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The Attraction of Imperfection: Depreciating Social Capital in Victorian Marriage Plots

Catherine Clair England-Plisiewicz
University of South Carolina

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The Attraction of Imperfection:
Depreciating Social Capital in Victorian Marriage Plots

by

Catherine Clair England

Bachelor of Arts
Wofford College, 2005

Master of Arts
University of South Carolina, 2007

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

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Accepted by:

Rebecca Stern, Major Professor

Anthony Jarrells, Committee Member

Thomas Jackson Rice, Committee Member

Amy Lehman, Committee Member

Lacy Ford, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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DEDICATION

To the memory of my grandmother,

Anna Christine Rogers Davis

1911-2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not have been completed without the help of many individuals. I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude toward my committee. Dr. Amy Lehman's positive support bolstered me as I completed this dissertation. Dr. Thomas Rice's revision comments were critical to polishing my final drafts. Dr. Anthony Jarrells's continuous support of my project, which was first inspired in one of his classes, was a true gift. I am also especially indebted to Dr. Rebecca Stern whose intellectual guidance has improved my work in countless ways.

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines the importance of social capital in British marriage plots. While most people imagine heroines of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels embody virtue, I argue that many of the most innocent heroines speculate that sacrificing good assets can produce better marriages. These marriage plots demonstrate that a heroine's reputation *must* be somewhat damaged before she receives her reward of marriage. In other words, these novels do not uniformly represent, or recommend, the preservation of a heroine's good reputation; rather, they implicitly suggest that some spoiling occur before the consummation of marriage. I study how this curious freckling of heroines' reputations is desirable and financially advantageous.

My first two chapters discuss how depreciated reputations become eroticized in early marriage plots including *Pamela* and *Northanger Abbey*. I focus on heroines who damage their reputations through flirtation, and I use Pierre Bourdieu's and Georg Simmel's theories to analyze social behaviors and the relationship between flirtation and value accretion, respectively. While early marriage plots often assume that a man who proposes to a woman with low social capital possesses a selfless love, by the Victorian period novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Daniel Deronda* are more suspicious of men who desire to marry their social inferiors as well as more critical of the eroticization of feminine vulnerability. In my third chapter on Victorian novels, I connect society's growing awareness of marital abuse to fictional investigations of how loneliness renders

women both appealing and especially susceptible to dangerous suitors. My fourth chapter considers the particularly troublesome capital that celebrity offers women, and I discuss the lives of real celebrities, such as Queen Victoria, and offer a reading of Trollope's *Miss Mackenzie*. My dissertation concludes by exploring how the patterns in established marriage plots survive in popular culture phenomena such as *Downton Abbey*.

This dissertation contributes to the critical conversation in three ways. First, my claim that the heroine's speculation of social capital is characteristic of the marriage plot is one that brings novels into contact with the credit economy of their time. Although standards for modesty prevent women's speculations from being clearly viewed, they were important players in non-monetary exchanges. Secondly, this project highlights a unique period during which women undergo a trial of solitude that prepares them for an affective marriage (or indicates their readiness for that state). While this period of social exile has deathly connotations, the possibility of future happiness imbues even this dark phase with a certain pleasure, especially for readers. Lastly, this project brings a new focus to the significance of flirtation in British fiction and develops our understanding of the history of desire. While many scholars have written on fallen women and unrelenting flirts, there has been less interest in the flirtation of heroines who are not ultimately condemned. Old models of femininity create a space for play, romantic gambling, and even slightly bad behavior that can harm a woman's reputation. Thus, the concept of erotic femininity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was not simply virtuously staid but flawed, daring, and lively.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Let me begin with a basic correction: since Samuel Richardson first rewarded virtue in his 1740 novel *Pamela*, many critics have characterized marriage plots as stories of good women who eventually receive the reward of matrimonial happiness. For instance, according to Utter and Needham's *Pamela's Daughters*, Richardson's novel produced in fiction "a generation of prudes" who followed Pamela's example (43), and who evolved into the Victorian domestic ideal of the "good girl," who is modest, obedient, and self-sacrificing (Rowbotham *Good Girls Make Good Wives* 23). Later writers such as Mark Canuel acknowledge the imperfections of nineteenth-century heroines while still maintaining that eighteenth-century marriage plots, such as *Pamela*, feature protagonists who embody perfect virtue (*The Shadow of Death* 90). Yet, what happens to marriage plot novels when we look, not at the virtues they reward, but at the misbehavior they endorse? How do their heroines participate, consciously or not, in the social economy?

The first thing we might notice is that neither Pamela nor her literary descendents are as "good" as generations of critics have suggested. In fact, heroines' imperfections are frequently the source of their attractiveness. They, like the beautiful women Edmund Burke describes, "learn to lisp, to totter in their walk, to counterfeit weakness, and even sickness," because "[b]eauty in distress is much the most affecting beauty" (*A Philosophical Enquiry* 100). In this dissertation, I argue that many of the most innocent

heroines speculate that sacrificing good assets can produce the best rewards. Specifically, heroines in marriage plots speculate with their social capital as they wager that a damaged reputation may be worth more on the marriage market than a pristine one. This form of gambling is prevalent, because a depreciated—but not ruined—reputation is one of the most valuable and erotic assets a heroine can possess. As heroines spend their social capital in order to appear attractively imperfect, they become important risk takers in the social economy.

Pamela, for instance, is “so deservedly distinguished”—so properly rewarded for her “virtue”—not simply because of the preservation of her virginity but also for the visibility, the written and circulated articulation, of her struggle to preserve her virtue during difficult and damaging circumstances that her letters embody (503). Further, though Pamela’s ability to preserve her sexual innocence remains a constant, she is much less able to maintain a good reputation consistently during this struggle, and her attractiveness actually depends upon the depreciation of her reputation. Indeed, her good name often suffers because of her adamant protection of her sexual virtue.

The savvy Pamela Andrews accrues more advantages from her depreciated social capital than any hermetically sealed heroine could, and thus, her descendents, if properly understood, are not domestic angels but a plethora of attractively flawed heroines. In this dissertation, I shall argue that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century marriage plots, like *Pamela*, demonstrate that a heroine’s reputation *must* be somewhat damaged before she receives her reward of marriage.

Of course, all main characters must encounter and surmount a series of complications on the road to achieving their goals, but in this project, I focus on problems

that supposedly “good” heroines encounter that endanger their reputations while also increasing their sexual appeal. Obviously immodest heroines such as Moll Flanders, Becky Sharp, and Lizzie Eustace are outside the parameters of this dissertation. Furthermore, my focus on heroines’ reputations differs from a discussion that would attend to heroes. Of course many heroes such as Mr. B and Mr. Darcy must reform prior to marriage, but their female counterparts must often suffer significant social depreciation, which their advantageous marriages restore. In many cases, marriage plots show heroes becoming increasingly perfect before walking down the aisle, but they also show heroines losing social standing, and thus losing their untarnished reputations, prior to their nuptials. While heroes are typically more attractive to heroines, and their readers, after having learned their lesson, heroines are more desirable because of the social troubles that have so enticingly blemished their reputations.

This project seeks to understand why the heroines of these marriage plots must suffer social depreciation before they receive their rewards. Early novels were often written for a primarily female audience very concerned with marriage during a period when marriageable men were increasingly scarce: higher death rates for men as well as the rise of global capitalism and imperialism resulted in there being fewer suitors, as many men were marrying later (after accumulating some capital) or moving to the colonies (Gillis *For Better, For Worse* 234, Watt *The Rise of the Novel* 143). In this crowded marriage market, marriage plots gave their female readers a realist space to imagine the consequences of different courtship strategies, as well as the different lifestyles one would live depending upon one’s husband.¹ Whether or not a woman

¹ Gothic novels may allow women readers to imagine domestic spaces as well but certainly in a less realistic fashion.

married, as well as her choice of spouse, were increasingly important factors in Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for a number of reasons: industrialization lowered women's wages, which made women more dependent upon men (Gillis 241-41); the lack of economic individualism for married women also increased their dependence upon their husbands (Watt 142); harsher stereotypes had been growing for unmarried women since the seventeenth century, partly because their labor was less beneficial to their families (Watt 144-45); the family narrowed from larger kinship networks to the conjugal unit, leaving married women more time alone with their spouse and children (Watt 138-39); and finally, second marriages were less likely for women due to the increased value society placed on virginity (Perry *Novel Relations* 252). Reviewing how much was riding on a woman's success in the marriage market highlights the strangeness of novels' heroines becoming more attractive for being, in some way, worth less.

It does seem surprising that these marriage plots that are so often touted for their moral lessons would reveal the advantages of a less-than-perfect reputation. Nancy Armstrong correctly argues that *Pamela* is part of "a considerable body of writing that deserves to be called a conduct book in fictional form" (*Desire and Domestic Fiction* 108), and yet this fictional conduct book does not uniformly represent the preservation of all its heroine's assets but instead adds to its moral recommendations the seemingly immoral suggestion that some spoiling occur before the consummation of marriage. This curious freckling of heroines' reputations, this slipping from high pedestals of feminine virtue, is desirable, because—after all—no one marries a prude if they can help it.² In

² Perhaps many middle-class, Protestant bridegrooms would not like to appear excessively concerned with the economic perfection of a marital match, which should presumably be built upon affection. As Ruth Perry explains, love becomes that which controls marriage rather than the family or community (237). If a

particular, I examine heroines who injure their reputations through the act of flirting both privately and with the public at large through celebrity.³

In terms of narrative form, most heroines who damage their reputations undergo a period of isolation before receiving a restorative marriage proposal that allows them to happily reenter good society as a creature whose faithfulness has been proven by solitude and whose identity is freshly remade in the image of her husband's. As bachelorettes undergo a trial of solitude, heroines and readers alike experience the pains of uncertainty not without some delightful twinge of pleasure. Noticing this period complements Helena Michie's recent scholarship on the honeymoon as a time planned to isolate and bond a new couple.⁴ This moonless, pre-nuptial period of separation creates an erotically charged tension between the hero and the heroine, which encourages him to approach and propose; as the economic theorist Georg Simmel explains, "[t]he longing, effort, and sacrifice that separates us from objects are also supposed to lead us toward them" (*The Philosophy of Money* 75). Like any myth of a living death that is succeeded by a resurrection, these traditional marriage plots have undeniable appeal, and this dissertation will consider how stories of depreciated heroines address their implied women readers. These novels may implicitly recommend that their readers speculate the amount of social capital they should risk in order to receive the best prize—the happy marriage.

novel's hero chooses a woman of lowered social capital, it presumably indicates the truly affectionate and unselfish motives of the hero.

³ Elizabeth Gaskell's Mary Barton is the sort of heroine with whom this project concerns itself—not fallen but certainly slumping—because she injures her reputation by flirting with Henry Carson and yet never becomes truly fallen. While Mary's flirtation remains relatively private, Magdalen Vanstone's, the heroine of Wilkie Collins' *No Name*, flirts more generally with the audiences who attend her dramatic performances.

⁴ For more on the importance of honeymoons, see Michie's *Victorian Honeymoons*.

The term “social capital,” which I use throughout this dissertation, is one that I have borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu’s “The Forms of Capital,” in which he argues that capital includes not only the monetary currencies in circulation but also the more disguised currencies of cultural and social capital (243). Cultural capital appears in one of three forms: “in the embodied state, i.e. in the long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods ... and in the institutionalized state,” which occurs when the former states are backed by an institutional certificate, such as an educational degree. Social capital consists of a person’s “connections” or place within a social body that owns economic capital, and is, like cultural capital, “convertible on certain conditions to economic capital” (244). Also, just like monetary wealth, a person’s social capital can fluctuate. When connections to those with wealth, power, or influence are strengthened or increased, social capital rises. Conversely, an individual’s social capital lessens if he or she proves embarrassing to the larger social body through weakening connections or through unacceptable behavior. Embarrassing individuals may be protected by the head of their social group, usually a family’s father, as a means to “defend the collective honor,” but in cases where individuals have accrued too much dishonor for their social group to accept, the head may cut them out to protect the other members (252). In many cases, the heroines of marriage plots have fathers who are unable to protect them fully from the consequences of their social missteps. The ineffectuality of the father allows the hero the opportunity to seize the post of protective father and thus grant the heroine a new family that restores and often increases her social capital.

Before I turn to the critical conversation, I will position Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* as an early British marriage plot that establishes an influential precedent for how social capital will continue to function in later British novels. When *Pamela* opens, its heroine has the reputation of a good, accomplished maid among her upper-class employers, indeed her late mistress was especially fond of her, and so she had access to a certain amount of aristocratic good will. For instance, Pamela's mistress "put [Pamela] to write and cast Accompts, and made [her] a little expert at [her] Needle, and other Qualifications above [her] degree" (Richardson 11); these accomplishments are examples of cultural capital and are not only skills that could be used to earn money but are also ones that will make this servant girl more agreeable to upper-class suitors.⁵ As Patricia Meyer Spacks notes, Pamela's "right to *belong* [to higher society] depends not only on her marriage but her knowledge of such matters as how to carve at table, how to sing for company" (149), which she learns under the tutelage of her mistress. The economic advantages of Pamela's good standing with the aristocracy are clear when Mr. B gives her six shifts, six handkerchiefs, and seven aprons, which she is able "to make Money of" (18). Despite the monetary perks of having a good name within a wealthy family, Pamela makes the surprising decision to deny Mr. B his master's privileges to her person, and in so doing, she takes a great risk that all the favor she once had with the aristocracy will be lost.

Whether or not Pamela was right to refuse Mr. B is an example of what Michael McKeon calls "questions of virtue." Pamela implicitly attacks the aristocratic ideology,

⁵ Pamela's mistress, Mr. B's mother, urges her son to "Remember my poor *Pamela*!" on her deathbed (11). The urgency with which she recommends the girl at such an important moment (almost as if she was treating her as a daughter or family member) combined with the training she gives Pamela dimly suggest that she may have been preparing her pretty, humble maid to be agreeable to her tyrannical son, who admits that his marriage might be troubled if he was espoused to someone equally spoiled (444).

which is supported by characters including Mr. B, Mrs. Jewkes, and Lady Davers, by resisting Mr. B's advances, which makes both her behavior as well as Richardson's novel a model of the new "progressive ideology" which argues that virtue and nobility are not necessarily aligned with titled birthrights (*The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* 21).⁶ I am arguing here that just as popular literature shifts from romances imbued with aristocratic ideology to novels of progressive ideology, Pamela herself shifts her reputation from being founded upon the good opinion of the aristocracy to that of the middle-class—which mirrors a similar shift in Mr. B, who he leaves his upper-class libertinism behind for bourgeois morality. While Pamela's behavior is at different points approved by both the aristocratic and progressive ideologies, she shifts the basis of her reputation to the progressive middle-class by the end of the novel. In order for her reputation to emerge as distinctly bourgeois, she first loses her good name among the upper class.

After Pamela refuses Mr. B, he frequently uses name-calling as a technique to bully her and as a sign that she is no longer favored or protected by his class; he calls her "Slut," "Baggage," "Boldface," "Insolent," "Sawce-box," and "Creature" (24, 28, 31, 71). Ironically, after showering her with insults, he threatens to give her a "bad Name," or reputation, if she escapes his advances by returning to her poor parents (25). Her obsession with virtue causes her to lose the social capital to which the upper class had formerly given her access. And yet, it is only through this painful loss of a good reputation in the eyes of the aristocracy, and their cronies such as Mrs. Jewkes, that she

⁶ McKeon's argument focuses on the novel as a historical genre, and he examines how an emerging, more middle-class culture creates this new genre in the eighteenth century to explore questions of truth and virtue according to different ideologies, which he calls the aristocratic, progressive, and conservative (20-22).

can rebuild her social capital within a newly formed middle-class ideology.⁷ Although Pamela muses on how the higher classes can be quickly brought low, she does not end her life a “*high-minded*” girl with empty pockets (258). Because the reformed Mr. B. represents the burgeoning middle class, Pamela ultimately loses no opportunities for monetary wealth or genteel friends; rather, her erotically charged reputation wins her more access to wealth and connections.⁸ As a self-styled bourgeois wife, she enjoys greater privileges than she would have as a ruined servant or even a pampered mistress, who with “Suits of rich Cloaths . . . may *appear* with Reputation as *if* [she] was [Mr. B’s] Wife” (my italics 190). Pamela loses a genuinely good name with the aristocracy, and then, she gains an even more favored name and reputation as the embodiment of the new middle-class.

After 1740, the compromised heroine restored by the husband-to-be becomes a romantic staple. From this point onward—despite whatever the suitor’s class is—the kind of reputation that will be maintained is one of middle-class morality. Whether Pamela did or did not consciously speculate that her good reputation might be bargained in order to obtain the advantages of a privileged wife remains unclear. In *Fictions of Modesty*, Ruth Bernard Yeazell argues that “[i]t is Pamela’s very unconsciousness of the end toward which she is moving—or at least her partially occluded consciousness—that makes that end possible” (87). Although Henry Fielding would find it doubtful that Pamela is

⁷ Unlike the servants who are fired for their allegiance to Pamela (222), Mr. B’s housekeeper at his Lincolnshire estate, Mrs. Jewkes, has the sort of old-world, feudal mind that supports the abuses of aristocrats and finds Pamela’s middle-class morality “strange”; for example, she sees no reason why Mr. B should not have his maid, if he likes her: “And is it not natural for a Gentleman to love a pretty Woman? And suppose he can obtain his Desires, is that so bad as cutting her Throat?” (110).

⁸ Mr. B becomes a model of for the new, ideal husband. One of his neighbors says, “For we Husbands, hereabout . . . are resolv’d to turn over a new Leaf with our Wives, and [Pamela’s] Lord and Master shall shew us the Way, I can tell you that” (402).

unaware of the affects of her charms, it is nevertheless true that Pamela leaves open the possibility that her modesty is sincere, and thus she sets the standard of deniable calculation for later middle-class heroines.⁹

The openness and immediacy of Pamela's writing is one avenue by which she presents her sincerity and trustworthiness. Pamela's diary builds her identity as it records her thoughts, movements, and desires. The diary also records those crucial moments when she forgets herself, which she calls the "greatest Harm in the World" (23). We think of these moments of forgetfulness as sexual, because Pamela's belief in the importance of virtue implies that any harm to that virtue must be the "greatest Harm" possible. Despite her chaste intentions, her identity as a virtuous, humble girl can easily slip away, which indicates the precariousness of her "good" character. After Mr. B. kisses her, she says, "You have taught me to forget myself, and what belongs to me" (23). Later when he accuses her of gossiping about the kiss, she begs him to stop speaking, "for fear I forget myself, and be sawcy" (30). She does in fact forget her self and speak saucily only a few pages later (40). Her sauciness is at once both disrespectful and flirtatious. Much of her flirtatiousness is due to her vacillating attitudes. Her sharpest words are often quickly contrasted with apologizes and compliments, and so, as she approaches and then pushes away, she also fascinates Mr. B. His attraction to Pamela does not grow simply because she staunchly preserves her virtue, but because she alternates between seeming to preserve it and seeming to open her self up to his

⁹ *Moll Flanders* is another novel that sets in motion elements, such as the female-as-commodity and the importance of female speculation in the marriage market, which I trace from the eighteenth century to the Victorian period. Moll openly provides instructions for how to find a good husband even in a market glutted with potential wives. Unlike the heroines I examine, her reputation is thoroughly ruined by nefarious behavior, and yet, she is still able to find a happy ending. Of course, her happiness is only permitted to exist in America, which is far enough away that her reputation becomes irrelevant.

advances—for example, she runs from his touch, only to return at the slightest call (210).¹⁰ However angry Mr. B says her impertinence makes him, her sauciness acts like so much “appetizing accompaniment” poured onto her body, which always appears more attractive to Mr. B when saucy words pour out of it (*OED* “sauce” 1a). This use of the word “sawcy” not only reminds us of verbal insolence and culinary refinements but also of the earlier and more sexually charged definition of “wanton, lascivious,” which was often used in Shakespeare’s dramas with “serious condemnation,” and which one cannot but hear echoes of in Richardson’s carnally focused novel (*OED* “saucy” 2a, 1b). Pamela claims that her ability to refrain from sauciness and remember her station depends upon Mr. B’s ability to remember his; she tells him, “Well may I forget that I am your Servant, when you forget what belongs to a Master” (23). When Mr. B. forgets his station and takes liberties with a servant, Pamela forgets her own place and also takes liberties with him. Her “pretty Impertinence” consists of saucy words that she speaks and later repeats within her diary (233). This inclination to forget herself constantly places her good character on a precipice from which it may slip—just as some tasty, liquid sauce may easily slip from a fork to a dress and thus cause a stain, which is all at once an expensive error, an embarrassment, and a reminder of a dinner’s deliciousness.

Pamela’s slips offer opportunities to reveal her capacity for remorse as well as her ability to create a new middle-class identity built upon honesty and a sense of self-worth. When Pamela forgets herself and her station, she forgets allegedly proper behavior of a

¹⁰ My argument about how Pamela’s flirtatious see-saw behavior complicates Mr. B’s description of his increasing attraction to Pamela: “And I see you so watchful over your Virtue that tho’ I hop’d to find it otherwise, I cannot but say, my Passion for you has increas’d by it” (213). The trouble that Mr. B has with Pamela is another possible cause for his growing passion; if he could have “the finest Lady in *England*” for “half the Trouble,” then perhaps that lady would appear only half as valuable as Pamela, because the value of an object is sometimes determined by the labor involved in obtaining it (215). Georg Simmel explains that scarcity, necessity of renunciation, and difficulty of acquisition all create value (75).

serving girl. Her diary registers each time she forgets and registers each time she remembers and rebuilds her identity. Thus, though Pamela expresses remorse over her improper behavior, she is also creating a new kind of woman for whom such behavior is forgivable or, perhaps, acceptable. Through this process of forgetfulness and memory, Pamela moves away from subservience to the aristocratic order and toward an identity built upon middle-class values, which prohibits kowtowing to the wealthy.

One of the less visible lessons readers may learn from Pamela's example is the importance of enduring solitude, and Richardson's novel establishes what will become of a common pattern for marriage plots: after the heroine slips, she must endure some degree of social isolation. Pamela proves her worthiness as the proto-bourgeois wife as she endures her imprisonment by Mr. B. Some of these experiences are so painful that Pamela swoons into a sort of temporary death from which she must resurrect (206). During what Mr. B calls "the Time of this Trial" (133), Pamela demonstrates her ability to withstand the kind of intense isolation that Ian Watt argues is characteristic of the affective marriage (139), while it also indicates just how much she is capable of enduring while still (at least eventually) loving Mr. B. Pamela writes that feeling love causes her "to be more a Prisoner," but surely, she has proven that she can withstand such sweet, confining bars (248). The severity of a heroine's period of isolation is often relative to the degree to which she will rise by her marriage. Pamela's marriage is particularly advantageous and consequently her isolation must be especially severe.

The higher a woman marries above her original station, the more likely it is that she will be excluded from her husband's society, and thus she and her husband would have to be sure that such social exile would not be objectionable to the bride. Mr. B

worries that Pamela will be unhappy without ladies' society: "But how will you bestow your Time, when you will have no Visits to receive or pay? Nor Parties or Pleasure to join in?" But, his future bride quickly squashes his worries as she insists that her time will be easily and pleasantly filled by attending to household economy and charitable works in the neighborhood: "O, Sir, said I, you are all Goodness! How shall I bear it!— But do you think, Sir, in such a Family as yours, a Person . . . will not find useful Employments of her Time, without looking abroad for any others?" (263) Readers need not doubt that Pamela could withstand the seclusion after the novel's earlier events, and as it turns out, she will undergo a second trial before her merits recommend her to her in-laws and the neighborhood's gentry.

Pamela's tremendous success was due to its blend of politeness and salaciousness; as Ian Watt has argued, it combines the "attractions of the sermon with a striptease," because it depicts a heroine who flirts while denying that she is flirting (173). According to Armstrong, "Richardson struck upon a double maneuver that ensured his novel was not a novel in the derogatory sense of the word, even though it was indeed a work of fiction. He deployed the strategies of the most deleterious fiction—a tale of seduction – within the framework of a conduct book" (*Desire* 109), and it is this "double maneuver" that women must replicate if they hope to be successfully married. Women must learn to differentiate "the right kind of sex and the wrong kind of sex" according to Ruth Perry's *Novel Relations*, in which she explains that Richardson and others were depicting a new sort of woman who could "be the right kind of sexual property: neither prude nor coquette but trustworthy and warmblooded" (254). Like *Pamela*, Pamela herself is an early example of a consumable good with a questionable reputation, and her

story suggests that the taint of scandal actually promotes desire. Richardson's editor encourages readers to take heed of Pamela's example with its "many signal Instances of the Excellency of her Mind; which may make her Character worthy of the Imitation of her Sex, from low to high Life" (503). Such comments legitimize Pamela's history while encouraging readers to manufacture such a story for themselves.

Pamela establishes both that this new "right kind of sexual property" exists and that its existence always involves the possession of a subtle, social taint, which proves that the woman is something in-between, neither prudish nor promiscuous. Just as a painting's flaws may prove its authenticity, so does a taint prove a heroine's authenticity and thus desirability. For instance, Pamela's sauciness is at once disrespectful and engaging. *Pamela* provides us with an example for how such delicately damaged sexual property may be bought, and its heroine becomes, in the words of her master, "a worthy Pattern for all the young Ladies" who may be copied like a fashionable gown by those who want to replicate her particular style of sexual property (285). If they wish equal success, later heroines must still maintain that standard of deniable calculation that Pamela first initiated. Although later heroines usually undergo less traumatic trials prior to their nuptials, they must still injure their social capital in order to be the sort of attractive bargain that bourgeois men snap up.

In the marriage plot, the heroine depletes her social capital as she falls into various scrapes that usually prompt a rise in her suitor's esteem for her and consequently a marriage proposal that restores (with interest) her social capital. This project focuses on heroines who fall but are rarely brazen. Women attempt to work just hard enough in the marriage market to be successful, and yet not so hard that they will be caught in the

embarrassing work of husband hunting.¹¹ They must speculate that their social capital can win them a husband without seeming to know that they are laying down a bet. Thus, a plausible unconsciousness is required in their investing in order to make them appear modest. Novel reading teaches women to skirt the edges of good behavior without ever crossing the line -- that is, to flirt with the unacceptable without becoming unacceptable.

However, the line between the acceptable and the unacceptable is often invisible until after it is breached. Like the river in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, the line is fluid. Maggie Tulliver, under the influence of Stephen Guest's intoxicating presence and the "delicious rhythmic dip of the oars" (426), notices nothing to warn her of her impending indiscretion as all "way-marks pass unnoticed" (426). Only once her fate is sealed does Maggie discover she has floated past the point at which she could return home to St. Ogg's before nightfall and, thereby, keep her reputation relatively intact.¹² Readers too may not be certain if a heroine has crossed the unforgivable line until the end of a novel. The only sure indication of a heroine having stayed within the limits of propriety is a happy marriage. Catherine Gallagher argues that fiction encourages speculation about characters and events and that this "imaginative play" allows readers to practice the sort of predictions necessary in modern life, predictions helpful in both imagining married life and in encouraging that blessed event to take place ("The Rise of Fictionality" 346). The marriage plot instructs its implied readers to place themselves in positions of just enough danger to elicit male affections and proposals, and it allows

¹¹ Marriage plots encourage female readers to think of themselves as tainted commodities rather than as consumers hunting for husbands. Their attempts to be a desirable (albeit imperfect) commodity must overshadow any desire to shop for a husband. Heroines such as *Vanity Fair's* Becky Sharp fail to deemphasize their desire to find a husband as they act more like scheming mothers than appropriately passive daughters.

¹² Although Maggie's indiscretion prompts Stephen's proposal, it is made too far after they have passed the point of no return both on the river and in their romantic commitments to others (427).

opportunities for guessing and predicting, which are especially useful when the standards of propriety are fluid as river water.

This project is indebted to Gallagher's work in "The Rise of Fictionality" which explains how the "fiction friendly" modern credit economy encourages flexible subjects to speculate upon the outcomes in novels just as they speculate upon the realness of the paper money in their pockets (345). Gallagher describes this flexible, modern subject as possessing "cognitive provisionality" (347). Individuals may practice their abilities to speculate and remain flexible as they read fiction, because fiction provides a constant vacillation between the real and the unreal, as well as a need for guessing, predicting, and estimating the worth of characters. This is particularly important for women who would have minimal experience with men until after their marriages. Prior to marriage, women may use novels as a means of practicing the arts of marital speculation (346).¹³ Ian Watt's scholarship on the historical context surrounding the rise of the novel emphasizes the importance of this practice to women entering an overcrowded marriage market (142).

Mary Poovey argues in *Genres of the Credit Economy* that eighteenth-century economic writing, especially by Defoe, familiarized readers with the ins and outs of money management (15). My argument expands this thesis to assert that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts familiarized women readers with the management of various forms of capital that may be used in the marriage market, and thus, marriage plots are not solely entertaining or fanciful but instructive in surprising ways, particularly in their subtle approval of risky behavior.

¹³ Gallagher's understanding of fictional characters such as Evelina who are "constant[ly] teetering on the brink of social non-being"—of being a "nobody"—is also helpful when examining female characters at points of very low social capital (*Nobody's Story* 208).

Nancy Armstrong has influenced both the ways in which I discuss literary periods and my claim that Pamela is a modern, fictional character who is “uniquely capable of reproducing itself not only in authors but also in readers” (*How Novels Think* 3). Also, her argument that the domestic angel was only ever an ideal and that novels counter this illusionary notion of femininity is an important precedent for my own thesis concerning depreciation (*Desire* 252). “Every woman was, like Louisa Gradgrind, a little bit fallen,” according to Armstrong, and “[w]hat mattered was that she never gave into her own desire but waged an unrelenting battle against it” (252). In “Captivity and Cultural Capital in the English Novel,” Armstrong claims that late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century culture assumes that women will fall into dangers from which they may be rescued (382). By this period, English fiction is more likely to depict dangers that threaten a woman’s social identity than those that attack her physical body; despite the seeming triviality of such social perils, the former can do as much damage as the latter (391). This idea of danger is essential to my understanding of how the fall of social capital triggers a rescuing project that arrives in the form of a marriage proposal.

Georg Simmel’s theories on scarcity, value, and marriage in *The Philosophy of Money* help inform how this project defines flirtation and its ability to produce affection through distance and sacrifice (72, 372). Flirting involves “withdrawal and approach,” which can increase any object’s desirability (75). Flirting also encourages others to sacrifice for their beloved object, and this effort takes advantage of the human tendency to value that for which it labors (86). Richard A. Kaye also understands flirtation as based upon “a series of deferrals,” and in *The Flirt’s Tragedy*, he highlights the ways in which Victorian and modern novels are “deeply preoccupied with flirtatious desire,” which he

argues is often used to expand plots and explore alternative sexualities (2, 3). Kaye's work responds to Ruth Bernard Yeazell's *Fictions of Modesty*, which focuses on how conduct literature affects eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writing on feminine modesty. Her work is especially helpful as it highlights the possibility of unconscious flirtation, which is relevant to my interpretation of *Pamela* and *Northanger Abbey*, in which it is perhaps unconsciousness that explains the immodest behavior by modest women.

Before discussing unconscious flirtation, it is important to understand better what flirtation is. Defining flirtation has been a longstanding problem, and Trollope's Mrs. Hittaway testifies to this fact when she wittily writes of her brother's fiancée, Lady Eustace, "I never quite know what people mean when they talk of flirting. But you may take my word for it that she allows her cousin to embrace her, and *embraces* him" (*The Eustace Diamonds* 296). Certainly, we can all agree with Mrs. Hittaway's implied message that flirtation includes less scandalous behavior than extramarital "*embraces*." More seriously, in Sarah Stickney Ellis's *The Daughters of England*, she defines flirtation as "all that part of the behaviour of women, which in the art of pleasing, has reference only to men," and she claims that "[i]t is easy to understand whether a woman is guilty of flirtation or not, by putting her conduct to this simple test – whether, in mixed society, she is the same to women as to men" (213). While Ellis admits that both men and women engage in flirtation, and sometimes unconsciously, she cannot imagine that flirtation would be performed either with a member of one's own sex or that it may be performed guiltlessly (213-14). And according to Judith Rowbotham, Ellis and most didactic Victorian fiction "universally condemned [flirting] as unfair, deceitful and impious . . . a

sure path to misery for the flirt herself . . .” (50). Flirting is often described as acting a part while keeping others in the dark; thus, the flirt’s allegedly fond feelings are mere stagecraft compared to the more genuine feelings of her victim. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “flirtation” as “[t]he action or behaviour of a flirt; flighty or giddy behaviour, frivolity; the action of playing at courtship” (“flirtation” 2). This definition usefully connects the act of flirting with playing. Play, as Gallagher notes, is important for modern individuals who may imaginatively cast themselves as characters in a variety of fictional situations in order to prepare, or practice, for the real world (“The Rise of Fictionality” 346). Additionally, the accusation that a flirt only plays a part is a common one that links flirting with play-acting. Nevertheless, such definitions are insufficient, because they do not clearly state the characteristics of a flirtatious act. Additionally, they have unnecessarily negative connotations.

I define flirtation as any behavior consciously or unconsciously preformed that encourages a person or group to feel greater interest, or greater care, for an individual; flirtation often involves behaviors of vacillation so that it creates a see-saw effect between nearness and distance, knowledge and mystery, authenticity and affectation, or pleasure and pain. Intention is irrelevant to whether or not an action is perceived as flirtatious; we can find social groups registering actions determined to be flirtatious through behaviors such as gossiping whispers, knowing smiles, and raised eyebrows.

