

THE FIGURE OF THE FEMALE TRAVELLER IN VICTORIAN FICTION

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
AddRan College of Liberal Arts
Texas Christian University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May, 2016

Acknowledgements

I owe a significant debt of gratitude to the many people who supported the writing of this dissertation. This support came in many forms, including financial, administrative, academic, and emotional. Without this support, this project would not have been possible.

Thank you to my colleagues at Academic Programs International, who have provided meaningful support and encouragement during the writing of this dissertation.

Thank you to the TCU English department and Graduate Studies administrative staff, especially Merry Roberts, Lynn Herrera, and Sharon McAteer, for invaluable support, problem solving, and friendship during my time at TCU.

Thank you to the VICTORIA list-serv, the TCU Mary Coats Burnett Library reference librarians and interlibrary loan staff, the TCU English department faculty, TCU Women and Gender Studies faculty, and my graduate student colleagues for the ongoing support of my research and writing. It has been wonderful to be a part of this community.

Thank you to the TCU English department and Graduate Studies for providing the teaching and administrative fellowships that have funded my graduate education and provided me with valuable professional experience.

Thank you to Dr. Bonnie Melhart for providing the opportunity to assist in establishing the Global Outlooks on Education Institute, and to Dr. Tracy Rundstrom Williams and Dr. Jane Kucko for providing the opportunity to teach for the Center for International Studies. These experiences indirectly supported my work on this dissertation about traveling women and led directly to my current position at Academic Programs International.

Above all, I wish to thank my incredible dissertation committee. My co-chairs Dr. Linda Hughes and Dr. Karen Steele have guided this project from a fledgling idea to its completed state. Without their steadfast support in all things, I could not have succeeded in completing this project. Thank you to my readers Mona Narain, and Sarah Robbins for their feedback, guidance, mentorship, and commitment to supporting my project. They have my deepest admiration, respect, and appreciation. It has been a gift to work with them.

Finally, thank you to my friends and family, especially Rachel Gallo, Nora McNeely-Bagley, Britt and Krista McNeely, Fairy Taylor, Jeremy Bagley, Kitty Ledbetter, Jennifer Small, April Patrick, and Krissy Sutphen, who have given me so much kindness, love, and support in this long process.

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Fairy Louise Taylor.

While many people supported me in completing this project, any remaining faults or shortcomings are solely the result of my errors.

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Introduction: The Figure of the Female Traveller in Victorian Fiction

Given the general fixation of Victorian-era literature on “angel in the house” gender ideology, which places women within the static space of home and family, one might assume that a study of the figure of the Victorian female traveller would yield few subjects. Yet female travellers are, in fact, everywhere in Victorian fiction. When I considered the number of female travellers featured in Victorian fiction, I could not help but wonder why they have remained under examined as a subject in literary criticism, even as increased attention has been paid to non-fiction travel writing by women. In this project, I attempt to correct the omission of the fictional female traveller from the study of travel literature. Consider the forebears of the journey trope in literature, who include such characters as Odysseus in Homer’s *The Odyssey* (750-650 B.C.), Christian in John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), and Lemuel Gulliver in Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726). These texts, counted among the most significant in literary history, shape the conventional journey trope. It is challenging to reconcile a female traveller with highly masculine ideas of mobility, especially in Victorian-era literature where gender roles are relatively rigid. I find that journeys undertaken by female characters tend to be less visible than the more masculine epic journeys, but women’s travel in literature is profound both in terms of a character’s identity and the concerns of the text. The figure of the travelling woman in Victorian fiction is a signal that the text is doing important ideological work with regard to gender and mobility. The travelling woman disrupts two conventional tropes, masculine mobility and female stasis, and calls for a re-evaluation of the way we see and privilege mobility in the Victorian novel.

In this study, the parameter I use to define the female traveller is that she must be a female protagonist or secondary character who undertakes a significant journey that holds importance in the overall narrative, where she steps out of her element in class, geography, or culture. This defining characteristic brings classed, English ideas of femininity into sharp focus as they are juxtaposed with encounters of cultural others. I position the figure of the female traveller as a cultural construction produced by significant cultural changes in the nineteenth century. This study departs from other studies of travelling women because it focuses on fiction and, more specifically, the Victorian novel. I do not seek to theorize further about women's actual travel accounts, but to work toward a theory of the representation and function of the figure of the woman traveller in fiction, which I find overlaps significantly with theories of self-representation in women's travel writing. At the same time, this project draws connections between the field of women's travel writing theorizing representation in literature in the vein of Karen Lawrence and Jan Borm's acknowledgement that travel literature is a hybrid genre that comprises many forms. My study of cultural representations of female travellers is situated within the body of scholarship on travel literature, but also builds on this body, demonstrating the ways in which ideas about gender and mobility bridge the gap between travel writing and fictional accounts of travel.

As Susan Bassnett identifies, over the past thirty years, feminist scholars have undertaken the valuable project of recovering the writings of women travellers in order to place them within and against a genre with a decidedly masculinist history and tradition (Bassnett 226). This work is difficult, writes Sara Mills in *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, as women's travel texts can be

challenging theoretically (6). In feminist criticism of travel writing, Mills's work represents an important departure from the pre-1990s "intrepid women" studies that feminist scholars and presses such as Virago have produced in her assertion that gender is but one facet of identity. In broaching the issue of gender in travel writing, Mills voices skepticism of feminist interpretations of women's travel narratives, arguing that texts may appear gendered, but they could just as easily be read through other lenses such as domesticity or racism, which problematizes reading them as proto-feminist. Instead of understanding women's texts to reflect gender difference, in *Discourses of Difference* Mills argues that "women's travel texts are produced and received within a context which shares similarities with the discursive construction and reception of male texts while at the same time, because of the discursive frameworks which exert pressure on female writers, there may be negotiations in women's texts which result in differences that seem due to gender" (6). One example Mills provides of the problem of gender is in the consideration of truth and falsehood; while women's texts are no more likely to be fictionalized than men's texts, women's texts are more likely than men's to be questioned as to their veracity (30). This suggests that "gendered" differences spring not from production but from reception and interpretation of texts produced by women versus men. Mills also identifies several misconceptions about women travel writers that scholarship has worked against. These include the misconception that women travel writers are rare or exceptional, that they traveled for escape from their lives in England, and that their texts are autobiographical (Mills 36). Women's texts are not produced from these qualities, Mills says, but they are assigned these attributes upon reception.

In a similar vein, Zoë Kinsley's *Women Writing the Home Tour* also argues that gender is a factor that influences how women travel and write, but it is not the only influential factor; class, reason for travelling, travel companions, home environment, cultural/geographic location of the journey are also highly influential in narratives of travel. Like Mills, Kinsley advocates for a more complex model of gender and the way it interacts with other factors in the travel narrative, as she shows female travellers can be more aligned with males than with other females in some contexts (5). For example, the imperial gaze is overtly masculine, yet women writers at times adopt the language and rhetoric characteristic of the "Monarch of all I survey" attitude described by Mary Louise Pratt. And yet, though she is careful not to essentialize women and cites the broad diversity in women's travel writing, Bassnett finds a clear assertion of femininity in women's travel writing through various strategies of self-representation (225). Findings in studies by these and other scholars overlap and diverge at many points, supporting wholly the complex nature of the travelling woman and her literary representation. The theoretical challenges of these texts, which are marked by fissures resulting from the complexity of nineteenth-century gender ideology with regard to travel, also extend to another type of travel text: fictive travel accounts.

Though in some ways very different types of texts, fictive and actual travel accounts share much in common that indicates their production is shaped concurrently by cultural discourses of gender and mobility. The shared formative influences are so significant, in fact, that the borders between the actual and imagined – even within a single text - are often indistinct. For example, Brontë's *Villette* recounts Lucy Snowe's journey to the fictional town of Villette, Belgium, where she undertakes work as a teacher in a Madame Beck's school for girls. When *Villette* is considered in conjunction with Elizabeth Gaskell's

biography of Brontë in which Gaskell recalls the time Brontë spent teaching in a Brussels *pensionnat* very like Madame Beck's Villette school, the line between the autobiographical elements of Brontë's journey and Lucy Snowe's fictional one blurs.

In Glen Hooper and Tim Youngs's *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, Jan Borm discusses the problem of categorization presented by texts like *Villette* and proposes that travel writing is not a distinct genre, but comprises texts fictional and non-fictional that take travel as their central theme (4). Borm cites the impossibility of identifying boundaries between forms as a justification for moving toward an idea of "travel literature" that includes fictive accounts of travel, just as the literary is at work in travel writing (13). Karen Lawrence's *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition* demonstrates how fictive travel accounts can be meaningfully considered within the same interpretive framework used for understanding actual travel accounts by considering Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* and *Orlando* alongside Mary Kingsley and Mary Wollstonecraft's actual travel narratives. Lawrence's study is doubly important, as it shows the falsity of conflating the figure of the woman with stasis, arguing women are not "Penelopes" passively waiting at home as Odysseus voyages. In analyzing travel across genres, Lawrence also sets the precedent for Borm's discussion of travel literature as a hybrid genre with indistinct boundaries. James Buzard continues in this vein in *The Beaten Track*, which examines travel and tourism's influence on culture as seen through literature such as E.M. Forster's *A Room With a View*.

Despite compelling models like Lawrence's *Penelope Voyages* and Buzard's *The Beaten Track*, fictive travel accounts are usually overlooked in critical scholarship though they appear seemingly everywhere on the literary landscape. In "Anywhere out of this

World: On Why All Writing Is Travel Writing,” fiction writer Nicholas Delbanco recognizes the prevalence of the sub-plot of travel in fiction, arguing “in the Western tradition of literature, the common denominator of *The Odyssey*, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, *The Canterbury Tales*, and *The Divine Comedy* – not to mention *Moby Dick*, *Don Quixote*, or *Faust*—is near constant motion” (91). His masculinist examples aside, Delbanco persuasively reveals the profound significance of travel in enduring literature and raises deeper questions about the literary roles and representations of the traveller.

To that end, I offer this dissertation project that takes as its focus the representation of female travellers in Victorian literature. One aspect of this project’s exigency and originality is its focus on the woman traveller; though studies of the journey motif abound in literary criticism, the Western cultural memory of the traveller in fiction is selectively masculine, much like Delbanco’s. My project counters the assumption that all great literary travellers have been men, and that the nineteenth century was a formative time for the figure of the female traveller. Travel during the nineteenth century was revolutionized by technological advancements such as the steam locomotive, which allowed travellers to cover more distance more quickly than before. And as Zoë Kinsley posits, practical, logistical considerations such as road improvements beginning in the eighteenth century eased travel conditions, which began to have a fundamental effect on travel as a leisure pursuit of the population (5). England’s empire was also expanding all over the globe at a fast rate of speed during the nineteenth century, changing perspectives about British accessibility and ownership over far-flung locales. Considering these rapidly changing sociocultural conditions, it is not at all surprising that the fiction of the period often represents the act of travel, and often represents the travelling woman.

The travelling woman in the nineteenth century is a complex figure, constructed concurrently by discourses of age, class, ethnicity, and gender and its corollary ideas of stasis and mobility and the literary production of travel in fiction and other genres. Her representation in literary forms such as novels and periodicals that met with mass appeal in the nineteenth century is, to borrow Mary Poovey's iconic phrase, unevenly developed, reflecting social issues at the fore during the time of her construction. For example, Monica Anderson reproduces this poem published in *Punch* in 1893:

A Lady explorer? A traveler in skirts?
The notion's just a trifle too seraphic:
Let them stay and mind the babies, or hem our ragged shirts;
But they mustn't, can't, and shan't be geographic. (20)¹

The poem was published at the time women explorers such as Mary Kingsley were granted admission to the Royal Geographic Society alongside their male peers. The poem's representation of the lady traveller as a ridiculous figure who should be at home minding babies, hemming shirts, and attending to other rigidly domestic responsibilities seems archaic and more characteristic of mid-century attitudes toward women than those one would expect to find at the late date of 1893. This particular representation emerges, not coincidentally, alongside the rise of the New Woman feminist ideals of the late nineteenth century. The poem's overt misogyny is reactionary and signals the perceived threat posed by the New Woman: her expanding social and geographic territory was widening significantly, perceived by some as an encroachment on previously masculine turf. The poem's reference to babies

¹ *Punch* was known for its ironic humor, so this poem's placement invites a satirical reading. Its misogynistic undertones are obvious even when the magazine's ironic bent is acknowledged.

and ragged shirts (both needing womanly attention) seems in direct opposition to the emancipatory work of late nineteenth-century social debates about the “woman question.”

The ridiculing, anxious tone of this little poem - four short, culturally loaded lines - that exhorts women to stay at home with their work suggests anxiety about the circulation of women within the empire Britain built. Unsurprisingly, the figure of the female traveller is similarly fraught in fiction as well, with similar anxieties expressed indirectly through the narrative. The figure of the female traveller in Victorian fiction is an embodiment of complex Victorian cultural negotiations with ideas of gender and mobility. These anxieties include cultural and social negotiations surrounding and enacted upon the figure of the woman and the expansion of women’s rights (legal and social) with regard to morality, work, sexual pleasure, participation in imperial politics, autonomy, and the movement toward modernity throughout the nineteenth century. These anxieties are inscribed upon the figure of the female traveller vis a vis the act of travel as well as by her own acts of conformity and resistance to convention. My use of “figure” and its implications to identify and name my object of study is intentional; in the politics of representing gender and travel in fiction, the female body is the touchstone to which all other facets of culturally constructed identity connect. In addition, the figure of the female traveller functions as a meaningful trope that can be traced across texts. In this dissertation, I extend the critical work undertaken in the field of women’s travel writing to theorize the function of the socially constructed figure of the woman traveller as she is represented in canonical literary fiction.

The figure of the female traveller requires deeper examination because she is a figure that embodies many of the cultural anxieties regarding a woman’s social role during the Victorian years. Domestic ideology, that gendered stronghold of the Victorian years,

discursively conflates the female body with home, shelter, and stasis. The woman traveller jarringly disrupts this discourse in her intentional absence from that fixed place of home. Additionally, her travel is motivated by some self interest, whether it be work, pleasure, or some other pursuit outside the domestic realm. Therefore, it is my assertion that the figure of a woman traveller is an effective focal point through which to trace British cultural anxieties about gender and mobility through the nineteenth century.

The various rhetorical strategies of nineteenth-century female travel writers, such as discussions of clothing and use of self-deprecation and humor, have been rigorously documented by critics such as Monica Anderson, Susan Bassnett, Zoë Kinsley, Karen Lawrence, Sara Mills, and Mary Louise Pratt, whose *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* and its concept of contact zones has provided some of the most oft-employed strategies for understanding the travel writing of women. In *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt coins the term “contact zone” to describe social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relationships of domination and subordination (7). These spaces are physical and geographical as well as discursive, and are especially implicated by gendered ideas of subordination and dominance in women’s travel writing. And though she is careful not to essentialize women and cites the broad diversity in women’s travel writing, Susan Bassnett also finds a clear assertion of femininity in women’s travel writing through various strategies of self-representation (225).

Extant scholarship clearly demonstrates the ways women travellers grappled with and negotiated nineteenth-century ideas of mobility through their writing. Some women, like Lady Harriot Dufferin, worked in their writing to show they remained well within the confined restraints of gender boundaries as they created highly Anglicized spaces abroad

(Agnew 95), while other travellers such as Lady Mary Montagu and Isabella Bird questioned and challenged those restraints as they crafted an identity as travellers that emphasized stepping out of the Anglicized zones and seeking cross-cultural encounters. Feminist critics of travel writing, especially of the nineteenth century, have repeatedly returned to the cultural anxieties around female travellers, but they have largely ignored how pervasively she appears in the literary form that circulated most widely: the novel. Even Buzard, whose work with literature and travel asks some of the same questions I pose in this dissertation, focuses on the function of travel and tourism in culture rather than the figure of the traveller itself. The female traveller in fiction is a puzzling omission from the body of scholarship on travel writing; after all, the traveller is the agent of the act of travel, and that act like all others is a complex negotiation of the traveller's subjectivity with the dominant discourses within his or her own culture. Especially considering the universal acknowledgement of the difficulty in defining travel writing within a distinct generic tradition and the pervasiveness of the journey motif in works of fiction, the figure of the traveller is a necessary focal point. A study of the literary traveller has the potential to bridge an existing gap between theories of travel writing and theories of fiction in a way that acknowledges the fluidity of literary genre while deepening understanding of the cultural ideology that shapes the discourse of travel that flows through literatures of travel.

In advancing an argument that claims the figure of the female traveller in Victorian fiction is the embodiment of complex cultural negotiations with Victorian ideas of gender and mobility through the act of travel, my dissertation project makes several contributions to both the field of travel writing and Victorian studies. Firstly, it challenges the existing critical conversation on the genre question in travel literature, identifying fictional texts that

foreground the act of travel and the traveller and arguing for their inclusion in studies of travel. To the field of travel writing, my project will suggest new texts for analysis and prove the interpretive strategies that have been applied to non-fiction texts are equally valuable in reading the act of travel in fiction because the structures of these texts are created from the same discourses of movement and mobility. When novels about travel are considered alongside travel narratives, the cultural forces that produced the nineteenth-century literary ideas of travel and the traveller become clear. And to the field of nineteenth-century studies, my project offers a new way to understand canonical texts and well-known characters through engagement with the cultural politics of mobility and the act – rather than metaphor – of travel. This has significant potential for the interpretive possibilities of texts such as *Vanity Fair* and characters such as Becky Sharp, which deal significantly with global movement. This project follows the recent global turn in nineteenth-century studies, moving beyond a transatlantic focus on Britain and North America to consider transnational concerns through novels that represent geographies such as India, France, Germany, Italy, and Belgium, all of which inscribe the figure of the traveller in different and meaningful ways.

In the introduction to the essays collected in *Not So Innocent Abroad: The Politics of Travel and Travel Writing*, Ulrike Brisson asserts that travel is not only an act but also a “space of political agency” (1). American Public Television personality Rick Steves concurs, as he writes about the political implications of travel in his book *Travel as a Political Act* (2009). Political and cultural work regarding the complexities of Victorian gender construction is, I argue, made explicit via the figure of the female traveller. This dissertation builds upon valuable theories asserted by theorists of travel writing. Karen Lawrence’s *Penelope Voyages* and James Buzard’s *The Beaten Track* have set the precedent that

authorizes reading fictive travel accounts within the interpretive frameworks of travel literature. Their scholarship primarily theorizes the literary motif of travel or the journey. Monica Anderson's *Women and the Politics of Travel 1870-1914* also significantly informs my study. Though Anderson focuses on travel accounts in the monograph, her theories about gendered travel discourse, agency, and imperialism easily extend to and support the reading of travel fiction that places female travellers in prominent positions. To this line of inquiry, my project makes visible the structures shared by both fictive and non-fiction travel narratives. I also approach representations of travel from a cultural materialist perspective. That is, I will seek to demonstrate how the dominant discourses or representations of the woman traveller are produced by the cultural institution of canonical literature. While gender's influence on acts of travel will remain at the forefront of my study, gender cannot be considered in isolation of other factors that concurrently construct the figure of the woman traveller. In my project, some of these importantly include age, class, motive for travel, English ethnicity, and religious or moral conviction.

In Chapter One, "It is Only English Girls Who Can Thus Be Trusted to Travel Alone: Class, Travel and Work in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*," I examine *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë's 1853 novel in which protagonist Lucy Snowe travels in search of work, self-sustenance, and independence. I read Lucy as a radical precursor to the "New Woman" of the late nineteenth century, and the act of travel as an important avenue to Lucy's independence and emancipation from mid-century gender ideology. In this chapter, Belgium figures prominently as a place that, unlike early nineteenth-century England, offers emancipation from the highly nationalistic English domestic ideal and allows Lucy an expanded concept of professional and personal mobility due in no small part to the influence of French language

and culture in Belgium. By transplanting Lucy to Belgium, a place where she flourishes personally and professionally, Brontë articulates resistance to dominant discourses of a woman's place at home but also to the Victorian stereotypes of the "spinster abroad" and the "mehsahib" ascribed to women travellers. According to Janice Schroeder, these two stereotypes or conventional categories of identity for women conditioned or fixed women's textual and tourist gazes on others in certain ways, and dominate descriptions of European women travellers' experiences (118). Brontë's rejection of these stereotypes creates in Lucy Snowe the representation of the modern female traveller on which later fictive travel accounts draw.

Chapter Two, "Mapping Morality: Mobility, Marriage, and Motherhood in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*," maps ideas of morality and mobility through the socially and geographically mobile character of Becky Sharp in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848). Through the figure of Becky Sharp, I explore the conflation of morality and stasis inherent in domestic ideology. Becky is an unconventional female character in Victorian literature, but her travels to Belgium, Paris, and Germany and her general rootlessness situate her alongside another more conventional character type in Victorian literature: the fallen woman. In this chapter, I support my reading of the moral implications of Becky Sharp's mobility by connecting her to Tess Durbeyfield in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), Hetty Sorrel in George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859), and Ruth Hilton in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853). I argue that Thackeray builds upon this trope of the fallen woman as he foregrounds and problematizes the link of mobility, marriage, and maternity to morality in his treatment of the female traveller. Becky Sharp's rambling travel becomes a signal of her indeterminacy and instability as a moral character.

As her mobility increases, the text raises more questions about her morality without providing any clear answers about Sharp's character and, more broadly, the indeterminacy of morality in *Vanity Fair*.

Chapter Three, "The (Dis)Pleasures of Travel: Art, Italy, and Feeling in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*," explores the idea of pleasure in travel through the disappointed figure of Dorothea Brooke Casaubon, protagonist of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72). Though honeymoon travel is meant to be pleasure-based, Dorothea spends her wedding journey to Rome in desperate sadness. Dorothea's disappointed expectation of pleasure in her honeymoon and marriage seems to signal a discomfort with the idea of a woman experiencing pleasure abroad. That this denial of pleasure for Dorothea takes place in Italy, a place associated with sensuality, doubly suggests that the woman traveller's sexuality should be confined to the domestic sphere of home. In this chapter, I argue that the act of travel that occasions Dorothea's unhappy honeymoon journey is central to her character's shift from a cerebral mode of experiencing the world to one that values feeling. This chapter also demonstrates profound effect of travel upon a person. Although a honeymoon is a conventional motive for travel for a Victorian woman such as Dorothea, its effect on her is transformative, which is one reason why journeys undertaken by women in fiction should not be disregarded.

Chapter four, "Identity and the Girl Traveller: Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*" examines the implications of age on mobility. As Alice's journey demonstrates, age and agency in Victorian literature share a complex and unexpected link. Like the travelling woman, the travelling girl is a signal of important ideological work in a text. In this chapter, I use Alice to theorize about the figure of the travelling girl as an

important and underappreciated dimension of the travelling woman. I argue that Alice's travel is a key and under examined element in the text, which is often studied as a work of children's literature but rarely as a travel text. Alice's travel narrative challenges the conventional attribution of agency to adulthood and suggests that mobility is symbolically significant in terms of identity for children who travel in literature. In this chapter's focus on Alice's young age and the trajectory of her journey, I ask for a re-evaluation of the idea of privilege in travel as well as a reassessment of childhood agency in terms of mobility.

The epilogue, "The Death of the Victorian Woman Traveller" looks briefly at the figure of Rachel Vinrace in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915) as a bookend novel depicting the Victorian idea of the travelling woman and the act of travel. *The Voyage Out* is unique in that it narrates the story of a woman traveller who dies before reaching her destination. In my reading of the novel, Rachel represents the figure of the Victorian woman traveller whose death is a signal that the cultural conditions producing (and inhibiting) the woman traveller no longer exist, and in the face of modernism, therefore neither does the figure of the Victorian woman traveller.

In each of the diverse texts I examine in this dissertation, the traveller's geographic mobility functions importantly to create a space where ideas of identity can be interrogated. It is significant that in each case the female traveller is transported away from England as "home," where cultural constructions of gender and mobility can be considered in a different context. The act of travel in fiction provides important opportunities for cultural encounters that are articulated through the characters' internal monologues and more overt commentaries on their experiences. These articulations provide meaningful insight into

gender, mobility, and the Victorian social and cultural construction of the female traveller in Victorian fiction.

Chapter One: 'It is Only English Girls Who Can Thus Be Trusted to Travel Alone:' Class, Travel and Work in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*

Before Lucy Snowe embarks on her solo journey to Labassecour in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), she reports on a scene overheard at her temporary Bretton home that sheds some light on the highly gendered nature of Victorian representations of travellers in fiction:

“Couldn't I pack my box and go with you, papa?” [Polly] whispered earnestly.

He shook his head.

“Should I be a trouble to you?”

“Yes, Polly.”

“Because I am little?”

“Because you are little and tender. It is only great, strong people who should travel. But don't look sad, my little girl; it breaks my heart. Papa will soon come back to his Polly.”(86)

Little Polly, too young and too tender – too female – to travel, awaits her beloved Papa as Penelope awaited Ulysses, embodying the prevailing literary trope that conflates women with stasis and men with mobility, movement, and pursuit (Lawrence 1).² Unlike little Polly who remains behind to wait for Papa, however, in *Villette* Lucy Snowe disrupts the static trope of the waiting woman as she proves to be an unconventionally and purposefully mobile character travelling alone to the fictional village of Villette in pursuit of work and

² In *Penelope Voyages*, Karen Lawrence challenges Roland Barthes's idea from *A Lover's Discourse* that the discourse of absence is carried on by woman. As shown in her text and in this chapter, the act of travel by women represents a radical disruption of the gendered discourse of travel.

independence. In this chapter, I argue that class and gender norms of travel, highly influenced in the novel by Victorian travel discourse, are challenged and, in some instances suspended, when the motive is the pursuit of work. Furthermore, the pursuit of work through travel confers upon single women a level of agency and mobility not afforded to their married, middle-class, and more materially privileged counterparts. That is, while Lucy Snowe faces significant challenges in her travels to Labassecour, her mobility is enabled by her liminal class status as a single woman living in genteel poverty.

Jane Eyre, of course, is likely the first of Brontë's women to come to mind when her fiction is framed in terms of travel and work. Jane does, after all, travel to Thornfield to take up employment as Adela's governess and is in almost constant motion through the course of the novel. I pass over *Jane Eyre* in this study based on my parameters for focusing on the figure of the female traveller: Jane never foregrounds the act of travel in her narrative, making it clear she does not conceive of or fashion herself as a traveller. For Jane, the destination, or the arrival at a fixed point, is foregrounded through the plot. In Jane's case, this purpose is Rochester and the resolution of the conventional marriage plot in a type of homecoming. For Lucy, however, there is no fixed point, and no homecoming, her primary purpose being the active pursuit of independence through work.

Lucy Snowe has not yet been fully considered within the context of her travel and work, a focus that brings to the fore an additional level of complexity in a novel already regarded as complex for its narration and nascent feminist impulse. *Jane Eyre* seems to remain the favorite choice for modern readers and filmmakers, who embrace the iconic governess as a proto-feminist character evincing strength and will perceived to be uncommon

to the Victorian heroine.³ In *Villette*, however, Brontë creates a heroine whose identity is deeply rooted in her work. Throughout the text, Lucy's work—in the sick room, the nursery, the classroom, and then, finally, her own school—is highly visible. These moments are of great literary significance, for they depart from the conventionally hidden nature of women's work in the Victorian novel. As Helena Michie notes in *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies*, although Jane's identity is significantly marked by her role as a governess, only once in the text do we see Jane teach Adela a lesson (36).

