passion. Although neither Lucy and M. Paul nor Shirley and Louis actually touch each other in these scenes, the dogs mediate their sexual and romantic feelings; Sylvie's eager licking of Lucy's face seems clearly to provide her with canine kisses while M. Paul smilingly looks on. Tartar's role is more layered, for though he too acts as a connecting figure for sexual feeling, he is also symbolic on other levels, signaling as he does class union, Shirley's transition from spinster to wife and shifts in power.

Additionally, both Brontë and Collins anticipate end-of-the-century treatment of the single woman as they examine and interrogate traditional ideologies of physical beauty and 'womanliness' through their unusual heroines. In their portrayals of strong, capable women in, respectively, Shirley Keeldar, Lucy Snowe and Marian Halcombe, Brontë and Collins challenge accepted beliefs about female identity, visibility and sexuality through their heroines' androgyny. Far from reflecting a "hopeless concern with transvestite behavior" (Gilbert and Gubar, 381), these representations of women who masquerade as men or overtly display 'masculine' qualities of body

[1] Curiously, Kranidis reads Lucy as a governess and interprets her as a widow at the novel's conclusion. While her overall analysis is generally interesting, her misreading of the ending invests her wind-up of Lucy's independence with a certain irony: "Thus Brontë delivers an antidote to the predicament of the spinster" (191).

or character offer alternatives to the conventional female. Shirley is never more vital or more present than when she adopts her Captain Keeldar or Esquire title. Even when she does not metaphorically cast off her feminine skirts for masculine breeches, as a romantically unfettered woman she is clearly in charge, running her estate, overseeing her property and making her own decisions. Rather than suppressing her intelligence as a properly self-effacing woman should, Lucy defends it as God-given and therefore natural. Playing the man to Ginevra's coquette provides her with such a surge of excitement, vitality and imagination that she quickly decides she is too visible and renounces stage appearances. With M. Paul's guidance and their mutual nurturing, Lucy eventually learns not to suppress her passion. Marian Halcombe, whose curvaceous body is topped by a masculine head, calls up the possibility of a young Miss Mann before bitterness blighted her life. Unlike Brontë's Medusa, however, Marian exhibits an energy that is often sexual in nature. Rather than turning men to stone, she re-invests them with masculinity. Into the bargain, she does not lack for either ingenuity or sheer physical courage.

This exploration of androgynous possibilities takes place in the essays as well, as feminists such as Frances Power Cobbe laud single women's strength, a traditionally masculine quality, and argue for a fuller, more complete womanhood than dependency and frailty afford. W.R. Greg finds this notion of strength threatening, suggesting as it does the unsexing of women and the toppling of the established patriarchal social order. Similarly, Mayor expresses anxiety that education will masculinize girls, tainting their womanhood and sullying the home. As I have shown, according to contemporary medical theories, old maids inevitably manifested some masculine features due to the circulatory blockages celibacy created. Cobbe, Bodichon and Boucherett re-invent this heretofore abnormal metamorphosis by encouraging women to cultivate self-reliance and strength.

Authors in both genres thus privilege the spinster body. Synecdochically emblematic of the 'surplus' woman's socially destabilizing power are her hands, which represent her ability to take control of her own destiny, mark her as a sexual being and represent her vulnerability. The

emphasis in both the periodical literature and fiction on single women's hands metonymically marks them as the old maid's most dangerous weapon. As Melinda Maunsell notes in her excellent analysis of "hand-codes" in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, "Power rests in the hands, can be expressed, given, grasped, retained or passed on by the hands" (59). Both essayists and novelists grapple with how much power a single woman should take into her own hands--or how much should be given to her--and how those hands should be employed. When a single woman takes responsibility for her life, she marks herself as an autonomous being who can dispense with male support, maritally and financially. She may make a home for herself with no companion rather than sacrificing her needs and desires for another's benefit. Such behaviour highlights self-interest, the consideration of which Caroline Helstone may only flirt with in 1849 but which becomes a central concern for Rhoda Nunn almost half a century later. A single woman's independence necessitates a union of previously differentiated qualities, which calls forth a dangerous, even by late Victorian standards, androgyny. This dissolves gender boundaries and upends approved social behaviour, for the autonomous single woman must add to her womanly qualities those of a male cast: visibility in the public sphere, resilience and strength to labour outside the home. As Mary Barfoot states in The Odd Women, "The old types of womanly perfection are no longer helpful to us" (153). Woman as sturdy oak rather than clinging vine undermines her position as moral superior and homemaker, with all that such roles require of her in purity, dependence and self-sacrifice. Her moral superiority is power conferred upon her by her patriarchal culture in exchange for dependence. Standing alone, supporting herself, she assumes her own power. In the realm of outside space, she may soil her hands; though this may occur when she stoops to pluck the crown of matrimony from the mud, success in securing this prize cleanses her hands. The single woman's hands, though, signify her ongoing autonomous power. Shirley's hands, which symbolize her position as landowner, millowner and community provider and have proven medically proficient in