For example, when *Daniel Deronda*’s Gwendolen Harleth expects a possible proposal from Grandcourt, her decision to go abroad suddenly is an act of flirtation, which Grandcourt, Lush, and Gwendolen’s uncle all believe is designed to secure Grandcourt as a match. While Gwendolen’s decision to leave is not motivated by a desire

to increase her appeal, but rather by an impulse to remove herself from a suitor of whom she is uncertain, it is nevertheless an act of flirtation, and one that Lush calls a “master-stroke,” even though it is not consciously designed to increase desire (513). Simmel explains, “withdrawal and approach are in practice complementary notices, each of which presupposes the other; they are two sides of our relationships to objects,” and so when Gwendolen, the object of Grandcourt’s desire withdraws, he approaches (75). And, like many successful acts of flirtation, Gwendolen’s withdrawal is perceived, especially by her uncle, to be a piece of “coquettish daring” on the borderline of “too much” (133). Unsurprisingly, the unconscious performer of this behavior, which so perfectly tantalizes readers as well as the usually unexcitable Grandcourt, is a great reader of novels, the genre most likely to explore just how much a heroine must risk in order to remain marriageable. Though Gwendolen’s risky behavior (along with her family’s financial trouble) triggers Grandcourt’s proposal, flirting in general only tends to, but does not necessarily, create desirability.

A number of other, and commonly acknowledged, flirtatious actions such as fluttering eyelids or fans, a hand that reaches toward another and then is quickly removed, or, famously, the sight of Elizabeth Bennet’s muddled petticoat emerging out from behind her gown are all examples of behaviors that can fascinate by giving and taking away contact in quick succession. Miss Havisham’s training of Estella shows a mastery of flirtatious give-and-take. Not only does Miss Havisham tantalizingly arrange for young Pip to visit Satis House every other day, her schooling of Estella further emphasizes the power of alternating closeness and distance:

Sometimes, [Estella] would coldly tolerate me; sometimes, she would condescend to me; sometimes, she would be quite familiar with me;

sometimes, she would tell me energetically that she hated me . . . And sometimes, when her moods were so many and so contradictory of one another that I was puzzled what to say or do, Miss Havisham would embrace her with lavish fondness, murmuring something in her ear that sounded like ‘Break their hearts my pride and hope, break their hearts and have no mercy!’ (95)

Miss Havisham recognizes that changefulness is essential to Estella learning to be a heartbreaker. Pip does not love Estella because she is a distant star, but because she is a star that sometimes seems to be within reach. As Pip describes Estella’s various moods, he uses the word “sometimes” five times in the paragraph above, which contrasts starkly with his description of Biddy, for whom he could never really feel passion, on the very next page: “I reposed complete confidence in no one but Biddy; but, I told poor Biddy everything. Why it came natural to me to do so, and why Biddy had a deep concern in everything I told her, I did not know then, though I think I know now” (96). Unlike the changeful, shallow-hearted, and desirable Estella, Biddy is constant, full of “deep concern,” and always available to hear “everything,” and thus, despite her goodness, she is also much less attractive. Biddy is emotionally and socio-economically close to Pip, whereas Estella, who has moments where she tells Pip the truth about herself, feels close only “sometimes,” usually just before she turns away to ascend a staircase or proudly endure gossip as she flirts with another man (311).¹⁴ While Estella flirts quite successfully, she does not do so unconsciously, and thus, because she neglects to maintain the possibility of deniable calculation, which is so important to feminine

¹⁴ Estella flirts with the boor Drummle in much the same way she flirts with the more sensitive Pip: “[Drummle] was always in pursuit of her, and he and I crossed one another every day. He held on, in a dull persistent way, and Estella held him on; now with encouragement, now with discouragement, now almost flattering him, now openly despising him, now knowing him very well, now scarcely remembering who he was” (309-10).

modesty, it is unsurprising that Dickens cannot in the end give her but little happiness.¹⁵

It is important to note that to flirt always puts a woman's reputation at risk, and so, if courtship involves flirtation, it also involves risks to one's social capital, and future happiness. But, sometimes the risks pay off.

At the beginning of this chapter, I argued that Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* is an early British marriage plot novel that establishes an important precedent for how social capital will function in later British novels. These novels are a culmination of ideas about marriage, suffering, and isolation that appear in many myths, romances, fairy tales, and dramas. Before a couple can be truly united in these genres, there is often a love test. While this can be as painless as examining which maid eats cheese most efficiently, as in the fairy tale "Brides on Their Trial," these tests more often involve an upsetting loss of status (*Grimm's* 225-26). For example, Psyche's trials result in a loss of the beauty for which she is famous, and not until Cupid reunites with her and grants her immortality is her beauty restored (Hamilton 130-33). In "The Knight of the Cart," Lancelot must humiliate himself by losing a tournament in order to please Guinevere (de Troyes 241), and the princess in Grimm's "King Thrushebeard" is forced to leave her family, work as a kitchen maid, and suffer being laughed at before she receives her happy ending (206-07).

Part of testing a bride involves a loss not only of status but also of social contact. Heroines are tested to see if they can endure isolation either with only their beloved for company or with no company at all. Psyche's troubles result from her inability to contently live alone with Cupid; her insistence that she see her sisters leads her to betray the god of Love's trust (Hamilton 124-29). Enide likewise is not content with the

¹⁵ In both endings to *Great Expectations*, Estella undergoes abuse by Drummle. And in neither ending does Dickens definitively show her as part of a happily married and procreative couple.

pleasures of Erec's bed, because she longs for him to fight and re-establish his fame so that men would cease gossiping about them (de Troyes 31-33). Not only does Erec punish her by forbidding her to speak, which effectively cuts her off from all companionship, but he also tests to see if she would marry again after his death (35, 59-61). A number of fairy tales, such as "Rapunzel," "The Girl Without Hands," and "The True Sweetheart," also involve a woman waiting alone or beginning a solitary quest for her beloved. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Hero is slandered, albeit falsely, which destroys her reputation. In order to try to restore it, she pretends to be dead and isolates herself so that there will be time for her innocence to be revealed and her charms to seen anew. Then, she rises from this false death into the bridal veil, which restores both her social life and reputation. What begins to change about this formula with *Pamela*, and more dramatically with later marriage plots by Burney and Austen, is that the trials increasingly precede the marriage proposal. This change reflects a growing interest in courtship and reveals a new standard for how well-tested a couple should be before standing at the altar.

Additionally, the trials in later stories are much less likely to be of the future mother-in-law's invention. In both "Brides on Their Trial" and "Cupid and Psyche," the hero and his mother maintain a close relationship, and in both cases the heroine must undergo a test or tests invented by her beloved's mother. In "Brides on Their Trial," the young hero is incapable of distinguishing which of three sisters he prefers based on their beauty, because he perceives them all as "equally pretty," and so his mother instructs him to "set cheese before them, and watch how they eat it" (*Grimm's* 225). He watches as one sister gobbles down the cheese and its rind, a second sister wastefully cuts off cheese

when she removes the rind, and a third sister carefully peels the rind, wasting nothing, and eats the remaining cheese. Once the test is over, the hero reports back to his mother, seemingly incapable of judging the results for himself. He follows her rather obvious advice of taking the third sister for his wife and lives happily ever after (226). By the eighteenth-century, such as close attachment between mother and son would bode ill for a young couple, because according to Perry, by that period most couples would distance themselves from parents in order to establish a new family (221-22). After this development, the tests put to later heroines are more likely to either arise from circumstances or originate in male suitors' brains. For example, Edward Rochester devises tests for both Blanche Ingram and Jane Eyre; he lies to Blanche to prove that her affection is merely mercenary, and he tortures Jane with the sight of Blanche in order to sound the depth of her devotion. By the eighteenth century, the future mother-in-law becomes a figure who either helps the girl to the altar or impotently complains about her son's choice.¹⁶

While there is a strong tradition of testing brides in literature, even within this tradition the results of a heroine's test is not of vital importance to whether or not she receives her reward. "Cupid and Psyche" and "King Thrushbeard" suggests that the trial is not as important as one might at first assume, but rather it is the effect of putting a young woman through the trial which is vital. Cupid begins his relationship with Psyche in secret so as to avoid his mother's wrath, and he maintains this secrecy by keeping

¹⁶ Mr. B's mother in *Pamela* is an example of the type of mother-in-law who promotes the heroine's cross-class marriage with her son—even after her death; the intimacy between Pamela and her mistress brings the young maid to Mr. B's notice, and Pamela is able to sustain and increase that notice, because Mr. B's mother taught her accomplishments, including writing, "above [her] degree" that will later secure Mr. B's affections (12). *Miss Mackenzie's* Lady Ball and *Bleak House's* Mrs. Woodcourt are both examples of impotent Victorian mothers-in-law.

himself hidden from Psyche. Cupid tests Psyche's trust by asking her never to look upon him in the light. Psyche famously fails this test one night when she uses an oil lamp to look upon the face of her divine husband and, unfortunately, spills hot oil on Cupid, which burns his shoulder. After this betrayal, Cupid flies back to his mother, Venus, so that she may care for his wounded shoulder, and presumably his wounded heart as well. This development also makes Cupid a less independent adult, and consequently, Venus takes over the task of testing Psyche as her son convalesces. Venus sets four tasks before Psyche,¹⁷ all of which she designs to lessen the young woman's beauty. Psyche succeeds at her first three tasks, but fails in her fourth, because she cannot control her curiosity and vanity. When Venus asks her to retrieve a box containing what is supposedly Proserpine's beauty, Psyche opens it and falls into a deadly sleep. Only this last test of curiosity directly addresses an issue that affected Psyche's relationship with Cupid, because it was her curiosity that encouraged her to look at her beloved's form. Strangely, it is after Psyche fails this test that Cupid returns to her and takes her for his wife, which begs the question: is passing the test necessary? Psyche proves her love for Cupid by humbling herself and becoming Venus' servant, which also proves her ability to remain alone as she perseveres through her trials. Perhaps humility and devotion are enough even if vanity and curiosity still persist. Nevertheless, Cupid takes back this woman at the very moment of her failure and makes her his wife for a second time: "Then waking her with just a prick from one of his arrows, and scolding her a little for her curiosity . . . he assured her that all thereafter would be well" (Hamilton 133). Passing all of one's tests in

¹⁷ No single task appears sufficient to gain Psyche any reward. This may remind one of "Cinderella" in which her stepmother twice tells her to pick up lentils from the fire before she may go the festival ball; after both trials, the cruel woman refuses to keep her promise (*Grimm's* 95-96). Again, it appears that the successful completion of tests is not always of the greatest importance.

stories like “Cupid and Psyche” as well as “King Thrushbeard,” which also rewards its once-haughty heroine at the very moment of her most public failure,¹⁸ indicate that either some tests are unimportant or that the test itself is less important than its humiliating effect. The pleasing pleasure of pricking the heroine awake to her mistakes is the hero’s sweet compensation for marrying his fumbling beloved. The test becomes a dramatic means for a heroine to lose status, which strangely renders her more desirable by also proving her inability to succeed on her own. The importance of humiliation continues in later marriage plots, but unlike these early stories, they are usually not stories of remarriage but of humbling before the marriage begins. These early heroines, if not also the latter ones, are rewarded more for their endurance than their goodness.¹⁹

In my next chapter, I will use Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* to examine how flirtatious heroines damage their reputations while simultaneously increasing their chances for receiving male affections. Catherine Morland does not gain a husband by preserving her social capital, but rather by damaging it. This loss triggers Henry Tilney’s desire to rescue the girl with the tainted reputation. Only after Catherine commits social sins, inadvisably reveals her own affections, misjudges General Tilney’s character, and is evicted from Northanger, does she receive a marriage proposal. It is not pristine virtue that receives a reward but an endearingly freckled reputation.²⁰ In *Northanger Abbey*,

¹⁸ After her father forces her to marry a man she believes is a beggar, the heroine of “King Thrushbeard” learns to be humble and gains domestic skills. After she becomes a kitchen maid in a palace, she must to use jars to store scraps of food to eat. During a great ball, her jars drop and break in front of a large crowd immediately before King Thrushbeard reveals that he is her beggar husband in disguise and that he will now take her for his wife again.

¹⁹ Ruth Perry states that one love test popular in the later eighteenth century “tested the duration of a woman’s first attachment” (248).

²⁰ The aforementioned mechanisms for creating a happy ending in *Northanger Abbey* revise those found in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in which marriage restores the hero’s reputation and economic

indecorous behavior and speech can be attractive, and thus readers learn that the risks involved in social improprieties are necessary to trigger the marriage proposal. Austen continues to use the pattern of sinking a heroine's social capital, isolating her from her social network, and finally rewarding her with marriage in other works, such as *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*.

In my third chapter, I turn from marriage plot novels that follow a heroine's diminishing social capital until it attracts a suitor who restores her status through an advantageous marriage, in order to examine Victorian novels such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, which expose the problems that can occur when men are attracted to women with low social capital. Such men, rather than proving their benevolence through unmercenary motives, may be attracted to the power they can wield over disconnected young women, who are particularly susceptible to abuse after marriage because of their lack of protective community ties. Rochester and Grandcourt, for example, propose to Jane and Gwendolen respectively when their social status seems particularly low. In fact, Jane flirts with Rochester by overemphasizing her solitariness, although she seems unaware of the risks involved in this approach. *Jane Eyre* suggest that an abusive, imprisoning marriage could have been a possibility for Jane if her first wedding was not interrupted, and *Daniel Deronda* shows readers the cruelty of Grandcourt's abuse of Gwendolen. These novels critique the eroticization of low social capital as part of a larger critique of male oppression and abuse. Ultimately, Victorian novels suggest that attraction ought not to be based primarily on a women's vulnerability

well being. What prevents Valancourt from being able to defend himself from the charges of gambling and lewdness, which have reduced his reputation and temporarily destroyed the possibility of his marriage with Emily St. Aubert, is the fact of his maleness. Decorum requires that he not discuss the acts of which he is accused. Austen, by making the female the offender, allows Catherine to speak on all topics; she thereby presents that ability to speak freely in defense of oneself as a charming, attractive, and natural impulse.

and emphasize how an ideal marriage should allow wives to take part in their community, which enables them both to fulfill their social responsibilities while also safeguarding them against dangerous isolation with their husbands.

My fourth chapter examines how celebrity affects social capital. Neither extremely limited nor extremely vast social capital is acceptable for a Victorian woman; ideally, she must have a moderate amount of connections, so that she is part of good society but not consumed by the general public. The women I discuss in this chapter negotiate with the public's opinions and tastes, and I will use Joseph Roach's ideas about how celebrities—not unlike the common flirt—must combine revealing their strengths as well as their weaknesses in order to attract public attention (“Public Intimacy: The Prior History of ‘It’” 24). After defining celebrity, I will provide a reading of Queen Victoria as both a monarch and a celebrity, whose all-too-visible body and desire for Prince Albert (and others) encouraged disrespectful gossip. Just as flirtation involves an improper display of affection, celebrity involves an often improper display of one's self, which enables a more dangerous and pervasive kind of gossip that is particularly unacceptable when it refers to women. Thus, the simple fact of a woman being a celebrity, rather than a domestic angel, makes her reputation dubious, even as her fame may make her good qualities better known. In this chapter, my focus changes from women who damage their reputations by flirtation within relatively small social circles to those women, such as Queen Victoria as well as other celebrities, who damage their reputation by widening their appeal and social capital.

Anthony Trollope's *Miss Mackenzie* explores the issue of celebrity, a kind of very public social capital that is wider than it is deep, because it causes what Thomas Hardy

indicts as a “superficial interest in many people and a deep friendship in nobody” in *The Hand of Ethelberta*, a novel about female celebrity (161).²¹ If flirting makes desires that ought to be private, if not nonexistent, public, celebrity makes a woman’s life, that presumably also ought to be private, a public display. Celebrity is a double-edged sword for the middle-aged Miss Mackenzie, whose youth was spent in isolation as she nursed sickly male relatives. Becoming a newspaper sensation and hot gossip item gives Margaret the circulation that she desperately needs in order to put herself on the marriage market, but it also prevents her from entirely controlling that circulation. Margaret’s fame is a helpful inducement to her wealthy cousin Mrs. Clara Mackenzie, who begins to give her relative friendly attentions. As Sharon Marcus notes, female friendship is necessary to oil the gears of courtship, which are especially creaky here in this middle-aged romance (97). But, celebrity also complicates Margaret’s relationship with Sir John Ball, a quiet-living father of nine whose own reputation is damaged in the papers, which depict him as the “lion” to Margaret’s meek “lamb” (Trollope 315). Fortunately, Margaret endures both her early isolation as well as her later celebrity with grace and, therefore, proves that she deserves an affective marriage, which will allow her social capital to rise above that of a put-upon female nurse and yet not remain so high that she will continue to be a public figure.

In my conclusion, I discuss how my ideas about courtship relate to contemporary society. Perhaps the pattern that I have described has survived most saliently in the 2012 Opening Ceremony for the London Olympics, *Downton Abbey*, and romantic comedies,

²¹ Hardy’s poet-heroine, Ethelberta, has a similar problem of receiving more attention than is appropriate for a modest woman; although unlike Miss Mackenzie, this knowing widow has no excuse of naiveté to protect her. Ethelberta calculates the effect her fame has upon men. If Ethelberta makes finding a rich husband her job, she works too visibly at it and thereby crosses a line beyond which denial is no longer an option. She is stamped as unredeemable and left as a warning to all women with too much art and ambition.

in which the heroines still often lose social capital before receiving male affections. The female protagonist's decreasing social capital, which I have observed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, sometimes devolves on screen into a sort of wet T-shirt contest, in which social mortification is key to sexual attractiveness. The clothes that preserved the protagonists' dignity after becoming soaked, often in an impetuous effort to obtain a man, reveal an appealing sexual eagerness while also literally revealing the outlines of a sexualized body.²² These light, confectionary plots tell us about the legacy of a pattern that began with that original marriage-plot-as-striptease *Pamela*.

In conclusion, this dissertation contributes to the critical conversation in three ways. First, my claim that the heroine's speculation of social capital is characteristic of the marriage plot is one that brings novels into contact with the credit economy of their time. Although standards for modesty prevent women's speculations from being clearly viewed, they were important players in non-monetary exchanges. Secondly, this project highlights a unique period during which brides-to-be undergo a trial of solitude that prepares them for an affective marriage (or indicates their readiness for that state). While such a period may possess a dreary loneliness, the possibility of future happiness imbues even this dark, moonless phase with a certain pleasure. This project also brings a new focus to the significance of flirtation in British fiction. While many scholars have written on fallen angels and unrelenting flirts, there has been less interest in the flirtation of heroines who are not ultimately condemned. Old models of femininity create a space for play, romantic gambling, and even slightly bad behavior that harms one's reputation.

Thus, the concept of femininity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was not simply

²² The revelation of the soaked and embarrassed female body is a popular tool to trigger an increase in the male lead's affection, which a number cinematic comedies such as *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, and *The Decoy Bride* use to advance their romantic plots.

cartoonishly staid but daring and lively. Finally, this project makes an important contribution to the history of desire. By examining how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels constructed desire around low social capital, we see a significant means by which women's vulnerability became socially acceptable, and even attractive. Today, popular culture continues to teach women that they should expose and embarrass themselves on the chance that their most vulnerable and, sometimes, most pathetic moments must become public in order for them to become beloved.

CHAPTER 2

THE ECONOMICS OF FLIRTATION IN *NORTHANGER ABBEY*

Much of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conduct literature focuses on how a young lady may remain simultaneously modest and marriageable, desireless and yet desirable. This literature advises women to develop a careful surveillance over their hearts as well as their behavior. In *Letters to Young Ladies on Their Entrance Into the World* (1824), Mrs. Lanfear explains how openness and caution should exist side by side: “Young women, therefore, while not insensible to merit, or averse to entering into a proper and suitable engagement, should guard their hearts with all diligence, and beware of too rashly forming what may be justly termed . . . a romantic and imprudent attachment” (53). Mrs. Lanfear’s language suggests that romantic feelings, and especially those that are not sanctioned as “proper and suitable,” are dangers that require one to “guard” and “beware” in order to preserve a modest heart, which will be capable of appropriate feelings at an appropriate time.

Along similar lines, in *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughter* (1774), the Scottish moralist Dr. John Gregory encourages young women to keep a “modest reserve,” abstain from going into public frequently, and avoid even overhearing anything that might damage their “Virgin purity” (20, 63, 25). If a girl plans to marry, she should anticipate this goal and “shun, as you would the most fatal poison”—any reading that would engage her imagination and encourage her nuptial dreams to move above “common life” (65). She should not love first (“That love is not to begin on your part”); she should not reveal

the extent of her love even after marriage (“If you love him, let me advise you never to discover to him the full extent of your love; no, not although you marry him”); and she should, if she develops feelings for a man without knowing if he admires her, hide her desire from herself as long as possible; once her unrequited attraction is revealed, she is entitled to “[feel] a violence done both to her pride and to her modesty” (47, 51, 40).

Modesty, in conduct literature, remains central to feminine virtue and thus to a woman’s reputation. In Mr. Chesswick’s *The Lady’s Preceptor* (1792), he includes an article “On Chastity and Modesty” from *The Literary Miscellany*, which describes how the woman who achieves sexual virtue becomes morally and socially victorious:

Chastity is a delicious virtue to a handsome woman, who has an elevated soul. While she sees all the world at her feet, she triumphs over all, and over herself: she erects in her own heart a throne at the foot of which every thing pays her homage . . . respectful sentiments of both sexes, universal esteem of her own, repay her, without ceasing, glory . . . (75)

While conduct books such as the one above busily praise “delicious virtue,” marriage plot novels imply that desirability does not look quite so regal, static, and perfect, because those who are lovable are more likely to slip in their social standing than “erect” a “throne” at which to receive “universal esteem” and “glory.” Nancy Armstrong argues that many novels are part of “a considerable body of writing that deserves to be called a conduct book in fictional form” (*Desire and Domestic Fiction* 108), and while novels, like conduct books, make suggestions for behavior, the suggestions often differ.

On the surface, marriage plots seem to advise female readers to preserve their assets much as conduct literature does; however, they implicitly recommend that their readers lose a certain amount of social capital in order to achieve a happy marriage. Specifically, marriage plots depict heroines who diminish their reputations, usually

through flirtation, and thereby trigger the sort of masculine desire that results in marriage proposals. Fictional women, like their real counterparts, endeavor to work just hard enough in the marriage market to be successful, and yet not so hard that they will be caught in the embarrassing work of husband hunting, which women's reading in advice manuals has taught them is unladylike. If novel reading allows women to internalize the marriage plot, as many critics suggest, readers also learn the value of misadventures that prompt a rise in suitors' affection and lead to marriage proposals that restore social capital with interest.

Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* demonstrates how flirtatious heroines damage their reputations while simultaneously increasing their chances for receiving male affections. Catherine Morland gains a husband not by preserving her social capital, but rather by damaging it. Only after Catherine commits social sins, inadvisably reveals her own affections, misjudges General Tilney's character, and is evicted from Northanger does she receive a marriage proposal from Henry Tilney. Austen thereby suggests that her errors trigger his desire. In Austen, as in many novels, it is not pristine virtue that is rewarded but an endearingly freckled reputation.

Though a clear vocabulary exists to describe virtuous heroines and fallen women, it is more difficult to describe those characters, like Catherine Morland, who slip but never fall. This chapter aims to examine a slipping heroine and the ways in which her missteps create desire. Critics such as Amanda Anderson and Mary Poovey reflect the popular nineteenth-century understanding of femininity as polarized between two categories, the virtuous, domestic ideal and the sexually deviant fallen woman. While they often attempt to complicate those two categories, they share an underlying

assumption that there are but two categories on which to work (*Tainted Souls and Painted Faces* 14, *Uneven Developments* 11). This dissertation argues that there is an in-between category that has existed throughout the history of the marriage plot novel. There are female characters who are neither perfect nor fallen and therefore do not fit into what Nina Auerbach describes as an Angel/Demon binary (*Woman and the Demon* 3). These “third women” are visible from Pamela to Tess and may have been understood, to some extent, by their contemporary cultures. Unlike the fallen women Anderson describes, slipping heroines are not doomed and thus marked by a lack of agency; furthermore, their mistakes do not occur merely because of environmental pressures or sexual passivity but often because of distinctly personal sexual desires (2, 7-8). Like fallen women, slipping heroines have trouble maintaining a flattering social identity (2), but their inability to maintain that perfect, public face becomes the source of their attractiveness.

In *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Armstrong explains that, beginning in the eighteenth-century, a new “modern form of desire” emerged “that changed the criteria for determining what was most important in a female” (3). Unlike traditional desire based on status, which includes money and family name, this emerging middle-class desire prioritizes domesticity as well as “certain qualities of mind” related to sensibility (4). I agree with Armstrong that culture creates desires and that “the rise of the novel hinged upon the struggle to say what made a woman desirable” (8, 4-5). This history of desire explains how a woman’s imperfect reputation becomes eroticized. When status was not the basis for desire, the very lack of status became desirable in itself. Society associated a woman’s low social status with other newly desirable domestic and emotional qualities,

which were presumably packaged together. Both the lack of social status and a lack of concern for such status were also attractively godly. For example, in *Private Education or a Practical Plan for the Studies of Young Ladies* (1815), Elizabeth Appleton explains that a “graceful negligence, as to admiration” suggests “our aim to please a higher power than that of man” (296). Furthermore, a woman with a less exalted reputation suited the withdrawn domestic existence that was increasingly expected for women and viewed as desirable by men whose goal was to set up a new, private home apart from larger kinship networks. Finally, an imperfect reputation allowed the woman to seem naturally guileless and honest. The imperfections of Burney’s and Austen’s heroines, according to Armstrong, make them seem more real than the ideal, domestic woman described in conduct literature (252). This realness in fictional heroines is essential to their attractiveness, both within their novelistic worlds and for their real-world readers. Their imperfect behavior often results in lower social capital, and society presumes that this lack of status is wrapped with other highly valued traits such as domesticity and emotional honesty.

Just as *Northanger Abbey* is a test case for this dissertation, it was also a test case for Austen, who was, when she began writing it in about 1798, only twenty-three and still very early in her writing career.²³ In all of her later works, Austen depicts heroines of greater self-possession than the naive and spontaneous Catherine Morland. Not until after Austen’s death, do readers meet the untutored and impetuous Catherine. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen tests the limits of a natural portrayal of youthful love and error in a heroine. Austen will never again take as many risks as she does in this novel. Later

²³ The first versions of *Northanger Abbey* were entitled “Susan.” Austen later renamed it “Catherine.” After her death, Austen’s brother, Henry, had the last version published under the title *Northanger Abbey* (Grogan 10-11).

characters who most resemble Catherine's natural spontaneity include Marianne Dashwood and Louisa Musgrove, but they are not their respective novel's heroines. No other heroine will so thoroughly embarrass herself as Catherine Morland, and no other heroine so clearly shows the eroticism that arises out of embarrassment.

Perhaps Austen herself was even a bit embarrassed by Catherine's foolishness, however adorable it may be, and so her later works depict heroines such as Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, and Anne Eliot, who are more mature and better behaved. Their stories may hold greater interest for readers, because love for them is less likely than for an endearingly impetuous girl like Catherine. Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet exist in a middle ground between the impetuous Catherine and the cautious Anne. While they make fewer mistakes than Catherine, neither is able to keep up all the expected social graces. Unlike Catherine, their mistakes often result from a biting wit or independence, which strike readers today as less rude and shocking than early nineteenth century society would have perceived them. Like Catherine, Emma's and Lizzie's suitors scold them before marrying them, and thus they are simply modifications of the Catherine-type; they are female heroines who have flaws but are not so silly as to degrade their sex's dignity. All of Austen's heroines experience mortification, but none so often nor so deservedly as Catherine. In her later novels, Austen's heroines will often attract suitors through depreciated social capital, but they will do so without having to be quite so very silly. More widely, later nineteenth-century novels will show many heroines who benefit from low social capital, but like Austen's later heroines, their behavior will tend to be less ridiculous. Furthermore, many Victorian heroines, such as Jane Eyre, will take advantage of depreciated social capital without committing significant errors themselves;

they will emphasize their lowly state, which was caused by circumstances rather than poor conduct, and thus they will appear both pitifully lovable and dignified. Nevertheless, Austen's *Northanger Abbey* unflinchingly capitalizes upon how Catherine's undignified behavior is the source of her attractiveness.

Northanger Abbey self-consciously examines novelistic constructions of the "heroine" character. In the novel's first paragraph, the narrator discusses what a heroine is and how Catherine initially lacks the typical necessities: "She had a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without colour, dark lank hair, and strong features" (39). But just as maturation corrected these deficiencies with "plumpness," "colour," and "more animation," so too must her story feature the sort of dangerous adventure that every heroine needs (41). The novel anticipates readers' expectation of danger to the heroine, and its opening chapters mock these expectations as Catherine proceeds safely from her home in Fullerton to Bath (44). Neither Catherine's parents nor the Allens, with whom she journeys, appear particularly concerned with preventing those dangers to person and reputation that novel readers understandably anticipate. Indeed, in Bath's Upper Rooms, Mrs. Allen shows little concern for the injuries her young charge might endure. Even though strangers surround and jostle Catherine, as long as she carefully maintains "her arm *too* firmly within [Mrs. Allen's]," she will never fall into any dangers and consequently never have any men fall for her (my italics 46).

The male suitor succeeds the presence of danger.²⁴ Mrs. Allen, who possesses a sort of overgrown girlishness, demonstrates for Catherine how to obtain attention from

²⁴ This causal relationship is one that even the dull-witted John Thorpe understands. While taking Catherine for a carriage ride, he manufactures danger by claiming his horse is inclined to "give a plunge or two" and then invents a rescue from danger by claiming that his "particularly judicious manner" of handling the reins prevented disaster (83).

men without acting immodestly. Mrs. Allen draws attention to herself by doing nothing more than going into the Upper Rooms without an escort, which thereby exposes her (and her delicate dress) to a crowd of strangers who bump her a great deal, and ultimately, leave her alone with “no party to join, no acquaintance to claim, no gentlemen to assist”—without even the necessary supplies for tea (47). Not until after the crowd thoroughly tumbles Mrs. Allen, which threatens to give an “injury” to the lady’s gown and a “hurt” to her head dress, does a man attend to Mrs. Allen and her young friend by providing tea and a little company (47, 48). While certainly not a flirt, Mrs. Allen is a perfectly conspicuous victim, whom a gentleman rescues from an embarrassing lack of friends and teacups. And, if she were not too old for the job, she could make a perfectly good heroine. In this scene, Austen both foreshadows and parodies her future and more seriously romantic depictions of how female vulnerability creates male attention. Mrs. Allen tumbling toward tea time companionship is, perhaps, not so very different from Marianne Dashwood’s tumble down a hill, which lands her in Wickham’s arms. Though these examples differ in tone, they both display a general rule that when a woman slips, she piques male affections.

And, throughout *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine will slip. Her social sins increase in severity as she progresses from unwisely choosing delicate muslins to falsely accusing respected men of murder. These mistakes threaten her reputation, which was never very wide or impressive due to her limited acquaintance (43, 47). Nevertheless, the more she risks her little mite of social capital, the greater the interest she ignites in Henry. Like the dress that Henry is sure “will fray,” Catherine’s reputation is not kept perfectly intact, but

this imperfection creates in her an attractively delicate and susceptible quality that highlights her naturalness and enables her to achieve a gainful marriage proposal (52).²⁵

IMMODESTY

The first serious threat to Catherine's social capital occurs as she, against all social mores, reveals her affection for Henry Tilney. Every time a woman flirts, she risks a depletion of her value. Conduct literature, which almost always discusses flirtation in a derogatory manner, encourages sanctions on the flirting female. Thus, if a woman gives too much attention to one man, others will often disparage her character. For example, the public flirtation of Marianne Dashwood and Willoughby leads to their ridicule in *Sense and Sensibility* (60), and in a later nineteenth-century novel, Pip reports that "people" criticize Estella for "throwing away her graces and attractions" on Drummle (*Great Expectations* 311). Isabella Thorpe exaggerates the danger of public censure by claiming that to dance again with James Morland would make them "the talk of the place," but her hyperbole is based in truth (*Northanger* 79). Furthermore, if a woman gives one man too much attention, she may lose other, better opportunities (as Catherine's ride with John Thorpe almost costs her Henry's esteem). Flirtation involves an exposure of desire; while, ideally, a modest woman would only expose her self to one man (or at least, one at a time), exposure often involves allowing one's desire to be seen by too many people. In the nineteenth-century, society often censures women who project visible, sexual desire. Even if a woman only reveals her feelings to the object of her

²⁵ Appleton's conduct book describes an immodest young woman, whose dress is "so light, so thin, so exposed, [that it] bespeaks her want of delicacy and her carelessness;" while she explains that this attire as well as some of her other careless behaviors, such as laughing as men tell coarse jokes, are "trifles" by themselves, all her behaviors come together to condemn her (303). Certainly, Catherine is not as immodest as the girl Appleton describes, but this description, with its focus on the dress indicates that Catherine, in even the choice of her delicate muslin, is accumulating readable marks against her character.

affection, she still runs the risk of losing him. Women must learn to calculate how much attention they can give without losing their reputations, yet to acknowledge that calculation also renders them vulnerable to censure.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, Charlotte Lucas espouses a very practical theory of courtship: “In nine cases out of ten, a woman had better shew [sic] *more* affection than she feels” (15). This scene demonstrates how any self-awareness of the utility of calculations (“nine cases out of ten”) exposes Charlotte as sadly unromantic and perhaps even mercenary. Charlotte, who is politely scolded by Elizabeth Bennet, is not factually wrong, but she appears morally wrong as she voices a socially unacceptable truth. Unlike Jane and Elizabeth, she will not achieve an enviable marriage. No heroine can verbalize a definitive understanding of how the marriage market functions and still receive a happy marriage, because to verbalize the market’s rules indicates an unacceptable knowingness that makes every action conceivably premeditated and, furthermore, shows an immodest penetration of the male psyche. While Charlotte’s immodesty may seem to be just another freckle, she has broken the cardinal rule for acceptable behavior that Pamela Andrews set in place: Charlotte destroys the plausible deniability of her maneuvering. By espousing this philosophy, and then, according to Elizabeth, putting it into “action” for “worldly advantage,” she eliminates the possibility that she is unaware of the ways in which she creates desire. She cannot deny her premeditation; she philosophized, considered Mr. Collins’s character, and became “convinced that [her] chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most,” which highlights again her careful calculation of character, likely outcomes, and comparative happiness (96). Charlotte correctly identifies that young women need to make calculations in order

to plan what they will *not* withhold from men (even as they always withhold their personal jewel), but she does not realize the importance of seeming unaware of this necessity.²⁶

Too romantic to make any practical calculations, *Northanger Abbey*'s heroine enters the hazardous game of flirtation as she first recognizes her affection for Henry in herself, a bold move considering that many heroines (Pamela, Evelina, Emma Woodhouse, and Elizabeth Bennet, for example) fail to know their own hearts until quite late in their respective novels. From the first evening of Catherine's acquaintance with Henry, she has "a strong inclination" for him (53). Catherine deviates from conduct literature advice left and right. She reads Romantic fiction and enjoys appearing in public. She loves first. She loves quickly. She loves without proof that it is reciprocated. She loves without parental approval. And she even lacks the modesty to hide the feelings of her own heart from herself, indicating an absence of the delicacy that was the cornerstone of feminine desire. Yet, in an early review, Archbishop Richard Whately assesses this unflattering depiction of Catherine as one of the novel's most charming strengths, because it reveals the secret of "what one knows women must be though one never can get them to acknowledge it" (367). Whately implies that, through Catherine's character, Austen reveals the immodesty that men know women possess, despite feminine attempts to conceal it. Furthermore, he delights in Austen's naughty heroine and

²⁶ On the continuum of Austen's characters who marry for money and those who will marry at any cost, Charlotte is closer to the scheming Isabella Thorpe than she is to heroines, such as Catherine and Lizzy Bennet, who balance marrying comfortably with feeling lovingly. Nevertheless, *Pride and Prejudice*, in the end, may prove Charlotte's original theory about flirtation, because Jane's perfect manners and modesty do prevent Bingley from forming a stronger attachment sooner. Ultimately, Jane's feelings must be exposed. But even if Jane's history supports Charlotte's theory, the novel still implies the women should not follow Charlotte's philosophizing example. Elizabeth, the novel's true heroine, laughingly rejects Charlotte's viewpoint and the necessity of any mathematical role in courtship, and later she becomes disgusted to see such calculation in action (16, 105).

points out that the fairer sex's only half-hidden foibles are equal in strength to his own sex's shortcomings; he argues that women are "[a]s liable to 'fall in love first,' as anxious to attract attention of agreeable men, as much taken with a striking manner, or a handsome face, as unequally gifted with constantly and firmness, as liable to have their affections biased by convenience or fashion, as we, on our part, will admit men to be" (367).