Contemporary reviewers of *Villette* (possibly because of the penumbra cast by the popularity of *Jane Eyre*) did not immediately embrace the character of Lucy Snowe, and seemed unsure of how to place her as a heroine. The *Athenaeum's* review, for example, is balanced but ultimately lukewarm: "The tale is merely one of the affections [...] it may be found in some places tedious, in some of its incidences trivial—but it is remarkable as a picture of manners."⁴ Amidst the tedium and triviality of the novel, the reviewer finds a bright spot: "A burning heart glows throughout [the novel], and one brilliantly distinct character keeps it alive" (186). The "brilliantly distinct character" the reviewer identifies is not protagonist and heroine Lucy Snowe but little Polly Home, a secondary character present only at the beginning and ending of the novel. The reviewer rhapsodizes over the virtues of the precocious, doll-like Polly, expressing a wish that Brontë would have "[traced] the

³ Though *Villette's* popularity was considerably bolstered for a time by Kate Millett's second-wave feminist analysis of the novel in *Sexual Politics* (1968). Contemporary readers might be again gravitating toward the text, as evidenced by a 2011 blog post on *The Hairpin*, dedicated to women's culture and interests, in which author Carrie Wilner proclaims *Villette* "the best book," meaning better than *Jane Eyre*. Much of Wilner's assessment of the two texts relies on the character of Lucy Snowe and professional pursuit, a point of Lucy's identity with which modern readers—mostly women—can identify and champion.

⁴ According to the online "*Athenaeum* Index of Reviews and Reviewers: 1830-1870," this review of *Villette* was written by Henry Fothergill Chorley.

girlhood, courtship, and matrimony of such a curious, elvish mite” (186). The reviewer does not cloak his disappointment that Lucy assumes the central role in the middle of the first volume, writing, “From this point, we are again invited to follow the sufferings and struggles of a solitary woman,—to listen to the confessions of a heart famishing for excitement and sympathy—at last finding Love, not “among the rocks,” but in the midst of storm and contradiction.” Here the reviewer refers to Lucy’s eventual relationship with the mercurial M. Paul, with which Brontë equivocally ends the novel (186). At the root of the reviewer’s distaste for Lucy Snowe, though, is her travel away from England, and he cites a concern that Brontë is providing a dangerous example for readers: “There are other ways for a woman of squaring accounts with trial than that of rushing around the world when the homeland becomes wearisome—of taking midnight rambles through a city when the sense of agony drives off sleep...” (187). Given the reviewer’s “solitary woman” comment and preference for the character of Polly Home, the *Athenaeum* reviewer seems to be responding most strongly to the influence of travel on Lucy’s unconventional character, which challenges a number of norms I explain later in this chapter.

Some Victorian critics of Brontë (then still known by her pseudonym Currer Bell) did recognize *Villette* as the better of the two works despite some plot and narrative oddities. For example, George Eliot wrote of her encounter with *Villette*, “I am only just returned to a sense of the real world about me, for I have been reading *Villette*, a still more wonderful book than *Jane Eyre*. There is something almost preternatural in its power” (qtd. in Hughes 711). Eliot was likely responding to Brontë’s use of the Gothic as well as the unconventional

character of Lucy Snowe and the intense narrative technique Brontë employs in the novel.⁵ As Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz explains, the narrative technique in *Villette* has been criticized as unreliable and voyeuristic, though Rabinowitz argues that in giving Lucy the power to develop her own mode of discourse, Brontë escapes the “dictated conventions of the realistic form,” rejecting maxims of behavior and developing a sense of female power through the act of narration (Rabinowitz 245). These elements, particularly Lucy Snowe’s narrative voice, contribute to a novel that is unusual and certainly less conventional than *Jane Eyre*. One can only envision the conversations Eliot must have had with her beloved G. H. Lewes, who describes *Villette* as a work of “astonishing power and passion” invested in truth and contempt for conventions, rating *Villette* among those books produced by a free-thinking mind (Lewes 490).

Many critics, though, seem fixated to the point of distraction on the figure of Polly (Paulina) Home, whose presence frames Lucy’s narrative and troubles the idea of home. In the vein of the *Athenaeum*’s review, the *Examiner* writes, “This elfin child is one of the quaintest and most delicate creations we have met with since the ever to be lamented death of Paul Dombey” (84). This keen interest in Polly may have resulted from the fact that although an unusually articulate child, she is the more conventionally feminine of the two, embodying restrained female domesticity that in character and in name opposes Lucy’s self-directed mobility abroad. Therefore, she is more culturally familiar to the reader. The static figure of Polly Home presented alongside the unconventionally mobile Lucy Snowe raises the question of how profoundly mobility in literature is mitigated by gender and class, facets of

⁵ *Villette*’s influence on Eliot appears again in her writings when, upon leaving England with George Henry Lewes, she writes in her journal that she is taking off for “La Bassecour” (qtd. in Lawrence 25).

identity that are further complicated by Victorian ideals of domesticity and work. To this end, in this chapter I examine the interconnectedness of travel and work for women in the Victorian years and the significant ways they emerge through the figure of Lucy Snowe in *Villette*. Implicit in the pursuit of work, of course, is the question of Lucy's class, which confers upon her a liminal, or fluid, status that changes the rules of engagement for her with regard to travel. The first section focuses on Lucy's most explicit descriptions of her acts of travel and their significant overlap with Victorian travel discourse. Brontë's reliance on conventional travel discourse to shape Lucy's character as a traveller throughout the text enables a reading of *Villette* as a literature of travel, in which Brontë deftly negotiates Victorian travel discourse through the figure of Lucy Snowe. The second section discusses Belgium, the location of Labassecour and the imaginary city of Villette. In the text Belgium figures prominently as not just a destination but as a space that enables Lucy to negotiate the complexity of a British feminine identity abroad in Europe. And finally, the conclusion expounds on the figure of the travelling woman in the Victorian novel in terms of work, considering both what the act of travel enables and what it hinders in terms of the traveller claiming an identity that includes English womanhood.

Helena Michie discusses the moral component of "Angel in the house" ideology in *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies*, explaining, "The angel who left her house was, on some metaphorical level, seen by the more conservative elements of Victorian culture as a streetwalker" (Michie 31). That the pursuit of work most often takes place outside of England is a compelling component of texts that depict working, travelling women; it suggests that while a single woman's liminal class status provides some privilege

with regard to travel, that privilege is relegated to the places and spaces that lie outside the discursive borders and boundaries of England.

In terms of travel, Lucy Snowe cuts a radical figure amongst Jane Eyre and other female protagonists of the Victorian novel. Brontë imbues Lucy with some familiar qualities: like Jane, Lucy is *déclassé*, or beset by genteel poverty. And like Jane, Lucy is single, which despite her small financial resources allows her a range of mobility not accessible to a married middle-class woman. For both of these women, their liminal class status (the education and upbringing of gentlewomen without the patriarchal or marital support to sustain a middle-class life) enables mobility, though to highly variable degrees. Where Jane's travel is almost entirely the result of circumstance, coincidence, and escape, and only takes place within the confines of England, Lucy Snowe's travel is just the opposite. Lucy's purposeful travel abroad is what sets her apart from Jane and her other female literary contemporaries. Lucy is deliberate in her travel, using mobility as a means of taking control of her destiny. Lucy's way of taking control of her life is to distance herself from England and the ideologies of gender and class it represents by traveling abroad to find work. Throughout the text, Lucy describes the act of travel and reflects on the experience, particularly what it means for her as a woman of her liminal class status. She seems aware in her reflections of the possibilities afforded by travel, though she also acknowledges that her situation necessitates a separation from any previously held idea of home.

For most female travellers in Victorian fiction, the actual act of travel occupies little description in the text. For example, in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, Cynthia Kirkpatrick's journeys to and from school in France are referred to vaguely but never narrated. Dorothea's honeymoon sojourn to Rome, while significant, provides few details of

the physical journey. Instead, a woman's travel is framed in terms of a spiritual or emotional journey in which the end result is more significant than the actual act of travel. For example, in *Jane Eyre*, Jane's only explicit description of her disjointed journeys from Gateshead to Thornfield follows her flight from Thornfield after her wedding is interrupted. In this singular passage, she describes being alone and starving, sleeping in the wood and eventually—serendipitously—making her way to Moor House, where St. John Rivers and his sisters reside. The passage is a feverish, rambling internal monologue of being alone and having nowhere to go rather than a narrative of how Jane deliberately conveys herself from place to place. Lucy's journeys, however, specifically her leaving England, are documented in detail. Even more significantly, Lucy narratively reflects on the experience of being a young woman travelling alone. In this way, Lucy positions herself as a traveller, a self-conscious actor in her own story rather than a slave to circumstance. Lucy's motivation for travel and her experiences while travelling are most significantly influenced by her gender and her class. While Victorian travel conventions rhetorically equate wealth with mobility, travel amongst the middle and upper classes is significantly constrained by rules of decorum. Lucy is an important example of the fallacy of equating wealth and class status with mobility. Lucy's need for work is what necessitates and therefore enables Lucy to travel alone despite her young age and relative poverty; what results is an interesting reversal of the concept of class privilege as it relates to travel.

Brontë opens *Villette* in a setting that strongly positions Lucy as a keen observer, an aspect of Lucy's character that Brontë develops significantly over the course of the novel and which contributes to her identity as a traveller. Little Polly Home, a child of eight, has been brought to Bretton to stay while her father is away at war. In their shared time at Bretton,

Lucy recounts and reflects upon home life, and she observes from afar as Polly and Graham develop a close camaraderie. She presents her observations of the warm domestic scene and family friendship between Polly and Graham with a certain detached coolness, a practice that positions Lucy as an outsider both at Bretton and, later, in Labassecour (a fictional European country based on Belgium). While Polly and Graham both have ancestral ties to the home they share, Lucy is Mrs. Bretton's goddaughter and the only member of the household who is not related by blood to the Brettons. From the beginning of the text, when readers meet Lucy in a home that is not her own, Brontë creates in Lucy a character whose ties to England are tenuous. This tenuous connection to England later enables her mobility.

After her stay at Bretton, Lucy returns to her family home for a number of years until an unspecified family tragedy, framed in the language of a tragic shipwreck, casts her out on her own and necessitates her undertaking paid work. Lucy's familial connection to the Brettons and her description of her home life before the tragedy affirm her *déclassé* middle-class status, positioning her in the liminal space of the unmarried, middle-class woman. She finds employment with the elderly Miss Marchmont, whom she nurses until the lady's death. After her mistress dies and her employment ceases, Lucy must find a new source of work, as she is completely alone in the world. Wages paid upon Miss Marchmont's demise leave Lucy with fifteen pounds, so while not rich she has the means to sustain herself for a short time. With her scant resources she sets out for London, her first destination, where she plans to take a brief holiday and look about for a reason to stay. From the very outset of the text, Lucy's liminal status is clear, and her motivation for travel is the pursuit of work so she may support herself. It is Lucy's description of her journey to London where her representation as a traveller begins to develop. The thought of travelling to the city from her rural location is

presented as divinely inspired, a vision conjured during a moonlit walk. Walking alone at midnight under the Aurora Borealis, a “bold thought” enters Lucy’s mind. “My mind was made strong to receive it,” she says, as it tells her to “leave this wilderness, and go out hence” (108). After this directive, Lucy mentally sees London, and decides that is where she will go.

At the outset of her travel, Lucy is aware that a young woman travelling alone to London is unconventional, and she mitigates this unconventional action through her narration. In one of the text’s many direct addresses to the reader, Lucy avers:

In going to London, I ran less risk and evinced less enterprise than the reader may think. In fact, the distance was only fifty miles. My means would suffice to both take me there, to keep me for a few days, and also to bring me back if I found no inducement to stay. I regarded it as a brief holiday, permitted for once to work-weary faculties, rather than as an adventure of life and death.
(109)

In this example, Lucy understates the risks and dangers of travelling alone as a woman of small financial means, a practice she repeatedly uses to reconcile the discourse of travel with her gender and class status. As a young woman who is both genteel and destitute, Lucy’s travel represents a huge risk both to her morals and physical wellbeing (a risk she refuses to acknowledge). A sudden illness or injury in London could bankrupt Lucy, and with no travelling companions or chaperones, Lucy is physically vulnerable and could easily find herself at the mercy of strangers. Though outwardly she denies the risks she is undertaking by traveling alone to London, her description of the journey acknowledges the difficult task she has undertaken. Her arrival after a day-long, uncomfortable and jostling coach ride

provides more honest insight into the ordeal as she describes the conflict she feels as an exhausted traveller and a woman who is expected to be obliging.⁶ She reaches London at nine o'clock on what she describes as a "dark, raw, and rainy evening in a Babylon and a wilderness of which the vastness and the strangeness tried to the utmost any powers of clear thought and steady self-possession with which, in the absence of more brilliant faculties, Nature might have gifted me" (109). As she alights from her coach, she is disoriented by the London dialect she is unused to hearing spoken. Surprised by the unfamiliarity of the sound of her own language, Lucy says in near wonder, "The strange speech of the cabmen and others waiting around seemed to me as odd as a foreign tongue. I had never before heard the English language chopped up in that way" (110). The long journey, late hour, rainy night, and unexpectedly unfamiliar language culminate in a feeling that Lucy is both literally and metaphorically far from home. When at last Lucy arrives at the old inn where she will pass her time in London, she reflects,

How difficult, how puzzling, how oppressive seemed my flight! In London for the first time; at an inn for the first time; tired with travelling; confused with darkness; palsied with cold; unfurnished with either experience or advice to tell me how to act; and yet—to act obliged. (110)

This passage is unusually honest and insightful for two reasons. First, the act of travel in literature is so often idealized and romanticized, rarely including the less savory aspects. The destination rather than the journey is normally foregrounded in novels that depict travel.

Consider Jarvis Lorry and Lucie and Dr. Manette's travel from Paris to London in Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, where the setting significantly moves from Paris to London and back

⁶ This passage recalls Jane Eyre's escape from Thornfield, wherein she describes the dangers of being penniless, alone, and at the mercy of the elements and strangers.

again without any description of the journey. Dickens also omits narration of the journey in *Little Dorrit*, where the Dorrits take a grand tour of Europe. If we take our cues from the great journeys in literature, which are mostly undertaken by men, then we must believe that most journeys are of epic significance, when in reality the act of travel is often exhausting, tedious, and unpredictable. As Lucy shows, the experience and knowledge of how to travel are not automatically conferred upon young women like her, nor is there a significant literary precedent for a travelling woman of her class standing. Second, the passage makes clear that expectations for travelling women are different than those for men. That is, they must bear the trials of the journey—the discomfort, the fatigue, the frustration—and yet arrive at their destination and “act obliged” to those who help them. It is in this point where middle-class domestic ideology and mobility intersect for Lucy: though she is poor and has travelled in the tedious, uncomfortable mode she can afford, she is still expected to perform her gentility upon arrival. Lucy feels the dissonance in these expectations, which seem irreconcilable due to her liminal class status.

Lucy’s assurance to readers that her journey was less risky and less enterprising than the reader might think is compelling because it is simply untrue. Lucy is travelling alone to an unknown place with a limited amount of money. Conveyance and lodging will consume a large portion of her small purse, and she has no contacts in London and no prospects for employment. Her journey is not only risky but could be seen as reckless, a gamble with potential for dire consequences. It is not until she is fed and settled into her room at the inn that the gravity of her decision to travel to London overcomes her. Exhausted and overcome by the struggles of her journey, Lucy narrates,

All at once my position rose on me like a ghost. Anomalous, desolate, almost blank of hope, it stood. What was I doing here alone in great London? What prospects had I in life? What friends had I on earth? Whence did I come? Whither should I go? What should I do? (111)

Lucy's bitter despair over her circumstances culminate in her declaration that it is better to go forward than backward—"that [she] *could* go forward"—before she falls asleep in the shadow of St. Paul's Cathedral (112).

Lucy wakes refreshed and tidy, with a new outlook on her future. She befriends the hotel waiter and explores the streets of London. Whereas the day before she had despaired of her solitary position as a travelling woman in "great London," today she relishes the experience of taking it all in on her own:

Descending, I went wondering whither chance might lead, in a still ecstasy of freedom and enjoyment; and I got—I know not how—I got into the heart of city life. I saw and felt London at last: I got into the Strand; I went up Cornhill; I mixed with the life passing along; I dared the perils of crossings. To do this, and to do it utterly alone, gave me, perhaps and irrational, but a real pleasure. (113)

After Lucy's walk she mentions the healthy feeling of hunger that seasons her simple meal of a joint and vegetables. Hers is not the empty hunger of boredom she had felt before while working for the elderly Miss Marchmont, but the physical appetite emerging from vigorous walking and experiencing a new place. After a nap she awakes to the realization that she can never go back to the desolate existence of nursing old women waiting to die. With this new

vivacity fed by London food and air, Lucy forms a project: she will sail to Boue-Marine, a continental port, and see what she may find.⁷

Lucy's candid account of her experience with the Boue-Marine watermen who are to convey her to her berth aboard *The Vivid*, the ship by which she will sail to Labassecour, leaves no question of the challenges presented to young women travelling alone—at night, no less—in an era when propriety called for a constant chaperone to any respectable woman stepping foot outside the home. Despite her friend the waiter's direction to the coach driver not to leave Lucy at the wharf alone, her driver does not keep his promise. "On the contrary," Lucy says, "he offered me up as an oblation, served me as a dripping roast, making me alight amidst a throng of watermen" (114). Lucy describes the dark night at the wharf as an "uncomfortable crisis," where foul language and rough hands threaten her sensibilities. Despite the offending scene, Lucy assertively chooses a boat, and to her surprise realizes she is neither wretched nor terrified over the ordeal: "How is this? Methinks I am animated and alert, instead of being depressed and apprehensive (115)?" When the waterman demands a price of six shillings she balks but ultimately pays it, saying, "It is the price of experience" (115).

The preceding scene makes clear that Lucy, while not previously a traveler, is familiar enough with Victorian discourses of travel to realize she is out of her element and in a dangerous situation. She even seems to know how she should feel in such threatening circumstances – wretched and terrified rather than animated and alert. Though on her first night alone in London she wishes for someone to tell her how to act while in a foreign place,

⁷ In her Broadview edition of *Villette*, Kate Lawson speculates "Boue-Marine" is Ostend, Belgium.

she begins to speak of herself as a traveller as she explores London alone and successfully navigates the treacherous watermen to board her ship.

After passing an exhausted night in her berth, Lucy joins the other passengers on the deck of her ship, *The Vivid*, and contemplates the act of travel. Her thoughts are inspired by watching the young Ginevra Fanshawe and her father say their goodbyes before he leaves her with the other passengers on the ship. “Foreigners say that it is only English girls who can thus be trusted to travel alone, and deep is their wonder at the daring confidence of English parents and guardians,” Lucy narrates, explaining that traveling English girls’ intrepidity is thought by some Europeans as masculine and improper or reckless and lacking proper surveillance. In a later conversation, Lucy learns Ginevra is seventeen years old, and this is but one of many voyages young Ginevra has taken alone: “Now I have made so many [voyages], I quite forget the first. I am quite *blasée* about the sea and all that.” “Do you like travelling alone?” asks Lucy. “Bah!” is Ginevra’s banal reply, “I have crossed the Channel ten times, alone” (118). Further conversation reveals to a shocked Ginevra that Lucy has no final destination in mind. Ginevra’s destination has been decided for her: she is en route to Villette, where she is a student in Madame Beck’s pensionnat for girls.

Though in many ways an unconventional traveller in terms of her class and gender, Lucy’s first-person account of her journey to London and then on to Labassecour overlaps significantly with the conventions of travel writing adopted by Victorian women. Borrowing from this travel discourse in her creation of Lucy Snowe, the unconventional literary traveller, Bronte shows the complex work she undertook in writing about a poor, single, but genteel woman—categories of identity not usually associated with a high level of mobility—who travels alone. Bronte’s models for mobile women, after all, were wives of colonial

administrators such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and slaves such as Mary Prince, both of whom were highly mobile but who had limited control over their movement. For fictional characters such as Lucy Snowe as well as actual travellers such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and other nineteenth-century travelling women of her ilk, acts of mobility and movement are constantly mitigated by contemporary British cultural discourses of gender and ideas of femininity.

One of the ways women travellers mitigate unconventional acts of travel in their writing is to include comments on their clothing and other markers of femininity as a way to show they have not compromised their character in undertaking even the most arduous of journeys. This convention appears extensively in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*, which documents Lady Mary's travels to Europe and Turkey in the early eighteenth century, and which has become one of the most referenced travel texts written by a woman. In her letters, Lady Mary describes in detail the conventions of dress she encounters in her travels, often comparing foreign fashions to her own English attire. Women travel writers in the later years of the nineteenth century employ the trope of clothing, or "vestimentary discourse" extensively,⁸ conventionally utilizing clothing description as a marker of the ways they maintain English culture, their gender, or their class as they travel abroad in even the most foreign, wild geographies.⁹

⁸ A phrase coined by Monica Anderson in *Women and the Politics of Travel*, "vestimentary discourse" conveys two main functions. The first function is to build ethos; through the self-presentation of clothing, the individual can present a coherent and acceptable social exterior. The second function is to "mask" the private self, allowing the individual to "perform" the identity she chooses (200). In short, descriptions of clothing are an important means of women writers' self-fashioning as they undertake journeys perceived by the public as unconventional to their gender.

⁹ See Mary Kingsley's well-known clothing descriptions in her *Travels to West Africa*.

This trope of clothing-as-marker makes significant crossover into fiction when a woman travels. In *Villette*, for example, Lucy Snowe experiences a harrowing ordeal at the hands of watermen at Boue-Marine, the port from whence she sails for Labassecour:

The coachman instantly drove off as soon as he had got his fare; the watermen commenced a struggle for me and my trunk. Their oaths I hear at this moment: they shook my philosophy more than did the night, or the isolation, or the strangeness of the scene. One laid hands on my trunk. I looked on and waited quietly; but when another laid hands on me, I spoke up, shook off his touch, stepped at once into a boat, desired austere that the trunk should be placed beside me — "Just there," —which was instantly done; for the owner of the boat I had chosen became now an ally: I was rowed off. (114)

Despite feeling alone, afraid, and violated in purse, morals, and body, once aboard the ship conveying her to Labassecour Lucy takes care to describe to the reader her evening toilette: "I took off my bonnet, arranged my things, and lay down...Harassed, exhausted, I lay in a half-trance" (69). Lucy's passing but careful mention of removing of her bonnet before lying down in her berth signals not only that she has been properly attired for her journey but that she has survived her ordeal with the savage watermen physically and morally intact. In this moment clothing articulates culturally loaded meaning about the wearer; for Lucy, it is the assurance that she may be leaving England, but her cultural identity is not being compromised by the act. Lucy's clothing continues to reinforce her identity throughout the text, with Lucy frequently mentioning the plainness of her "robe gris," the staid grey dress she prefers over the pink dress Mrs. Bretton orders for her to wear for a concert. Though she does resign herself to wearing the pink dress to the evening's event, it is not without protest:

“A pink dress! I thought no human force should avail to put me into it...I would just as soon clothe myself in the costume of a Chinese lady of rank” (276). Such protest over a simple pink dress indicates that clothing is deeply reflective of English identity and personal values for Lucy, and even seemingly small changes like the color of a dress can send the wrong signal. Lucy’s rational identity, so invested in ideas of work and independence, is reflected in her daily donning that favorite “robe gris.” A pink dress, on the other hand, presents a softer, more conventionally feminine image of a woman that Lucy finds as foreign as the image of a Chinese woman.¹⁰

Lucy’s maintenance of her English identity is especially important once she leaves England and arrives in Labassecour. Interestingly, Lucy is more conventionally English in Labassecour than she ever was at home in England. She strategically emphasizes her Englishness and performs a distinctly English identity while in Labassecour to improve her personal and professional situation. As Maria Frawley explains in *A Wider Range*, “immersion in a foreign culture allows Lucy the freedom both to construct an identity and to embrace anonymity, to scrutinize and to retreat from self” (Frawley 17). Lucy’s immersion in foreign culture does not overshadow her Englishness; rather, her Englishness provides automatic status in Labassecour that she did not enjoy as a poor, single woman in England.

It has long been accepted that there is an autobiographical impetus to Lucy Snowe’s sojourn to Belgium-inspired Labassecour. In her biography of Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell recounts Brontë’s own travels to Brussels as a young woman, and her time spent

¹⁰ Lucy’s exaggerated reference to China in this quote, one of the many indicators of Lucy’s English colonialist attitude, is especially culturally loaded when considered within the Orientalist framework proposed by Edward Said. Additionally, it is important to note that she does eventually don the pink dress, a change that foreshadows her later role in the romantic plot.

teaching at a school there that resembles Madame Beck's Villettes pensionnat for girls (237). Given Brontë's adoption of autobiographical conventions in her fiction writing, it is sensible to assume that her own travels to Belgium aided in her imaginative crafting of the village of Villettes.

In her reading of the novel, Anne Longmuir argues that the setting is more complex than simply representing an autobiographical interjection. Rather, she sees nineteenth-century Belgium is a space where British and French cultural conflicts can be reconciled both in life and in literature (167). In the era of the Grand Tour, culturally French Belgium offered a "safer, more manageable version of France" to English tourists (176). Belgium held significant historical interest for English travellers and tourists for several reasons, Longmuir explains. Most significant of these is the 1815 Battle of Waterloo, in which the Seventh Coalition (under the command of the Duke of Wellington and Prussian Army commander Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher) ended the rule of Napoleon.¹¹ Regarded as a decidedly English victory, the site of the Battle of Waterloo provided a point of pilgrimage for English tourists and significantly increased tourism to Belgium in subsequent years (Longmuir 170). The English victory over Napoleon in Belgium contributed to a sense of ownership over Belgium in the British people, creating a "British" space in continental Europe (175). Additionally, Belgium had a long-standing resonance of a place of refuge for English exiles. In this way, Longmuir argues, Belgium is a site where Brontë (both in *Villettes* and *The Professor*) negotiates British cultural identity.

Although Belgium was not technically a part of Britain's empire after the Battle of Waterloo, post-1815 literature such as *Villettes* that represents Belgium reflects a sense of

¹¹ For further discussion on the Battle of Waterloo and English culture, see Jeremy Black's *The Battle of Waterloo* (Random House, 2010).

national ownership over the place commonly seen in British travel writing about colonized spaces. The attitude of ownership is reflected in *Villette* and other Victorian novels that represent Belgium as a setting or space.¹² Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* theorizes this attitude of ownership reflected in travel writing; her "Monarch of all I survey" phrase has become de rigeur for describing and theorizing those common passages in which a traveller (especially English and European male travellers) can be seen asserting a sense of ownership over the culture and landscape before him or her. The "Monarch-of-all-I-survey" strategy is inflected by gender, Pratt says, with male travellers adopting it more frequently and more overtly than female travellers (197). Pratt writes about colonial encounters, but I invoke her ideas here because imperialist discourse positions anywhere, including European locations like Belgium, as a potential possession. Maria Frawley positions it differently, suggesting that in Victorian attitudes about travel, "travellers left home assured that their status as English men and women would guarantee a privileged position abroad" (20). Lucy demonstrates this attitude repeatedly throughout the text, especially in her observations of the manners of the native Labassecourian people and the non-English teachers at Madame Beck's school.

I propose an extension of Longmuir's incisive argument that Brontë set *Villette* and *The Professor* in Belgium as a way to reconcile highly nationalistic conflicts between French and British culture, however. More significant than providing a space for reconciling cultural conflicts in *Villette*, Belgium is a unique space where Lucy can define and perform a distinctly English identity without actually being bound by its conventions. That is, in Belgium, Lucy's obligation to English feminine manners is only to herself and not to any

¹² In Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, for example, Waterloo is invoked as a place and space that significantly contributes to the formation of Jos Sedley's ridiculous character.

other person. Villette's foreign culture dismantles the class- and gender-based relationships that assign Lucy a subordinate status in England, giving her power to re-structure them at her discretion while abroad. For example, though Lucy recognizes Dr. John to be Graham Bretton, she says nothing to him or to the reader, an omission and "calculated dishonesty" that Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz says transfers the power in that relationship to Lucy; if she does not permit him to recognize her, his criticisms and diminution of her in the text hold no significance (Rabinowitz 246). In *Villette*, therefore, Belgium as a setting does as much work in framing gender and national norms through the character of Lucy as an English woman in Belgium as it does more broadly for French and English cultural relations.