cauterizing her own wound, must be disempowered before she can place them in Louis', whose own fingers itch to tame her.

The Brontë novels that I have discussed form the core of this dissertation, and even a brief examination of her real-life experiences provides a bridge between representations of the single woman as she appears in the essays, the fiction and my scholarly analysis of both. In her short life, Charlotte Brontë embodied the central focus of this thesis in her own simultaneous visibility and invisibility, existing as she did as both a famous author who enjoyed an albeit brief male persona and as "a country spinster" who described herself as an "obscure" and "insignificant being" (Shorter Vol I: 448, 109, 107). While she desired to "walk invisible" as an author, she repeatedly called attention to her own lack of physical attractiveness in letters to friends, thus placing herself, however negatively, in the limelight (384). As Currer Bell she strove for androgyny, the freedom of indeterminate sex, though she revelled in being mistaken for a man and bristled when her work was identified as coming from a female hand. While she recoiled from reviews that attempted to decide her gender, she was guilty herself of assessing an anonymous work sent to her by James Taylor as "the product of a lady" (82). Yet her correspondence is filled with references to her own ugliness, to her thin frame and sunken, grey face, in a self-conscious bid to acknowledge herself what she felt was all too obvious to others. Small wonder, then, that Lucy Snowe teases readers with a house-of-mirrors narration in which she writes of her own invisibility with continual references to it.

Like Lucy Snowe's, Charlotte Brontë's life, not surprisingly, as she recounts it in letters to her friends and publishers, was largely one of privation and loss, frequently figured in food metaphors and tropes of starvation. This figurative language manifests Brontë's conflicting need to sustain herself and dutifully to sustain others. Like Lucy, she finds letters offer her "meat and drink" (Shorter Vol I:141) and perhaps compensate her in some measure for the society she admitted to William Smith Williams she "thirst[ed]" for (62). Social contact with loved ones

further bolstered her. After a visit from Ellen Nussey in January 1843, she described herself to Ellen as being "as solid as a large dumpling since you left" (253). Social interaction both feeds her and makes of her a more sustaining food; she becomes a good provider of food when she herself is nourished, thereby fulfilling her domestic duty as a Victorian woman. Balancing these dual needs gives rise to much of the tension in Brontë's personal correspondence and in her fiction. As a woman who expected from the age of twelve to be an old maid, she gave considerable deliberation to the dilemma of single women and their limited sphere of action. "One great curse of single female life," she wrote to Smith Williams in July 1849, "is its dependency" (Shorter Vol II: 58). While advocating work for single women, however, she recognized the barriers glutted markets presented and thus could not provide heartening solutions for her fictional females. In the May 1848 letter to Smith Williams, previously cited in Chapter Four, she comments on the meagreness of employment opportunities for women:

> It is true enough that the present market for female labour is quite overstocked—but where or how could another be opened? Many say that the professions now filled only by men should be open to women also—but are not their present occupants and candidates more than numerous enough to answer every demand? Is there any room for female lawyers, female doctors, female engravers, for more female artists, more authoresses? One can see where the evil lies—but who can point out the remedy? (Barker Letters 189)

Certainly, Brontë's meditation smacks of both exclusionary thinking, for she has achieved her own career, and the Victorian cultural myopia regarding separate spheres. However, she also reveals a genuine concern with the plight single women faced, confronted with the need to do something towards earning their own bread and hampered by social and economic restrictions. The paucity of opportunity is precisely the difficulty that afflicts Caroline Helstone; she is denied her uncle's permission to go out as a governess, and there is little else she can do.

