I AWOKE IN PRISON: SOCIETAL DEPENDENCE ON
FEMALE SUBJECTION IN MIDDLEMARCH AND
JANE EYRE

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This thesis attempts to analyze the structures that support and maintain the society of nineteenth-century England through the lens of the novel. Within the novels *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Middlemarch* by George Eliot there appears a specific system of societal organization that rests on female subjugation. Nineteenth-century England had retained a fear of the individual outside of societal constraint from the era of the French Revolution, and in an effort to control such and individual the social contract is enacted: the individual trades their freedom for safety within the community. In order for the male portion of the population to rest existentially with such a trade, the female section must be subjugated under male control to give the illusion that nothing was lost in
the exchange. Women, studied here in the female protagonist within these two novels, thus become the crux of an entire society’s structure and survival. These protagonists serve as mirrors to their male counterparts, reflecting back an image of himself as a moral subject, and in order to keep her in such a role she is disciplined through community surveillance and her education. Within these novels male control is also maintained through domination of the verbal economy and restricting the female protagonists to very small spaces. Some of these women provide challenges to this type of control in their very sexuality, and it is thus split into the dichotomy of the saint and the harlot in order to preserve domination.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The French Revolution swept the continent in the eighteenth century, affecting every part of society and life for the British. Socially, the country feared the rampant individualism proclaimed by the revolutionaries. The century concluded with the publication of the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen” asserting the “natural, inalienable and sacred rights of man.” Some of these rights were “liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.” This individualism threatened the social order the British had so long prided themselves on and enjoyed. In order to maintain this regulation, individuals must give up their freedom in exchange for safety within society. I assert that there is a fragile substructure beneath this exchange that reassures individuals as they give up their freedoms. In order to make the sting of relinquished freedom less severe, man is granted an illusionary subjectivity, one where he is told he is the king of his castle and determines his own life. This balance is a delicate one in which man seeks outside himself to confirm the reality of his subjectivity. Woman becomes the key element: she is oppressed and objectified so that man can prove his place in the power dynamics. She is treated as a commodity to be sold and traded for the benefit of the individual man and society as a whole. We see this system evidenced as the scientific community of the time used the biological differences between men and women to prove the validity of this social order.
This societal structure is also evident in nineteenth-century novels such as George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* in their treatment of female protagonists. These women desire to be seen, to be recognized as independent individuals, but that is a transgression that is not allowed. While these women are forbidden from exerting their own essence upon the world around them, they are at the same time watched endlessly to make sure they never step out of their place. In both cases the seeing is done by their male counterparts. The women are seen when and how their male counterparts wish. The common denominator is that the women do not have choice in when they are seen. They are completely dependent on men for their survival, and their safety lies in their occupying the space equivalent to furniture within their husband’s home. Yet these women cannot just be mindless possessions, but rather they are conscious of their place of imprisonment, which is obvious as one looks at many of the novels of the era. Within these novels these women are kept under watch so as not to disturb the system. According to Michel Foucault’s discussion of power and surveillance in his book *Discipline and Punish*, the visibility of individuals “assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection” (*Discipline* 187). It is important to note that this constant vision, as mentioned above, is not the same as choosing to be seen by your own volition. This surveillance functions as the same kind of restriction as equating “being seen” as transgression. These women are under constant examination from their surrounding societies and even from the reader, and that is the
“technique by which power, instead of emitting the signs of its potency, instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification” (187). It is how she is kept in her place and made sure to not step out of bounds. And, as Foucault notes in his observations on formal examinations within schools, which resembles this inspection of women, “in the space of domination, disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects. The examination is, as it were, the ceremony of this objectification.” I would further Foucault’s examination of power to point out that just as a man arranges the pieces of furniture within his home so he does to his wife to make sure she is used as and located where society and his desires would have her.

In this thesis I will show a connection between the fear of individualism, male subjectivity and female oppression and objectification. These three societal constructs form a precariously balanced structure that is dependent on everything remaining in its exact place to prevent disorder. I will trace this connection and its consequences through the character development and the interaction between society and the individual in the novels *Middlemarch* by George Eliot and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë. Throughout, I will note connections and overviews about women in the society of this time and about the male-female relationship of this period. This is not to say that there are no exceptions to these trends within the period or other historical frameworks. Any discussion of human behavior and society as a whole will be messy and imperfect. While these exceptions exist, the trend of behavior and societal structure seem too prevalent to ignore. These exceptions to not invalidate the observations and connections I make in the following
discussion but rather complicate them. There is a tension between the theory and the 
working out of human relationships. This tension exists within the actual society as well, 
so for a theory to work within these bounds it must embrace the same oppositions.

In chapter one, I use Iris Young’s concept of mirroring within the male-female 
relationship in order to reveal its importance to the existential peace of man and the 
stability of social structure. The women in the novels are educated in various fashions to 
fill their vital role, and it is under the pretext of love and marriage they are restricted to 
small spaces and must choose to ignore their imprisonment or resist and be disciplined. In 
chapter two, I deal with language and control as an indicator of subjectivity and the 
verbal economy evident within the novels. The women within them are not granted this 
subjectivity, and the ones who remain aware of their lot teeter on the edge of rage and 
madness. If these women choose the latter option, Victorian morality and propriety 
cannot allow such instability, and as a result such women are demonized and punished by 
the control of feminine sexuality and continued moral education. In chapter three, I 
address the fairy tale of the knight and the damsel in distress as central to the 
maintenance of this power dynamic. Yet as the Victorian Era has attempted to remain 
monster-free, men must create the danger that threatens their damsels in order to save 
them. This constant threat from male invasion plagues the female protagonists of these 
novels with fear. As these men seek to possess their damsels, feminine sexuality is 
revealed as problematic in its instability, and so society splits its features in order to 
resolve the tension. The restriction and objectification of women thus becomes not
simply a societal construct of a particular time period, but an intentional and vital element to the preservation of that entire society which is fearful of complete demise.

Before dealing with the novel of this era, it is important that we observe the structure of discipline and punishment that existed as reality for the authors and their readers. Foucault deals with this entire structure in *Discipline and Punish*. He begins his discussion with a notation of the shift from the overt violence of rulers to the control of their subjects by a more subversive and hidden method. The reasoning behind such a shift, i.e. from public execution to the use of prisons, is that public violence “was, in any case, dangerous, in that it provided support for a confrontation between the violence of the king and the violence of the people” (*Discipline* 73). While Foucault is dealing with France rather than the English society we are discussing, his observation are relevant in the context of England as well, which was marked by political agitation and outbursts prior to and during the nineteenth century. He also begins his discussion of discipline historically from before the revolutions that embodied such open violence. He claims that the violence of the king provided the example and thus elicited violence in return from the people. As revolutions swept the continent it became apparent to observant rulers that this type of control was obviously losing its effectiveness. Thus, a movement towards a new type of discipline is begun, one in which the society and the men that make it up would discipline themselves. This shift was a consequence of arising pressures rather than a conscious meeting of the heads of state to change the penal system; it appeared to be ideal for the control of the people and the safety of the monarchs and so a stronger movement to a new system began. According to Foucault, in such a system “the ideal
punishment would be transparent to the crime that it punishes; thus, for him who contemplates it, it will be infallibly the sign of the crime that it punishes” (104-105). This connection became a vital piece of the framework of the new system as it ingrained the rules and their consequences in the very mind of the individual. This association has multiple advantages according to Foucault. The first is the “stability of the link, an advantage for the calculation of the proportions between crime and punishment and the quantitative reading of interests,” and the second is that “by assuming the form of a natural sequence, punishment does not appear as the arbitrary effect of a human power” (105). Thus, it is not the king who is responsible for the punishment but rather the individual himself. If the common man is to be angry at the consequence of his actions he may only be angry with himself. It removes any threat of repercussion and revolt from the space of the king keeping the country in order and him safe from violence.

In this new system “the law must appear to be a necessity of things, and power must act while concealing itself beneath the gentle force of nature” (106). Within the mind of each individual this new cause and effect would thus “reverse the relation of intensities, so that the representation of the penalty and its disadvantages is more lively than that of the crime and its pleasures.” In order to blend with the ideology of the times, Foucault argues, the force behind this discipline “must be the force of sensibility.” Sensibility was the ruling trait for respectable individuals during the Victorian Era and within it individual traits are either praised or punished out of their possessors. Foucault highlights a historical transformation which includes “the gradual extension of the mechanisms of discipline throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their
spread throughout the whole social body, the formation of what might be called in
general the disciplinary society” (209). The system is fully in place by the time of the
Victorian Era. Within this system, feminine autonomy was equated to vanity and some of
the women within these texts will attempt to “steal” freedom and liberty that was
considered not rightfully theirs. In accordance with the new system of discipline, their
punishment must match their crime, and thus any freedom that they had was removed, as
we will see in such scenes and the red-room in *Jane Eyre*.

As a basis for our analysis of the nineteenth century, it is also helpful to
consider the ideological framework that was established in the aftermath of the
Revolution. Linda Colley notes in *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, with the
Revolution pounding on English doors eighteenth-century “Britons . . . regularly defined
themselves in opposition to what they saw as being French characteristics and manners”
(250). The English wanted to distinguish themselves from the liberal and destructive
individualism that characterized the French during this era. This included any radical or
revolutionary ideas about the treatment and role of women. Colley remarks, in her
discussion of Edmund Burke, that “the twin phenomenon of working women daring to
seize the initiative in public event, and of a queen who was also a wife and a mother
being driven by force from her home, were alike proof that events in France threatened to
undermine society” (253). This very real fear of the destruction of society initiated the
British reaction to curb and control the individual.

The novel of the Victorian Era emerged in the wake of these events and
reflected a deep societal need to maintain order and control of the individual and its
subjectivity. According to Foucault, in his discussion of eighteenth-century prisons, “the potentiality of danger . . . lies hidden in an individual and . . . is manifested in his observed everyday conduct” (Discipline 126). He suggests that within these prisons one can assess the conformity of an individual by observing his life and daily interactions. This evidence of conformity can be seen as well in the lives and actions of the common individual as well. Further, it can be determined whether the societal prescriptions that were becoming widely distributed and associated with morality had been accepted and enacted by the individual. George Eliot’s Middlemarch opens with this definition of borders, making very clear to not only the reader, but also to its characters, the standard against which their sanity might be measured. The narrator comments that “sane people did what their neighbors did, so that if any lunatics were at large, one might know and avoid them” (5). Eliot’s narrator displays a fear of those who walk outside the societal bounds, and are different and strange that resembles the insecurities Colley depicts in her discussion of British society. I would further this portrayal by labeling them as also revolutionary, dangerous and defined as immoral. These “lunatics” must be controlled, lest they send England into the chaos that the continent had experienced with the French Revolution.

The novel became a place in which this fear could be resolved by issuing critiques and sanctions for the individual and his place within society. But, as Nancy Armstrong states in How Novels Think, “novels thus gave tangible form to a desire that set the body on a collision course with limits that the old society had placed on the individual’s options for self-fulfillment, transforming the body from an indicator of rank
to the container of a unique subjectivity” (4). The novel, as a place to investigate and experiment with individual and social bounds, thus becomes a dangerous thing that could seek to place the individual above the safety of the community. Armstrong observes that fiction of the Victorian Era sought to move from that place of danger to reestablish safety and order, avowing that, “for the expressive individual to become a good subject, his desires must not only be strictly his; they must ultimately serve the general interest as well” (33). Yet this feat may actually be impossible, for “the nineteenth-century subject was ultimately incapable of incorporating the contradiction posed by desires that arise from within, on the one hand, and those that invade the individual from without, on the other” (23). Of the many potential outcomes, two seem to be presented as society’s choice. Either individualism is allowed free reign, choosing all kinds of evil and destruction, or society tightens the reigns for its own survival and the safety of its individuals. The collective must surely know better than any of its parts, so a new line is drawn, and a new contract proposed.

Within the novel we find a space to enact and ingrain this social contract, which traded individual freedom for safety and rested on creating women as others in order to maintain the delicate balance of societal control. Armstrong says that this contract “demands that an individual restrain his or her individuality in exchange for the state’s protection of that individuality against other forms of self-expression” (How Novels Think 35). Self-expression becomes something to be feared from your neighbor; a man without appropriate loyalty and commitment to the collective becomes a volatile danger to society’s stability. The solution is that the individual and his revolutionary
threats are caged and sacrificed for the greater good, while allowing man to retain an illusionary subjectivity. Foucault argues in his tracing of the development of the panopticon, a building model used in prisons that allows observers within it to see every prisoner within the structure at any given time, that “it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it” (Discipline 217). The Victorian man is created completely from scratch to fulfill society’s need and desire for order and predictability. Instead of being a place where man can discover himself and interact with his fellow man, the social order becomes a restraint. Elizabeth Langland claims in “Inventing Reality: The Ideological Commitments of George Eliot’s Middlemarch” that thus “society emerges as a monolith of oppression rather than a medium for interactions” (98). It seeks to control the individuals that make up its whole by prescribing their identities for them.

Yet man’s new identity was fragile in that ideals, such as the universal rights of man, threatened to enlighten man to his reduced subjectivity and therefore establish him as a threat to the stability of social order. In order to preserve this balance an other had to be created, a rival in both subjectivity and identity that could absorb the aggression building in this new cage. In her book Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England, Mary Poovey argues within her discussion of the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act that “man’s identity as a subject with rights, then, depended on both establishing a stable identity for woman and keeping real women in the inferior position of nonsubjects or representatives of property” (80). By taking the role of
defining female identity, man is able to still control and dictate an individual and their
development, satisfying his need to feel like God in his dominance. Leonore Davidoff
and Catherine Hall observe this phenomenon in their book *Family Fortunes: Men and
Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* as evidenced in their assertion that
“man’s nature was seen as in God’s image while woman was defined as ‘other’” (110).
As a representative of the English imperial nation that prides itself on strength, power,
and self-definition, man must rule over others and keep them beneath him. In Victorian
novels, Elaine Baruch notes in “The Feminine ‘Bildungsroman’: Education through
Marriage” that “woman is child, animal, housemaid, angel, femme fatale—almost
everything on the great chain of being except the human” (337). She is so completely
other from man that he is able to conquer and possess her without prick to his conscience.

Woman thus became the perfect solution for reaffirming man’s superiority and
illusionary subjectivity, while distracting him from the fact that he himself was being
dictated and used as a puppet by government and society. By further characterizing her
within the novel, she reenergized and stabilized the societal norms that, at once, kept the
world spinning as it always had and kept her own hands locked in shackles.

The novels that we deal with specifically in our discussion are written about
women, but also by women. That act alone might appear to break the female shackles and
set her free. While they are beginning to make a movement from constraint to having a
voice and being seen, they did not write these novels in a vacuum, and both the authors
and the female protagonists are operating within the greater society. They cannot
transgress without consequence. Throughout this entire discussion I claim that women
cannot do certain things, some of which they are actually not able to do but others that they absolutely can accomplish but only with severe consequence. They could write novels depicting a free and autonomous woman that would not be published or endorsed, and they themselves would be crucified for their transgressions. So, they attempt this movement in a more subversive and hidden manner. The moments we see within the novel of an autonomous woman are brief and sometimes deeply embedded in commentary that would reassure the unaware reader that the author absolutely supports the role and place given to women within their society.

The women that are thus characterized within these novels are recognized as objects to be purchased and only by male acknowledgement, despite the women’s deep criminal desire to force their existence upon the consciousness of those around them and to be seen. In her book *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Armstrong notes that by viewing power relations through the lens of the domestic sexual relationship it “makes it possible to see the female as representative of all subjection and to use her subjectivity as if it were a form of resistance” (24). While Armstrong is suggesting that female subjectivity can be used this way, not that woman herself has used it in such a manner, I suggest that one sees precisely this resistance in the novels of Eliot and Brontë. This resistance is dangerous, as it threatens an established social order which has determined that women within the novels are only recognized by man’s choice to acknowledge them. They cannot decide to step out when they wish to be noticed; they must wait for his eye to release her into existence. These women could be characterized as those who seek to resist, and akin to those Armstrong observes who refute conduct manuals and their
assertion that they should find their amusement solely within the home and not set out in search of adventure. Armstrong argues of these women that this “is their crime: these women either want to be on display or simply allow themselves to be ‘seen’” (Desire 77). By all logical standards of the time, women cannot even have the desire to individuate since they are biologically inferior to men.

In Eliot’s novel we see this criminal desire to be seen in Rosamond, a young woman in Middlemarch who is eligible for marriage but does not seem to recognize that she is a commodity that is up for trade between her father and Lydgate. She is trying to choose Lydgate because she thinks he will bring her the independence and control that she has been vying for. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in The Madwoman in the Attic assert that “Dorothea and Rosamond can only express their dissatisfaction with provincial life by choosing suitors who seem to be possible means of escaping confinement and ennui” (515). Rosamond continually attempts to assert herself and her desires on to the flow of life and reality. To an extent, she seems blissfully convinced that she does have control and identity. She proclaims, “I am not magnanimous enough to like people who speak to me without seeming to see me” (Eliot 107). She desires to be observed and acknowledged, yet her hollow victories still only give her an identity that is defined in relationship to the men around her. She is courted by suitors, the center of their momentary attentions, yet these men come as consumers, not as providers. She is “seen,” but only for her beauty and talents, not as an individual, which is evident in the ways that Lydgate describes her abilities to entertain and her child-like beauty. It is also how Lydgate can be so shocked to see her nature revealed after they are married. Even after
her marriage, as she strives to be seen she still achieves it only so far as a new carriage would be recognized as it goes through town with comments and accolades given to its owner. She is still simply an object or a reflection, but she does not achieve the recognition that she hopes for. In a discussion of conduct manuals, Armstrong notes that, as a man peruses the market, “what he calls for is not a woman who attracts the gaze as she did in an earlier culture, but one who fulfills her role by disappearing into the woodwork to watch over the household” (Desire 80). Langland observes that, although the narrator makes Lydgate “the object of irony in his mental identification of women with furniture, the text itself repeatedly insists that women who do not rise above Society’s claims are little better than household furnishings” (95). Thus, her fate is sealed as an object to be placed inside of her husband’s house, another fixture proclaiming his identity and subjectivity. Eliot captures this contradiction in her commentary on Dorothea. She is stripped, yet “many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done” (Eliot 792). She cannot be recognized without the masculine vision resting upon her.