Perhaps the most significant consequence of setting *Villette* in Belgium is the opportunity it affords Lucy to develop a positive self-image based on her Englishness abroad in contrast to her poor spinster status at home. In England, Lucy's gender and especially her class status render her one of what W. R. Greg described as a "redundant woman."¹³ She has no family, no ties to the land, and no prospects to make a fruitful match. Anne Longmuir argues in "Emigrant Spinsters and the Construction of Englishness in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*" that Lucy's impulse to travel away from England is less reflective of intrepidity or agency as a character and more a response to Victorian concerns like those articulated by Greg about the surplus of spinster women and the resulting calls for them to emigrate as a solution to the problem ("Emigrant Spinsters"). Longmuir's historicizing of Lucy's travel is useful for understanding why Lucy must travel to Europe rather than to another destination in the British Isles for a true revision of her English identity, but it fails to consider the fact that Lucy did not set out in her journey with the intention of emigrating. In Labassecour, Lucy is

¹³ *Why Are Women Redundant?* London: N. Trübner & Co, 1869.

still an English woman, to be sure, but the meaning of that label changes upon her border crossing. In Belgium, Lucy's English cultural identity elevates her status and becomes her most valuable asset. At no point in her travel to Belgium or residence there does she cast off or lose her Englishness as she adopts cosmopolitan values inflected by the French language and culture of Villette. Abroad in Belgium, Lucy's narrative constantly works to assert and refine her English identity. Two of her strategies for articulating, asserting, and performing her Englishness abroad are the relaying of beliefs about English women and her careful mentions of markers of her Englishness in her encounters with others.

Repeating foreign perceptions about English women helps Lucy fashion herself in a way that leads readers to bestow upon her the cultural privileges of being an English woman travelling alone. By repeating what others say and believe about English girls and women, Lucy never has to articulate them herself, which in itself would be un-English and unfeminine. As Lucy is invested in crafting and projecting a culturally English identity, this is a shrewd narrative decision that preserves the perception of Lucy as humble and feminine when, in fact, she is proud of herself in undertaking this intrepid journey. For example, as quoted earlier in the chapter, on her ship crossing to Boue-Marine, Lucy comments "Foreigners say that it is only English girls who can thus be trusted to travel alone, and deep is their wonder at the daring confidence of English parents and guardians" (118). Lucy thinks this in observation of Ginevra Fanshawe embarking the ship alone in preparation of her voyage to school in Villette, but the statement applies identically to Lucy, also travelling alone. This idea is repeated in Lucy's late-night chance interview with Madame Beck, who, after hearing Lucy's account of how she has arrived at the pensionnat, exclaims, "Il n'y a que les Ainglaises pour ces sortes d'entreprises...sont-elles donc intrépides ces femmes-là! [Only

Englishwomen undertake these sorts of enterprises...those women are fearless!] (130).

Lucy's description of her journey to Villette and walking its streets at night, lost and alone, proves she actually felt a healthy amount of fear. But, by repeating these foreign perceptions about women and travel, Lucy is performing complex rhetorical work in the service of positioning herself both as a traveller and as an English woman by claiming the values she projects onto others. In repeating the idea that English women are intrepid in their capability to travel alone, she undoes the idea of domesticity, which conflates the female body with home and stasis. She also illustrates that the same rules for women and travel do not apply abroad. Outside of the "home," or England, the rhetoric of domesticity cannot be practically applied. In Victorian England and in many Victorian novels that feature travelling women, chaperones or travel companions, particularly for women of the middle and upper classes, are *de rigeur*. When considered in terms of Lucy's class and work, however, the travel companion or chaperone is superfluous. Chaperoned travel tethers women to their place of origin and their home. Lucy's travel in search of work, an act reflective of her economic class status, permits an unencumbered mobility, as she has no fixed point of return, nor does she desire one. She repeats several times throughout the text that "English life is a desert," even going so far as to say about her gamble of travelling in search of work,

I had nothing to lose. Unutterable loathing of a desolate existence past forbade return. If I failed in what I now designed to undertake who, save myself, would suffer? If I died far away from—home, I was going to say, but I had no home—from England, then who would weep? (113)

This passage illustrates the double-edged nature of Lucy's independence. As she says, she is truly alone in the world, with nothing and no one to lose. With no connections and no

immediate prospects, finding a way to support herself is literally a matter of life and death, as the workhouse was the only safety net for women of her status. And yet, it is her state of independence that enables her mobility

As such, Lucy's lack of rootedness to a fixed idea of "home" is as much an opportunity as a misfortune in *Villette*. As a poor, single woman of liminal class status with no family, she has no obligations, no property, no dependents, and no obligation to view England as "home." This lack of rootedness to a specific physical place (England) is what enables her travel abroad to Belgium. Because of Lucy's complex relationship with the idea of home and being an Englishwoman, "home" in *Villette* is a fraught concept that follows Lucy through the text. Monica L. Feinburg argues, "*Villette* throws the home into a complicated and seemingly oppositional relationship with what is called the 'self,'" emphasizing that domesticity in *Villette* has little if anything to do with houses (170). Rather, Feinburg says, domesticity in *Villette* is actually about the ideal of social life. And this we do see in *Villette*; after all, the human need for community transcends gender and national identification. Lucy seeks connection and community with others even as she reinforces the idea that she is an English woman whose reputation and work ethic are beyond reproach.

In addition to repeating the perceptions of English women by foreigners, Lucy also quietly reinforces her English identity throughout the text through her encounters with others. Lucy's encounters with others who work for Madame Beck help her refine her idea of what it means to be an English woman abroad. Though Lucy evinces a lack of investment in England as a place, her cultural identification with Englishness develops inversely to her geographic proximity to her home country. That is, she begins to see her Englishness as an asset and, as a result, performs her Englishness more overtly, in Belgium than she ever does

in England. This strategy meets with success, as she gains employment almost immediately upon arriving in Labassecour. Lucy arrives at Madame Beck's late at night not speaking any amount of French, in possession of no money, no references, and no qualifications to teach at the pensionnat. And yet, she gets the job. Despite her marginalized position in England, in Belgium Lucy's Englishness carries with it a positive set of values that elevate her status abroad.

Once situated at Madame Beck's pensionnat, Lucy's interactions with others serve to distinguish English culture from culturally French Belgium. The first contributor to this cultural distinction is Lucy's relationship with the French language. In England it serves as a reminder of her class status and resulting brief education, demonstrated by an interaction with Mrs. Leigh, a woman with whom Lucy attended school. Lucy pays a visit to Mrs. Barrett, an acquaintance of hers and housekeeper to Mrs. Leigh, who now has two small children and a foreign nurse. Lucy recalls Mrs. Leigh's dullness at school thusly,

Different as were our social positions now, [Mrs. Leigh] and I had been schoolfellows, when I was a girl of ten and she a young lady of sixteen; and I remembered her—good-looking, but dull—in a lower class than mine...In addressing the nurse, Mrs. Leigh spoke French (very bad French, by the way, and with an incorrigibly bad accent, again forcibly reminding me of our school days), and I found the [nurse] was a foreigner. (108)

Lucy's icy "by the way" critique of Mrs. Leigh's French suggests there is more to this aside than an offensive accent. Lucy, after all, knows no French whatsoever, so her judgment seems particularly harsh. This brief interaction focused on language is influential in Lucy's eventual journey, as it opens Lucy's mind to the idea of leaving England to seek work. Mrs.

Barrett tells Lucy that the French nurse's only job is to "walk out with the baby and chatter French with Master Charles." She is treated almost as well as a governess, Mrs. Barrett says, and relays to Lucy the nurse's intelligence that "there are many Englishwomen in foreign countries as well placed as she" (109).

Though Lucy's encounter with the French nurse plants the seed of foreign travel in Lucy's mind, it is not until she disembarks from her ship that she actually encounters foreigners in their Otherness. Naturally, her shipmates on the crossing from Boue-Marine are all English like Lucy. Once she disembarks, however, she becomes self-conscious of her cultural difference, wondering if she is doing anything strange at the breakfast table that might mark her as an "Anglaise," or English woman. The language difference presents more of a challenge than Lucy anticipates when her luggage is nowhere to be found. Luckily, an Englishman interferes on her behalf and provides directions to an inn where she might stay until her trunk arrives. The Englishman's directions are fortuitous, for they lead Lucy not to an inn but to Madame Beck's door.

Almost immediately the text demonstrates that Belgium, or at least Villette, is not a space where cultural identity is unimportant or free of class connotations. Lucy asks for Madame Beck upon entering the pensionnat, but their interview achieves little. Madame Beck speaks little English, and Lucy no French. With the aid of a translator Lucy tells Madame Beck her tale and states her business: to work for Madame Beck, and to begin immediately as a way to secure lodging for the night in the city where she knows no one and does not speak the language. Upon hearing Lucy's story, Madame exclaims over her bravery in undertaking a journey so long, arduous, and unconventional. Monsieur Paul, an emotional, tyrannical teacher at the school, provides her only reference, procured through a

physiognomic examination of her character. M. Paul's recommendation is equivocal but favorable enough to persuade Madame Beck to engage Lucy immediately.

The timing of Lucy's arrival is serendipitous; luckily for Lucy, Madame Beck has grown tired of Mrs. Sweeny, the woman she employs as nurse to her three children. As her name suggests, Mrs. Sweeny is Irish, which Lucy carefully notes. Brontë draws on the stereotype of Irish drunkenness to justify Mrs. Sweeny's dismissal. When Lucy first encounters the woman whom she is to replace, Mrs. Sweeny is unconscious. The smell of whiskey in the air, Lucy and Madame Beck cast their gaze upon this scene:

Beside a table, on which flared a remnant of a candle guttering to waste in an empty socket, a coarse woman, heterogeneously clad in a broad-striped showy silk dress and a stuff apron, sat in a chair fast asleep. To complete the picture and leave no doubt as to the state of matter, a bottle and empty glass stood at the sleeping beauty's elbow. (133)

Upon formal introduction to Mrs. Sweeny, Lucy's English prejudices against the Irish are evident in her description of the disgraced nursemaid. At one point Lucy refers to Mrs. Sweeny as "the heroine of the bottle" (135), an alternately comatose and violent woman who flies into a rage when dismissed by Madame Beck. Lucy matter-of-factly explains, "I need hardly explain to the reader that this lady was in effect a native of Ireland" (135). Although Lucy may be the newest comer to Madame Beck's establishment, she employs her colonialist sensibility against the Irish Mrs. Sweeny, making it clear her Englishness trumps her newcomer status and reinforcing her respectability as an Englishwoman.

The entire experience of taking her place at Madame Beck's—her mode of arrival, M. Paul's physiognomic exam, Madame Beck's penchant for covert surveillance, Mrs. Sweeny's

dismissal— is so unconventional and out of the ordinary that it leads Lucy to muse, “All this was very un-English: truly I was in a foreign land” (135). Interestingly, this comment has nothing to do with the unfamiliar language, but rather with the unusual manners of the people with whom she now shares a home. Lucy’s choice of words in her statement—“all this was very un-English”—is significant as she determines what Englishness means outside of England. She is not attributing Madame Beck’s unusual manners to her French culture, but instead cultivating an idea of English identity she will adopt abroad.

In Lucy’s project to cultivate her English identity in Villette, she often remarks on Madame Beck’s manners to illustrate how different they are from the English manners to which she is accustomed. Her comments about Madame Beck are presented more as cultural musings than personal indictments, but they work to elevate Lucy’s Englishness above Madame Beck’s French identity. Take, for example, Lucy’s comments on Madame Beck’s morning routine: “Til noon, [Madame Beck] haunted the house in her wrapping-gown, shawl, and soundless slippers. How would the lady-chief of an English school approve this custom?” (136). Without passing direct personal judgment on Madame Beck, Lucy articulates the oddity of Madame Beck’s habit. Using culture to mitigate what amounts to Lucy’s personal opinions and observations about the French culture of Labassecour contributes to an “othering” of French culture that helps Lucy—and the reader of *Villette*—develop a clear understanding of English identity. It also works to reconcile French and English cultural differences while maintaining a respectful and mutually beneficial relationship between the two women, showing that disagreeing opinions over cultural practices are unavoidable but need not interfere with positive cultural relations.

Even in her praises of Madame Beck, Lucy subtly elevates Englishness above others with regard to work as well as manners. For example, she acknowledges Madame Beck's respect of English culture as it pertained to her business: "She had a respect for 'Angleterre'; and to 'les Anglaises,' she would have the women of no other country around her children, if she could help it" (138). It seems to be Madame Beck's entrepreneurial spirit rather than her character that impresses Lucy most, as she finds fault with the school's students, who share Madame Beck's culture more than they share Lucy's. Lucy characterizes the students of the pensionnat as "inadventurous, unstirred by ambitious impulses," and rebellious, qualities readers are to understand are un-English (142). Lucy goes so far as to identify a physical difference between the Labassecouriennes and English girls: "The continental female is quite different than the insular female; I never saw such eyes and brows in England" (145). These criticisms of the girls she teaches is another way Lucy cultivates a distinct, personal idea of Englishness abroad, elevates herself above them culturally, and justifies her unusually strong-handed methods of discipline. These struggles, which have their basis in cultural difference, can be seen within the space of Lucy's classroom on her first day as a teacher. When one student misbehaves, Lucy shoves her into a schoolroom closet. She mocks the poor work of another student, reading the poorly-written essay aloud to the class, then ripping it in half, in an uncharacteristically bold power play inspired by her desire to impress (or at least not disappoint) her employer, Madame Beck.

Lucy's othering of Madame Beck, the students at the pensionnat, and her attribution of strangeness to the Belgian culture of which she is now a part reflect the English idea of the "other" Edward Said proposes in his landmark 1978 *Orientalism*. Highly influential in postcolonial studies, *Orientalism* is also useful in theorizing nineteenth-century cultural

encounters reflected in travel texts both actual and fictive. In examining Lucy as a traveller, for example, *Orientalism's* concept of othering explains Lucy's interactions with Madame Beck and those she encounters in Belgium and her recognition of foreign cultures. It also reveals how Lucy's "othering" of non-English characters in *Villette* serves to refine Lucy's sense of her own English identity, elevate it over the foreign culture she is encountering, and embrace it as a valuable asset. I am not the first to notice Lucy's quietly colonialist language in *Villette*. Rosemary Clark-Beattie sees the colonialist impulse as an important factor structuring the text, arguing, "Villette is structured by what might be called a colonialist impulse. Like many of her contemporaries, Lucy escapes her insignificance within English society by fleeing to a setting where her adherence to the mores of the very culture she has fled sets her apart, in her own mind, as superior" (825). The foreign setting and foreign customs and manners provide a "backdrop" against which Lucy's Englishness stands in relief (Clark-Beattie 828). Against the Labassecourians, to whom Lucy attributes characteristic laziness and lack of commitment to telling the truth, Lucy assumes an air of English superiority redolent of colonialist discourse, though Labassecour is not a colonized space. Lucy's colonialist attitude is fascinating in its development throughout the novel. It is not evident during Lucy's time in England, where she is a deeply sympathetic, disenfranchised character who has nothing and no one (and, arguably, no one on which to look down). As she travels farther from England, however, and descends in status (marked by her need to seek work), Lucy's Englishness and her colonialist attitude become more pronounced. Her English prejudices become most evident upon her arrival at Madame Beck's pensionnat, where the Irish and the French are immediately positioned as culturally inferior "others." That Lucy's conventional, expected English prejudices have made the journey to

Labassecour with her seems to be a discordant note in her otherwise admirable character, and is difficult at points to reconcile with her more positive proto-feminist qualities. Lucy's oppositional ideologies of independent travel and encountering foreign culture lend a complexity to her character important to consider in terms of her own Victorian context, as Lucy both reflects and replicates social ideas of gender and nation that form her identity.

Victorian travel discourse frequently intervenes in the development of Lucy Snowe's traveller's gaze, most significantly in the frequent acknowledgment that for a woman like Lucy, travel is an intrepid and unconventional act, and in Lucy's narration of all the ways she maintains her Englishness as she travels abroad. Brontë departs from Victorian travel discourse about female travellers at points, though, especially in her unique positioning of Lucy as a woman travelling in search of work. Brontë troubles the idea of "home," that place of stasis and domesticity discursively conflated with the female body. But Brontë also creates in Lucy Snowe a character that rejects the common Victorian stereotypes that contributed to the discourse of travel as it related to women of the era in travel writing and in fiction. Janice Schroeder identifies these two prevailing stereotypes as the "spinster abroad" and the "memsahib," both of which served to fix European women's textual and tourist gazes in certain ways (118). Lucy complicates these stereotypes by embodying qualities of both the memsahib *and* the spinster to varying degrees, two archetypes usually presented as oppositional identities in the woman traveller. The memsahib, the imperial administrator's wife, is often an implicit but unofficial extension of her husband's sanctioned colonial work.¹⁴ She is a mobile figure, but as an agent to her husband she has little control over her

¹⁴ An exemplary specimen of the memsahib, or diplomat's wife, is Lady Harriot Dufferin, Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava. Her travel narratives, *Our Viceregal Life in India*:

movement. Lucy's colonialist attitude toward the French and Labassecourienne people she encounters at Madame Beck's draws on the colonial gaze of the memsahib, but her single status places her firmly in the camp of the laughable but intrepid spinster. The factors that complicate Lucy's identity most are her single status and pursuit of work. After all, the memsahib is nothing if not a wife, and the spinster is defined by her lack of a husband. Lucy's gaze is differently fixed; rather than seeking someone to marry, Lucy seeks some work she can do. And yet, her insistence on cultivating an identity that is recognizably and stridently English draws on the idea of the memsahib.

The idea of travel does not dissipate after Lucy settles into her life in Labassecour. Travel emerges again as a primary facet of Lucy's identity at the conclusion of the novel when M. Paul, with whom Lucy has fallen in love, undertakes an ill-fated act of travel. Interestingly, M. Paul's unresolved journey is really more about Lucy's continued development as an independent professional woman than it is about the resolution of the marriage plot. To some degree, literary convention seems to intervene in Brontë's conclusion of the otherwise unconventional *Villette*. Lucy and M. Paul fall in love in the traditional mode of the marriage plot, but their relationship is unresolved by the conventional marriage. The final chapter of *Villette* closes with Lucy's narration of the three years following M. Paul's departure to the West Indies, an endeavor designed by his family to prevent him from marrying Lucy. Before embarking on his journey, M. Paul establishes Lucy in her own pensionnat, where she works in anticipation of his return. Of the three years in which she anticipates M. Paul's return, Lucy says, "M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life. Do you scout the paradox? Listen" (565). Lucy's

Selections from my Journal, 1884-1888, and My Canadian Journal 1872-1878, document the time she spent in India and Canada accompanying her husband in his diplomatic work.

description of these happy three years is inflected by the sentiment of anticipation or hopeful expectation of return, a quality Shanyn Fiske sees in Penelope at the conclusion of the *Odyssey* (19). In “Between Nowhere and Home: The Odyssey of Lucy Snowe,” Fiske reads *Villette* in light of the *Odyssey*, finding many concepts, including homesickness, shared between the two works. Fiske argues that Lucy is left in a state of “suspended hope” (19) for M. Paul’s return, much as Penelope waited for Ulysses. Like Fiske, Karen Lawrence also reads Lucy as a waiting Penelope at the close of the text. When reading Lucy as a traveller who challenges the norms of nineteenth century mobility in literature, however, an important distinction arises between her three years of Penelope-like waiting and the time following the storm that shipwrecks and kills M. Paul. For three years, Lucy does represent the conventional trope of the waiting woman as she works to ready her home for M. Paul’s return. There is a perceptible shift in Lucy at the end of the novel, though, that moves her from the role of waiting woman back into a role that emphasizes her professional pursuit. She does not end the novel as a waiting woman but as a woman whose professional pursuit has come to fruition, which underscores her work rather than her romantic relationship as the focal point of the text. The turn from her waiting is brief but significant in understanding Lucy as a professionally successful and independent traveller rather than a woman waiting behind.

For Lucy Snowe, the idea of home remains a fraught concept throughout *Villette*. Always an outsider in England, Lucy has few ties to keep her there, especially as she faces inevitable poverty alone. When weighed against her current prospects, Lucy rightly sees travel as affording options that otherwise do not exist to her. As an outsider, she has more to gain from a change of scenery than she can possibly lose, because she has nothing. Lucy is,

according to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, “from first to last a woman without--outside society, without parents or friend, without physical health or mental attractions, without money or confidence or health--and her story is perhaps the most moving and terrifying account of female deprivation ever written” (399-400). When we read Lucy’s character in terms of love, she is indeed always on the outside of happiness. However, when we read her in terms of her work, she is successful. Travel changes the rules of social engagement for Lucy; with a little money and a plan, she is able to travel to Labassecour, a place less bound by the class and gender ideology that places her on the periphery of English society. In Labassecour she thrives professionally, becoming fluent in French and finding satisfaction in her chosen profession as a teacher, all the while maintaining and even emphasizing many facets of her English identity. She does not spend the entire novel isolated in her Englishness, however. An unexpected plot twist transports the Brettons, their English home, and even little Polly (now grown into a young woman) to Labassecour, where Lucy is reunited with them and welcomed into their circle once again. Brontë suggests the possibility of a marriage between Lucy and John Bretton (Mrs. Bretton’s now-grown son, formerly called Graham), a prospect that offers Lucy all she has lost and gone without since that unspecified event that separated her from her family and her home. By the end of the novel, however, it is clear that Brontë pairs Lucy with M. Paul as a way to further explore Lucy’s identity as an independent, professional woman for whom the act of travel is extremely formative.

Nothing about Lucy’s journey to Labassecour and her cultivation of an independent identity there is marked by ease, and yet she succeeds in securing there the independent life she desired. As a female figure, her act of travel is mitigated most significantly by her gender and her liminal class status as a single woman, both of which present challenges and

unexpected opportunities. Lucy's character as a female traveller is distinctly shaped by Victorian travel discourse in *Villette*, most significantly in her own frequent acknowledgment that for a woman like herself, travel is an unconventional act, but travelling abroad alone does not necessarily threaten a conventional sense of English femininity. Instead of assimilating and adopting French culture in Labassecour, Lucy embraces Englishness more strongly than she did in England. Brontë departs from Victorian travel discourse about female travellers significantly, though, as in her unique positioning of Lucy as a woman travelling in search of work. In the first place, Brontë troubles the idea of "home," that place of stasis and domesticity discursively conflated with the female body. But Brontë also creates in Lucy Snowe a character who rejects the common Victorian stereotypes of the "spinster abroad" and "memsahib" that served to fix European women's textual and tourist gazes (Schroeder 118) in favor of a new model of the travelling woman whose gaze is fixed upon work.

As I have discussed earlier in the chapter, Victorian travel discourse imbues Lucy's narrative most often in her articulation of her English identity, from mentions of clothing to descriptions of manners she deems "un-English." Beyond this conventional self-fashioning as an Englishwoman, however, Lucy's professional pursuit—which takes place outside of England—represents a new type of modern mobility that signals a cultural shift in the construction of the female traveller and ideas of work for women. This shift can be seen in later novels that feature women, including George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) and Mona Caird's *Daughters of Danaus* (1894), though as married women The Alcharisi and Hadria Fullerton are encumbered by different familial and cultural baggage than Lucy on her independent journey to Labassecour. Brontë's creative imagining of Belgium offers Lucy a

space “less circumscribed” by domestic ideology, which changes the dynamics of Lucy’s relationships with others and with her own identity as an English woman (Feinberg 175).

Beginning with its title, *Villette* is not just a novel but a literature of travel that represents the cultural negotiations of mobility that were enacted through literature in the creation of the figure of the female traveller. In terms of work, class is the most prominent facet of identity that influences a woman’s mobility. In the Victorian years and today, wealth is often equated with mobility and travel. Contrary to that equation, *Villette* demonstrates the privileges of mobility that correlate to the Victorian woman’s pursuit of paid work. The text also shows the irreconcilable nature of ideas of work and domesticity in the Victorian years. While Lucy is successful and happy in her work, her love life has suffered a tragic end beyond her control.¹⁵ Travel is an important element of Lucy’s negotiations of her class and gender status that surprisingly reveals that the figure of the single woman has access to a degree of mobility and agency married middle-class women are denied. The pursuit of work, in itself a highly classed undertaking, illuminates the tension between domestic ideology and acts of mobility that emerge through the figure of the female traveller in the Victorian novel.

¹⁵ Like Lucy Snowe, Hadria Fullerton in *Daughters of Danaus* and The Alcharisi in *Daniel Deronda* experience a similar dissonance between work and home life: not one of these is, at the end of her novel, happy and successful in both work and home affairs.

Chapter Two: Mapping Morality: Mobility, Marriage, and Motherhood in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*

Whereas Lucy Snowe's liminal status as an unmarried woman enables an unconventional level of mobility as she voyages out in pursuit of meaningful, remunerative work, Becky Sharp's travel through *Vanity Fair* (1848-1849) reflects a vastly different set of intersecting complexities related to mobility, marriage, and motherhood. This chapter looks at *Vanity Fair* and its representation of Becky Sharp, whose journeys throughout the text are tightly linked to the moral imperative inherent in nineteenth-century ideas of marriage and motherhood. In the Victorian novel, the domestic ideal of woman as wife and mother is inextricably bound by ideas of stasis. When a woman marries and becomes a mother, mobility is rarely a significant aspect of her experience and narrative except under a few specific and conventional circumstances, such as travelling for her honeymoon, accompanying her husband on diplomatic missions, recuperating by the seaside for health reasons, or voyaging to the European continent. Further, she rarely—if ever—travels alone, as she is usually accompanied by her husband or chaperone.

Conversely, when a woman who is married or a mother does travel, especially when she travels alone, it represents a significant disruption in the narrative of domesticity and is often tied to a woman's failure to meet her moral duty in the domestic realm. When a woman travels in Victorian fiction, the travel signals that meaningful ideological work is taking place in the text. The trope of the fallen woman is one visible example of this, and is pervasive in nineteenth-century fiction, with literature of the Victorian years showing a particular preoccupation with women's sexuality. In *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat*, Jennifer Hedgecock writes, "the fallen woman trope is really

meant to keep women subordinated to patriarchal power, and at the same time, to provide a convenient scapegoat for the existing moral turpitude in Victorian society” (49). Consider the prominent example of Hetty Sorrel in George Eliot’s *Adam Bede*, who leaves her home after she becomes pregnant. While on the move, she abandons her child, causing it to die. Hetty never returns to the domestic realm after her imprisonment for the crime of infanticide. In Ellen Wood’s sensation novel *East Lynne*, Isabel Carlyle abandons her husband and children, leaving her home and family to travel to France with another man.¹⁶ Like Hetty, after she becomes a fallen woman, Isabel does not resume her position in the domestic realm.¹⁷ Hedgecock asserts that the reason these fallen women do not re-enter the domestic sphere once they have left it is because social convention will not let them, as “her fall issues forth an entire signifying system that constructs meaning out of her experiences on the street, representing her as a pollution or as a woman who literally loses control of her moral bearing” (49). It seems that once a woman’s morals are lost to or polluted by the act of sex outside of the domestic context of marriage, she can no longer be accommodated narratively within the home. Her travel signals her exile from the norms of middle class womanhood, and she cannot go home again. Fallen women are prevented from returning to the domestic space of marriage and the home, killed off, or made outcasts, as in the cases of Hetty Sorrel and Isabel Carlyle. In these two prominent cases, mobility and the married mother are negatively linked to the woman’s morality.

¹⁶ Further examples include The Alcharisi in Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876), Ruth in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Ruth* (1853), and Martha Endell in *David Copperfield* (1849-1850) among others.

¹⁷ In one of the novel’s sensational and implausible plot twists, Isabel returns to her home disguised as a governess. She does not resume her post as mother and wife, however, so she cannot be said to have re-entered the domestic sphere after her affair.

