

THE VICTORIAN MASCULINE WOMAN IN *WIVES AND DAUGHTERS*,
MIDDLEMARCH, AND *JUDE THE OBSCURE*

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in English.

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DEDICATION

To my husband, my little brother, and Jack Kennedy

...Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed;
rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time... (Butler 519).

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ABSTRACT

According to Judith Butler, both today's progressive society and the industrialized British Victorian era use binary genders to create a system of heterosexual reproduction that ensures the survival of the species. In Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, George Elliot's *Middlemarch*, and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* the main female characters rebel from the bourgeois feminine gender roles of the beautiful wife and nurturing mother, expressing a preference for the masculine pursuit of intellect. Without a corrective motherly feminine influence, Molly Gibson, Dorothea Brooke, and Sue Bridehead delve into the masculine realms outside of the conventionally feminine domestic sphere. Neglecting their dress and other standards of loveliness, their masculinized bodies do not reflect the encoded bodily messages of their feminine middle-class standing. When confronted with the contrast of the excessively feminine charms of Cynthia Kirkpatrick, Rosamond Vincy, and Arabella Donn; the masculine scholarly interests of the heroines appear sexually unattractive and lowers their wifely value. However, once the heroines are introduced into the scripted interaction of heterosexual relationships, jealousy of their feminine rival and societal punishment for their gender confusion causes Molly, Dorothea, and Sue to acquiesce to proper middle-class respectability. Although confined to the borders of middle-class femininity, Molly and Dorothea find methods of masculine intellectual expression in their companionate marriages, while Sue, resigned to her subjugated fate, suffers in an inequitable marriage.

PREFACE

Based on Judith Butler's concept of gender, outlined in her article "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," this thesis investigates the construction of gender in the Victorian era, using the novels: *Wives and Daughters*, *Middlemarch*, and *Jude the Obscure*. *Jude the Obscure* is used to illustrate the changing conceptions of working class gender in the age of the New Woman, in contrast to the bourgeois courtship and marriage in the earlier novels *Middlemarch* and *Jude the Obscure*.

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INTRODUCTION

“[Same-sex couples] wouldn't be asking for this relief if the law of marriage was what it was a millennium ago. I mean, it wasn't possible. Same-sex unions would not have opted into the pattern of marriage, which was a relationship, a dominant and a subordinate relationship. Yes, it was marriage between a man and a woman, but the man decided where the couple would be domiciled; it was her obligation to follow him....” (Ginsburg qtd. in Tillman)

Currently, American courts battle over the definition of marriage; following centuries of precedent, some believe that homosexual unions defy their definition of marriage as a procreative union between one male and one female. Conventional marriage, the customary institutional milestone which solidifies the construct of binary genders, requires one man and one woman to comply with culturally established standards of gender. In a traditional marriage, a partner's desirability is even determined based on how one conforms to the standard gender roles: leisure, weakness, and child-rearing for women; and vocation, strength, and sports for men. Unconventional unions pose a threat to the established structure of society because they undermine the legitimacy of what society understands as the separation of binary sexes into procreative gender roles. Debating the very definition of marriage causes the margins between masculine and feminine to blur.

Culturally, the debate over whether gender is a biological certainty or a cultural performance interpreted according to the script of historically predetermined standards polarizes views about several contemporary issues, including gay marriage and the acceptance of transgender individuals. Opposing the Social Darwinist idea that gender is organically defined, theorists like Monique Wittig, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Simone de Beauvoir, and Judith Butler agree that gender is a social invention. Judith Butler identifies one aspect of gender construction in her article “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and

Feminist Theory,” which contends that gender is socially enacted through a series of culturally encoded bodily exhibitions (519). The determination of appropriate gender performances depends on cultural, social, and historical influence. In “The History of Sexuality,” Foucault connects today’s gender disputes with laws against medicalized sexual deviancy from the nineteenth century, deeming them both an “age of multiplication” in their common focus on “matrimonial relations” to “reproduce labor capacity” and “induc[ing] sexual heterogeneities” (892). Many of the Victorian restrictions on and precepts of gender and class were perpetuated by the theory of Social Darwinism, claiming that class and heterosexual reproduction originate from a focus on marriage’s roles that divide gender into binaries of “naturally” established roles. Victorian critics like John Ruskin, Sarah Stickney Ellis, and Thomas E. Hill outlined etiquette instructions for suitable middle-class masculine and feminine behaviors, encouraging the polarized separation of genders; while others like John Stuart Mill, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Emily Davies petitioned for gender equality. The socially prescribed performance of gender and class can be examined in the Victorian texts of Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy. In novels by these authors, social compulsion mandates heterosexual matrimony for women, enforcing the proper middle-class feminine standard upon the major female characters.