As Austen acknowledges how those like Whately assume women really are, she mocks expectations of modesty, and especially of what Ruth Bernard Yeazell calls the "modest unconscious" (281n33). Austen jokingly implies that Catherine's dreams of Henry would be improper. The narrator instructs her own readers to question, if not disregard, the advice of conduct literature:

Whether she thought of him so much, while she drank her warm wine and water, and prepared herself for bed, as to dream of him when there, cannot be ascertained; but I hope it was not more than in slight slumber, or a morning doze at most; for if it be true, as a celebrated writer has maintained, that no young lady can be justified in falling in love before a gentleman's love is declared, it must be very improper that a young lady should dream of a gentleman before the gentleman is first known to have dreamt of her. (53)²⁷

This scene concedes and mocks the social importance of a woman avoiding any undue emotional attachment, because even in dreams Catherine is not safe from the question of immodesty.

Consider the difference between Catherine and Dr. Gregory's depiction of a shamefaced woman who experiences feelings for a gentlemen prior to any declaration of similar feelings for her: "It is even long before a woman of delicacy dares avow to her

²⁷ The celebrated writer is Mr. Richardson, who writes on the immodesty of women in number 97 of *The Rambler*.

own heart that she loves; and when all the subterfuges of ingenuity to conceal it from herself fail, she feels a violence done both to her pride and to her modesty. This I should imagine, must always be the case when she is not sure of a return of her attachment” (41). While Dr. Gregory says he does not see anything immoral in becoming interested in a worthy man before his feelings are known, through the description above, he sets forth the expectation that a normal woman “must always” feel the “violence” of her indecency. He implies a woman, such as Catherine, who neglects to feel that “violence” to her “pride” and “modesty” is guilty of an even more serious form of immodesty. If Catherine’s impolite behaviors cheapen her according to the standards endorsed by thinkers such as Richardson and Gregory, ultimately this cheapening is necessary for her to attract and then finally gain value through her marriage to Henry Tilney.

Just as Austen famously critiques the longstanding importance of familial wealth to a woman’s marriage prospects, here she also criticizes the more recent social emphasis on female virtue. As Austen attacks these economies of wealth and virtue, she replaces them with a new economy of human feeling in which it is better and more advantageous to be natural and behave a little badly than to be artificial and behave perfectly. In other words, it is better to express natural desires, than to manufacture an artificial modesty. Thus Austen’s works do not simply criticize the mercenary spirit that pervades the marriage market; they also criticize excessive attention to virtue, which inevitably promotes the artificial creation of goodness, and perhaps most especially in those women who cannot recommend themselves through their financial worth. Overvaluing riches, status, or righteousness creates standards that are impossible to reach, and therefore, encourages women to act dishonestly. Just Mr. Darcy’s list of required feminine

accomplishments is impossibly long and encourages Caroline Bingley's posturing, so too are all impossible standards wrong, because they encourage just the sort of unnatural behavior that men of the period, including Mr. Darcy, find artful and "despicable" (29). In the figure of Catherine Morland, Austen experiments with the possibility of a heroine with foibles, immodest desires, and general foolishness, who merits respect for her genuine feelings of love and friendship.

As the novel progresses, Catherine's revelations of her feelings become more pronounced and public. Catherine suddenly exclaims how well Henry dances in front of his sister, Eleanor, who responds with a knowing smile (91). She reveals her desire for the Tilneys to attend the cotillion ball (92). And when Henry teases her about her attentions to Thorpe, instead of playing the coquette as any proper lady would, she positively reveals herself by saying, "I do not know anybody, it is impossible for me to talk to them; and, besides, I do not *want* to talk to anybody," suggesting she does not *want* anybody besides Henry (96). Later, her eagerness to apologize and regain Henry's good graces after first having missed their appointment, and then having seemed to delay it (though this delay was a scheme of Thorpe's), causes her not only to make her feelings perfectly known ("I would have jumped out and run after you") but also to act with something approaching rudeness (109). She is "quite wild" to apologize to Henry at the theatre – so wild, in fact, that she rumples Mrs. Allen's gown in her unladylike enthusiasm (109).

Her "wild" assurances that she would never have purposely missed an appointment with Mr. Tilney show Catherine's untutored, natural, and appealing qualities, and Henry is better able to be "more cordial" and bear a "more natural smile" in

response to her flattering, if somewhat inappropriate, behavior (109). Her undignified conduct continues later in the novel as she barges her way into the Tilney residence with such speed and force that no footman can prevent her: “I did not care what you thought of me. – I would not stay for the servant” (116). Her behavior causes some shock and nearly results in the dismissal of William, the footman (116-17). Nevertheless, this bad behavior reveals her best qualities: a natural honesty and a sexually attractive spontaneity.

The spontaneity with which Catherine reveals her feelings in public cause them to appear natural, and thus whatever knowledge she may have about men or courtship seems irrelevant, because there is no lag time between feeling and acting. Austen sometimes uses a dash to show the haste with which Catherine delivers her exclamations (91, 109). For instance, during a description of a conversation between Catherine and Eleanor, Austen’s narrator seems to be cut off by Catherine’s overflowing affection, which bubbles up in a compliment to Henry’s dancing:

. . . and though in all probability not an observation was made, nor an expression used by either which had not been made and used some thousands of times before, under the roof, in every Bath season, yet the merit of their being spoken with simplicity and truth, and without personal conceit, might be something uncommon. –
‘How well your brother dances!’ was an artless exclamation of Catherine’s towards the close of their conversation, which at once surprised and amused her companion. (91)

The narrator’s description of the girls’ conversation is interrupted in such a way as to make Catherine’s sudden compliment an exemplar of her sincerity. Her exclamation is “artless” partly because it is also “surprising.” Instead of being simply rude, loud, and interruptive, Catherine’s compliment becomes acceptable and amusing to Eleanor and Austen’s readers, who follow the always impeccably behaved Eleanor Tilney’s cues.

Later in the novel, there can be no doubt that Catherine risks her reputation as she hazards not only the good opinion of the Tilneys but also of her own friends, who watch the violence with which she breaks from them to run after the Tilneys (115-16). As soon as she understands that John tricked her into missing her appointment with the Tilneys, Catherine instantaneously revolts against his control: "This will not do . . . I cannot submit to this. I must run after Miss Tilney directly and set her right." Before she can leave John and Isabella "poured" complaints on her, and even her beloved brother is "angry." The Thorpes try to hold her back and chastise her for being "quite ridiculous, quite absurd." Eventually, she frees herself from the hands of the siblings and staunchly proclaims, "Then I will go after them . . . wherever they are I will go after them." After this repetition of "I will go," she breaks free. When John attempts to catch her again, James prevents him. James echoes his sisters' proclamation of "I will go" as he says, "Let her go, let her go, if she will go," which shows both that James allows and values his sister's feelings and that he, too, has thoughts and feelings independent from the Thorpes' influence (115). Even with her brother's tacit approval, Catherine receives further censure from John, who begins, "She is as obstinate as –" before he stops, unable to finish the simile, because "it could hardly have been a proper one" (115).

Thus we see how Catherine's pursuit of the Tilneys leaves her vulnerable to unspeakable insults. Yet, breaking from the Thorpes, Catherine breaks from two inferior social connections: her potential suitor, John, whose implied swearing shows just how carefully he must manage his true crassness, and her friend Isabella, whose affectations and dishonesty contrast sharply with Catherine's sincerity. By desiring to distance herself from the Thorpe family with a sudden, spontaneous, and rebellious will, she shows that

she wants to leave those who have a limited supply of taste, intelligence, and wealth, without seeming to calculate that an acquaintanceship with the Tilneys is worth more. And when she does have the opportunity to reflect as she walks away, she “could not repent her resistance” or settle her nerves until she finds the Tilneys (116). Luckily, after exasperating the Thorpes with her stubbornness, her walk to Beechen Cliff with Henry and Eleanor is rescheduled, and Catherine begins an intimacy with the Tilneys upon the ashes of her relationship with the Thorpes.

Even though Catherine’s behavior might result in knowing smiles, the natural un-self-conscious emotional revelation allows her to reap a more affectionate attention. When she risks her reputation, Henry bestows upon her a “yet sweeter smile” (109). Here Austen is developing a new rule for masculine behavior, which permits the impropriety of a desirous female heart to ignite male passion, so that Catherine “in finding him irresistible, [becomes] so herself” (139). Austen’s narrator “confesses” that her story has a “new circumstance for romance,” because her hero’s “affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her serious thought.” Although this image of a more passive and reactive masculinity breaks from romantic tradition and is even “dreadfully derogatory of an heroine’s dignity,” Austen’s narrator implies that it is not new to “common life” (232). She thus implies that the woman immodest enough to show her heart may find ample reward for her injured dignity.²⁸

²⁸ Despite the newness of this type of romantic relationship in fiction, a review in the *British Critic* claims that Austen’s “heroes and heroines, make love and are married, just as her readers make love, and were or will be, married,” which indicates that desirous female hearts like Catherine’s are not unusual in real life (297).

While Austen implies that indignities may have their benefits, conduct literature from the period focuses on the perfections of true modesty. Yeazell contends these texts “exhorted Englishwomen to guard their modesty—even while insisting that true modesty is not conscious of itself . . .” (5). All of this discussion about modesty and its ability to attract marriageable men could only make women more self-conscious (57): “A proper reserve, the conduct books never tired of repeating, makes a woman more, not less, desirable” (44). As early as the seventeenth century, some writers such as Richard Allestree realized that ignorance might require a conscious will (52). Allestree’s concept of “an affected ignorance” highlights the fundamental connection between modesty and ignorance (qtd. in Yeazell 52). The narrator of *Northanger Abbey* only half jokingly asserts that “[a] woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing any thing, should conceal it as well as she can” (124), suggesting that Austen understands the value of appearing ignorant—which Dr. Gregory also famously recommends (23)—even if she disapproves of the practice’s necessity.²⁹ To be perceived as modest, a woman must either appear, or genuinely be, unknowledgeable about the world and her self.

This self-willed ignorance would have to withstand the lessons of novels, which so often teach women that damaged social capital produces male affections. Even readers may, at times, find it difficult to distinguish between self-willed ignorance, which involves a certain active resistance to knowledge, and ignorance that results from a lack of knowledge. While self-willed ignorance could be performed effectively, such a perfect performance would be undesirable, because slips in modesty make transparent the

²⁹ Austen mocks Dr. Gregory’s advice to his daughters to hide their knowledge: “But if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from men . . .” (23).

heroine's desire. And once her desire is just slightly visible, society and suitors will see her as attractively imperfect—as well as more desirable.

In the characters of Catherine and Isabella, Austen provides examples of a successfully managed ignorance and an ineffective, obviously false, modesty respectively. Readers might sometimes doubt the genuineness of Catherine's modesty, ignorance, and surprise, if it were not for the character of Isabella, who exemplifies ineffectively feigned modesty.³⁰ Examining the scene in which these young women chase two men through Bath best reveals how Austen contrasts their differing motivations and knowledge. Unlike other moments in which Catherine acts with questionable decorum, this little adventure does not affect her social capital. Austen employs this moment to build and display character, rather than to advance the marriage plot.

The episode begins as the two girls discuss *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and the opposite sex in the Pump Room. Then Isabella suddenly claims, “there are two young men who have been staring at me this half hour” (65). Considering Isabella's frequent use of hyperbole, we can assume that, at most, two very normal-looking young men glanced in her direction. Isabella designs all of her actions during this scene to attract the young men's attention. She moves to look at the room's book of arrivals; she asks Catherine to keep watch to see if they follow her to the book; and then, she chases after them on the street. Isabella justifies this pursuit with a transparent excuse that she wants to show Catherine a new hat from a shop, which happens to be in the same direction that the young men are moving. While Isabella is not as philosophical about the male mind as Charlotte Lucas, her little denials and planned moves prove that she is no more natural

³⁰ For a discussion of surprise in *Northanger Abbey*, see Christopher R. Miller's “Jane Austen's Aesthetics and Ethics of Surprise.”

than her movements are instantaneous. By denying her immodest motivations and insisting that she is only asserting her independence and “not pay[ing] them any such compliment” (66), Isabella sidesteps the chance of receiving any censure from Catherine, who remains oblivious to Isabella’s true motivations, and so Isabella also sidesteps suffering any immediate embarrassment about chasing men down public roads. Isabella’s choice of friendship with a girl too oblivious to chastise her for indecent behavior allows her to move through this incident without rebuke. Interestingly, the power to avoid censure is less advantageous in Austen’s fiction than opportunities to receive correction.

In *The Shadow of Death*, Mark Canuel argues that Austen favors characters that commit faults *and* feel guilty, over those characters that deny their guilt. Austen not only shows that punishment has benefits but also that individuals have a ““right to be punished”” and to receive the advantages that penitence offers character (84). Those who deny their shortcomings refuse the punishment inherent in the feeling of guilt and thereby also miss the attention and distinction that punishment awards (8).³¹ It is not, then, Isabella’s mistakes that prevent her from receiving attention from the two young men or even from the narrator, but her failure to admit that she has erred.

Upon reaching busy Cheap-street, Isabella halts her chase and appears in an unflattering light:

Every body acquainted with Bath may remember the difficulties of crossing Cheap-street at this point; it is indeed a street of so impertinent a nature, so unfortunately connected with the great London and Oxford roads, and the principle inn of the city, that a day never passes in which parties of ladies, however important their business, whether in quest of pastry, millinery, or even (as in the present case) of young men, are not detained on one side or other by carriages, horsemen, or carts. This evil

³¹ Canuel’s work examines Romantic writers as among the first to oppose capital punishment and to participate in cultural discourse that revises the meaning of punishment (2). Romantics redefine punishment as a difficult balance between what is deserved and what is useful (168).

had been felt and lamented, at least three times a day, by Isabella since her residence in Bath (66)

Isabella competes for use of Britain's crowded infrastructure, and here she feels that she loses out, because the young men are lost, and without a second glance for the huntress at their heels. Unfortunately, Isabella mourns incorrectly. Instead of feeling regret for her forward behavior, she feels the "evil" of a road that prevents her from further improper conduct. As Isabella maneuvers on this lively avenue of commerce, just as a merchant might when transporting goods, she presents herself as a hardworking vendor in the marriage market, and consequently cheapens herself on the aptly named Cheap-Street. Her public chase after anonymous men resembles a streetwalker trying to land her next client. Isabella's pretenses of being shocked by men's glances and only concerned with the glories of a new hat are ineffective. By the time she runs into her brother and James Morland, her immodest character is clear to the reader.

She exposes her false character by the speed with which she changes her mood from anger (at the gigs that prevent her from following the young men) to delight at seeing James, on whom she immediately sets her "bright eyes" to "incessantly [challenge] his notice" (67). In Austen's portrayal of Isabella's changing attentions, she may be humorously alluding to the old proverb that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush"; ironically, the young men would stand in for the birds, an animal usually associated with femininity, and Isabella would, then, possess the equally inappropriate identity of a hunter of men. The utility Isabella perceives in this chance meeting, in which she may come closer to catching James, contrasts with Catherine's simple pleasure in meeting her brother unexpectedly. Unlike the more affectionate Morland siblings, Isabella and John give each other very little attention, which highlights the shallowness of

even their most intimate, family connections.³² Later in the chapter, Austen foreshadows Isabella's ultimate inconstancy to her "bird in the hand," James, when Isabella passes the two men she chased earlier and "looked back at them only three times" (69).³³ Unlike the more humble Charlotte Lucas, who applies her courtship philosophy to her life, Isabella's greed and vanity make it difficult for her to apply even the most proverbial principles. Throughout the novel, Isabella's inconstancy highlights the insincerity of her feelings. And her willingness to blatantly shower attentions on potential suitors and, perhaps most importantly, her inability to disguise her obvious maneuvering from any one except, of course, the oblivious Miss Morland reveal two major deficiencies: Isabella is able neither to be modest nor to act modestly.

But, of course, Catherine also watches the young men, and she also follows in their footsteps along with Isabella, and yet she does not appear unfemininely mercantile. Instead, she appears to act as an obliging and concerned friend, who merely follows orders, not sexual or financial desires. Although Catherine participates in trouser chasing, she appears ignorant to how immodest both she and Isabella appear, because she is disinterested and thus oblivious to Isabella's schemes. Readers do not perceive her as immodest even as her behavior on the streets of Bath is not quite correct, because her participation in the chase does not reveal her desire for the young men. While Isabella attempts to appear ignorant of her own motivations, Catherine's genuine ignorance is more convincing and appealing. Even after Isabella asserts that "[o]ne was a very good-

³² Just as she does in *Love and Friendship*, Austen implicitly criticizes characters that value recently formed relationships over lifelong, familial ties.

³³ After Isabella and James are engaged, Isabella begins a flirtation with Captain Frederick Tilney; her attempt to get an upgraded fiancé of greater economic worth falls flat, leaving her without Frederick or James.

looking young man,” Catherine exhibits no signs of knowing that she is on a man-hunt, and thus, she demonstrates an ignorance that enables her to appear modestly unaware of the very activity that structures young women’s lives and, sometimes, the traffic of cities.

Catherine’s denseness during the man-chasing scene as well as her more general ignorance of the world and fine accomplishments, reveal that there is a good deal of truth in Austen’s narrator’s jest that “a good-looking girl, with an affectionate heart and a very ignorant mind, cannot fail of attracting a clever young man, unless circumstances are particularly untoward” (124). This scene on the street of Bath is an important example of the ease with which Catherine acts badly without knowing it.

Isabella’s behavior reveals her falseness; by contrast, Catherine appears authentic. Beside Isabella, whose calculations and greed are undeniable, Catherine’s own behavior appears to advantage. Later in the novel, when Catherine suffers for her improper behavior, it is usually because her behavior reveals her desire for Henry, which if not totally proper is forgivable. While Catherine’s desire focuses on Henry, Isabella’s desire is more promiscuous and therefore less acceptable. Even Austen’s loosened standards for female behavior will not support Isabella’s wanton flirtation.

Luckily, having a bad girl for a friend has a few perks. Isabella’s dishonest conduct toward James Morland and her wild flirtation with Captain Tilney provide Catherine with opportunities to discuss courtship and romantic attachments with Henry. He, in turn, observes Catherine’s modesty and correctness as she reacts with “sorrowing wonder” at her friend’s untoward behavior. He also sees her reject the improper Isabella with relative ease, which reveals that though she has lost a close friend, she is not “very, very much afflicted” (198). And so, although Isabella is an embarrassing and

disappointing friend who might have damaged Catherine's reputation by association, she does not ultimately harm Catherine.

To the extent that Catherine's friendship with Isabella allows her to practice affectionate feelings outside of her family circle, it helps prepare her to join a new family group.³⁴ Soon Eleanor Tilney replaces Isabella as Catherine's primary friend. This friendship with Eleanor, who is Henry's sister, allows Catherine a more perfect transition into marriage. Isabella, then, becomes an early stepping-stone to better and more valuable connections. In fact, Isabella is for Catherine exactly what she wanted Catherine to be for her—that is, a helpful tool to catch a man with money. The scheming Isabella, who hopes to use Catherine, loses friends and fails to find a love match by the end of the novel, while Catherine, who spontaneously and “so unaccountably” mentions her friend's bad behavior, receives “credit” from Henry for revealing what is best in “human nature” (202).

Catherine naturally, and thus successfully, demonstrates her modest ignorance by displaying surprise at Henry's growing esteem and attentions—even though her reading in romantic fiction would have taught her that it is rather more probable than not for a young woman in some social distress to be beloved, whether that distress originates from being pursued by buffoons like John Thorpe or tossed into post-chaises by aristocratic villains. Catherine's surprise, coupled with her inability to analyze probability, enables her to appear unself-conscious, and thus natural. She does not count the bills her beau's

³⁴ In *Between Women*, Sharon Marcus discusses the nineteenth-century assumption that female friendship prepares women for marriage, because the relatively new idea of the companionate marriage is understood as similar to a friendship (26). Marcus' argument focuses on how Victorian society promoted bonds between women, suggesting that gender roles were surprisingly elastic during that period.

father will pay out, as Isabella does,³⁵ nor spout statistics like Charlotte Lucas. And when her mother declares it a “ten to one” shot that she will ever see General Tilney (or consequently, his family) again, she sits in silence unable to agree or disagree (230). If Catherine uses mathematics, it is only to show the expanse of her affection: “I had ten thousand times rather have been with you [Mr. Tilney]” (109). According to Mark Loveridge, the two terms around which the novel circles, nature and probability, were “virtually synonyms” in eighteenth-century discourse (6). Austen plays with these terms as Catherine proves her naturalness by being unable to predict what is natural and probable. She can indulge in nothing more than a “secret ‘perhaps’” about her future with Henry (144).

FALSE ACCUSATION

If Catherine reaches the borderlands of propriety by revealing her heart, then her wrongful accusation of General Tilney is beyond the pale. Her belief that he murdered his wife and her investigation into Mrs. Tilney’s chamber breaks all the rules of hospitality. Catherine realizes that, if her “shocking suspicions” were known, “she could not wonder at any degree of [the General’s] indignation ... at his even turning her out from his house” (221-22). She commits a social sin of such severity that it warrants a severing of ties and a serious depletion of social status. Luckily, her great breach remains relatively secret. Only Henry discovers her misunderstanding; only he knows how close she is to destroying her newest friendships. Instead of being less attracted to Catherine as a result of her foolishness and her insults to his family, his attraction increases. Even while reprimanding her hyperactive imagination, he becomes a lovelorn sentimental hero who

³⁵ If Catherine can be said to be flirt, she is certainly not of the same type as Isabella. In a review, *The British Critic* praises Austen’s characterization of Isabella, as an accurate depiction of a certain type for flirt, “for flirts, like all other parts of the animal kingdom, may be divided into two or three species” (299).

reads the mind of his beloved as she melodramatically “raise[s] her eyes towards him more fully than she had ever done before,” falls into tears, and runs away (Loveridge 21; Austen 194).

As Henry chastises Catherine for her shameful suspicions, his affection for her grows:

If I understand you rightly, you have formed a surmise of such horror as I have hardly words to – Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live ... where every man is surrounded by a neighborhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting? (194-95)

Henry first refers to her as “Dear Miss Morland,” but by speech’s end, he draws the misguided creature closer and names her “Dearest Miss Morland.” His supposed difficulty in putting his feelings into words makes this moment more reminiscent of a love scene than a proper scolding. Despite this romantic atmosphere, Catherine continues to feel the weight of “her folly, which now seemed even criminal” (195). She weeps that her foolishness was “exposed” on that “fatal morning” to Henry. The public terms (“criminal” and “exposed”) with which Catherine recalls her embarrassment reveals that her wrongdoing was of a societal nature. Her language recalls that of captured criminals, trials, and executions, rather than that of a private breach of friendship. After such an offense, she assumes that her chance to win Henry’s love and esteem “was sunk” (195), but he is more inclined than ever to this “sunk” young lady, paying “her rather more attention than usual” (195). His friendliness and subsequently their intimacy intensify, because Catherine continues to share all of her embarrassments with him. A shadow of

self-consciousness enables her to know that some embarrassing remembrances “might not be without use” (197).

Canuel’s reading of *Mansfield Park* argues that “ [a]lthough Fanny spends much of her time in the novel in state of mortification from actual or potential offenses, the chastisement and suffering she endures nevertheless guarantee her visibility and social value; she thus anxiously seeks the very errors and consequent punishments that she wishes to avoid” (8). Like Fanny, Catherine finds that her mistakes give her visibility as a heroine and as a romantic interest to Henry. Neither Fanny nor Catherine ever deny their shortcomings or attempt to evade unpleasant consequences, and their errors eventually trigger the restoration of their social status through marriage. As Dr. Gregory explains, feminine guilt, even when it is unfounded, possesses tremendous charm for men: “Nature has made you blush when you are guilty of no fault, and has forced us to love you because you do so” (20). Just as “errors in knowledge and conduct” in *Mansfield Park* are “by and large to be cherished rather than avoided” (Canuel 83), Henry’s scolding speech to Catherine can be read as his first address as a lover, and thus easily treasured as a precursor of future, and greater, attentions.

EVICTED AND EXECUTION

Catherine’s greatest loss of social capital occurs when she is cast out of Northanger Abbey. Catherine circulates among the Thorpes and the Tilneys like a blank check as the men attempt to guess the amount for which she might be cashed. When John Thorpe inaccurately informs the General that this check is worthless, Catherine is sent packing.³⁶ This eviction triggers Henry’s most gallant gesture yet. His proposal of marriage effectively restores Catherine’s social value with interest. Her “mortifying”

³⁶ Upon her marriage, Catherine is worth £3,000 (239).

eviction, like her earlier social sins, accompanies a loss of status, but unlike those errors, this eviction is beyond her control (218). If Catherine had not lost smaller portions of her social capital earlier through improper behavior, then the eviction may not have been the tipping point that results in Henry's offer of marriage.

Although Catherine is not responsible for the General's rude dismissal of her, she feels more shame than indignation, which is unsurprising considering that initial reactions to John Thorpe's mistreatment were very similar. Austen connects the General and John through their mutual interest in guessing Catherine's economic worth as well as their ill treatment of the young lady (which demonstrates how their greed leads to immoral behavior). When the General mistrusts his supposedly penniless houseguest by throwing her out, it recalls John's earlier misuses of Catherine, such as when he tricks her into missing her appointment with his rival Henry. After John deceives her, she "took to herself all the shame of misconduct, or at least of its appearance" (108). Similarly, when General Tilney behaves badly toward Catherine, she again feels more shame than prideful indignation. In other words, although Catherine has not committed a social sin, she acts as if she had. Furthermore, as she returns home, she appears as if she has behaved badly. Thus it is impossible to discuss Catherine's slips in decorum by simply discussing the actual errors that occur, because we must also discuss what simply appears to be incorrect behavior.

Northanger Abbey's final chapters are often considered the most gothic in the novel. Gilbert and Gubar discuss how men such as John Thorpe and General Tilney confine Catherine to fictions they invent about her, just as gothic villains confine heroines behind locked doors (130, 137). In terms of Catherine's perceived worth, it is

unimportant if the General was not justified in dismissing her from Northanger, because the event itself as well as her appearance of guilt are what affects her value in the marriage market. Just as Catherine's innocent, albeit public, carriage ride with John Thorpe is regrettable because it creates a bad appearance, Catherine's social worth is depreciated when she leaves the General's home, both because her eviction cuts her ties with the Tilneys and because it looks bad for a guest to be sent packing by her host.

Although Catherine's eviction is a terrible ordeal, it frees her from a gentlewoman's rights.³⁷ For the space of a seventy-mile carriage ride, Catherine is independent, without social tie, and almost penniless. She becomes one of the destitute heroines about which she reads. As her mother notes, this interlude of utter exile from friends and family allows Catherine to prove herself a capable adult, rather than a "little shatter-brained creature" (225). Fulfilling the role of lonely heroine also grants her an outsider's position from which she can critique patriarchy: the general's failure to care for her properly underscores the hypocrisy of upper class gentility.³⁸ During her exile in the post-chaise, she demonstrates the strength of her affection for Henry even after his father wrongs her. Earlier in the novel and on a smaller scale, Catherine's relatively unruffled rejection of John and Isabella Thorpe shows how she narrows her social ties in order to choose those of the greatest personal value.

Catherine's eviction offers to Henry a similar opportunity for maturation and steadfastness. Her disgrace allows him to prove that his love is not based on convenience

³⁷ General Tilney ignores the protocol that requires a young lady to be thoughtfully protected as he neglects to give her a friend or a servant to accompany her on her carriage ride home.

³⁸ In *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, Claudia Johnson argues that Catherine's reading in gothic fiction taught her "to distrust parental figures and to feel that her power of refusal is continuously under siege" (39).

and that his happiness relies upon having a relationship with her. These are important revelations in a novel that universally rejects inconstant and mercenary characters such as John and Isabella Thorpe (as well as Frederick Tilney), who receive neither admiration from the reader nor happy marriages from Austen. Henry's proposal plays an important role in his own development. In "'Do You Understand Muslins, Sir?': Fashioning Gender in *Northanger Abbey*," Judith Wylie argues that as a "second son, fondly attached to a mother who died before her time, clearly under his father's thumb, Henry has not made the psychological break from paternal rule that would render him psychologically a man."³⁹ Henry's departures from conventional masculinity explain his peculiar understanding of muslins, which reveals his "empathy for the feminine, the disempowered, and the colonized," as well as his less pleasant moments of preachy chauvinism (139, 141). As though he were a little general, Henry lectures Catherine on her alleged misuse of the words "nice" and "torment," declares everyone who dislikes novels to be "intolerably stupid," and poses as a misogynist by declaring that "nature has given [women] so much [intellect], that they never find it necessary to use more than half" (121, 123, 120, 127). While making these assertions, Henry is all affectation. The son mimics the arrogance his father displays about his home, Northanger, as he pretends to be a master of language, education, and women. In this sort of imitative mood, Henry makes a sad hero, and a rather bad man.

Earlier in the novel, Catherine's "wild" (read: natural) immodesty allows Henry to be more natural, and by the novel's end, her disgrace will offer Henry another

³⁹ Judith Wylie's article offers an interesting reading of Mrs. Allen as woman past the stage of being a heroine and who uses clothes to substitute for her lack of children (132, 136). Wylie argues that Mrs. Allen uses a language of clothes to translate the masculine world into one she understands and enjoys. There is great power in Mrs. Allen's decisions to pursue pleasure through buying and using clothing (145).

opportunity for character development (109). After Catherine's eviction, Henry breaks from his father and begins to assert himself as an adult male through two important actions. First, he indignantly confronts his father about the heartless eviction of Catherine. Then, despite his father's objections, Henry cements his new independence by declaring that he will propose. As Bourdieu explains in "Forms of Capital," the head of a family, usually a father, sometimes protects embarrassed family members as a means to protect the larger social group (252). Henry, by offering his hand to Austen's disgraced heroine, chooses to claim and protect the embarrassed girl and, thereby, takes on the role of the masculine head of a new family. He also reveals himself as a unique and loving individual who refuses to imitate his bullying father.

In engaging himself to Catherine, Henry sacrifices his father's good opinion, his access to Northanger Abbey, as well as his future prospects to rise in the world through marriage. This "sacrificing," according to Georg Simmel, "can make a thing valuable, worth sacrificing for" (87). Henry sacrifices potential opportunities and his father's approval in order to embrace Catherine. His decision is a sign of a culture shifting toward the practice of affective marriage. Catherine's ability to love Henry, despite painful separation, proves her fitness for the affective marriage, which as Ian Watt argues, requires a proportionately greater intensity of feeling to match its greater isolation from the larger family network (139).

If Henry sacrifices for Catherine, she suffers for him. Catherine's punishment includes both her eviction from Northanger and her subsequent social death. After the carriage ride locks her away from everyone she knows, she arrives at her little village in an embarrassingly cheap form of public transport, which is only made worse by the fact

that she arrives on a Sunday, when respectable village folk attend to religious duties: “A heroine in a hack post-chaise, is such a blow upon sentiment Swiftly therefore shall her post-boy drive through the village, amid the gaze of Sunday groups, and speedy shall be her descent from it ” (223). After her “descent” from this wheeled disgrace and her return to home life, the language Austen uses of being “sunk again” reminds us of one buried away from the world (223, 230). Of course, societies have often associated social exile or banishment with death (“you’re dead to me!”), and as a punishment exile is, in some ways, crueler than death itself. While it is important not to overemphasize the hardships of Catherine’s return home, she is very unhappy, idle, and lacks interest in food (230). Canuel argues that Austen’s work frequently shows characters undergoing punishment, and through these depictions, Austen enters the larger, Romantic discourse about what punishments are appropriate and for whom (81, 169). Austen’s work is not often recognized for its contributions to this conversation on punishment, and especially capital punishment, “because of its sophisticated evasions of legal violence that link [her work] to more obvious critique of capital punishment in works like *Frankenstein* (1818) and *Waverley* (1814) In Austen’s fiction the death penalty can be detected only in the margins, buried in dark hints and clever jokes” (81). Canuel’s emphasis on Austen’s oblique references to punishment is yet another reason to examine Catherine’s return to Fullerton as a social death, a social execution. Canuel notes that a number of Austen characters experience “mortification”—a word that in modern usage figuratively links the pain of social embarrassment with death (100). Catherine, like so many of Austen’s heroines, undergoes a “mortifying and grievous” experience, one that is similar to a death and therefore produces the response of grief (218). Catherine is buried away from

society, and her spirits and hopes are sunk—just as if they were buried six feet deep. Like the early reformers who rallied around the unmerited punishment of innocents, Henry courageously saves Catherine from her living death. If Catherine’s eviction and social burial are unjustly severe, they are, nevertheless, useful in enabling her social resurrection. Furthermore, Austen’s use of Biblical allusion directs our focus to the transitions between life and death.