In this chapter, I argue that Thackeray builds upon the trope of the fallen woman as he foregrounds and problematizes the link of mobility, marriage, and maternity to morality in his treatment of the female traveller. Becky Sharp's rambling travel is a signal of her indeterminacy and instability as a moral character; the reader is not even clear about her location half the time, and her mobility prevents readers from rooting her within any narratives of gender, motherhood, or marriage. Throughout the novel, Becky's mobility "maps" her morality. As her mobility increases, the text raises more questions about her morality without providing any clear answers. Thackeray importantly employs geographic mobility as a device to highlight the indeterminacy of Becky Sharp's character and, more broadly, the indeterminacy of morality in *Vanity Fair*.

Becky Sharp is a singular character in Victorian fiction, but in her creation Thackeray amalgamates (and appropriates for his ironic purpose) a number of ideas about nineteenth-century mobility and gender, including the tension between masculinity and femininity. Anna Moya describes Becky as an important response to and departure from the "angel in the house" ideal of womanhood, and an important representation of female masculinity (77). *Vanity Fair's* treatment of Becky Sharp and the ideas of motherhood and mobility she embodies reflect nineteenth-century literary trends in representing mobile women. For certain women who undertake travel in Victorian fiction, mobility is not just a matter of convention, but a moral matter as well. Married women and women who are also mothers are more likely than single, child-free women to be represented as morally questionable characters. Novels featuring women who are also mothers who attempt to exercise mobility, either through travel or social climbing, suggest Victorian moral and social values create a rigid incompatibility between the ideas of mobility and marriage or motherhood. This

incompatibility underscores the stasis inherent in the domestic ideal and figures women whose desires are not rooted in their home not just as bad mothers, but also as murderers, monsters and villains. As the character of Becky Sharp shows, the intersection of motherhood and mobility is fraught with moral implications that stem from the deep roots to created by marriage and family.

Much of the text's uncertainty with regard to Becky Sharp's moral character and the concept of morality in general is owing to the unusual setting of Vanity Fair. Thackeray's allusion to Vanity Fair in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) seems explicit; *The Pilgrim's Progress* describes Vanity as a town "lighter than vanity," where "all that is there sold, and all that cometh thither is vanity" (Bunyan 115). Thackeray's Vanity Fair shares these characteristics to an extent. Kirsty Milne, however, cautions against relying too confidently on Thackeray's allusion for understanding *Vanity Fair*, as the trope of Vanity Fair had been transformed by other writers long before it appeared in Thackeray's novel (103). Thackeray further transforms the trope into one with more sinister undertones. Setting a novel in a place like Vanity Fair, which the narrator describes through using the language of a puppet show, creates an overarching sense of performativity, instability, and indeterminacy that extends to the characters, conventions, and values of the place. In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray creates a challenging, dynamic setting for exploring the question of Becky Sharp's morality that effectively blocks attempts to arrive at absolutes or a definitive interpretation of the text and its assertions. Other critics have used stronger words to describe the text; for example, A. E. Dyson has described *Vanity Fair* as "surely one of the world's most devious novels" (76). As Judith L. Fisher argues, Thackeray's obfuscation may have been a deliberate strategy, as "Thackeray deliberately attempted to disrupt the reading

process in order to thwart any stable interpretation,” a reflection of his skepticism about the possibility of arriving at absolute truths as they can be expressed through language (Fisher 1-2).¹⁸ Fisher, like other critics including John Reed, Micael Clarke, and Robert Colby, advocates for reading Thackeray holistically in order to best understand his rhetorical and stylistic strategies, themes, and contexts. Fisher extends these studies, arguing that while Thackeray can be read holistically, she also finds that there is a “continuous discontinuity,” in the experience of reading Thackeray, as there is no inherent stability in Thackeray’s use of language and narrative technique. For example, she contrasts Thackeray’s unreliable narrators with Dickens’s unified and stable narrative voice to demonstrate Thackeray’s suspicion of the egoism of the author (Fisher 1-2).

Other critics including George Levine, Jack Rawlins, Winslow Rogers, and Janice Carlisle see Thackeray’s “lack of narrative unity” as less deliberate and more a consequence of his discomfort with his feelings, with his role as author, and with his audience (Fisher 7). Critical interpretations of Thackeray’s irony run the gamut from seeing Thackeray’s irony as a form of deliberate skepticism intended to challenge language conventions to explaining it as a self-conscious response to his own modernism or shame at being a writer. In my study of *Vanity Fair*, specifically in Thackeray’s use of travel as a device for exploring gendered conventions of morality, I find that Thackeray’s strategies are a result of his skeptical attitude toward absolutes rather than a result of his discomfort with the role of the author or narrator. As an author, Thackeray’s narrative strategy is complex, purposeful, and masterful as he carefully reveals, obscures, and contests different aspects of each character and setting. This

¹⁸ Fisher connects Thackeray’s upbringing and early training as an artist, parodist, and critic to the skeptical thinking that informs his narrative and stylistic technique in his fiction writing.

suggests an author who is comfortable with his role and who is highly attuned to his audience.

The dynamic and interesting Becky Sharp becomes the immediate focal point of *Vanity Fair* despite its titular claim that it is “a novel without a hero.” As John Reed writes in *Dickens and Thackeray: Punishment and Forgiveness*, “You know that you are in for an uncommon read when, early in your novel, a young woman declares ‘revenge may be wicked, but it’s natural,’ as Rebecca Sharp does in the second chapter of *Vanity Fair*” (Reed 329). And yet, despite the novel’s focus on Becky, its portrayal of female friendship, and provision of a large cast of female characters, feminist criticism of *Vanity Fair* has been surprisingly sparse. Micael Clarke posits that the reason for relative inattention to the novel is its uncommonness; that the novel’s “complex, highly allusive, and ironic narrative voice” and its divisive central characters (Becky and Amelia) make the novel a challenge to read and to teach (69). Becky may not be the novel’s hero, but she is definitely the novel’s star. Through the novel she remains the focal point because of her unconventionality and complexity, which begin with her birth. As the daughter of a French opera dancer and starving artist, Becky is born without the place and family roots that are important in nineteenth-century British society. She is an orphan in life, but not in the conventional literary sense. Unlike other Victorian orphans such as Jane Eyre in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Pip in Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1861), and Sara Crewe in Francis Hodgson Burnett’s *A Little Princess* (1905), there is no eventual revelation of wealthy family or aristocratic roots. The revelation of wealth or aristocratic roots conventionally works to reward the orphan’s virtuous character, as does making a good marriage or becoming a mother. Thackeray seems to flaunt this convention with Becky. Instead of revealing her

latent virtue through marriage and motherhood, he uses these conventional “rewards” to highlight her lack of virtue. For example, her marriage does her no good, and the birth of her son brings out the worst in her rather than revealing latent goodness. Instead of relying on the conventional representation of the “redeemed” orphan, Thackeray uses Becky’s background to establish a potentially sympathetic reading of her character, which is necessary because she is immediately shown engaging in “bad” behavior, throwing her *Johnson’s Dictionary* [sic] out of the window of the carriage as it drives her away from Miss Pinkerton’s school. However, given Miss Pinkerton’s characterization as an ignorant, hypocritical, and cruel headmistress who mistreated Becky during her years at the school, it is difficult to find fault with Becky’s act of defiance, even when Amelia takes her to task for her “wicked, revengeful thoughts” (15). Becky’s background is crucial to her development as a morally ambiguous, complex character for one main reason: it establishes a moral grey area in which Becky operates throughout the text while at the same time soliciting sympathy from the reader and the narrator. As Lisa Jadwin emphasizes, Becky’s skepticism and duplicity seem a natural extension of her upbringing, to which Thackeray devotes the second chapter of the novel (665). Her background as a first point of connection among the reader, Becky, and the narrator makes it possible for readers to adopt a sympathetic attitude toward Becky that persists throughout the text even as her actions become more questionable as she becomes more mobile. The result of this point of connection is that the narrator and reader can agree that Becky is not good, but she has good reason to be bad.

Part of Becky’s complexity as a character stems from the ironic tension Thackeray creates between her questionable moral character and her likability. Conventionally in Victorian fiction, characters displaying immorality and avarice are precluded from likeability

or sympathy. Thackeray subverts this convention with Becky Sharp, for whom it *is* good—or at least not so bad—to be bad. However, Vanity Fair, the setting of the novel, is not some ordinary place. Vanity Fair is a social, materialistic world driven by delusory desires and transient achievements from within which the narrator speaks. Its fluidity ironizes and complicates the idea of morality in Vanity Fair, as it is difficult to tell what the text definitively determines as moral (often until it presents its idea of what is amoral). The complexity of the concept of morality in the text also explains why it is easy to sympathize with the questionable characters, such as Becky, and to revile the more decidedly moral characters, such as Amelia. Much of Becky Sharp's unconventional character is shaped by the social conventions of Vanity Fair and its ironic and sometimes satirical representation of nineteenth-century social conventions. Her likeability stems in part from her refusal to conform to the social conventions of Vanity Fair. Because Thackeray represents the values of Vanity Fair as so repulsive, how can we dislike a character who resists her role within that place? The setting of Vanity Fair is the literary equivalent of quicksand; just as the reader begins to grasp at the novel's assertions, Thackeray undercuts and shifts them away from definitive messages about social values. Thackeray's complex range of characters (especially female characters) and their ambiguous outcomes reflect what Fisher sees as a perceptive and realistic worldview held by the author. She claims, "Thackeray saw and grimly accepted a treacherous and insecure world where indeed there were love and goodness but no security for either" (37). Comparing the fates of Becky versus Amelia and Dobbin versus George Osborne demonstrates that Thackeray does not play by the literary rules that say the "good" characters earn a happy ending.

From the beginning of the novel, Thackeray uses Becky Sharp to signal that mobility

and its relationship to morality is a primary concern within *Vanity Fair*. Becky's geographic mobility and her social mobility, or attempts to climb the social ladder in pursuit of a better life, are often intertwined, as she often must leave her current situation and location to seek new opportunities. Becky's journey begins with her departure from Miss Pinkerton's school, where she visits the Sedley home before moving on to her governess situation. It is around the question of marriage that Becky's questionable motives first become clear. While visiting the Sedleys, Becky makes her first attempt at securing a better position in life by making herself as attractive as possible to Jos Sedley, Amelia's unmarried older brother who has an appointment in the East India Company's Civil Service. Becky's willingness to ally herself with a colonial administrator and the possibility (and likelihood) of a life lived outside of England foreshadows her later openness to mobility and other unconventional modes of living. Becky is strategic in her wooing of Jos Sedley, thinking to herself that if she is to win him as a husband, "[She] must be very quiet... and very much interested about India" (29). Here, as in many situations Becky inhabits, she designs a role for herself and plays it well with a certain end in mind. The narrator emphasizes Jos's dandyish appearance, vast appetite, and nervous personality, creating an impression of general unattractiveness, which he contrasts with Becky's good looks and clever nature. Jos's attractiveness to Becky as a potential husband is not in his person but in his fortune and status, making her interest in marrying him seem shallow. Her attempts are met with resistance from the Sedley family, who see Becky as an interloper in their family and regard her with suspicion. According to the social norms within which the Sedley family operates, Becky may be an acceptable friend to Amelia, but she is not an acceptable wife for Jos because of the difference in their social status. In the influential *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*,

Nancy Armstrong argues that a discourse of marital love underwrites the role of middle-class power in both the political and economic spheres (Armstrong 8). Ironically, the only way for Becky to change her station and gain some agency in her life is to marry someone like Jos. She is keenly aware of the high stakes of marriage. Becky wants things—wealth, social status, fame—that are beyond her grasp without help from someone else, so Becky’s affections are often opportunistic. As Julia Kent identifies, this type of opportunistic desire in his characters is something of a hallmark of Thackeray’s writing. She writes, “[Thackeray’s] novels repeatedly and ironically collapse the distinction between feeling love and wanting things” (Kent 128). This speaks to Thackeray’s view of the transactional, highly complicated nature of marriage in the nineteenth century, which was expected to confer either status or wealth, if not both. It is fitting, then, that the transactional aspects of marriage would be at the forefront of his protagonist’s narrative. As Becky can offer neither wealth nor status to the Sedley family in a marriage to Jos, she leaves their home unengaged, on the path to become a governess at Queen’s Crawley. Becky’s journey on the outside of a hackney coach from the Sedley’s home to her new post at Queen’s Crawley is symbolic of her travel downward on the social scale, and she piteously recounts it in a letter to Amelia: “I made the journey *outside for the greater part of the way* [emphasis hers]” (88). Not only must Becky endure the indignity of travelling by hired rather than private coach, she must sit on the outside—the less costly way to travel—and endure the falling rain after she is unsuccessful in her attempts to marry Jos.

Becky’s bid to improve her status through marriage continues at Queen’s Crawley, where she is to be governess to Sir Pitt’s daughters. Queen’s Crawley is a significant setting for Becky, though she spends a relatively short time there. It is at Queen’s Crawley that

Becky makes a tactical error in her attempt at moving up the social ladder when she marries Rawdon Crawley, the youngest son of Sir Pitt and beloved nephew of Lady Crawley. Based on Becky's goal to rise in social status, marrying Rawdon seems, on the surface, like a success for Becky: he is from a good family, with a position and an estate. A marriage into the Crawley family is Becky's ticket to a respectable life. Thackeray's sense of irony intervenes, however, turning a success into an error with far-reaching consequences. During Miss Crawley's visit to King's Crawley, Becky endears herself to the wealthy old woman, who then takes Becky back to London with her in what seems like an upward swing to Becky's social and geographic mobility. Becky misjudges her relationship with her employer, however, mistaking Miss Crawley's favoritism with true familial affection. Banking on the Miss Crawley's approval of a union between her favorite nephew (set to inherit her money) and her new favorite companion, Becky marries Rawdon in secret and carries on with the Crawley family without revealing the marriage. In one of the text's most perfect moments of irony, Rawdon's father, Sir Pitt, proposes to Becky, unaware that she has already covertly married his son. She must refuse on the grounds that she is already married, strategically omitting the fact that her husband is her suitor's son. In the moment of Sir Pitt's proposal and Becky's tearful, regretful refusal, Becky's gains in marrying Rawdon are diminished by the opportunity she missed in making herself unavailable to Sir Pitt, the cost of which she is keenly aware. In anguish,

Becky thought to herself, in all the woes of repentance—and I might have been my lady! I might have led that old man whither I would. I might have thanked Mrs. Bute for her patronage, and Mr. Pitt for his insufferable condescension. I would have had the town-house newly furnished and

decorated. I would have had the handsomest carriage in London, and a box at the opera; and I would have been presented next season. All this might have been—now all was doubt and mystery. (178)

Becky rarely expresses regret in the novel, but in this tortured internal monologue she recognizes how serious the consequences of marrying Rawdon are for her. Had she held out for Sir Pitt's proposal rather than gambling on Miss Crawley's approval, she would have become Lady Crawley, with all the social and financial benefits attached to her title. The moment of Sir Pitt's proposal highlights the risk inherent in Becky's opportunistic pursuit of upward mobility: while she can engineer a situation to her benefit, she cannot control the outcome.

Even worse than her missed opportunity with Sir Pitt is the reality of her marriage to Rawdon: there is no money. After Becky reveals she has married Rawdon, Lady Crawley is incensed to the point of disinheriting her nephew and his new wife, angrily writing them out of her will. In more ways than one, Becky's opportunistic marriage to Rawdon is a mistake that follows her throughout her life and presents compounding problems, especially around money. In the first place, Rawdon Crawley has no money of his own. All of his wealth is dependent on his inheritance, which he unknowingly forfeits when he secretly marries Becky. So not only does he have no money, his marriage to Becky undermines his financial future. Add to that a gambling habit that creates debts in most of the Crawleys' personal and business relationships, and Becky's marriage becomes especially problematic. Thackeray's treatment of marriage in this instance subverts the idea that for women, an advantageous marriage offers stability and upward mobility. In most ways, Becky was better off before she married Rawdon. She was poor, but not in debt. She was beloved by the Crawley family and

enjoyed the privilege of moving easily amongst them and their friends. Marrying Sir Pitt might even have been less socially stigmatized because he was an older man and widower. Through the financial component of Becky and Rawdon's union, Thackeray emphasizes the transactional nature of marriage and the high opportunity cost involved in Becky's choice to marry Rawdon.

Whereas Victorian heroines, at marriage, settle into domestic stasis, Becky's marriage to Rawdon prompts increased mobility. She first travels as a soldier's wife, accompanying her husband's regiment to Belgium. While her marriage to Rawdon Crawley enables and necessitates her geographic mobility, Becky's new status as a married woman presents some interesting and unexpected roadblocks to her autonomy. Entering into the social contract of marriage costs Becky some of the fluidity allowed by her previous, more liminal status as an unmarried woman with few ties to people or place. As a married woman, Becky can no longer circulate among people of higher status as she did when she was a governess, and her level and range of mobility are, in some ways, more limited than before. As a soldier's wife, Becky is well chaperoned as she travels with the wives and families who board the packet ships sailing for Ostend and then on to Brussels. Becky's journey to Belgium significantly shapes Becky's character development and in terms of the text's treatment of mobility and morality, as the shift in setting from London to Brussels, a battle site, changes the dynamic of Becky's relationship with her husband, with Amelia, and with her country. The backdrop of a war zone represents the moral tension underlying the characters of *Vanity Fair*, and it is there, far away from the stability of London society, that the text reveals its moral judgments. *Vanity Fair*'s culture is built on artifice and orchestration that thinly veils the underlying turmoil. The chaos of war, however, highlights the fragile structures of *Vanity Fair* and

reveals a glimpse of its darker side, specifically through the character of George Osborne. He propositions Becky—his pregnant wife’s best friend—at a party, which is interrupted by the announcement that Napoleon and the French army have passed the Sambre and are approaching. The men prepare for battle, and shortly after, George is killed in the Battle of Waterloo. The relationship between these two events is set up almost as cause and effect, demonstrating the significance of what has occurred. As Julian Jimenez Heffernan explains, the truncated Waterloo-episode plays a pivotal role in the novel, “structurally, thematically, and symbolically . . . no important character in the novel remains unchanged after Waterloo” (26). George’s death in battle is tied directly to three concepts that constantly reassert themselves throughout the text: mobility, maternity, and marriage. In the scene I have just described wherein George propositions Becky, all three of these concepts take on an interrelationship and clarity that the text obscures in other places. George’s death takes place abroad, in Belgium, rather than at home, in England. Amelia’s pregnancy emphasizes the amorality of George’s overtures to Becky. It is bad enough that Becky is Amelia’s best friend, but the fact that Amelia is pregnant with his child makes it difficult to find any sympathy or justify his actions as those of a frightened soldier on the verge of battle.

Becky’s travel abroad as a soldier’s wife may begin conventionally, but it later becomes a symbol of her outlier status in English society. The setting of Belgium, a low coastal country on the fringes of European power, distances Becky from London, England’s metropolitan center. While being an outsider often carries with it a negative connotation, for Becky in Belgium, her outsider status serves her well in some cases. While the women continue to exclude her from their company and gossip about her, Becky’s fluency in French, charisma, beauty, and European style make her a popular companion to the men in her

husband's regiment (a fact which further alienates her from the other wives). What she lacks in social capital at home in England she gains in spades when she travels to Belgium, even amidst the chaos of war. Becky's geographic travel combined with the cosmopolitan fluidity imbued by her mother makes Becky seem most at home when she is abroad. Belgium, her first destination abroad, is the setting where the text begins to underscore the aspects of her character that distinguish her from the Englishwomen with whom she attempts to mingle at home. Becky finally has the upper hand when compared to the snobbish women who exclude her in England. Becky also maintains her composure when the Battle of Waterloo breaks out while the wives and families of the regiment begin a desperate flight back to England. Becky's conduct in the crisis reveals her ability to fend for herself, but also reveals for the first time the depth of Becky's individualistic, self-deterministic nature. While her fellow countrymen panic for conveyance back to England, Becky sees crisis as an opportunity for gain. She has two horses, and horses are dearly wanted. They are specifically wanted by the Lady Bareacres, who has always treated Becky scornfully in social interactions. Becky parlays Lady Bareacres's panic to escape into a lucrative exchange of social capital, but she does not sell her the horses.¹⁹ Instead, she extorts a huge sum of money from Jos, her friend, capitalizing on his cowardice and desire to flee. Once the deal is transacted, Becky immediately tabulates the value of the battle's spoils: Jos's money from the purchase of her horses, proceeds from selling Rawdon's personal effects, plus her widow's pension promise Becky a life free from obligations to others. Becky's speculation about her possible financial gain from the battle and the death of her husband is shocking, as the narrator contrasts her

¹⁹ In denying the Bareacres family her horses, Becky inverts the power dynamic of the social relationship they have at home in England, and also enjoys revenge on the Bareacres for their constant social snubbing.

financial calculations with the panic of her peers over the potential loss of their husbands. It is possible to justify Becky's actions in Belgium, for anyone in her situation might do the same thing to take care of their own interests in a similar crisis situation. In terms of mapping her morality by the degree of her mobility, however, Becky's time in Belgium reveals much about her investments. They lie not with her country or her relationships, but with her own well-being. This self-interest, which Becky exhibits throughout the text, is where the narrator seems to judge Becky the most. If by virtue of her gender Becky is expected to demur to the needs or desires of others, such as her husband, child, or country, she certainly does not meet that test of morality. While Becky is able to exploit the Waterloo battle situation for her personal financial gain, it is the English-allied forces who are victorious in the battle, defeating the French and ending Napoleon's reign. As an act of foreshadowing, this English military victory does not bode well for the fate of French-speaking Becky. Later, the text overtly links Becky with Napoleon, a French figure of power and mobility who was ultimately a failure. An illustration of Becky in Napoleon's iconic bicorne hat appears at the head of chapter LXIV (which is also the chapter in which the narrator makes some important revelations about Becky's character). Becky's refusal to aid her fellow countrymen in a time of crisis, her exploitation of the situation—fleecing a friend—for her personal benefit, and her speculation about the potential financial gain from a dead husband establish her *modus operandi* for a number of other events in the novel.²⁰

The second event that raises questions about Becky's moral character is the birth of her son, Rawdon, whose arrival in the narrative signals a significant shift in the narrator's portrayal of Becky's character. Much as when she married, this shift occurs because the

²⁰ Inconveniently for Becky, Rawdon does not die in battle, so her financial gain is significantly smaller than she speculates.

liminality of Becky's identity that existed before she became a mother becomes more defined (wife, now mother), increasing the tension between what she desires and what she is supposed to desire. As a wife and mother, Becky cannot escape her categorization into those conventional and societally revered categories as she could before, and her social and geographic mobility decreases by degrees as well. Thackeray's introduction of little Rawdon into Becky's narrative is indicative of her own lack of investment in her new role as mother to the boy.²¹ He is mentioned as an afterthought to Becky's speculation on the fortune she will gain by Miss Matilda Crawley's death. There is no mention of the pregnancy or birth, only the child's need for mourning clothes (458). Thackeray may be using the birth of Becky's son to underscore her French identity. As Julia Kent identifies, this is a method Thackeray uses in *Vanity Fair* and other novels: "[Thackeray] is strongly drawn to French novelistic representations of marriage and domesticity and often appropriates them when attempting to demystify the forms of intimacy that supposedly characterize the English home" (Kent 129). In *Vanity Fair*, it creates a further degree of separation between Becky and her English baby. The child's French *bonne* is also mentioned immediately, and the narrator explains that Becky leaves the baby with the *bonne* in order to join her husband in Belgium. Of this separation, the narrator explains, "The parting between Rebecca and the little Rawdon did not cause either party much pain. She had not, to say the truth, seen much of the young gentleman since his birth" (458). As French conventions of parenting in the nineteenth century dictate, Becky had placed him with a nurse in a village outside of Paris

²¹ It is also possible to read Becky's lack of maternal involvement as a more radical refusal to allow motherhood to limit her mobility, especially when she has a doting co-parent to assume the parental responsibilities. However, the narrator does not share that feminist view and frames Becky's maternal ambivalence as a moral failing. If Becky has any investments in motherhood, the narrator does not share them with the reader.

after his birth, where he had spent the first months of his life with a surrogate family, and where his father would frequently visit him. The text reveals that Becky neglects to pay Rawdon's nurse for the care she provided for her son, leaving town without paying her debt. Becky's cultural background and her residence in Paris place her well within nineteenth-century French parenting conventions in leaving her child with a *bonne* for extended periods of time. In England as well, it was common for women to employ a wet nurse for the care and feeding of their child for two to three years, so while this is a very different approach to parenting than we see in the twenty-first century, it is not abnormal to see it depicted in the nineteenth-century novel. The fact that Becky does not visit her son while he is in the care of another woman (which is obviously possible, as his father visits him regularly) and then leaves town without paying the woman who nursed and cared for her child are two points the narrator highlights. In both cases, the narrator uses Becky's neglect to raise questions about her moral character without overtly condemning her.

The presence of a child—even though he is often left in the care of others—imbues Becky's acts of mobility with a moral dilemma, and from the beginning her travel is framed as an act that takes her away from her motherly duties, from leaving Rawdon with her maid as she joins her husband in Belgium to leaving England without making any arrangements for him after her messy breakup with her husband. One scene is particularly illustrative of the Crawley family dynamic. Becky, entertaining Lord Steyne in the drawing room after the opera, hears her son crying from the room overhead. "It's my cherub crying for his nurse," she says, but does not stir to go to his aid. Lord Steyne notices this inaction and sardonically says, "Don't agitate your feelings by going to look for him." Becky makes no move to agitate her feelings, replying "Bah! He'll cry himself to sleep" (447). Meanwhile, the boy's father,

being the more tender, loving parent, steals away to check on him while Becky continues to entertain Lord Steyne with talk of the opera they have just seen together. In this scene and within the Crawley family more generally, Thackeray subverts gendered parenting conventions, further highlighting Becky's failure to perform as a mother in even the most perfunctory way.²² Becky's failure to take interest in her role as mother is cast as a moral failing by the text. Even dubious characters such as Lord Steyne, who is cruel to his own family, remark on her disinterest in her child, which acts as an especially powerful condemnation.

While the narrator generally takes a sympathetic view toward Becky's motivation behind many of her life choices, her failure as a mother is one point on which Thackeray's narrator does not withhold judgment. The narrator presents a sympathetic view of Becky on other points, such as her treatment of her husband, but there are few efforts to temper his disdain for how she treats her son.²³ The narrator's descriptions of Rawdon's distant admiration of his mother emphasize how little feeling he receives from her: "Mother is the name for God in the lips and hearts of little children; and here was one who was worshipping a stone!" (478). Becky's faults as a mother increase throughout the narrative as she devolves from dislike and boredom to hatred, culminating in a scene wherein she beats young Rawdon for listening to her sing to Lord Steyne. The narrator records Rawdon's complaint that her

²² Taken as a single scene, Becky's disinterest in her crying child may not raise concern given the different ideas about parenting in the nineteenth century. However, the narrator describes many scenes that highlight Becky's disinterested and sometimes cruel treatment of her child, often comparing them to Amelia's devotion and attention to her son. The narrator creates an effective image of Becky as falling well outside the norm of early nineteenth-century norms for mothering.

²³ When the narrator describes Becky's low opinion and treatment of her husband, it is usually balanced with criticisms of Rawdon's character, especially his inability to keep out of debt.

attention seems misdirected from her child to Lord Steyne: “Why don’t she ever sing to me – as she does to that bald-headed man with the large teeth?” (561). Shortly after, she sends her son away to school, an idea proposed and paid for by Lord Steyne, who dislikes the child. The narrator notes that Becky shows no emotion at their parting, but her husband is heartbroken by the separation.