The marriage plot, the focus of many Victorian novels, illustrates the rigid gender boundaries of middle-class heterosexual relationships. The intellectual female characters of Molly Gibson from *Wives and Daughters*, Dorothea Brooke from *Middlemarch*, and Sue Bridehead from *Jude the Obscure* express unbecoming masculinized behaviors due to a strong fatherly influence in the absence of motherly guidance. All three women are reared by men, who imbue them with an unbecoming intellectual curiosity and aspirations higher than conventional feminine roles; consequently, all three women develop a youthful attraction to activities that the

Victorian period associates with men. Once they renounce the ambiguous gender accoutrements of childhood, young men and women in British Victorian society were compelled toward heterosexual marriage, which requires both sexes to adhere to conventional middle-class gender roles. Butler claims that in order to insure its survival, society devises a practice of heterosexual marriage, where each gender has a “natural” attraction to the other. Butler explains that marriage insists on a set of functions or roles particular to each gender in order to ensure attraction to the appropriate gender (524). The effective Victorian performance of femininity attracts men with its display of beauty and intellectual inferiority. With a propensity for education, typically reserved for masculine characters, the female heroines in these three novels repel rather than attract eligible masculine mates; these female characters, through their resistance to middle-class femininity and insistence on learning, intimidate masculine characters by invading their intellectual territory. There was no space in Victorian society for a homoerotic attraction to a woman projecting a musicalized gender image, as it did not fit the mold of heterosexual reproduction.

Progressing into adulthood, Molly, Dorothea, and Sue can neither escape the designated roles of wife and mother, nor can they be permitted to linger outside the parameters of their predetermined class or gender. For her embracing of masculine intellect, Molly faces the loss of a soulmate to her step sister Cynthia’s more enticing performance of conventional feminine beauty, while Dorothea endures an unfortunate marriage and the isolation of widowhood. Sue, for her complete rejection of marriage, suffers the death of her illegitimate children. When these women act outside of their prescribed middle-class gender roles, they reveal the created nature of gender. Michel Foucault’s essay “Discipline and Punish” explains that invisible social precepts like gender and class are created and sustained through the combined complicit actions of the

dominated and subjugated parties (550). When Sue adopts masculine clothing, disregarding the policies of her girls' school and societal expectations by spending the night in a man's home, she resembles Butler's example of a transgender individual, whose dress conflicts with the society's standard of gender. The transgendered image merges male and female presentations, threatening the binary distinction between masculinity and femininity, unsettling the foundations of a reproductive heterosexual society. According to Butler, society punishes and marginalizes each of the women in an attempt to thrust them into accord with the proper regulations of society (528). Donning male clothing and disregarding threats to her feminine virtue in defiance of feminine social expectations, Sue is punished through social rejection, represented by her expulsion from school. It is not until Sue consents to marry Phillotson that she is restored to her feminine place in society. Like Sue, Molly and Dorothea, chastised for their crimes against gender, also surrender to the feminine scripted role of the bourgeois wife.

Victorian society expects a young, eligible woman to seek a prominent husband who has the desirable qualities of proper social and economic position. Once a respectable Victorian woman suitably marries, the female domain becomes the home, a symbol of her husband's social standing – where a wife conducts an acceptable bourgeois presentation of fashionable fabrics, dishes, food, leisure, and servants. Young middle-class women were strictly educated in the proper feminized performance, delicately reflecting refined markers of class rather than the laboring intellectual inquires of masculine education. Sarah Stickney Ellis, a respected Victorian proponent of middle-class decorum, in her guidebook *Wives of England: Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence, and Social Obligations*, contends that a wife's domestic duty depends upon her dutiful attention to pleasing her husband's superior intellect and ensuring his comfort and satisfaction. Ellis also feels that a wife extends her husband's social standing through a public

exhibition of his educational brilliance and financial substance, enhanced by her devoted silence (78-79). If a wife is devoid of attractive feminine traits, she cannot represent or supervise the proper presentation of her husband's refinement and social status, and instead she becomes a liability in society's interpretation of her husband's business and reputation.

All of the three novels considered here present female heroines who desire to delve into the depths of masculine intellect, opposing the roles and limitations of conventional feminine beauty. These heroines are highlighted through the contrast of a feminine antithesis, who initially displays a superficial feminine education combined with conventional Victorian loveliness, but as each marries, these ideals fail to construct the perfect wife and mother. As Mary Wollstonecraft asserts in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women and the Wrongs of Women, or Maria*, if middle-class women are educated in "false refinement" and prized only for their "weak elegance of mind," depending on their husbands for understanding and intellectual authority, then women descend into "a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone" (25). For example, Rosamond is initially attracted to Lydgate's superior education; however, once they are married, she spares no expense to display the pleasing beauty of middle-class social standing without deferring to her husband's intellectual authority. Following her girlish whims, Rosamond also causes her own miscarriage through her refusal to comply with her husband's instruction to avoid horseback riding while she is pregnant. When she should be managing the household and rearing children, Rosamond, with her shallow education, is only capable of displaying feminine allure, fostering loveliness and developing an incapacity for properly managing her domestic duties.