Historical and political events helped to convince women of the necessity of their oppression, and this is echoed within the novel as a female character’s very existence and development depend on male protagonists’ recognition of her. Eliot’s narrator opens her novel with a statement of the prescript and expectation of a woman’s place within this system, that “women were expected to have a weak opinion; but the great safeguard of society and of domestic life was, that opinions were not acted on” (5).
These women are kept in their place even while believing, just as the men in the novels do about themselves, that they somehow are still human souls, even while they are being traded and ignored. In the article “Cameo Appearances: The Discourse of Jewelry in Middlemarch,” Jean Arnold notes that within the genre of the female Bildungsroman there is an “irony [that] is impossible to avoid, for it promotes the impossible task of free female self-formulation as a dream that cannot be realized in a culture that only allows males to engage in such practices” (273). The female protagonists are set up for failure; they cannot possibly achieve the identity development that they seek. Gilbert and Gubar deal extensively with this idea as they describe “a story of enclosure and escape, a distinctively female Bildungsroman in which the problems encountered by the protagonist as she struggles from the imprisonment of her childhood to the almost unthinkable goal of mature freedom are symptomatic of difficulties Everywoman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome” (Gilbert 339). The necessity of keeping women in the place of subordination thus becomes very clear: an entire universe and its delicate balance rests in her powerless hands. In reference to the ideology of the state, Althusser recognizes a similar phenomenon as he notes that “the upper floors could not ‘stay up’ (in the air) alone, if they did not rest precisely on their base” (135). Ideological structures collapse rather quickly if the foundation, upon which they rest, i.e. the subordination of woman in the system I am describing, is not secure.

Colley further suggests of earlier eras and I assert that it continues to be evident during the Victorian Era that “the welfare of Great Britain made it absolutely vital that women should continue to behave in a traditional manner” (240). This reaction
stems from the same historical climate that created the need to control the individual: “under enormous pressure from war and revolution without, and more rapid social and economic transformations at home, Britons seized upon the comparatively minor changes in women’s state as a symbol of all that seemed disturbing and subversive” (242). They responded with an extremely strong reaction of defining feminine behavior and space, as “even more than before, both sexes, but particularly women, were deluged by conduct books, sermons, homilies, novels and magazine articles insisting that good order and political stability necessitated the maintenance of separate sexual spheres” (253). Victorian society’s entire existence as well came to rest upon traditional gender roles, and therefore it was very important that everyone within that society understood the importance of keeping things the same. The earlier generations observed that the French Revolution “had exposed women to political violence as never before, but in return, had given them few if any concrete advantages” (256). As they watched the execution of Marie Antoinette and other female political voices, they began to fear the violence that would threaten their lives and their families. This fear made it easier to convince them to submit to the safety and stability of the social contract.

This stability is ensured by its repetitive reenactment on the stage of daily life and within the novel, by keeping a female character as a fixture until man chooses to recognize her as a protagonist and then carefully monitor her development to make sure it does not spin out of control. In her book Unbecoming Women, Susan Fraiman suggests that thus plots like that of Pride and Prejudice are hinged “on a strange man’s knock at the door . . . submit[ing] that a woman’s escape from lonely monotony is just so
precariously hinged” (66). These characters are imprisoned until man sees it beneficial, usually to his own gain, to release her and guide her into her pseudo-development and her place within society. She is kept under strict surveillance to determine that she is developing within the very narrow walls that fulfill her purpose of societal scapegoat. In Brontë’s novel, for example, Jane notices that “Mr. Rochester . . . exercised over his intended a ceaseless surveillance . . . this perfect, clear consciousness of his fair one’s defects—this obvious absence of passion in his sentiments towards her” (111). His observation of her defects and his absence of sentiment reveal his posture of assessment toward her. He observes her as one appraising a valuable purchase, determining whether the purchase will be exactly what he is expecting. Rochester keeps a very close eye on Miss Ingram’s defects, I assert, in order to make sure they are not threatening to the social structure. Individual marriages such as these make up the construct of societal safety and protection and must be selected carefully. Rochester so understands the need for control and the removal of self-definition from his bride that he will settle for nothing less. As Jane enters his house, he seems to exercise his power over her with much more satisfactory results, with “an influence that quite mastered me,—that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his” (Brontë 104). She is thus seen fit to be taken as a wife, but little does he know that although she will serve, she will not be mastered. She will not be a commodity to be traded simply because of her sex.

As an essential component to this system of keeping women in submission, substantiated by the scientific biological differences between the sexes, women were commoditized, leaving them completely dependent on men for their survival. In her
analysis of Claude Lévi-Strauss’ discussion of marriage, Fraiman explains “that women function as a kind of currency, their circulation binding and organizing male society” (73). They are the glue holding society together, traded between individual men to reaffirm each trader’s own subjectivity. Peter Bellis comments on Jacques Lacan’s idea of the scopic drive in “In the Window-Seat: Vision and Power in Jane Eyre.” In his discussion of “the gaze” from Lacan’s *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Bellis notes that “his lone example of the woman’s place in this visual structure clearly relegates her to the status of an object” (639). In *Jane Eyre*, for example, St. John, in his role of religious leadership, reveals his internalization of this trade by the way he talks about his very own sisters: “I know I have always loved my own sisters; and I know on what my affection for them is grounded,—respect for their worth, and admiration of their talents” (Brontë 234). With his attention to their value and performance, it seems as if he is not talking about human beings anymore. This female industry kept women in a place of being socially dependent upon men to not only determine their worth but care for them and keep them out of the hands of other men. Women rested completely in the custody of men for every aspect of their situation. They were left to hope that they were traded into kind hands and hope that once there they would be cared for.

Science of the day was able to give continued evidence for the maintenance of this system as scientists investigated the female body and its biological and sexual differentiation from the male body. Poovey affirms in a discussion of anesthesia and childbearing that, “by the mid-nineteenth century, women’s social dependence on men was increasingly justified by reference not to a woman’s fallen nature, but to this
biological difference” (25). Biological differences were linked to intellectual ones as well, making it common sense that women should be “shielded” from the world and kept from the unnecessary stress of determining their own life. Women were seen as intellectually unable to grasp the concepts that made the world function; therefore, it seemed logical that they should not be expected to make decisions within that realm. As medical men sought to authoritatively define women biologically, they took ownership of women’s bodies from them. Not only is a woman traded at will for business’ sake, but she is also defined physically, mentally and emotionally from outside forces. While considering a significant change for the English subject in the decades following the French Revolution Armstrong notes that “this later subject has no self to express until . . . she has acquired the cultural means of expressing it” (How Novels Think 55). Keeping her commoditized and under control thus made it possible to keep her body under ownership. The culture will not allow her the means to explore her subjectivity. It is vital for her to remain objectified so that man can retain his imagined identity as subject and not be tempted to break from the safety of society. Poovey notes in her study of the debates about the Matrimonial Causes Bill that when “a woman became what she was destined to be (a wife); she became ‘nonexistent’ in the eyes of the law” (52). She is recognized as a daughter simply because she is on the market and able to be traded; once her transaction has been completed there is no need to recognize her as any more than an object within the household. She is raised and courted in such a way that Eliot’s narrator notes that she “dictates before marriage in order that she may have an appetite for submission afterwards” (Eliot 66). This taste of authority is really a cruel one. As she first
interacts with society, she seems to command the attention of every man; she cannot fully grasp that she will fade into the wallpaper of the house of which she becomes lady.

Within the novels, we see this feminine dependence on their male counterparts for their very existence in the protagonists; they are kept trapped within the system, and they are very aware of their dependence and imprisonment that torments them. Women were thoroughly cognizant of their reliance on men, some believing it was truly necessary, but Langland argues “that is Eliot’s point: women have no meaningful sphere for social action” (98). They move within the novel, but never really affect the society or greater world around them. They cannot change the rules, they can only try to play the game and lose as little as possible. As he observes a shift in biographies from royalty to the common man, specifically of those imprisoned in mental institutions and prisons Foucault notes that “this turning of real lives into writing is no longer a procedure of heroization; it functions as a procedure of objectification and subjection” (Discipline 192). Although Foucault is referring to the charting of patient and inmate care, I assert that this is also the process of the Victorian novels we are considering. Within her novels, Langland says Eliot reveals a realism in which her “vision coincides so perfectly with patriarchal orthodoxy about the inconsequence and inanity of society and woman’s place within it” (99). Eliot paints the system that I have been suggesting within the lives of specifically her female characters. Brontë does a similar thing as she portrays Jane as a woman who has no one who has taken ownership of her, but must still find her way in order to stay alive. Jane is shown to possess “a private fear . . . that in thus acting for myself, and by my own guidance, I ran the risk of getting into some scrape” (Brontë 52).
She is very aware of her dependence on the men within the novel, and since she must act of her own accord, she runs the risk of being left to her consequences as punishment for such an act. It would be said that she shouldn’t have presumed to walk in a man’s world, and that her injury was her own fault. Yet, she is positioned so that no other choice remains for her until she is under the care of Rochester or St. John. Once in their custody, they immediately take her life into their hands by supplying her income and living arrangements. But in both instances, as soon as they attempt to send her life in a direction that tries her morally, she resists and flees to another location. Jane is a somewhat rare character in her dictation of her own life, as I discuss at greater length below. Perhaps it can be blamed on her education, or lower class. Since she is not from the middle class and works as a governess, she seems to be allowed a certain level of transgression because she does not know better. She is uncivilized, as an animal, and those around her discipline and train her towards submission. She is less of a threat when she breaks away from her owners, because she is not the symbol of values and motherhood within greater society, as are the women who would employ her. She is a servant, and uncouth behavior can be expected of persons of that class. Yet, as she struggles to find her way she cannot avoid the pressure of conformity as it attempts to crush her if she remains too far outside of compliance and with the lunatic sector of society.

Eliot’s and Brontë’s novels contain other women as well who will not endeavor to struggle against definition quite like Jane, but rather will resign themselves to their lot. As Mr. Bulstrode’s past is exposed in *Middlemarch*, his wife and family are left in shame and ruin. Mrs. Bulstrode’s reaction is to stay with him, and as much as it seems
magnanimous, she can do nothing else as she is really not an individual in her own right. She is simply an appendage; for her to go out on her own at that stage in her life would be like a leg trying to work and live separate from its body. Similarly, Celia and Dorothea also find themselves faced with destitution, but, fortunately for them, they are young enough to still be traded into security. They live under the care of their uncle, but he cannot give them name or place because they do not inherit from him. He seems so out of touch with reality that they might have had a similar story-line to Jane’s, sans boarding school, with the lack of guidance and protection he is able to give them. Opportunely, they are able to marry into status, money and protection. They have locked themselves into the cage of matrimony, but unlike Jane’s early imprisonments, theirs is, at the very least, not subject to the elements.

Even in situations of achieved safety, these women were not blind to and unaffected by their lack of subjectivity. After dreaming of great vistas of knowledge and purpose after her marriage, Dorothea is rudely awakened to “the stifling oppression of that gentlewoman’s world, where everything was done for her and none asked for her aid” (Eliot 261). She cannot even seem to articulate that she is without purpose, she is simply aware that she is without activity. Gilbert and Gubar comment that “Dorothea is imprisoned not just by Casaubon, or Brooke, then, but by a ‘wall-in maze’ of relationships in a society controlled by men who are very much like both of these men” (507). Her imprisonment stretches beyond her marriage and her actual home to the far reaches of society and life as she knows it. Langland observes that within Eliot’s novel “prosperous middle-class women come to inhabit a narrative empty space, a still center of
enforced inactivity the ‘gentle woman’s oppressive liberty’” (202). At best, a woman can serve as a cheerleader for aspiring men, “holding up an ideal for others in her believing conception of them” (Eliot 565). At the worst “she is a basil plant, feeding on a murdered man’s brains” (Langland 106). Langland suggests that by revealing the impotence of women within the social world and “exposing their apparent ignorance and inability to act effectively, the novel more seriously extends the power of the patriarchal realm it is seemingly criticizing” (98). Yet some glimpse from Dorothea’s courtship awakened her to a “sense of connection with a manifold pregnant existence,” which for her feminine life “had to be kept up painfully as an inward vision, instead of coming from without in claims that would have shaped her energies” (Eliot 261). She is without purpose, but unfortunately, not consciousness. She is locked in darkness with an awareness that light is absent. She desires greatness and a reason for existence; the trouble comes when desire for greatness turns into action.
CHAPTER II

THE LIFELESS MIRROR

In order to solidify the male position of subject within the system I am proposing, woman must be placed in the stance of object and then “educated” to remain in that place without resistance. The ideal Victorian woman that we observe within these novels becomes for man an object that is placed inside his home, something he has collected or acquired in order to echo himself just as the other decorations of his house do. She becomes something of a mirror, whose purpose is to reflect man’s preferred image of himself back to him. This role becomes so important within my proposed structure because she is the one who reassures man that he really is who he has manufactured his character to be. She reflects not only his identity but also his morality within the community. I would argue that her subordination to the place of object thus becomes vital to maintaining the order of Victorian society, at least the representation of it that we see within the novels. Within the structure I am postulating, her reflection keeps man existentially satisfied to the purpose and space of his existence, and that keeps him in the place that society needs to restrain him in order to maintain control over his individuality. This position of women is evidenced in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, where women are restricted to painfully small places in order to maintain the structure I am suggesting in which man possesses them more
completely and society to triumphs over the individual. Rochester attempts to objectify
Jane in her adornment, as she is a reflection on himself. Lydgate makes a similar move to
own Rosamond as he imagines the paradise that his new wife will create for him
domestically. Unfortunately, some of the women in these novels are aware of the tight
space that they occupy and must make a conscious decision to ignore their restriction or
resist it and face the consequences of rebellion. Women who chose the route of resistance
are subject to a discipline that is usually swift and harsh. Rosamond and Dorothea are
aware of the minute space they are allowed to occupy within marriage as they begin to
see the wide vistas they imagined before marriage shrink to catacombs after.

Within these novels, we can see nineteenth-century society’s tendency not
only to use discipline to keep both men and women under restraint, but also to use the
preemptive strategy of feminine education as evidenced in female schooling like Lowood
and Mrs. Lemon’s. First women are taught to internalize the idea that women are
intellectually and overall inferior to men. As we will see in later moments within the
novels, both Dorothea and Jane exemplify this behavior as they blame themselves for the
inadequacies and evil within their husband and fiancé. Within these two novels we will
see specific interactions between the masculine and feminine spheres and the individuals
that inhabit them, mainly within feminine schooling, that the novels suggest are a
representation of attitudes at large within Victorian society. Once these women believe
their inferiority, they are apt to believe anything else that man or their society tells them,
because they believe that they are dependent on men for their intellectual and physical
survival in the world. Ideally, once schooled into these beliefs these women are placed on
a pedestal as the angel of the house who is the moral compass for society. They will convert man from his barbaric ways to a properly civilized Victorian gentleman and thus save the society from him. Yet if they are unable to accomplish this then they become the whipping boy, absorbing both his and the endangered society’s rage at their failure. They are left to the violence of men without protection as punishment for not making him peaceful. The women in these novels do not seem to be outraged at this treatment and double standard because it is all executed under the guise of love and marriage. Each woman is deceived by the act of courting into believing that her lover is searching for a woman to love and share his life with, while he is simply appraising her as another piece of his collection of household items or servants. She is thus rescued by him from the horrors of spinsterhood, and therefore should be eternally grateful that he chose her, regardless of his gentle or brutal treatment of her as his wife. Her ownership by her husband and being stripped of her subjectivity are colored to be providential incidents for which she must count herself extremely lucky. Yet, some of the novels’ characters such as Jane (who glimpses marital reality during her engagement to Rochester) and Dorothea (who is exposed to this reality full-bore with Casaubon), struggle here and cannot suffer the shock of becoming nothing more than a mirror on the wall. As Dorothea clearly learns, her husband never desires an assistant to his work to allow her to grow in knowledge, but rather an immobile reflection of his status. She must deny her individuality under resigned submission or writhe under conscious restraint, fighting to free herself from securely locked cages. In this chapter, I discuss the power relations between men and women as theorized by Lucy Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir, and
show these as reflective of the trends in relations between the genders and society in the nineteenth century. Eliot’s *Middlemarch* and Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* function as a manifestation of this ideology by using women as objects to support male subjectivity, refusing them self-definition, and disciplining those who attempt to achieve their own subjectivity.

**Reflections of Him**

The male-female relationships within these novels seem to reflect the structure I am asserting. This structure is based on the theoretical observations of Lucy Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir. Within their theories man suffers loss at the lack of boundaries to his existence and so confines woman to his home as a mirror to reflect back his identity to himself. Once a woman has married, she enters her husband’s home as an object he has collected like the paintings on his walls and the rugs under his feet. Yet he will expect even more of her as he demands her service as well. She will attend to him and take care of his household while he forms her into his perfect reflection, as Sharon Locy notes in “Travel and Space in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*” that “the female child’s early life is a blank—as she is—until her encounter with the man who will assume a role in shaping the girl he will take as a bride” (106). Her blankness is what enables her to fill this reflective role within her marriage. Somewhere between servant and article she must attempt to discover who she is within his walls.

As Iris Young observes in her article “House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme,” it is in this role that Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir say she is
“deprived of active subjectivity because [her] activity concentrates on serving and supporting men in the home” (315). She is not building anything of her own; she is just hired help, supporting and maintaining what her husband chooses to build. She is consumed by his subjectivity and has none of her own. In quoting Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Emile Colley argues that a wife’s “dignity depends on remaining unknown; her glory lies in her husband’s esteem, her greatest pleasure is in the happiness of her family” (240). Similarly, the women within these novels are to remain unknown to their greater societies, without name or identity simply reflecting back those around them. According to Young, man’s need to place woman in this supportive role stems from the loss that everyone is born into as they leave their mother’s womb and are left in a world “without walls, with no foundation to [their] fragile and open-ended existence” (319). As a species we are terrified, seeking something on which to base our existence and purpose. We must have boundaries, definition to the known, something against which we can define ourselves. Young continues by arguing that this deficit is so traumatic that men seek to repair this loss by returning to the woman as a representative of the womb (320). He exercises nostalgia in that he seeks a substitute for the loss as opposed to coming to terms with it. There is simply no other option for him than to return to what provided his definition and safety, i.e. woman. He therefore must situate her in whatever way is necessary for him to affirm his own subjectivity and provide balm for his wound of separation. This existential need is central to the structure I am suggesting. It is this need that drives man to grasp at subjectivity and search for someone through whom he can prove his power. In order to fulfill this need, the role and purpose woman must adapt to is
that of the mirror. Young continues that “in [man’s] objectifying self-reflection woman serves as material both on which to stand and out of which to build, and women likewise serve as a primary object for reflecting himself, his mirror” (319). She is an object within his home, the mirror on his wall whose sole purpose is to reflect man back to himself. In Young’s estimation she is no longer human but raw material that may be used, molded, or traded to fulfill the man’s need for existential survival.