Her son’s departure and an explosive incident with her husband precipitate a further unmooring from her home and from England. Spurred on by her husband’s finding her in a compromising position with Lord Steyne, Becky’s marriage effectively ends. Rawdon and Lord Steyne fight, and in the aftermath Rawdon discovers the hoard of cash – thousands of pounds—Becky has been hiding from him in her desk.²⁴ After the encounter, Becky’s room, with torn clothes strewn and jewelry in a heap on the floor, reflects the damage that has just occurred in her personal life. Interestingly, she utters few words during this highly charged encounter. She does not offer explanation for the situation or excuses for her behavior. The only thing she says is “I am innocent,” though no one makes any explicit accusations. The accusations against her character are implied and indirectly stated: her relationship with Lord Steyne is inappropriate even if it is not sexual, and she has seriously wronged her husband and failed as a wife and mother. She repeats this phrase—“I am innocent”— five times over the course of the five-page exchange, and it is the last thing she says to her husband before he leaves her in the mess that was once their home. The narrator ponders, “What had happened? Was she guilty or not? She said not, but who could tell what was truth which came from those lips, or if that corrupt heart was in this case pure?” (634). Later, Becky defends herself as “not guilty” of similarly ambiguous crimes to Sir Pitt, continuing to indirectly reference

²⁴ Upon finding a thousand-pound note, Rawdon remarks that Becky might have spared him a hundred pounds to bail him out of jail.

the moral questions that have arisen from her unconventional conduct. No longer bound by the symbolic domestic ties of motherhood and marriage, Becky spends the last part of the novel traveling through Europe as a manipulative outsider rather than someone seeking a better life.

After the “Curzon Street Catastrophe” involving Lord Steyne, Becky leaves England for Europe, effectively abandoning her son for the rest of the novel. Rawdon is better off when she is not there, now in the care of Sir Pitt and Lady Jane, but the text makes clear that it is still a moral transgression for her to leave him. Becky’s travels are partially to escape the conflict she has left behind her and partially to make money to continue living in the fashion she prefers. Becky reappears in the narrative gambling (and losing) at the Erbprinze hotel in Germany. She is discovered there—fallen significantly in social and financial position—by the now-grown George Osborne, who is travelling with Amelia, Jos, and Dobbin, and is subsequently reunited with her old friends. Through this reunion, the narrator relays the turn Becky’s life has taken since leaving England. The narrator offers a prefatory warning for what’s to come in his recounting of Becky’s time spent abroad:

We must pass over a part of Mrs. Rebecca Crawley’s biography with that lightness and delicacy which the world demands—the moral world, that has, perhaps, no particular objection to vice, but an insuperable repugnance to hearing vice called by its proper name. (759)

Clearly, the narrator is carefully withholding details from the reader. His acknowledgement that he has held back is far more strategic than if he had told all of Becky’s secrets, as his discretion allows the reader’s imagination to fill in the gaps. After a dissertation on delicacy and the public’s offense at a frank discussion of immorality or vice, the narrator makes an

important revelation about Becky's character that calls into question everything he has previously stated about her. He challenges the reader thus:

I defy any one to say that our Becky, who has certainly some vices, has not been presented to the public in a perfectly genteel and inoffensive manner. In describing this Siren, singing and smiling, coaxing and cajoling, the author, with modest pride, asks his readers all round, has he once forgotten the laws of politeness, and showed the monster's hideous tail above water? No! (759)

It is important to note that the narrator defends himself in this passage rather than defending Becky. He goes on to say that the monstrous tail is right below the waterline for anyone who chooses to look deeper, but also asks "has any the most squeamish immoralist in Vanity Fair a right to cry fie?" (759). This aside about Becky's character is significant because it acknowledges the implicit moral judgment that plagues Becky throughout the text: readers know she is bad, they just do not know how bad she really is. Likening her to a Siren, a beautiful but malevolent and cannibalistic mythical figure, also recasts Becky's previous and future dealings in a more sinister light.

The narrator's tone with regard to Becky's morality shifts in the final chapters of the novel, where he begins to withhold less information about Becky (and others' opinions of Becky) from the reader, though still without making any overt moral judgments of his own. It is not coincidental that Becky is most geographically mobile in these chapters, travelling from London to France and Germany and around the European continent. This is also the point where Becky's trajectory is the most opaque, for it is difficult to keep track of her. Rather than narrating Becky's journey chronologically, the narrator "catches up" to her and sometimes backtracks, lending an overall feeling that she is evading the narrator and the

reader. Thackeray's alignment of Becky's increased travel with a suggested decline in moral character implies that many of Becky's moral failings come from the roots she has severed, and what she has left behind: her home, husband, and child.²⁵ For Becky, travel is a means of rejecting and refusing the gendered English ideas of morality, a code by which she cannot live. She has breached the social contract of marriage and motherhood and expresses no remorse. Beyond that, she has no desire to return to the roles she left, maintaining her individualistic, self-determining desire for money and status. As her social status declines, her self-representation takes an inverse turn. When she encounters Jos Sedley at the Erbprinz hotel, for example, she tells him to call on her at the Elephant hotel and ask for "Madame de Raudon." (758). Later, the narrator reveals that she has changed her name and her vocation a number of times in her travels. This name changing, along with her constant location changing through travel and engagement in questionable work on the stage, is also indicative of the text's suggestion of her moral instability. Identities in *Vanity Fair* are unstable by design, best seen in Becky's shape-shifting late in the novel. Kit Dobson characterizes identities in *Vanity Fair* as performance-based, and the characters are judged on their ability to convincingly perform their roles that are "at every turn constituted through performances...only sustained with difficulty" (1). It seems that Becky's travels erode her ability to sustain the identity she has attempted to perform through the novel. Her talent for deception begins to wane and her encounters with other English tourists in Europe bring to light her history and close the doors of easy circulation that were once open to her on the Continent. Her reputation from home eventually catches up with her in her travels, and she is

²⁵ Her abandonment of her role as mother is so complete that she simply forgets about her son, making no considerations or arrangements for him when she leaves England. He is placed in the care of Lady Jane, whom he comes to regard as his mother.

forced to travel as an uneasy means of escape (766). She rambles from Boulogne to Dieppe, to Caen, and then to Tours and Paris, but she is eventually driven out of France by her creditors (768). From France she travels to Brussels, where she gambles away her money at *ecarte* and, after three months, is driven out of Brussels in debt. Being driven out of Belgium, one of the “low” countries, signifies how far she has sunk in status. The common theme of Becky’s travel at this point of her life is escaping her responsibilities to others, whether it is her family or the people to whom she owes money.

The narrator emphasizes the changeable, aimless nature of Becky’s character by using the language of travel, calling her a “gypsy,” a “vagabond,” and a “wanderer.” Of her travels, he says “Our little wanderer went about setting up her tent in various cities of Europe, as restless as Ulysses or Bampfylde Moore Carew. Her taste for disrespectability grew more and more remarkable” (768-769). The narrator’s comparison of Becky to masculine travelling figures is a telling choice. A comparison to Ulysses suggests a certain nobility and positive connotation, and subverts the Ulysses/Penelope trope of men who travel and women who stay behind to mind the home and miss the traveller. A reference to the lesser-known Bampfylde Moore Carew, an imposter, swindler, and bonafide gypsy who once faked smallpox by pricking his skin and rubbing it in salt and gunpowder, is less flattering (Ashton). Taken together, Thackeray’s allusion to these travellers underscores Becky’s indeterminate nature: either she is an innocent victim of her circumstances, or she is a malevolent swindler.

Reports of Becky’s movement through Europe (diplomatically reported by the narrator as told to him by a third party) suggest she falls into the latter camp as a gypsy and a swindler, at least while she is most mobile. Not one to cast direct judgment on Becky, the

narrator reports that a “Madame de Raudon, “began giving concerts and lessons in music, and another “Madame Rebecque” made appearances at the Dame Blanche opera, where she was hissed off the stage for incompetency (770). In addition to these speculations, the narrator halfheartedly dismisses accounts that she was once banished from St. Petersburg by the Russian police, where there was a report she was a Russian spy at Toplitz and Vienna. As her mobility increases, doubts about her moral character mount as well. It is also significant that at this point that Becky begins to describe herself as a person defined by mobility. She uses the sad tale of her travels as a means by which to hook Jos’s interest upon their reunion, though her description of the events of her life is more sympathetic than the account given by the narrator. Jos is not immune to her charms and leaves a visit with her at her hotel believing she has been the innocent victim of her circumstances. Jos’s inability to see the subtext of Becky’s performance (a deficiency that first became obvious in his character many years before) ultimately leads to his suspicious death.

Becky’s skill at manipulation and Jos’s naïve blindness to her motives create an opening in the text for a sinister, important event: Jos Sedley’s extended illness and death at Aix-la-Chapelle. The narrator’s measured revelation that Jos has died abroad after naming Becky as beneficiary on a large life insurance policy is, by that point in the text, sensational, but not at all surprising. Becky’s moral character is established as equivocal, so while there is no reason to believe Becky had anything to do with Jos’s death, the circumstances cast heavy suspicion on Becky nonetheless. After all, this is not the first time Becky finds herself in a compromising situation with a complicated but totally plausible explanation. The possibility that each of her plausible explanations could be true creates an ambiguity in Becky’s character that stems from this unresolved tension: she could repeatedly be the victim of

unfortunate circumstances, or she could be a murderer. The answer to the question “Does Becky kill Jos?” would be the most revelatory of the entire novel. The admission of Becky’s guilt would be a sensational climax to the novel, but Thackeray’s ambiguity about Becky’s role in Jos’s death avoids the conventional “big reveal” and instead continues to push readers into their own interpretation of the event and leaves the mystery of Becky’s morality intact through the novel’s end. Deborah Thomas speculates that Thackeray obscures Becky’s guilt in Jos’s death because of his personal beliefs on public execution. She theorizes that Thackeray’s horrified reaction to the public execution of Francois Benjamin Courvoisier in 1840 led to his privately conceiving of Becky murdering Jos, but obscuring it from public view (Thomas 1). While Thomas’s theory places *Vanity Fair* within the Victorian debate about capital punishment and makes meaningful connections between the ambiguous circumstances of Jos’s death and Thackeray’s own feelings about public execution, even she acknowledges it provides no definitive proof to answer the question that would indict or exonerate Becky. The ambiguity is so noteworthy and perplexing that John Sutherland explores the question in his book *Is Heathcliff a Murderer? Great Puzzles in Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Sutherland evaluates the facts and determines that if Becky did do it and is not punished, then *Vanity Fair* has one of the most “un-Victorian endings in nineteenth-century fiction,” as conventionally guilt is punished and virtue rewarded (68). While the lingering question of Becky’s guilt or innocence is frustrating to readers, it serves a purpose that seems in line with Thackeray’s work in the rest of the novel in that it asks readers to evaluate the criteria we use to make judgments about a person’s character and circumstances. In Becky’s case, it shows us that binaries of goodness and evil, or morality and amorality lack the complexity to reflect human nature fully as it is formed by one’s circumstances.

Despite the narrator's many ruminations on morality, the novel provides no clear rewards or condemnations for any character. At the novel's end, Amelia is married to Dobbin and has a daughter, of whom Dobbin is extremely fond: " 'Fonder than he is of me,' [Amelia] thinks with a sigh" (822). It is unclear if her sigh signifies wistfulness for Dobbin's former devotion to her, or contentedness with her life. Becky's happiness is similarly unclear. She lives in England on a generous allowance given by her son, who inherits the Baronetcy at Queen's Crawley after his father and Sir Pitt die consecutively. She spends most of her time at Cheltenham and Bath, where some in society there despise her, and others are sympathetic to her plight, considering her to be a "most injured woman," and going to church and selling goods at charity bazaars (821). Her stasis at the end, especially her involvement in philanthropy and the church, adds another level of ambiguity to her representation. Has she reformed? If so, is her loss of mobility a reward? If she has not reformed, is stasis a punishment for the cosmopolitan Becky Sharp? In the novel's closing scene, Amelia and Dobbin, walking through London with their children, chance upon Becky at her work in the bazaar stalls. At the chance meeting, Becky casts her eyes down demurely and smiles, while Becky and Dobbin quickly gather their children close to them and walk away (821). Though brief, this ending scene is significant in terms of the textual work of cultural criticism Thackeray is doing throughout the text. As Gary Dyer points out, the bazaar as a setting for Becky's final scene communicates more about Thackeray's view of nineteenth-century British culture than may at first appear. He writes, "the conclusion of the novel sums up Thackeray's concerns with deceit, class, and gender in a manner typical of what had become a topos in British writing; the author indeed revitalizes the distaste for business and the demonization of women common to the depictions of bazaars over the previous thirty-two

years” (Dyer 196).²⁶ The novel’s ambiguous ending provides little by way of an easy conclusion on matters of morality and happiness, especially for Becky and Amelia, the women at the heart of the story. The novel’s concluding question asks, “which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? Or, having it, is satisfied?” (822). The plot suggests Amelia and Becky each acquire the things they desire (Amelia a family, Becky wealth and independence), but the narrator does not say if each woman is rewarded, such as through happiness or contentedness. Neither is punished, to be sure, but an absence of punishment is not the same as a reward. In a text deeply invested in mobility, I find that Thackeray remains ambiguous to the end in his treatment of Becky Sharp, her mobility, and her morality. In the same way her travel throughout the text raises questions about her morality, her stasis in the end raises more questions than it answers. It could mean that she has reformed and is genuinely engaged in philanthropy and church life. To a reader who has absorbed Thackeray’s skepticism though the novel’s many pages, though, it is not easy to believe Becky could be happy or content with a life going to church and working the bazaar stalls. If it is an act, like so much of her life to date, engaging in philanthropic or church work under false pretenses seems particularly low. Either way, one wonders, “But what’s her next move?” Though Becky returns home to England, her domestic narrative has already been irreparably disrupted. She is a wife with no husband and a mother with no child, so the attachments that create domestic stasis are, for her, absent. With travel as a defining aspect of her narrative, Becky’s stasis in the end is also a part of the map of her morality. It remains anyone’s guess where that map leads.

²⁶ In line with her chameleonic appropriation of titles and use of names that best serve her present situation, Becky goes by “Lady Crawley” at this time in her life. The narrator notes, “She never was Lady Crawley, though she continued so to call herself” (821).

Chapter Three: The (Dis)Pleasures of Travel: Art, Italy, and Feeling in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*

In George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-1872), Dorothea Brooke undertakes a more conventional journey than either *Villette's* Lucy Snowe or *Vanity Fair's* Becky Sharp. Or, at least, it begins as a conventional journey for a Victorian woman: a honeymoon. In the novel, Dorothea and her new, much older husband Edward Casaubon embark on a wedding journey to Rome. For Dorothea, the honeymoon holds the promise of uniting her with her new husband. She and Casaubon find themselves at cross-purposes, however, when Rome's allure for him is more academic than romantic. While Casaubon finds himself stimulated and immersed in study, Dorothea spends most of the honeymoon alone, lonely and frustrated by her unmet expectations of this first voyage as a wife. The journey serves as an emotional and intellectual passage for Dorothea. In this chapter, I argue that the act of travel that occasions Dorothea's unhappy honeymoon journey is central to her character's shift from a cerebral mode of experiencing the world to one that values feeling. That is, her travels to Rome cause a profound change in the way she experiences life, love, and interpersonal relationships; where Dorothea initially prioritizes intellect over emotion, she ultimately becomes more responsive to the affect of her emotions. While this shift could possibly have resulted from travelling nearly anywhere with her unresponsive husband, within the context of the Victorian novel in which sexual matters are often implied rather than explicitly stated (particularly for middle-class readers), the setting of Italy is vital in signaling the emotional and sexual awakening Dorothea experiences. Eliot's Italian setting, full of art, pleasure, and music, reflects Dorothea's move from the cerebral to the embodied as her sexuality unfolds and finds its own union with her intellect.

George Eliot was herself an avid, thoughtful traveler, and her fiction writing reflects her familiarity with Europe and the act of travel.²⁷ John Rignall provides the most significant study of George Eliot's engagement with Europe and finds that European culture and literature serve central functions in Eliot's fiction. For example, in *George Eliot, European Novelist*, Rignall writes, "The motif of travel in her novels not only exposes some of the limitations of English life, as in the Roman scenes in *Middlemarch*, but it also plays a part in the formation of the self, raising questions about gender-determined differences in the construction of identity" (Rignall 9). Rome as a temporary setting with its "fragmentariness" offers Dorothea the opportunity of disorientation – a "fragmenting" of her self identity that allows for profound growth (Rignall 51). Rignall also points out Eliot's puzzling relationship with the act of travel as it appears in her writing – mostly "in the wings" rather than at the forefront, except in her last novel, *Daniel Deronda*. He writes, "Only the Roman scenes of *Middlemarch* and scattered episodes elsewhere, most notably in *Daniel Deronda*, bear immediate testimony to her European journeys. The life and writing took different roads" (43). Though Dorothea and Casaubon's time in Rome occupies relatively little space in the novel compared to the time spent at home in England, that short time is rich for analysis because of all Eliot brings out through the act of travel. The specific location of Rome is also important because of its connotations of art and pleasure, which provide a backdrop that highlights the tepidity of their erotic relationship.²⁸ One of the most significant fragments of

²⁷ In a retrospective view of Eliot's life, Eliot's own honeymoon to Venice was likely a low point in her travels. It was here that her new husband, John Cross, jumped from the window of their hotel room after their marriage. This well-known anecdote adds an additional and particularly sad resonance to Dorothea's honeymoon.

²⁸ Dorothea and Casaubon visit other cities on their honeymoon, but Rome is the only one mentioned by name and description.

Dorothea's self identity is her sexuality, which seems to be shaken awake by the Roman art she encounters.

One clear signal (besides Dorothea's encounters with sensuous Roman art) that *Middlemarch* is going to engage more than tangentially with the idea of female sexual identity is Eliot's immediate invocation of Saint. Teresa. Jill Matus examines Saint. Teresa's important role in *Middlemarch* for what it tells us about Dorothea. She writes:

To think about Teresa in *Middlemarch* in relation to other representations of her is to focus Dorothea's problems in terms of gender and the social construction of sexual difference, and to situate George Eliot's representation of female aspiration and achievement in relation to nineteenth-and twentieth-century thinking about hysteria and sexuality. A hysterical Saint Teresa returns as the repressed in *Middlemarch* to call attention to problematic assumptions about femininity and sexuality. (216)

As Matus explains, Eliot's invocation of Saint Teresa highlights Dorothea's yearning for higher purpose and limited heroic opportunity (215), which she attempts to overcome through her marriage to Casaubon in a bid for higher purpose by proxy.²⁹ Saint Teresa would have been a recognizable figure to nineteenth-century readers, and Matus argues that Eliot is evoking popular knowledge of the saint as an "epic-seeker" rather than drawing in-depth knowledge of her life from works like her autobiography or biography (219). As such, the novel's early comparison of Saint Teresa and Dorothea would have invoked for readers a figure "running away to martyrdom" (219), which of course takes on a particular significance

²⁹ Matus notes, "George Eliot is interested in invoking Teresa in the context of yearning and higher purpose, thereby preparing the ground for the representation of Dorothea Brooke as a latter-day Saint Teresa with reduced heroic opportunity" (215).

given Dorothea's religious convictions and motivations for her marriage and other life choices. Eliot's invocation of Saint Teresa would also imply female sexuality for nineteenth-century readers, as "Teresa's enduring presence in representations and discourse about hysteria and sexuality does draw attention to a Teresa who would perhaps have been an appropriate 'patron saint' for the incipiently hysterical Dorothea Brooke" (216). Eliot's utilization of Saint Teresa forms the foundation of Dorothea's self-abnegating character, positioning Dorothea's unsettled sexuality and desire to live a life of higher purpose at the forefront of readers' minds early in the novel.

The idea of martyrdom in relation to Dorothea emerges early in the text, and it is directly tied to her religious motivations. When we meet Dorothea Brooks, she is a severe, religious girl who exists almost entirely in the intellectual or cerebral realm, suppressing emotion to its exclusion in making decisions. Her religious devotion cultivates asceticism in her daily life, and she actively rejects the things that bring her pleasure. She and her sister, Celia, live in Tipton Grange in Middlemarch with their uncle, who is their guardian following their parents' death some years before. From the beginning, Celia and Dorothea are obvious foils. Whereas Dorothea is dark-haired, serious, and rigidly religious, Celia is blonde, cheerful, and religiously moderate. Dorothea is described thusly by the narrator:

Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there; she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects; likely to seek martyrdom, to make retractions, and then to incur martyrdom after all in a quarter where she had not sought it. Certainly such elements in a marriageable

girl tended to interfere with her lot, and hinder it from being divided according to custom, by good looks, vanity, and merely canine affection. (6)

While Dorothea is capable of both thinking and feeling, she seems unskilled in balancing the two, and seems to see thoughts and feelings as mutually exclusive modes of experiencing life. She categorically rejects emotion and sentimentality, evident in an early scene with her sister, Celia, as they divide their deceased mother's jewels. Celia wishes to wear the jewels, which have been locked away since the sisters arrived at Tipton Grange a year earlier, to memorialize their mother, but Dorothea is horrified that either she or her sister would wear the ornaments. Celia tried to persuade her to take some of the jewels and wear them, saying "But how can I wear ornaments if you, who are the elder sister, will never wear them?"

Dorothea responds, "Nay, Celia, that is too much to ask, that I should wear trinkets to keep you in countenance. If I were to put on such a necklace as that, I should feel as if I had been pirouetting. The world would go round without me, and I should not know how to walk" (9).

Yet, when she finds an emerald bracelet and ring, she claims them for herself. When she turns to admire the emeralds in the light she doesn't enjoy or comment on the aesthetic pleasure they bring, nor recall memories of her mother wearing them. Instead, "all the while her thought was trying to justify her delight in the colours by merging them in her mystic religious joy" (9). While Celia's admiration of the jewels is clearly rooted in the emotional experience of admiring the pretty colors and remembering her mother, Dorothea struggles to reconcile the same feelings with her thoughts about her religiously rooted opposition to wearing jewelry. Her first response is to reject the jewels and the feelings altogether, as she tells Celia to take the lot of them: "We need discuss them no longer. There—take away your property" (9). Dorothea's response hurts Celia, not just for the cold rejection of their

mother's jewelry but also for the tone of superiority Dorothea adopts when rejecting the necklaces and bracelets, which clearly have sentimental value to Celia. When Dorothea decides to accept the emerald bracelet and ring, it's not without some intellectual wrestling with the decision and guilt over her feelings of desire for the beautiful emeralds. This early scene foreshadows her struggle between the thought and feeling later in the novel as it relates to her personal relationships, particularly with the men in her life.

Celia's sensitivity and sentimentality throw Dorothea's intellectual severity and insensitivity to the emotional aspects of interpersonal relationships into sharp focus. Dorothea's severity and misguided privileging of intellect over feeling, as she shows with the jewelry, is further illustrated in the way she responds to two suitors, Sir James Chettham and Edward Casaubon. Sir James is an eligible young man, an excellent match for her in age, energy, and mission, but Dorothea finds him silly, treating his romantic interest in her with disdain and dismissal that border on hostility. Her intellectual attitude about the paternalistic nature of marital relationships, formed from figures such as Milton, guides her interactions with her two suitors (first Sir James Chettham and then Casaubon) so much so that she is unable to recognize Sir James's overtures to her despite their obviousness to everyone around her. For example, over dinner with the Brooke family at Tipton Grange, Sir James praises her skill as a horsewoman, sensitively recognizing that she enjoys and takes some pride in riding. Dorothea scoffs. In the same conversation, Casaubon somewhat less romantically praises her organizational skills (12-13). Dorothea swoons. When Sir James brings her a Maltese puppy as a present, she insults the gift and suggests he give it to Celia in an overt signal that she would prefer he re-direct his affections toward someone she deems more his type. She is, however, flattered when Casaubon defends her decision to give up her beloved horseback

riding hobby. When Sir James presses her for the reason behind her renunciation of the beloved activity, Casaubon says, “We must not inquire too closely into motives [...] Miss Brooke knows they are apt to become feeble in the utterance: her aroma is mixed with the grosser air. We must keep the germinating grain away from the light” (15). Where Sir James encourages her in what she enjoys and presses her to articulate her feelings, a move which makes her uncomfortable, Casaubon encourages her to avoid examining her feelings too closely. This interaction over dinner and especially Casaubon’s phrasing, “We must keep the germinating grain away from the light,” heavily foreshadows the events to come, particularly Dorothea’s struggle to reconcile thought with feeling. With all her strong religious convictions and strong sense of self, Dorothea retains a certain naiveté about personal relationships, particularly as they relate to romance and potential husbands. The narrator describes this quality thusly: “Dorothea, with all her eagerness to know the truths of life, retained very childlike ideas about marriage...the really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it” (7). The descriptor “childlike” and the fantasy of husband as father figure testify to Dorothea’s sexual inexperience and general lack of knowledge about conjugal relations.

Rather than being put off by Casaubon’s age and dry, pedantic demeanor as most young women would be, Dorothea finds him attractive, though the narrator is careful to note that Dorothea’s way of seeing Casaubon reflects an ideal rather than a truth: “Dorothea by this time had looked into the ungauged reservoir of Mr Casaubon’s mind, seeing reflected there in vague labyrinthine extension every quality she herself brought...” (16).³⁰ It is not long until their affection for each other becomes mutual and they begin to discuss marriage.

³⁰ Celia’s response to Casaubon is more expected of a young woman, and she finds him repulsive.

Of her attraction to Casaubon, Dorothea says, “He thinks with me” (16). She makes no mention of feeling nor of attraction to anything but his mind, which is unusual for a young Victorian woman (or any woman) ostensibly in love. The people around her notice the strange nature of the relationship, however. Her family and friends, including her sister and uncle, encourage her to consider Sir James as a potential partner, but Dorothea rejects their advice, not even aware that Sir James fancies her, not Celia. Celia informs her:

It is better to hear what people say. You see what mistakes you make by taking up notions. I am quite sure Sir James means to make you an offer; and he believes that you will accept him, especially since you have been so pleased with him about the plans. And uncle, too—I know he expects it. Every one can see that Sir James is very much in love with you. (Eliot 23)

Dorothea is genuinely shocked by this revelation, which shows her naiveté in matters of love. Sir James’s overtures to her have not been subtle. She resolves that she will revoke all politeness from him, even in the matter of the cottage improvement plans she enthusiastically supports, in order to deter his burgeoning “fondness,” a word she finds odious and offensive, as “it is not the right word for the feeling I must have towards the man I would accept as a husband” (24). Her uncle tries to steer her away from Casaubon and toward Sir James after Casaubon asks him for permission to make an offer of marriage, and Dorothea declines the well-intended guidance.³¹ This aspect of Dorothea’s personality, in which she rejects and resists the normal interdependent nature of interpersonal relationships with family and friends (in this case, people who are concerned for her future happiness), becomes an important marker of her development and evolution I discuss later on in this

³¹ Sir James, Mrs. Cadwallader, and Celia all register more energetic disapproval of the match and blame Mr. Brooke for not stopping it.

chapter.³² As I explain, Dorothea's move from a cerebral mode of experience to an emotional one has a deep impact on her interpersonal relationships (romantic and familial) as well as her worldview.

Common sense alerts readers to the fact that Dorothea and Casaubon are not a good match, but the text signals in a number of ways that the union is not going to have a conventional happy ending. One of the textual strategies that sets up Dorothea and Casaubon to be such an incongruous match (and her interest in him to be so surprising) is the particular language the narrator and other characters use to describe Dorothea and Casaubon. Descriptions of Dorothea foreground her youth and energy; she is often described using the language of springtime, freshness, and health, with glowing cheeks and eyes (9). Conversely, descriptions of Casaubon's sallowness and deep eye sockets connote agedness, sickness, and fragility (13).³³ The text makes clear that he is in the winter of his life, while Dorothea is just beginning to bloom.³⁴ These May-December descriptions also connote a problematic connection between sexuality and fertility, implying that Casaubon is well past his sexual and fertile prime, which could be a big problem for the much younger Dorothea, who has entered her prime childbearing years. It is in the way she describes her love for Casaubon that Dorothea demonstrates her cerebral rather than physical desires and impulses; her love takes the form of admiration rather than desire, being intellectual rather than physical. It almost seems as if she wants to *be* Casaubon rather than be his wife. Casaubon, too, is enthusiastic

³² Specifically, I discuss the important changes catalyzed by her honeymoon. Post-honeymoon, Dorothea begins to accept and value the guidance of others.