For instance, Mrs. Morland echoes the famous verses on life and death from Ecclesiastes: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up” (*KJV* 3:1-3). This passage relies on a binary between life (“born,” “plant,” “heal,” and “build up”) and death (“die,” “pluck up,” “kill,” and “break down”). In this passage, dying or killing often involves labor. Mrs. Morland alludes to this passage as she scolds her daughter: “Your head runs too much upon Bath; but there is a time for every thing—a time for balls and plays and a time for work” (230). Catherine’s time to be born—or, more precisely, her time to be reborn into a post-pubescent heroine—and her time to live (to go to Bath and “balls and plays”) is over, and now, her mother argues, it is her time to work for her family. Presumably, this work will involve helping her younger siblings with their lessons, which if it is not death itself is, according to her conversation at Beechen Cliff, “torture” (123). Mrs. Morland’s injunction to labor has deathly connotations, because both Ecclesiastes and Mrs. Morland place work and death in opposition to pleasure and life. For Catherine, laboring at home is an isolated, social

demise. Luckily, because of Henry, Catherine's time for healing and being built up will arrive sooner than she or her mother expect.

Considering Catherine's exile as social death or a form of being buried alive is particularly appropriate considering how readily *Northanger Abbey* borrows from gothic fiction and its fears of murder, live burial, and imprisonment. Not long before her own burial in village life, Catherine believed that General Tilney either killed or imprisoned his wife; she believed it possible that "Mrs. Tilney yet lived, shut up for causes unknown . . . receiving from the pitiless hands of her husband a nightly supply of coarse food" (186). Richard Lansdown asserts that Catherine's gothic fears for Mrs. Tilney are due to her own growing affection for Mrs. Tilney's son and her anxiety about marriage, sex, and entering a family into which she is not yet sure how she might be treated (71-72). Only after Henry's magnanimous proposal do satisfactory signs foretell that Catherine's future life with him will be happy and social.

Catherine's suspicions about Mrs. Tilney's live burial within her own home and her own more figurative burial in her obscure community touch upon larger cultural fears about the increasingly indistinct differences between life and death. As Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt explain, "it was the doctors who claimed in the eighteenth century to have discovered that humans might linger there for much longer periods of time than had previously been thought. The discovery of 'suspended animation,' or 'apparent death,' cast doubt on what had for centuries seemed the certain signs of death" (*Practicing New Historicism* 191). Despite this new awareness in the medical field, there was little agreement on how to tell if someone was dead or merely "suspended." The only sure way of telling if a body has not yet crossed over "consisted

simply in recoverability” (191). And the same principle applies to imperfect heroines: the only sure way one can know that they have not gone too far and lost too much social capital is if they recover what was lost through a happy and advantageous marriage. As Catherine languishes at home, readers wait to see if recovery is possible. While Catherine is not mistaken for dead, her “languor and listlessness” and her “absent and dissatisfied look” remind us of those uncertain states between the quick and the dead as well as her own invented image of Mrs. Tilney confined “to a cell in which she languished out her days” (230, 187).

Many marriage plots depict their heroines enduring a period of isolation brought on by the depreciations of their social capital before their advantageous marriages restore that social capital. Such social deaths are common in Austen’s works. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny returns to Portsmouth and her closest relations, who have far less capital of every kind in comparison with the Bertrams. Other heroines spend their time of social isolation prior to marital proposals in the sick bed. In these cases, the connection between depleted social capital and death is especially clear. Heroines who might die after committing social errors are most reminiscent of the many fallen women in nineteenth-century fiction who literally die after breaking with decorum. In fact, all imperfect heroines who slip from time to time are sisters of fallen women; like them, they must suffer, but their discomfort is only a short phase that occurs prior to their redemption. For slipping heroines, temporary suffering is all that is required before they receive a happy marriage, and any hint that her isolation will continue after the marriage is a dangerous sign that Victorian novels are particularly interested in reading. Stories of fallen woman emphasize the possibility of death after a depletion of social capital, which demonstrates the

importance of social standing and acceptance to women, which any good marriage must support. Additionally, sinking the heroine so that she not only battles a sense of shame but also battles for life itself makes the novel's concluding restorative marriage appear an even happier event.

Marriage plot heroines who spend their time of social depletion bedridden with concussions or high fevers have a unique opportunity to be both near others, and yet seemingly less able to maintain or build relationship. As they lay near the precipice of death, they tease readers, and potential lovers, with the possibility that they could lose their lives if they lost their social and romantic hopes. Louisa Musgrove in *Persuasion* and Marianne Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* are two examples of heroines who slip from decorum, slip into unconsciousness, and rise to walk down the aisle. Because of their unconsciousness, they would seem less able to catch a man, but in fact, for a heroine who has erred, this an opportunity of a lifetime. If a suitor's affection grows while the young lady lies unconscious, however flirtatious she might have been before her illness, she is now beyond the possibility of being criticized for immodest conduct.⁴⁰ Apparent unconsciousness is essential to modesty, and thus any limited capacity for self-awareness when around men, can be an advantage, even if a blow to the head causes that unconsciousness. Needless to say, there is something disturbing about a man watching over and loving an unconscious woman who cannot rebuff or, at present, return his nearly necrophilic attentions, but such things do happen in these fictions as they allude to the voyeuristic male fantasy of possessing a "sleeping beauty." For instance, Mr. B. first begins to comprehend Pamela's true worth after she faints during one his violent assaults

⁴⁰ In *The Flesh Made Word*, Helena Michie argues that illness often occurs after a young woman's feels her desire for a man and before she receives a proposal; thus, it punishes her for unmaidenly sexual desire (25). Nevertheless, these women are usually particularly attractive during this period of chastisement.

in her bed, and Catherine's sporadic stupidity is certainly part of her girlish charm. Like modesty and ignorance, unconsciousness gives a woman the opportunity to be attractively passive and helpless. Unconsciousness, whether it saves a heroine from rape or censure, is almost always a good thing.

When Catherine rolls into Fullerton in her little cell on wheels, she returns in such embarrassment that readers can only guess if or how she may ever recover her cheerful spirits and active social life. Austen's narrator refuses to show us a "heroine, returning at the close of her career, to her native village, in all the triumph of recovered reputation, and all the dignity of a countess, with a long train of noble relations in several phaetons" but instead "bring[s] back [her] heroine to her home in solitude and disgrace" (223). As she settles into home life, with the inane Mrs. Allen as her only friend, her spirits continue to lag – she is "sunk again" (230). Even her mother begins to think less of Catherine as she watches her listlessness: Mrs. Morland finally resorts to an intervention, which takes the form of a didactic article from the *Mirror*. At this moment when Catherine's spirits are lowest and her social capital most wounded, Henry Tilney arrives, promptly proposes, and amply restores her standing in the social economy. And thus Catherine makes a "match" who is, in her parents' opinion, "beyond the claims of their daughter" (237). Henry arrives after Catherine's third night home, giving his proposal something like the happiness of an Easter Sunday.⁴¹ He also effectively prevents her from having to read the *Mirror*. Like Becky Sharp, who flings Johnson's *Dictionary* from her

⁴¹ Although Catherine is buried alive temporarily in unvaried village life, she resurrects upon the arrival and proposal of Henry Tilney, who will soon take her to a home clearly cheerful enough not to be confused with a tomb. His parsonage is so full of the "most comfortable" and the "prettiest" rooms that it might be a heaven on earth for the young couple (207, 208).

carriage, *Northanger Abbey* tosses out the didactic, simplistic lessons of conduct fiction and shows how marriage comes to imperfect and convincingly realistic young women.

The narrator claims to evade the trite image of the triumphant heroine, and Austen does throw out the idea of making her heroine a countess or giving her a noble entourage, but she nevertheless allows her heroine's reputation to be recovered by the end of the story. Victorian novels, such as *Daniel Deronda*, will explore the unpleasant outcome of women who marry up without receiving any social benefit from their marriage. Unlike these later novels, *Northanger Abbey* concludes with a happy heroine who has a "recovered reputation" in addition to a husband with a "secure" and "very considerable fortune" (223, 237). In this novel and in many others, Austen creates conclusions that are at once very joyful and yet do not seem terribly unrealistic. These believably blissful conclusions help explain why fans, even today, sometimes view her works as recipes for happiness. As Austen deletes catalogues of fine carriages, footmen, and noble relatives, she chooses the essential ingredients for happy endings in the more modern and realistic romances of marriage plot novels. The essential ingredients that she chooses and employs many times for her happy endings are an advantageous affective marriage and a restored reputation.⁴²

BEYOND *NORTHANGER ABBEY*

The aforementioned mechanisms for creating a happy ending in *Northanger Abbey* revise those found in Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in

⁴² Austen parodies this plot with two very undeserving characters in *Sense and Sensibility*, in which the recently evicted Lucy Steele catches the recently endowed Robert Ferrars.

which marriage restores the hero's reputation and economic well being.⁴³ What prevents Valancourt from being able to defend himself from the charges of gambling and lewdness, which have reduced his reputation and temporarily destroyed the possibility of his marriage with Emily St. Aubert, is the fact of his maleness. Decorum requires that he not discuss the acts of which he is accused. Austen makes her heroine the offender and allows her to speak on all topics, even though at times her speech breaks with social etiquette. Austen presents that ability to speak freely in defense of oneself as a charming and natural impulse, which is attractive in a female. In *Northanger Abbey*, indecorous behavior and speech are risks worth taking. Austen continues to use the pattern of sinking a heroine's social capital, isolating her from her social network, and finally rewarding her with marriage in other works, such as *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*.

Through the character of Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen implies that it is moral to reward those who have been depreciated for relatively trivial reasons in the eyes of society. Colonel Brandon argues that Willoughby's betrayal of Marianne (which many presume broke not just her confidence, but their engagement) will increase Marianne's social capital. When he relates the tale of how his ward Eliza was impregnated and deserted by Willoughby, Brandon knows that Eliza will never regain significant social status after her "wretched and hopeless situation." He, nevertheless, argues that society will consider Marianne blameless: "[Marianne's sufferings] proceed from no misconduct, and can bring no disgrace. On the contrary, every friend must be made still more her friend by them. Concern for her unhappiness, and respect for her fortitude under it, must strengthen every attachment" (262). Brandon's speech does, of

⁴³ In this novel, both hero and heroine endure a difficult period of isolation. Montoni confines Emily in the Castle of Udolpho, and Valancourt is imprisoned.

course, reveal his bias in favor of Marianne. Marianne's conduct with and toward Willoughby is so open, selfish, and immodest that she makes herself into an example of impropriety and an object of gossip. From Brandon's perspective, however, true disgrace results only from sexual openness (i.e., Marianne has not crossed the unforgivable line created in this patriarchal society). There are, nonetheless, many degrees of disgrace, and certainly, in the eyes of readers and society, Marianne has embarrassed herself. Importantly, Brandon argues that Marianne's troubles will make her friendships deepen, or in other words, her social capital more secure, because he assumes that people will act morally and leniently. Through Brandon, Austen may be arguing that friendships ought to deepen when an individual is in trouble and that society ought to be more interested in its weaker members.

Interestingly, the only connections that grow more valuable to Marianne after Willoughby's betrayal are with men. Mr. Palmer is kinder and more helpful, and Colonel Brandon's tender feelings grow until Marianne's sickness causes him to confess his love to Mrs. Dashwood. Women, on the other hand, are often too pleased to be close to the center of gossip to care more deeply for the person who provides the gossip they enjoy. As Jan B. Gordon explains, gossip feeds upon incomplete projects such as "eligible bachelors and waiting women" (59). Patricia Meyer Spacks explains this link between gossip and incompleteness in a different way as she writes, "gossip impels plots" (7). These theories of gossip imply that those who take pleasure in gossip are not necessarily motivated to bring stories to a close, and thus end their supply of entertainment. Men such as Colonel Brandon, who have no interest in idle chitchat, are more likely to encourage conclusions.

When Colonel Brandon gives Edward Ferrars, whom he barely knows, a living on his estate, he increases Edward's economic and social capital after and *because* his mother and family have decreased it. Edward Ferrars' mother disowns and disinherits her oldest son upon learning of his engagement to Lucy Steele. Just as Colonel Brandon finds Marianne blameless, he finds Edward innocent as well, although readers and Edward himself see in his engagement to Lucy a weakness of character. Nevertheless, Brandon's behavior toward Marianne and Edward is Austen's moral standard for how we ought to behave to those whose social capital has been depreciated. Brandon, along with other ideal patriarchs such as Mr. Darcy, show the importance of those with money and power being generous and protective of others who fall into distress. Bourdieu explains that heads of families may choose to expel a member whose shame endangers the prestige of the entire group (252). In Austen, the best patriarchs ultimately refuse to shy away from embarrassing connections, and only the worst (and usually women such as Mrs. Ferrars and Lady Catherine) threaten or actually disown family members. While Henry Tilney's entrée into acting as a patriarch only exists in a very nascent form that appears at the end of *Northanger Abbey*, he begins his career with admirable liberality. The happy endings that characters such as Col. Brandon and Henry Tilney create are not simply romantic fantasy, because they suggest that there is a moral imperative – indeed a moral pleasure—in redeeming the redeemable.⁴⁴

Victorian novels register a very realistic fear that many male patriarchs do not possess the moral character of a Colonel Brandon or Mr. Darcy. Later novels depict the

⁴⁴ For instance, Darcy is the father of Lydia's and Jane's marriages in addition to marrying Elizabeth himself. Colonel Brandon's generosity to Edward is what allows him to marry Elinor, and, of course, Col. Brandon marries Marianne. Even Henry and Catherine's marriage finally receives General Tilney's approval because a nobleman proposes to Eleanor Tilney, which throws the General into such a good humor that he approves his son's choice.

dangers inherent in men who find pleasure in the company of their social inferiors. These works encourage readers not only to feel that powerful men may take advantage of a young woman before marriage, but that they may also inflict an equally horrific fate after marriage. By marrying a woman with few social resources, a wealthy and connected man could possess a wife over whom he has a terrific amount of control. He may even take advantage of his bride's weakness by isolating her from society, rather than making her the newest "great lady" in the neighborhood. Later novels continue to show the erotic attraction of feminine embarrassment that Austen depicts, but they also reveal the fact that men who are drawn to socially inferior women may be looking for a wife to control and keep "down," rather than bring "up" through marriage. Unlike Richardson, these novels do not assume that a man who marries his social inferior for the sake of love will be a good and generous husband. Unlike in the worlds of Richardson and Austen, Victorian novels show that a man attracted to low social status, and the virtue that presumably accompanies it, does not necessarily possess virtue himself.

Certainly in Austen's fiction there is an enjoyable and dramatic effect to the pattern of sinking the heroine and then having the hero raise her high. In this chapter, I have highlighted the essential role that the depletion of social capital plays in Austen's satisfying marriage plots, and likewise suggested that female readers might mimic stories of "natural folly in a beautiful girl" to their advantage in the marriage market (126). Novels such as *Northanger Abbey* do not simply criticize the internalizing of novelistic tropes, they may also encourage readers to take advantage of these tropes and their power to inspire and inform real decisions. When the market is particularly overcrowded with women desirous of the bridal veil, women must take greater risks and make more

accurate – and subtle – calculations. Austen's readers are made aware of social mores while they are also taught not to accept a depletion of social capital as a defeat but rather as a precursor to later success. Victorian novels will refine Austen's recommendations by explaining that while foolishness attracts men, young women must be careful of the type of man that it attracts. These later novels will instruct women to read their potential savior-suitors carefully, because while the erotics that Richardson and Austen explore continue to exist throughout the nineteenth century, there is increasing suspicion of men who fall for slipping heroines and of the patriarchal system that Austen's fiction at least partially supports.

CHAPTER 3

“THERE IS NO ONE TO MEDDLE, SIR”:

THE DANGERS OF ATTRACTION IN *JANE EYRE*

Thus far, I have argued for the importance of social capital—that is a person’s connections or reputation—in British marriage plots. I have maintained that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century marriage plots demonstrate that a heroine’s reputation *must* be somewhat damaged before she receives her reward of marriage. Marriage plots suggest that some spoiling before the consummation of marriage is sexually desirable in women and, often, financially advantageous for them as well. Rather than uniformly representing heroines with perfect reputations, these novels represent many heroines with tainted characters and, thereby, implicitly recommend that their female readers imperfectly preserve their social standing. Novel reading, then, may have helped women learn what sort of little stains might be attractive in the marriage market.

My first two chapters discuss how depreciated reputations become eroticized in early marriage plots such as *Pamela* and *Northanger Abbey*, which were written, as Watt explains, during a period in which British society was increasingly embracing affective marriages and focusing on virtue rather than wealth and status (*The Rise of the Novel* 137-39). According to Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, eighteenth-century society began to imagine the virtuous individual, and particularly the virtuous woman, as the most desirable (3). Armstrong claims that this imagining occurred in both

novels and conduct books, more or less simultaneously. As I have argued, literature often showed good women suffering some social isolation or loss of social standing prior to the peak of their attractiveness. This provocative message, that attractiveness often relies on an imperfect reputation, is one that the novels of the period contain but that the conduct literature does not acknowledge.

In order for a woman to obtain an adorable sort of damage, her social capital must wane. It is important, however, that the heroine does not seem to have purposely damaged herself in order to seek the attentions of a sympathetic suitor. Like Richardson's *Pamela*, a woman must be able to deny calculation in any reductions she may have suffered to her social value in order to gain male affection.

Pamela establishes what will become a common pattern for marriage plots: after the heroine slips and injures her social capital, she must endure some degree of isolation before having her social standing redeemed by an advantageous marriage. The heroine's period of social isolation may serve as both a test of her ability to continue to love in difficult circumstances and as a preparatory period for marriage, which from the eighteenth century onward, according to Ruth Perry, will involve the man and wife creating a new social unit that, at least to some extent, separates them from larger kinship networks (*Novel Relations* 221-22). Using Mark Canuel's *The Shadow of Death*, I explored in my last chapter how this period of isolation often contains some threat of death or a death-like condition, which both creates high drama within these novels about events as commonplace as courtship while also allowing readers to imagine that the heroine emerges from her trial purified and justifiably able to marry well and happily. Austen's novels repeat Richardson's pattern in a more comic vein as they demonstrate

how having the hero save the heroine after a recent social slip allows him the opportunity to demonstrate his own worth by proving that he lacks mercenary motives. The hero who mercifully takes up and marries a slightly spoiled young woman also highlights his ability to serve as a strong, protective family head.

In eighteenth-century and Romantic-era marriage plots, a man's proposal to a woman with a damaged reputation indicates the sincerity and benevolence of his love, but by the Victorian period, this assumption comes under suspicion. The Victorian wariness of eroticized social injuries is not merely another way for Victorian writers to counter their Romantic forebears; their suspicion involves a more long-ranging distrust of Romantic and earlier eighteenth-century writers, who helped create middle-class sexual tastes. The Victorian suspicion registers a larger cultural critique, namely that earlier thinkers confused valuing individualism and morality with eroticizing social vulnerability and, at times, loneliness. Although this eroticization of low social capital may allow underprivileged women to make better marriage matches, as Victorian writers note, it does not insure their safety after the wedding.

This chapter aims to demonstrate that, even as Victorian novels continue to display the attractiveness of damaged social capital, they are also increasingly concerned with the dangers that faced women with eroticized social vulnerability. Victorian novels were progressively more conscious of the risks of being "freckled," because it made women helpless against abusive men. Many novels critiqued eroticizing feminine vulnerability by illustrating the dangerous results of this taste for defenselessness. While works such as *Aurora Leigh*, *Ruth*, and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* show the abuses suffered by severely socio-economically disadvantaged women, I intend to focus on

novels that depict abuses which occur, or are predicted to occur, to *somewhat* disadvantaged heroines *after* they enter marriages that would, at first, appear as advantageous. *Jane Eyre* will serve as my example of how Victorian anxiety concerning that attraction of low social capital combines with older marriage plot patterns.

This chapter will explore two ways in which Victorian novelists revise the marriage plot. First, they begin to show more concern with the abuses that may occur within marriages that are built upon the man's attraction to a woman with an imperfect social capital. This concern with marital abuse reflects the larger Victorian trend of focusing more and more on what happens after marriage. This apprehension regarding marital abuse reflects the nineteenth-century's rising cultural concern with male violence, especially against women.⁴⁵ Secondly, Victorian novelists push back the limits of how socially depreciated a heroine can be before she no longer deserves a happy marriage. By doing so, these writers level critiques at their society's rigid view of proper femininity. Victorian marriage plots redefine what spoilage looks like for heroines so that those who qualify to be heroines are not just giddy girls who behave embarrassingly because of their youthful innocence or eager hearts. Heroines can also be women whose gentility or lovability are more questionable due to a longstanding lack of social capital or less naively flirtatious behavior. Although Victorian authors permit their heroines to make more visible calculations in the marriage market, a heroine still cannot seem to have intentionally bruised her social worth for the sake of gaining a man. Also, even as heroines may possess more dubious social reputations, the old rule of sexual containment

⁴⁵ Matthew Weiner's *Men of Blood* describes nineteenth-century culture's increasing awareness of masculine violence (2-3).

remains; for any heroine to receive a rewarding marriage, she must abstain from consensual, premarital relations.

Nineteenth-century marriage plots prefer tracking the progress of heroines who are neither fallen from society nor powerfully positioned within it, but this preference also means that those heroines are fairly vulnerable to abuses of power, even after entering socially beneficial and, at times, loving marriages. Thus danger is the conjoined twin to any feminine attractiveness based on social depreciation. Victorian novels are suspicious of the eroticization of female social vulnerability, because they assume it encourages marital isolation. Victorians see isolation as a two-headed problem, which poses two distinct kinds of dangers: abuse to the wife and neglect of the community. Isolation increases the likelihood that a wife will experience cruelty and that those abuses will continue unimpeded, because they are hidden from the public eye. Additionally, marital seclusion absents the couple from the community to which they should contribute. Such neglect, if widespread, might put the community in a state of jeopardy. Thus the attractively imperfect and disconnected bride lives under the threat of isolation after her marriage, which will bring with it these two important risks. Victorian novels conflate these two dangers, bringing them together in men like *Daniel Deronda*'s violent and selfish Grandcourt; he fails as a husband on at least two counts as he neglects the community as well as his wife. Having a life for the Victorian wife must include community involvement, and a husband who prevents this participation abuses his wife by hindering her from fulfilling her social function. Therefore, the captive wife is always an abused wife. According to the Victorian perspective, seclusion in marriage is incompatible with a happy union.

As Martin Weiner explains, Victorians supported their notion of superiority partly by congratulating themselves upon treating their wives better than allegedly inferior societies, such as in India where men were reputed to mistreat their women or encourage polygamy (*Men of Blood* 31-2). Novels sometimes show how abusive English husbands fail to remain truly “English” as they are more likely to be unjust or neglectful toward their fellow countrymen, implying that one of man’s most private failures can have public ramifications.

While Victorian novels continue to present proposals triggered by recently depreciated social capital, they also open up the possibility that a man proposing marriage to a woman of low social capital may be just as opportunistic as a man proposing marriage to an heiress of seemingly limitless wealth. John Galsworthy’s *The Forsyte Saga: A Man of Property* (1906), which is set in the later half of the nineteenth century, exemplifies the endurance of a Victorian perspective on the abusive potential of a husband who marries “down” socially. When Soames Forsyte, who has money and family connections to spare, marries the orphaned Irene, who has only fifty pounds a year and a stepmother eager to be rid of a potential rival, it is the groom, not the comparatively poor bride, who seizes an opportunity for power and possession. With Soames’s persistent proposals and wealth, it is no wonder that the unprotected Irene consents to marry (129-30, 62). Galsworthy describes the emotional and physical abuse that results from this match as well as Soames’s attempt to isolate Irene in a newly built country home, where she would be “away from opportunities of going about and visiting and seeing people, away from her friends and those who put ideas into her head!” (64). All of this abuse is due, at least partly, to the fact that the marriage began with a rich, possessive

man marrying a woman whose lack of money and caring friends confines her to her husband until, even after taking a lover, she “come[s] back like an animal wounded to death, not knowing where to turn” (373).⁴⁶ Stories such as this one demonstrate that the vulnerability of a woman who brings nothing into a marriage extends long after she supposedly becomes one with her lord and master. As a wife, she is most vulnerable if she has neither a financial settlement nor friends to whom she can turn. Because a wife’s defenselessness is not simply a financial weakness, which laws such as the Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 somewhat addressed, the problem of how low social capital endangers women remains a constant issue throughout the nineteenth century, and it is a problem that legislation cannot eliminate.

Legal reforms, such as the Married Women’s Property Acts, reveal the Victorian period’s concern with women’s economic safety after marriage. And while legislation cannot always prevent social abuses that disconnected women may suffer during marriage, Victorian culture worried about the ways in which marriage leaves women in vulnerable positions. The works of Caroline Norton and, later, Frances Power Cobbe, for instance, evidence a larger trend of addressing married women’s defenselessness. In “A Letter to the Queen on Chancellor Cranworth’s Marriage and Divorce Bill” (1855), Norton argues that English law should be used to protect the weak, and through an extended list of what “an English wife cannot” do, she shows the extreme vulnerability, which legal non-existence causes (146). According to Norton, the English wife “cannot,” for example, “legally claim her earnings,” “leave her husband’s house,” or “claim support” from her spouse (146-47). Interestingly, immediately prior to Norton’s catalog

⁴⁶ In the succeeding volumes of *The Forsyte Saga*, Irene leaves Soames and, eventually, enters a better marriage, but her first husband continues to disturb her happiness.

of the actions an English wife “cannot” take, she provides an image of how the wife’s defenselessness could, when taken to the extreme, leave her in total nakedness: “An English wife has no legal right even to her clothes or ornaments; her husband may take them and sell them if he pleases, even though they be gifts of relatives or friends, or bought before marriage” (146). Perhaps unwittingly, Norton’s description supplies an insight into the erotic excitement of coverture. Coverture, and even the term *feme covert*, only encourages one to think of its opposite – the uncovered female body.⁴⁷ Curiously, it is the covered, married woman whom, in reality, the law strips of all protection without ensuring that her husband will properly safeguard her. Thus, by implying that marriage shelters women, because husbands presumably protect, or cover, their wives, the other possibility of the wife being easily stripped of all cover by her husband also becomes apparent in an erotically exciting way. I would argue that the legal practice of coverture implicitly encourages linking feminine vulnerability with sexual attraction, because one of the attractions of marriage for men was the power it granted them and the nakedly dependent state in which it left their wives.

The Victorian wife was vulnerable not only legally and economically, but also physically. The Victorian marriage plots’ concerns with the dangers that accompany female attractiveness are rooted in the culture’s anxiety about male violence toward women. According to Marlene Tromp’s *The Private Rod*, “prior to the mid-century legislation concerning cruelty, a man could legally beat his wife, even if it resulted in crippling, maiming, and, occasionally, death, particularly if the courts felt there was provocation” (251n). Despite such an obvious, moral shortcoming on Britain’s part, its

⁴⁷ The “uncovered” female is the single woman, or *feme sole*, who has the legal right to own property and keep her earnings, unlike her married counterpart.

culture, according to Weiner's thesis, saw a large-scale anti-violence movement, which began in the sixteenth century, and was expanding rapidly in the nineteenth (11). By the 1830s, the movement changed its focus from male violence against other males to male violence against women (35).⁴⁸ Society viewed men as the naturally more violent and anti-social sex, and it associated women with milder qualities; and thus people began to believe that married women were "urgently needing protection from bad men, which brought acts of violence against women, more often than not taking place in the home, out 'from the shadows'" (1, 3).⁴⁹ Society attempted to refine and civilize men, and especially working-class men, so that they might become non-violent, rational "'men of dignity'" rather than forceful, vengeful "'men of blood'" (5-6). Philosophies of self-control combined with new policies from the justice system to gradually decrease violent crime, especially public, male-on-male violence, by mid-century (13, 3).⁵⁰ A large, professional police force, established by Robert Peel in 1829, also gradually shifted its focus from protecting property to protecting people, which allowed the police to frequently become quickly involved in domestic disputes (19). At the same time as there was enhanced surveillance, the legal system became more concerned with protecting

⁴⁸ Weiner explains that as early as the 1791 Quarme case, the husband's right of chastisement came under legal review when a man who kicked his wife to death (though without intending to murder her) was hung. In 1828, Justice Park set a new, limiting precedent for a husband's right of chastisement when a man was hung after lethally beating his wife, whom he suspected of adultery; this case is noteworthy because, traditionally, a wife's adultery was one of the offenses that justified male rage (172-73).

⁴⁹ Weiner notes that male protectiveness often amounted to sounding brass. This emphasis on female vulnerability was, at times, used to restrict women's freedom (4-5). Nevertheless, both paternal as well as progressive, feminist thinkers came to agree that the female body ought to be protected (35).

⁵⁰ According to Weiner, male killings of other men dropped during the Victorian period, but "'private,' domestic or other intimate killing was failing to show clear evidence of diminution" (2). While anxiety about violence was prevalent in the Victorian period, it was lessening overall (11). Somewhat confusingly, records of crimes increased sevenfold from 1805-1842, but this was very likely due to better police work (17). Cases of wife murder were highly publicized because of the public outrage against violence toward women. Additionally, murder trials were the only type that could end in capital punishment after 1837 and, thus, were perceived as more important and exciting (35, 27).

individual safety as well; penalties for personal attacks, even those against wives, grew more severe while the harshness of penalties for crimes against property diminished (20).⁵¹

Later in the century, women could more easily obtain legal separations as the concept of cruelty expanded to include more kinds of violence (Weiner 37), and there were new resources to help them take abusive husbands to court. For example, the Associate Institute for Improving the Laws for the Protection of Women began in 1843 in order to help prostitutes, and by 1853 it focused its support on aiding women who were victims of assault or rape by prosecuting their attackers; this group's successfulness reveals a new lack of tolerance for violence against women (102n, 103). The institute also brought attention to the existence of assault among all social classes (103). In *Cruelty and Companionship*, A. James Hammerton asserts that the idea of the working-class husband being more violent than the middle-class husband was merely an unwarranted assumption, because men from the upper classes were just as likely to be physically or sexually violent as their less privileged male counterparts (2, 87).

The 1831 revision to Richard Burns' *Justice of the Peace* heralds an important awareness of marital abuse and a promising attitude change. Burns instructed those on the bench to allow parents, teachers, jailers, and masters reasonable right of chastisement of their children, students, prisoners, and servants respectively, but for the first time, this right was not given to husbands for use against their wives (Weiner 173-74). Of course, after 1831, many husbands and courts still believed that a right of chastisement existed

⁵¹ According to eighteenth-century common law, a person could be hung for stealing a shilling, but a person guilty of manslaughter received only one year in prison (19). After the 1837 Offenses Against the Person Act, capital punishment was no longer a punishment for crimes against property and murder was the only crime for which capital punishment was still an option (24, 27). Once capital punishment was no longer the penalty for rape, convictions rose (Weiner 77).

and could be used, especially if the wife was verbally or physically abusive, drunken, neglectful, or adulterous; nevertheless, over time, the kinds of behavior that justified chastisement lessened (174, 176, 170).

These trends show that there is evidence that, even before the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, legislators and activists were turning their attention toward violence directed against women, and novels also register this concern with women's safety. In the eyes of Parliament, one of the main reasons for the Divorce Act was the protection of working-class women against brutal husbands (Weiner 73). After this Act, marital problems within all classes became more salient as newspapers reported upon the scandalous interiors of English homes. According to Hammerton, the new challenges to husbands' rights sometimes engendered within men a "preoccupation with authority" that "often [extended] to the point of neurotic obsession." This anxiety, unfortunately, served to heighten the likelihood that wives would suffer due to their husbands' need to exhibit power (72).⁵² Primarily in a response to her apprehension about working-class women, Frances Power Cobbe's essay "Wife Torture in England" (1878) threatens the English sense of national and moral superiority as it argues that, unless wives are treated equally, the English husband is no better than a slave owner (224-27). Later in the century, the interest in the problem of spousal abuse did not wane. In "A Shock to Marriage?" Ginger Frost explains that the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1884 abolished the penalty of imprisonment for wives who refused to give conjugal rights, and the 1887 Clitheroe Decision saw this law in action as an appeal court refused to uphold Edmund Haughton

⁵² Using three mid-century cases, the Bostock case, *Curtis v. Curtis*, and *Kelly v. Kelly*, Hammerton contends that "men's obsession with control [skirted] the borders, at least, of mental illness. More significant, though, is the fact that in all these cases the object of each husband's obsession was his sense of his own unlimited authority, expressed in the desire for mastery, determination to control outside influences like doctors, and the illegitimacy of his wife defiance, sometimes extending over many years" (81).

Jackson's right to kidnap his estranged wife, Emily (100-06).⁵³ Through letters, riots, and court attendance, the public participated in this court case and, thereby, showed their highly emotional involvement in the ongoing debates about marriage (115). Hammerton explains that the "new discourse of marital reform was to succeed in bringing the husband's conduct under scrutiny, but the extent to which it really brought about a change in marital relationships is more difficult to establish" (108). Marriage plot novels were part of this discourse, and they drew attention to abusive male behavior as well as to the female vulnerability that often attracted men into marriage.

When novelists and activists attacked such practices as coverture and domestic violence, they also implicitly questioned the value of eroticizing feminine vulnerability, which placed women in marriages in which they were powerless. Any married woman was at risk, but this weakness was compounded when there was a considerable inequality of social or economic capital between her and her husband. Even though this erotic quality—the attractiveness of a woman with low social capital—was a relatively new byproduct of progressive values that emphasized the lovability of those without high social status, it developed into part of a larger problem concerning female safety.