As evidenced in these novels, as his mirror, woman must be carefully contoured in order to reflect a moral man, therefore making him acceptable to the collective, conforming to their ideas of citizenship. According to Young, this act of his “self-affirming subjectivity is possible because she supports and compliments his existence as both an origin of his creativity and the product in which he can see his self reflected. She serves as the material envelope and container of his existence” (319). He is no longer floating unbounded in existence, but has erected walls to keep him safe and define him through separating himself from opposition, from what he is not. She becomes the measurement by which the world may judge him. As a representation of his position, Fraiman notes of characters like Aunt Pullet in The Mill on the Floss that she is “like her clothes, she is primarily ornamental, signifying her husband’s wealth and taste” (133). Her status as an ornament reflects her objectivity and her purpose, to complement and improve the appearance of him as a man. Arnold argues that “ideal beauty became defined as moral, such that judgments of ideal beauty related to perceptions about ideal social behavior. Because the established morality of this strong patriarchal society was necessarily dictated from a male subject position, it imposed its political values and
practices upon its judgment of beauty in females” (280). Her beauty and appearance, the way she is perceived by those around her becomes the measurement of her morality and submission to society. Her husband must maintain control of her and her beauty lest his own image be scarred by hers. He is not only trying to affirm his own identity, but also further define it within the nineteenth century’s cultural bounds of sanity, as defined as doing just as his neighbors do. Armstrong notes in her analysis of bourgeois morality and the material wealth of the modern nation that “materialism in the loose sense of the term—concern for property, the things of this world (especially things that can be bought), and the health of the body and its biological reproduction—consequently becomes the yardstick for bourgeois morality” (How Novels Think 28). Morality is central to the identity of the Victorian citizen, and he not only wishes to stabilize his own personal identity, but also his identity within the community. His female counterpart is the yardstick that he will be held against to determine if he will fit into proper respectable society.

The nineteenth-century woman within the framework I have suggested is the foundation of man’s and society’s identity; all of their stability rests in her remaining in objectivity. Arnold argues that:

In the context of Victorian culture at large, industrial development had ensconced middle class women in discrete domesticity while dispatching men to work in the factory or office. It has been well-documented that, as men and women became radically separated by their designated work roles, middle class women also experienced subordinated status in all aspects of public life from which they were barred: production of goods for sale, ownership of capital, legal rights to custody of children and property, participation in political processes, education. The economic system thus imposed its negative political consequences on the
subjective experience of individual women, such as those in Middlemarch. (267-68)

These women are relegated to a separate space outside of the system that furthers and structures the society that they live in and are controlled by. Poovey notes that women are threatening to the security of paternal relationship and male ownership of property:

“because of the place that woman occupied in the symbolic order, she was the guarantor of truth, legitimacy, property, and male identity” (80). She becomes the representative of decent middle-class Victorian society. She is no longer recognized as an individual, but rather as a symbol. She not only reflects man back to himself, but society back to itself as well. Foucault suggests in his book The History of Sexuality that throughout the history of the west power has dealt with sex by prohibiting it and saying to sex that its only option is to “renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed do not appear if you do not want to disappear. Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification” (84). I assert that power within the structure I am suggesting attempts to control women through prohibition as well and thus gives women the option of renunciation or suppression. Locy argues as she considers Lorna Ellis’ claims that within the novel “the female protagonist must, of necessity, ‘give up [some] aspects of her independence’ and ‘find ways to reconcile her view of herself with others’ expectations of her’” (106). Society and her own existential need to individuate are at war with one another.

Arnold further suggests of the female protagonist that “it becomes apparent to her that her personal development and her moral duty can never be united; to live by the
female moral standard of unselfishness means to give up personal agency, to practice what the narrator terms at first “the freedom of voluntary submission,” later “resolved submission,” and, finally “the retrospect of painful subjection to a husband” (280).

Individuals and the collective need to hold certain view of themselves in order to prevent cognitive dissonance and to continue peacefully though their lives. The female protagonist cannot move from her place or his structure is shaken, then he will be left feeling out of control, in the place Young calls nameless and boundless. Yet this proves problematic for some of the novel’s protagonists, as Arnold observes in his discussion of Franco Moretti’s idea of Bildung that “in Dorothea’s case, ‘formation as an individual in and for [herself cannot coincide with her] social integration as a simple part of the whole’” (279). She cannot achieve the development she seeks and still satisfy society’s demand for her individuality. On the other hand, Jane tells Rochester “wherever you are is my home—my only home” (Brontë 147). She means that she has had no family up until him, and that they are now linked together in that bond, providing her with roots to grow from. Yet her statement is ironic because Rochester and her society imagine her finding her home in him in a very different way. Through marriage to him she will become situated in him, tied to him so that she can find her identity and purpose in no other place than him. He will not be a dwelling for her to freely come and go from, but a prison where she is shackled by the identity and definition that he will give her.

In order for this woman to fulfill her purpose as reflective of man she must be restrained within bounds that permit her to do only that. Young observes that the nineteenth-century patriarchal system “allows man a subjectivity that depends on
women’s objectification and dereliction; he has a home at the expense of her homelessness, as she serves as the ground on which he builds” (319). I am asserting that her subordination is what ensures that the rest of the nineteenth-century world is able to function the way it always has. She provides order to a world recovering from chaos. With her safely in her place, danger is removed in the form of the unknown, which becomes defined, and the laws of society are established. Within my structure she is the crux of reality for her era, the very thin line between sanity and order, terror and madness. In a discussion of Peter Gaskell’s 1833 celebration of home, Poovey notes that “the illusion that freedom and autonomy existed for the man within the home therefore depended on the illusion that within the home no one was alienated—and this depended on believing that woman desired to be only what the man wanted her to be” (77-78). This era’s man as represented within these novels truly had to believe that it was her desire, as much as his, to fulfill the role that Young asserts is that of mirror. In order to conquer and subdue another soul man must redefine her as other. She cannot be like he is; by placing her within a completely different category, he may make assumptions about her to fulfill his own needs and subject her to experiences that he would never dream of allowing for himself. In this place of other she has no identity of her own, no purpose, and no life, which becomes even more evident in observation of the novel.

These Victorian novels illustrate this objectification and mirroring on a micro level. In Brontë’s novel, Rochester attempts to adorn and possess Jane, and as result she resists and flees leaving him. When Jane and Rochester finally disclose their emotions for each other and she accepts his proposal of marriage he begins to objectify her as if she
were a room to be decorated. He tells her that he will place a “diamond charm round your neck . . . I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings” (Brontë 155). He is trying to turn her plain exterior into one that would better reflect his view of himself. Yet his speech betrays that these embellishments are really shackles and irons. His desire to transform her is a desire to eradicate her from existence.

He falls in love with her because she seems a blank slate, with not much adornment of her own, as becomes evident by his constant description of her in an infantile state that he may mold as he wishes. She is submissive and seeks to serve him; she appears the perfect mirror, so he begins the process of decorating her to his tastes. Perhaps he is not completely malicious in this act, as he had probably seen many women doing the exact same thing to themselves. According to Young, woman “tries to envelop herself with decoration. She covers herself with jewelry, makeup, clothing, in the attempt to make an envelope, to give herself a place” (321). These women are trying to have bounds for their own identity since they have been denied that recognition from men. Jane distinctively feels this switch of possession as she “thought his smile was such as a sultan might . . . bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched” (Brontë 161). She courted on the level of his equal, in her mind, not seeing that he was appraising her just as he was Miss Ingram. Gilbert and Gubar note that “Rochester, having secured Jane’s love, almost reflexively begins to treat her as an inferior, a plaything, a virginal possession—for she has now become his initiate” (355). Suddenly, his real view of her becomes obvious and she rebels against him, begging him not to try to change her. His response is that he will honor her wishes until he possesses her completely, then she will reflect what he desires.
her to be. When she flees from the situation in which she knows she cannot survive, Rochester is left in chaos.

Rochester’s first wife is Bertha who is problematic in her inability or unwillingness to be the ideal wife. Once he returns to the continent he seems to drift around looking for his ideal and a suitable mirror. This becomes clear in his rage at Bertha’s audacity to have a self, life and sexuality that did not revolve around him. After Jane leaves he is unable to continue the search, and collapses into deep depression. It does not seem as if he misses her; he misses the security and definition she represented. We are told by the innkeeper that “he grew savage . . . on his disappointment: he never was a wild man, but he got dangerous after he lost her” (Brontë 258). Never once considering how it must be for her to live in that state daily as she fulfills his needs, he searches continuously for her out of fear of an unenveloped existence. Within the framework I am suggesting, he cannot live without her because she is the foundation to his existence and identity, the evidence of his self.

In Eliot’s novel, Rosamond and Lydgate offer another look into this female objectification as Lydgate reflects on the perfect womanhood he has discovered in her and how that will fulfill his needs for identity and foundation. As Rochester initially attempts to possess Jane, Rosamond is surveyed by Lydgate and is determined to be “sweet to look at as a half-opened blush-rose, and adorned with accomplishments for the refined amusement of man” (Eliot 256). She is a vase of flowers that will brighten his drawing room and a performer to entertain his guests. Gilbert and Gubar observe that Lydgate “values women mainly as a relaxing diversion or a subject or inquiry” (509). She
is exactly as he wants to represent himself to the world, she will reflect nicely on him, for:

he had found perfect womanhood—felt as if already breathed upon by exquisite wedded affection such as would be bestowed by an accomplished creature who venerated his high musings and momentous labors and would never interfere with them; who would create order in the home and accounts with still magic, yet keep her fingers ready to touch the lute and transform life in to romance at any moment; who was instructed to the true womanly limit and not a hair’s breadth beyond—docile, therefore, and ready to carry out behests which came from beyond that limit. (Eliot 334)

Her veneration of his thoughts and work affirm that he is all that he currently defines himself to be. She has the power to allow him escape from the reality he must endure because he can control and shape her into whatever pleases him. He significantly specifies that she will not go outside of her bounds, that she will accept her placement in his home. She will carry out his bidding, never questioning his wisdom. This in turn defines him as strong and knowledgeable, as a gentleman with refined tastes, laborious within the world, and worthy of such a possession.

According to Fraiman, in her reading of *Evelina*, men in that novel and—I would assert—in Brontë and Eliot’s as well “take advantage of female dependency to satisfy themselves. Both possess a young woman (whether briefly or permanently) in a way that impairs her self-possession. Both, finally, are aroused by an enfeebling female innocence, and the roles they play in relation to this are complimentary” (45). These men have no interest in who she is or what she may become. He must possess her in order to control what she reflects back onto his identity. As a body cannot have two owners, she is stripped of her control and subjectivity. Rochester and Lydgate are both attracted by the
youth and naivety of Jane and Rosamond. Both women are in essence unshaped clay that is still moldable into any form that these men would want them to be. By seeking out a woman at this stage of life, they are insuring that their conquest will be easy and so they will be affirmed as strong and worthy of their prize. By restricting feminine youth to small spaces, they ensure that their word and desires will not be questioned and they may rule their houses and hence their world unopposed.

The Victorian woman, within these and other novels, is restricted to minute spaces as man attempts to possess her and as her society resists and stifles her individualism. In the development and maintenance of characters like Maggie and Lucy in *The Mill on the Floss* by nineteenth-century society, Fraiman observes that these women are “excluded from boy’s roving, self-enlarging genre, are ushered into a diminishing space. Adult feminity . . . seems to require live burial in the smallest closets of a large house” (133). She becomes part of the home she in enclosed in, locked away in the drawing rooms and feminine spaces. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that “the woman who yearns to escape entirely from the drawing rooms and patriarchal mansions obviously cannot” (338). Even in her journey throughout the novel, she stays restricted in the small space of a town or two, rarely ever traveling outside of those bounds. Her life thus becomes minute in space, experience, and social encounters. Langland argues that within the novels “social life is represented only insofar as it confirms the triviality of women’s lives” (99). The descriptions of feminine life are usually snapshots of conversations about who will marry whom and who has bought or acquired something new. Women do not seek out their self or their place in the world, Fraiman continues:
“needless to say, this is not the steady march to masculine selfhood, but a slippery antiexpedition to femaleness, which threatens to be crippling” (133). The female protagonist’s character development is not one of massive moves to discovery and subjectivity, but rather a restricted and frustrated development that usually results in her surrender to an advantageous marriage.

This diminishing space can be seen in both Brontë’s and Eliot’s treatment of feminine lives within the novels. Langland notes that in Eliot’s description of ladies’ lives “the adjective ‘little’ crops up fairly often” (96). For example, Eliot’s narrator comments that “Dorothea seldom left home without her husband, but she did occasionally drive into Middlemarch alone, on little errands of shopping or charity such as occur to every lady of any wealth when she lives within three miles of a town” (315). This representation “belittles the life of a lady and evacuates it of significance. There exists a still center, a blank, in Eliot’s representation of women’s lives” (Langland 96). In Brontë’s novel, Locy observes, Jane can be seen “looking out into a world much wider than the one in which she finds herself imprisoned,” and at Lowood “the overall feeling of the place is claustrophobic, hemmed in as it is with routine, regulation, and deprivation” (109, 111). She is hemmed in from all sides, and she seems to have nowhere to go or grow. Completely restricted in her earlier stages of development, her potential for revolutionary development seems bleak. As Judith Leggatt and Christopher Parkes state in “From the Red Room to Rochester’s Haircut: Mind Control in Jane Eyre,” as Jane’s character progresses, she “moves from the small, enclosed spaces of the window seat and the red room through progressively more expansive horizons” (179). But these more expansive
horizons are an illusion, because “Jane’s imagination is controlled [and] every part of the country is conceived of as part of the carceral network, there is no longer an ‘outside’ to which the rebel can escape” (179). There is no place for her to run, even the idea of escaping has been removed, and she can only situate herself within the space available to her. I would argue that these areas may be described in the same way that Foucault depicts complex spaces created by discipline within the educational system, these spaces “mark places and indicate values; they guarantee the obedience of individuals” (Discipline 148). The spaces that women are confined to are equally effective at keeping women within their allowed sphere of activity and subjectivity. This restriction of women to very tight spaces develops, in part, as a reaction against the era’s perceived threat of individualism. In her discussion concerning the Victorian novel’s inability to contain the tension between individualism and the social body, Armstrong discerns that these novels “renounced individualism in the interest of social stability only with great reluctance, however, leaving the reader with a world that was not only monster free but also significantly diminished” (How Novels Think 54). The nineteenth-century man’s world has become diminished in the places he is allowed to tread within societal acceptance and sanity, and so woman’s must also be reduced.

The Victorian woman as we see her depicted within these novels is aware of her imprisonment and must decide whether to submit to it or resist. In Brontë’s novel, Jane is repetitively imprisoned in just such a way. While she is at Gateshead, she is consistently confined to hiding places behind curtains and out of the world of self-determination. Her stay in the red-room is perhaps her most impactful restraint. She is
placed there because she dared to defend herself from the violent blows that sought to keep her in her place. She reacts and resists, and so is literally buried in the small closets of Fraiman’s large house. In Eliot’s novel, too, Rosamond sits quietly, dedicated to her embroidery she suddenly stops “and laying her work on her knee . . . contemplate[s] it with an air of hesitating weariness” (Eliot 91). It seems she is hesitant to recognize the weariness of her lot so early in her life. To become unsatisfied or keenly aware of the closeness of the walls that enclose her would be to allow the seeds of insanity to begin to germinate. Dorothea becomes similarly aware of the reality of her marital existence in contrast to her earlier ideals as Arnold suggests that “she experiences the constraints of political and economic practices that partition Victorians into separate gendered spheres and hierarchical power relations; however, she continually privileges the aesthetic allure of a possible ultimate meaning arising from that same set of cultural practices that subordinate her” (265-266). The novel tells us that she “has not distinctly observed but felt with a stifling depression, that the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband’s mind were replaced by ante-rooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither” (Eliot 186). She is now aware that she is trapped. Even the great mind that her husband seemed to boast contained such vastness, she has found to be small and confining. She has nowhere to go and “having once embarked on your marital voyage, it is impossible not to be aware that you make no way and that the sea is not within sight—that, in fact, you are exploring an enclosed basin.” She must now decide whether to resign herself to her lot by submitting and ignoring her restraints or resist.
In order to ensure that she remains within locked doors, her society takes certain measures to enforce the ideals of feminine purpose and place. Arnold suggests that “social structures are inscribed upon women with a coercive force similar to the manner in which a sculptor shapes inert material into a form” (276). She is molded and chiseled into the form that society needs her to be using different tools to achieve the desired shape. One such tool is an extension of the sacrifice of individuation for societal protection that is demanded of her male counterpart. He achieves illusionary individuation within the societal bounds, satisfying his need for purpose and place while alleviating his fears of the endless unknown. Whether society gives him full rein to determine everything about who he will become and what he will do is weighted against the very real recognition of himself as a subject. He may not choose everything, but he is respected as soul and mind of an individual with claims and rights to certain freedoms. Woman, on the other hand, is allowed no such space. She is denied any individualism by definition; she is subject to, as is the heroine of *Evelina*, according to Fraiman, “deindividuation and conventionalization” (53). She does not have an existential question to answer. The story of her development is “circularity, belatedness, and futility” (53).