³³ Frederic J. Kirk suggests that some friends of George Eliot's, John and Sarah Austin, may have served as inspiration for Dorothea Brooke and Edward Casaubon. Kirk persuasively details the parallels between the two couples in his "*Middlemarch: Gloss on a Roman à Clef*," (*George Eliot – George Henry Lewes Studies* 46-47 [2004]: 53-63).

³⁴ Mr. Brooke pins his age at around 45, or about 27 years older than Dorothea, but the text implies that he is much older.

about gaining a wife in Dorothea, but each has his or her own vision of the nature of the marriage. At the outset of their relationship, Dorothea envisions a life aiding Casaubon in completing his life's work. She makes the comparison to Milton and his daughters, who aided him after he became blind, and wholeheartedly embraces what she sees as her duty to her future husband. Casaubon's idea of Dorothea's role in their marriage is similar, as he envisions Dorothea assisting him in his work and caring for him in his old age. Each has a critical blind spot, however, which obscures the vision of the reality that will emerge from their union.³⁵ Dorothea dreams of assisting Casaubon in his great work but cannot see that his work is an exercise in futility and a project that can never be finished. More importantly, though, both Dorothea and Casaubon are blind to their desires when it comes to marriage. Casaubon desires solitude and, occasionally, a set of willing hands to help him, while Dorothea unknowingly desires a more "normal" marriage that includes love, children, and affection. Casaubon proposes in a letter praising Dorothea's mental qualities, delighted he has found a woman "adapted to supply aid in graver labours and cast a charm over vacant hours" (28). Not once does Casaubon's letter mention love as a motivation for his proposal of marriage. Because of all these events, it is no surprise to readers when the scene opens on Dorothea's honeymoon and she is unhappy.

The honeymoon may be a near ubiquitous experience for the middle class Victorian woman, but its effect on the traveller is profound. In terms of travel, Dorothea's change as a result of her honeymoon shows that even conventional journeys have a significant impact on the traveller. For women in Victorian literature, honeymoons are so conventional that the logistics of the journey are often omitted. For example, the scene opens on Dorothea in Rome

³⁵ The act of seeing becomes increasingly important as the story unfolds, with art playing a significant role in opening Dorothea's eyes, so to speak.

without any description of how she arrived there. Eliot employs the trope of honeymoon travel, but not as readers might expect. Dorothea's honeymoon is not the moment marking her foray into the happiness of the communal relationship of marriage but rather a significant moment in her own personal self-awareness.³⁶ With regard to the character of Dorothea, Eliot seems to have two goals. The first is to develop Dorothea as a complex character who reflects the naiveté of her age and gender. The second is to cultivate a sense of sympathy for Dorothea, whose cool, rigid nature is initially off putting.³⁷ Taken together, these two efforts by Eliot create a greater climate in the novel for viewing the follies of youth with sympathy rather than condemnation.³⁸ In *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction*, Audrey Jaffe explains the mechanism by which Victorian fiction creates sympathy: "A confrontation between a spectator [the reader] 'at ease' and a sufferer raises issues about their mutual constitution...the sufferer is effectively replaced by the spectator's image of him or herself" (2). Eliot employs no similar sympathetic mechanism to create sympathy with older characters such as Casaubon and even Mr. Brooke.³⁹ An example of Jaffe's "scenes of suffering" is Dorothea's honeymoon, which is an important device in Eliot's sympathetic

³⁶ One signal Eliot provides to indicate that Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon is not going to turn out well is that the wedding takes place at the beginning of the novel rather than at the end. In the Victorian novel, happy marriages rarely result from weddings that occur early in the narrative. For example, consider Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, and Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right*. For further discussion of the failed marriage plot, see Kelly Hager's *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce: The Failed-Marriage Plot and the Novel Tradition* (Ashgate, 2010).

³⁷ Without Eliot's careful cultivation of sympathy for Dorothea, it would be easy for readers to say "she made her choice and must live with it" rather than remaining engaged with her development throughout the long novel.

³⁸ This sense of sympathy extends to Fred and his financial irresponsibility, Rosamund and Lydgate's bad marriage, and Will Ladislav's lack of focus as well.

³⁹ A notice and short review of the novel's first installment in the *Athenaeum* characterizes Mr. Brooke as "rambling" and "inconsequential," and Casaubon as "not bad," but "hopelessly and aching negative and repulsive" (*Middlemarch: A Study* 713).

portrayal of Dorothea and for shutting down the possibility for readers to sympathize with Casaubon. In her use of the honeymoon as a sympathetic device, Eliot creates a unique textual space where Dorothea is permitted to openly regret her choice of husband and marriage while creating a path for her to make a different choice, even though it is not a “good” match for her in terms of social convention.⁴⁰ Eliot’s use of the honeymoon is especially important in the way it serves to individuate Dorothea relative to her husband rather than unify them, achieving the opposite ends of the ideal honeymoon. In this way, the honeymoon, usually a symbol of the conjugal union that has taken place, becomes a symbol of Dorothea’s loneliness and isolation, calling into question the overwhelmingly positive and idealized conventional narrative of marriage.

Since Dorothea’s honeymoon is such a pivotal event in her development, it’s important to understand some of the historical context of the honeymoon. The conventional honeymoon journey as it is presented in fiction understates the impact it has on a woman’s identity. Marriages and honeymoons may be ubiquitous and conventional, but they are also profound in the identity shift they represent, especially for women. Until late in the nineteenth century when the New Woman became a visible figure because of her increased autonomy and independence, a Victorian woman’s identity was largely determined by her relationships to men: she was her father’s daughter, her husband’s wife, or her son’s mother. A marriage, honeymoon, and the accompanying name change mark a profound shift in identity.⁴¹ This important shift is often signaled quietly in a text rather than stated explicitly.

⁴⁰ Her later marriage confers on her neither status nor wealth, and it has the added impracticality of disqualifying her from inheriting Casaubon’s property. While not a practical choice in terms of social convention, it is one guided by love.

⁴¹ And, to a lesser extent, the birth of a child.

Eliot, however, gives voice through Dorothea to some of the deep feelings brought on by the change from single girl to married woman.

The aims of the Victorian honeymoon were more weighty than they might seem at first thought. In *Victorian Honeymoons: Journey Toward the Conjugal*, Helena Michie sets out to identify and describe what the honeymoon journey is supposed to accomplish. In her cultural study of letters, diaries, and fictional texts, Michie finds that the honeymoon was supposed to accomplish “some very difficult cultural work: fusing two people with limited experience of the opposite sex, who often deeply identified with their families of origin and with communities of same-sex friends, into a conjugal unit that was to become their primary source of social and emotional identification” (2). This expected transformation, Michie says, is why many honeymoon journeys took place away from the familiar settings of home. Michie establishes a cultural framework and context for reading honeymoon journeys in literature and archival sources such as letters and diaries, where the happenings of the honeymoon were written using oblique terms and vague euphemisms for the sexual encounter born out of the stalwart Victorian commitment to propriety. Because of this reticence, it takes some parsing to understand the coded way women wrote about their sexual encounters. Since Dorothea’s own description of her honeymoon is indirect in the text, Michie’s framework aids in reading Dorothea’s honeymoon in terms of her emotional and physical disappointment in the experience. Scholars have posited a number of theories of what did and did not happen on Dorothea’s honeymoon because of the way the text presents the journey, but because of Dorothea’s coded reflections on the event, there is no consensus.

Since the Victorians were invested in emphasizing the difference between the married and the single, the passage from singleness to marriage is a major one (Michie 24).⁴² Michie writes that the honeymoon became an expected part of the ritual surrounding marriage in the nineteenth century (26). While the honeymoon is usually presented as a privilege of the middle and upper classes, Michie finds evidence that honeymoon travel also became conventional for the upper working classes by the last quarter of the nineteenth century (26). Victorian honeymooners often traveled abroad to Europe or domestically in England depending on the length of the tour and time of year. The behavior of “honeymooners,” recognizable as a cultural icon, was commented on and parodied in literature and popular periodicals such as *Punch* (Michie 27).⁴³ It was around mid-century, or just before Eliot began writing *Middlemarch*, that the honeymoon became ubiquitous. In the Victorian period, the destination of a honeymoon also became important, the journey becoming an oft-used metaphor for a woman’s leaving home and setting off on the voyage of married life (30). A short honeymoon meant two to four weeks; long journeys meant one to three months (32).⁴⁴ Instructions for honeymoons were dispensed through books such as *Warne’s Book of Courtship and Marriage*, but these were mostly logistical instructions for where to go, what to see, how to dress, and other particular instructions for behavior. They largely ignored the issue of sex, however. As Michie finds in her study of real-life accounts of honeymoons, both women and men embarked on honeymoon journeys with varying degrees of sexual knowledge and experience, which led to some anxious circumstances and unequal

⁴² Michie traces the evolution of the honeymoon from the changes in marriage customs from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. For a brief history of British marriage, see Michie 19-26.

⁴³ According to Michie, honeymooners were identifiable by their excessive affection and strict judgment of others who act like stereotypical “honeymooners” (27).

⁴⁴ Both of these by today’s standards are very long.

expectations.⁴⁵ Much of this context is evident in Dorothea's honeymoon; the long tour, the destination, and Dorothea's expectation that her honeymoon will transition her from single girl to married woman are all conventional. Since by this time the honeymoon as practice and the honeymooner as cultural icon were well-established, the text deftly overturns the honeymooner stereotype of the ideal conjugal journal to depict alienation, confusion, and frustration instead.

Dorothea's honeymoon journey is a notable event in fiction (and is discussed so frequently in scholarship) because it fails so spectacularly to accomplish the unifying goal of the marriage journey. For that reason, it is especially memorable for readers because of the empathy it inspires. When the iconic scene opens on Dorothea in Rome, she bears little resemblance to the love-struck honeymooner. She is alone, standing near a statue of the sleeping Ariadne in the Vatican museums. The statue is described in sensual terms, "reclining...in the marble voluptuousness of her beauty, the drapery folding around her with petal-like ease and tenderness" (121). Abigail Rischin explains the importance of the Ariadne in this scene: "Eliot affirms the dynamic and expressive power of art by using the statue as a catalyst for the birth of desire, as a prefiguration of the novel's central romance plot, and as a vehicle for representing female eroticism within the constraints of Victorian fiction" (1122). In the Ariadne, Eliot "uses static art objects as agents and emblems of narrative dynamism and as representational resources whose voiceless visual rhetoric speaks more explicitly than language" (1124). Rischin draws a further parallel between the sleeping Ariadne and Dorothea, likening Dorothea's figurative abandonment by Casaubon to Ariadne's

⁴⁵ For example, In Dorothea and Casaubon's case, it's not clear if the marriage was actually consummated. Either way, both parties seem disappointed in the union.

abandonment by Theseus at Naxos (1126).⁴⁶ The Ariadne, representative of female sexuality and desire, is a visible symbol of Dorothea's latent and unacknowledged sexual desire. Beyond the rich symbolism of the buttoned-up Dorothea standing next to such a sensuous piece of art imbued with mythical meaning, this is evidently the first time Dorothea has seen a piece of art like this, and that it has a profound effect on her understanding of herself as a sexual being. Her uncle has art in the home where Dorothea lives, but "to poor Dorothea these severe classical nuditities and smirking Renaissance-Corregiosities were painfully inexplicable, staring into the midst of her Puritanic conceptions: she had never been taught how she could bring them into any sort of relevance with her life" (47). Dorothea would have seen paintings, engravings, and one-dimensional images of the female body before at home and through reading periodicals and illustrated books, but seeing the Ariadne would have offered a different perspective on the female nude. As seen in Figure 1, the Ariadne is a large-scale, realistic sculpture. Her body is carved in meticulous detail, her arms, neck, breast, and stomach exposed and her fleshy thighs closely draped in her dress.

⁴⁶ In Rischin's reading, Will functions like Bacchus, "rescuing" Dorothea after she "awakens" from the weeping session in her dressing room.



Figure 2: *Sleeping Ariadne*, photograph by Branson DeCou

It is a striking piece of art, and it's no surprise that Dorothea lingers near it.⁴⁷ Viewing the Ariadne, Dorothea can, possibly for the first time, find relevance in art and understand what the sexual female body— or what her own body— looks like within the context of the conjugal relationship. She does not seem especially pleased by this realization.

While she stands next to the Ariadne, Dorothea is observed by two men who come upon the scene: a German artist, Naumann, and, by chance, Will Ladislaw, Casaubon's second cousin whom Casaubon supports financially.⁴⁸ Dorothea is not gazing at the statue but rather at a streak of sunlight that falls across the floor in front of her. Dorothea is dressed in "Quakerish grey drapery" with a long cloak fastened at the neck, gloves, and a fur hat covering her conservatively braided hair. This scene is striking for the opposing images of

⁴⁷ The scale of the *Sleeping Ariadne* at the Vatican and Medici's *Ariadne*, another version of the statue at The Uffizi in Florence, is striking, especially in the lower body. The legs and feet are huge.

⁴⁸ Ladislaw and Dorothea have met before, which is how he recognizes her. Art is also the focal point of their first meeting, which I further discuss later in this chapter.

womanhood it represents: the sensual, reclining Ariadne versus the upright, fully clothed Dorothea. In fact, the German artist gazing upon the scene remarks,

What do you think of that fine bit of antithesis?... But she should be dressed as a nun. I think she looks almost what you could call a Quaker; I would dress her a nun in my picture [he is envisioning painting her]; However, she is married. I saw a wedding ring on that wonderful left hand. (121)

Eliot's overt contrast of Quakerish Dorothea standing next to the sensual statue coupled with Naumann's observation that she should be dressed as a nun raises questions about the success of her honeymoon and whether or not her marriage has been consummated. Scholars generally theorize that Casaubon is impotent and that the marriage was not consummated, but in her study of honeymoons Michie offers a different theory: that Casaubon—also inexperienced in sexual matters— was a bit too devoted to the idea of marital duty and Dorothea's first sexual experiences as a married woman were less than pleasurable, or possibly even traumatic. To support this theory, she cites Dorothea's nightmarish description of St. Peter's and the visual assault she feels in taking in so much art in Rome with her inexperienced eyes (86). Phyllis Rose's explanation of the nature of Victorian marriage in *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages* concurs with Michie's theory that Dorothea's transition from chaste girl to married woman is traumatic simply given the culture around women and sex at the time, arguing that "Suddenly [in marriage] sex, after being proscribed, was approved, encouraged, indeed required" (60). Of honeymoon conventions, she observes, "The custom of isolating for an extended period of time a newly married couple and asking them to concentrate on what they had been brought up to ignore was a harsh one..." (Rose 59). Given Dorothea's naïve idea of the nature of marriage (envisioning a father figure,

drawing parallels to Milton and his daughters), it seems that even a relatively positive or normal first sexual encounter with her new husband could be distressing and disorienting. Where before she had not thought of herself or Casaubon as sexual beings or in a sexual relationship, she is, on her honeymoon, forced to confront sexual feelings aroused by the sensuous Italian art that surrounds her as well as the reality she faces in this new phase of her relationship.⁴⁹ Since Casaubon at no point proves himself to be particularly careful or responsive to the feelings of his young bride, it seems fair to speculate that her initiation into the sexual component of her relationship with him is indeed a harsh one. This feeling is likely exacerbated by the way Dorothea spends her time in Rome: alone during the day, but returning to her husband in the evening after he concludes his study. Ladislaw distills the situation, stating his incredulity at the fact that Casaubon “[had] first got this adorable young creature to marry him, and then passing away his honeymoon away from her, groping at his mouldy futilities” (131). Moreover, because Casaubon is so much older than she and has visited Rome a number of times, their experiences of Rome are not really shared between them, emphasizing Dorothea’s solitary and individual journey even though she is now married. While everything is new and novel to Dorothea, Casaubon approaches the art and architecture of Rome with the boredom of familiarity that begins to grate on Dorothea. His well-meaning suggestions take a pedantic tone, and it is clear that Dorothea acutely feels that her honeymoon is not quite going the right way.

Eliot’s sympathetic strategy of making Dorothea so miserable on her honeymoon, a time when she should be so happy, is effective, as readers tend to empathize with her rather

⁴⁹ A friend who visited Rome and Florence for the first time marveled, “I have never seen so many penises in my life.” I do not think it is a stretch to say Dorothea may have felt the same way.

than judging her choice. Early reviews in the *Athenaeum* describe Dorothea as “poor Dorothea,” her marriage a “brief tragedy” (“*Middlemarch*. By George Eliot” 137). She wonders at her unhappiness, mentally asking, “but was not Mr Casaubon as learned as before? Had his forms of expression changed, or his sentiments become less laudable?” (125). She is beginning at this point to understand that an important change is taking place, though she does not immediately recognize that it is taking place in her rather than in her relationship or in her husband. As she tries to pinpoint the source of her sadness, she is initially disoriented as her ideas mingle with feeling in a new and unfamiliar way: “and by a sad contradiction in Dorothea’s ideas and resolves seemed like melting ice floating and lost in the warm flood of which they had been but another form. She was humiliated to find herself a mere victim of feelings, as if she could know nothing except through that medium...” (127). Her word choice here seems important; where she could have chosen another word such as “mode,” “way,” or “manner,” she chooses the words “form” and “medium,” which are closely associated with art. In this and other important moments, Eliot’s use of art as an important device in the novel becomes apparent.

Just as it is through Dorothea’s description of St. Peter’s that we can gain some insight into her perceptions of sex, it is through art that the reader can begin to track important moments of change in Dorothea—“a girl fed on meager protestant histories and on art chiefly of the hand-screen sort” (124)— and her way of experiencing the world around her. It is through Dorothea’s viewing of Italian art that we are most clearly able to see the importance of Eliot’s choice in sending Dorothea on a honeymoon to Italy rather than to another European destination such as France or Belgium. For the Victorians, Italy connoted sex, art, and pleasure. According to

Alessandro Vescovi, it was “what the Orient is to Europeans of the twentieth century, a mixture of attraction and repulsion: attraction for the ancient civilization and for Italy’s contemporary struggle to put an end to a period of political and economic subjugation and, at the same time, repulsion to its chaotic roads, dirty inns, stinky slums, crime, and depravation” (Vescovi et al 9). For women, the idea of Italy holds additional meaning. Madame De Stael’s 1807 novel *Corrinne* had—at least textually— associated Italy with women’s freedom and self-realization, significantly impacting Victorian conceptions of Italy (Vescovi et al 11).⁵⁰ As Joel J. Brattin identifies, Eliot uses Italy as both setting and symbol in *Middlemarch* to emphasize the novel’s major themes (291). For one, the setting of Italy highlights the differences between Dorothea and Casaubon, particularly Dorothea’s inexperience with travel, art, and sex, and Casaubon’s scholarly, weary approach to Rome, the honeymoon, and the marriage. Most importantly, the setting seems to awaken some latent sexual desire Dorothea had not previously recognized in herself. Barbara Hardy concurs with Michie’s description of the sexual implications of Dorothea’s encounter with the “strange and phantasmagoric imagery” of Italian art and points to the resulting identity shift in Dorothea, a “violent defamiliarization, an intellectual and sensuous revulsion, with sexual undertones” (Hardy 334). In this way, the setting of Italy is crucial to Dorothea’s development because, as Hardy argues, [fictional travelling women’s] responses, or lack of response [to art, monuments, and landscapes in Italy],

⁵⁰ For further discussion of Victorian literary discourses on Italy, see Annemarie McAllister’s “ ‘A Pair of Naked Legs and a Ragged Red Scarf’: An Overview of Victorian Discourses on Italy,” in *The Victorians and Italy: Literature, Travel, Politics, and Art* (19-43).

mark developments and destinies, connections and differences (Hardy 327).⁵¹ Art, both in Italy and at home, is central to Dorothea's development.⁵² In her unfamiliarity with and ignorance of the art she sees, Dorothea is not alone, and through the narrator, Eliot takes care to show that Dorothea is no more ignorant of Italian art than the average English tourist, and that we should not judge for what she does not yet know. The narrator notes that "travellers did not often carry full information on Christian art either in their heads or their pockets: and even the most brilliant English art critic of the day⁵³ mistook the flower-flushed tomb of the ascended Virgin for an ornamental vase due to the painter's fancy" (120). For Dorothea, the unfamiliar setting allows for a reorientation of desire from the cerebral to the emotional that is at first distressing to her (and to the reader) but later becomes important for her ability to connect in meaningful relationships. As Hanna Hunt writes in her essay on the representation of Rome in *Middlemarch* and *Portrait of a Lady*, "Dorothea's frustrated marital hopes and awakening to a new sexual and psychological maturity are firmly placed in the 'Eternal City'" (Hunt 188). It is true that the most profound change takes place in Dorothea's character, but that change takes root earlier in the novel with a chance meeting and brief discussion of art. Eliot foreshadows the impact of art and Dorothea's later shift in her first meeting with Will Ladislaw, which takes place before the honeymoon scene when he observes her in the Vatican. While walking the grounds of the home she will make with Casaubon upon their return from

⁵¹ As Hardy also notes, Charles Dickens, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, George Gissing, and E. M. Forster also send young heroines to Italy for the rich opportunities it offers for exploring female subjectivity and creativity.

⁵³ Bert Hornback identifies this reference as William Hazlitt (Eliot 120).

Rome, Dorothea meets Ladislav for the first time, just as he returns from sketching. Eliot signals the importance of this chance meeting through art, as she does with their second meeting in Rome. He shows the sketches he has just drawn to Dorothea during their brief and otherwise unremarkable first meeting. He asks her what she thinks of them, and she replies, "I am no judge of these things...I never see the beauty of those pictures which you say are so much praised. They are a language I do not understand. I suppose there is some relation between pictures and nature which I am too ignorant to feel" (51). Her speech is indirectly aimed at Casaubon (seemingly to impress him with her lack of feeling about beauty), but Ladislav misunderstands it. In this moment he forms his opinion of the girl who is to marry the uncle he despises:

Ladislav had made up his mind that she must be an unpleasant girl, since she was going to marry Casaubon, and what she had said about her stupidity about pictures would have confirmed that opinion even if he had believed her. As it was, he took her words for a covert judgment, and was certain that she thought his sketch detestable. There was too much cleverness in her apology: she was laughing at both her uncle and himself (51).

Interestingly, Ladislav, a poet and artist who is as full of feeling as Dorothea is of ideas and thoughts, mistrusts Dorothea because of the "cleverness" he identifies in her apology. Ladislav may be on to something in his assessment of Dorothea's critique. Dorothea dismisses the sketches in the same way Casaubon dismisses music, by filtering the experience of art through an intellectual lens and denying the feeling that is also part of the pleasure of experiencing art. While an intellectual understanding certainly adds significant

dimension to the experience of art, there is also great pleasure in the emotional response.⁵⁴ In this case, Dorothea is simply following Casaubon's lead, unknowing of the changes that lie waiting for her on her honeymoon in Rome, a city filled with art.

Rome serves as an important setting in revealing Dorothea's deepest character flaw, but also her greatest opportunity for growth: she does not know herself as well as she thinks. Though at home she seems to have a strong thread of identity, until the mobilizing shock of her honeymoon Dorothea's heuristic for understanding the world and making decisions comes from two important cultural narratives: that produced by her religion and that bestowed upon her by conservative, patriarchal Victorian gender norms. She carefully navigates these narratives in her home life, but the farther Dorothea travels from home, the more apparent it is to the reader that she is out of touch with her most basic needs, desires, and wants. Her seemingly strong sense of self-awareness is not true; the identity she has created has simply not been significantly challenged yet. Dorothea's journey to Rome presents the challenge to her sense of self-identity, removing her from familiar surroundings, from the people, routine, and visual surroundings that provide comfort to her. As a honeymoon, it also forces her to realize the significant change in her societal role from single girl to married woman. She experiences a severe form of culture shock as she travels not only from England to Italy but also from the culture of single womanhood to marriage. Dorothea's travel is an important device in the novel as Eliot asks the reader to sympathize with Dorothea's coming-to-grips with herself.

⁵⁴ Dorothea's experience with art in Italy corresponds with Roland Barthes's idea of *jouissance* versus the idea of pleasure in the textual encounter. In Dorothea's inability to interpret and understand art, she also denies the less challenging pleasure of experiencing it.

Whether it's from the disappointment of not consummating her marriage or from an unpleasant first sexual experience, Dorothea's emotional state deteriorates until the reader finds her six weeks after her marriage, still in Rome (her honeymoon journey falls into the "long" category), weeping in her dressing room.⁵⁵ Her view of her husband and of the life she has chosen has changed since the day of her marriage, and she feels it keenly. Although the narrator assures readers that this type of reorientation and disappointment is quite normal when a marriage takes place, the signs are clear: this marriage is not going to go well for Dorothea. Bad honeymoons lead inevitably to bad marriages (Michie 5). In the poignant and often referenced moment when Dorothea is sobbing alone in her dressing room, the narrator remarks on the nature of a new marriage:

Some discouragement, some faintness of heart at the new real future which replaces the imaginary is not unusual, and we do not expect people to be moved deeply by what is not unusual... However, Dorothea was crying, and if she had been required to state the cause, she could have only done so in some such general words as I have already used: to be driven to be more particular would have been like trying to give a history of lights and shadows; for that real future which was replacing the imaginary drew its material from the endless minutiae by which her view of Mr Casaubon and her wifely relation, now that she was married to him, was gradually changing with the secret motion of a watch-hand from what it had been in her maiden dream. (124)

The narrator is speaking generally about the unexpected, profound changes that occur in life, and specifically points to marriage as a change that can be particularly disillusioning. The

⁵⁵ The dressing room scene is the first time Dorothea is depicted in an emotional state.

narrator states, “In this way, the early months of marriage are often times of critical tumult—whether that of a shrimp-pool or of deeper waters—which afterwards subsides into a cheerful peace” (125). As readers find out, though, the narrator is incorrect, at least in Dorothea’s particular case. Her unhappiness never subsides to a cheerful or peaceful place in her marriage to Casaubon.⁵⁶ The narrator acknowledges Dorothea’s feelings but almost immediately negates them by suggesting they will fade with time. Audrey Jaffe would categorize this as a scene of suffering intended to cultivate a sense of sympathy between reader and protagonist, but Cara Weber frames the scene in broader social terms in her short study of marriage and sympathy. Weber sees Dorothea’s suffering (and the narrator’s commentary) as a matter of sympathy and ordinary experience, explaining, “The narrator’s comment that ordinariness (of suffering) tends to preclude sympathy challenges the reader to reconsider her response to commonplace scenes of suffering (494).⁵⁷ I propose an alternate theory with regards to sympathy in this scene: that Eliot allows the narrator to discount the gravity of Dorothea’s situation in order to deepen the reader’s sympathy with Dorothea. Before this point, Dorothea’s vulnerability is masked by her arrogance, and it is easy for the reader to see her unhappiness as a consequence of her hubris. The narrator’s commentary on Dorothea’s vulnerable situation aligns the reader with Dorothea, creating a deeper sympathy than if the narrator had affirmed that Dorothea had indeed gotten herself into a bad situation.

⁵⁶ Dorothea’s marriage is cut short by Casaubon’s death, but the text does not indicate that there was any hope for their happiness had he lived. On the contrary, the text is overt about her mistake in marrying Casaubon through the objections registered by her friends and family, Casaubon’s unresponsiveness to her most earnest attempts to endear him, and her own thoughts and feelings.