According to Virginia Sapiro, Mary Wollstonecraft's work calling for the equal education for women influenced nineteenth-century writers like Eliot, who compared Wollstonecraft to

Margaret Fuller, “pointing out that men make themselves subject to the most uneducated women by their own actions, which are meant to keep women as inferiors” (277). A mid-nineteenth century reprinting of Wollstonecraft prompted secondary characters like Eliot’s Rosamond, Gaskell’s Cynthia, and Hardy’s Arabella; whose initially pleasing performance of conventional middle-class femininity, habitually seen and eventually unappreciated by her husband, cause a desire to locate another who will appreciate her constructed feminine charms (45). These three female characters devote their feminine bodies to attracting male attention, rather than sacrificing their bodies to the wifely role of motherhood.

Though Victorian middle-class women are assigned the roles of wife and mother, both roles that confine the female body to the structure of the home, each of the leading female characters of the novels *Wives and Daughters*, *Middlemarch*, and *Jude the Obscure* reject the traditional roles and behaviors defined as feminine. Lacking the direction of a motherly feminine influence, these characters, pursuing choice and freedom, delve into the intellectual world ruled by masculine minds. As the restrictions of femininity loom near, a character who performs her destructive middle-class femininity according to society’s prescribed standards – Cynthia, Rosamond, and Arabella – appears in juxtaposition to Molly’s, Dorothea’s, and Sue’s masculine presentation of intellect. Punished for their unattractive intellectually encoded bodily presentations, society impels the heroines into the proper feminine boundaries of bourgeois marriage. When inhabiting their proper domestic space, each woman begins to develop appealing feminine qualities like pallor, a delicate beauty, and physical weakness. The earlier novels of *Wives and Daughters* and *Middlemarch* culminate in the contentment of companionate marriage, maintaining the Victorian gender categories of male and female. However, *Jude the Obscure*, a novel echoing the development of female education and sexual freedom of the time,

ends in the surrender to the fate of a miserable and ungratifying inequitable marriage, questioning the viability of a purely reproductive heterosexual pairing.

WIVES AND DAUGHTERS: MASCULINE INTELLECT VERSUS FEMININE BEAUTY

He was at that age when young men admire a formed beauty more than a face with any amount of future capability of loveliness...He only looked upon Molly as a badly-dressed, and rather awkward girl, with black hair and an intelligent face.... (Gaskell 86-87)

Elizabeth Gaskell's novel, *Wives and Daughters*, demonstrates how the performance of socially established feminine standards defines a Victorian woman's marriageable desirability, as most feminine attributes are interpreted through socially encoded bodily presentations. Raised only by her father, Molly Gibson, the novel's central character, rejects conventional female gender roles, opting instead for the masculine freedom of intellectual curiosity. Though Molly is attracted to traditionally masculine activities involving intellect, she is only permitted by society to participate as a beautiful middle-class female; this means that Molly is required to perform attractive feminine actions in order to become a proper wife and mother. Cynthia Kirkpatrick, displaying the desirable image of femininity, further exposes the disparity by juxtaposing Molly's divergent masculine scientific examination of nature with Cynthia's own excessive feminine display. Almost losing Roger to Cynthia's feminine charms, Molly ultimately conforms to her female gender role established by bourgeois societal norms – labeling her as marriageable and attractive to the opposite gender. Molly's attraction to Roger combined with Cynthia's immersion into conventional heterosexual relationships triggers Molly's adoption of proper feminine behaviors. Through the endorsement and guidance of an upper class woman, Harriet Cumnor, Molly learns to perfect her middle-class performance of femininity; and society finally accepts her as beautiful, desirable, and eligible for marriage to a landowner's son.

In her youth, Molly emulates lower-class femininity, the only example available to her, including climbing trees, a lower class, masculine-like behavior that opposes her middle class

standing. Due to the demise of her mother, Molly emulates the masculine traits displayed by her father; the only feminine characteristics Molly attains are adapted from the lower-class female servants. Uneducated in the coded messages of middle-class society, the lower-class servants may approximate upper-classes manners, but these standards are unsuitably enacted when presented by the lower-class. When discussing Molly's attire for an upper-class event, Mr. Gibson displays ignorance of the encrypted meanings of women's dress by trusting his servant, rather than relying on the Miss Brownings, devoted members of the middle-class:

“Molly will know she's to put on her best clothes,” said Miss Browning. “We could perhaps lend her a few beads, or artificials, if she wants them.”

“Molly must go in a clean white frock,” said Mr Gibson...for he did not admire the Miss Brownings' taste in dress...he esteemed his old servant Betty's as the more correct, because the more simple. (13)

Molly's white frock projects a socially confused message. Rather than successfully symbolizing middle-class virginity, this simple white dress disrupts the sexualized expression of bourgeois femininity, which is communicated by socially prescribed addition of feminine accessories adorning and accentuating the female body. Molly has not learned to cover herself in the cloak of middle-class femininity – so the other women of the upper-classes view Molly as “a little wild creature” whom they desire to “tame,” or educate in the ways of conventional femininity (Gaskell 159). When she is first admitted into society as a child, Molly expresses so much uncertainty as to how both class and gender are conventionally executed that she leaves the experience with only the negative desire to “never be a lord or a lady” (28). Molly exists in a sexually unaware state of childhood, where there are no boundaries between social classes or division of binary genders. Butler echoes Simone de Beauvoir's claim that one is not born a woman but must become a woman through an accurate performance of society's approved

feminine qualities (522). In order to become a member of society, Molly must be civilized in order to function as a middle-class female within its boundaries.