**Self-Regulation: The New Discipline**

We see within these novels that, in order for society to ensure that women internalized the prescriptions and definitions bestowed on them by nineteenth-century society and stayed within their place, women who left this restricted scope were disciplined. According to Leggatt and Parkes, the novel “presents a modern view of the
nation-state in which all spaces, even domestic ones, are part of a larger network of discipline” (170). This discipline became so ingrained that it was no longer necessary to use brutal tactics: “the rise of the modern nation-state is marked by a shift away from spectacular forms of punishment, such as public hangings and floggings, to structural forms of discipline, ones built into the shape of society” (170-171). Society had begun to police and discipline itself in such a way that its members were unaware of even doing it, making it even easier for control to be maintained without rebellion. According to Foucault in his consideration of the exertion of power without impeding progress, “the Panopticon’s solution to this problem is that the productive increase of power can be assured only if, on the one hand, it can be exercised continuously in the very foundations of society, in the subtlest possible way, and if, on the other hand, it functions outside these sudden, violent, discontinuous forms that are bound up with the exercise of sovereignty” (Discipline 208). This system of surveillance has moved from the prison to the common English town through the eyes of its citizens keeping constant watch on each other. This method is far more effective than the tyrant ruler who beheads those who rebel, now the very foundations of this society are kept safe by the members themselves. This power, that Foucault observes within the police force, “in order to be exercised . . . had to be given the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible” (214). Its eye never sleeps and every action and even thought are subject to its judgment and punishment. Leggatt and Parkes further Foucault’s observations in noting that “because the individual is held within the regularly configured institutions of the carceral network,
he or she is less able to slip outside the bounds of society and even less able to imagine an outside” (171). So rebellion is stifled at its very roots by the belief that it is an impossibility within the bounds of reality and its laws.

In order for a woman like Dorothea to achieve self-determination, Arnold comments in his consideration of feminine Bildung, “she [must] engage in a speculative project of a radical nature for her time: she must transgress inflexible gender boundaries if she is to succeed” (273). She must do more than just find a quiet place to be different; she must cross her societal scripts and threaten the social structure with her transgression. Transgression is not something that Victorian society or the novel takes lightly. According to Armstrong, the novel of this era “not only portrayed all women who expressed extreme forms of individualism as extremely unattractive but also punished them so harshly as to persuade a readership that the very excesses that once led to self-fulfillment and the illusion of a more flexible social order now yielded exactly the opposite results” (How Novels Think 79). Within the novel her only hope of self-determination was to try to present herself in such a way as to attract the right kind of husband. To lessen her attractiveness while on the market for a survivable situation was to sentence her to death. If she could not change the way the system works—a system which Armstrong describes as a “dominant political order which depended, among other things, on representing women as economic and political objects”—she must find a way to survive in it, throwing off anything, including individuation, that might jeopardize her continued existence (Desire 15). Once convinced that it was futile to try to individuate
and determine her own self, woman was fertile to internalize male and societal expectations that were presented as prerequisites to settling a beneficial situation.

Convincing these women that they were intellectually inferior to men was the first step to internalizing further prescriptions. If a woman understood her brain to be less than a man’s, it would fall into obvious succession that she would be in need of his wisdom and guidance. This became extremely important in the nineteenth century as more and more men were vying for active citizenship. There had to be a logical reason why women could not join the revolution and claim citizenship for themselves. Colley says of the earlier generations that “one answer was by placing renewed emphasis on the physical, intellectual, emotional and functional differences between men and women” (239). If men and women could be distinguished as so entirely different in every aspect, then it followed clearly that they may not both be capable or ready for the responsibilities of self governing. Colley notes that Rousseau was convinced of this fundamental difference as he claimed that woman was born to obey, that she was “less clever and physically weaker, she was an essentially relative creature, more dependent on her men-folk then they were on her” (239). She therefore was not capable of entering the world at large or participating in society and its creation and maintenance and, according to Colley’s interpretation of Rousseau, “the confines of her home were the boundaries of her kingdom. This was where she exercised a gentle and improving sway over her husband and forged the next generation, breast-feeding and brainwashing her children into patriotic virtue.” So, she was vital to the continuation of society in that she carried and birthed the children, and then trained them into acceptable citizens, but she could not be
trusted with the responsibility of altering government. This extremely restricted role and space become more evidently occupied in the era’s novels.

Within both novels, Dorothea and Jane have both internalized this inferiority so that they own male faults as entirely their own. As Dorothea attempts to expand her horizons through learning Greek, she is “shocked and discouraged at her own stupidity” (Eliot 58). She acknowledges a “painful suspicion” that there “might be secrets not capable of explanation to a woman’s reason” (58). Her education has not been one that has prepared her with the skills necessary to just know the value of Greek accents. Yet a lack of experience or preparation is translated into a smaller mental faculty. She has internalized that her biology has predisposed her to lesser understanding, and therefore does not even attempt to find another explanation for her difficulty in study. As Jane wanders though the gardens of Thornfield wrestling with her emotions and assumptions of her necessary departure, Rochester finds her and commands her into his presence. She is convinced that he is going to marry Miss Ingram because he has contrived to make her believe that so that he could remain in control of not only her emotions, but also her movements. He continues his game as they walk through the garden and she confesses that “I became ashamed of feeling any confusion: the evil—if evil existent or prospective there was—seemed to lie with me only; his mind was unconscious and quiet” (Brontë 149). The confusion is a sign to her of her own instability and insanity. She must be outside of some moral realm into the territory of the lunatic for her mind to be thus disorientated. She even goes so far as to define it as evil, and it of course must rest with her because he appears so composed. If an evil was being committed, it is on the part of
Rochester, who is attempting to control her like a puppet. But, like Dorothea, she has been indoctrinated with this inferiority complex to such an extent that she automatically assumes that the fault and evil must lie with her. Once these women had internalized this submission to the wisdom of men and how they see things, it is easy to begin to fill their minds with the expectations of what they were for and should do.

The women of many eras, but specifically the Victorian women we see in these novels, are placed on a pedestal with the ideal that it is their duty to civilize man, yet they plummet into the role of scapegoat as they are unable to demand change. With the Angel in the House ideal inundating Victorian society’s view of women, it became natural to focus woman’s purpose to not only caring for and supplying man’s needs, but to improving him as well. According to Armstrong in her discussion of Fredric Rowton’s anthology of female poetry, female desire, if she was allowed to contain any, “must be turned to the rhetorical work of transforming the male from a competitive brute into a benevolent father” (Desire 56). He is, by nature, viewed as rough and uncivilized, and so it becomes her job as the guarantor of truth to conform him to the societal allowance of father. The assumptions here allow for so many of the constructs of this male-female dependence to continue. Because he is assumed to be uncivilized, all kinds of atrocities and faults can be attributed to that trait and therefore excused. It also becomes her responsibility to make him into something else, so that if she fails, her absorption of the consequences seems justified. This appears to be a place of power for the woman as Armstrong notes in her treatment of changes in the sexual contract, “the dynamics of the sexual exchange are apparently such that the female gains authority only by redeeming
the male, not by pursuing her own desires” (*Desire* 55). But it is really a trap, another place where she is defined and restricted with no means of escape. She really has no power to change or define man because she has no subjectivity, yet she will be held accountable for not completing what is impossible for her. Her humanity is farther removed in this dual placement of pedestal and scapegoat, yet it is hidden behind the veil of love.

A mask of love and marriage is employed within these novels to conceal and continue this treatment of women. In looking into *David Copperfield*, Poovey notes that woman must be thus purged or cured in order for a “sphere to exist that is outside and different from the sphere of market relations . . . only then will there be a place in which the (male) individual’s desires can be produced as an acquisitive drive and then domesticated as its economic aggression is rewritten as love” (122). As aggression is amended to love, specifically the love that leads to marriage, it seems that everything is just renamed so that it is more comfortable to a proper conscience. But Arnold suggests that there are “similarities between the process of carving sculpture and the process of inscribing Victorian woman’s gender roles in the new bride, both of which are achieved by discarding unwanted parts of the original form” (276). She is being recreated in marriage, parts of her that prove offensive or troublesome to the society as a whole are stripped off and she is given a new identity. Baruch notes that Hegel is a spokesperson for the nineteenth-century ideal that “women have their essential destiny in marriage and there only” (336). Because woman has been commoditized within nineteenth-century society, the male-female relationship has become one of the marketplace, a business
transaction. By feminine civilizing, the male aggression and competition to possess woman can attain a semblance to love. This move is necessary to keep the relationship from appearing as it actually is. To describe the marriage relationship as strictly of power relations and ownership threatens to prick the consciousness of a sensitive Victorian society, thus calling into question abuses previously swept aside. By disguising the trade with love and devotion, warm feelings are experienced that mask the recognition of human trafficking. With this assumption in place, women are shamed and punished for revealing any desire for a situation other than the one that God and man have seen fit to bless them with. Cries of oppression or abuse would have thus appeared the cries of a lunatic, easily ignored.

This woman as portrayed in these novels is expected to be grateful that she is owned by man, yet some, like Jane, cannot and crave subjectivity even as they do not possess the words to express that desire. She should be content to stay in the place she is assigned, grateful that someone has taken ownership of her. Poovey argues that two assumptions that pervaded even the minds of advocates of expanding women’s employment were “that women would work only out of necessity and the belief voiced by conservatives that women’s proper work was moral superintendence and (unpaid) domestic labor” (159). Yet even as Jane attempts to settle down with Rochester and leave the workforce, something in her resists. In terms of Jane development, Locy argues that “marriage to such a man would be a mistake, and Jane fears being enslaved both by his desire to possess her and by her own passionate love for him. She fears losing herself in him” (114). This loss of self is exactly the one thing that will make her lose the overall
battle for subjectivity and freedom. Yet Armstrong notes of the unmarried woman within fiction that it is evident that “happiness came to depend instead on her ability to renounce desire and accept a position . . . in this way, British fiction replaced self-expression with self-government as the key to social success” (*How Novels Think* 52). In order for her to find happiness and social success she must lose herself in the identity of another, as any other solution brings with it discipline.

As seen in Jane’s imprisonment in the red-room, Armstrong suggests of fiction written after the mid-century that women within these novels are severely punished “if they resist the established forms of political authority, no matter how ineffectual their resistance turns out to be” (*Desire* 55). According to Foucault in his discussion of the English prison, this type of imprisonment is very effective, as “isolation provides a ‘terrible shock’ which, while protecting the prisoner from bad influences, enables him to go into himself and rediscover in the depths of his conscious the voice of good” (*Discipline* 122-123). Her prison becomes a form of discipline that should make her a better citizen and drive the evil from her heart. He continues that “the prison would constitute the ‘space between two worlds’ the place for the individual transformation that would restore to the state the subject it had lost” (123). It is extremely efficient as a form of discipline because of its “triple function as an example to be feared, instrument of conversion and condition of apprenticeship.” Although these women should be grateful for the “apprenticeship” they are being offered, they cannot seem to convince themselves that everything is as it should be and that they are the luckiest creatures in the world. So it is with Jane; after eight years at Lowood, her discontent returns as she says, “I desired
liberty; for liberty I gasped . . . it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication; for change, stimulus: that petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space . . . grant me at least a new servitude!” (Brontë 52).

She begins crying for liberty, for freedom from the oppressive definition and restraint in which society has attempted to confine her. Her cry disintegrates under the pressure of a breeze barely blowing. Realizing the futility of her desire she acquiesces to plea for stimulus and change. Again there is no place for such a request to exist; it does not fit within the bounds and definition of reality. So, she finally returns to earth to beg for a new servitude. She cannot fill any role other than servant; it is the only place she has been allowed to occupy. As much as she desires something different, she recognizes that there is not even language to express something different than what currently exists.

The women of Middlemarch experience a similar discontent as they recognize the conflict of their desires with the stations allowed to them. In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea and Letty, a daughter of the Garths, cannot seem to find satisfaction in their objectivity, just as Jane cannot, even though it is dangerous and impossible for them to seek out anything else. Dorothea recognizes the disconnect between her inner desires and what is permitted as “with such a nature, struggling in the bands of a narrow teaching, hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses, a walled-in maze of small paths that led no whither” (Eliot 24). She seems to have found the Holy Grail in Casaubon, who she thinks will release her to greater knowledge and vistas. But we quickly become aware, and Gilbert and Gubar point out that “he only perceives Dorothea as a decorous complement to his own existence, a moon . . . a secretary and a
scribe, an appreciative representative of the public, even an apostle to carry on his mission after his demise” (501). She is his apostle and “the eroticism of inequality—the male teacher and the enamored female student . . . illustrates both how dependent women are upon male approval and how destructive such dependence is” (506). She is of course disappointed with the reality of her situation and finds herself trapped, as Jane is, crying for simply a new servitude, a new closet to inhabit. We receive a telling glimpse into the development of these assumptions at the family level in the home of the Garths. Ben and Letty are a brother and sister pair who reflect the practice of ingraining prescriptions. Ben states that “it was clear that girls were good for less than boys, else they would not always be in petticoats which showed how little they were meant for” (Eliot 789). In his young mind, it makes perfect sense that women have no purpose, because their clothes, the way society has garbed them, say that they are prepared for sitting and adorning drawing rooms. His sister Letty is a very bright young girl who seems to writhe under the submission that her mother tries to teach her. But out of compassion, her mother continues to push her into that place. It seems she knows that if Letty does not come to terms with the way things are that she will suffer and yet still end up in the same place as if she had simply consented. After trying to show that she knows an answer that her brother does not, that she is intellectually comparable to him, her mother replies, “When your brother began, you ought to have waited to see if he could not tell the story. How rude you look, pushing and frowning, as if you wanted to conquer the world with your elbows” (Eliot 233). It is not acceptable that Letty should be trying to conquer anything; that is far outside the prescription for an object. Mrs. Garth is also reminding her that her
assertion of her own power and will is deemed unattractive and will jeopardize her on the marriage market. It appears that Mrs. Garth is trying to educate her daughter on how to navigate the narrow passages reserved for feminine movement.

Not only are the women of these novels educated by their mothers, but their message is reinforced by the female education and the definitions of marriage, which define them as both ornament and servant. If women were sent to school, they were able to be indoctrinated even further in order to internalize societal prescriptions. Schools for women, as seen in *Jane Eyre*, focus on drawing-room skills. They are taught to be ladies: taught to draw, sew, speak French and supervise households. Everything that they learn is to prepare them to be the entertainer who, as Lydgate desires, can bring romance at any moment and is an efficient and submissive household manager. Even beyond these skills, they are taught the ways of the male-female relationship as they watch Mr. Brocklehurst interact with the teachers. He runs the school as lord and king, severely punishing any that would resist him. What the girls observe on a micro level are the consequences for any type of resistance from their prescribed role, which is reflected on the macro level. In *Middlemarch*, Rosamond has been educated in the same way, as she is the top of her class at Mrs. Lemon’s. She seeks to move herself upwardly through marriage because that is all she has been prepared to do. She has mastered the art of being an ornament, but her education will not stop there.

A girl’s education is furthered in her marriage. Baruch observes that, within the nineteenth-century novel, “the heroine longs for a marriage that will increase her knowledge, often in some wide experiential sense” (336). This is different from their
male counterpart in that “while men, a Rochester, for example, have often expected marriage to root them into the social order, women . . . have turned to marriage to achieve the goals of romantic individualism, those of increased knowledge, enhancement of feeling and experience” (340). This is exactly what Dorothea envisions, a “really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it” (Eliot 6). Dorothea seeks out this kind of advancement as a hopeful escape from the restriction and imprisonment of marriage. In her consideration of *Middlemarch* Arnold notes that “through a web of metaphors based on light, the text consistently marks a personally defined aesthetic ideal of ultimate meaning as an ideological balm for gender subordination” (266). Yet Baruch remarks that Mrs. Sarah Stickney Ellis reveals a nineteenth century’s position on women’s education as she claims “that no husband was ever happy that his wife could read Virgil without a dictionary” (337). The novel will make this view abundantly clear to the extremely naïve Dorothea the further she embarks on wedded life. Arnold further observes that “when she marries Casaubon to gain access to his knowledge, his valued ‘standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly’ will prove to be inaccessible to her because it is a product of the same structures of stratification that dictate her dependent status in the male-dominated political economy” (266). She cannot escape the structures that define her no matter how hard she tries. She has been prepared for marriage through her education of the ways society desires her to be; now she will continue her education on a more specialized level, absorbing just how her husband wishes her to be. Unfortunately, the very things she thinks she is choosing, Arnold argues, “by default, espouse political
or economic positions that ultimately consign her to a subordinate gender role” (267). She has been shaped and molded into a societally acceptable woman, and now she will continue her sculpting to become the mirror that reflects exactly what her husband needs. Even during the courting period, Fraiman observes that he is testing her out to see if she might be made of the material that he desires; he “schools her in order to wed her” (6). Further, Locy claims that “the woman’s identity is first shaped by and then subsumed legally by that of her husband and where she exists in a kind of protective custody under his roof” (108). His education is much different than hers as he accepts this custody of her.

A man, such as those we observe within these novels, is educated so that he may make a place for himself within the world. He must become shrewd and learn the intricacies of the power relations so that they are never in danger of collapsing. As he educates his daughters and his neighbor’s daughters, he makes sure that the cycle of female mirroring continues. According to Armstrong in her consideration of Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*, there lies within this contract an “invisible power—the power of education, indeed of language itself” (*Desire* 33). It is his words that define and order her being, that allow or disallow her possibilities within existence. It is his words that rule her reality, words that are not her own, that she cannot speak or change. She must live in the constructs he builds for her, for she is powerless to build anything else without the materials of language at her disposal.
CHAPTER III

POWERFUL LANGUAGE AND THE
FEMALE DEMON

In order for the structure I have proposed to maintain masculine and thus its own power, men must control not only subjectivity but language. Within these novels, a struggle for control over language and the text, specifically within male-female relationships, can be observed. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane battles for the verbal authority to define herself, as those around her seem to prefer her silence. From her life at Gateshead where John and Mrs. Reed attempt to silence her through violence and imprisonment, to her education at Lowood, to her battles with Rochester and St. John as they try to wed her, Jane is continually struggling for power. According to Gilbert and Gubar, St. John represents patriarchy and thus “Jane must symbolically, if not literally, behead the abstract principles of this man before she can finally achieve her true independence” (365). St. John proves to be the most dangerous of captors for Jane’s struggle for subjectivity because “where Brocklehurst had removed Jane from the imprisonment of Gateshead only to immure her in a dank valley of starvation, and even Rochester had tried to make her the ‘slave of passion,’ St. John wants to imprison the ‘resolute wild free thing’ that is her soul in the ultimate cell, the ‘iron shroud’ of principle” (Gilbert 366). On principle, women do not have the power of language and this verbal economy is one where women are removed from the flow of important information. I am using the term
verbal economy here to describe a closed system of informational exchanges that reveals another way in which women and even their thoughts are treated as items to be traded.