While Parliament worked to give married women thicker legal armor through more equal control over their money and property, novels investigated how inequalities of social capital could be worked on and worked out.⁵⁴ Nightmarish stories of a rich, powerful man—or even Zeus himself—forcing himself upon a poor girl are well-known

⁵³ The Clitheroe Decision enabled several working-class women, who lacked the familial and financial support that Emily Hall Jackson possessed, the right to help from the police as they attempted to leave abusive husbands (Frost 109).

⁵⁴ In addition to legal reforms that gave married women more economic rights, other laws such as the Custody of Infants Act in 1839 and the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 gave women more access to their children and comparatively easier divorces.

critiques of masculine authority. Many Victorian marriage plots had a more specific abuse to investigate, namely the possibility (sometimes realized, though often avoided) of mistreatment occurring after a consensual marriage, particularly if it involved a rich man and a poorer or less well-connected woman. Victorian marriage plots begin to portray realistically the dangers women encountered when marrying up while also remaining committed to providing readers with pathways by which somewhat underprivileged women could find marital happiness. Authors of realist novels had to maneuver between two impulses—the impulse to show and critique the vulnerability of attractively imperfect heroines even after they marry well (and are supposedly secure within gentleman’s homes) and the impulse to provide happy endings. Novels such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876) explore how a woman’s lack of social value, whether recent or longstanding, may be a powerful attraction, yet does not always appeal to uniformly protective, selfless suitors who desire to give or restore a woman’s good reputation. On the contrary, the suitor attracted to the heroine of damaged social capital may desire a wife to control or isolate from society. By this period, a gentleman who looked upon a social inferior as a potential wife—even when his feelings were sincere—would know that he was playing the part of the hero from popular works by Richardson, Burney, and Austen and that he may be able to blind his conquest to his true character and motives because of his surface resemblance to the reformed aristocrats of literature.

As Catherine Gallagher points out, early novels usually focus on characters with “innocent credulity,” and by doing so, they encourage their readers to feel a superiority and wisdom as they skeptically imagine the potential outcomes of a hero’s or heroine’s

actions: “In short, the reader, unlike the character, occupies the lofty position of one who speculates on the action, entertaining various hypotheses about it” (“The Rise of Fictionality” 346). When a heroine receives attention from a suitor who is her social superior, the skeptical, nineteenth-century reader, then, may be inclined to imagine the unpleasant outcomes of the courtship, which are the very effects to which the hopeful heroine might turn a blind eye. Hammerton argues that the unmarried woman must distinguish between reasonable and unreasonable men, the latter of whom are unable to be touched by argument and would act, perhaps even violently, according to their own will (61). Novel reading may help readers discriminate between possible suitors. Victorian novels encourage their readers to hesitate before giving credit to wealthy, connected men who court their social inferiors. These novels ask their female readers to speculate two things carefully: the amount that they should allow their social capital to fall (in order to appear attractive) and the kind of attention and danger they can expect their social vulnerability to invite.

VICTORIAN GENDER ROLES AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

In my earlier readings, I stressed the erotic power of heroines whose reputations are tarnished by slips from decorous behavior. By the Victorian era, suspicion surrounds men who are *too* keenly attracted to women with low social capital. Marriage plot novels have always been interested in the instruction of rakish and arrogant men in order that they may become good husbands. By the mid-nineteenth century, novels become explicitly concerned with reforming male violence and preventing abusive marriages. Victorian novels cannot routinely depict happy marriages between individuals of extremely disparate social status, because cross-class marriages are likely to isolate the

couple, and especially the bride, from society. The more realistic marriage plots of the Victorian period cannot ignore the likelihood of a wife's unhappiness if her marriage socially isolates her. By refusing to ignore the possibilities for negative outcomes after the bridal flush, these novels reflect the culture's escalating attention to marital violence, to which the legal system, charities, and newspapers gave ever-increasing consideration throughout the nineteenth century.

Victorian novels are suspicious of both the eroticism of friendlessness and the possibility of a couple in an affective marriage disengaging from society, which might be dangerous to the wife or, at least, deleterious to the larger community. As a reaction against Romantic self-indulgence, mid-nineteenth-century British society praises social responsibility and assumes that the ideal Victorian couple would have strong, social ties. Therefore, while the model conjugal unit for Victorians may be less involved with wider kinship networks than a couple married in the Renaissance, they nevertheless cannot be socially estranged from their family or neighbors. Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?* exemplifies this ideal, as Alice Vavasor's and John Grey's happy ending includes both a love-match and John's decision to pursue a political career, which connects the pair to public life and solidifies their friendship with the political Palliser family. In other words, Victorian novels reject self-involved, passionate Byronic heroes, such as the scarred and violent George Vavasor, as too selfish and immoral to bring their wives joy or their communities improvement. In *The Dangerous Lover*, Deborah Lutz discusses how Byronic heroes are attractive due to their perpetual homesickness (48-49); she argues that George Vavasor is "[u]nredeemably cursed like Cain" and "becomes a voyager in the

end, sailing to America to escape punishment for his murderous actions” (54).⁵⁵ While George’s dark nature may have its charms, his inability to accept punishment and create a British home renders him unsuitable for marriage.⁵⁶ As Alice ponders the differences between John Grey and George Vavasor in an attempt to choose a husband, she must distinguish correctly between a reasonable and an unreasonable man in order to hope for later contentment; according to Hammerton, this discrimination between the reasonable and unreasonable is an essential part of a woman’s work on the marriage market (61). In an instructive move for readers, Alice chooses well by picking a reasonable, restrained, socially responsible man for her spouse. According to Davidoff and Hall’s *Family Fortunes*, Victorians believed that, “[t]rue masculinity was not to be gained from sexual adventure but by self-control” (401) and, I would add, by having a productive, moral function within society before and, especially, after marriage.

Victorians such as Ruskin defined the man as the “doer” (Ruskin “Of Queens’ Gardens” 260). According to Ellis, men must actively go out into “the mart, the exchange, or the public assembly” on capitalistic and imperial missions (Ellis *The Women of England* 57); therefore, in order for a man’s marriage to allow him to fulfill his role as an Englishman successfully, with “his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest,” as well as what Gladstone calls his “innate” “sentiment of empire,” his marriage should encourage him to go out of the home and into society (Ruskin 260,

⁵⁵ Lutz asserts that the “eroticism of homelessness settles around the desire for one who restlessly pines; who searches always for something long gone; who, in a word, desires” (48). Although Lutz correctly underscores the continued appeal of the fugitive wanderer throughout nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture, I argue throughout this chapter that Victorian marriage plots advise against marriages based on the “erotics of homelessness.” Victorian novels show that neither the hero nor the heroine should receive affection simply because they are outsiders.

⁵⁶ Additionally, unlike John Grey in future Palliser novels, the self-promoting George Vavasor fails as politician.

Gladstone “England’s Mission” 185). For many men, their marriage “often coincided with taking on new responsibilities in business or profession,” and, at times, it also coincided with the husband ending private, romantic affairs that fulfilled no useful social function (Davidoff and Hall 323). An illegitimate union or a marriage to an embarrassing woman could inhibit a man’s ability to be accepted in his community and, consequently, may prevent him from possessing that outward, active force that defined masculinity. The husband who cannot play his public role prevents his wife from fulfilling her own complementary function as the moral touchstone for an active man (Ellis 57). Such an inhibited wife is being treated cruelly, because she is unable to perform her proper social role. Novelistic depictions of seclusion are code for marital abuse and violence. If a man’s marriage to an unacceptable woman isolates him, it doubly isolates his wife, who would be cut off from the world due to both her gender and her socially problematic marriage.

Happy marriages are possible for Victorian heroines, like Jane Eyre, who possess fewer connections, but only if their suitors act and propose in such a way as to ensure the future wife’s equality with her husband and the couple’s interaction with society after the marriage. Victorian marriage-plot heroes, including *Can You Forgive Her?*’s John Grey, *Bleak House*’s Allen Woodcourt, or *Mary Barton*’s Jem Wilson, all play a public or imperial role, which presumably allows their wives to play an equally important, albeit supportive, role in nation-building. For instance, Mary Barton accompanies Jem Wilson to Canada, so that he may do the work of cultivating that colony’s “old primeval” woodlands for the growing British Empire (392). Unlike George Vavasor, who exits England for America, Jem’s emigration with Mary allows them to contribute to the

Empire's prosperity. Interestingly, because of Rochester's injuries, his marriage to Jane is somewhat more secluded, and so, before we can leave those two alone in the forest, we must be sure they share power relatively equally and that Jane will not be alienated from humankind. After seeing that Jane has power within her home and some connection to the world outside of it, readers can feel quite sure that her married life is not that of an imprisoned, Gothic heroine, but rather more like that of a new Eve who is tucked safely within a Edenic vale.

Although Jane cannot push her blind, mutilated husband out the door to work in the busy mart or plow Canadian fields, she still expands her influence by dividing her fortune among her three cousins, which allows them, and especially St. John, to go forth into the world with greater resources. St. John Rivers becomes an "indefatigable pioneer" who "clears [a] painful way for improvement" in India until the end of his life. Through Diana's and Mary's husbands, who are, respectively, a naval captain and a clergyman, Jane indirectly supports those men who are still able to do public work (Brontë 385). Additionally, young Adèle, who will presumably marry soon, now bears the stamp of Jane's care and is less Frenchified as a result (383). Jane and Rochester are all the "more happy . . . because those [they] love are happy likewise," and through those who are better fit to fulfill active duties to their community, Jane fulfills both duty and her emotional need for involvement. With Rochester's slowly returning sight, even he sees more of the world, and in a more godly way, for having taken this obscure, little woman to his side (385). Thus, *Jane Eyre* cannot ignore the wife's responsibility to influence the world for good, but it is particularly progressive in allowing her to accomplish this through means other than her husband. Despite Rochester being to some extent

unmanned by his injuries, Jane is not deprived of her function as a touchstone to those who are operating in the world. Jane's impact, which extends beyond Rochester, provides evidence that regardless of their seclusion in Ferndean, she is not forlornly cut off from human activity and progress.

A LONELY BEGINNING FOR "THE POOR ORPHAN CHILD"

Unlike earlier heroines such as Pamela and Catherine Morland, Jane Eyre does not damage her social capital immediately prior to her first engagement; instead, she has long suffered a lack of friends through no fault of her own. In fact, Jane spends the longest time with the lowest social capital of the three heroines—Pamela, Catherine, and Jane—on which I have focused thus far. Even as a maid, Pamela's story begins with her receiving much goodwill from the aristocracy, and Catherine's family and friends, however obscure, never leave her totally destitute for longer than a carriage ride. Through Jane, who is plain, difficult, and unconnected with the world, Brontë plays at the edges of what an acceptable heroine can be. Jane's attractiveness is far less obvious than Pamela's or Catherine's, and yet her lack of connections causes her to possess a romantic appeal, especially to Rochester.

In *The Character of Beauty in the Victorian Novel*, Lori Hope Lefkowitz argues that Jane appears more beautiful to readers as they progress through the novel, because they "are made to reassess [their] criteria for appreciating beauty" (149). When Jane decides to create two portraits, one of Blanche Ingram, "an accomplished lady of rank," and the other of herself, "a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain," she is not, as she claims, comparing an attractive image with an unattractive one; instead, she compares two images based on differing erotic codes, the former of which is from an older,

aristocratic model and the other of which originated within the new middle class (Brontë 137). By creating a portrait of herself to be judged and looked upon as an art object, she reinforces the idea that disconnected women are sites for sexual attention—even when they are not obviously pretty country lasses. Moreover, Jane’s work emphasizes her moral goodness as she attempts to correct the pride that led her to believe Rochester prefers her. Through this moral corrective, she reveals her attractiveness in a backhanded sort of way by underscoring her goodness, a quality that has, since the eighteenth century, been almost synonymous with desirability.

Jane’s lack of sufficient social capital begins when her maternal grandfather disapproves of his daughter’s new husband, whom he believed was “beneath her.” He ceases all financial support to Jane’s mother, and thus, even before she is born, Jane’s grandfather positions her to possess fewer connections than what is, perhaps, her due. Sadly, Jane’s father’s ministerial work in an industrial town causes him to catch typhus fever, which infects and kills his wife and himself. His low social connections as a “poor” curate in an underprivileged parish quite literally result in death (21). The disinheritance of her mother and the deaths of her parents and Uncle Reed are the earliest damages to Jane’s social connections. Mrs. Reed continues this trend by treating Jane as a disagreeable, “heterogeneous thing” that does not belong in her household (12). At Gateshead, Jane’s lack of connections and her passionate nature lead to her emotional neglect. Later, her once unlikable qualities and deficient capital will become a double-edged asset in her pursuit of Rochester’s love.

Bessie’s song famously highlights the child’s emotional loneliness, because she is the “poor orphan child” for whom only “God is a friend” (18). The “capricious” Bessie is

an inconstant supporter who occasionally helps Jane at Gateshead and, later, seems to flit into her adult life at irregular intervals. Unfortunately, this nursemaid's own social position is so minimal that she cannot replace the advantages Jane's parents or uncle might have offered (24).

Jane herself can only imagine that her uncle's ghost—a being from another, nonsocial world—would bother to love and protect her. When confined in the red room, she feels that her uncle's spirit may return to revenge her ill treatment, an idea that is both “terrible” and “consolatory”:

I wiped my tears and hushed my sobs, fearful lest any sign of violent grief might waken a preternatural voice to comfort me, or elicit from the gloom some haloed face, bending over me with strange pity. This idea, consolatory, in theory, I felt would be horrible if realized. (13)

Jane's possesses mixed feelings toward powerful, masculine help. She experiences terror and desire; she wants protection and wants to run from the only being she supposes might provide it (14). In her fear of her uncle's ghost, Jane collapses after Mrs. Reed and the servants reject her pleas for liberty. The red-room scene shows that, beginning in childhood, Jane would have reason to believe that signs of male love only arise after her family treats her badly or expels her from their circle. While in the red room and, later, at Thornfield, Jane is confined in a lonely place where she feels both a desire for and anxiety about the governing male powers, which seem attracted to her because of her weakness. Jane believes her “tears,” “sobs,” and “signs of violent grief” might rouse her uncle to comfort her, and as an adult, Jane's forlorn solitariness does arouse Rochester's desire to protect and possess her.

Her experiences in the red room parallel her stay in Thornfield Hall. The Gothic similarities between the stately red room and Thornfield's imposing battlements further

associate these two mysterious settings with the Gothic trope of endangered young women, and both spaces are, in fact, sites of female enclosure. Jane enters these spaces in a servile capacity, as either a prisoner or a governess, when their masters are absent.⁵⁷ As a child, she sits on a “low ottoman” not far from her uncle’s “ample, cushioned easy-chair . . . looking, as [she] thought, like a pale throne,” and as a young woman, she sits in a chair alongside her master’s “swelling” and “immense easy-chair” by the fire (11, 111, 112).⁵⁸ The furniture upon which Jane sits reveals her “low” status in both environments. Just as Jane tries to run from the red room so that she may not to be “killed” by a powerful, overprotective spirit, she later literally runs from Rochester’s immoral paternalism in order to save her soul (14). Jane’s experiences demonstrate the benefits of social exile in procuring male attention as well as the anxieties that accompany being rescued by a powerful man.

Not long after the red-room scene, Mrs. Reed chooses to disconnect the orphan girl from her only known family by sending her to the Lowood Institution. Although Jane claims to cancel her own connection to her aunt (“I will never call you aunt again”), this action is not what the love-starved Jane desires; on the contrary, it is an angry reflection of the rejection Mrs. Reed has already shown her by countless acts of exclusion (30).

Interestingly, Jane boasts that she will have her revenge on Mrs. Reed for telling Mr.

⁵⁷ Both spaces are domestic interiors that possess “vacant majesty” as their masters no longer, or rarely, dwell within. Like the red room, which is under the “spell” of Reed’s death, Thornfield is also under the spell of Bertha’s inhabitation, which makes the house a misery to its master and mystery to Jane (11).

⁵⁸ Additionally, both settings display patriarchal power and emphasize the ambivalent symbolism of the master’s bed as a source of life/sex and death/punishment. In the red room, her uncle’s deathbed “stood out like a Tabernacle” (10). This bulky bed appears to Jane to possess an almost godly power, perhaps of restoration, like that of the host contain within a church’s tabernacle. In Thornfield, Rochester almost dies in his burning bed, which Jane “baptize[s]” with water and, thereby saves him (127). After this fire, Jane is again left in a dark room, but the scene ends not with Jane running away, as she was tempted to do, or with her falling unconscious, but with an intimate moment with Rochester. Gilbert and Gubar famously explain that this fire is Jane’s/Bertha’s punishment for Rochester’s sexual crimes (368). In both spaces the possibility of new life accompanies fear.

Brocklehurst that she has a “bad character” by giving her aunt a bad name in return; Jane taunts her aunt as she says, “I’ll let everybody at Lowood know what you are, and what you have done,” which indicates both Jane’s sense of justice as well as her belief in the punishing effect of sullyng a person’s character (31). While Jane claims that her connection to her aunt has ended, it has not; they are still bound together by family ties, and perhaps even by hate.

Just as Jane could never be psychologically cut off from Rochester (which accounts for their telepathic communication), she is not really cut off from her aunt after leaving Gateshead. Jane demonstrates their continued attachment both by prophetically dreaming of children, “a sure sign of trouble” when Mrs. Reed falls ill, and by going to Mrs. Reed’s side as she nears death. Her dream and deathbed loyalty to her aunt prove that their tie was merely hidden, not cut, and exemplifies her adult belief in the permanence of intangible connections between people: “Sympathies, I believe exist: (for instance, between far-distant, long-absent, wholly estranged relatives; asserting, notwithstanding their alienation, the unity of the source to which each traces his origin) whose workings baffle mortal comprehension” (187). The mature, narrating Jane conceives of a sort of connection based so deeply within one’s blood that it is eternal. She imagines that there are familial ties that can never be cut, even if one tries, because one cannot absolutely exclude a family member from one’s consciousness and emotional life.

Mrs. Reed’s attempt to exile Jane from her socially prominent family is an abuse against familial blood ties. While later in life, Jane will for a time return to her Gateshead relatives, at Lowood, Jane’s social capital is certainly low. Jane feels “alone in world, cut adrift from every connection” (79). By poisoning Jane’s reputation with Mr.

Brocklehurst, Mrs. Reed tries to ensure that Jane will be seen as what the headmaster calls “an interloper and an alien,” whom her schoolmates should “shun,” “exclude,” and “shut ... out” (56). Yet Helen Burns and later Miss Temple defy these directions, and so, Jane’s exile is not as isolating as her aunt intended.

While Jane values social acceptance, and she works hard to gain the friendship of her classmates, Helen instructs her to believe that “the love of human beings” is unimportant and that one should not fear being solitary because of the “kingdom of spirits” which surrounds them (59). In other words, Helen argues that Jane overvalues social capital and that only what we might call “spiritual capital,” that communion with God and his saints, is worthy of pursuit. While neither Brontë nor Jane can fully accept Helen’s philosophy, the novel is suspicious of the desire for human love, which is, at times, a self-centered version of the desire for human connection in general. To wit, Rochester’s first marriage proposal to Jane, which seems to open up the material world to her, turns into a trial of her soul.⁵⁹ Importantly, while Helen argues for the virtuousness of an ability to suffer human solitude, she unknowingly aligns virtue, which her culture already associates with desirability in women, with solitariness; there is, then, an implied connection between desirability and virtuous isolation. And, as Jane prepares for and first attracts Rochester, her image as solitary figure is essential to her attractiveness.

Jane’s friendship with Helen and Maria Temple enables her to practice narrating her own history for others. She first tries to do this for Mr. Lloyd, the apothecary, but is

⁵⁹ St. John Rivers’ proposal may appear more in line with Helen’s philosophy, because he wants to marry Jane for religious purposes. He plans their marriage to leave any human desire for love unsatisfied so that they might unite strictly for the sake of fulfilling God’s evangelical purposes. Their union would have been just as dangerous and false as the one Rochester initially plans because of St. John’s more subtly abusive domination. His abusive potential shows itself through his “awful charm” and intention to travel with Jane to India, where she would be isolated from all connections and, she believes, would certainly die (342, 343-48).

unable to verbalize her feelings fully (19). With help from Helen, Jane relates her “sad” story to Miss Temple in a style that is “restrained,” “simplified,” and “more credible” (60). By the time Jane recounts her past to Rochester, she is an effective narrator with control over her audience’s reactions and thus capable, at least, of telling her story in a way which would be beneficial to her goals. When Jane pens her autobiography, overall, she has a sincere, reliable voice, but at times we may also question if Jane’s childish flair for pathos touches her narration. For instance, while Jane’s young life indisputably lacked social capital, she may have chosen to highlight that lack, or even to exaggerate it, as she implicitly asserts her own independence and virtuousness. Jane’s need to advertize for a position as a governess epitomizes her emphasis on her absence of ties with the larger, social world:

How do people do to get a new place? They apply to friends, I suppose: I have no friends. There are many others who have no friends, who must look for themselves and be their own helpers; and what is their resource? I could not tell: nothing answered me A kind fairy, in my absence, had surely dropped the required suggestion on my pillow . . . ‘Those who want situations advertize; you must advertise in the —*shire Herald*.’ (73)

In the beginning of this passage, Jane can only imagine that “people” would find a job through their “friends.” But Jane claims to have “no friends,” which shows that in her estimation her Reed relatives as well as the recently married Miss Temple do not count. Jane is characteristically absolute about her absence of social capital: “I have no friends.” As Jane begins a mental dialogue about how she might find a position, even her unanswered questions remind us of the dearth of people to whom she can turn to for help or conversation. The one-sidedness of this internal conversation emphasizes her perceived isolation within the world. While Jane does not seem to be helped by God or one of his messengers, she does describe assistance arriving from a supernatural source,

“a kind fairy,” and the otherworldliness of this source further underscores Jane’s lack of real-world connections. Just as she believed that only her uncle’s ghost would protect her in the red room, here she imagines that her only career advice could come from a fairy. Throughout her descriptions of her late childhood and youth, Jane depicts herself in much the same way that she depicts herself to Rochester: as a socially isolated figure.

While Jane does have sadly low social capital, it is not at the absolute zero (“I have no friends”) that Jane might believe. It is difficult, for instance, to imagine that Miss Temple would not offer her some advice if she had asked. Brontë leaves open the possibility that Jane exaggerates her shortage of social capital and that she may do so to emphasize her moral goodness and attractiveness. It is this attraction that will be dangerous to possess in the household of Edward Rochester.

THE DANGERS OF ATTRACTION

Jane flirts with Rochester, and while her acts of flirtation do not significantly decrease her social capital, they do emphasize an alleged friendlessness in an erotically powerful manner. In addition to her mental acumen, sexual purity, and sympathetic friendship, Jane’s appearance of having no connections in this world (even while she has a living aunt and cousins at Gateshead) eroticizes her in Rochester’s eyes. The flirtatiousness of Jane’s first interview with Rochester at Thornfield lies not only in her ability to reveal and conceal her history by turns, but also in her willingness to play along with his fantasy of her as otherworldly and “elfish” (Brontë 108). After he discovers that Jane is an orphan, he creates a little fantasy in which she was waiting for her kinsfolk, the “men in green,” when they first met on the lane. Jane then claims that even the “men in green all forsook England,” and thus, they “all forsook” her (104). She follows up this

amusing fiction with the lie she has never seen any relative of her own despite having lived with her three first cousins and aunt-in-law. Thus Jane uses truth, fantasy, and falsehood all to depict her perfect isolation to Rochester. If Jane and Rochester's conversation seems unlike typical sexual banter, Brontë illustrates its flirtatious nature through Mrs. Fairfax's "raised eyebrows," which is a stereotypical reaction of a respectable woman observing the coquetties of youth (104).

Although Jane's intention in this scene with Rochester is unknowable, her behavior hints at a hidden sexual calculation. Perhaps Jane speculates that her perceived value will increase in her master's eyes if she appears as to be without family and friends. In other words, she may bet that she can begin a romance by appearing as the typical solitary, Romantic individual. Furthermore, by emphasizing her solitariness, she identifies herself as an unattached, struggling, and independent woman, rather than flirtatious teenager who seizes an opportunity to amuse a rich employer. What Jane does not yet fully realize as she first converses with her master by the fireside is how much more vulnerable she becomes by attracting him.

For Rochester, an ethereal woman—such as Jane—of unknown origin who lacks connections may become an adorable “provoking pet,” while women of family and wealth, such as Blanche Ingram and Bertha Mason, combine fleshy charms with moral repulsiveness and are, he believes, ultimately, unsuitable wives (234, 251).⁶⁰

Furthermore, the otherworldly woman in Rochester's imagination literally lacks worldly,

⁶⁰ According to Mary Poovey's *Uneven Developments*, Brontë rejects this binary because of the connections between Jane and Bertha (145-47). In *The Flesh Made Word*, Helena Michie describes the ways in which Victorian literature circumscribes women's bodies, so that the ideal Victorian woman seems to have almost no physical existence; she notes that “Jane's ethereality stands, for Rochester, in complete contrast with Blanche's fleshliness” (24). When Jane acknowledges her own need for food, after leaving Rochester she begins to recognize her own physical existence and desire for romantic love (24-25).

and therefore sexual, experience. Just as indecorous and impulsive behaviors show a natural sexual attractiveness in Austen, its marker in Brontë is uncanny solitariness.⁶¹ In both cases, the basis of attractiveness is an untutored, untouched, and natural quality that might flatter masculine desire for possession.

Jane's solitariness relates to her singularity, her specialness, which makes Rochester value her as a natural rarity. During one of their early conversations, he says, "Not three in three thousand raw school-girl governesses would have answered me as you have just done. . . . it is no merit of yours: Nature did it" (115). Brontë links solitariness with valuable singularity, which renders Jane's personhood precious. Thus Rochester's subsequent endangerment of her soul becomes particularly egregious.

Rochester's desire to marry his obscure governess does not differ greatly in nature from Mr. B's desire to marry his servant or even Henry Tilney's desire to marry an insignificantly dowered cleric's daughter. The difference lies in what Jane's obscurity offers Rochester. Unlike Catherine Morland, Jane's lack of reputation results from her neglected upbringing and cannot be traced to bad behavior that results from her love of Rochester. In addition, Rochester does not plan to improve Jane's social capital; he wishes them to move "out of the common world to a lonely place" (228). For Rochester, the brooding rover, a lover without ties is a convenience, because it would allow him to continue his idle, wandering lifestyle. Such an ungrounded lifestyle, in which the male partner dedicates himself to pursuing his own whims, leaves the woman defenseless against his selfish desires and unable to find a stable, productive social existence of her own.

⁶¹ Lori Hope Lefkowitz perceives Jane's "plain beauty" as a variation on "noble savagery" (152).

For some men, there may be a certain charm in marrying a social inferior, because it avoids any feelings of indebtedness to her family. While the dowry is meant to prevent a husband's resentment of an economically unproductive wife, it may also make the husband feel indebted to his in-laws. Cixous explains that the masculine economy is typically uncomfortable with any form of indebtedness, especially if it is unclear how that debt may ever be repaid ("Castration or Decapitation?" 48). Men who marry women who provide no financial or social benefits avoid any unpleasant sense of obligation or feeling of having been sold passively to the highest female bidder—as Rochester was to Bertha. Furthermore, men who marry impecunious women may find it flattering or enjoyable to feel their independence and moral superiority, knowing that the only debt to be paid is the wife's to her husband; in a culture where wealthy men's wives do not work outside of the home, the bride's debt can only be paid through domestic labor within the home and between the sheets.

If Jane uses the charm of her low social capital to attract Rochester, he unquestionably uses a barrage of tricks to pull her heartstrings. Rochester plays all kinds of erotic games. He plays at being the benevolent hero, the Byronic hero, the scorned lover, the woman, the lovesick ghost—all of which reveal the terribly obvious fact that, although Rochester desperately desires Jane's love and company, he emotionally tortures her in order to test her love. As Lutz explains, his bitterness and anger plays out in his courtship "through making others feel torment as he does" (67).⁶² Brontë's depiction of harmful masculine trickery is a sign of the new cultural and legal understanding of psychological abuse; Weiner explains, "[i]n the courts even trickery, long a tolerated

⁶² Rochester's father and the Masons cause Rochester's anger and vengeful spirit, because they pressured him to marry Bertha for her inherited wealth while hiding her inherited madness from him (260).

weapon in the perennial war of the sexes, was coming under closer scrutiny and sanction. As the century proceeded judges and juries began to allow deception to stand in for force, and explain away the failure to resist [rape]" (115). Questions of deception were common to cases in which men climbed into the bed of a married woman and had intercourse with her while she was under the impression that the intruder was her husband. An early case of this sort convicted a man of burglary and rape, in spite of the fact that the duped woman did not resist sexual contact (116-17). Courts especially despised the trickery of respectable, professional men, such as clergymen and doctors (115-116). The 1837 Offenses Against the Person Act allowed deceived women to bring their seducers to court for assault, and cases were successful in gaining convictions, despite conservative opposition that believed rape was rarely possible (Weiner 117, 121). In this light, Rochester's trickery and intention of marrying Jane illegitimately is a kind of abuse, which works as a synonym for physical force. Conveniently, Rochester's desires concerning Jane go virtually unchecked because of her friendlessness; Jane's family shows no signs of protecting her until the attorney Briggs, along with Mason, interrupts the wedding in order to carry out John Eyre's instruction to "extricate [Jane] from the snare into which [she] had fallen" (Brontë 251).

Rochester's behavior also hints at the possibility of physical abuse. His athletic stature and masterly deportment connect him to violence, as does his duel with Céline's lover, during which he shot his rival's arm and rendered it as "feeble as the wing of a chicken in the pip" (Brontë 123). Vengeance upon a one's wife's lover is the sort of violence most associated with masculinity. Though Céline is only Rochester's mistress, his behavior nonetheless signals his masculine impulsiveness and aggression, qualities of

which Victorians were growing wary (Weiner 202). Thus, while Rochester is never actually violent toward Jane, his potential for psychological or physical abuse is evident.

Other novels by the Brontë sisters also reveal an awareness of men's capacity for physical and psychological violence. In Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Gilbert assaults Mr. Lawrence, a perceived rival, with a whip, nearly causing a fatal accident (116). Arthur Huntingdon's violence is less physical, yet his isolation of Helen after their marriage in a home that is more like a drunken gentleman's club is cruel. The lifestyle that he forces upon her causes her to suffer constant degradation due to the impertinence of his guests and his own adultery. Like Rochester, Huntingdon desires to control his wife and "have [her] all to himself." Her captivity begins on their honeymoon; he allows her to make "no acquaintance with persons and manners, and very little with things" (203). Later, by forcibly reading her diary and destroying her paintings, a possible source of independent income, he attacks her individuality. His ferocity toward objects intimately connected with Helen reveals his potential for violence against her (364-65).

In *Wuthering Heights*, acts of violence are too numerous to name. Heathcliff's treatment of Isabella Linton, who initially loves him, is especially relevant to understanding depictions of marital abuse. Heathcliff boasts of "painting" Isabella's "blue eyes, black, every day or two" if the two were ever to live alone together (104). After they marry, he confines her to the Heights, and there are many signs of her agony: she weeps after her wedding night, her looks change, and she anxiously questions "what" she has married (136, 126). Although Heathcliff claims that he "keep[s] strictly within the limits of the law," eighteenth-century law would permit such actions as kidnapping, rape, and "provoked assault" against a wife (138). Heathcliff cruelly combines physical,

psychological and, perhaps, sexual abuses in his treatment of Isabella. Overall, the Brontë sisters' novels show their awareness of masculine violence and how it can affect women within marriage, especially when they are isolated.

For both practical and romantic reasons, Rochester perceives advantages in imprisoning his future bride, just as he already has confined his first wife. Even during Rochester's engagement to Jane, he shows a desire to cut her off from other connections, whereas the ideal mate would aim to more than restore the social capital Jane lost in childhood. When Adèle wishes to go with them on a shopping trip to Millcote, Rochester forbids his ward from accompanying them with a "peremptory" command: "I told her no. I'll have no brats! – I'll have only you . . . she will be a restraint." This moment hints at the authoritarian husband that Rochester may become; he wants to separate Jane from one of her few companions, which affects her enough to make "the sunshine" disappear from her face (Brontë 226). Rochester's decree of "I'll have no brats" also implies a possible hostility to children because of their inconvenience. Additionally, he may object to having children, who would naturally bond to their mother, preventing him from possessing his wife's entire attention. Although Rochester gives in and lets Adèle come along for the sake of pleasing his fiancée, it is with the half-humorous threat that "shortly" he will "claim [Jane]—your thoughts, conversation, and company—for life," which makes Jane's marriage sound uncomfortably like an imprisoning lobotomy (227).

Of course, Rochester does offer Jane monetary wealth and sensual pleasures, but as his fanciful story to Adèle indicates, he would rather give Jane the lonely moon than the bustling world: "for I am to take mademoiselle to the moon, and there I will seek a cave in one of the white valleys among the volcano-tops, and mademoiselle shall live

with *me* there, and only *me*" (my italics 227). The double confinement of this fantasy, which includes both the moon and a cave, should immediately alarm readers just as it alarms Adèle both to Jane's vulnerability after the marriage and to the selfish immaturity—"me," "me"—of a man who imagines, even if only in jest, that a cave with a volcanic view is a comfortable home for a teenager who longs for "the busy world, towns, regions full of life" (93). Furthermore, the "white valleys" that Rochester describes reveal the connection he sees between social isolation and desirable purity. This association of solitary women with virtue and desirability is a result of the new feminine ideal, as isolated, domestic, and good.