Implied in Brontë's comments on the single life are the underlying questions of the contemporary periodical literature: How much control does a single woman have over her life? How much power does she have? How much should she have? Implicit in these questions are

anxieties about the impulse for personal fulfillment--or even a sense of contentment--and the dictates of social or family duty. Writers of periodical literature and fiction not only deliberate on what to do with the spinster but also challenge and explore how much power she should or can have in a society of shifting demographics. Frances Power Cobbe, William Rathbone Greg, Charlotte Brontë and Wilkie Collins among others interrogate the accepted notions of visibility and power, invisibility and duty, and how both their personal and social ramifications impact the old maid. This socially stigmatized figure fascinated her society as she continues to intrigue modern scholars, nor did she disappear as the century drew to a close and issues of female employment, education and marriage continued to concern the public. In many ways, the 'old maid' gives way to a more radical and equally disturbing female in the 'New Woman,' who enjoys more independence if not less conflict, as George Gissing explores with the character of Rhoda Nunn in his novel The Odd Women, published in 1893.

The more emancipated woman of the 1890s has greater freedom to choose for herself, but she is still considered an anomaly; she still provokes both her society's sense of possibility and its anxiety. Rhoda, another masculine-looking spinster lacking in conventional beauty, seems an amalgamation of the women discussed here. She combines Shirley Keeldar's self-possessed authority, Marian Halcombe's strong-mindedness, Caroline Helstone's questioning of social expectations and Lucy Snowe's passion. However, unlike these earlier protagonists, Rhoda receives a marriage proposal from a man she loves and refuses it, choosing to remain single. She tells Everard Barfoot that she is a mentor figure to the single women "whom vulgar opinion ridicules. How can I help them so effectually as by living among them as one of them, and showing that my life is anything but weariness and lamentation? I am fitted for this. It gives me a sense of power and usefulness which I enjoy" (209). Rhoda is, in some respects, W.G. Hamley's role model, choosing singleness for political reasons as well as personal, and admitting the satisfaction she derives from mastery. Like Hamley's highest type of old maid, Rhoda embraces self-interest,

refuting the Victorian staple of female self-sacrifice as both Caroline Helstone and Frances Power Cobbe previously do in fiction and in real life. She tells Virginia Madden, "I am sure [self-sacrifice] is often wrong—all the more so because people proclaim it a virtue without any reference to circumstances" (23). However, Rhoda's self-interest is offset by her intolerance, a trait that is particularly detrimental because she directs it towards women who lack her own fortitude and commitment. Her friend and co-worker Mary Barfoot accuses her of hard-heartedness when she refuses to re-admit a wayward student to their school. Mary tells the younger woman that her commitment to the women's cause is stunting her humanity and "warping a very noble character." Moreover, Mary sees that this lack of compassion is unnatural for the younger woman and detrimental to their cause (150). Mary articulates the statement as a food metaphor: "Your zeal is eating you up" (56). Mary later states that Rhoda has gone beyond "practical zeal" (65). Rhoda's chosen celibacy and anti-marriage stance are figured as unhealthy, as self-consuming.

Thus celibacy continues to be a vexed issue in 1893, perhaps even more than at mid-century, for as Philippa Levine states,

> Towards the end of the century spinsterhood began to take shape as a concrete political position deemed preferable to marriage amongst a portion of the feminist community. From the late 1880s, as the critique of male sexuality became more public and more developed, many feminists began to see singleness as both epitomizing a new morality and finding an independence unachievable within the confines of male-female relations. (47)

Rhoda, declaring marriage a "disgrace" (111) and the source of most women's unhappy and wasted lives (65), replaces the marital state with her own brand of sincere yet "fierce virginity" (Showalter xx). Indeed, Rhoda believes that female sexual feeling needs to be repressed in order for the women to raise themselves, arguing, "Christianity couldn't spread over the world without the help of the ascetic ideal, and this great movement for women's emancipation must also have its ascetics." Mary points out reasonably that only exceptional women will see this as their duty and deems it a "strained ideal" (67). Rhoda's commitment to her cause is thus two-sided: while it

demonstrates her strength of mind, her lack of compassion is unwomanly because it harms the very women she toils to help and inhuman because she warps her own full character.