Through controlling the information that the women have access to these men are able to begin to possess the very thoughts and mind of the feminine half of society, which also restricts their ability to self-define. Feminine life thus becomes a series of illusionary choices of self-determination, especially obvious in the ritual of courting and within the relationship of marriage. This becomes obvious within the novel *Middlemarch* as Casaubon attempts to control and direct Dorothea’s life from even beyond the grave, and in *Jane Eyre* as St. John wrestles to keep the control he had enjoyed over his sisters by determining their marriages. Due to male self-focus, this illusion begins to break down after the marriage vows, and these women suddenly become aware of the narrowly restricted lives they have been condemned to. Once they are aware, they can either choose to ignore the reality of their situation or remain conscious of it.

Within these novels, we see that this consciousness is a very dangerous one, as the rage and madness that results from it are not tolerated by Victorian society and generally produce physical prisons in addition to existential ones, as even her consciousness becomes a threat to social structure. Dorothea comments on many occasions of her knowledge of an approaching insanity from her restriction. Similarly, Jane’s teeters on this edge as she is doubled in Bertha, and we see the parts of Jane that would fight back and resist characterized in Bertha and then demonized in order to exact punishment. These women are thus revealed as a threatening and unstable force that must be controlled and moralized back into its proper place in society. This is achieved by
controlling her sexuality and the morality of her education. Transgressors of this system are defined as “bad subjects” whose image, when they are women, becomes one that is demonized. These women are punished for their crimes by both circumstances within the novel and by other male and female characters. For example, Casaubon and John Reed attempt to punish Dorothea and Jane for their action towards subjectivity and Rosamond is similarly punished by the novel in her miscarriage. The most troubling discipline is exerted by women on women, as is done to Jane as she is imprisoned in the red-room. In this chapter, I will attempt to show that the control of feminine subjectivity discussed in the last chapter is achieved first through the control of language and the mental colonization of the women within the novels as reflective of trends within Victorian society. This control is furthered in the education against and punishment of both individual women and feminine traits that go outside of the approved feminine sphere.

The Verbal Economy

Within this system, language is situated in the hands of men in order to control subjectivity. We can see examples of this control within the medical and authorial fields of the nineteenth century as well as within the dichotomous texts of conduct manuals. At a time when the world is defined by male discovery, politics and religion, women are left male words to try to express and define their existence. Her very body is defined by male doctors who are seeking to explain their own ideologies of sex and gender rather than discovering what may break down the structure with which they are familiar. They appear to fear women and their unknown suppressed power. Poovey
observes in her discussion of the use of anesthesia during child birth that medical men of
the time possessed a fear that “women would regress to brute animals, a state in which
they would be beyond the doctor’s control” (32). It seems that maintaining very strict
control over her body and her subjectivity became an issue of self-preservation. In order
to do this effectively, men needed to keep language in their own hands. Armstrong argues
in her discussion of the novel that a “modern culture depends on a form of power that
works through language--and particularly the printed word--to constitute subjectivity”
(Desire 25). The novel then becomes a place to work out and reflect a desired system on
a community and to inundate its female protagonists with those prescripts.

Women, at the time, had begun to write novels, yet Mary Ann Evans still
wrote Middlemarch under the pen name George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë penned Jane
Eyre as Currer Bell. Nicole Fisk notes in “‘I Heard Her Murmurs’: Decoding Narratives
of Female Desire in Jane Eyre and Secresy” that “an increased use of pen names reflects
the nineteenth century’s more conservative stance towards women writers” (223). It was
not openly acknowledged that women had the intellectual capacity to write something of
complexity and value, as they were still excluded from other genres of writing. They
could not be taken seriously in the medical, political or religious realm, for these were
places of importance, where the real thought and construction of society took place. It
obviously seems a complication to the control of language that women writers were able
to write, especially about these female characters. While I cannot deal with this issue in
its entirety within the pages of this text, it does seem strange that women authors would
continue to draw women within the system they themselves were seemingly trying to
break free from by the basic act of authorship. It seems to me that even though they were moving forward toward a new system simply by writing, they themselves were still completely entrenched within the reality that surrounded them. Only able to write what they knew, they were not even consciously aware of many of their limiting beliefs. In addition, women were raised and molded through the era’s conduct books to reside in what Fraiman terms a place of conflict between “one area [that] concerns what we would loosely call affiliation: the desire for dyadic, familial, and also wider communal ties [and another] area ha[ving] to do with ambition, especially the ambition to study, to gain intellectual authority, and perhaps to write” (16). So, they are brought up with an ambition that is later stifled, denied and mocked, as becomes evident in the verbal economy of the novel.

Within the novel a struggle between the sexes to control language and the text becomes evident, revealing a verbal economy in which men are in control. Sarah Maier suggests in “Portraits of the Girl-Child: Female Bildungsroman in Victorian Fiction” that “women . . . in Victorian society . . . like children, were to be seen and not heard. Women were not to have opinions, comments or desires and thus, no independent thought” (322). Their silence and invisibility is what helped insure that they would only fill the roles and space allotted to them. Fraiman perceives that between male and female characters like Elizabeth Bennett and Mr. Darcy in Pride and Prejudice there exists a “matching [of] wits, more than flirtation, [which] is a struggle for the control of the text” (77). This is most often seen between couples in the courting stage. It is a sort of battle for power to make sure the man holds an acceptable amount of it, and I assert that the woman is
adequately fooled as to the level of muteness that will be required of her after marriage as opposed to the quantity allowed by the premarital interactions. Fraiman further observes that, within the text of *Pride and Prejudice*, as “much as women talk in [the] novel, the flow of important words, of what counts as ‘intelligence,’ is regulated largely by men; in this verbal economy, women get the trickle-down of news” (70). Women are able to share the gossip and the hearsay of domestic life, but even that information has been doled out to them in doses by their husbands. In discussing Middlemarch society, Gilbert and Gubar note that “it is women who are associated with spinning this fabric of opinion that constitutes the community, because it is they who sew together the threads of connection” (522). Even though women sew the connection, they do so with limited thread as they are left with a stunted and shaded amount of information. According to Foucault in his discussion of sex, “in order to gain mastery over it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present” (*History* 17). Power and control are found within language. Women do not help to build or create the information, so they become circulators of the world man desires to create, and her silence is preferred.

The feminine silence as preference is observable throughout Jane’s life within *Jane Eyre*. In one of the first scenes of her life as the novel depicts it, Jane is in battle with John verbally even before violence has occurred. Janet Freeman notes in “Speech and Silence in *Jane Eyre*” that in their verbal warfare John Reed defines Jane by calling her a dependent, and Jane responds by trying to reclaim the subjective power of language
by defining him, but she is only able to say what he is like (687). She struggles to define him as he has her, but finds herself without the language to do so. John’s reaction to her attempt is physical violence as an expression of his anger at her even trying to possess verbal domination. Once Jane is locked in the red-room, Maier notices that she is told “that ‘only on conditions of perfect submission and stillness’ will she be liberated because any of Jane’s attempts at speech are interpreted by Mrs. Reed as ‘violence’ that is ‘repulsive’” (321). Mrs. Reed recognizes that feminine voice is not something that has been granted within the patriarchal system that they inhabit, especially not to a woman of a lower class. As a woman that despises anything that rocks the system or brings to consciousness her own captivity, she despises the open rebellion that Jane expresses.

When Mr. Brocklehurst comes to meet Jane and Mrs. Reed, the adults talk about Jane as if she is not even present in the room, again defining her and bounding her identity with their words instead of her own. Freeman continues by arguing that Jane’s “powerlessness, in the presence of those two, is conveyed by the way they dominate her speech” (689). Again she rebels by angrily retorting to Mrs. Reed that she and no one else will define her life at Gateshead. When she meets Rochester at Thornfield it becomes evident to Fraiman that she “is most acceptable to him when she holds her tongue” (694). He desires the verbal control that he demonstrates as the fortune-teller by “giving out to one woman after another his privileged version of her past, present, and future” (694). As Rochester takes on the female role of the fortune teller, Bellis notes that he is “momentarily identifying himself with Jane as feminine spectator, he sets in motion a larger reversal of roles, a shift in visual authority that structures the remainder of the text and culminates in
his own blindness” (645). It is in this reversal of roles toward the end of the novel that an apparent contrast to this verbal economy emerges.

Rochester’s verbal and visual power to define women from outside of themselves in order to maintain control is stripped from him in his disability, for, according to James Phillips in “Marriage in Jane Eyre: From Contract to Conversation,” “perhaps Rochester is blind because it is as a voice that Jane must come to him, as a partner in conversation” (209). Because Jane is the one who can see the world around them, she becomes the gatekeeper of information, able to disclose or hide limited or extensive amounts of data. They both become aware of this shift when he asks her what happened to her after she left Thornfield. She delays his curiosity by forcing him to wait until the morning to hear her story and then, when she tells it, she “soften[s] considerably what related to the three days of wandering and starvation” (Brontë 265). He is certain that she “had endured . . . more than [she] had confessed to him.” While dealing with this shift in the relationship between Jane and Rochester, Armstrong argues that this “exchange of female authority takes the form of linguistic authority—the supervision of information” (Desire 47). Jane has moved into the masculine role of controller, she holds the cards and the words to define their lives together. Armstrong furthers this idea in discussing middle-class sexuality and suggests that, “As the novel detaches both desire and the need for its constraint from the principles governing the marketplace, it sustains the illusion of Jane’s autonomy and therefore the illusion that she controls her personal experience” (Desire 47). It may be only by sleight of hand that it appears that Jane has gained this masculine control. For it requires that Rochester be crippled and blind for it to
take place, and perhaps his blindness is the only reason it is allowed. Because he is stripped of his independence and masculinity, she is not taking authority of a man but rather supervising a household as any woman over other women or male children would.

This control is taken even a step further as the men in these novels seek to take possession of the very thoughts and minds of women as evident in Jane and St. John’s relationship. In order to possess another individual it is vital to relegate him/her to the position of other. The women in these novels are separated as other, their lives and beliefs are defined for them, and they are continually molded into the ideology and society of the owners. The female body has already been seized, but the conquest continues to the female mind. Great rebellion can sprout from the thoughts of the unsatisfied and restless, so safety is dependent on conquering this realm as well. As Jane lives under the supervision of St. John, he defines her life and seems to have a strange control over her. She says, “I fell under a freezing spell. When he said ‘go,’ I went: ‘come,’ I came; ‘do this,’ I did it” (Brontë 239). He is able to dictate her very movements and for a time it appears that her mind has been so controlled that it does not even rebel at her knowledge of this fact. Yet she is able to maintain some of her self and refuses to marry him, even though she feels herself swaying near acceptance more than once. For she fears that, “as his wife—at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked—forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital—this would be unendurable” (245). She knows that keeping herself defined by St. John would kill her because she would become so objectified as to lose the very things that
made her human. The flame of her nature, of her soul, kept under the control and
definition of another would burn the life and breath from her body. This refusal may stem
from when, as Leggatt and Parkes note, eighteen-year-old Jane “stands in her window
and contemplates leaving Lowood for the world outside, we can see that her imagination
has not been completely colonized by the institution” (180). She has resisted the
education that would colonize her, which is what gives her the ability to see what St. John
is attempting to do.

In *Middlemarch* Dorothea, Celia and Rosamond find themselves in a similar
situation of being possessed, yet the first two have already internalized their prescribed
inferiority that they are unable to see it as Jane does, and the latter attempts to resist out
of naiveté rather than conscious rebellion. When reflecting on Casaubon, Dorothea
realizes that “‘he thinks with me . . . or rather, he thinks a whole world of which my
thought is but a poor twopenny mirror’ (Eliot 20). Unfortunately, she has already
internalized the inferiority complex of the female mind so fully that she assumes by
nature that his thoughts are greater than hers. But what is interesting here is that she calls
her thoughts a mirror. It seems she recognizes that she is not allowed to have any
thoughts that are her own or not framed in the very male language that Casaubon
represents. Her thoughts cannot be anything but a reflection of his, because those are the
lot and the shackles that confine women. Celia echoes her lament as she acknowledges
that “she never did and never could put words together out of her own head” (41). She
claims that she always says things just how they are and does not add anything else, yet
she cannot put together words out of her own head. She can only report things as they
are, as they have been told to her, as a parrot. She cannot originally express anything else, because she does not possess the power of language. Rosamond does not seem to realize that her words are not her own and seeks, even after she is married, to continually express herself to be recognized and influence her life the way she would chose it. After she has gone behind Lydgate’s back again to try to negotiate economically, which of course is no place for a woman, he is furious and rages against her. When she angrily retorts that she should be able to speak on things that concern her: “I think I had a perfect right to speak on a subject which concerns me as least as much as you,” he replies “Clearly—you had a right to speak, but only to me” (626). She is only allowed to speak to her husband, and he will remain the gatekeeper and controller of their lives and information. In trying to enter the verbal economy, she has transgressed and is quickly and powerfully thrown back into her place.

In order for a woman’s mind to remain possessed and under control within this system her ability to self-define must be limited if not completely denied; this can be seen within the novels in Jane’s constant male supervision and her startling change in circumstances when she leaves that custody, St. John’s rule of his sisters, Casaubon’s grip of Dorothea even from beyond the grave, and her masked subjection in her choice of Will despite her husband’s wishes. Poovey argues that guaranteeing men’s identity “depended, among other things, on limiting women’s right to define or describe themselves” (80). They cannot define themselves lest they begin to try to define other things around them as well. Within the novels, Maier notes, “the entire arc of the literary text is disrupted by the encouragement of young women to remain passive and selfless
rather than to become active agents of their own subjective maturation” (319). Brontë’s and Eliot’s texts “reflect and illuminate how these multiple narratives of a girl-child’s transition to womanhood create a nexus of dependence that threatens to curtail her potentialities at a singular or linear development in subjective selfhood” (320). The men within novels continue to exert outward control so that they can maintain this inward prison. St. John seems to leave the frame of the novel after Jane leaves to return to Rochester. There is no need to keep him in place as her control now that she has decided to get married, but he does enter near the end to approve of his sister’s attachments. One marries a Navy Officer and the other a friend of his from college who is also a minister. Although the paragraph disclosing their happy marriage has no other mention of St. John other than his knowing one of his brothers-in-law before their marriage, his name appears as the weighty start to the next paragraph. His influence over and presence within the text cannot be denied even though he has left the country and is distant physically. He still orders and defines his sister’s universes, and could no doubt cast just as powerfully judgmental an eye from India as from England.

This limiting of feminine self-definition in additionally visible with Middlemarch as Casaubon orders Dorothea’s life even from beyond the grave. He seeks her as a worthy mirror to affirm the intellectual prowess he fears is an illusion. Yet glimpses of her own consciousness and soul are terrifying to him, as he is uncertain of his control over them. As a final move to keep her forever within his grasp, he leaves an addendum to his will that says she cannot marry Will or she will lose her fortune. Casaubon is trying to dictate to her and define her even after his death. His fear may not
be an unwarranted one, in that a woman with fortune and no husband to control her could be a very dangerous form of independence in society. She defies him and chooses Will over her fortune, but still chooses male authority over determining her own life. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that Dorothea’s “marriage is still the most subversive act available to her within the context defined by the author, since it is the only act prohibited by the stipulations of the dead man, and her family and friends as well” (530). She attempts subjectivity in the only way she can, and even in this, “by choosing a man she thinks of as a baby, moreover, Dorothea gains a sense of her own control over the relationship.” She attempts escape by choosing Will: “associated as he is with southern sunshine, fresh air, open windows, and intoxicating spirit, Dorothea accepts the dispossession of Aunt Julia and finds her way out of the deathly underworld in which she had been so painfully shut up.” But even in this move to freedom and self-determination she does not fully escape. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that “if she still does not escape the confining maze of social duties and definitions this is because no such transcendence seems possible or even necessarily desirable in Eliot’s world.” According to Langland, this novel “culminates in a contradictory picture of both nineteenth-century society and Victorian women. On the one hand the ‘self’ inevitably reflects society; on the other, it must resist society” (93). This is similar to Jane’s refusal of Rochester which sends her spiraling into starvation and severe poverty, as she wanders for days without food or shelter. She is suspect to everyone she meets because she is alone, moving of her own accord. It becomes very obvious on a physical level that woman cannot survive without the presence of man. She is left begging for bread as Jane is, or lost and unable to define herself like Dorothea.
I Awoke in Prison…

The Victorian women in these novels lived lives of illusionary choices and subjectivity. This is specifically seen in their courting and marriage, where the suitors are choosing them as material possessions rather than as another individual, and the male protagonists’ self-focus makes it impossible to maintain the illusion of love suggested within the courting process, which leaves these women, if they becomes aware of it, jaded and imprisoned. In “Women on Women’s Destiny: Maturity as Penance,” Nina Auerbach suggests that, if one contemporary “paradigm in women’s literature is defined by immolation, paralysis, and madness, her Victorian counterpart was endowed with an often monstrously outsize nobility that led to her extinction, generally in the anonymity of an ambivalently-defined marriage” (328). Marriage thus becomes the safe and customary cage to which women are confined. It is the ending of nearly every novel at the time, proclaiming that happiness lies in the internalization of society’s ways. It seems that things are kept safe and happiness prevails when the struggle of youth ends in marriage. Fraiman suggests, in her discussion of Pride and Prejudice, that part of the illusion, which Austen was suspicious of, “attempts to deny the material contingencies of marriage and to romanticize it as a simple matter of female interest and choice” (65). Some of the female protagonists with these novels feel that they have all of the options in the world and for one moment in their life can determine the fate of a man, instead of the other way around. Yet that is not the case. As one of these women thinks she is ensnaring a male character with her charms, she is really performing an audition to see whether she fits his desires. It would not be unimaginable to see her excitedly contemplating the
blessings of marital bliss in the drawing room while he is in the parlor negotiating her 
worth and price with her father. Baruch observes that, in *Anna Karenina*, “if the 
attraction of marriage to women has been the enrichment of possibility, its danger . . . is 
the destruction of self altogether” (350). It seems that none of it is really her choice, that 
her life is made up of the illusion of choices. She is, as Colley notes of the legal status of 
women in the eighteenth century, completely “stripped by marriage of a separate identity 
and autonomous property” (238). Some of these female protagonists will soon discover 
that their husband desires a material possession to reflect him, and that the less she makes 
herself known the better.