Dress does not solely display one's gender but also exemplifies the class standing of the individual. Elizabeth Langland's essay "Nobody's Angels: Domestic Ideology and Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Novel" argues: "the clothes, like the customs, were constructed to distinguish the middle-class women from her social inferiors. Her apparel, physically inhibiting as it may have been, is also a sign of her class power because it precluded physical labor and displayed her managerial status" (294). As Molly lost her mother, she has no feminine influence representative of her own class; she is, therefore, unfamiliar with how to employ attire to appropriately display leisure and claim her station as a middle-class female.

In preserving Molly's maidenhood and innocence, Molly's father, Mr. Gibson, prohibits knowledge of worldly concepts, intentionally keeping Molly ignorant of knowledge connected to a young woman's development. Mr. Gibson places restrictions on Molly's education, not wanting to "teach Molly too much" in his desire to "keep her a child" (34). In regulating Molly's education, Mr. Gibson intends to deter her knowledge of sexual desires, but in obstructing Molly's observation of proper heterosexual sexual attraction, Mr. Gibson is interrupting Molly's demonstration of both class and gender. When invited to an upper-class dinner, Molly reveals a disinclination for the feminine rituals of dining, which exhibit markers of class and social status. Instead, Molly displays a masculine connection to the outdoors; "she would have rather stayed in the park all night long, and slept under the beautiful quiet cedar," rather than venture into a situation where society forces her to obey the "unknown ordeal of 'going to dessert,' which was evidently regarded both by children and nurses as the event of the

day” (22). Molly – oblivious to society’s binary division of gender and class – cannot obey suitable middle-class feminine behaviors.

Even though Molly fails in expression of proper gender, due to social illiteracy, others infer her gender through the comparison of her actions to prearranged social norms. Butler explains that gender is not an individual projection, but a shared experience (525). Just as an actor must have an audience to interpret the performance, Mr. Coxe, Mr. Gibson’s apprentice, examines and classifies Molly’s confused gender performance through his distant observations. Though he is not of Molly’s station, by projecting his sexual desires onto Molly’s body, Mr. Coxe employs a culturally defined set of standards to determine her gender, casting Molly in the role of desirable female. Mr. Gibson “was startled into discovering that his little one was growing fast into a woman, and already the passive object of some of the strong interests that affect a woman’s life; and he – her mother as well as her father – so much away that he could not guard her as he would have wished” (Gaskell 55). Realizing that he cannot prevent the expression of sexuality, Mr. Gibson transplants Molly into the social world of the land-owning Hamleys, where he believes Molly’s juvenile manners and ambiguous gender will remain free from heterosexual contamination.

Though Mr. Gibson regards the Hamley residence as a barrier against the corruption of Molly’s naiveté, it becomes the site where Molly awakens from the spell of innocence. Through a discussion with Mr. Hamley about the death of her mother, Molly becomes aware of her father’s ““thought of remarrying again,”” and she fearfully “recur[s] to the idea, as one does to that of danger which has passed by without one’s being aware of it” (68). Marriage creates a polarization between the Victorian middle-class masculine and feminine genders, so when imagining her father’s second marriage, Molly realizes how to distinguish both gender and class.

Using her incomplete knowledge of marriage, Molly endeavors to ascertain eligible matrimonial companions. Molly's eyes may have adjusted to the light of gender, but she fails to perceive the weight that social rank has on the probability of marriage. Instead, Molly constructs possible bridal spouses for her father, considering the only females she knows: Miss Eyre, Miss Browning, Miss Phoebe, and Miss Goodenough (70). As these women are of lower middle-class status, none are a proper match for Mr. Gibson; they exist outside his realm of middle-class social interest. All of these women are incapable of suitably projecting Mr. Gibson's social standing. Once informed of the impending marriage to the widowed Mrs. Kirkpatrick, Molly recognizes that the addition of a female figure, through marriage, will alter the relationship between her and her father, impelling Molly to enact ideal middle class femininity through a respectable motherly feminine guidance, including altering the quality of Molly's unfashionable dress.

The new Mrs. Gibson serves as Molly's motherly guide to the feminine realm by prodding Molly into the guise of a proper lady. Mrs. Gibson becomes Molly's instructor in the socially fashioned gender roles of middle-class masculinity and femininity, where: "marriage is the natural thing" (Gaskell 98). Mrs. Gibson informs Molly that in a proper middle-class marriage "the husband has all that kind of dirty work" of toiling for money, "and his wife sits in the drawing-room like a lady" (98). A woman who appreciates dress and recognizes how this exhibition of class can enhance her social status, Mrs. Gibson induces Molly to obey conventional class and gender etiquette in adorning herself in fashionable garments and feminine beauty practices. With a guide to scrutinize her performance of her middle-class femininity,

Molly was better dressed than formerly; her stepmother saw to that. She disliked anything old or shabby, or out of taste about her; it hurt her eye; and she had already fidgeted Molly into a new amount of care about the manner in which she put on her clothes, arranged her hair, and was gloved and shod. Mrs. Gibson had

tried to put her through a course of rosemary washes and creams to in order to improve her complexion; but about that Molly was either forgetful or rebellious...Still her appearance was extremely improved, even to Osborne's critical eye. (Gaskell 180)

Just as Mrs. Gibson's dress expresses her new found progression in status through marriage, Molly, in her modified attire, reflects a level of breeding appropriate to her station. Mrs. Gibson manipulates Molly's appearance, and as a result, Molly projects a key facet of ideal middle-class femininity, marking her as an alluring, eligible lady of leisure to the opposite gender.