In his portrayal of Rhoda's strength Gissing revisits the issue of potential masculinity writers such as Boucherett, Cobbe, Brontë and Collins explored. Rhoda's energy has a distinctly masculine cast. While Everard is attracted by her vigour, intelligence and determination, Gissing implies that these very qualities have come at the expense of her femininity, a femininity represented by the coils of her abundant dark hair. Her face betrays this, for it "seem[s] masculine, its expression somewhat aggressive"; indeed, her "lips [are] consciously impregnable," combining both the masculine aspect of an unassailable fortress and a feminine anatomy, as though her lips are an external hymen proclaiming her celibacy. Similarly, like Marian Halcombe's, her hands fuse feminine and masculine features, being both "shapely" and "strong" (22). Everard notices that her wrists are also strong, and he enjoys their whiteness in conjunction with her "healthy brownish complexion" (114). In this combination of white and brown, Rhoda thus signals both her gentility and her robust constitution. In fact, Rhoda's vigour particularly stimulates him, for he imagines twenty-mile treks across the hills with her and, possessed of her hand and feeling her tug to free herself, the pull of her muscles causes him to exert his own force: "She was trying to draw her hand away. Everard felt the strength of her muscles, and the sensation was somehow so pleasant that he could not at once release her" (144). Although he enjoys their equality--"she sat down with him as a male acquaintance might have done" (114)--his desire for domination is clearly evident when he holds her against her will.

However, like the early and mid-Victorian spinster, Rhoda reveals the mark of her celibacy upon her body. Everard, despite his attraction to her, "read[s] chastity" in her face and this virginal state also manifests itself in her cold palm (148). That Everard so misreads her, mistaking her celibacy as a species of frigidness, indicates his later mistaken assumptions of her. In her introduction to the novel, Showalter observes that Rhoda is "capable not only of intense desire, but

also of agonizing jealousy" (xxii). Like Lucy Snowe, Rhoda is a woman of passion, not least sexual passion, and her deliberate suppression of her sexual urges in advance of a social ideal both recalls Brontë's heroine[2] and indicates the difficulties inherent in establishing oneself as a social role model for chastity.

If Rhoda's celibacy appears to infuse her with a callousness that can be read as masculine, the later assurance of a marriage proposal, emblem of her feminine power, however, invests this New Woman with conventional womanliness, realizing the "possibility of subtle feminine forces that might be released by circumstances" (22). Bolstered by the knowledge of Everard's regard and her own potency to make a proposal a reality by the "raising of [her] finger" (213), Rhoda's demeanour alters. She feels "a new contentment in life....a rush of joy would suddenly fill her heart, and make her cheek glow. She moved among people with a conscious dignity quite unlike that which had only satisfied her need of distinction. She spoke more softly, exercised more patience, smiled where she had been wont to scoff. Miss Nunn was altogether a more amiable person" (213). Miss Nunn is altogether more 'womanly.'

Ultimately, however, while Rhoda eschews marriage, her spinsterhood has about it a troubling aspect. Though her singleness is clearly part of her identity, her political self, her decision to retain her celibacy is not straightforward. Unmarried, she appears to be "an example of perfect female independence" (309), visible as an autonomous single woman rather than subsumed into a domestic role as wife and mother, where she would be 'covered' by Everard's dominance. However, in her peculiar relationship with Everard, each has played games of control and manipulation, so that their love becomes subordinated to the shifts in power. That Everard, dilettante and, as Showalter identifies him, "sexual tease" (xxiv), is not worthy of Rhoda problematizes her choice still further, for it has not been made for a man who is her equal. Nonetheless, one should recognize that Rhoda

[2] Showalter surmises this may have been deliberate, given Gissing's interest in Brontë (xxi).

chooses for herself, offering Everard her androgynous hand in farewell. Alice Madden, on the other hand, accepts what comes her way, having done nothing to steer events in any particular direction; rejuvenated and restored to health by the care of her newborn niece, she joyfully anticipates "the life that was prepared for her" (385).

Each of the protagonists under study here has in fact negotiated greater visibility for herself at some point, albeit temporarily and ambiguously, just as Brontë transacted a public role for herself, however cleverly she managed to cloak it under an androgynous disguise. Coming from the hand of an actual spinster, a woman who had struggled personally and painfully with the ramifications of spinsterhood in mid-Victorian society, Brontë's old maids, potential and actual, form a more realistic and radical treatment of the surplus woman question than perhaps does Collins's adventurous Marian. Pulled between the conflicting desires for a career and for marriage with a worthy man, it is perhaps not surprising that Brontë both shunned and courted visibility. "Out of obscurity I came—" she wrote to G.H. Lewes on the first of November in 1849. "[T]o obscurity I can easily return—" (Barker Letters 248). However, by virtue of their writing, Brontë, Collins, Cobbe, Greg, Thackeray and the other writers discussed here ensure that their spinsters will remain present and visible, that single women will continue to "signalize [themselves] from pole to pole" (Glum 199).

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