In courting scenes within Eliot’s novel, suitors notice of Rosamond that “she 
talked little; but that was an additional charm . . . the usual quietude which seemed to him 
beautiful as clear depths of water” (Eliot 144). Although the novel paints a romanticized 
image of Lydgate truly falling in love, it seems that he is really looking for an idea rather 
than a person. He does not appear to imagine that he will bring anything to her or that he 
even should. Similarly Dorothea begins to dislike Casaubon’s very presence and admits 
that the “difference . . . it made to her was not always a happy one: she felt that he often 
inwardly objected to her speech” (310). Though he tries to keep up her illusion of love 
and happiness, he is much too focused on himself and his own needs to truly give her 
anything. She has been cheated and trapped, whether by her own romanticism or 
Casaubon’s will, into a life that it appears she cannot escape or hope to change. Auerbach 
notes that within this novel Dorothea’s “destiny is defined exclusively by her two 
marriages and by the images of the prison and the maze that the book flings round her”
While each marriage seems at first a great escape and to “promise purpose and meaning, each enmeshes her further and more finally” (329). Auerbach further claims that

the marriages are perceived, though with increasing delicacy, in reiterated images of entombment. Dorothea’s marriage to Casaubon is an incarceration which is literal, social and spiritual at once, as “the still, white enclosure which made her visible world” modulates into “the stifling oppression of that gentlewoman’s world” where “[h]er blooming full-pulsed youth stood . . . in a moral imprisonment which made itself one with the chill, colourless, narrowed landscape, with the shrunken furniture, the never-read books, and the ghostly stag in a pale fantastic world that seemed to be vanishing from the daylight.” (329)

The ever-widening vistas that seemed to welcome her before she entered marriage, crumble into catacombs that entomb her, stealing her youth, vitality and self. Marriage is nothing that she dreamed of. It is the prison that will crush her into the mirrored commodity that she must be to support his subjectivity in this system.

These women are left with a choice to become the object or remain conscious of their imprisonment as giving actual vent to the rage of their situation would condemn them to physical ‘prisons.’ Locy argues that Victorian “angels of the house learned: ‘home’ could be a prison” (114). In furthering Locy’s observations, I would assert that some women appear to surrender to this prison without the inner fire to fight or acknowledge their imprisoned state. Yet still others become enraged at the deception that has captured them. Madwomen in attics, they bang their fists against the walls and seek to take revenge on their jailers. In Brontë’s novel, Jane’s marriage to Rochester approaches, and she is more closely linked with her alter ego in Bertha which creates a doubling between the two women. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that “on a figurative and
psychological level it seems suspiciously clear that the specter of Bertha is still another—indeed the most threatening—avatar of Jane . . . what Bertha now does, for instance, is what Jane wants to do” (359). Jane does not want to be chained to a marriage of possession with Rochester and so Bertha destroys the veil and attempts to sabotage the union. Further, “Bertha . . . is Jane’s truest and darkest double: she is the angry aspect of the orphan child, the ferocious secret self Jane has been trying to repress ever since her days at Gateshead” (360). She is the glimpse into Jane’s deepest soul and the rage that threatens her eventual submission and absorption into society. Robyn Warhol builds off of Gilbert and Gubar in “Double Gender, Double Genre in Jane Eyre and Villette” as she deals with the idea of doubling within feminist texts. She claims that “to be ‘double’ is to resist categorization as one thing or the other; to invoke ‘doubleness’ is to address binary oppositions without resting comfortably in either of the two terms being opposed” (857). She notes that within “Charlotte Brontë’s texts [doubling is used] to subvert oppressive categories of gender and value in Victorian culture and literature” (861), but more importantly that “structural doublings parallel the novels’ treatment of gender difference [and] their refusal to allow characters to settle into stable roles of masculinity or femininity” (868). There is resistance in the very linking of the two characters which is furthered in Jane’s intense reaction to her dreams about children.

These children are not only seen as a bad omen but as Poovey suggests also “metaphorically represent the dependence that defined women’s place in bourgeois ideology . . . along with the frustration, self-denial, and maddened, thwarted rage that accompanies it—mark[ing] every middle-class woman’s life because she is not allowed
to express (or possess) the emotions that her dependence provokes” (141). Jane is angry but cannot express it because she would be physically confined to an attic just like Bertha. She has no option but to try to live with her rage, to find ways to explain it away, lest she collapse into exhausted insanity. Yet she cannot get away from the knowledge of her dependence, and so a rumbling begins:

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot . . . Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a constraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (Brontë 65)

Women are not a different species, an other; they are human can be expected to writhe under the same pressures as men. They feel just as men feel; they need space and activity for their souls just the same. It is not from a psychological disease that they suffer, but rather from a natural reaction to too rigid constraint and stagnation. Jane is bringing women to the same level as men, recognizing them for their similarities, not their differences. She is calling out the standard treatment and restriction of women as cruelty. Jane’s assertion is groundbreaking, echoing the claims of her feminist predecessors like Mary Wollstonecraft and Harriet Taylor. That Jane would even have the words to express what she does here is amazing. These women, the millions that silently revolt, have found a way to turn male words, to rearrange them to speak of the feminine existence and soul. This is the rumbling that threatens to collapse my theorized order. Unfortunately, a
terrified ruling assembly will retaliate brutally and swiftly to maintain the order of stability and safety.

In *Middlemarch*, Casaubon and Dorothea are an example of the ‘costs’ of a woman out of her place and an affirmation that those women need to be controlled. Within these novels, it appears that women who do not remain quietly in their cages must be subdued, and Armstrong notes in her discussion of the Victorian novel, “signs of excess have to be disciplined, that is, observed, contained, sublimated, and redirected toward a socially acceptable goal” (*How Novels Think* 8). Threat to the social order cannot be tolerated. Society seeks, above all, to preserve itself. Casaubon and Dorothea are held up as an example of the dangers of a woman with too much thought of her own. After the marriage has begun, Casaubon realizes that “a young lady turned out to be something more troublesome than he had conceived . . . she judged him, and . . . her wifely devotedness was like a penitential expiation of unbelieving thoughts” (Eliot 397). Dorothea had simply become more knowledgeable of the inner workings and reality of Casaubon’s person. She is portrayed as “the young creature who had worshipped him with perfect trust [and] had quickly turned into the critical wife” (398). Casaubon’s expectations have not been met; he has a wife who thinks too much on her own. Casaubon suffers a heart attack from the added stress of his inability to mold Dorothea into submission; she threatens to rival him in scholarship, and he feels inadequate to deal with her emotionally. They seem to exist as an example of the fate of a husband unable to control his wife, and Dorothea’s drained vitality and youth exemplify the results from her
attempted yet failed submission. Within my proposed framework, it becomes very apparent that the community at large requires sacrifice to maintain the order of things.

In order to achieve this sacrifice, women must give over their subjectivity within this system for the greater good of society just as man does; women who do not are dangerous and even something such as her latent sexuality can be a threat that needs to be controlled. These women would be what Althusser calls ‘‘bad subjects’’ [and Armstrong further defines as] individuals who take the ideology of free subjectivity too much to heart and do not freely consent to their subjection” (How Novels Think 29). Society will allow the illusion of free subjectivity, but only that. Individuals are expected to release that subjectivity for the good of the whole, without question or resistance. These bad subjects had to be removed in order to preserve society, and, as Poovey argues in her discussion of David Copperfield, “stabilizing this representation of woman depended on writing out of the image the possibility of promiscuous (or autonomous) sexuality—not only because an unfaithful woman could produce literal illegitimate offspring, but also because if all women were capable of independent desire, there would be no possibility that any desire could be domesticated or that there would be any natural limit to competition” (115). Women threaten this natural limit to competition in the market. They are seen as the more dangerous, volatile other half of humanity, and what must be controlled is female sexuality, desire, words and thoughts. By projecting these problematic traits onto women, these men are able to distance themselves from them and claim that they are the more rational, controlled dominant portion of society. Once this has taken place education can be used to remove these opposing traits from women.
The threat of feminine power must be exorcised by educating women in morality and societal preferences. Within *Jane Eyre* Mr. Brocklehurst, Helen and Mrs. Reed serve as these educators for Jane, even as she continually refuses to take her place. At the school at Lowood, Mr. Brocklehurst has made it his mission in life to “direct that especial care shall be bestowed on [Christian grace and humility’s] cultivation amongst them. I have studied how to best mortify in them the worldly sentiment of pride” (Brontë 19). It seems he will lower them to the place he sees fit for them to occupy under the guise of religious morality. In his mind, it appears that there is no place for pride in a woman because of the dangerous threat she embodies to everything he sees as good and right. They are simply lucky that he has come along to save them by placing them firmly in their place. According to Maier, Brocklehurst’s methods reflect the Victorian opinion that “female education centres on the ability to adopt or adapt to the conventional roles expected of women through conformity of place and the masking of one’s selfhood in order to maintain acceptability within society” (320). His “plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient and self denying” (Brontë 37). This is the best way he sees to keep these women exactly where he thinks they should stay. Leggatt and Parkes argue that he must accomplish this task because “Lowood manufactures inmates whose sole purpose is to provide labour for the market economy” (176). Since the girls at Lowood are all orphans, it is perhaps not unrealistic to assume that they will never be exposed to luxury and indulgence and that they should not be spoiled so that when it is gone they are all the more miserable. But to Mr. Brocklehurst, luxury is edible food, rooms and water that are
not frozen as they wake, long hair and more than one dress made of fabric other than burlap. It seems that to care for them just as well as one would care for their cattle is too much for him. I think that his fear of what they could become and the hazard they pose drive him to essentially torture them into submission. Leggatt and Parkes note that, in an incident that Jane recounts, a young girl is given a hair cut because her hair grows in beautiful ringlets and is “an emblem of female sexuality, something that is traditionally associated with disorder and irrationality, and with a lack of control that defies Brocklehurst’s power” (173). He cannot stand for it and so decrees that it be chopped short. The haircut “declares to Jane that to enter into society is to enter into a completely mechanical culture owned by men; it declares that she must allow herself to be completely owned by patriarchy” (174). Maier further argues that Mr. Brocklehurst “is the epitome of the patriarchal phallus in Victorian society. The power resides in his control, and Jane must battle even for the right to be considered as human in his estimation” (322). Mr. Brocklehurst and the school at Lowood are prime examples of methods of punishment deemed incredibly effective according to Foucault. He suggests that the methods within the apparatus of corrective penalty, such as the school Mr. Brocklehurst is attempting to create, should be “time-tables, compulsory movements, regular activities, solitary meditation, work in common, silence, application, respect, good habits” (Discipline 128). This not only perfectly describes this school in particular, but woman’s sphere and her daily routines for the rest of her life. Mr. Brocklehurst seems to have a complete conviction of Foucault’s idea that “the agent of punishment must exercise total power, which no third party can disturb; the individual to be corrected must
be entirely enveloped in the power that is being exercised over him” (*Discipline* 129). There is no lacking in the exercise of total power at Lowood.

Mrs. Reed and Helen are extensions of Mr. Brocklehurst’s ideology in that they elicit duty and morality to subdue Jane into her proper feminine place and that “both attempt to discourage the girl critic” (Fraiman 103). It’s as if they want her to stop looking into the way things are so that she will not discover the flaws and holes in the system. Maier argues that they “represent the customary ways of dealing with the burden of being female in a strictly patriarchal system” (323). Jane threatens to shake their resignation to their lot with her questions and constant struggle against the way things are. Helen responds to Jane’s cry that she cannot bear the abuse they are subjected to by claiming that “it [is] your duty to bear it, if you could not avoid it: it is weak and silly to say that you *cannot bear* what it is your fate to be required to bear” (Brontë 33). She is weak and silly if she cannot bear to be starved and slowly murdered by disease and the elements. Brontë’s novels seems to suggest, against Helen’s claims, that Jane is only silly because that is what women are trained to think so that they find some future hope in their suffering and do not fight back against the hand that restrains them. Unfortunately, Jane does not believe Helen or Mrs. Reed when they tell her to simply submit to the way things are. She declares to Helen her response to what she cannot bear: “If people were always kind and obedient to those who are cruel and unjust, the wicked people would have it all their own way: they would never feel afraid, and so they would never alter, but would grow worse and worse . . . we should strike back again very hard . . . to teach the person who struck us to never do it again” (34). Even from a very young age, Jane sees
that their submission to violence only begets more violence and that obedience only empowers the perpetrator and encourages them to greater acts of cruelty. At this point in the novel, Jane continues to resist the hand that would strike her, bringing upon herself and every woman who follows suit the wrath and discipline of a society menaced.

The women in these novels who transgress their morally prescribed place must be rehabilitated as society is attempting to purge dangerous male traits from the female scapegoat; this becomes evident in *Middlemarch* in the characters of Dorothea and Rosamond. As Lydgate is perusing feminine options at a social, Dorothea becomes a topic of discussion because she is beautiful and accomplished. Yet Lydgate determines that “she did not look at things from the proper feminine angle. The society of such women was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form, instead of reclining in a paradise with sweet laughs for birdnotes, and blue eyes for a heaven” (Eliot 88). Women like Dorothea are not desirable because they are more work for a man to interact with, rather than the sweet fairy that Lydgate imagines. She seems akin to Armstrong’s description of the monster in *Frankenstein* who “is at once too much and not enough of an individual to belong to a community that considers the individual its basic unit” (*How Novels Think* 72). It seems she is not seen as capable of filling an actual place in society, but is constantly transgressing the small sphere she has been allowed. Yet for her to become anything else is impossible, for as Fraiman suggests, a “girl taught to be exceptional is to be morally suspect” (8). She is now treading in dangerous places, for to be morally suspect is to call for the hand of conservative society to rehabilitate her by any means necessary. Desiring to be an individual within this society is requesting a position
that could potentially hold power over men in that same community. Rosamond desires to wield this type of power over the men in her space. She considers how “delightful [it would be] to make captives from the throne of marriage with a husband . . . himself in fact a subject—while the captives look up forever hopeless” (Eliot 414). She wants to trade places and rule over and enslave the same men that seek to bind her. Yet, according to Armstrong in her consideration of *Jane Eyre*, female “power over the male sometimes resembles the demonic force—manifest in the madwoman—that would define these women as anti-heroines and undesirable wives” (*Desire* 53). They are called a demonic force, madwomen, yet the features that are attributed to those names are more a reflection of the dominant male class than anything exclusively feminine. For Victorian fiction “portrayed the despicable qualities of ruling-class masculinity as truly despicable *only* when those qualities appear to animate women” (*How Novels Think* 81). These traits must be projected onto the women and labeled as evil so that they can be effectually purged from society by the same men who possess them.

A woman out of place becomes a demonized image, as evident in the characterization of Bertha, and as Jane and Dorothea find themselves slipping on the same slope of insanity. This demonic force that is projected onto women must be rallied against and subdued at all costs. In Brontë’s novel, Jane’s resistance against the power that abuses her, as Fraiman notes, makes her “doubly guilty of insubordination—as a girl and as a dependent: the red-room punishes Jane less . . . for her female sexuality than for questioning what she boldly identifies as her ‘slavery’” (96). She questions the way things are and the evil that has been identified in her and termed female. Yet she resides
on a slippery slope between desiring freedom and encroaching madness. Locy observes that Gilbert and Gubar discuss the red-room as “a kind of patriarchal death chamber’ [where] Jane has no escape on her own, except perhaps through madness” (108). Ingram and Faubert further conclude: “the link between the concept of madness and the ideals of femininity . . . were so strong that definitions of female madness rarely strayed from definitions of femininity” (qtd. in Fisk 223). Strictly by definition of her gender, she is already associated with the unhealthy, unnatural and the dangerous. In addition, Locy notes that “Jane’s expression of needs which are the same as those of a man ‘is next-door to insanity in England in the 1840s’” (113).

As Bertha rages in the attic of Thornfield so Jane’s rebellion threatens her to a similar fate. When we are finally allowed to see Bertha, we are met with a being that, “whether beast or human being, one could not . . . tell: it groveled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered in clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face” (Brontë 176). This is no longer the image of femininity, but a wild animal dangerous not only to herself but to anyone who would come near her. It is Bertha’s imprisonment that has turned her into the monster that she is at Thornfield, Fisk notes that, “in her youth, Bertha is ‘the boast of Spanish Town for her beauty;’ however at Thornfield Hall, she is compared to ‘the foul German spectre—the Vampyre’” (222). She is the representation of both the power and strength of the female spirit and the fear of those who subdue her. They are afraid not only of her power, but of her rage at her imprisonment lest she ever make it out of their grasp. Sandro Jung argues in “Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, The
Female Detective and the ‘Crime’ of Female Selfhood” that even Bertha’s laugh “is the direct, immediate and unmediated language of passion and rage” (24). This creature seemingly groveled, she appears in the stance of submission, but I would assert that it is really a stance in preparation to strike or escape. In her, wildness becomes a negative evil rather than the strength of an individual. She is portrayed as neither male nor female because the image created of femininity cannot hold her and a masculine image refuses her. In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea becomes conscious of a similar battle to the one that rages within Jane. Dorothea has “been becoming more and more aware, with a certain terror, that her mind was continually sliding into inward fits of anger and repulsion, or else into forlorn weariness” (Eliot 187). She fears this place of anger as it links her to the same madwomen in the attic as Jane. She finds herself at a precipice of insanity and monstrosity or catatonic depression. She has begun to leave the place of societal submission and sanity and begun to make friends with the lunatic, and the novel cannot leave this undisciplined.

Female transgression seeks to usurp men and will be punished by those men, whether through her husband or circumstances of the novel such as with Dorothea and Casaubon, Jane and John Reed and Rosamond and her miscarriage. In Eliot’s novel, after Dorothea oversteps her bounds and acts on her own, Casaubon’s threatening reminds her that “this is not the first occasion, but it were well that it should be the last, on which you have assumed a judgment on subjects beyond your scope” (Eliot 356). His menace and ability for violence are chillingly felt in the same statement where he refers to her as “my love.” She notices that he seems to always use this term when he is displeased with her. It
seems he is unhappy with her when she becomes more than the ornamental fixture he intended her to be, and this term reestablishes his ownership of her person under the guise of love. In Brontë’s novel, Jane’s strong will and personal determination, seen in her interactions with John, cannot be tolerated, and so she is confined to the red-room and beaten by him. She is afraid of him as he stalks and terrorizes her for not settling quietly in her place in his house and domain. In *Middlemarch*, Rosamond is punished by a more distant source, since it is not in Lydgate’s character to beat her. After she has defied her husband again and gone riding despite his warning her not to, she miscarries. Physical and emotional pains are inflicted on her as punishment for not submitting. Little is said of her miscarriage or her feeling about it, which perhaps further confirms her society’s stance. It cares little for her emotions regarding her punishment, and more that it is evident that resistance is dangerous.