Molly must not merely alter her body; her household duties cause a relocation from the masculinized natural world to the defined feminized domain of the domestic. As a child without a feminine influence to communicate proper education or to demonstrate gendered activities, Molly roamed in the wild outdoors as a product of nature, emulating her father, a logical man of science. Regarding her socially unbecoming outdoor adventures, Molly remarks: "I know Betty says I wear her life out with the green stains I get in my frocks from sitting in the cherry-tree" (28). Through masculine behavior, Molly violates her designated femininity, placing her outside the preordained realm of suitable middle-class demeanor.

Mrs. Gibson alters Molly's improper projection of gender and class by improving Molly's bedroom. Where one resides within the house communicates a tangible depiction of gender and social status – broadcasting to the observer the difference between the feminine and masculine, the subordinate and the superior. Langland asserts that not only were Victorian "spaces coded as masculine or feminine," where the "feminine spaces extended from the drawing room to the sitting room and boudoirs," but particular spaces were assigned exclusively to each particular class: "the masters' establishment was separated from the servants' quarters" (295). Outside of the drawing room and boudoirs, Molly subverts her body's identification with middle-class femininity through her exploration of nature. When Mrs. Gibson repurposes Molly's

outdated bedroom, creating a suitably fashionable space, she announces both Molly's station and gender. In an attempt to improve Molly's brown complexion, Mrs. Gibson restricts Molly from the liberty of nature. Originally the natural world served as a sanctuary to Molly; now prohibited from the outdoors, Molly resorts to the feminized borders of "her own smart new room, which hardly yet seemed a familiar place" (189). Molly resentfully accepts Mrs. Gibson's definition of her gender and interpretation of her social position, which relocates her body to the territory of the middle-class domestic lady.

Cynthia Kirkpatrick, Mrs. Gibson's daughter and Molly's step-sister, invades this newly feminized space, and she lavishly enacts a standard representation of the ethereal Victorian femininity. Unlike Molly, in her formative years, Cynthia had both a conventional feminine education and motherly instruction, which combined to portray the proper façade of a lady. Cynthia is described as "one of those natural coquettes, who instinctively bring out all their prettiest airs and graces in order to stand well with any man, young or old, who happened to be present" (464). To those observing her calculated "natural" beauty and charm, Cynthia's body mechanically signifies her feminine gender, but Cynthia is also noted for her adept manner of performing her scripted social role. Encrypted in the movements of her body as well as in the meaning of her words, Cynthia conveys attractive messages of bounteous femininity: "indeed, she made something of the same kind of impression on all men. They were first struck with her personal appearance; and then with her pretty deprecating manner, which appealed to them as if she had said, 'You are wise, and I am foolish – have mercy on my folly'" (229). Coached in her feminine wiles by her mother, Mrs. Gibson, Cynthia emphasizes her delicate features, while simultaneously downplaying her shrewd and pensive disposition. Cynthia cultivates an artificial feminine display, the true purpose of which is to attract a wealthy and well-positioned

prospective suitor, ensuring her future social and financial stability. In his essay “Transgression and Sexual Difference in Elizabeth Gaskell’s Novels,” John Kucich suggests that lying is branded a feminine trait, as deception was used quite frequently in “plotting a social rise” (200). Because Cynthia’s staging of femininity is designed solely to attract men, it is a deception meant to elevate her social standing. Molly perceives the dishonesty in Cynthia’s feminine presentation, thinking of it as: “not the sunshiny rest of a placid lake; it was rather the glitter of the pieces of a broken mirror, which confuses and bewilders” (Gaskell 345). As a broken mirror, Cynthia reflects encoded bits of desirable feminine precepts calculated to ensure a heterosexual match of an appropriate social standing, according to Victorian conventions of marriage.

Cynthia, who is seemingly the paragon of feminine beauty, deceitfully uses her excess femininity to entice men into the role of marriage. Butler claims that to ensure the future existence of a culture a system of reproduction is instilled through heterosexual marriages consisting of binary genders: one male and one female (524). Devising a plot to raise their social standing, Cynthia and Mrs. Gibson deceitfully use middle-class gender performance to attract partners into heterosexual marriage arrangements that will elevate their social standing— for both women view matrimony as the only means to escape the occupation of governess, a humble and lower middle-class fate. Considered by society as desirable due to the expression of feminine qualities, Cynthia becomes entangled in engagements from various suitors. Molly, on the other hand, observes as femininity is so engrained in Cynthia, that her “role would have been played by her unconsciously; the things prescribed were what she would naturally have done” (Gaskell 346). While Cynthia’s abundant femininity ensnares various gentlemen, tarnishing her priceless virginal reputation in her quest to obtain the most qualified suitor, Molly rebels against the predestined feminine aspiration to marry. Since the role was prescribed, “Molly would have

resisted; have gone out, for instance, when she was expected to stay at home; or have lingered in the garden when a long country walk was planned” (346). Performing according to the bourgeois feminine ideal, Cynthia outshines Molly’s masculinized intellect and connection to nature.