While Rochester imagines an idealized seclusion, Adèle realizes that such isolation is tantamount to death for the bride. Just as *Pamela* explores the physical and psychological dangers of a servant's imprisonment and *Northanger Abbey* describes isolation as a metaphorical death, this insightful child understands that nuptial bliss cannot be possible outside of society. Adèle immediately recognizes that, if Rochester gets his wish and takes Jane into seclusion, then Jane will surely die, because with "nothing to eat: you will starve her." In this moment, and throughout the novel, food represents not simply literal nourishment but also emotional sustenance, which Brontë implies cannot be provided solely by Rochester (or at least not the arrogant, profligate Rochester to whom Jane is engaged here). Revealingly, Adèle predicts that their heavenly isolation will cause only Jane's death, not Rochester's; furthermore, she identifies Rochester as Jane's murderer when she says, "*you* will starve her" (my italics 227). Rochester brushes away his ward's objections with promises of celestial manna, lunar fires, and dresses made of clouds. In *The Flesh Made Word*, Helena Michie argues that

Rochester attempts to deny Jane a physical existence so that he can think of her as merely a part of his own flesh and without physical needs (24). I would add, that he envisions her without independent social needs either. Significantly, this conversation occurs just after Rochester's behavior causes Jane's "sunshine" to disappear as she feels "[t]he chill of Mrs. Fairfax's warnings, and the damp of her doubts" (Brontë 226) and just before he attempts to buy her uncomfortably colorful silks. Adèle's concerns for her governess' food, warmth, and dress on the moon are already real concerns on earth.

Although Adèle is humorous, playing the French skeptic who cannot understand English whimsy, she also verbalizes concerns that Jane and novel readers share about this marriage. We must agree with the child, because she knows that the restless Jane "would get tired of living with only [Mr. Rochester] in the moon" (227), and she understands that a perpetual honeymoon of seclusion is actually a prison. It is no wonder that after the "harassing" shopping trip that follows this conversation, Jane secretly contacts her wealthy uncle, hoping to inherit a fortune so her smug fiancé will cease to act like Zeus or treat her like a dress-up doll (229).

The records of divorces from later in the century justify Adèle's concerns about isolation. In the 1869 divorce case *Kelly v. Kelly*, Frances Kelly obtained a legal separation from her husband, Rev. James Kelly, on the grounds of abuse, despite the fact that her husband was never physically violent. He was excessively controlling, frequently confining her to their home, in which she was stripped of a wife's powers. Rev. Kelly denied his wife access to money, forbade her to travel or see her solicitor, and required her to be accompanied by a manservant whenever she was permitted to leave the house. And just as Adèle feared for Jane's health on the moon, Mrs. Kelly's health weakened under

the strain of her marital incarceration (Weiner 76-80). Rochester's selfish, obsessive need to claim Jane and exert his power over her shows a frightening tendency that is not unlike the neurotic monomania for power that Hammerton observes in husbands (71). Jane challenges Rochester's rule by rejecting the amethyst and pink silks he prefers and refusing to dine with him. Even after Jane leaves, Rochester does not cease grasping for control until Thornfield's destruction (Brontë 228-30).

During their engagement, Jane realizes that Rochester's powerful attractiveness involves dangerous power. We observe Jane grow skeptical of her own personal version of Byromania as she carefully polices her relationship with Rochester. He, in loving Jane for her lack of connections, is furthering his goal of becoming disconnected from his own unpleasant past and family. He is not, in fact, planning to raise Jane to his status through a legal marriage; rather, he plans to continue his selfish, voluntary social independence. At this point, he is not using Jane's love as a home to which he can bring his troubled heart for restoration, as he will later in the novel, but is, instead, using her disconnectedness to continue his own immoral, restless lifestyle.

Frighteningly, Rochester uses Jane's apparent friendlessness to justify a wrongful act, a bigamous marriage that would require retirement from the world. With echoes of Pontius Pilate, another famous rationalizer, he expounds, "Have I not found her friendless, and cold, and comfortless? Will I not guard, and cherish, and solace her . . . For the world's judgment—I wash my hands thereof" (218). Rochester decides that it is enough that he imitates the marriage-plot hero, who marries a poor, good girl, and he fails to imagine how his plan to "guard," "cherish," and "solace" Jane will strip her of her character. Though Rochester cares nothing for the "world's judgment," society would

judge Jane harshly as his penniless girl-bride, and they would become even more brutal whenever his thinly veiled secret marriage to Bertha is discovered. Rochester willingly washes his hands of society's opinions, but Jane, who worries about what even the housekeeper thinks, shows less desire to do so. Jane and Rochester's marriage would, if successful, perpetually limit Jane's social capital as well as encourage Rochester to remain an absentee landlord. Theirs would be just the sort of solitary marriage of which the Victorian age does not approve. The completely isolated couple that Rochester and Jane would have become must be rejected, because it is both unbeneficial to society and perilous for Jane. But these are dangers about which Jane is not yet fully aware.

As I noted above, Jane's behavior prior to Rochester's first proposal de-emphasizes her familial and social ties. She claims he is her "only home" and assures him that "[t]here is no one to meddle, sir. I have no kindred to interfere." Yet only weeks earlier she had learned of her uncle's existence (209, 218). Later Jane defends her forgetfulness, saying it resulted from the "hurry of events," but it is unconvincing that a person who has always desperately sought true family would easily forget the discovery of a childless uncle who desires to make her an heiress (229). Jane's repeated assertions that she has "no one" appear almost as proof that she learned strategies for marrying up from her nurse Bessie's retellings of *Pamela*, "which were narrated on winter evenings . . . [the tales] fed our eager attention with passages of love and adventure takes from old fairy tales and older ballads; or (as at a later period I discovered) from the pages of 'Pamela' and 'Henry, Earl of Moreland'" (7). And perhaps she did learn to underscore her low social capital from *Pamela* in order to attract an authoritarian, upper-class suitor. Jane's denial of connections may simply be an attempt to present herself as the

independent woman she wishes to be. Nonetheless, the idea of her utter friendlessness powerfully attracts Rochester. It flatters his belief that he alone can give Jane all the happiness life requires and allows him the opportunity to be emotionally and socially abusive.

The marriage Rochester plans is one that is outside law, custom, and morality. Both he and Jane are guilty of hoping to find all the world and happiness only in each other, but this is a too excessively isolated version of the affective marriage for Victorian audiences. Jane and Rochester lie as they deny their connection to an uncle and a wife respectively; both of these relations even bear their surnames of Eyre and Rochester, which makes the closeness of the connections obvious. Jane and Rochester pretend to be more solitary than they are as they attempt to defy society together and plan their doomed wedding.

The private marriage ceremony as well as the isolated married life that Rochester plans would remind readers of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debates over the legal requirements for marriage. As Lawrence Stone explains, beginning in 1653, the government attempted to decrease clandestine marriages and the legality of marriages performed without a clergyman, such as those that were understood to exist due to an exchange of gifts (21, 18). These efforts would potentially protect women from men who had no intention of being legally married while also protecting rich men from potentially litigious women, whom they had married outside the church but with whom they may have exchanged vows or gifts (19). The question of how and to what extent family and community should be involved in approving matches was also under review. Interestingly, prior to the nineteenth century, oftentimes the larger community, extending

even beyond immediate relatives, was involved in approving potential marriages in both the upper and lower classes (Perry 204).⁶³ The Marriage Duty Act of 1694, which required banns to read in church for three Sundays (or the purchase of more costly private license), is a formally institutionalized version of community consent (206).

Nevertheless, before 1753, the Church of England and local communities recognized many marriages even when the couple performed the ceremony themselves (Stone 17-18).⁶⁴ The community's belief that they could sanction or reject a couple's union did not lessen quickly. The public's intense involvement in the late-nineteenth-century Clitheroe divorce case, which was exhibited by their letters, court attendance, and riots, shows that the community felt they had some power over marital decisions (Frost 115).

Almost immediately after the socially unauthorized engagement, Jane begins to suffer mortification as Rochester's treatment of her embarrasses her dignity. When Jane notices Mrs. Fairfax spying her embrace with Rochester, she feels "a pang at the idea that [Mrs. Fairfax] should even temporarily misconstrue what she had seen" (Brontë 218). Rochester's desire for their union to be solitary highlights the likelihood of further pain. As they shop in Millcote, Jane's "cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation," and she feels that her husband will treat her as a toy and slave (229). Even the song he sings to her suggests that true romantic commitment requires a woman to commit suicide upon the death of her beloved, as Indian women do (232-33). Rochester's Eastern sensibility and his association with sultans, Indian rubber, and bigamy cause him to appear un-English and perilously unchristian. Unlike St. John Rivers, Rochester does

⁶³ See David Levine and Keith Wrightson's discussion of "multilateral consent" in *The Making of an Industrial Society* (309).

⁶⁴ See Lawrence Stone's *Uncertain Unions*, Ruth Perry's *Novel Relations*, and John R. Gillis's *For Better, For Worse*, for more information on the history of marriage.

not propose to take Jane to India, but he does plan to live in an “Indian” lifestyle with her as his second wife, and the heat of their unsanctified passion would just as surely devastate her soul as the hot, foreign climate would destroy her body. Brontë hints that Jane and Rochester’s union would bestow upon the bride neither happiness nor spiritual blessings.

There can be no legal union because of Rochester’s previous marriage, and so what looks like an engagement that would end in a disastrous marriage cannot conclude in any marriage at all. A couple that marries with the intention of isolating themselves from their community is not planning a true marriage at all. Jane’s marriage can only be a moment of celebration if it connects her to the community, which safeguards her to some extent against cruelty.

ROCHESTER BECOMES A SAFER SUITOR

The ideal Victorian couple values social responsibility and will regularly interact with others in their community; therefore, Victorian novels test heroines not only for their ability to endure loneliness but also their ability to endure social attention while remaining faithful to a single admirer. After Jane leaves Thornfield, she proves her moral worth and her love for Rochester by wandering alone on the moors and continuing to love Rochester even after she has a happy home at Marsh End and a new offer of marriage. She emphatically asserts that she has not “forgotten Mr. Rochester, reader, amidst these changes for place and fortune. Not for a moment” (Brontë 340). Only after Jane becomes “a favourite in the neighborhood” near Marsh End, inherits her fortune, and discovers sympathetic cousins can she return to the newly transformed Rochester and marry him without causing readers to fear for her married life (312). Certainly, her social

capital rises with the expansion of her fortune and family, which makes unhealthy isolation less probable. The injuries that render Rochester a “caged eagle” also ensure that he cannot overpower Jane (367). Now Jane is in control and the blind Rochester relies upon her. In preparation from his wife-like dependency, Rochester suffers the feminizing punishment of social exile, first at Thornfield and then at the “desolate” Ferndean, all while never ceasing to love Jane (366). By suffering the trials that are normally reserved for the heroine, Rochester prepares for his future role as a spouse who, in some ways, resembles a dependent wife more than a sovereign husband.

Just as Jane is initially attractive to Rochester because of her social obscurity, Rochester becomes more lovable once he is socially and physically degraded through isolation, blindness, and the loss of a hand. As Lutz explains, “Rochester’s scarred face after the fire at Thornfield signified his lived punishment but also his exiled status; Jane’s love is his only redemption in life” (52-53). Like the monstrous gothic cathedrals that John Ruskin’s *Stones of Venice* (1851-53) would soon be exalting, Rochester’s body, which had never been handsome, becomes a massive and irregular tower. His physique shows the marks of his fiery redemption; as it does so, it implies the security of his soul’s eternal life. The ruggedness of Rochester’s healthy form revealed his vitality, athleticism, and sexuality (and the confidence those qualities gave him), but once that active form becomes damaged, the basis for his personal value is his soul, rather than his broad shoulders. As Ruskin explains, “imperfection is in some sort essential to all we know of life. It is the sign of life in mortal body, that is to say, of a state of progress and change” (172). Rochester’s injuries, which produce his physical imperfections, demonstrate an

internal, moral change from arrogance and selfishness to humility and mildness, which indicates that he is now Jane's moral equal.

Interestingly, Rochester's moral rise happens after his social fall, and this change adheres to the bourgeois assumption that individuals can rarely possess both virtue and status. According to the Millcote innkeeper, Rochester "would be alone" after Jane left him, and so he "grew savage," retired Mrs. Fairfax, sent Adèle away to school, "broke off acquaintance with all the gentry, and shut himself up, like a hermit, at the Hall." He "would not cross the door-stones of the house, except at night, when he walked just like a ghost about the grounds" (Brontë 364). Unlike his earlier roving, which took him away from his country, this sad self-exile takes him out of the living world as he devolves into a "savage" and a "ghost." The innkeeper explains that "perhaps it would have been better if [Mr. Rochester had died]" during the fire, because "many think he had better be dead" (365). If Rochester first removed himself from the world, now his community wishes he had left this world of the living altogether (presumably because of his attempted bigamy as well as the horror of his injuries). The village's desire to make his seclusion deadly permanent demonstrates the essential link between social exile and death, as I discussed in my last chapter.

Rochester's detention is a self-enforced punishment for his past misconduct, especially for "keeping company" with too many women. As Canuel explains, middle- and upper-class individuals often avoided punishments for their crimes, even when they legally deserved capital punishment (100). While Rochester is neither prosecuted for attempted bigamy, nor imprisoned or fined as a convicted bigamist would be, he does suffer a proper punishment by both medieval and modern standards. He undergoes a

physical torment as well as a social exile and a depreciation of his social capital, the latter of which serve as penalties akin to the modern punishments of imprisonment and fines. Later at Ferndean, where only two servants reside, Rochester's isolation is even more severe because of his blindness as well as the seclusion of the estate (Brontë 366). While he has not lost his land or his fortune, Rochester has lost the glamour and prestige of being the master of large household, and he now possesses only censure and pity from a community that wishes him dead (365). Rochester does not seem to come out of his deathly punishment until Jane returns to him, and even then he worries that she may not be his "living Jane" and "altogether a human being" (369, 372). But, as she assures him, she is "not cold like a corpse or vacant like air" (369).

Only once Jane has passed her own deathly trials on the moors and with the icy St. John does she return to "rehumanise" Rochester and bring him back from the brink of death (371). Brontë proposes to deal with male violence by making men more like women. Rochester's dramatic decrease in social status and physical power is essential to the happiness and stability of his future marriage with Jane, because not only is he feminized through punishment to become something like Jane's moral equal, but also, as a man, he loses social and physical authority. According to Esther Godfrey's *The January-May Marriage in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*, Rochester is "emasculated by his blindness and injuries as well as his age" (196). This symbolic castration offers readers the assurance that his wandering days are past and his own power is now more equal to Jane's. Rochester proves that his seclusion has transformed his moral character as he acknowledges the goodness of God's judgment, his own humble state, and his former "wrong" to Jane, which would have "sullied [her] innocent flower—

breathed guilt on its purity” so that she would have ceased to be a good girl and become, instead, an irredeemably ruined woman (Brontë 380). Rochester regrets his attempt to be like a malevolent god, who “breathed guilt” instead of life, and becomes a harmless, and more lovable, man.

Despite having kept her virtue, as Jane travels toward Rochester she discovers that her reputation in Millcote has become a source of unflattering gossip. As the innkeeper, who is a former servant to Rochester’s father, tells Jane her own history without realizing to whom he speaks, he explains how servants judged her unprepossessing—“nobody, but [Rochester] thought her so very handsome.” Jane’s poor reputation causes the innkeeper proclaim, “I have often wished that Miss Eyre had been sunk in the sea before she came to Thornfield Hall.” While Jane’s recent acquisition of family and fortune has increased her social capital, she suffers an embarrassment at the hands of this man who “often wished” her “sunk” (364). Furthermore, the very fact that she passes through Millcote unrecognized shows Jane entering a country in which she is both maligned and unconnected, which is particularly poignant considering that she recently lived in the area. Just before Jane and Rochester unite, the innkeeper—that hub of community gossip—informs us that both Jane and Rochester are wished dead and thus exiled into another world.⁶⁵ Like a proper heroine, Jane demonstrates again that she “would always rather be happy than dignified,” and so she disregards the humiliation of hearing herself criticized and continues to travel toward Rochester (349).

In Jane’s and Rochester’s unattractive bodies and imperfect reputations, Ruskin might have found “certain irregularities and deficiencies which are not only signs of life,

⁶⁵ Anger motivates the innkeeper to wish Jane Eyre was dead, but his “pity” for “Poor Mr. Edward” causes him to claim that “perhaps it would have been better” if he were dead as well (365).

but sources of beauty” (172). For Ruskin, imperfection in Gothic architecture truthfully reflects the Northern climate that creates it (156-58), and thus imperfect characters realistically portray human experience. And in this truth, there is some beauty. Lefkowitz argues that although Rochester’s beauty decreases, his desirability increases, because “the reader comes to admire the rough edges of his beauty,” which honestly present his character (151, 149).⁶⁶ Novels such as *Jane Eyre*, which makes its unattractive characters appealing, participate in an aesthetic tradition that includes both Burke and Ruskin, highlighting the beauty of imperfection and instructing readers to make merciful judgments. As Ruskin argues, imperfections often indicate vitality and individual freedom: “All things are literally better, lovelier, and more beloved for the imperfections which have been divinely appointed, that the law of human life may be Effort, and the law of human judgment, Mercy” (172). As Jane loves the wreckage that is Rochester, she models the kind of selfless, merciful love that Rochester did not give her during their engagement.

Rochester’s second and only legitimate proposal does not follow Jane asserting her obscurity, but rather her telling him about another man’s proposal. Interestingly, at first Jane explains Rochester’s desire to marry her as caused by his “delight in sacrifice” (379), as though he was a benevolent suitor taking on a socially inferior wife beneath him with purely charitable motives. She assumes, like George Simmel, that sacrifice can increase the perceived value of an object (75) and that Rochester loves her, because he makes a sacrifice in marrying her. Readers know that Rochester’s motives are rarely quite

⁶⁶ Lefkowitz compares Rochester’s unhidden imperfections to the hidden defects of Bertha and Blanche Ingram: “Noble as [Rochester] is, the suggestion of wolfishness redeems Rochester as we too are supposed to have learned that the polish which money puts on beauty conceals either the mad beastliness of Bertha or the worldly greediness of a Miss Ingram” (149).

so pure, and now Rochester himself rejects this explanation of value-accretion as he exclaims, “Sacrifice! What do I sacrifice?” (379). Finally, Rochester proves that he values Jane without sacrificing for her or emotionally abusing her.

Jane Eyre resists a fabulously happy ending, because Brontë laces the conclusion with visible scars. Jane, for instance, never enters the busy world for which she once pined and is instead bound to the maimed Rochester, whose injury affords him a forgivable excuse for retreating from society into his snug English home and garden. While their marriage is not ideal, it is safe and respectable. The muted colors of their happiness clarify Jane’s moral character, and the novel’s ending prevents this erstwhile governess, who marries above her station, from being misread as a patient and maneuvering Shamela.

Jane Eyre is groundbreaking in the degree to which it foregrounds the desirous female heart and its insistence upon marital equality. Nevertheless, it is part of a growing mainstream concern in the period that aimed to discredit sexual attraction based upon a woman’s low social capital. *Jane Eyre* breaks with convention by eliminating the problem of Rochester’s abusive superiority through both lowering his status and raising Jane’s standing—making them appear more like a respectable middle-class couple than an aristocrat and his servant. Older marriage plots primarily create social equality by having the hero generously raise the heroine to his station. Brontë implies that the future of the Victorian couple does not rely simply upon giving women more status through marriage, but also in taking away masculine power, which can result in abuse. After all, even with money and social connections, a Victorian woman cannot in any normal circumstance have the same access to education, travel, and experience that could make

her the equal of a rich, connected, and healthy man. Thus it is necessary for masculine status to be handicapped in order to create a marriage based on equality. Once the difference in status is destroyed, attraction based upon low social capital can neither be as common nor as potentially abusive.

VICTORIAN MARRIAGE PLOT VARIANTS

While *Jane Eyre* allows a happy marriage to result from an attraction initially built, at least partially, on the eroticism of limited social capital, other Victorian novels reveal that the familiar patterns of marriage plots may not necessarily end in happiness, especially if the heroine fails to act virtuously. In Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds*, Lizzie Eustace remarries when her social capital is low due to her illegal and outrageously dishonest behavior. Although her marriage to the popular minister and "scheming hypocrite," Mr. Emilius, "who [followed] her in the hour of her troubles" may offer her some social support, it is an unimpressive match for the wealthy widow (2:367). Furthermore, her desperation to marry results in her failing to secure her money through a settlement, and the novel ends ominously for Lizzie as it implies that her marriage will bring her misery: "After a certain fashion he will, perhaps, be tender to her; and he will have his own way in everything, and be no whit afraid when she is about to die in an agony of tears before his eyes" (2:369). Mr. Emilius, whose Jewishness underscores his foreignness, will not be the ideal, reasonable, kind-hearted English husband who treats his wife well. Lizzie's marriage, which was made when her social capital was at its nadir, is painful for her; we can, of course, see her suffering as both a punishment for her theft,

dishonesty, and excessive flirtation as well as a warning against marriages taking place during a time of social vulnerability.⁶⁷

Lizzie Eustace is an example of the kind of woman who is still outside the limits of what a heroine can be, if she will receive a happy ending. Like Lizzie, George Eliot's heroine, the spoiled, unlikable, and morally confused Gwendolen Harleth, lives on the very edge of heroine territory. As *Daniel Deronda* closes, Eliot hints that Gwendolen is about to become a good woman and true heroine who will find love, but these are future events that are not depicted within the novel. Although Gwendolen's early life and physical beauty are unlike Jane Eyre's, both characters are limit cases for what a Victorian marriage-plot heroine can be. Gwendolen's first marriage to the wealthy Henleigh Grandcourt goes terribly wrong and clearly shows the vulnerability of married women. Mercifully, Grandcourt dies, and Eliot indicates that Gwendolen is changing for the better and will, in future, deserve a happy marriage. In addition to expanding the category of heroine, George Eliot also stretches, according to Marlene Tromp, the kind of incidents that are included in realist novels about marriage (200). Building upon *Jane Eyre*'s brief look into life after marriage, Eliot, and other later Victorian novelists, direct their focus toward married life.

In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot explores the abusive potential of men who look to marry their social inferiors through the character of Grandcourt. Due to his love of power, Grandcourt finds more pleasure in marrying a woman whose status is lower than his own

⁶⁷ Despite this example of a man taking advantage of a woman's hour of troubles, Trollope shows through the marriage of Lucy Morris and Frank Greystock that a happy marriage is possible between a rising lawyer and a humble governess. Like Brontë, he shows that achieving such a match involves a great deal of pain for the obscure girl, whom Frank neglects during their first engagement. Just as in *Jane Eyre*, two proposals are necessary for the match to gain good footing. Anxiety about proposals to recently weakened women appear elsewhere in Trollope's works; in *The Warden*, Mr. Harding worries that his threatened position will allow Bold to "press" him for his daughter's hand (221).

than he would in marrying an heiress; furthermore, he enjoys knowing he could “completely master” a woman of spirit such as Gwendolen (256). His proposal to Miss Harleth arrives very soon after her family falls into financial distress. Due to this downfall, she must make a lonely journey home from Leubronn; during her travels, she suffers under a railway officer’s glances as he “conclude[s] that she was not very high in world” (195). Unlike Jane Eyre, Gwendolen’s limited social capital is a new condition that is “a particular hardship to her” (201). As happens with Jane and Lizzy Eustace, her suitor takes advantage of that weakness; even Grandcourt’s reflections tell him that her acceptance was due to her new, lowered circumstances: “. . . it seemed very unlikely to him that if it had not been for the very sudden poverty which had come over her family, she would not have accepted him” (269). Unfortunately, unlike Catherine Morland and Jane, Gwendolen, the “princess in exile,” endures neither the loss of fortune (with the prospect of becoming a governess) nor loneliness with fortitude, and so she fails the tests often required to receive an advantageous marriage (32, 194-95). Gwendolen’s inclination for “fits of spiritual dread” causes any solitude, even walking alone, to be a discomfort to her (52). This worried girl accepts Grandcourt not out of love for him but rather out of fear of poverty and social degradation for herself and her ““poor mamma”” (253). Gwendolen does not gamble upon her weakness, but upon her strength. She incorrectly assumes that she will be able to handle her future husband.

Grandcourt’s proposal appears heroic and kind to outsiders, but in reality, he gains hold of Gwendolen at her most vulnerable and will continue to tighten his clasp throughout their marriage. Gwendolen’s pennilessness and Grandcourt’s apparent generosity lead her uncle to decline to insist upon his niece receiving a settlement. Her

uncle's choice to put faith in Grandcourt's financial generosity shows the Harleth family's weak bargaining position, which Grandcourt takes advantages of when he chooses to neglect his wife in his last will (613). The public behavior of Grandcourt and Gwendolen resembles that of more typical marriage plot heroes and heroines, but the feelings and motivations behind their actions are less virtuous. Their union fulfills every suspicion around the eroticism of low social capital, because Grandcourt uses his wealth and power both to keep himself aloof from society and to torture Gwendolen with isolation and mental anxiety.⁶⁸ For example, he forbids her family from visiting their home (469). Also, the "poisoned" diamonds he gives her cause her maddening guilt (303). He is an "immovable obstruction" in Gwendolen's life that is only removed by his death (582).

By 1876, when *Daniel Deronda* was published, Eliot would have been acquainted with the wealth of information about marital abuse that had been publicized in newspapers since the 1857 Divorce Act and which was fictionalized in sensation novels.⁶⁹ In *Daniel Deronda*, which Tromp argues contains both a realist and a sensational plot, Eliot shows "through her heroine Gwendolen's relationship to her cruel husband that violence is a real possibility in the ranks of the elite and that the real itself must be read and understood through the sensational" (200). Gwendolen must expand her notion of what is real to include the sensational elements in her married life (18). Unable to verbalize her fears, Eliot registers Grandcourt's psychological abuse of Gwendolen

⁶⁸ Grandcourt hunts, because "[o]ne must do something"; this remark evidences his selfish, pleasure-seeking lifestyle (92). Additionally, Grandcourt fails to fulfill his responsibilities to his mistress Lydia Glasher and their four illegitimate children, albeit his will makes some reparations by declaring their son his heir (613).

⁶⁹ Sensation novels such as *The Woman in White* and *Lady Audley's Secret* unflinchingly depict the violence of husbands and wives.

upon her body through sensational clichés such as her “pallid” face, “hysterical” screaming, and quickening heartbeat (Tromp 208; Eliot 303, 275-76).⁷⁰ As early as 1799, Lord Stowell ruled in *Evans v. Evans* that a wife’s fear of cruelty, if justified, was cruelty itself, and although largely ignored for decades, this precept gained impact after 1857 (Weiner 37).

While Grandcourt is calm and hates even minor displays of physical violence, such as raising his voice, Eliot exposes his fierceness (Tromp 202).⁷¹ She shows signs of Grandcourt’s cruelty through his treatment of his dog, Fetch, and his language toward Gwendolen, which describes her as a horse whom he “brought to kneel down” and will control with “bit and bridle” (Eliot 104-05, 269, 582). When, in Chapter 54, Eliot compares Gwendolen to Madonna Pia and Grandcourt to her murderous husband, she makes Grandcourt’s dangerousness explicit (Tromp 208).

Unlike the heroes of traditional marriage plots, Grandcourt never reforms. Eliot teases readers with the possibility that Daniel Deronda will stand in as Gwendolen’s hero. Daniel, who is attracted to people “in proportion to the possibility of his . . . rescuing them” and who flirts by “looking tenderly at the women and talking to them in a Jesuitical way,” is suited to be a pitiful woman’s hero, but refuses to attach himself to Gwendolen (273, 304). Deronda rescues Gwendolen’s pawned necklace and gives her advice on gambling and finding one’s purpose in life, but he never proposes. Of course, Deronda is destined to rescue and marry Mirah Lapidoth, a representative of the beleaguered Jewish people. Interestingly, Deronda proposes to a “humiliated” Mirah

⁷⁰ Tromp argues that sensation novels model “resistance to (as well as capitulation to) violence” and that Gwendolen’s playing of the mad, sensationalized woman in an attempt to regain control (8, 220).

⁷¹ For Tromp’s full analysis of Grandcourt’s control, see *The Private Rod* (202-14).

immediately after her father steals the ring Daniel's mother gave him (679). Daniel is very careful not to pay too much attention to the beautiful Mirah after he rescues her from her suicide attempt, because he is aware that to make love to a vulnerable, lonely woman would be in bad taste.⁷² His qualms reveal his suspicion of the eroticism of friendlessness while also underscoring his own struggle to resist a friendless woman's attractiveness.⁷³ Nevertheless, after Mirah leaves the care of the Meyricks, Deronda fulfills the role of the typical marriage plot hero by proposing to Mirah during a moment of painful embarrassment (which is especially poignant because her father's behavior reflects a racial stereotype). He proposes as her social capital is lowering. With Mirah's father on the run, her only living relative is her impoverished, dying brother Mordecai.

Despite his choice to propose to Mirah at a point when she is particularly vulnerable, we can assume that their marriage will be a success, in part because, as a couple, they will play a role in the Zionist movement, which will give greater meaning and purpose to their union.⁷⁴ Unlike some other writers, including Brontë, Eliot does not

⁷² The properly sensitive Victorian male must worry about any signs of a significant inequality between himself and his beloved. For instance, if there is an age difference, the older man, as Kay Heath explains, must experience anxiety about the propriety of the match in order to be depicted positively, as John Jarndyce and Arthur Clennam are in *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* respectively. When older men—such as *Hard Times*'s Josiah Bounderby and *Middlemarch*'s Edward Casaubon—pursue younger women without a thought to the age difference, they “are depicted as self-deluded fools, impotent in personality and virtue, as well as, the texts hint, in their physical bodies” (“In the Eye of the Beholder” 43n4). Sometimes Victorian novels will allow marriages in which power and years are distributed unevenly, but they require any male suitor, who may have the greater amount of power, to demonstrate an awareness of that difference as well as an awkward sensitivity to the position it in which it places him.

⁷³ In addition to her friendlessness, beauty, and religious devotion, Mirah's submissive nature compounds her other attractions, because it flatters Daniel's righteousness (Tromp 231).

⁷⁴ Just as Daniel Deronda is careful not to take advantage of his position in regard to a disconnected woman, *Bleak House*'s John Jarndyce decides that he cannot marry Esther Summerson despite her willingness. Both Deronda and Jarndyce show their moral worth by hesitating to marry vulnerable women. Their studious avoidance of any untoward behavior toward a vulnerable woman shows they are sensitive to the power dynamic between the genders and classes as well as the history of richer men taking advantage of poor women. Jarndyce, for instance, changes his role in Esther's life from fiancé to father as he arranges for Esther to marry her beloved Allen Woodcourt. Together the two begin a life of social usefulness in

require the happy couples' sense of social responsibility to be directed toward the English.

As I discussed earlier, Eliot deviates from the traditional marriage plot pattern to the extent that at least one pretty girl (Gwendolen) who suffers lowered social capital cannot immediately gain a happy, restorative marriage. Despite this deviation, Eliot suggests that there is a seed from which some marital happiness might still grow for Gwendolen, who is growing into a worthier woman. After Grandcourt's death, Eliot briefly re-introduces Gwendolen's old admirer and cousin, Rex Gascoigne, whose love for Gwendolen remains constant and whose position in the world as a young lawyer is active and on the rise (608-09). Though Gwendolen had once been too haughty to graciously let Rex down, he has turned his passion for her into an adorably vulnerable thing, "as if it had been an object supremely dear, stricken dumb and helpless," during the time that Gwendolen herself has become more wretched and helpless (608). We never see Rex again after it is discovered that Grandcourt does not leave Gwendolen a great fortune, and yet we are left to wonder if this young man who wants to "be of any use" may find a place in Gwendolen's life (609). One reason the novel does not end with a union between Rex and Gwendolen may be because Gwendolen has not yet passed the test of enduring a solitary life with grace (even in her marriage, she leans on Daniel), but as her last letter to Daniel states, "it shall be better with me," which leaves us to assume that she will pass her test most beautifully and pathetically in her widow's weeds and

which Woodcourt practices medicine among the poor, among whom Esther can also discharge a charitable role without feeling that her illegitimacy and scarred face are social hindrances: "The people even praise Me as the doctor's wife. The people even like Me as I go about, and make so much of me that I am quite abashed" (988-89). Like the union between Mirah and Daniel, the marriage between Allen and Esther overlooks a dismantment in social capital and, yet, avoids having the husband become perilously superior to his wife as they fulfill their social responsibilities side-by-side.

“live to be one of the best of women” (695, 694). Gwendolen also shows signs of a new selflessness as she determines to care for her mother, and family, and to “[make] others glad they were born,” which will help her become a worthier woman and wife (694). In the novel’s final book, “Fruit and Seed,” Hans Meyrick hints that Grandcourt’s death may have left a space in which Rex may plant himself (685).

Admittedly, in the marriage of Gwendolen and Grandcourt, Eliot provides a darker ending to an attraction built on depreciated capital. Eliot uses an older novelistic pattern and renders it more realistic and complex, because her villain does not reform as Mr. B and Rochester do. Nevertheless, I would argue that, because of the romance between Daniel and Mirah, Eliot deviates only slightly from the traditional marriage plot trajectory. While Mirah is too boring to be a heroine who deserves our fullest attention throughout a novel, Gwendolen is a character on the edge of becoming a virtuous heroine. Eliot indicates that Gwendolen surely will become a good woman and wife, but she leaves the implied, future marriage plot between Gwendolen and her cousin out of the novel’s narrative.

As I have argued throughout this chapter, nineteenth-century marriage plots reveal an increasing concern for and awareness of marital abuse and the ways in which women were vulnerable. This vulnerability multiplies if the wife has fewer social ties than her husband or is cut from the connections she possessed prior to marriage. In Victorian novels, writers continue to demonstrate how depreciated capital triggers affections, but at the same time, they critique men and institutions that fail to protect women after their marriage vows are read. Novels suggest safeguarding wives by allowing them to have more equal power with their husbands and by suggesting that

couples perform, wherever possible, social duties outside of the home, which benefits the community as well as the wife. Couples who devote themselves to their social responsibilities avoid selfish, exclusive lives; their love for one another allows them to have a more general love of community and nation.

At the same time as Victorian writers show suspicion of the eroticism of friendlessness, they are also expanding the type of woman who can be a heroine in order to include those who are less obviously attractive or in greater need of personal reform. The numerous freckles these heroines possess increase their attractiveness to men, but they require greater social consciousness and humility to win over readers, who see them as models for what a more empowered and useful woman could look like.

All of the heroines whom I have discussed in the last two chapters have fluctuating social capital within relatively small networks. This question, then, remains to be answered: How does social capital function for Victorian marriage-plot heroines with celebrity status? As novelists expand the territory of the heroine during the Victorian era, this category includes more women with vast social recognition; but there will be unique challenges for these heroines, who will have particular difficulty proving their feminine virtuousness before they, too, can deserve the benefits of married life.