Within *Jane Eyre*, Mrs. Reed and Jane are prime examples of transgressing women being disciplined by other women, which ensures their continued collective subjection and isolation. Gilbert and Gubar note that “women in Jane’s world, acting as agents for men, may be the keepers of other women . . . but both keepers and prisoners are bound by the same chains” (Gilbert 351). Almost a greater evil than the brutal punishment of transgressing women by society or men is the punishment inflicted by other women. The reaction in Burney’s *Evelina* is, as Fraiman observes, that feminist “anger is deflected from its target and redirected against other women” (54). These are women who are trapped in the same cages, experiencing the same muteness and madness. Yet instead of joining together in comfort if not rebellion, they rage against each other or
anyone weaker than they as ventilation for the infuriating lot they must bear. This is yet another strand of the web that confines them. In encouraging competition and distrust among women, society can ensure that they will never have the strength to resist. Millions of madwomen would be unstoppable and crush those that enslave them. Mrs. Reed’s treatment of Jane is a prime example of this anger turned towards weaker women.

She has internalized the male demand that women stay in their place and obey their fathers. She now sees it as her responsibility to make sure that Jane stays in that place as well. It appears that Jane is a threat to her personal safety, and Mrs. Reed has no desire to be associated with a woman who goes against the grain. Locy observes that while in the red-room “Jane’s frightened and frightening reflection is, as Gilbert and Gubar note, ‘a sort of chamber, a mysterious enclosure in which images of the self are trapped’” (108). Ironically the same image that is used to describe feminine objectification is the same one that traps her self. The fact that this punishment comes from a woman further impresses that there is no safety for a woman’s resistance even within her own sex: Maier argues that “the child Jane is not only struggling against a patriarchal institution and society from which she is physically and mentally separated, but more frighteningly, against the repression of her individuality by the complicity of her own sex” (321). When Mrs. Reed condemns Jane to the red room as punishment for striking back at John it is woman who forces and restrains her there. The servants attempt to tie her to the chair using their garters. This is significant in that these are intimate female garments, something that only other women would be allowed to see. This feminine intimacy, that should be present as a result of sharing the same likeness, is turned into a weapon and a restraint. She has been
betrayed by her own sisters. Maier further notes that the young Jane recognizes this “as an act which supports, is complicit in, and reaffirms through a lack of female voice the ideological apparatus of male action and female passivity which governs society” (323). It seems as if each of them is just trying to survive the onslaught of societal demands that seek to bury them. There is nowhere and no one with whom she is safe. She is left utterly on her own.

Each of these women, possessed in their individual cages by the societal constructs around them, creates the foundation to the structure that I have suggested. I am postulating that if they were to shake this edifice by attempting to transgress into spaces not allowed to them the entire system would collapse. Further demonstration of the specifics of the model I am advocating can be noted in the use the novels make of the myth of the knight and the damsel in distress as well as their dealings with this damsel’s troubling sexuality.
CHAPTER IV

THE MONSTER AND THE SAVIOR

In the structure I am suggesting, the nineteenth-century man found within these novels struggles to retain his own subjectivity as his society secretly strips him of it; he turns to woman to solidify his identity and illusion of power. In order to accomplish this, he seems to become enthralled with the fairy tale of the knight and the damsel in distress. Everything about the story seems to affirm the knight’s strength and autonomy, and so he seeks to thrust his female counterpart into the tale, for if she appears as the damsel he must be the knight. Unfortunately, because of Victorian society’s attempts to remove all monsters and threat from society so as to maintain order, it appears that the easiest way he is able to enact the fairy tale is if he endangers woman in order to save her and affirm himself. Eliot’s *Middlemarch* and Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* capture the constant feminine fear of invasion by men who are desperate to prove themselves all that they have claimed as their power and identity. Rochester fantasizes about how he will save Jane, who is portrayed as almost a corpse, by stealing her away to the moon. Jane is further endangered at almost every turn of her life by John Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst in her youth and by Rochester and St. John in her adulthood, as they attempt to possess her for their wife.

These damsels include a sexuality that proves problematic to the men that would seek to possess them. Female sexuality thus becomes a central location of
ambiguity and attempted control in the Victorian society we see illustrated within these novels. In what I see as an attempt to deal with this issue, woman is defined by the characteristics of both the saint and the harlot. Rochester and Lydgate do this most obviously in their comments about Jane and Rosamond as child-like yet something they interact with sexually. The women in these novels are necessarily split in this way in order for society to be able to deal with their problematic contradictions separately by elevating one and condemning the other. Feminine sexuality is additionally problematic for Victorian society, because it is a site where instability breeds and therefore must be tightly defined and controlled. The texts provide multiple locations for the observation of this dichotomy, society’s need to solve it, and man’s desire to have both angel and whore. In addition, these women live in fear of their lives, their servitude, and violence at the hands of men and each other. Jane lives in fear partially of this invasion as her wedding day approaches. Her fear seems even more grounded as she becomes aware of Bertha who appears to have been imprisoned because of her ownership and exercise of her sexuality. This seems to suggest, as does Fraiman of *Evelina*, that “patriarchy itself is the villain” (45). In this chapter I deal with some of the problems that Victorian society encountered as represented within these novels and reflected within their characters, in trying to control all aspects of society and individuals. The first is man’s need to prove his strength and subjectivity by rescuing a weaker woman who was challengingly not endangered. The second is feminine sexuality as a location of ambivalence, fear, and violence and the ways in which resolution is sought through dictating meaning and eradicating the unmanageable.
Happily Never After

The nineteenth-century woman as seen in these novels is apparently trapped in a fairy tale in which she is treated as an object or commodity and consistently endangered and saved by men in order to affirm masculine subjectivity. These female protagonists must negotiate the constant masculine attempts to own them. As we have discussed in earlier chapters, patriarchy is what has commoditized women so that they are a good to be appraised and either purchased or simply taken for enjoyment. Fraiman asserts that as Orville praises Evelina he is “guilty of appraising her as if she were a wine or cheese” (50). He will determine her age, value and her ability to give pleasure. He is really trying to ascertain whether she will satisfy his specific tastes. Similarly, within novels these “young women are tied up to be chosen, like poultry at market,” drained of all life and up for sale (Eliot 486). These women seem aware of this place they occupied within society. Some like Rosamond, in *Middlemarch*, attempted to make themselves alluring and endeavor to trap the man of her choice, yet I assert that her control being is a mere illusion. We are told that “every nerve and muscle in Rosamond was adjusted to the consciousness that she was being looked at’ (110). She knows how to put on a show so as to have more men consider her. Yet she does not understand the barter she is making, assuming she will rule her house and her husband with the charms that served her so well in courting. She did not consider the dangers of being owned by a man who, unlike her father, does not cling to images of her as his child. Dorothea similarly is unaware that even in the worship of Will Ladislaw she is “forever enthroned in his soul” (446). His worship does not elevate her at all, but rather restricts her to objectification. Like
goddesses these women are not seen as human; they do not possess individual souls to be known. They are rather images, mirages, chained to the needs of the worshippers who still seek to dictate her character.

In Brontë’s novel, Jane reacts somewhat differently, as she cannot survive under the yoke of ownership. Jane has seemingly found the love of her life in Rochester, but his true desire quickly become evident: “I mean shortly to claim you—your thoughts, conversations, and company—for life” (Brontë 160). He is not looking for a partner or someone to share life with, he is looking for someone to possess, someone to own and to puppet. Jane cannot stand this idea and soon flees from him to try to save herself. Even as these women seem aware of the dangers that men pose to them, older women, such as Mrs. Vancy to Rosamond, instruct them to “allow for young men. Be thankful if they have good hearts. A woman must learn to put up with little things . . . [because] you will be married some day” (Eliot 91). It seems that, in order to survive, woman must release herself into this place of potential danger, so that she can be saved and brought to man’s side. Colley observes that in eighteenth-century Great Britain “woman was subordinate and confined. But at least she was also safe” (256). I would extend this to the nineteenth-century woman as well. It is as if she is to be grateful in her servitude, if her husband has a good heart as opposed to an evil one. She must excuse the little things that warn her of the constant danger she is really in and seek to please him at all costs, so as not to ignite his wrath.

I see evidence that the men in these novels desire to save women from danger so as to affirm their own masculinity and strength and to create an outstanding debt in
their favor. It is the archetypal fairy tale: a strong and worthy knight finds a damsel in distress saves her from the dragon and then whisks her away to his castle, where she is now his captive and plunder. This is clearly enacted within the text, when Rochester tells Adele how he will save Jane, and as “fire rises out of the lunar mountains [where has taken her]: when she is cold, I’ll carry her up to a peak and lay her down in the edge of the crater” (Brontë 160). He has taken her away to the moon so that she is removed from society and he can possess her completely. It appears that, in his mind, he is the great savior and will care for her basic needs as they inhabit their remote honeymoon abode. But the woman that he depicts here is that of a limp and lifeless corpse, she has no life or spirit of her own. Not only does his description of their lives leave out any agency on her part, but he will move her body from place to place so that it does not die and can continue to fulfill his needs and desires. Arnold attributes the plausibility of such an ideal to the fact that “agency that informs [the] valued individual’s actions is one that was denied to Victorian women” (273). Yet because the Victorian society depicted in these novels has struggled and seemingly succeeded in creating a small and monster-free world, men must create their own danger so that they have something to save women from. In doing so, men endanger women so that they can save them and fulfill their own fantasies about their greatness.

Saving the damsel also creates a debt to be paid. Within the frame of this fairy tale, if a man has saved a helpless woman from dire evil then she in turn would owe him her life and very self in repayment. The laws of war seem to rule in that whoever wins the battle takes the spoils to do with as he pleases. Yet I would argue that it is under the flag
of love and chivalry that man rescues her and brings her to his side, so that she may remain safe. Once there, she becomes his possession, and he may use her and dictate her self however he wishes, more precisely to assure that she remains in her place of servitude and obedience. She has left one prison for another. Within the text, Jane experiences this rescue, but is unfortunately left in the hands of the evil step-mother. After Jane’s parents die, she is brought to Gateshead to live with her uncle. While it seems that not all men rescuing women will fit this model, as we don’t see her uncle endangering or trapping her, others in her life will fit it perfectly. Yet even without the malice, her supposed safe place changes as her uncle passes away and she is left in the hands of her aunt and cousins. Her refuge quickly becomes dangerous and is filled with abuse. Ironically, the very room in which her uncle lived, the red room, becomes the place in which she is locked and tormented, inflicting some of her deepest psychological scars.

Within this model, it seems that the women in these novels are endangered by men in order for each man to maintain his personal stability and prove his subjectivity. Yet male relationships with women may not appear to be endangering at first glance. They seem to treat women with an esteem that, while acknowledging female weakness, gives the impression that they only desire to keep them safe. Fraiman notes in her reading of *Evelina* that this “condescension may be polite and gentlemanly so as to not be immediately obvious” (51). Yet there is the innate view that they are condescending, that women are so far beneath men that they are not entitled to anything other than treatment as a servant. And the “men who ‘help’ the frailer sex . . . usually have their own interests
at heart, and when these are foiled, the force underlying their relation to women is soon enough explicit” (49). Within this framework women exist for the purpose of men, and when they strive to have autonomy or resist the desires of men they become troublesome. Frustration at this challenge to their given identity turns some men into a dangerous threat that will have what they want, no matter the cost.

The nineteenth-century woman that we see in these novels is plagued by the fear of existing in the hands and at the mercy of so many other forces, including the power of her own body. She is deeply aware that even her own body is not her own and that she may be used and violated at any time. Poovey’s interpretation of Barbara Bochichon’s pamphlet *Women and Work* suggests that she lives at a time when “all women were governesses to their children, prostitutes to their husbands, and victims of their father’s crimes” (150). She must be on her guard eternally, yet with little chance of defending herself from invasion, injury and possession. Fraiman suggest that, in Brontë’s novels, she “hints at what seems to be a recurrent fear . . . the working woman’s fear of the predatory gentleman” (110). Because of Jane’s status as an orphan and her relatives’ insistence that she is not a part of their family, she is destined to be a part of the working woman’s class. Her entire life is one of struggle to evade the hand of men. At times she is successful, and at time she is not, but she is continually endangered and saved by the male characters of the novel. She begins her life at Gateshead, brought there by her uncle, who was trying to save her from literal death as a newly orphaned child. Yet his good will is short-lived, as he dies, and she is left in the hands of Mrs. Reed and her violent son John. She tells the reader that her cousin “bullied and punished me . . . continually: every
nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near” (Brontë 5). The very description she gives of her own body brings to mind a predator and its prey, her flesh is in morsels, a commodity, and no longer human. She is petrified to her very core of him and not only what he has the power to do to her, but what Victorian gender scripts will allow him to get away with. Fortunately, they are both still young enough that the abuse stays physical instead of progressing to the sexual level as it does in other Victorian novels.

In *Jane Eyre* Jane similarly expresses a deep and instinctual fear shared by women of men. In our current world, women are taught from a very young age that their selves and their bodies are something alluring to men. They possess a secret power that forces men to want them, yet they do not know how they exude that power or how to control it or shut it off. So it becomes their own fault and responsibility if they are harmed by male desire. Somehow they are said to have been “asking for it” or not to have said “No,” even though they are stripped of the very language to do so. This fear grips the female frame and consciousness. I would suggest that this is not a new phenomenon, but that it is a reflection of a historical fear that would have been even stronger in an era ruled by patriarchy. Bellis notes that “John Reed claims the house and its contents as his, to be eventually inherited from his father’s estate” (641). He is in control of the entire structure that confines and defines Jane. He will dictate what she has the power to do: “the father’s book is closed to her, he insists; she can only be the powerless victim of its oppressive force” (641). When Jane fights back and strikes John in return for his blows, she is chastised, deemed ungrateful and condemned to the red-room.
Jane suffers further at the hands of Mr. Brocklehurst at Lowood, but it is not until she is grown and living at Thornfield that masculine threat attempts to devour her again. Leggatt and Parkes note that Rochester occupies a superior position that “is based on traditional concepts of gender roles. Although he claims her as his equal, Rochester continually bullies Jane and plays games with her emotions in order to make her conform to his desires and will” (174). Even before any desires are expressed Rochester observes and tries to control her, he seems to have been stalking her, determining her strength and whether she is the flavor that he desires. As Bellis observes “the struggle between Jane and Rochester is embodied in a conflict between two different modes of vision: a penetrating male gaze that fixes and defines the woman as its object, and a marginal female perception that would conceal or withhold itself from the male” (639). We see evidence of these two visions as she tries to escape to the garden to think through her situation and where she might go from Thornfield. As she leaves the safety of her room, she confesses: “I knew I might be watched thence; so I went apart into the orchard . . . more sheltered and more Eden-like . . . I felt as if I could haunt this shade forever: but . . . my step is stayed . . . by a warning fragrance” (Brontë 149). She is aware of the eyes that constantly seek her, so she tries to escape to a safer place. She describes the orchard as Eden-like, a place free of sin and evil in its un tarnished state, and the site of woman’s entrapment at the hands of the serpent. She feels as if she could haunt that place eternally, as the shadow that she knows she represents in her world, simply a place all her own to inhabit, unknown and unseen, would be her desire. Yet “that perfume increases: I must flee . . . he will not stay long: he will soon return whence he came, and if I sit still he will
never see me” (149). The fragrance of his cigar has warned her of his intrusion on her Eden. He knows that she is there and has come to seek her out. Perhaps the cigar is a part of the hunt for him, to strike fear within her and let her know that her time is limited until he will capture her. Her fear returns as she has the urge to flee. She almost cries out in desperation the desire that he will leave, that he will return to the world that he represents and leave her to her haven. She freezes, like an animal being stalked and hope that he will not see her. Yet that is not the case, as she tries to sneak by him he calls out to her and his words, his power, command her to his side. There he proposes marriage to her and she accepts. Yet with that agreement she unknowingly places herself in his hands and back in harm’s way.

His marriage proposal promises to elevate her station, giving her both a name and a fortune, but at the same time Rochester’s secret and dark past threatens to imprison and shame her as she is tied to him. Rochester goes about the process of molding Jane to reflect him, as he would desire almost the moment they are engaged. Bellis argues that “Rochester [further] goes on to describe her mouth and brow, not so much analyzing Jane’s character as attempting to reconstitute it” (644). He tries to dress her up in new clothes and jewelry, all to mirror the place in society that he occupies. Jane is very resistant, because it seems that she can feel that he is starting to define her, to take her subjectivity and place her under the shackles of the wifely role. He repetitively expresses that he will have his way with her after they are wed, that he will allow for her independence now, as part of the game, but after the wedding possess her completely. She begins to be aware of the danger that he poses to her and her self definition. Once she
has become aware of Bertha and has determined to break off the engagement and leave Thornfield, Rochester’s violence and threat are unveiled. As he begs her to stay and she stands firm, “he crossed the floor and seized my arm, and grasped my waist. He seemed to devour me with his flaming glance: physically, I felt, at the moment, powerless as stubble exposed to the draught and glow of a furnace—mentally, I still possessed my soul” (Brontë 191). She is very aware that he is stronger than she, and she is lucky that he does not force himself upon her despite her refusals, but Brontë must keep him superficially admirable so that she can return Jane to him in the end. She faces the monster of powerlessness that threatens her if she is bound to him, yet she claims a possession of her soul that he cannot take. She holds an inward power that she will not release to him no matter how he rages, but she also recognizes that her determination can only stand so much assault. Bellis notes that “when she leaves the house, she leaves Rochester’s last gift behind; ‘it was not mine; it was the visionary bride’s,’ she says, rejecting his attempts to turn her into a ‘doll’ like Adele, to make her another creation of his masculine gaze” (646). And so, to protect herself and the little bit of self-possession she has managed to retain, she flees Thornfield into the perilous world of femininity outside of the prescribed role of man’s care. This dangerous place is where she experiences what Gilbert calls “her terrible journey across the moors suggest[ing] the essential homelessness—the nameless, placeless, and contingent status—of women in a patriarchal society” (Gilbert 364). Gilbert and Gubar further this parallel in noting that Jane’s only options for escape are “through flight . . . through starvation [or] escape through madness” (341). Through the rest of her tale it seems she will dabble in all three.
Jane continues to experience the saving power and the threat of male violence as she comes to live with her cousins. Jane stumbles through the world, collapsing near death at St. John’s doorstep. Once again a man has swooped in and saved her, even as his female servant condemns her to the cold. He gives her a place to live and a way to make an income, all things she could not negotiate for herself without male aid. Once she is cleaned up and back to health she falls immediately under male gaze and St. John begins to appraise her for her value as a wife. He determines that she is exactly the wife he needs to support and care for him on his missionary journey. So, he begins to test the level of control he is able to have over her, attempting to possess her body by giving her a kiss as he does his sisters when they go to bed for the evening. After that kiss, Jane says, “he viewed me to learn the result; it was not striking: I am sure I did not blush; perhaps I might have turned a little pale, for I felt as if the kiss were a seal affixed to my fetters. He never omitted the ceremony afterwards” (Brontë 240). It seems he observes that it catches her off guard and that she feels directed and fettered by it, and he is pleased with that result, so much so that he never omits that kiss again. He very quickly begins to control Jane with the power of his speech, and she describes a type of robotic obedience that she cannot seem to stop. St. John seems to be her knight in shining armor, which rescues her from death and then offers her his hand in marriage. It takes everything in her power to refuse him, and as a result his anger and violence are ignited at her transgression from the male storyline. Phillips argues that having feared “to become, in her inequality as Rochester’s mistress, an instrument for the satisfaction of his baser desires, she fears that, without St. John’s love, she would become merely his instrument in turn, rather than his
equal” (208). Suddenly, he becomes a threat to her and she fears “the corrupt man within him” (Brontë 247). Even though he is of the cloth and claims that her marriage to him would be obedience to God, Jane recognizes that the “flesh” in him is capable of injury that could be fatal to her.