Society deems Cynthia’s prescribed feminine appearance as more alluring to men than Molly’s investment in learning, which serves as a threat to the intellectual masculine sphere by infringing on their scholarly territory. Jennifer Panek’s essay “Constructions of Masculinity in *Adam Bede* and *Wives and Daughters*” describes how Victorians abided by reproductive guidelines based on writings from “Darwin’s theory of sexual selection” stating: that “while women were selected for beauty, men were primarily selected for ‘genius’: the natural order decreed that women’s contribution to the improvement of the race was a fine physique and a man’s was a highly developed intellect” (128). In relation to these socially imposed standards, Cynthia flaunts her “natural” feminine beauty, where Molly cultivates masculine intellect using her father’s science books and Roger’s observational training. Molly scarcely endeavors to disguise her masculine learning, where “she reads such deep books – all about facts and figures” (267). Often eclipsed by Cynthia’s exhibition of feminine elegance, Molly gains limited male attention in her masculine presentation of scholarly insights, but the men remain enraptured with Cynthia’s excessive feminine performance. No matter who the male figure: “Cynthia put on all her pretty airs – her look of intent interest in what any one was saying to her...her unspoken deference; in short, all the unconscious ways she possessed by instinct of tickling the vanity of men.” Even Mr. Coxe’s attraction to Molly wanes when she is compared to Cynthia’s captivating femininity, “so while Molly quietly repelled him, Cynthia drew him to her by her soft attractive ways; and his constancy fell before her charms” (402). Distracted by the comparison of Cynthia’s extravagant performance, suitable men instantly discount Molly’s potential and value

as a wife because she portrays masculine intellectual attributes. Without embracing the calculated actions of femininity, Molly threatens the heterosexual foundation of the Victorian culture.

Throughout most of the novel, Roger Hamley, a landowner's son, classifies Molly as a masculinized friend, and he has no sexual attraction to Molly's masculine interpretation of gender. Molly, in her masculine performance, lies in discord with the gender that society associates with her body. Butler states that one's "gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is only real to the extent that it is performed" (527). Like the transgendered individual in Butler's example, many deem Molly's masculine behavior as a gender faux pas, easily rectified and transposed into feminine demeanor. Mrs. Hamley deduces that her sons would decode Molly's gender presentation as unappealing because:

She's not at all the sort of girl young men of their age would take to. We like her because we see what she really is; but lads of one or two and twenty want all the accessories of a young woman...such things as becoming dress, style of manner. They would not at their age even see that she is pretty; their ideas of beauty would include colour. (Gaskell 79)

Unattractively dressed and dependent on intellect, Molly may present as masculine, yet Mrs. Hamley sees beneath the seemingly unfeminine surface, to Molly's natural, rather than performed, beauty. Molly disrupts the binary categorization of gender that, according to Panek, depends on: "the male tendency to assume a woman's character is naturally inscribed in her appearance" and the masculine "desire for pliant, child-like, sweetly ignorant wife." Panek argues that the gendered features of "feminine intellectual inferiority stem from the extraordinary value that society places on cleverness and skills as measures of masculinity" (134-135). Though upper-class women, like Mrs. Hamley and, eventually, Lady Harriet are able to see Molly's value, Victorian young men ascertain feminine desirability based upon the precise

performance of the ascribed feminine façade. For this reason, Roger rejects the notion of sexual attraction to the “badly-dressed, and rather awkward girl, with black hair and intelligent face” (87). Molly displays a combination of scholarly abilities and disheveled dress that produce a perception of her gender as masculine, which frustrates the social value placed on Molly’s bodily appearance. The more Molly fulfills the roles prescribed to males, the less Molly’s body communicates wifely worth to the men around her.

Molly continues to present a masculinized appearance when she performs tasks normally associated with a father or brother. Through exaggerated feminine display, Cynthia traps herself in an indissoluble contract of marriage with Mr. Preston, who threatens to blackmail Cynthia with her own words of affection if she refuses to honor her pledge to be his wife. Molly inserts herself between Cynthia and Mr. Preston, serving as Cynthia’s guardian. Again displaying masculine behaviors, Molly defends her stepsister’s virtue, severing the marital contract, a task normally reserved for a male family member, proving “that Molly was as unconscious that he was a young man, and she a young woman, as if she has been a pure [ungendered] angel of heaven” (483). Although Molly’s masculine performance permits her to step in and resolve matters between Cynthia and Mr. Preston, when gossip embroils Molly’s name with Mr. Preston’s, she becomes a stained feminine figure.