⁵⁷ Most readers will be more sympathetic to Dorothea in this scene than the narrator is, even if we read the narrator as coy and ironic. The text invites a less sincere reading of the narrator’s comments about Dorothea’s feelings, but whether the narrator is sincere or sardonic, the result is the same: we feel Dorothea’s pain.

So, because of rather than in spite of the narrator's misplaced optimism, at this moment both the reader and Dorothea know unequivocally that she has made a mistake in marrying Casaubon.

Dorothea's weeping breakdown is the watershed moment in her development. After this time, she and Casaubon begin to argue in nearly every instance they are represented together for the remainder of the marriage. Dorothea's feelings take precedent over her intellectual understanding of her relationship with her husband now that she had learnt what it means to feel. The narrator often discusses the disconnect Dorothea feels: she can understand and rationalize Casaubon's actions, but she can't prevent them from affecting her emotionally. In terms of her own self-development as an individual, this is a very good thing. As she becomes aware of her own feelings after the journey to Italy, she begins to act in accord with them rather than against them. In terms of her relationship, however, her self-awareness is not such a positive development, as it widens the chasm between her and her husband, to whom she is supposed to be united. They return home in the middle of winter not as Mr. and Mrs. Casaubon, but as two people who are even more different from each other than before: Dorothea, resigned to the life she has chosen but positive nonetheless; and Casaubon, somehow older and more brittle than his pre-honeymoon self. Again, Dorothea is described as the picture of youth and health: "She was glowing from her morning toilette as only healthful youth can glow: there was a gem-like brightness on her coiled hair and in her hazel eyes; there was warm red life on her lips..." (172).⁵⁸ By contrast, Casaubon becomes ill immediately upon returning home.

⁵⁸ The descriptive language of gemstones echoes the early gem scene, suggesting Dorothea's life will continue to have a certain vitality despite the predicament of her marriage.

The self-awareness Dorothea gains in travelling to Rome and the personal development that ensues cannot be reversed once she arrives home in Lowick, though Dorothea and Casaubon both make an effort to take up the life they had envisioned together, with Dorothea assisting her husband with his work. The impact of travel has been far too significant for them to pick up where they left off at home. In the course of their travels, Dorothea has strayed dangerously into the reality of self-awareness. So has Casaubon. The narrator turns to Casaubon's perspective on the marriage, describing the depression and anxiety he began to feel about the match even before he was married; the "new bliss was not blissful to him" (177). Although the narrator turns to Casaubon in this chapter, allowing ample space for explaining Casaubon's feelings and behaviors, Casaubon's revelations somehow do not have the effect of cultivating sympathy with readers. In fact, understanding Casaubon's innermost thoughts somehow limits the reader's sympathy with him even further, especially when he talks about Dorothea's usefulness to him. Since the text sets up Casaubon and Dorothea as oppositional figures after their marriage, readers naturally feel compelled to choose a side. It is much more palatable to side with Dorothea, especially when Casaubon says things like, "[Dorothea] might really be such a helpmate to him as would enable him to dispense with a hired secretary" (176). Since Casaubon's primary interest in Dorothea is her double utility as wife and unpaid assistant, it is no surprise that the sudden interjection and prioritization of feeling by Dorothea into their relationship acts as a cleaver to his idea of their union. After all, an emotional being is not what he sought in a wife, and he must have felt to some degree that he was the victim of a bait-and-switch. Though both Dorothea and Casaubon desire intellectual connection and shared work, she desires intimacy alongside intellectual connection, and he does not. As a result, he further distances himself from her.

Unfortunately, Casaubon makes himself so unlikeable that readers have no desire for sympathy with him. In one instance he silently refuses to take her hand, a slight Dorothea feels deeply. When she goes to him in the Yew Walk, “Mr Casaubon kept his hands behind his back and allowed her pliant arm to cling with difficulty against his rigid arm. There was something horrible to Dorothea in the situation which this unresponsive hardness inflicted on her” (265). His refusal to hold her hand or take her arm is the outward sign of his inner turmoil over the relationship. Unlike Dorothea, however, his character does not move forward from this point.

At the same time her husband is pulling away from her, Ladislav cannot seem to get close enough to Dorothea.⁵⁹ Since Dorothea now has the experience of extensive travel, it seems natural that she would gravitate toward Ladislav, who is both well travelled and of foreign attraction, speaking to Barbara Hardy’s idea of the “need for foreignness” present throughout the novel. Dorothea’s burgeoning friendship with Ladislav complicates the newlyweds’ feeble attempts at domestic bliss as Casaubon grows jealous and paranoid, but Dorothea and Ladislav’s friendship is significant in terms of Dorothea’s development and is one meaningful indication of the change in her character. It indicates a softening on Dorothea’s part. Whereas before her marriage and honeymoon she was cold and dismissive of the artful, poetic Ladislav, she has come to like him and to value his friendship.⁶⁰ When Ladislav pays Dorothea a visit, she says “I am so glad to see you” and wishes he could stay (226). Another important element of the friendship is that it develops in opposition to

⁵⁹ Although well intended, Ladislav keeps doing the wrong things to see Dorothea after Casaubon has forbidden him from visiting their home, such as visiting their church (294). His presence annoys Casaubon, which in turn distresses Dorothea.

⁶⁰ Dorothea’s growing affection for Ladislav also symbolizes her growing acceptance of this more emotional side of herself.

Casaubon's feelings. Dorothea's friendship and sympathy with Ladislav are an indication that she has begun to think for herself as well as to respond to her feelings. If Casaubon represents intellect and Ladislav represents feeling, Dorothea's gravitation toward Ladislav is a clear indication of her character's trajectory toward the emotional. Casaubon recognizes this change in Dorothea and, in a final act to keep control of her, adds a codicil to his will to prevent her from marrying Ladislav in the event of his death. If she marries him, she will not retain any of the property she inherits from her husband. On the eve of his death Casaubon also asks her for a verbal promise that she will live her life fulfilling his wishes, "to avoid doing what I should deprecate, and apply yourself to do what I should desire" (296). Rather than answering Casaubon right away as she would likely have done before they married, Dorothea asks for time to make her decision. She wrestles with the decision, and is distressed by the implications of any answer she might give. If she agrees to his request, she is yoked to Casaubon for all eternity. If she disagrees, she still has to live with him (for whatever years he may have left) in their shared knowledge that she has defied him. In her deliberation there emerges a new, more complex mode of thinking informed by Dorothea's development. Her black and white thinking has evolved to recognize subtleties she could not see before, including how she feels about the promise she has been asked to make. She comments, "There is a deep difference between that devotion to the living and that indefinite promise of devotion to the dead" (298). His request does not allow for that subtlety, though, and she prepares herself to agree to his request despite her feelings about it. Dorothea puts him off just long enough. When she finds Casaubon in the Yew Walk, he has collapsed and died. She does not have to give an answer. In this way, the novel rewards her for her careful consideration of the complex situation that arises from Casaubon's seemingly simple request.

If she had answered quickly either way, without taking time to weigh her feelings and thoughts on Casaubon's request, the consequences would have been severe. Her choice is not just between giving a simple yes or no to Casaubon's request, but between two very dismal futures, and she easily recognizes the loaded meaning behind his request. The time she takes in carefully considering an answer is the result of her move toward a more balanced way of life in which thought and feeling exist in harmony.

As the text spends more than half its space developing Dorothea's character up to the point of Casaubon's death, I too have devoted most of the space of this chapter to the analysis of her development to this point. If we read the novel in terms of its narrative structure specifically relating to Dorothea, Casaubon's death is Dorothea's climax, and Dorothea's resulting change forms the resolution. Casaubon's absence from the text (and from Dorothea's life) highlights the profound changes in Dorothea that initially took root during her honeymoon journey, particularly as she forms and strengthens relationships with others such as her sister Celia, Sir James, and Mr. and Mrs. Lydgate. After Casaubon dies, Dorothea's interpersonal relationships undergo significant change as she softens and becomes more receptive to others. She begins to understand the complexity of feeling, that it is possible to feel two or more very different emotions at the same time. For example, she feels grief, relief, and anger over Casaubon's death, as well as both grief and love for Ladislaw, whom she feels she can never marry. She also feels compassion for Rosamund Lydgate after finding her in a compromising situation that before would have inspired her contempt and judgment. The complexity of Dorothea's character at the end of the novel is striking when compared to the Dorothea of the beginning. She begins as a girl who seemingly cannot feel. By the end of the novel, emotion is paramount to Dorothea's life. The

narrator says, “No life would ever be possible to Dorothea which was not filled with emotion” (513). Of course, despite all the impediments to her marrying Ladislaw, she does marry him in the end. For the second time, she marries against the wishes and advice of her family and friends, who seem to object more vehemently to her union with Ladislaw than they did to her marriage to Casaubon. Her only explanation for the marriage—made to Celia, who asks her to explain—is this: “No, dear, you would have to feel with me, else you would never know” (506). Dorothea’s marriage to Ladislaw is not just a conventional resolution of a romance plot, however. Through Dorothea’s second marriage, Eliot speaks to the equivocality of the choices Dorothea has before her. Is she better off for having married Ladislaw, or Casaubon, for that matter? In marrying Casaubon she traded happiness for self-awareness and property. Had she just remained an unmarried widow, she would have been a wealthy woman of status. In marrying Ladislaw, she traded her hard-won fortune for a less financially lucrative relationship based on love. In a superficial reading, it would seem that Eliot, in choosing love over money and status for Dorothea, is making a clear argument for feeling and love over logic and practicality. Eliot’s value system is not that simplistic, though, as the ending presents Dorothea as happy but limited in her scope of influence by the life she has chosen. Despite the relative smallness of Dorothea’s life, the narrator describes its meaning:

Her finely-touched spirit still had its fine issues, though they were not widely visible. Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill

with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs. (515)

In this description, Eliot does not reduce the value of the life Dorothea has made to the value of the choice she has made in marrying Ladislaw, but rather emphasizes the agency with which Dorothea made the choice. Eliot's own socially unconventional but happy union with G. H. Lewes is represented here, in Dorothea's more traditional marriage, in that both unions are choices made outside the confines of the gendered social narratives of marriage. And *Middlemarch* is explicit about the power of narratives to determine the course of lives. The narrator explains: "For there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it...But we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas, some of which may present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we knew" (514-515). In this way, Dorothea is Eliot's argument for recognizing the narratives that control all of our lives, and a quiet exhortation to readers to take care with their own choices. As one review in the *Athenaeum* states, "There is truth in what would seem to be George Eliot's notion of the world" ("*Middlemarch: a Study of Provincial Life*" 713).

It is easy to read Dorothea as a cautionary tale, warning of the lasting effects of ill-advised marriages, but this reading is too simplistic and ignores the complexity of Eliot's work through Dorothea. In Dorothea's character, Eliot presents a realistic (and possibly self-revealing) portrait of personal development that values the marriage of the cerebral and the emotional, or of thought and feeling, over a more one-dimensional viewpoint based in either feeling or intellect. Eliot shows that they are not mutually exclusive and can exist together in a harmonious life. In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea's greatest victories are won against everyday,

even mundane villains we can all recognize: naiveté, hubris, apathy, and over-attention to social narratives in making decisions about our individual lives. Eliot does this by first representing an advantageous marriage to Casaubon in terms of property that has a detrimental effect on Dorothea's emotional state, and following it with the opposite: a match built on love that results in relative poverty.

Amongst all the events of Dorothea's life, not even the death of her first husband is as impactful or lasting as the effect of her honeymoon journey to Rome. The primary catalyst for Dorothea's development is the act of travel. Rome is where she begins to recognize and embrace her emotions and undergoes a change that cannot be reversed once she returns home. Her literal mobility, through travel, is directly linked to the mobility of her profound character development. Just as she cannot un-see the art that affects her in such an emotional, physical way, she cannot repress the feelings that emerge within her marriage. Though she marries Casaubon for his intellect, once married and abroad, the thing that brings Dorothea and Casaubon together in the first place – intellect—becomes a wedge between them. It is in that wedge and the absence it creates that Dorothea's feelings begin to grow. With the emergence of Dorothea's feelings, their relationship does not seem to reorient in a way that includes the types of intimacy – physical and otherwise—necessary for new conjugal relationship they have entered into with each other. If the purpose of the honeymoon journey is the transfer of one kind of identity and identification to another (Rose 56), such as from birth identification with one's family to conjugal identification with one's husband, Dorothea's honeymoon almost works in reverse. Dorothea and her husband leave Rome less attached to one another than when they arrived because she sees gaps in her life that she would have been unable to see had she not travelled. As I have shown, this failed honeymoon

journey is essential for the rest of the novel and especially for Dorothea's development. She begins the novel as a woman who exists almost exclusively within the intellectual realm and who closes herself off to feeling, which is symbolized by her attraction to Casaubon. By the end, she has married her intellectual and emotional selves and gained the wisdom she lacked before.

The act of travel in *Middlemarch* and in literature necessitates an important re-orienting for the traveller as well as for the reader. In *Middlemarch*, this is a significant reorientation of sympathy between the reader and Dorothea as well as Dorothea's reorientation to her life as a married woman. This reorientation is important especially for what it reveals about the nature of self-awareness. For Dorothea, her self-awareness is limited by her context, as it was for most Victorian women when access to travel was limited. It is not until she leaves home for Italy that she can understand the context of her life and the decision she makes in marrying Casaubon.⁶¹ Self-awareness and self-knowledge are two of the novel's primary concerns, and they are present in a number of characters as well as in addition to Dorothea. As Rebecca N. Mitchell argues in her examination of the "Rosamond plots" of *Middlemarch* and *Jane Eyre*, "*Middlemarch* challenges the very nature of self-knowledge, questions the status of identification in intersubjective relationships, and insists upon the unknowability of the other" (309). But, as Mitchell also states, self-knowledge is not only about the self; it is also about relationships with others (another reason why Dorothea's development and evolution from the cerebral to the emotional is crucial to the

⁶¹ Based on the profound effect of her confrontation with the foreign that takes place in Dorothea as a result of her travel, it is likely that had Dorothea travelled to Rome and experienced Italian art before her marriage she would not have made the same choice of husband.

novel). This requires an awareness and understanding of difference and not just a focus on similarities.

With regard to Dorothea and her evolution from the cerebral to the emotional, she only gains the ability to apperceive difference with understanding and acceptance once she has returned from Rome to Middlemarch. Before the turning point of her honeymoon, Dorothea is quick to dismiss those who are different from her, to the detriment of her relationships. Dorothea's incapacity for empathy or fostering connections with people she finds to be different from her causes a number of difficulties for her, not least her marriage to Casaubon. Given the text's emphasis of the power of narrative at the end, it is no surprise that Eliot presents the experience of travel this way to readers: through Dorothea, Eliot offers readers this opportunity of personal reform as they travel alongside her on her journey. In many ways, *Middlemarch* is a novel about rebirth, second chances and reform of the self, both for Dorothea and any reader who follows her journey to Middlemarch, to Rome, and then back again to Middlemarch.

Chapter Four: Identity and the Girl Traveller: Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

When Alice follows the white rabbit down the rabbit hole, she begins a journey unlike any other in literature. Wandering through Wonderland, Alice narrates a journey that illuminates the implications of age on the fictional female traveller. Being “just a little girl” would seem like a disadvantage in travel given the privileged nature of mobility in literature. But, as Alice’s journey demonstrates, age and agency in Victorian literature share a complex and unexpected link that works against the assumption that travel is afforded to the privileged few. Alice is a special traveller in two distinctive but related aspects: her age and her motivation for travel. The motivation for Lucy Snowe’s journey to Belgium was necessity; she had to travel to find work in order to support herself. The motivation for Becky Sharp’s journeys was evasion; she travelled in order to leave obligations and people behind. The motivation for Dorothea Brooke’s journey was her honeymoon; she travelled as part of the traditional marriage narrative. Each of these women is motivated by an extrinsic social factor. Alice’s journey, however, is more intrinsic: she is motivated by a search for her own identity. In her pursuit of the White Rabbit, Alice demonstrates the mobilizing lack of inhibitions of youth. After seeing the White Rabbit disappear into a rabbit-hole, Alice follows it almost instinctively: “in another moment, Alice went down after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again” (Carroll 10).

Like the travelling woman, the travelling girl is a signal of important ideological work in a text. Alice is distinct from the travelling woman, however, because she represents the unrestricted imaginative possibilities of youth. In this chapter, I use Alice to theorize about the figure of the travelling girl as an important and underappreciated dimension of the

travelling woman. I argue that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a travel text primarily concerned with identity, and that Alice's travel is a key and under examined element in the text. This much-loved text has been examined from virtually every perspective, including the historical, philosophical, philological, linguistic and, of course, the literary. In *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art*, Juliet Dusinberre discusses the profound influence of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* on the rise of modernist literature and on authors such as Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust, demonstrating that literature for children is not confined to the realm of children (4-5). Dusinberre reveals very clear links between the Alice books and modernist literature and shows that Carroll and the Alice books have, without question, deeply influenced literature and culture since Alice's inception. In *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction*, Kimberley Reynolds also examines the broad influence of children's texts and maps the way "children's literature contributes to the social and aesthetic transformation of culture by, for instance, encouraging readers to approach ideas, issues, and objects from new perspectives and so prepare the way for change" (1). Perry Nodelman's *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* similarly discusses children's literature and its wide influence beyond the children's realm. In the case of Alice, Nodelman compellingly states that Alice is one of the only children's texts to receive "any amount of interpretive attention of the sort critics usually provide for adult texts of literature, attention we often believe children's texts, in their simplicity, do not require" (15). Similar to the approaches of Dusinberre, Reynolds, and Nodelman, each of whom acknowledges the far-reaching influence of children's literature on culture, I read *Alice* as a radical text in terms of Carroll's depiction of Alice as a female traveller. Where much existing scholarship, including

Jacqueline Rose's influential *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Literature*, explores *Alice* as primarily as a children's text for children, my positioning of *Alice* as a travel text highlights elements of the novel that connect it to and demonstrate its departure from nineteenth-century discourses of age, mobility, and identity. Alice's travel narrative challenges the conventional attribution of agency to adulthood and suggests that mobility is symbolically significant in terms of identity for children who travel in literature. One of the major aspects of Alice's journey that shapes her identity is her many encounters with the fantastical others of Wonderland who challenge and shape Alice's identity and emphasize the travel nature of the text. Alice's encounters with these others in a fantasy context take on a broader significance because of Carroll's layered allusions to imperialism, English culture, and the foreignness of the adult world from the perspective of the child.

Alice's unconventional mobility and the text's foregrounding of the travel act are evident even in the title of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In Victorian literature, adventure stories usually feature male protagonists, such as Mowgli in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) and Jim in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1881-1882).⁶² To understand just how unconventional it is for Carroll to have written a story about an adventuring girl, consider the development of adventure fiction from the beginning to the end of the Victorian era: it was developed as literature for—and mostly about—boys (Butts 15). As Kristine Moruzi argues, literature became increasingly gendered as the century progressed. Fiction for girls became more domestic, while fiction for boys became more adventurous (4). In his choice to create an adventure story about a girl, Carroll subverts

⁶² In addition to the gender difference of the adventuring protagonists, both *The Jungle Book* and *Treasure Island* were published two decades later than *Alice*, and have overtly imperialistic adventure themes.

literary conventions of both age and gender. It is rare to see a female child protagonist in a novel, much less to send her on an adventure or journey.

Locating Alice within the context of traveling children in literature shows that her travel narrative differs from her peers in some key areas, namely in the nature of her autonomy and her participation as a girl in a story of adventure. Alice's autonomy, which is an important element in the story, is not the result of her being an orphan, unlike many other autonomous child protagonists. The child protagonist in golden age children's fiction such as *Peter and Wendy*, *The Jungle Book*, and *A Little Princess* live outside of normal family structures because their parents or caretakers are physically absent, dead, or emotionally absent. David Floyd explores this convention in *Street Urchins, Sociopaths and Degenerates: Orphans of Late-Victorian and Edwardian Fiction*: "The long nineteenth century might also be called the century of the orphan; this potent literary type is remarkable for its consistent recurrence and metamorphic implications and the manner in which they function as barometers of burgeoning social concern" (1-2).⁶³ It is a trope of nearly all children's fiction that the protagonist is a literal or symbolic orphan, but Floyd finds the orphan trope particularly prevalent in nineteenth-century literature. The ubiquity of absent parents in Victorian children's literature may seem cruel, but it is a complex device that functions in two important ways. In the first place, it creates a sense of sympathy between the reader and the orphaned child. Orphans are not ideal children. They misbehave, have messy hair and clothes, and say and do things that a child with parents could not. But, because they are orphans, bad behavior endears them to us. In the second place, the lack of parental

⁶³ There are imperialistic influences on the orphan as well. Laura Peters explains that "popular orphan adventure narratives provide a forum for imaginative responses to empire," which can be seen in Carroll's imperialist allusions (64).

supervision, either because the child's parents or guardians are dead or emotionally absent, enables the child to go on adventures from which they would otherwise be restricted. For example, the absence of Mowgli's parents in *The Jungle Book* allows him to live in the jungle to pursue and kill Shere Kahn. In their parents' temporary absence, Wendy, John, and Michael are able to fly to Neverland with Peter Pan. In this way, the orphan has a greater sense of freedom and autonomy than a child who is carefully looked after. Alice is not an orphan, as she is being looked after by her sister on the banks of the river, but Carroll's use of the dream as a narrative framing device (not obvious to the reader at the outset) lends the illusion of an adventure undertaken by Alice alone. Carroll's use of fantasy and the narrative technique of framing Alice's travels through Wonderland as a dream serves the same function as killing off a protagonist's parents; it removes the gatekeeping function, allowing the child the freedom to explore alone.

When it comes to children's mobility in Victorian literature, however, there is a distinct gender element that affects girls. Absent parents do not free girls from domestic influence in the same way boys are freed to undertake adventures. As Marah Gubar finds in her influential study of the "cult of the child" in Victorian literature, "even when child characters set out to explore family-free space in classics such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*, they never manage to extricate themselves from the formative effects of their upbringing" (5). This seems to be especially true for girls, who cannot escape the domestic ideal. Consider, for example, Wendy Darling in Barrie's *Peter Pan*. As soon as she arrives in Neverland, she is assigned the role of "mother" to all of the lost boys.⁶⁴

Alice's burgeoning self-awareness as her journey progresses is a familiar trope to us

⁶⁴ Similarly, through the course of her travels in Wonderland, Alice never extricates herself from the lessons of her waking life.

now, but in Victorian literature, girl characters were not typically a symbol for growth or change. As Nina Auerbach states, the girl in Victorian literature conventionally tends to be a static character, present to support the development of a boy or man in the narrative:

Cast as they were in the role of emotional and spiritual catalysts, it is not surprising that girls who function as protagonists of Victorian literature are rarely allowed to develop: in its refusal to subject females to the evolutionary process, the Victorian novel takes a significant step backward from one of its principle sources, the novels of Jane Austen. Even when they are interesting and “wicked,” Victorian heroines tend to be static figures like Becky Sharp; when they are “good,” their lack of development is an important factor in the Victorian reversal of Pope's sweeping denunciation – “most women have no characters at all”- into a cardinal virtue. Little girls in Victorian literature are rarely children, nor are they allowed to grow up. (Auerbach 45-46)

Little boys in Victorian literature tend to be allied to the animal, the Satanic, and the insane. For this reason, novels in which a boy is the central focus are usually novels of development, in which the boy evolves out of his inherent violence, “ ‘working out the brute’ in an ascent to a higher spiritual plane...Wordsworth's little girls tend to be angelic, corrective figures who exist largely to soothe the turbulence of the male protagonist” (Auerbach 44-45).⁶⁵ An example of this convention is the character of Mowgli in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), or the character of Colin in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911),

⁶⁵ Consider, for example, Mowgli in Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, who literally lives with animals. This convention carries over into Victorian adult protagonists as well. One popular example is Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, in which Heathcliff, who enters the novel as a wild, young gypsy child, is civilized by Catherine.

both of whom are civilized by little girls.⁶⁶ In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, there are no little boys for Alice to civilize. As such, her narrative is entirely self-interested. Her questions as she travels through Wonderland are usually about herself – “Who am I?”—rather than focused outward on other characters or her surroundings (19). Writing a girl protagonist in an adventure story, especially one that went on to become so popular and beloved, upends literary convention as well as the idea that girls are not or cannot be adventurers. Carroll effectively changed the adventure genre by creating Alice. Given Alice's profound impact on culture, I would argue that her influence on representations of girlhood is still shaping how girls and women are represented in popular media, from Wonder Woman to Buffy the Vampire Slayer to the Power Puff Girls. In taking the lead in adventure/action genres, each of these contemporary figures follows in Alice's adventurous footsteps. Travelling Alice and the setting of Wonderland reject the rarified upper middle-class, Oxford-based culture and norms around gender, where women of any age have little power, mobility, or access to knowledge.

It is precisely Alice's identity as an upper middle-class British girl and her attempted fidelity to the rules she has been taught that cause her to misjudge, offend, and make a social mess of things on many occasions in Wonderland. However, one of her distinctive qualities as a girl character is that as she moves through Wonderland, she learns that her normal rules

⁶⁶ For another example of the girl traveller in a fantasy text, consider Wendy Darling in J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911). Also adapted by Disney into a beloved animated childhood film, *Peter and Wendy* is a fantasy text featuring a child protagonist who travels to a fictional world. Like Alice, Wendy possesses curiosity and a childlike sense of adventure, which motivates her travels to Neverland with Peter Pan, the boy who never grew up. There is a major though subtle difference between Alice and Wendy, however: their age. While Alice is clearly a child, Wendy is on the verge of “growing up,” indicated by her father's insistence that it is time for her to move out of the nursery.

of engagement do not apply in this new place. For example, when Alice falls down the rabbit hole, she tries to use her knowledge of her “other” world to make sense of the new place. She repeats her multiplication tables (all wrong); tries recalling her geography lessons (again, all wrong), and attempts to repeat a poem learned at school (“how doth the little crocodile/improve its shining tail...”) that she cannot correctly remember (Carroll 19). Alice’s attempts to orient herself in this new world utilizing the knowledge she gained in her “real” world are unsuccessful, and as she grasps at her identity, she becomes more confused. Since she doesn’t feel herself, she decides she must be someone else: “I must be Mabel after all, and I shall have to go live in that pokey little house, and have next to no toys to play with, and oh, ever so many lessons to learn!” (19). This early scene foreshadows the identity questions Alice encounters throughout the story and provides a benchmark against which Alice’s evolution, including her ability to read audiences very different from herself, can be measured as she moves from place to place within Wonderland.

Alice’s travel through Wonderland forces her to reckon with her concept of her own identity because the act of travel facilitates encounters with foreign and challenging figures and ideas. As she moves from place to place in Wonderland, she encounters characters that question her identity, and she is importantly forced to resist their incorrect claims about who she is. In the process of explaining herself to others, she gains an understanding of herself. In her encounter with the caterpillar, Alice is unsure who she is within the context of her surroundings. When asked, “Who are you?” by the caterpillar, Alice answers, “I-I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have changed several times since then.” When the caterpillar demands that she explain herself, Alice responds, “I ca’n’t explain *myself*, I’m afraid, Sir...because I’m not myself,

you see” (41). By the time the pigeon challenges her identity by calling her a serpent (an understandable mistake, given the length of Alice’s neck at this point in the story), Alice is able to respond more confidently what she is not:

‘But I’m *not* a serpent, I tell you!’ said Alice. ‘I’m a—I’m a—’

‘Well! *What* are you?’ said the Pigeon. ‘I can see you are trying to invent something!’