**The Saint and the Harlot**

Feminine sexuality is another aspect of the fairy tale that the men in these novels fear as unknown and seek to control. These women not only play the damsel in distress that man may win as a prize, they also play the dangerous siren that would lure him to his doom. Nineteenth-century medical men sought to control the female body, because it was problematic to their framework of existence; likewise the men of the era sought to define and eradicate the ‘problem’ of feminine sexuality. As Armstrong argues in a discussion of Defoe’s heroines, their sexuality “so directly assaults the autonomy of the others that it cannot be incorporated within the social body charged with protecting the individual autonomy” (**How Novels Think** 41). In a society committed to its own safety and protection at all costs, female sexuality is a liability and an inconstant too dangerous to leave alone. Further, Armstrong notes that the solution for population control, according Thomas Malthus’ *Essay on the Principle of Population*, is that if the “female body is the object of sexual desire, then we can control that desire by controlling her body” (**How Novels Think** 115). The solution to female desire and controlling the female body is marriage. Within this institution, a woman was safely transferred from her father’s possession to that of her husband, who would maintain absolute control and
definition over both her body and desire. In her revision of Bataille, Fraiman claims that in this way “marriage is a . . . renunciation of the [woman’s] right to a sexual agenda of her own” (73). It seems she cannot have a will of her own in this area, because she fulfills the role of object to service man. Possession of a woman being transferred in marriage, as Fraiman notes Elizabeth is transferred from her father to Mr. Darcy in Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, “make[s] a joint statement about the primacy of male and the effaceability of female desire” (74). Her desire can simply be erased from existence; his identity and subjectivity master every other part of her life, and so his desire eradicates and replaces hers.

Female sexuality thus becomes the site where subjectivity is decided; women must lay down the innate power of their sexuality, or they become bad subjects that threaten the stability of the Victorian society within the novel. It is vital that female sexuality and desire are owned and controlled because, as Poovey notes in her reading of *David Copperfield*, “woman is the site at which sexuality becomes visible: not only does her provocation make men conscious of their own sexuality, but her vanity and willfulness show that no man can be sure of securing her affections” (97). She is the center of all the disorderly and problematic elements of a society straight-jacketed by propriety and respectability. She is the wild card and threatens to shatter the fragile structure of her society with her intemperate soul and desire. Therefore, Poovey continues that woman “is made to bear the burden of sexuality and to be the site of sexual guilt because the problematic aspects of sexuality can be rhetorically (if not actually) mastered when they are externalized and figured in an other” (97). Through mastering her, society
is able to resolve its irrational numbers and finalize its perfect and clean boundaries.

Women who retain their subjectivity over their sexuality become bad subjects in that they do not lay down their power for the good of the masses. For, according to Foucault in his historical discussion of society’s view of the human body, “the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called ‘disciplines’ . . . in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the disciplines became general formulas of domination” (*Discipline* 137). This idea of control continued in the nineteenth century, and while Foucault was specifically referring to the ungendered human body, I would suggest that the control would be exercised differently on male and female bodies. The control enforced upon the female body served as the very chains that bind her. It seems her body becomes a tool to be used, and this control can be defined by Foucault’s further discussion of the human body and “how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines” (138).

These women cannot escape their role as a commodity in a business marketplace, but they can attempt to control the trading of their own bodies. Yet when they do this, Armstrong argues, “they identify the entrepreneurial energy of the bad subject with sexual energy: the power both to attract and satisfy customers” (*How Novels Think* 37). This ownership and exchange of their bodies is rebellious because as in Austen’s novels “it is their restraint, their ability to reject not only unwanted sexual advances but advantageous marriage proposals as well that converts their otherwise
docile bodies into those of bad subjects. By saying no, these heroines challenge the marriage rules that maintain the social hierarchy” (43). They are threatening the foundation of their society by attempting to exert authority in the ownership and trafficking of their bodies. And although the societies we see depicted in these novels cannot name this threat, they will seek to control it none the less.

The nineteenth century’s ambiguity about female sexuality that we see illustrated within these novels becomes evident in the dual imagery of saint and harlot and within male existential need to control it. According to Poovey, society at large did not identify women as the site of trouble within desire. In her discussion of his essay titled “Why Are Women Redundant,” she suggests that W.R. Greg “consistently assigns responsibility for the moral laxity that perpetuates such sexual license to men, but the solutions he devises always address the supply side of the economic balance, not the sexual demand” (5). Even though these men are deemed the problem the solution should be found in the control and regulation of female sexuality and desire. It is her responsibility to avoid what Fraiman terms “the abyss of extramarital sexuality” and to “successfully prevent ‘things’ from happening to her. Her paradoxical task is to see the world while avoiding violation by the world’s gaze” (7). The weight is laid on her shoulders; she must resist man’s advances even while this defines her as a bad subject. Women must protect themselves from the dangers that men pose, even while tightening the restraint around their own wrists. The issue with this attempted control is the duality of definition of what exactly female sexuality looked like. Baruch notes that, in religious circles of the time, woman “has either been the exalted, desexualized mother on a
pedestal or the vulnerable object dependent for her very breath on the male” (344). Secularly, on the one hand female sexuality was defined as non-existent; women possessed no desire and were simple devices for male pleasure, release, and reproduction. Or, on the other hand, it was described as a dangerous and unknown force that sought to attract unsuspecting men and ensnare them in their web of destruction.

This woman, with her dichotomous sexuality, is a contradiction that, according to Poovey’s observation of poems by Pope and Swift, is “associated with the flesh, desire, and unsocialized, hence susceptible, impulses and passions”; she is the weak link in society, capable of letting in all kinds of destructive forces into the monster-free Victorian society (9-10). But she is also “his moral hope and spiritual guide,” the one who can save him and therefore all of society (10). She is at once society’s destruction and its savior. Poovey goes on to suggest that “the contradiction between a sexless, moralized angel and an aggressive, carnal magdalen was therefore written into the domestic ideal as one of its constitutive characteristics” (11). This walking paradox is central to the framework of the Victorian society we see in these novels and therefore vital to protect and maintain. Arnold suggests that, “in classical aesthetics and in capitalism, ideal images collapse individual distinctions in women, for in a developing industrial economy that separates genders, the need is to perceive all women as naturally performing the same domestic functions in all homes” (279). The individual women that make up the category of woman must be eradicated and her traits idealized so that they can be used for the purposes that their society needs. Armstrong explains in her discussion of ambivalence that this dichotomy is a result of “finding it impossible to carry
on a relationship with such an object, the individual generally resolves this problem by splitting that object in two, producing a good object and a bad object, each of which contains certain features of the other” (How Novels Think 57). By splitting feminine sexuality in two, man is able to pedestal one and condemn the other, and by removing her innate complexity and contradictions he is able to better define and control her so as to reduce her threat upon his subjectivity and society. Thus, Poovey claims in her discussion of Lady Eastlake’s dealings with the governess’ plight, “the implicit accusation here is that women had to be idolized and immobilized for some men to think them safe from other men’s rapacious sexual desire and from their own susceptibility” (148). As the nineteenth-century man in these novels constantly tries to reassure himself of his subjectivity and control over his destiny, it becomes increasingly vital that he also protect and preserve not only the image he has erected of himself but also the mirror that contains it. It seems that these men recognize the threat that other men pose to their possessions and defined masculinity. The dichotomous definition of woman as both angel and demon allows them to mutually protect their own identity and subjectivity.

Even though it is easier for society to control woman as a split persona, the individual man is still torn and desires both female personas. Within the novels, the men are continuously commenting on their desires for this contradiction. They want an angel to domesticate their house and make sure they are fitting in the domestic ideal and Victorian societal prescriptions for the sane, yet they also want the whore on the street who is willing to fulfill all of their fantasies. In Jane Eyre, as Rochester encounters Jane he sees her as “little sunny-faced girl with dimpled cheek and rosy lips,” yet he receives
her with “an embrace and a kiss,” and she is “caressed by him” (Brontë 155). It is almost disturbing that he would desire to caress the child-like innocence that Jane embodies, but on deeper consideration it becomes evident that Rochester is simply caught between the two ideals. He wants someone who is innocent, one who can both save his soul and rescue him from his loneliness and that he knows is untouched and undefiled by another man’s reflection. Rosamond is similarly described by Lydgate at first glance as he notes “how lovely this creature was . . . with this infantine blondness” (Eliot 150). She is described as an infant, not only in her innocence but also in her pliability. In Middlemarch, Lydgate sees, or thinks he sees a woman who is ready to be molded and crafted into the object and reflection that he desires to see of himself. This appears to be why she is so attractive to him; she is a blank slate that can be whatever he wants her to be. In this, “Lydgate threatens to usurp control of women’s bodies and therefore endanger their deepest selves” (Gilbert 508). Dorothea holds a similar allure for the aging Casaubon, as he observes that “she was not coldly clever and indirectly satirical, but adorably simple and full of feeling. She was an angel beguiled” (198). She is not much of a challenge or a threat, and so she is what he is looking for in his advanced age. She is also neither witty nor intelligent in his eyes and thus also not a threat to his life’s work or identity as a scholar. She is a simpleton who simply feels, like a pet or an infant would. Arnold suggests that Dorothea is continually under a male gaze which “objectifies her into their perceptions of her role within the male ordered culture” (276). Yet Dorothea cannot help but to disrupt this prescription, for “as the men’s categories . . . impose a static, definitive perception of Dorothea from an external, culturally-wrought vantage, her
own subjective experience chafes at such formulaic outlines” (275-276). In opposition the men in these novels want not just the angel they have described but the harlot they secretly desire.

This becomes evident as, at a party in Middlemarch, the men are congregating and discussing the young women in the room, with one of them commenting that “there should be a little filigree about a woman—something of the coquette. A man likes a sort of a challenge. The more of a dead set she makes at you the better . . . there should be a little devil in a woman” (Eliot 82). A woman is a game to them, something to be conquered, and the bigger the challenge the better for it proves his masculinity even more and increases the simple pleasure of the game. Yet this devil is one that is very tightly defined, she cannot be an individual being in herself it must simply be a trait of the object that he possesses and controls. He really wants to have his cake and eat it, too, to have the prize that he knows is safe from the conquests of other men so that his subjectivity is not at risk. He wants to have a bit of the prostitute at his disposal without the cost or moral consequences that come with her. Dorothea is a perfect example of this duality of treatment. Casaubon assumes that she is luring Will into his infatuation with her by her beauty and charms. Yet he doesn’t seem to think that is intentional on her part simply that being a woman is a dangerous thing that may attract other men to try and steal her. Casaubon is so insecure that he restricts her from seeing Will, so that she will not be susceptible to Will’s advances. So, as Casaubon sees Dorothea, on the one hand, it is her fault that Will is so in love with her, but on the other she does not have the strength or
intellectual superiority to resist his cunning advances. She at one time must be punished and protected.

In Brontë’s novel, Jane encounters this need to control feminine sexuality, and, because she cannot tolerate the consequences of resistance, she flees from Rochester only to be returned to him once he has been reduced and they have been isolated enough to allow for an egalitarian relationship. As she and Rochester are about to get married, she cries herself to sleep one night at the thought of leaving Adele’s bed for Rochester’s. In the bed she shares with Adele she is the authority, even physically bigger and stronger, and she is also sharing it with her same sex, keeping her safe from the dangerous advances of the male. When she will move to Rochester’s bed it will be the completion of his ownership of her and her complete loss of self. He has already made it quite obvious in other encounters that he will have her just as he wants her after they are wed. He has already tried to take control of her body and identity in trying to dress her to reflect him. He will continue this complete possession of her sexually as she is not morally or physically able to resist him. After seeing the fate of resistance in Bertha’s imprisonment, Jane flees. She knows that she does not want sacrifice herself to him, but she is suddenly very aware of the consequences of resistance. As Rochester describes Bertha’s attempt to strangle him, he calls it the “sole conjugal embrace I am ever to know” (Brontë 123). Bertha is the aggressor here, and the one who both initiates and dictates how the interaction will go. Bellis observes that “she could hardly be a better image of the petrifying, castrating Freudian Medusa” (647). When Bertha is first described it is her sexual physical appearance that is presented. Fisk notes that Jane observes that she is in a
white gown with her hair down, and “although the white gown suggests purity . . .
unbound hair suggests a highly sexualized female” (219). Fisk further suggests that it was
Bertha’s enjoyment of her sexuality in their marriage that disturbed Rochester, and so he
takes her from the wild tropics to icy England and imprisons her to “force . . . her into
chastity; her response is to express her sexual nature symbolically using fire and her own
physicality” (220). She has reversed the roles in attempting to dominate and resist
Rochester, and therefore she cannot be tolerated and must be imprisoned.

Even though Jane marries Rochester, Poovey claims, “she does so as an
expression of her desire, not of the self-sacrifice St. John advocated; the image with
which she represents her marriage fuses man and woman instead of respecting their
separate bodies, much less their separate spheres” (147). Jane has found a way to have
relationship with Rochester without releasing her subjectivity or being condemned by
society. Bellis significantly observes that “it is also crucial for Brontë herself, since she is
willing to turn to the supernatural in order to distinguish the power of Rochester’s
summons from the masculine order of written language” (646). By removing his vision in
becomes evident that “Rochester’s subsequent fate [is] he is now ‘a fixture,’ ‘stone-
blind,’ as the inn-keeper puts it” (647). He has become the piece of domestic furniture
that he attempted to craft Jane into as his “blinding has often been described as a
symbolic castration” (647). He seems to have become more woman than man, almost
stripping the victory of Jane’s new power over him. The novel can only allow this type of
relationship between females. His disability and the fact that they live in a small house
secluded in the woods outside of proper society may be the only place that such a marriage is allowed to exist.

Critics have debated the significance of Jane’s marriage to Rochester, some claiming that it is a marriage of equality and others that it is only possible because of his disability. According to Leggatt and Parkes “many feminist critics have recognized a lack of freedom in Jane’s marriage to Rochester, the way it threatens to remove her from the working world and turn her in to a stereotypical Victorian angel in the house” (169). Phillips claims that “Rochester wishes to marry Jane because it is through marriage that they will be able to enter a relationship of equals: he wishes to marry her precisely because he does not want to take advantage of her” (203). He argues that it cannot be his crippling that allows for their union because “it was not Rochester’s physical superiority that earlier constituted the obstacle to their union” (209). This could stand to reason if earlier evidence had not set the marriage up as an impossibility because of the control Rochester sought over Jane. It seems to Fisk that “Bertha’s death enables Jane to marry Rochester and to set up a different kind of equality, one in which she will be in no danger of losing her feminist vision as the nearly blind Rochester will be compelled to see the world through her feminine gaze” (229). This connection to the verbal economy throughout the rest of the novel makes this interpretation appear the most likely. Other critics, like Locy, agree that “the only way Jane and Rochester can be equals is if he is seriously brought low—blinded and missing his right hand, humbled and punished for his sins” (119). And Locy argues further that “Thornfield, the symbol of male domination,
must be destroyed and Jane may only return to Rochester when she has been empowered by her own wealth and respectable family connections, all things that would make her more his equal” (115). If she enters the marriage as unequal it simply furthers their earlier relationship and power dynamic of master and servant, preventing Jane from conquering the patriarchal system that seeks to crush and control her. According to Leggatt and Parkes, this victory may come at a cost: “As that agent, she is able to live at Ferndean only because she has negotiated a complex deal with the state, one that insists she become an active participant in darker forms of control, such as those in use at Lowoodschool” (170). She may have to become a part of the very social control that she has despised.

Although these women have struggled valiantly against the threats that would try to endanger, possess and define them they are set up to have no other conclusion than that of submission to their society through marriage. This failure at achieving subjectivity is reflective of the reality of the world in which their author’s existed. Despite their vision for something greater, the actuality of what was allowed within a society attempting to control and subvert women proves the stronger force. As I have asserted, this force’s power stems from what I see as an entire system balanced precariously on the shoulders of women in their place. It does not seem that it is malicious on the part of the individuals within the system, but rather is composed of millions of people vying for balance and identity within a vastly changing society. These two novels demonstrate this structure in the characters and societies contained within their pages. While the limits of this thesis only allow the consideration of the two, many other novels of this time period contain
evidence for the existence of such a system. Recognition of its existence is important because it changes the entire interpretation of these women and their situation. Instead of being mindless slaves of an ignorant generation these women emerge as warriors. Courageously shouldering the mantle of womanhood thrust upon them by the existential needs of their society, they struggle throughout their lives to find equilibrium and meaning in a world that would offer them neither. In this place we can see the foundation of the liberation of women in its drafting stage, and the audacity and bravery is both breathtaking and inspiring.
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