Molly demonstrates ignorance of social convention when, due to Cynthia’s duplicitous coquettish behavior, her name is placed in conjunction with Mr. Preston’s. The gossip, questioning Molly’s feminine virtue, declares that Molly *has* feminine virtue to be challenged. Having resolved Cynthia’s flirtatious misstep, Molly, through town gossip, is propelled into the role of the female in a heterosexual encounter, and Molly requires the upper-class interpreter of femininity, Harriet Cunnor, to guide her through these waters into respectable womanhood. In

“That ‘Old Rigmarole of Childhood’: Fairytales and Socialization in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters*,” Carrie Wasinger draws parallels between Molly’s and Cinderella’s problematic domestic circumstances, which are transformed through the magical aide of a fairy godmother. Wasinger contends that Lady Harriet Cumnor’s upper-class position permits her to be the “mediator” who “transforms the protagonist and secures the narrative’s goals: typically, a harmonious heterosexual union and economic rise” (272-273). As a member of the upper-class, Lady Harriet’s performance of femininity is enhanced by her superior social standing. The magical Lady Harriet, using her powers of class and gender based on the authority of her social position, guides Molly in leaving calling-cards in homes where Molly often “ran in whenever she liked” (Gaskell 532). This elevates Molly’s status and restores her virtuous respectability by transforming her into the unquestionable epitome of stereotypical middle-class femininity where she performs “everything properly, and according to full etiquette” (532). Lady Harriet’s association amplifies Molly’s social position, which society translates into masculine desire for Molly’s body. Almost immediately, Roger becomes infatuated with Molly during a social event at the Cumnor’s, where, for the first time, Molly successfully presents both femininity and her middle-class status. Roger’s attraction develops only after Harriet Cumnor, through her friendly association and assistance, raises Molly’s social status and cultivates Molly’s feminine expression.

In her recent elevation in status, Molly both accepts and performs proper middle-class feminine precepts, which obscures her unattractive masculine attributes. Harriet Cumnor, the feminine link to the upper-class, inscribes Molly with characteristics connected with a self-sacrificing wife and mother. Molly demonstrates her bourgeois feminine worth through the

regulation of the Hamley servants and the sacrifice of herself to the needs of others. Attending to the demands of the Hamley residence, Molly unveils her recently realized feminine capabilities:

It was well that Molly was such a favorite with the old servants; for she had frequently to restrain and to control. To be sure, she had her father's authority to back her; and they were aware that where her own comfort, ease, or pleasure was concerned she never interfered, but submitted to their will. (Gaskell 580)

Once seen as a restriction to Molly's masculine desire for the outdoors, Molly manages the Hamley home, a signifier of a woman's social influence. Molly's body acquires a connection to the space of the home, an attractive domestic symbol of middle-class femininity. In *Nobody's Angels*, Langland argues that a proper eligible woman must display the wifely managerial capabilities of overseeing a home because "the home, often figured as a haven with its attending angel, can be decoded so that we recognize it as a theater for the staging of a family's social position, a staging that depends on a group of prescribed domestic practices" (9). After observing Molly's management of his home, Squire Hamley discovers Molly's social value, which he had often ignored and not seen as a suitable match for his sons. Through her successful organization of the home, Molly displays her wifely virtue, and Squire Hamley finally regards Molly's body as a feminine, even kissing her hand (581). Symbolized by Squire Hamley's recognition of the feminine qualities of a part of her body, Molly transitions from the masculine territory of intellect and nature to the feminine realm of the domestic. In her performance of proper feminine characteristics, Molly adjusts the social perceptions of her gender.

After attending to the upper-class management duties of the Hamley home, a role previously performed by Mrs. Hamley, a severe illness confines Molly to the home and solidifies her transformation into alluring femininity. The feminine self-sacrifice and dedication to the care of the Hamleys after the death of Hamley's eldest son, Osborn, causes Molly to become physically exhausted. Eventually, Molly succumbs to domestic afflictions similarly suffered by

Mrs. Hamley: ““Molly’s illness is only nervous, Mr Gibson says. A nervous fever; but you must remember nerves are mere fancy, and she’s getting better”” (584). The men diagnose Molly’s illness as a weakness of the female body, which presents no immediate danger. Like Mrs. Hamley’s illness, it illustrates the frail state of the female mind and body compared to the robust masculine form and intellect. During this illness, Molly’s adolescent body morphs into the dainty, desirable conventional female through the interpretive masculine gaze. Upon Roger’s notice of the delicate features of her body, “Molly felt herself colour all over with the consciousness of his regard,” and “she looked up, and showed him her beautiful soft grey eyes, which he never remembered to have noticed before” (592). In caring for the Hamley home, Molly enacts the domestic role of a wife, developing a weak constitution common to upper-class wives like Mrs. Hamley. Being confined indoors for the duration of her illness severs Molly from the masculine outdoors, and her body develops an attractive feminine pallor. Observing these feminine behaviors, men define Molly’s body as desirable and respectable.