‘I—I’m a little girl,’ Alice said rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through that day. (48)

Because of her recently enlarged size at this moment in the narrative, Alice seems to be doubtful of the veracity of her answer that she is a “little” girl. Her tentative answer is important, however, because it is the first time she asserts her identity in Wonderland. Instead of asking “who am I?” as she has on a number of occasions, Alice answers the question of her identity, reassuring herself as for the pigeon who accuses her of trying to steal its eggs. Once Alice has articulated a self-identity to the pigeon, she begins to take control of other parts of the narrative, including her size and the trajectory of her journey. For example, she holds on to pieces of the mushroom and strategically takes bites of it to return to the size she prefers; soon, she is selecting her own path (the one that leads to the March Hare’s house) when confronted with a fork in the road (59). By the time she arrives at the Queen’s croquet ground, she has developed an understanding of Wonderland and her place in it, enough to confidently speak back to the queen. By the end of her tale, she disrupts the nonsensical trial for the stolen tarts. This final scene is the culmination of Alice’s journey, in which encounters with foreign figures and spaces have forged a sense of self-identity in unfamiliar territory.

Wonderland provides a disorienting space where Alice can raise questions of identity—her refrain of “Who am I?”—outside of the context in which the questions’ answers are found. When she finds herself grown large and stuck in a house after drinking from the bottle labeled “DRINK ME,” Alice ponders her situation, saying,

‘It was much pleasanter at home,’ thought poor Alice, ‘when one wasn’t always growing larger and smaller, and being ordered about by mice and rabbits. I almost wish I hadn’t gone down that rabbit-hole—and yet—and yet—it’s rather curious, you know, this sort of life! I do wonder what *can* have happened to me! When I used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one! There ought to be a book written about me, that there ought! And when I grow up, I’ll write one—but I’m grown up now,’ she added in a sorrowful tone: ‘at least there’s no room to grow up any more *here*.’ (Carroll 33)

In the passage above, Alice identifies a striking difference between the narrative possibilities of girls versus women. In the moment she identifies as a child, she thinks a book should be written about her. In the moment she identifies as a “grown up” (referring to her size, not her maturity) her tone changes to sorrow and she seems to abandon that idea. These are sophisticated thoughts for a young child and seem to indicate a deep respect by Carroll for the child’s imagination and unique subject position. Nina Auerbach notes that Alice’s inward focus is one of the most unusual characteristics of her adventures: “Other little girls travelling through fantastic countries, such as George Macdonald’s Princess Irene and L. Frank Baum’s Dorothy Gale, ask repeatedly ‘where am I?’ rather than ‘who am I?’ Only Alice turns her eyes inward from the beginning, sensing that the mystery of her surroundings is the mystery

of her identity” (Auerbach 33). Alice’s question is an important one, as it speaks to the transformative power of travel in literature and life. Travel and the encounters it facilitates, as with Alice in Wonderland, disrupt traditional narratives of identity.

Alice’s experiences with foreignness—Wonderland’s foreignness to Alice, and Alice’s foreignness to Wonderland— also demonstrate how symbolic meaning is highly culture-specific. In English culture, Alice’s status as a little girl connotes innocence and purity. In Wonderland, she is perceived as a threat on more than one occasion. Because she has left her culture and entered another one, all of the cultural capital she has in England as a little girl is lost in Wonderland. At first she tries to hold on to her symbolic identity by clinging to knowledge and manners she learned elsewhere, but after some time she realizes she is forging a new path. While she does not enjoy the benefits her identity as a little girl affords, she is no longer limited by that symbolic meaning, either. She comes to realize that she can do and say what she likes in Wonderland, and experiences both the benefits and consequences of that new freedom. For example, in “Alice’s Evidence,” the final chapter of the story, Alice grows increasingly perturbed by the poorly-run trial, and no longer fearing the Queen of Hearts’ empty threats of “Off with her head!” Alice pronounces the Queen’s procedures “Stuff and nonsense!” (108). The exchange continues, with Alice confronting the Queen of Hearts (whom everyone in Wonderland fears):

‘Hold your tongue!’ said the Queen turning purple.

‘I wo’n’t!’ said Alice

‘Off with her head!’ the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved.

‘Who cares for *you?*’ said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time).

‘You’re nothing but a pack of cards!’ (109)

The scene in the final chapter is ridiculous, twisting familiar aspects of the legal process into a comedy of errors. It is an important scene, however, in terms of Alice’s development, as it shows Alice speaking back to the Queen of Hearts, Wonderland’s ultimate authority figure. This defiance of the Queen of Hearts, the symbolic authority figure of Wonderland, is so powerful that it wakes Alice from her dream. Alice’s speaking-back represents the moment of self-actualization for her: she can be a girl *and* she can have power even when adults have authority. In this way, Carroll hinges his story on concepts of identity, especially the fluid and changeable identities of culture and age. Alice’s journey demonstrates that concepts of identity are relative rather than fixed. One way Carroll demonstrates this symbolically is through Alice’s many size changes, in which she vacillates between being very small and very “grown up,” Alice’s own phrase for being large in size that also alludes to adulthood. These changes in size seem appropriate for Alice’s developmental phase of girlhood, being on the verge of puberty and “growing up” physically and emotionally. The final scene that wakes Alice is a key way to see her coming of age, gaining her voice in a scene fraught with the power she lacks when she falls asleep as a child. Her awakening seems to be a line of demarcation in the story between Alice the child and Alice the burgeoning woman.

Alice’s encounters with the foreign figures and culture of Wonderland underscore its thoroughgoing investment in the act of travel and place the text squarely within critical discussions of travel literature. Her encounters with the foreign support ideas of Edward Said’s “other” and Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of the “contact zone,” both of which are

frequently invoked in discussions and analysis of travel literature. Alice's journey to and through Wonderland puts her in direct confrontation with a range of fantastical Others and a foreign culture, which is then described from the unique perspective of a child. As Daniel Bivona argues, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* reveals a fascination on Carroll's part with the imaginative possibilities latent in a "confrontation of cultures," such as the kind of encounters that Alice has in Wonderland. Carroll, however, transports the confrontation of cultures (an idea Victorians were grappling with constantly through the spread of imperialism and the global influence of print culture) from the real to the fantastical. In his analysis, Bivona describes the text in the language of travel writing, employing words and ideas such as "confrontation of cultures" and "ethnography," which are all typical of discussions of travel and encountering the foreign. Bivona's reading of *Alice* as an imperialist travel text recognizes the importance of the journey trope, and also highlights Alice's unconventionality as a girl traveler.

As Mary Louise Pratt observes in *Imperial Eyes*, the "Monarch of all I survey" attitude of English travel writing rarely expresses Englishness as the "Other." Amongst all of Lewis Carroll's extraordinary inventions in Wonderland, the English Alice turns out to be the most spectacular monster who cannot blend in, the ultimate tourist who sticks out for her appearance and unfamiliarity with social convention. The setting of Wonderland effectively inverts the perspective of the foreigner and offers a rare outside view of English culture. For example, when Alice joins the Mad Hatter and the March Hare for tea, the familiar English teatime custom with all of its etiquette is twisted into something unfamiliar that Alice cannot figure out. She does not understand the barbaric idioms the Mad Hatter and March Hare use to communicate ("He's murdering the time! Off with his head!"), or the logic behind the

story of the treacle well told by the Dormouse (65-66). She becomes increasingly frustrated with the tea table's disorderliness, seat-changing, and perceived rude manners. "At any rate I'll never go *there* again," she remarks upon leaving, "It's the stupidest tea-party I ever was at in all my life!" (68). Alice's stumbling over the English tea ritual is amusing to readers, but has deep national implications as well. Read in conversation with Carroll's imperial allusions and encounters, the mad tea party scene satirizes one of the practices most associated with English civility, showing how it may appear to those on the outside. The Mad Hatter's tea party is far from civil – it is a messy, confusing, and rude experience for Alice, who tries her best to participate in the way that is familiar to her. The only way for Alice to prevent further offense is to leave the party, and not to participate at all. The Mad Hatter and March Hare's convoluted and esoteric ritual makes sense to them, but to an outsider, their teatime is an indecipherable riddle. With Alice as the outsider in the story, readers see Englishness from an unconventional and unflattering perspective.

In a world full of odd and unusual characters such as Wonderland, Carroll could have easily emphasized the physical differences between the Wonderlanders and human child Alice to explore the idea of difference. Certainly some of the characters border on the grotesque, but these physical characteristics are not the differences Alice is most attuned to. Rather, it is overwhelmingly the foreignness of the Wonderlanders' ways that makes Wonderland seem fantastical. Alice's venture into Wonderland is more like a traveller visiting a foreign destination for the first time. Who among us has not, at least internally, marveled at cultural differences with a sentiment that mirrors Alice's "Curiouser and curiouser?" (Carroll 16). In a child such as Alice, these comments are guileless and inoffensively meant, rooted in youthful curiosity (though she is often misunderstood and

taken to task for being offensive, such as in her conversation with the mouse about her cat, Dinah). When adult women make similar overt comments on markers of foreignness, such as Mary Kingsley's comments on black Africans in *Travels in West Africa*, our modern sensibilities wince at their racist or imperialist origins. By the time a girl reaches womanhood, as indicated by the other travelling women I study in this dissertation, she has a keen understanding what she can and cannot say aloud. The reader, then, is similarly limited by the character's inhibitions, and must decode the characters' highly coded words. Whereas young Alice's comments are said aloud, more mature travellers' thoughts on their cultural confrontations remain in the realm of narrated reflections. For example, Lucy Snowe's observations of Madame Beck's French identity are narrated as internal thoughts rather than comments said aloud. The difference in these modes of remarking on cultural difference is age. Alice's young age is most important to the story for the freedom it permits Alice in her cultural observations. Because she is a girl, both her experience with and articulation of her observations of Wonderland are open and uninhibited.

Carroll's narrative strategy of relocating Alice of the bank of the Isis river near her home in England to the foreign location of Wonderland creates an important disconnection between the figure of Alice and the constructed symbolic meaning of her identity as a little girl. On the riverbank, she is still a human child, a little girl regarded as innocent and powerless. In Wonderland, that meaning is different. Rather than being regarded as innocent and powerless, as she was at home, in Wonderland she is regarded as a dangerous foreigner, posing a threat to the Wonderlanders' safety. For example, the pigeon mistakes Alice for a serpent trying to pilfer its nest and attacks her, forcing her to change sizes very quickly to avoid injury. In Wonderland, Alice is unrecognizable as a little girl, her body inscribed with a

very different and threatening meaning. Alice's English cultural identity also loses its symbolic meaning through her act of travel. While she retains all the markers of Englishness, including her clothes, way of speaking, and attitudes toward the Others she encounters in Wonderland, those symbols of English identity mark her as a foreigner and confirm her outsider status.

Disconnected as it is from the cultural and social context of England, Wonderland provides a setting where Carroll can test various types of cultural confrontation, including allusions to imperialism and the child's perception of the adult world. Alice's journey can be read as metaphor for English imperialism, and it provocatively upends traditional ideas of imperialist domination. After all, Alice (an imperialist representative) is quickly shown to be the lone foreigner and unthreatening child in Wonderland rather than a dominating figure. One of the most subversive aspects of *Alice Adventures in Wonderland* is Carroll's imperialist allusion, equating England to a young girl who has no clear direction. Carroll sets up Alice's imperialistic relationship with Wonderland from the very inception of the story, with Alice embodying Englishness and Wonderland becoming an amalgamation of fantastical otherness. The book's introductory scene opens on Alice, a quintessentially English girl, who is being taught English history. Alice's imaginative mind pondering English history combined with the drowsy warmth of the English afternoon results in a vivid dream wherein she is transported to a realm filled with warped familiar figures and customs. English imperialist history from the perspective of a child translates to her adventure in Wonderland. In her dream, she retains her Englishness right down to her pinafore, while the colonial Other described in her history lessons morphs into the spectacular hybrid creatures depicted in the story, such as the hookah-smoking caterpillar and the gryphon.

Wonderland also functions as a metaphor for the adult world, and Alice's perceptions representing how children view adult rules and logic as absurd or at least nonsensical. Michelle Abate argues in *Bloody Murder: The Homicide Tradition in Children's Literature* that nonsense occupies an important space in literature, both for children and adults. With regard to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Abate notes that Carroll's nonsense works to bridge the gap between perceptions of the child and adult worlds in revealing "that the elements of nonsense are not limited to the seemingly socially vacuous realm of literature for children; they permeate even the most sober and serious facets of adult society" (Abate 63). Alice's journey into Wonderland and the confusion she feels over the ridiculousness of the rules she encounters therein functions as an amusing but also incisive metaphor for the child's perspective on the adult world. Just as children do not understand the structures and reasons underlying all of the rules they are meant to follow, Alice does not understand the rules of Wonderland. To her ears, the rules are confusing and nonsensical, seemingly unguided by logic of any kind. The most obvious point where the rules of Wonderland are clear to everyone but Alice is the aforementioned tea party scene. Alice's frustration with the Hatter's nonsensical logic about tea-time and the Dormouse's story about the treacle well, which employs Carroll's playful language games, made more sense to me on a recent reading of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* than in previous readings, as I now have a daughter who is near Alice's age. One of the first jokes I tried to teach my daughter, Nora, was this one, when she was three: "Why was six afraid of seven? Because seven eight nine." She laughed, and I thought that was because she understood the joke and thought it was funny. She immediately tried to tell me a joke, which came out something like this: "Why was seven afraid of nine? Because the lamp ate the cupcake!" She laughed harder at her own made-up

joke than at mine, and for months told the same nonsensical jokes despite my earnest attempts to teach her some good ones. It occurred to me after about a month of these nonsensical jokes that she was simply mimicking what she heard. I understood that this is what my jokes sounded like to her: to her ears, they were nonsense, but that was funny, too. The jokes I told her made no sense to her because she could not access the logic behind them and, as a child, does not yet understand the duplicity of language. Carroll employs a layered humor in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* which is largely inaccessible to children, whose language skills are not yet sophisticated enough to grasp the full meaning of his jokes. The text is also full of homonyms, which are an abstract, inaccessible concept to pre-literate children. For example, when the Mouse tells Alice his tale, she envisions a "tail," losing attention to the story in her attempt to visualize a tail:

'You were not attending!' said the mouse to Alice severely.

'What are you thinking of?'

'I beg your pardon,' said Alice very humbly: 'you had got to the fifth bend, I think?'

'I had *not!*' cried the mouse, sharply and very angrily.

'A knot!' Said Alice, always ready to make herself useful, and looking anxiously about her 'Oh, do let me help to undo it!' (Carroll 29)⁶⁷

Alice also confuses "not" with "knot," furthering the misunderstanding about the tale/tail. In the same way that Nora's nonsense jokes were a reflection of her lack of understanding my jokes, Alice's dream journey through Wonderland is a reflection of her youthful

⁶⁷ The text during this monologue takes the curvy shape of a mouse's tail, creating an enjoyable visual/textual joke.

understanding of the adult world. She is simply repeating back what she perceives based on her capacity as a child to understand the adult world, which Carroll equates to a foreign land.

The fantastical realm of Wonderland is a key element in Alice's ability to articulate questions of identity and explore concepts of otherness. Unlike other travel texts that also articulate questions of identity and concepts of otherness, Alice employs fantasy rather than realism or naturalism to deeply explore what happens to self-identity when the rules of cultural and social engagement are completely changed. As Perry Nodleman posits about the role of fantasy in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, "Fantasy situations and characters like those in Alice are clearly not intended to mirror things actually existing in reality; but there are long-standing traditions of interpretations that allow readers to connect them to reality by reading them as allegorical or symbolic versions of real things" (16). The fantasy element, then, bridges a gap between the relatable and the unfamiliar for the reader. The fantasy element of the text permits Alice a wider range of motion than she could experience in a more realistic text. For example, Alice is able to travel a long distance away from home just by tumbling down a rabbit hole. She travels even further on a river of her own tears once she arrives in Wonderland (21). Conversely, to get far from home in a realistic novel, Alice would require a mode of conveyance, which she probably would not be able to procure herself because of her age. She would also require food and money, neither of which she needs in Wonderland (in Wonderland, she rarely eats because she is hungry; food is usually taken to manipulate her size). On a realistic journey, she would encounter people who would be concerned about her welfare, as children travelling alone are cause for concern. None of these realistic concerns exist in fantastical Wonderland, so Alice is able to travel farther from

home with fewer impediments. Although she interacts with many inhabitants in Wonderland, not one expresses concern about her being a child travelling alone.

Carroll's empathetic portrayal of a child who struggles to make sense of her world is rare among adult writers, as the child's naive way of viewing the world is lost as we age into adulthood. Carroll's own worldview and well-known affinity for children make for an interesting context for understanding the book, and his biography may contribute to the book's enduring popularity.⁶⁸ The reading public's love of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland's* results primarily from the text's complexity and its intriguing publishing history. Jan Susina states that "*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a text firmly rooted in the codes and conventions of the Victorian period" in terms of allusions to people and events of the period (33). However, it also subverts many of those same codes and convention, enough to be wickedly funny, but not quite enough to be dangerous or taboo. For example, Alice does not run away, which would have been a radical act. Instead, she follows—or is led—down the hole by the rabbit, with Carroll emphasizing that Alice had not premeditated her journey, as she follows the rabbit down the hole "never once considering how in the world she was to get out again" (10).

Alice's age is a difference that provides an important point of departure from women travellers in fiction. Her openness and talkative commentary on the foreign aspects of Wonderland contrast with the other female characters I have studied in this dissertation, as

⁶⁸ Carroll's reputation as one of the great eccentrics of the Victorian age has undoubtedly contributed to continued interest in the book, as the public remains interested in the figure of the author even to the present day. A number of books exploring his personal life have appeared just within the past five years, including *Lewis Carroll: The Man and His Circle* by Edward Wakeling and Rhona Lewis (2014), *The Story of Alice: Lewis Carroll and the Secret History of Wonderland* by Robert Douglas-Fairhurst (2015), and *The Mystery of Lewis Carroll: Discovering the Whimsical, Thoughtful, and Sometimes Lonely Man who Created "Alice in Wonderland"* by Jenny Woolf (2011).

Lucy Snowe, Becky Sharp, and Dorothea Brooke often ruminate and reflect on their feelings internally and silently. Since Alice has not formed into a woman yet, her sense of restraint is less pronounced than we see in women travellers. As a young girl, Alice has not yet fully absorbed the social narratives of being a woman, although through her chatty narration of her journey, it is possible to see them taking root, such as when she worries about proper social decorum and the Wonderlanders' seeming lack of manners. Alice's openness and lack of cultural filter in her observations is, within the Victorian culture of restraint and reticence, a fresh take on female perspective. Alice also provides a counterpoint to the idea that age affords privilege. As a young girl rather than a woman, she is free to say what she thinks, travel where she wants, and enjoy a higher level of freedom with her behavior than adult women.

If the travelling Becky Sharp represents the ironic instability of *Vanity Fair*, Alice functions as a similar signal of Wonderland's topsy-turvy literary terrain. Curiosity, introspection, and questioning authority are the qualities that make Alice's travel so distinctive. Generally, aging is equated with gains in knowledge, wisdom, wealth, agency, and mobility. We see childhood as a stage of development toward adulthood, and a child as an underdeveloped adult. If we view childhood as an experience distinct from adulthood and the child in literature as distinct from the adult (rather than solely in progress toward it), it is possible to view child characters, such as Alice, as the primary agents in their own stories. Alice's story, especially the fantasy element, would not be possible with a more mature character. The fantasy realm suspends the limitations on Alice's mobility she would experience in the "real" world and allows the adventure of a child travelling alone to advance the plot. The fantasy realm also places her in an interesting position as she—a realist

character in a fantasy world— becomes a connector between the real and fantasy worlds, and the vocalizer of silly rules that are only revealed to be silly when they are transported to a new context. Carroll's use of a travelling child protagonist works to highlight the absurdity of gendered Victorian social mores as perceived by a child by putting them in direct contrast with a completely different kind of society where gender and age are not necessarily defining factors of mobility or power. Through the act of travel in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll asks readers to imagine the possibilities of their own identity if they, like Alice, were suddenly transported to an unfamiliar place. Who would they be? How would they respond to unfamiliarity? These important questions about place and identity would likely resonate with Victorian readers whether they read the text as children or as adults.

Epilogue: Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*: Rachel Vinrace and the Death of the Victorian Woman Traveller

In episode five of the sixth and final series of *Downton Abbey*, Lady Edith Crawley has hired a new editor, Laura Edmunds, for her London magazine, *The Sketch*. It is 1925, and while Edith's decision to hire a woman editor raises a few eyebrows, it is generally acknowledged (with shrugged shoulders) by all in her aristocratic circle that the times have changed. Together Lady Edith and Laura discuss the progress of the modern era that has led to the historical moment when a woman could hold the job of magazine editor. They make plans to publish an article about women like them, the "Victorian babies grown into modern women." Lady Edith's comment articulates the significant shift in gender ideology and women's public participation that occurred at the turn of the nineteenth century, which is reflected in literature of that time. Virginia Woolf's 1915 novel *The Voyage Out* explores that line in literature through the act of travel undertaken by female protagonist Rachel Vinrace.

The Voyage Out marks a significant departure in the way female travellers are represented in Modernist fiction versus Victorian-era fiction. In *The Voyage Out*, protagonist Rachel Vinrace embarks on a journey to South America on the *Euphrosyne* with her father, aunt, and uncle (Mr. And Mrs. Dalloway join them later, in Lisbon). At age twenty-four, Rachel is a modern woman born in the Victorian era, much like Lady Edith in *Downton Abbey*. As such, she must navigate cultural changes that re-frame her role as a woman. Rachel's character seems to embody the conflicts between the Victorian and Modernist ideals of womanhood. She is not extremely young, but she is naïve about the ways of the world and relationships. For example, she confides in her aunt Helen that Richard unexpectedly kissed her when they were talking. She is confused by the kiss, feeling angry, flattered, terrified, and

intrigued. While Rachel confides her feelings, Helen “could hardly restrain herself from saying out loud what she thought of a man who brought up his daughter so that at the age of twenty-four she scarcely knew that men desired women and was terrified by a kiss” (86). Rachel is also blasé about her travel. Unlike the travellers I have discussed in the preceding chapters of this dissertation who overtly engaged with their own mobility, the act of travel seems commonplace rather than novel to Rachel. Although she is undertaking a long journey by sea from London to South America, she rarely comments on her journey. Rachel’s relative silence on the act of travel speaks volumes about the cultural shift that has occurred around the act of travel and the woman traveller. In *The Voyage Out*, the act of travel presented matter-of-factly, with no special consideration given to Rachel’s gender or the nature of her travel. Mobility has become the norm for women, or at least not a rare and notable exception.

Set in 1905, the novel straddles the amorphous line between the Victorian and the modern. In many ways, Rachel Vinrace can be seen as an amalgamation of the figures I discuss in the preceding chapters. As an unmarried young woman, her character possesses some of the child-like qualities of Alice, while her journey most closely resembles the highly chaperoned travel undertaken by Dorothea Brooke and Becky Sharp (for some of her journeys, at least). In terms of the Victorian construction of the female traveller, *The Voyage Out* can be read as a bookend text, and the character of Rachel Vinrace as a representation of the simultaneous death and coming of age of the Victorian woman traveller. As I have argued in this dissertation, a woman traveller as protagonist in a novel is a signal that a text is doing important ideological work with regard to gender and mobility. *The Voyage Out* supports this argument, as the text probes ideas of modernity, mobility, and gender in a landscape changed by ideas of progress.

The Voyage Out is unique in its representation of the female traveller in one key way, however. Unlike in any of the other texts I have studied for this dissertation, in *The Voyage Out*, the protagonist dies before completing her journey and returning home. After a two-week-long fevered illness, Rachel dies two chapters from the end of the novel. Rachel is recently engaged to Terence Hewet, another passenger on the ship, and her death interrupts both the conventional travel narrative and the conventional marriage plot. Her journey from London to South America is also more than halfway complete. Rachel's death is symbolically significant as a signal that the cultural conditions producing the woman traveller no longer exist; in the face of modernism, neither does the figure of the Victorian woman traveller as it has previously been inscribed upon literature and culture.

In *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror*, Simon Joyce identifies Virginia Woolf's "need to make firm distinctions between past and present as well as the inevitability that terms begin to bleed into each other" (18). In *The Voyage Out*, Woolf utilizes the character of Rachel Vinrace as a historical and cultural delineator between the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Rachel, an Edwardian woman with Victorian sensibilities, also shows the ways the past and present are inextricably married. Woolf draws upon ideas of gender and mobility to probe concepts of identity as they relate to history. Rachel's death points to the ideological anachronism that is the Victorian woman traveller, and clears the way for a new narrative of gendered mobility.

Throughout this dissertation, I aim to make the female traveller in Victorian fiction visible; to situate her within the trope of travel within fiction and discourses of mobility; and to probe the cultural factors that influence her travel and our reception of her travel and its larger meaning within narratives of mobility. In each chapter, I highlight the implications of

travel and mobility for fictional women in the Victorian novel. In *Villette*, Lucy Snowe's pursuit of independence and work leads her to travel abroad to a place where English social stigmas about working women could not follow. In *Vanity Fair*, Becky Sharpe's mobility maps her morality, the text revealing the inverse relationship between the domestic ideal and mobility in the Victorian novel. Dorothea Brooke's honeymoon travel in *Middlemarch* demonstrates the powerful effect of travel upon the fictional traveller as her honeymoon to Rome fails to unite her with her husband but facilitates the profound change of personal awareness. Similarly, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* shows the ways that the challenges and foreign encounters facilitated by the act of travel force (and empower) the traveller to articulate a sense of self-identity forged internally, even when the traveller in question is a little girl.

Based on what I have shown in this project, I propose an expansion of the definition of the journey in literary criticism of pre-twentieth-century fiction that includes the more coded acts of mobility undertaken by women. We should de-masculinize the travel trope by more fully recognizing and valuing women's journeys in literature, for even when they seem conventional (such as the honeymoon) they are profound in the lives of women. When a woman travels in literature, we should pay close attention to the claims the text is making, such as with regard to work as in *Villette*; the deep impact even the most conventional honeymoon travel can have on a woman as in *Middlemarch*; a woman's perceived place at home and/or abroad as in *Vanity Fair*; or the agency afforded by youth as in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. These claims provide a unique and valuable perspective on the complex interrelationship of gender and mobility for the travelling woman in the Victorian novel and for all women who travel in fiction.

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VITA

Sarah Elizabeth McNeely was born October 31, 1982, in Evansville Indiana. She is the daughter of Krista and Britt McNeely. A 2001 graduate of Klein Oak High School in Spring, Texas, she received her Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in English from Texas State University, San Marcos, in 2005. Sarah earned her Master's Degree in English with a major in Technical Communication with distinction from Texas State University in 2007.

Sarah began graduate study at TCU in September 2008. While working on her doctorate in English with a specialization in Victorian literature, Sarah held a number of teaching and administrative positions. She served as Graduate Instructor in the English Department (2008-2012); as Graduate Assistant to the Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies (2012-2013); as Teaching Assistant for the Center for International Studies (2012-2014); and as Graduate Teaching Fellow in the English Department (2013-2014). During the course of her study, Sarah received the English Department's Outstanding Graduate Instructor award for 2012, the Women and Gender Studies Graduate Research Award for 2013, and the English Department's Outstanding Graduate Student Award for 2013. She is a member of the Modern Language Association, the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals, and NAFSA.

Since April 2015, Sarah has worked for Academic Programs International in Austin coordinating faculty-led study abroad programs to England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Spain, and Portugal.

ABSTRACT

THE FIGURE OF THE FEMALE TRAVELLER IN VICTORIAN FICTION

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This dissertation examines the figure of the female traveller in Victorian fiction. Using examples of travelling women from canonical novels of the Victorian era, including Charlotte Bronte's *Villette*, William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, this study identifies the gender implications of mobility in Victorian fiction.

This study defines the female traveller as a female protagonist or secondary character who undertakes a significant journey that holds importance in the overall narrative and where she steps out of her element in class, geography, or culture. The figure of the travelling woman in Victorian fiction is a signal that the text is doing important ideological work with regard to gender and mobility. The travelling woman disrupts two conventional tropes, masculine mobility and female stasis, and calls for a re-evaluation of the way we see and privilege mobility in the Victorian novel.