CHAPTER 4

SLIPPING INTO CELEBRITY:

ANTHONY TROLLOPE'S *MISS MACKENZIE*

In the previous chapters of this dissertation, I have discussed how low social capital is an attractive flaw in marriage-plot heroines. In this chapter, I will turn my focus from heroines with few connections to those who become celebrities. How do famous women, who often suffer a unique kind of isolation and loneliness, move through the marriage market? How does a celebrity heroine become attractively marriageable when novels often assume that lovability relies upon depreciated reputations and virtuous loneliness? Is it possible that marriage-plot heroines with celebrity status can become attractive for many of the same reasons as those lonely heroines with low social status?

Celebrity status is problematic to nineteenth-century notions of femininity. Any female whose life and body are public spectacle fails to appear perfectly modesty and domestic. Thus, as I will argue using Trollope's *Miss Mackenzie* (1865), the excessive social capital which accompanies widespread public recognition can work somewhat like low social capital, if three conditions are met: the publicity reveals the heroine's vulnerability; the lady does not appear to have made fame her conscious goal and seems willing to prioritize love and domesticity above her renown; and, of course, her notoriety is not gained due to sexual scandal. Like depreciated social capital, celebrity is a kind of a fall, not from society, but from bourgeois morality and femininity. Consequently, this slip

from respectability provides a heroine with the wrong sort of reputation from which a properly discrete middle-class hero might rescue her.

In this chapter, I will discuss why celebrity is problematic for Victorian women by providing evidence from biographies of Queen Victoria as well as other famous women who learned to turn their fame into cash. Finally, I will a readings of a novel in which the heroine possesses wide-reaching social capital. *Miss Mackenzie* recounts the story of an old maid who becomes a newspaper sensation before, eventually, finding marital happiness. The celebrity heroines on whom I will focus have wider social capital because of their own behavior, rather than their family's renown. This celebrity heroine is a rare species in the Victorian novel, which may be because such women's unique circumstances have a less universal appeal. Additionally, portraying a celebrated woman is a more progressive depiction of feminine power with which the Victorian age was not entirely comfortable.

DEFINING CELEBRITY

What is celebrity? The October 2011 edition of *PMLA* on the special topic of "Celebrity, Fame, Notoriety" is evidence of the rising field of celebrity studies, which attempts to define and analyze celebrity. In the journal's opening article, Joseph A. Boone and Nancy J. Vickers state that "celebrities may become 'texts' worthy of analysis" and that while celebrity culture has increased recently, it is "by no means just a phenomenon of the present" ("Introduction: Celebrity Rites" 902). According to Luckhurst and Moody, modern celebrity is usually thought to emerge in the eighteenth century along with more diverse media outlets ("Introduction: The Singularity of Theatrical Celebrity" 3). Boone and Vickers explain the history of the word "celebrity,"

which “derives from the Latin nouns *celebritas* and *celebratio*, both of which signify the presence of a multitude, a large assembly or gathering, a crowd. By extension, these and related terms also point to an attribute (that of being famous or renowned) of the thing or person whose presence gives birth to the crowd.” The *OED*’s more recent definitions of “celebrity” define it as “[t]he condition of being much extolled or talked about; famous; notoriety,” and as a “person of celebrity; a celebrated person: a public character” (def. 3 and 4). Prior to the modern period, the word was used in a religious context; mass was, and still is, “celebrated,” and many of those persons, saints, and monarchs who drew the largest crowds were associated with divinity (903).⁷⁵ While a celebrity may also be famous, “fame” has a slightly different connotation and is often thought of as a state of permanent renown that cheats death’s obscurity. Helpfully, Boone and Vickers outline several qualities of celebrity that give us a working understanding of the term: “*Celebrity has a history Celebrity demands a gaze Celebrities perform Celebrities reside in the public sphere Celebrity invites close reading*” (906-08). This chapter answers celebrity’s invitation for close reading as it examines depictions of celebrities in nineteenth-century texts.

In “Salomé!! Sarah Bernhardt, Oscar Wilde, and the Drama of Celebrity,” Sharon Marcus explains that not only were many nineteenth-century celebrities actors, but all celebrity was theatrical, because of the “nonreciprocal exhibition and attention” that the celebrity receives and the audience gives, rendering both the celebrated and the anonymous crowd dependent upon the other for their role (999). Marcus “define[s] celebrity as theatrical because it combines proximity and distance and links celebrities to

⁷⁵ The *OED* recognizes this religious sense of the word with its first two definitions of “celebrity” as meaning “Due observance of rites and ceremonies; pomp, solemnity” and “solemn rite or ceremony, a celebration.”

their devotees in structurally uneven ways” (1000). Thus, in her understanding celebrity is not unlike successful flirtation, which relies upon the alternation between intimacy and modesty. Indeed, a celebrity is one who seems to flirt with the public as he or she attracts attention, and then demurely hides behind stage curtains or sunglasses until those curtains part or those glasses lower. Although flirting off the public stage can be symmetrical, flirting with the public is usually asymmetrical: the attention generally moves in one direction—toward the star. However, with all eyes on the stage rather than the seats, the celebrity runs the risk of appearing egotistical, seeking endless attention.

Successful celebrities tease as they provide the feeling but never the reality, of intimacy. According to Joseph Roach’s “Public Intimacy: The Prior History of ‘It,’” the “It” factor celebrities possess is highly sexual and relies upon the notion that their sexualized bodies might be accessible (15, 23). Celebrities who have “It” also possess glamour, rarity, and a delicate balance of strength and weakness (15, 24). They have “the ability to stand as if naked in the middle of a crowded room as if alone,” and thus those with “It” convey a sense of vulnerability and loneliness even while publically on display (28). Again understanding the celebrity’s appeal, like the allure of the seminude cover girl Roach describes (16), relies upon acknowledging the flirtatious nature of the celebrity’s relationship with his or her audience. Roach explains that successful celebrity requires a balance between “*charismata*,” or “signs of strength,” and “*stigmata*,” “signs of vulnerability” (24). The greatest celebrities are both dying bodies and immortal icons (24). For example, the actor David Garrick was known for his “flashing eyes” as well as his short stature (24), and Sarah Siddons’s plumpness gave figurative weight to her motherly performances on stage until she became so heavy that the stigmata of her

stoutness overshadowed her acting (26). Like marriage plot heroines, celebrities must balance appealing traits with flaws. Just as heroines balance good, decorous behavior with embarrassing moments in small social circles, celebrities balance revealing their strengths and weaknesses with the wider public. The celebrity who seeks an audience and the woman who sets her cap on getting a spouse must both speculate about how to maintain desirability by appearing neither unlovably perfect nor pathetically valueless.

THE CELEBRATED QUEEN

Queen Victoria is the nineteenth century's most famous woman, and her celebrity shows how the tensions between charismata and stigmata play out on the national stage. In *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch*, John Plunkett describes how the image and the idea of Victoria saturated the culture, because "she was simultaneously revered, reviled, fetishized, ignored, and gossiped about" (8). Victoria used various means to shape her public persona so that she would exude both noble virtue and humble openness. Plunkett argues that, despite Victoria's strategic attempts to manage how she was viewed, she did not have full control over her representation (2). Newspaper coverage, portraiture, clothing, and photography all contributed to and shaped her celebrity. Compared to previous royals, Victoria and Prince Albert participated in more public engagements and achieved greater exposure in print through weekly and illustrated newspapers such as *News of the World*, the *Illustrated London News*, and the *Illustrated Times*, which reported and commented upon their movements (13-14).⁷⁶ Up to seventy percent of the *Illustrated London News*'s engraving space was at times dedicated to the queen (102). Victoria's people appreciated their access to the monarch, but at times critics questioned

⁷⁶ According to Plunkett, the lowering of the stamp duty in 1855 and the repeal of the paper tax in 1860 promoted the growth of newspapers and thus allowed images of celebrities such as Victoria to circulate more widely (14).

if she lowered herself by catering to her people's desire to see more of her. For instance on May 26th, 1838, a writer for *Figaro of London* found Victoria's long processions on her coronation day to be undignified and unnecessary (24). Whether journalists praised or criticized royal events, newspapers helped to keep the royals at Britain's cultural center while also domesticating them for their readers; many female readers, for instance, fed upon little tidbits about the queen's household arrangements (87). As a woman, Victoria's ability to represent regal power was always questionable, but at the same time, the citizens of the increasingly liberal Britain seemed to favor a monarch who appeared more human than divine.

Significant media excitement surrounded Victoria from her early years as queen in the late 1830s. Reginamania made selling prints of the young monarch big business (Plunkett 72). Portrait painters, whose images were later copied by cheaper printers, were especially pained by the expectation that the queen's visage should combine femininity and beauty with majesty and dignity. Thomas Sully's *Queen Victoria* (1837), which shows a softly robed monarch looking over her shoulder with half-hooded eyes, was generally thought the most successful, because it appeared simultaneously imposing and inviting (94). The proliferation of her image made the public feel close to her even as critics called her a spectacle that served as entertainment (9-10). The press used theatrical language to describe, and often criticize, royals who operated as national amusements; one 1837 article entitled "The Royal Actress" from *Figaro in London* likened Victoria to a theatrical star to denigrate her performative public appearances (120).

In her youth, maturity, and old age, the public read Victoria's clothes as indicating her public role and personal values. According to Adrienne Munich's *Queen Victoria's*

Secrets, the queen enjoyed clothes as well as jewels, and even in her thirties, she eagerly played dress-up with Empress Eugénie, the wife of Napoleon III (74, 65). Unfortunately, she had neither the taste nor the figure to look fashionable, and thus there arose the popular belief that she did not care about her clothes, because she did not look good in them (66). The belief that the queen was above the absurdities of fashion—above a supposedly irrational enslavement to the arbitrary codes that afflicted woman—seemed to testify to her practicality and good sense (61). At the same time, no one likes to think one’s queen looks bad. If Victoria appeared too fashionable, she would seem superficial and perhaps even Frenchified, but if she were too unfashionable, she would appear unladylike or unpatriotic (after all, shouldn’t British manufacturing be able to make a decent gown?) (61). Unable to solve the dilemmas of what to wear, Victoria handed the job over to Albert, and after his death, stuck to black (57). The British people solved the problem of the queen’s clothes by believing that they revealed her middle-class morality. Myths circulated that she was sometimes confused for a commoner because of her simple attire, which perpetuated the idea that she was a “republican queen Lovable because beyond fashion and therefore beyond time itself” (60, 77-78). Just as wounds on the hands and feet of saints reveal their spiritual worth, the queen’s ill-fitting gowns are *stigmata* that her people refigured into a moral strength that mirrored their middle-class values. The queen’s dowdy clothes made her more endearing for her public; for instance, Henry James imagined being held close “under the fold of her big, hideous Scotch-plaid shawl” (78).⁷⁷

⁷⁷ For further remarks on Henry James’s feelings toward Queen Victoria’s folksy clothes as well as a reading of T. Mullett Ellis’s children’s book *The Fairies Favorite*, which explores why Victoria was the worst dressed woman in the world, see Munich (71-78).

As was the case with the stars of stage and screen, by midcentury photographs played an important role in Victoria's celebrity. She and Albert were enthusiastic about the new technology and patronized the London Photographic Society (Plunkett 146). In May of 1858, the Society publically displayed a picture of Victoria for the first time (147). Throughout her life, Victoria happily shared her image with the people, as evidenced by her official Diamond Jubilee photo on which she insisted there would be no copyright so that it might be disseminated more freely (168, 197). Her photos gained added importance after Albert's death when she, much to the public's chagrin, appeared in public less often (166). At first, photography seemed to give common people greater access to the reality of the queen's presence, and photos were believed to be a counterpoint to the idealized images of court portraits and beauty book illustrations (163). Yet in time, the public grew acquainted with how photographers could eliminate wrinkles and shrink waists, and they also became aware of how photographic subjects performed for the camera (186, 194). People criticized Victoria's affected mourning and humility, finding pictures of her staring longingly at Albert's photo or posing with a spinning wheel uncomfortable and false (179-80, 186).⁷⁸

Like other public displays such as civic engagements, portraits, and fashion, photography showed Victoria experimenting with the degree and type of access she offered her people. Demand for the celebrated queen never expired in her lifetime, but with so many eyes on the queen, her ability to balance regality with commonality was always questioned.

⁷⁸ These complaints were reactions to William Bambridge's *Mourning the Prince Consort* (1862) and J.E. Mayall's *Queen Victoria at a Spinning Wheel* (1863), which Plunkett reproduces in *Queen Victoria*.

The problem of having a female monarch and, thus also, a female celebrity on the throne was especially apparent prior to Victoria's marriage, when reginamania was at its strongest and the young queen's possible improprieties were most worrisome. Her sexualized, unwed body was a constant source of admiration and ridicule. According to Plunkett, Books of Beauty such as *Gems of Beauty* and *Affection's Keepsake* focused on her "glamour and desirability" during the 1830s (79). Additionally, several mentally unstable men stalked the queen, hoping that she would condescend to notice them.⁷⁹ These men were called the "Queen's lovers" and gave fodder to journalists, including Charles Dickens, who wrote humorously on the male obsession with Victoria (135-37). The young monarch's untethered sexuality was a sign of her potential for personal and political independence, and according to Plunkett, the commentators who feared her power also made her into a subject of fun (34): "The frequent stress on Victoria's femininity caused a tension between Victoria's state body and her private body. This tension, which reflects a fear of female power, is evident in humorous caricatures that either predicted a state of petticoat rule or show Victoria wearing pants" (88). Through cross-dressing caricatures and other pieces that often bordered on the pornographic, the press refused to treat her imagined body as inviolable (30). The omnipresence of Victoria in popular culture encouraged critics to question her ability to keep any part of her real body private.

Questions about how Victoria used and wanted to use her body abounded.

Newspapers joked that she converted people to her political opinions through the power of her physical charms (Plunkett 85). Others looked askance at her close friendship with

⁷⁹ Victoria's stalkers include Tom Flower, Ned Hayward, Thomas Richard Evans, and Captain Goode, who believed that he was George's IV's son and hoped to regain his royal status by marrying Victoria (Plunkett 136).

Prime Minister Lord Melbourne, who had been involved in sexual scandals, and gossips mockingly called Victoria “Mrs. Melbourne” at Ascot (156-7). Still others criticized her for looking over too many of Europe’s princes in order to find a mate. Fundamentally, the public was ill at ease with the queen’s position as a female monarch who would choose and propose to a man (30). According to Munich, Victoria’s position highlighted the debate about a women’s proper place in society and opened up the possibility that other women might follow their queen’s example by insisting upon marital choice (Munich 7, 62).⁸⁰ Victoria’s status as a monarch prevented her from acting modestly, and as Plunkett explains, when she chose to marry Albert for love, her sexual desires for him became public:

. . . the prominence given to her wedding accentuated Victoria’s independence and threatened a transgression of the increasingly gendered distinction between public and private space. . . . The high-profile nature of Victoria’s wedding consequently provoked attacks on the uncomfortable and deviant visibility of her sexuality. These were themselves part of a larger suspicion directed towards her feminine independence. (30)

While Victoria was congratulated for marrying for love, the publicity that her love received, when royal weddings had traditionally been private, brought criticism (29).

After the wedding, the queen’s perceived lack of modesty was attacked, because she reportedly walked around Windsor at eight in the morning after her wedding night, held grand parties during her first days of marriage, and within three days of the wedding, returned to London and public duties. The *Satirist* viewed these action as revealing her inappropriate independence and willful need for public display (Plunkett 32). After her

⁸⁰ Munich records one street ballad that deals with the fear that gender power relations would be turned on their head, if women modeled themselves after Queen Victoria: “Since the Queen did herself for a husband ‘propose’ / The ladies will all do the same I suppose; / Their days of subserviency now will be past / For all will speak *first*, as they always did *last*” (63).

marriage, her sexuality was less emphasized as she was imagined as a national mother (34). Nevertheless, her appreciation for male beauty, her passionate temper, her borderline necrophilia for Albert, as well as her friendship with Disraeli and, especially, her Scottish gillie John Brown all caused her to be dogged by questions of sexual impropriety throughout most of her reign (Munich 56, 60, 157-59). The constant doubts about the queen's virtue suggest that there was a basic discomfort with a woman possessing a public life, because it inevitably brought all her actions into view, including her sexual behavior.⁸¹ Thus, in the Victorian age, celebrity always suggested immodesty in a woman. Even if no impropriety was ever proven, the fact of a woman being on display, either by choice or birth, implied some imperfect ability to remain properly domestic.

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF PERFORMANCES AND PUBLIC LIVES

Similar questions of modesty were raised again and again in relation to the period's great actresses (and women writers, albeit to a lesser extent), who were the only Victorian women outside the royal family whose celebrity neared that of the queen. Like Queen Victoria and marriage plot heroines, Victorian women writers and, especially, actresses often gained value through damaging their respectability and/or sacrificing their privacy. Even when information about their personal lives revealed sexual transgressions, actresses were often able to exchange notoriety for bank notes. The lives of actresses made explicit how a woman's personal stains could be converted into wealth.

In "Private Lives and Public Spaces," Sos Eltis explains that nineteenth-century actresses were often accused of sexual misbehavior because their profession required

⁸¹ For a discussion of Victoria as a fearsome and enticing femme fatale, see Munich's *Queen Victoria's Secrets* (175-86).

them to feign emotions that Victorians believed should only be expressed with sincerity (171). In her essay “Actresses and the Economics of Celebrity,” Felicity Nussbaum argues that femininity and acting were incompatible, because any woman who reveals her talent for performance also highlights her lack of feminine virtue (148).⁸² This incompatibility of virtue with acting was a gendered problem. Actresses were more gossiped about than actors, and audiences were more likely to confuse women’s performances of vice with their real behavior (150).⁸³ These confusions, however unflattering, were important in increasing an actress’s economic value: “The economic gain for these women players paradoxically depended on their construction of a private space that was regularly and purposely violated by an emergent medial apparatus, sometimes at the actress’s own instigation” (163). Thus actresses often needed to compromise their own private lives, or damage their respectability, in order to achieve economic success. For instance, Lillie Langtry promoted herself at the beginning of her career by making the features of her home open knowledge; for example, she followed Oscar Wilde’s advice and publicized a redecoration of her private apartment.

Celebrities like Langtry promoted themselves in order that their celebrity would enable their professional success. If they had a respectable private life, they would make that known, as Madge Kendal and Marie Bancroft did by working with their husbands.

⁸² Some Victorian actresses revealed that the skills that made them good stage performers were very similar to the skills of successful society ladies. Langtry thought of herself as a society lady who continued the same work of good self-presentation from the parlor to the stage (Eltis 173-74). In the early twentieth century, The Actresses’ Franchise League promoted suffragette causes and taught working-class women presentation skills, which were intended to help them prepare for the performances that regular life requires. Campbell, Terry, and Langtry were all involved with the League in these efforts (184). Despite the period’s promotion of natural innocence and sincerity, the successful lives of actresses and the women they helped reveal the advantages of practiced performances.

⁸³ *Middlemarch* contains a fictional depiction of an actress whose personal life reveals itself on stage when Madame Laure, who plays murderess, kills her actual husband on stage (142-44).

But if an actress's private life was scandalous, she could either perform virtuous domesticity, as Ellen Terry and Mrs. Patrick Campbell did with success, or, like Langtry and Sarah Bernhardt, embrace a more explicit sexual appeal (Eltis 170-72).⁸⁴ Langtry, who famously had an affair with the Prince of Wales, found success in roles that emphasized a lack of virtue (Nussbaum 173). Marcus argues that Bernhardt's physical contortions on stage, which underscored her "scandalously uncorseted form became a metaphor for features of her celebrity persona," which was dominated by sexual gossip and willful idiosyncrasies (1005). In his biography, *Sarah*, Robert Gottlieb describes how Bernhardt acquired her famous coffin from friends and seems to have slept in it during at least one short period of her life; the actress's widely-known sexual misbehavior as well as her possible coffin sleeping, made famous by a photograph she very profitably published of her confined body, show how her inability to sleep in an appropriate bed fed her fame and mysterious appeal (44, 83-84).

Although women writers were more respected in general than actresses, many also opened their private lives in order to increase their literary celebrity. Thus Nussbaum's argument that Victorian actresses purposely constructed and violated their private lives in order to achieve success also applies to the strategies of celebrity women writers during the period. Alexis Easley's *Literary Celebrity, Gender, and Victorian Authorship, 1850-1914* asserts that the British public was infatuated with the homes and lives of literary celebrities in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and this interest "fueled the new media—tourist guidebooks, exposés, photo essays, and gossip columns—that offered incomplete answers to an increasingly curious public." Women

⁸⁴ Joy Melville's biography of Ellen Terry describes the reality of the admired actress' private life, in which she displayed her ineptitude for domestic order and a sexual openness (*Ellen Terry* 51-57).

writers had to carefully balance seeking public exposure with maintaining a respectable, private life: “Too little exposure could mean invisibility in a fiercely competitive literary marketplace, yet too much exposure could mean being cast aside as a vulgar literary fad” (12). Like Langtry, who opened her home, literary celebrities were interviewed for magazine profiles about their domestic arrangements; while these profiles had the positive benefits of giving publicity and offering readers models for alternative lifestyles, they also hinted at scandalous behavior (17). In an 1890 “Celebrities at Home” profile in *World*, Edmund Yates interviewed Charlotte Robinson; his interests included her home, which she decorated, and her domestic partner, Emily Faithful. Yates subtly intimates the possibility of their sexual relationship as he alludes to Faithful’s scandalous involvement in the Codrington divorce case of 1864 (141-43). Robinson’s situation was not unique. The woman writer’s need for publicity meant that she must open her home and thus her life up to speculation and gossip.

Easley argues that of all the female celebrities, Harriet Martineau was the most successful at self-promotion while maintaining respectability (16). As Martineau built and wrote about her home, the Knoll, in the Lake District, she established herself as one of Britain’s more important writers (69). She associated herself with the male, canonical tradition, and most especially with Wordsworth by living and writing about the Lake District, and the guidebooks that she wrote assured that her home became a destination for literary tourists (72, 83). When visiting the house, visitors could observe a woman’s literary profession existing alongside domestic comforts. She designed the house to hold large bookcases and made her library the main floor’s showpiece, revealing how a woman’s professional pursuits might easily be situated within domestic arrangements

(73). By constructing her home from the ground up, Martineau builds a professional identity around her private life and succeeds at establishing her position as a woman writer without comprising her reputation. Unlike many literary and theatrical celebrities who sacrificed both their privacy and their respectability, at least to some extent, Martineau satisfied herself and her readers with a private space tailor-made for public consumption and thus avoided having to resort to sensationalism for publicity.

Just as Victorian actresses and writers used celebrity to promote their careers, other Victorian women could also use celebrity to promote their desirability. Despite the fact that celebrity inevitably places a women's virtue under suspicion, having status puts women in wider circulation, which allows them more opportunities to be seen and admired by marriageable men. Additionally, celebrity renders a single woman singular. If unmarried women were all-too-common in the Victorian age, renown could set a woman apart from the crowd of her peers who were all vying for marriage proposals. As William Rathbone Greg notes in "Why Are Women Redundant?" (1862), the problem of the "enormous and increasing number of single" or "redundant" British women means that, unless they take extraordinary steps, such as emigration, many will never have the opportunity to marry (158). Although gaining celebrity is a risky maneuver, it is one that could, at least theoretically, help women find their way to domestic happiness—and without traipsing across half the world.

Trollope's *Miss Mackenzie* explores how celebrity affects the marriage prospects for its heroine—a woman for whom a happy and financially advantageous marriage is unlikely due to age. Nevertheless, celebrity gives her the sort of attention that concludes

in proposals. The retiring Miss Mackenzie gains a marriage that results in both wealth and happiness.

THE ACCIDENTAL CELEBRITY

Although Trollope's original intention when beginning *Miss Mackenzie* was to write a novel without a marriage plot, the novelistic propulsion to marry off the heroine overwhelmed the writer's original plans. Like other marriage plot novelists, Trollope romanticizes his heroine's low social capital, but later, and more unconventionally, he shows how, despite her age and poverty, Miss Mackenzie's newly-gained and extensive social capital enables her to find a loving and financially advantageous marriage with Sir John Ball, her cousin who is also, by virtue of his title, her social superior. The attention she receives as a newspaper sensation gives her a necessary boost on the marriage market, in which it is particularly difficult for her to find a desirable husband as evidenced by the four marriage proposals she declines. Her celebrity offers her both social status, to which she had very little claim after losing her inheritance, and the stain of embarrassment, because her behavior (and that of her suitors) becomes a source of common scrutiny and entertainment. She benefits from her celebrity, because it highlights her good qualities, including her lack of interest in celebrity itself. Neither her former romantic seclusion nor her tempting wealth could trigger proposals motivated by love and willing sacrifice. Like other heroines whose low social capital provides the means by which they make successful marriage matches, Margaret Mackenzie is at once both the victim and beneficiary of her celebrity status. Through this novel, in which a modest woman marries only after she becomes a celebrated personality, Trollope establishes the possibility that female celebrity does not necessarily have to be associated

with excessive immodesty; furthermore, he establishes that erotic vulnerability is not a quality that is exclusive to women with low social capital, because it may also plague those with abundant connections.⁸⁵

Victorians saw social capital that is either very narrow or very wide as inappropriate for women; thus, a loving and advantageous marriage should allow a woman a suitable amount of social capital that enables her to have connections while also remaining away from public life. As I discussed in my last chapter, a woman with limited connections may not be safe in her domestic asylum, but as I have attempted to establish here, a woman with too much notoriety will be troubled by questions of immodesty. A proper Victorian marriage should allow a wife an ideal amount of social capital that shields her from both dangerous isolation and unpleasant accusations of immorality. In *Miss Mackenzie*, Margaret's marriage restores her social capital to an appropriate level, because it concludes her life as a newspaper sensation and a source of gossip while also securing her connections to wealthy relatives and friends.

⁸⁵ *Miss Mackenzie* is one of Trollope's lesser-known works, and so I will provide a brief summary. Margaret Mackenzie's youth was spent in seclusion as she nursed her father and then her brother, Walter. Soon after the novel opens, she inherits Walter's fortune, which allows her to become an independent lady of leisure. After refusing Harry Handcock's unenthusiastic offer of marriage, she adopts one of her impoverished nieces and sets out to find what pleasures life has to offer in Littlebath. This city presents two distinct social groups, an evangelical sect and a pleasure-seeking clique, but in neither group can Margaret find social fulfillment. As she attempts to learn the rules of her new social world, she becomes the object of three men's designs: her financially-strapped but good-hearted cousin, John Ball; a dishonest but attractive businessman, Mr. Rubb, and an ambitious clergyman with a squint eye, the Rev. Mr. Maguire. Encouraged by mercenary motives, all three of these men propose marriage and are refused. An important turn of plot involves Margaret discovering that she has wrongfully inherited her fortune, which legally belongs to John Ball; she demonstrates a remarkable honesty and meekness as she allows the money to be returned to him without whispering any objection. John then makes a second, and far more romantic proposal that she accepts, feeling that she does now truly love him. Maguire, who believes Margaret may still be persuaded to marry him, then takes her story of being disinherited by her cousin to the newspapers in an attempt to win her and her fortune. While the legal questions are being sorted out, Margaret worries that she has lost John, who suffers due to the public scandal. With the help of her wealthy relative, Clara Mackenzie, who discovers Margaret after she becomes a much-discussed gossip item, Margaret marries John and becomes Lady Ball.

In his *Autobiography*, Trollope recalls his singular attempt to write a novel without a marriage plot:

Miss Mackenzie was written with a desire to prove that a novel may be produced without any love; but even in its attempts it breaks down before the conclusion. In order that I might be strong in my purpose I took for my heroine a very unattractive old maid who was overwhelmed by money troubles; but even she was in love before the end of the book, and made a romantic marriage with an old man. (189)

As Trollope explains elsewhere in his autobiography, he feels that love adds a desirable “softness” to novels, which he seemed compelled to give Margaret (224). Despite his attempt to create a female heroine who was too unlovable to marry, someone who lacked the “softnesses and graces of youth,” Trollope, beginning quite early on in his characterization of her, gives her middle-aged body and character such a youthful and feminine “softness” that she can both love and be loved (*Miss Mackenzie* 4, 214). In her mid-thirties, she is “still a young woman,” has “more of the graces of womanhood than belonged to her at twenty,” and possesses such “soft, trusting eyes” that John worries they bewitch him (26, 8, 292). Ultimately, of course, Trollope prefers to write novels in which there are lovable characters like Margaret Mackenzie, because he feels stories of courtship and love are instructive to young people; additionally, love stories enable his novel’s moral messages to be so appealing that he draws large audiences (224-25). Compared to some of his contemporaries, Trollope was less of a moralist and more concerned with his own career, in which publicity and profits went hand-in-hand. Just as Trollope realizes that the marriage plot enables his novels, and thus his precepts, to receive wider attention, Margaret’s celebrity will allow her to receive the attention she needs to receive a loving marriage. This novel teaches readers that even women over thirty who have public reputations can be modest, attractive, and marriageable.

Prior to her rise to celebrity, Margaret's social capital is very limited, and Trollope romanticizes his lonely, isolated heroine just as other marriage plot novelists, including Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens, romanticize Jane Eyre or Esther Summerson respectively. Trollope repeatedly refers to Margaret as Tennyson's Mariana, whose "life in London had been altogether of the moated grange kind" and "as near that as prose may be near to poetry, or truth to romance" (5). From the opening chapter, Trollope reads his heroine as a romantic figure because of her social isolation.

Not long after she leaves her "moated grange" and begins to make friends in Littlebath, the sternly religious Mrs. Stumfold and her circle cut her, leaving Miss Mackenzie in an erotically charged social exile:

Mariana's solitude in the moated grange was nothing to hers. In granges and such like rural retreats, people expect solitude but Miss Mackenzie had gone to Littlebath to find companionship. Had she been utterly disappointed and found none, that would have been bad; but she had found it and then lost it. Mariana in her desolateness, was still waiting for the coming of some one; so was Miss Mackenzie waiting, though she hardly knew for whom. (162)

While the narrator's description of Margaret's social isolation is lightly comic, he does, nevertheless, enhance Margaret's romantic qualities by comparing her to Tennyson's weary heroine. As Trollope compares Margaret to Mariana waiting for her lover, the comparison hints at Margaret's sexuality and suggests that, despite her age, her loneliness is caused by her inability to fulfill her erotic desires. The subtle revelation of Margaret's desire for "she hardly knew for whom" shows that she too possesses a subtle taint of immodesty—that is, an adorable inability to keep all her desires perfectly in check.

Her story resembles, at least at first, the progress of many of other heroines whom I have described in this dissertation, and especially Catherine Moreland: she gains social

capital at a seaside retreat, loses it, and then suddenly receives a proposal from clergyman. Unfortunately, unlike Catherine, the romantically secluded Margaret receives a proposal from the wrong man, the Rev. Mr. Maguire, and although she considers his proposal, because she dreads being lonely, she ultimately rejects him—proving that her desire is not so outrageous that she will take any squinty-eyed Pharisee who pops the question. Not only does Margaret exhibit her worth by choosing to suffer through loneliness rather than marry without love, as is typical for marriage plot heroines, but she also undergoes a distinctly different trial when she must suffer the embarrassment of becoming a newspaper sensation. Nevertheless, Margaret passes her tests before becoming the wife of John Ball, who is also, like Margaret and Mariana, “weary” (109, 111, 270). Trollope’s depictions of eroticized loneliness and suffering, as well as his poetic allusions give a soft haze to the “weary” middle-aged romance of Margaret and John.

If marriage plots show their readers the appeal of characters with low social capital, they often do so with young women. In *Miss Mackenzie*, Trollope reveals, despite his original intentions, that Margaret’s age is not an obstacle to her lovability. In the most-often written about scene in the novel, Margaret sits before her mirror and wonders if she is too old for passion:

. . . she got up and looked at herself in the mirror. She moved her hair from off her ears, knowing she would find a few that were grey, and shaking her head as though owning to herself that she was old; but as her fingers ran almost involuntarily across her locks, her touch told her that they were soft and silken; and she looked into her own eyes, and saw that they were bright; and her hand touched the outline of her cheek, and she knew that something of the fresh bloom of youth was still there; and her lips parted, and there were her white teeth; and there came a smile and a dimple, and a slight purpose of laughter in her eye, and then a tear. She

pulled her scarf tighter across her bosom, feeling her own form, and then she leaned forward and kissed herself in the glass. (111)

As Margaret examines her body, touching “almost involuntarily” her soft hair and then her cheek, and bust, she discovers her loveliness. In this scene, she becomes a desirable object as she examines her own body and as the male narrator and readers scrutinize her body through her perspective. As she looks into her own eyes, she plays the coquette with herself as she laughs with “a slight purpose” only to suddenly tear up and then, perhaps most surprisingly, pucker up. Trollope reveals not only that Margaret’s body is still attractive with a “fresh bloom” but also that she still possesses the appealing little falsities and sensibilities of a young woman, who can flirt by alternating laughing and crying. And if we insist on remembering her grey hairs, they make her appeal all the more poignant for emerging from a body and spirit that remains youthful.

In “Miss Harleth, Miss Mackenzie: Mirror Images,” Charles Swann argues that this scene may have inspired George Eliot to write about similar occurrence in *Daniel Deronda* during which Gwendolen Harleth sits before her mirror and gives herself a reassuring peck. Both women “declare their self-confidence” as they kiss their reflections. Swann argues that, unlike Gwendolen, Margaret is “at least half-consciously aware of her own sexuality” (47). Kay Heath also agrees that “Trollope provides a celebratory moment of female sexuality” in which Margaret discovers her body’s value on the marriage market (36). Once Margaret finds herself attractive, she becomes so. After Margaret shows that she can look at herself as desirable, she sets the example for how others may look at her—and they often will look at her, especially after she becomes a celebrity. Just as *Northanger Abbey* illustrates how female passion can ignite male desire, this mirror scene shows how a woman’s self-love is a condition that is necessary

for her to receive love from others, especially if there is any question about the desirability of her body. In other words, Margaret's ability to kiss herself causes her to be more kissable.

In her article "In the Eye of the Beholder: Victorian Age Construction and the Specular Self," Kay Heath argues that there is a "repeated pattern of age anxiety in [Victorian] novels, especially those with marriage plots," that can be examined through mirror scenes; she concludes that, when a character such as Margaret Mackenzie views herself as young in the mirror, she receives a youthful, marriage plot story, while characters who perceive themselves as old will not be able to achieve a happy ending (28). Thus, in old age, there is some advantage to disidentification with the mirror image of one's aged self, because then one can construct an imagined, youthful self who may live out more happy and youthful story (29). Heath explains that Margaret "negotiates the complex border between spinsterhood and marriageability, showing that, despite strong cultural prescriptions of spinsterhood, specular dissociation can make age pliable and more self-determined for women on the margins on mid-life" (35). While Margaret's inheritance allows her to be marriageable in her mid-thirties, money alone cannot make her youthful or sexually desirable (36). Margaret's reading of her body as desirable gives her plot its youthfulness, or what Trollope would call its "softness." Her decision to prioritize love when considering marriage ultimately allows the "early-mid life 'old maid' to become un-spinstered for love instead of money" (37). While she receives multiple proposals because of her fortune, her choice to accept only John Ball's proposal once it can have no mercenary motives, and indeed only after her celebrity ensures that the marrying would cause John some embarrassment, shows that she is very much like

any young heroine who deserves a love match that would restore her to a respectable level of social capital.

A discussion of how the quiet-living Margaret becomes a celebrity requires some explanation of *Miss Mackenzie's* involved plot. Margaret becomes a household name after she refuses her one of her mercenary suitors, Maguire, in favor of John Ball. John makes a second and more romantic proposal to Margaret after she loses her fortune to him. Maguire, who waited for weeks hoping that he would receive a positive answer from Margaret to his proposal, refuses to accept that he has lost either Margaret or, more importantly to him, her fortune; he intrudes upon the Ball family home where his ungentlemanly behavior and false assertion that Margaret was his fiancée taint Margaret's reputation (281-87). John, whose mother goads him into distancing himself from Margaret, becomes suspicious but never certain that Margaret may have been after his fortune and have planned the moments when she appeared so attractive to him. While Margaret does not purposely make her dressing-gown's sleeve fall back so that John can see her soft arm, she does neglect to mention her relationship with Maguire prior to engaging herself to her cousin (292-93). While Margaret never was engaged to Maquire, she has acted questionably by not explaining that she had recently received and considered another man's proposal. The legal entanglement involving Margaret's and John's inheritance gives him further reason to stay away Margaret. Despite having accepted his proposal and having shown complete willingness to surrender her fortune to John, Margaret is left more alone than ever ("was there a single being in the world whom she could now call her friend?"), and extremely uncertain that their marriage will ever take place (301). Unable to afford her Littlebath lifestyle and unwilling to suffer the

indignity of remaining in John's home, Margaret returns as a lodger to her brother's former home on Arundel Street, where "low as her standing might have been then, at this present moment it was even lower," because even her landlady, Hannah Protheroe, is wealthier than she and has a steadier suitor who marries the old lady, which, consequently, leaves Margaret in further isolation (302, 309). Margaret imprisons herself by refusing to leave the house for fear that she will miss one of John's rare visits. Choosing to remain alone, even on Christmas, Margaret prudently refuses to associate with people whose station might demean a baronet's wife, though she can hardly believe, she will ever be one (312, 328).

While Margaret lives in her tomb on Arundel Street, Maguire writes John Ball to accuse him of "robbing [Margaret] and trying to cover the robbery by marrying [her]" (314). Desperate to take the case further, Maguire writes a leading article for the *Christian Examiner*, a Littlebath newspaper, in which his biased description of the legal and personal situation of John and Margaret appears in the "the glory of large type" (321). After the paper prints his story of "The Lion and the Lamb," which paints John's behavior as wicked and Margaret's as innocently weak, he mails it to nineteen friends and relations of the pair. Margaret's fame increases as Maguire continues to write letters to the *Christian Examiner* and, the London papers pick up the popular story and reprint the articles; as Margaret's landlady says, "the whole story [is] all over town at any rate, and in the lane, and all about the courts" (326, 340). While Maguire never names the Lamb, it is an open secret among Margaret's acquaintances and in genteel circles that Margaret Mackenzie, who never sought fame and who passively gives up her fortune to the man she loves, is the Lamb. "Everybody had heard of Lion and the Lamb, and

everybody was aware that she was supposed to represent the milder of those two favourite animals. Everybody knew the story . . . ” and “everybody” believed that, although the leonine John will deprive the Lamb of her valuable fleece, she will receive her restitution in the most romantic way by coming under his protection as his wife, Lady Ball (345).

Suffering from extreme social capital, whether very limited or very extensive, is one of the most common tests that marriage plot heroines undergo in order to prove they are worthy of a happy marriage. Margaret, like so many of the heroines I have discussed, endures a trial of isolation, which takes place as she lives in seclusion in Arundel Street. Interestingly, Margaret also undergoes a trial of publicity, during which she proves her love for John and her ability to gracefully succeed to the title of Lady Ball. Perhaps it is because Margaret’s marriage involves her gaining a title during a period when all aristocrats were, to a greater or lesser extent, public figures that she must undergo the additional trial of publicity in order to prove that, unlike John’s snobbish mother, she is worthy of that title and is not attracted to John out of a desire for social status. For a short period, Margaret’s two trials converge; as her fame grows on the London streets, she chooses to imprison herself at home.

Trollope, like the celebrity theorist Brenda R. Weber, emphasizes how fame and loneliness exist hand-in-hand for women. In “Always Lonely: Celebrity, Motherhood, and the Dilemma of Destiny,” Weber asks why women in the nineteenth century and today perceive their “celebrity as something that is ultimately lonely and a shabby substitute for love” (1110). Weber focuses on experiences of women with children who find their fame “isolating and ultimately unsatisfying,” in part because our culture

perceives celebrity as selfishness and thus opposed to the ideal of selfless motherhood (1110-11). While the Victorian public particularly criticized mothers who sought the limelight, fame of any sort was contrary to the idea of the female “gender code that reinforced humility, privacy, and domesticity” (1112). Although Margaret Mackenzie is not a biological mother (she only adopts one of her nieces), Trollope’s novel highlights how female celebrity frequently coexists with loneliness, unhappiness, and a lack of love. For instance, *Miss Mackenzie* describes the presumed friendlessness of Queen Victoria, whose “altitude is too high to admit of friendships” (115). Also, early in her career as Margaret longs for companionship, she wonders if ladies suffer from limitations similar to that of royals: “It was well to be a lady. . . . But, then, might it not also be very well not to be a lady; and might not the advantages of one position be compensated with equal advantages in the other? It is a grand thing to be a queen; but a queen has no friends. It is fine to be princess; but a princess has a very limited choice of husbands” (117). Through her interactions with Rubb and Maguire, Margaret learns to value gentlemanly behavior (and dress) and, eventually, proves her willingness to suffer in order to remain a lady. Luckily, after her period of lonely celebrity, Margaret receives more pleasant attentions that allow this marriage plot to come to a close.

After suffering through a period of both loneliness and celebrity, Margaret’s fame brings her more positive attention from her landlady, her family, and, finally, John Ball, demonstrating how the wide, shallow social capital of her celebrity eventually converts into economic capital and deeper, more meaningful social connections. Hannah, Margaret’s landlady, becomes kinder to her penniless lodger after she sees that she is both well known and likely to become Lady Ball, and she is the first to predict

Margaret's turn of fortune. Hannah declares that "everybody is talking about [Margaret's case] everywhere [sic]" and explains to Margaret that such celebrity will allow her to get whatever she wants: "It's my belief that if one only gets talked about enough, one may have a'most anything one chooses to ask for" (339). Here Hannah explains Bourdieu's principle that the disguised forms of capital, such as social capital, are convertible into economic capital or into "a'most anything one chooses to ask for" (244). Importantly, Margaret does not have Hannah's acumen for understanding how her circumstances are advantageous. Like other heroines before her who prove their innocence through a sort of denseness, Margaret cannot "see" how she "shall be any the better because [her situation] is talked about"; she also claims that she has no desire "to ask for anything," revealing her modest insistence that she will neither ask for a handout from John nor his hand in marriage (339). Margaret implicitly asserts that, unlike Queen Victoria, no amount of status will cause her to break with the code of her gender which forbids her to "ask for anything" from man. Over and over again, Margaret's celebrity and her reactions to it reveal her best qualities, or her *charismata*, as she behaves with meekness, innocence, and modesty. Her celebrity and all the gossip it creates about her makes her good character more generally known and thus more socially valuable, so that even her landlady treats her better. Although Margaret cannot admit it, she learns from gossip to recognize the likelihood that she will obtain happiness and wealth through marriage. For example, after her conversation with Hannah, she ironically decides that her landlady is "a stupid woman—the stupidest" and then runs to her room in order to "to teach herself to believe" what the supposedly "stupidest woman she had ever heard or seen" has told her about her prospects.

Only three days after this conversation with Hannah, Margaret's celebrity enables her to begin a friendship with her wealthy cousin, Mrs. Clara Mackenzie, who takes an interest in Margaret solely based upon the stories she has heard about her cousin's exemplary behavior, which by this point have reached as far as Scotland (341). Here again Margaret's social capital allows her access to other forms of capital. Clara possesses economic capital, social capital, and the kind of cultural capital that understands male behavior and how to bring a courtship to its desired end. As Sharon Marcus argues in *Between Women*, female friendships help courtships to progress smoothly, and the lonely Margaret is in great need of this kind of friendship (97). Clara is wealthy, well connected (her husband knows John Ball well), and charming. Margaret's friendship with her fashionable cousin is essential for the novel's marriage plot, because Clara bolsters Margaret's confidence, encourages her to show herself to her best advantage, throws her together with John, and promotes her desirability to John.

After some prodding from Clara, Margaret, who is one of the most sought-after personalities in London's West End, reluctantly agrees to take a stall at the Negro Soldiers' Orphan Bazaar (Trollope 355-57). Clara arranges for John to see Margaret at the Bazaar, and she insists that her reserved cousin, who normally wears mourning clothes for her deceased brother, wear a muslin dress "covered all over with the prettiest little frecks of black" and "the gayest, lightest, jauntiest, falsest, most make-belief-mourning bonnet" (358). Clara's feminine arts, evidenced by the "false" hat she purchases for Margaret, are just the sort of thing Margaret needs in order to be successful on the marriage market—represented by the Bazaar itself which is filled with well-dressed, often desperate women attempting to sell things to men. In contrast with the

other nameless “harpies” at the Bazaar, Margaret’s celebrity and demure behavior make her appear attractively singular in the crowd of “unclean birds,” and her ability to sell her goods quickly is evidence of her popularity (365). By placing the “well-behaved” Margaret in a freckled muslin and a flirtatious bonnet, Clara provides Margaret with the appearance of immodesty, when in reality, at least “at present,” Margaret seems “too well-behaved a young woman to think of such vanities” (367). Unlike the mirror scene, when Margaret shows her ability to giggle and then cry almost on cue, the sadness of Margaret’s recent isolation seems to have left her out-of-practice with such useful, if somewhat dishonest, feminine accomplishments, Clara is thus necessary to help reestablish Margaret’s attractiveness through slightly improper clothing choices. Nevertheless, Margaret agrees to wear the somewhat daring clothes, and we can presume it is because she does, in fact, want to attract John’s attention; therefore she is to some extent responsible for her false and artful costume. Luckily, she only gains ground with John by risking her modesty and honesty by wearing the eye-catching ensemble. Just as in the innocent but questionable conversation between Margaret and John in her bedroom, when her dressing gown’s sleeve fell back attracted him months earlier, he “wanted to marry her especially since he had seen how nice she looked in the black-freckled muslin” (377, 292). In this “freckled” dress, Margaret cannot appear too perfect, as she would in a solid expanse of strict black, because the dress itself reveals the spotted, imperfect quality that is essential to desirability. Margaret reaps the benefits of her celebrity as well as her costume, because she does not overtly put herself forward, and with Clara’s connections and sartorial savvy, Margaret meets John and dresses attractively without compromising her modesty too much.

Ultimately, as Clara smoothes the path toward Margaret's and John's marriage, she assures him that, despite the attention Margaret's "singular story" gives her, Margaret's "conduct has been perfect" (387). More importantly, Clara also reveals Margaret's desiring heart, and implicitly her sexual need, when she claims that "a single life will not suit [Margaret]" (388). She exposes Margaret's heart by telling John that she wants to marry him "as much as any woman ever wished anything" and that he "need have no doubt about her loving [him]" (388). In this conversation, Clara balances Margaret's perfections and improprieties with expertise as she highlights Margaret's model behavior, while also revealing her secret immodestly: she discloses that Margaret very much wants to marry a man who is unsure if he wants to marry her (which certainly breaks with the rules of the conduct literature I discussed in my second chapter). Clara is an intermediary between John and Margaret, presenting a reading of Margaret as a desirable woman and thereby encouraging John to propose, which he does only minutes later. Margaret's celebrity enables her to have the friendship and encouragement of someone as powerful and socially astute as Clara, who is "one of those prophets who knew how to assist the accomplishment of their own prophecies" (393).

Margaret's celebrity reveals her desirable combination of *charismata* and *stigmata*, because it makes known her goodness and meekness as well as her questionable decisions and acquaintances (most especially those that involve Maguire). John's attraction to her increases because of this revelation of her best as well as her most embarrassing qualities. Margaret's celebrity also offers John an opportunity to sacrifice by marrying her. In addition to forfeiting his chance to marry for money (which is a sacrifice he proved he would make when he took a poor young woman as his first wife),

John indicates that he will also sacrifice his privacy. According to Simmel, sacrifice endears us to the object for which we suffer, because it increases our perceived value of that object (86). Margaret, therefore, becomes more adorable to John when he gives up his privacy, something very dear to him, for her.

The story of “The Lion and the Lamb” is painful for John, which he shows when he “rudely” brushes past a young woman who calls him “Sir Lion” at the bazaar (369). Trollope also describes how John “groaned and toiled under” the pain of the notoriety that Maguire’s articles gave him, which the narrator compares to an “unclean animal’s sting” (372). Not only must he suffer the indignity of being accused of robbing his cousin, he must also suffer the even more embarrassing humiliation of having gossips and at least one newspaper await his romantic reconciliation with her through marriage; this reserved and somewhat cowardly Englishman wonders if he can bear such disgrace, even for love: “Could he marry his cousin amidst the trumpets, and the halo, and the doggerel poetry which would abound? . . . Had he done anything to deserve this punishment?” (373-74). And yet, this quiet, middle-aged man, who would have preferred to get married in “silence” does suffer through publicity for his cousin who “had been so prettily dressed . . . in black-freckled muslin” (377, 367-67). Trollope reveals that the male sacrifice of money is not always sufficient, because there are sometimes more personally painful sacrifices that must, and should, be made in order for the groom not only to prove his love’s worth but also the great value of his bride.

Margaret is worth sacrificing for, because she neither asks that others sacrifice nor seeks any benefit from the fame she gains as “the Lamb.” Margaret also suffers the loss of her privacy, because “she and her history were public property” and, thus, “her name”

is “frequent[ly] in men’s mouths,” suggesting that celebrity itself is a violation of one’s individuality as Margaret’s “name,” which Trollope uses as a metonym for Margaret’s self, is promiscuously found in “men’s mouths” (346, 345). This violation is potentially especially disturbing for women, for whom personal security is, perhaps, a high priority. Despite the perks of celebrity, Margaret is never more pleased than when she finds a domestic role in which she can also have many friends, evidenced by the many congratulatory messages she receives on her wedding day (400-01). In other words, Margaret can only be happy when she is the property of one gentleman rather than of public at large. In the final chapter, Margaret’s celebrity is presumably about to decline as the story of “The Lion and the Lamb” comes to a happy conclusion; nevertheless, her social rank rises above that of any of her friends when she marries a baronet and becomes Lady Ball. She handles this rise in rank with the same womanly “grace” as that with which she handled her celebrity: “Lady Ball accepted thankfully, quietly, and with an enduring satisfaction as it became such a woman to do” (401).⁸⁶

In *Miss Mackenzie*, Trollope shows the traditional eroticization of lonely vulnerability while also creating a new kind of attractive susceptibility that allows vulnerability to come not only from being ignored by society but also from being consumed and discussed in public. The *stigmata* of a Victorian woman’s celebrity can also be an attraction, or ironically charismata, especially when the lady seems embarrassed by her social status. Despite Trollope’s forgiving attitude toward female celebrity, his novel implies that such a state of social capital is undesirable, especially

⁸⁶ In “‘Alone in the Wide, Wide World’: Trollope’s *Miss Mackenzie* and the Mid-Victorian Etiquette Manual,” Andrew Mauder explains that Trollope’s educational function in this novel is to teach proper behavior (49). Trollope teaches his readers how to react appropriately to rises in economic and social capital, while he also implicitly encourages such rises to take place, at least within each class, if not between classes (68).

after marriage. For Trollope, a woman's celebrity is yet another path to a married and domestic life, but it is not a path that a woman should purposely seek, appear to enjoy, or maintain after her marriage. Victorian heroines who break any of these rules will not receive the same happy ending that Margaret found.

All the benefit Margaret Mackenzie receives from her celebrity is possible, because she does not seek to receive any benefit. Throughout this dissertation, I have examined stories in which a women's unconsciousness, or possible unconsciousness, allows them to appear innocent and modest and, thus, more attractive. Additionally, I have highlighted how slight stains on women's modesty and reputation is essential to their desirability, while suggesting that, especially during the Victorian period, this erotic taste for feminine vulnerability was seen as dangerous and, perhaps, morally wrong. Nevertheless, in twentieth- and twenty-first century popular culture, this attraction for women's imperfections, and especially for somewhat lowered social capital persists as one of the primary ways to endear a female character in audiences.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In the London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony, called “Isles of Wonder,” Britain staged for the world three stories that represent its national history and values: a national epic of progress and industrialization; a magical children’s story of a state-supported hospital that transforms into a nocturnal fantasy land; and a love story of the digital age, in which a boy succeeds in getting a girl by restoring her social connections. Through this ceremony, Britain implicitly declares that these three kinds of stories, if not solely invented by British artists, are associated with the British cultural tradition. Although Danny Boyle, the event’s artistic director, did not receive universally positive reviews, especially in America, for his staging of Britishness—complete with giant, balloon babies and many chaotically choreographed scenes—the event is, nevertheless, worth examining for its retelling of dominant British narratives. Most relevant to this dissertation is the ceremony’s third act, which shows a twenty-first century romance relying upon the same patterns that the English marriage plot novel invented in the eighteenth century. Its attitudes toward women’s social mistakes, male rescuing projects, and a couple’s relationship to the community suggest the perpetuation of the principles I have discussed throughout this dissertation.

The third act of the Opening Ceremony announces itself with circular signs that read “Frankie and June say . . . thanks Tim,” which refer to the 1971 June Whitfield and Frank Howard parody of the song “Je T’aime” and to Tim Burners-Lee, the inventor of

the World Wide Web. The romantic story takes place in our digital age of blinking, neon technology, which is symbolized by a house in the center of the stadium made of flashing screens rather than solid walls. Hundreds of young, raving British dancers surround the house and among them are our two central characters, presumably a new version of June and Frankie, who make eye contact with each other across the crowds. Soon after this initial connection is made, the mob separates the pair. Then, June makes a terrible mistake for any twenty-first century adolescent—she loses her mobile phone. As everyone knows, social capital for today's youth requires wireless technology, and so, although June dances in a large crowd of her peers, she is disconnected from them. Just as the marriage plot heroines I have discussed lose their social capital due to foolish errors, June loses her social capital and becomes vulnerable at the rave party. Luckily, Frankie finds the lost phone and returns it to her. His initiative and her gratitude enable them to become a connected pair, evidenced by their subsequent dancing and embrace. The lost phone allows Frankie the opportunity to act like a traditional marriage plot hero who rescues his beloved from danger and obscurity. Unlike those marriage plots, June's vulnerability does increase her attractions, but it does give the hero any opportunity to become attractive to her. The symbolic consummation of their marriage plot exists not only in their public kiss, which echoes the embrace that often concludes a wedding, but also in an inserted filmed clip, which shows them dancing together in the unadorned attic of the digital house. They demonstrate both their ability to create a private, loving space as well as their ability to remain connected to the vibrant culture outside of the house via cellular technology. Importantly, June still has her mobile phone that allows her to call out from the attic at anytime and is thus unlikely to share the fate of Britain's most

famous attic dweller, Bertha Mason. Just as this couple unites with each other and their community because of cellular technology, the World Wide Web unites all who use it in an international love affair.

This stage performance repeats the pattern of the marriage plot novel as the lovers meet, the heroine's social capital slips away, and the hero restores it prior to their romantic union. Furthermore, the story shows how the couple finds a space that is both intimately private and safely connected to the digital world. The choice to include this narrative as one of the three primary stories of Britishness reveals the importance of marriage plots to how Britons think of themselves and how we will continue to think of them—energetically dancing toward love, embarrassingly slipping up along the way, and carefully negotiating the balance between making love at home (which is an Englishman's private castle) while still remaining close to the surrounding community.

While the Opening Ceremony's marriage plot figures the depreciation of its heroine's social capital through the loss of her mobile phone, other popular culture marriage plots—especially in twentieth and twenty-first romantic comedies and occasionally dramas—display the heroines' social vulnerability with far more obviously erotic imagery. Many films render their heroines' attractively defenseless when they accidentally fall into water or become exposed in some other, similar way. These fallen women are not ruined for all good society, but their pride and outfits certainly take a dive. Their soaked bodies, to which their clothes unmercifully cling, reveal both a nearly naked susceptibility and their attractive forms, indicating that good manners, which requests women to put on dress and dignity, only covers their beauty, which, if exposed, would more easily attract sexual and romantic attention.

These wet T-shirt catastrophes appear in a number of American and British films. For example, in *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), David's (Cary Grant) feelings toward the hair-brained Susan Vance played by Katharine Hepburn soften after they fall in the river and then sit together in the woods waiting for their clothes to dry. In *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), Mary (Donna Reed) and George (James Stewart) fall into the pool while doing the Charleston over the high school's natatorium; this event is essential to the formation of their romantic connection, which progresses further when George sees young Mary looking womanly in a robe, which eventually slips off. Later in the film, when George Bailey sees Bedford Falls as it would have been if he had never been born, Mary is an uptight, dowdy, and unmarried librarian, who apparently never had the chance to fall carelessly into a pool or fall in love with a man.⁸⁷ The device of soaking the female lead continues even after the Golden Age of Hollywood. In *The Sound of Music* (1965), Maria's falling out of boat because of her excitement at seeing Captain Von Trapp reveals her playful energy as well as her enthusiasm for him, which quickly transforms into a passionate argument that shows her commitment is not only to him but to his children's welfare as well. If these early films only hint at the erotic excitement of having a woman adorably soaked, later films will increase the erotic potential while never shying from the slapstick humor.

Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason (2004), which is the second in a series of films that retells *Pride and Prejudice* for modern audiences, contains another example of how the mortified nineteenth-century heroine becomes the soaking wet leading actress of today. The always-mussed Bridget, who has recently been released from her lengthy

⁸⁷ Although Mary does not have a financially successful marriage, the film redefines wealth as having friends, and so Mary ends up with the "richest man in town." Importantly, Mary brings George's friends together to save him from ruin, which shows how her marriage connects her to the town.

confinement in a Thai prison, is splashed by two trucks on her way to confess her love to Mark Darcy in what is now a transparent summer dress. Her see-through frock underscores the exposure she risks through her public confession, which she makes to Darcy during a large meeting concerning British-Peruvian trade. Like so many marriage plot heroines, she suffers through both isolation and embarrassment before finding happiness. Not long after she admits her feelings to Mark, he proposes, and the two are finally engaged. Even in the twenty-first century, female humiliation and error are integral to love. As Bridget assures us: “Happiness is possible even when you’re thirty-three and have the bottom the size of two bowling balls.”⁸⁸

Most recently, in *The Decoy Bride* (2011), Lara, an American film star, plans to have a secret, paparazzi-free wedding in rural Scotland, and in order to accomplish this, she stages a false wedding between her fiancé, James, an inauthentic novelist, and a local guidebook writer, Katie, who is frustrated with the smallness of her village as well as her failures with men. The decoy wedding accidentally marries James and Katie legally, and due to various plot machinations, the newly betrothed couple spends the hours following their nuptials trapped in a castle. In order to escape their confinement, during which they heatedly argue with each other, James and Katie jump from the castle into its moat. Once James is safely on land, rather than running to find his fiancée, he turns around to save the floundering Katie; the scene ends as James lies atop Katie, whose wet dress is now torn to her panty line (*The Decoy Bride* is not a subtle film). After this rescue, which both embarrasses Katie and reveals her sexual appeal, she and James talk together very sweetly as they walk down the beach; each tells the other that they are the great “loser,”

⁸⁸ In addition to these examples of female humiliation in film, more heroines fall out of boats and off docks in American movies including *Must Love Dogs* (2005), *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2005), and *The Proposal* (2009).

making it abundantly clear they are falling in love. Luckily, Lara the celebrity decides to marry a member of the paparazzi, indicating that her romance is with fame and male attention rather than with James, who will, of course, eventually marry the obscure Scottish lass whom he saved from the frigid waters.

All these films—from the classics to contemporary comedies—imply that a woman's most embarrassing moments are also her most attractive; thus these movies implicitly encourage their female viewers to step so closely to the edge of proper behavior that they will teeter over the side, splaying their legs, gasping for air, and unclothing their bodies in such a way that they will require the care, warmth, and, perhaps, the overcoat of a male hero, who observes the titillating spectacle of her body while also fulfilling an opportunity to save her from further distress. Even when the male co-star also falls or jumps in after his beloved, these scenes show one of the ways in which female degradation precedes male attraction.

During the first two seasons of the internationally popular series *Downton Abbey*, Julian Fellowes, its writer and creator, revisits and revises the traditional marriage plot in the love story of Lady Mary Crawley and Matthew Crawley. Through their romance, which begins in 1912 and finally culminates in a marriage in 1920, Fellowes maintains the marriage plot principle that a socially blemished female gains attractiveness while he also allows that blemish to be what it never was in eighteenth- or nineteenth-century novels—consensual, premarital sex.

His series constantly emphasizes the importance of social capital for those upstairs and down, and especially for Lady Mary. The series' first episode is set in April 1912 after the sinking of the Titanic, which also sinks Mary's prospects for the future.

Downton's heir and Mary's fiancé, Patrick Crawley, is aboard the Titanic and dies during its infamous sinking. With the sinking of the Titanic, Lady Crawley's insurance for a future of wealth and privilege also sinks. When the new heir, Matthew Crawley, arrives at Downton he derides the Crawley girls prior to meeting them, assuming that they will desperately chase after him, but upon seeing the beautiful and self-assured Mary, who overhears his insult, he retracts his opinion. Later in the season, Matthew becomes increasingly sensitive to how the estate's entail brushes aside Mary's claim to her parents' wealth and status, even as it vastly enriches him; Matthew's growing attraction toward Mary coincides with his rising sympathy for her social and financial vulnerability.

While Matthew's feelings increase for the disinherited daughter, she places her future in greater peril by commencing a flirtation with a Turkish diplomat, Kemal Pamuk, who seduces the virginal Mary and then, suddenly, dies in her bed. Mary immediately knows that, if the affair becomes public, this single event could forever destroy her reputation; she proclaims to her mother that if she does not receive help moving Pamuk's body, her reputation will have a stain more long-lasting than her natural life: "If you don't [help me move the body], we'll figure in a scandal of such magnitude that it won't be forgotten until long after we're both dead. I'll be ruined, Mamma, ruined and notorious, a laughing stock, a social pariah." Later, when London gossip begins to whisper about the scandal, Mary's mother, Lady Grantham, argues that her daughter must marry before the rumor is confirmed, or "every door in London will be slammed in your face," a prophecy that is somewhat fulfilled when Mary receives few invitations during her following London season. Fortuitously, in the very next episode after Lady Grantham's bleak speech, Matthew, who is ignorant of Mary's sexual indiscretion,

proposes. The event takes place after a conversation in which Mary asserts that she is “less [fastidious] than you might think”; Matthew chooses to propose to Mary because of his attraction to her beauty, her social and financial vulnerability, and her imperfect humanity—which is evidenced in the fact that she no longer pretends to be coolly perfect. Unfortunately, Lady Grantham becomes pregnant—creating the possibility that Matthew will no longer be heir—and Mary hesitates to make the engagement public, as she wonders what her true prospects are; Matthew feels the insult of her indecision and ends the engagement. Lady Grantham has a miscarriage, and Mary ends season one with a reputation on the brink of ruin and without a protective suitor.

By the beginning of season two, the usually snobbish Lady Mary has taken on a nouveau riche newspaperman, Sir Richard Carlisle, as her beau in an attempt to put together plans for her future life. Circumstances cause Mary to tell Sir Richard about her affair with Pamuk. Sir Richard, as a prominent newspaper tycoon, can protect Mary’s reputation by buying the ruinous story, but he does not offer his protection with beneficence. As uneasy music plays in background, viewers detect that he delights in lording his new power over his fiancée, just he enjoys lording his new money over servants. When Mary begins to drag her feet about setting a wedding date, he threatens her with ruin in order to control her with fear. Despite his working-class background, Sir Richard’s behavior is very similar to that of the Victorian husbands discussed in chapter three, whose attraction to vulnerable women was evidence of their desire to have and abuse power. One scene, in particular, suggests the possibility of Mary becoming a physically and sexually abused wife as Sir Richard pins her against a wall, threatening and aggressively kissing her: “If you think you can jilt me or in some way put me aside, I

tell you now you have given me the power to destroy you and don't think I won't use it . . . don't ever cross me, never [he kisses her violently], absolutely never." As the once high-and-mighty Lady Mary makes one, frightened little nod to this speech, we see how little power she now has; her ruined character has given her few other options than to sink to an engagement with a man who is her social inferior, enjoys her powerlessness, and continually tries to control her movements by, for example, he determining her place at the dinner table and attempting to spy upon her. Tellingly, during a game of charades, Mary acts out the title to *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by shaking her head and falling repeatedly, hinting both at her possibly abusive marriage with Sir Richard (just as Helen Graham's marriage to Arthur was tormenting) as well as her own fallen state. Little does she know that the secret to her happiness is letting Matthew know that she has fallen.

Despite his engagement to Lavinia Swire, Matthew's affection increases toward Mary because of her sad situation. Mary is newly vulnerable. Not only does Mary's grandmother reveal that Mary's heart still belongs to Matthew, which shows an unflattering indignity to which Mary would never admit ("Would I ever admit to loving a man who prefers someone over me," asks Mary on one occasion), but more importantly, she reveals the abuse she suffers under Sir Richard's control, which also attracts Matthew's care. After Lavinia's death, Mary explains to Matthew why she must marry Sir Richard; believing that in telling him the truth he will "despise" her, she nevertheless chooses to recount her encounter with Pamuk: "I'm Tess of the D'Urbervilles to your Angel Clare. I have fallen. I am impure." Matthew quickly interrupts Mary's Victorian understanding of her ruin and its consequence as he angrily says, "Don't joke. Don't make it little, not when I'm trying to understand," and thus, Matthew brushes aside two

centuries of sexual morality as a distraction that is nothing more than a “joke” that belittles his genuine attempt to “understand.” Importantly, Matthew makes his reaction to Mary’s news not a matter of forgiveness, but instead a matter of understanding. He encourages her to break with Sir Richard, withstand the “storm” of scandal, and assures her that “I never would, I never could despise you.” Nevertheless, it seems significant that Mary believes and feels herself to be guilty and deserving of misery; it shows that this selfish young woman has a sense of justice.

Matthew shows his ultimate support of the Mary by proposing to her again after the Servants’ Ball. The two dance outside in front of the house as the black night sky and Mary’s dark hair are spotted with falling, white snowflakes. While Mary says knowingly, “My story is still out there and always will be,” Matthew assures her that he has not “forgiven,” her “because I don’t believe you need my forgiveness” and then proposes to the snowflake-spotted girl, who he picks up and embraces before the screen goes dark. Certainly Matthew rescues Mary, saving her from being unprotected as the story spreads, but he does so without taking the moral high ground. Through Matthew, Fellowes—like Hardy and others—critiques Victorian moral standards and implies that condemnation of a woman’s sexual indiscretion is no longer an acceptable response from a good and truly loving man.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ In reacting this way, Matthew also mirrors Lord Grantham’s own reaction and thereby shows his appropriateness to follow in his older cousin’s footsteps as the head of family that chooses not to exclude their members—not for sexual indiscretion and not even for marrying a chauffeur as the youngest daughter does—but will usually stand in a protective circle around all the trusted members of its household, family and servant alike. Just as the series shows the family support the valet, John Bates, who is falsely charged with murder, so too does the family bolster Mary, who, like Bates, does not deserve the punishment of an actual or social death. Echoing the unnecessarily guilt-ridden consciences of Catherine Morland and Fanny Price, Mary and Bates both indicate their moral worth by feeling guiltier than their friends or readers would believe is necessary.

Fellowes owes his erotic code to the marriage plot novel that promoted the attractiveness of the socially depreciated female, and he revises this tradition (and certainly, he is not the first to do so) by expanding what may only freckle a heroine's character and by making her mistakes into events that are simply understood rather than forgiven. Through these alterations to the traditional marriage plot, Fellowes announces that a new era began in 1920 during which social connections still mattered but far more risqué behavior might be accepted, even among unmarried, young women who traditionally lived under the most stringent rules. He implies that no woman, at least as long as she feels herself to be guilty, need be treated as too guilty for a loving marriage to a wealthy man.

Throughout this dissertation, I have discussed the relationship between social capital and desire, and I hope in this conclusion to have shown how American and especially British culture continues to depict how feminine social vulnerability encourages male affections. Even as there are contemporary attempts to make this erotic principle less damaging to women, many of these popular stories continue to demonstrate for their female viewers that humiliation, guilty feelings, and often social isolation are prerequisites for love. Nevertheless, these stories imply that a woman is loved not in spite of her flaws but because of them.

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