Although Molly accepts her prescribed role, she does not abandon her desires for intellectual freedom. Molly, always opinionated and emotional, refuses to adhere to the controlled feminine front of silence, a behavior that the perfection of feminine performance, Cynthia, continuously displays. Though the novel was left unfinished, the last chapter contains various instances where Molly rebels against Mrs. Gibson’s childish femininity, where Molly is often “finding it difficult to keep her temper” (638). While Molly’s appearance and dress are much enhanced by her association with middle-class femininity, she refuses a new dress. Though Molly transforms into an attractive feminine beauty, she still insists upon her opinions that society “had better see them as they really were, in dress, habits, and appointments” (648).

Reared in a masculine environment and without the guidance and protection of a mother, Molly imitates the intellectual masculine presentation of her father. A new female influence to the family, Mrs. Gibson encourages the reconstruction of Molly's confused masculine gender representation into a proper middle-class feminine performance, and influenced by her father's rationality and her connection with science and nature, Molly rebels from these socially prescribed expressions. Overshadowed by Cynthia's excessive flirtatious feminine appeal, Molly is denoted as undesirable, due to her projected masculine nature. Lacking feminine spectacle, Molly fails to exhibit the image of a conventional Victorian wife and mother. Through Cynthia's enticing and precarious heterosexual encounters, a change in Molly's masculine gender presentation occurs when Molly's virtue is tarnished by improper social conduct. The questioning of her virtue no longer permits Molly to revel in a perpetual state of childhood sexual innocence. Threatened by social ruin, Molly's class is elevated by Harriet Cumnor, and Harriet's mobility and upper-class connections mandate Molly into her role as a female, accompanying her newly acquired middle-class manners and dress. These representations convey the message that Molly is an eligible and ethically sound female, who is ready for the occupation of wife and mother. Molly's character still contains masculine elements, including an inclination toward the scientific exploration of nature through her emotions. Just as her father had, Roger fosters Molly's scientific examination of the natural world, where "he tried to interest her in his pursuit, cherished her first little morsel of curiosity, and nursed it into a very proper desire for further information" (120). Even lacking a composed ending, the reader, having witnessed Molly's feminine conversion, surmises that the marriage between Roger and Molly will not inhibit Molly's intellectually masculine inclinations. In their companionate marriage, Molly will serve as a helpmate, assisting Roger in his scholarly

endeavors. Through their corresponding scientific interests, Molly and Roger develop a healthy respect for one another, rather than a relationship of feminine dependence and masculine dominance. Though she accepts her feminine fate of matrimony, Molly marries for love, not social distinction or economic security. In the end, even heterosexual marriage cannot counteract Molly's desire for intellectual freedom; seemingly, her marriage to Roger combines Molly's feminine role with masculine education. Since she is married, Molly is no longer required to be enticing, so she can investigate the masculine avenues of intellect because her marriage provides a protective perimeter from the judgement of society.

MIDDLEMARCH: THE ROLE OF WIFE AND MOTHER IN BOURGEOIS MARRIAGE

Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress. Her hand and wrist were so finely formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to Italian painters; and her profile as well as her stature and bearing seemed to gain the more dignity from her plain garments, which by the side of provincial fashion gave her the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible...Miss Brooke's plain dressing was due to mixed conditions...The pride of being ladies had something to do with it: the Brook connections, though not exactly aristocratic, were unquestionably 'good'.... (Eliot 7)

In the above epigraph from *Middlemarch*, George Eliot defines middle-class gender boundaries by assigning classic and virginal femininity to the novel's heroine, Dorothea Brooke, through an examination of her body and its adornments. A woman's hand, wrist, and dress are synecdoche, extensions of her feminine form. But like Molly Gibson from *Wives and Daughters* whose hand eventually comes to signify her respectable femininity, Dorothea's masculine tendency to value education initially precludes her from accepting her class-appropriate feminine role. Desperate to explore the masculine realm of intellect, Dorothea marries Edward Casaubon, an aged intellectual upper-class gentleman, whom Dorothea hopes will guide her through the caverns of knowledge; however, until his death, Casaubon expects Dorothea to conform to her proper wifely role. Dorothea wanders between male and female gender lines, until confronting the formidably enticing middle-class femininity enacted by Rosamond Vincy. In her opposition to the charming beauty of Rosamond, Dorothea unveils her class appropriate femininity by inserting herself in a romantic heterosexual relationship. Like Harriet Cumnor does for Molly, Dorothea plays the role of an upper-class woman attempting to protect and restore the middle-class reputation of the neglected and confused Rosamond; in marrying Will Ladislaw, Dorothea asserts her femininity, while also restoring Rosamond's middle-class feminine virtue.

Before awakening into mature femininity, Dorothea presents a conflicted front in her aspiration to explore the masculine realm of intellect. Her bodily appearance reflects the English middle-class standard of feminine beauty, but she uses her body to perform masculine acts. Applying Judith Butler's notion of gender as a series of prescribed acts performed over time, though Dorothea may have masculine passions for education, it is a presumption of encoded feminine motifs by spectators that cause society to view Dorothea's body as feminine and socially desirable. Stretching the bounds of femininity, Dorothea's masculine nature masks itself in the middle-class feminine ideals of wife and mother, as her beautiful hands are "not thin hands, or small hands; but powerful feminine, maternal hands. She seemed to be holding them up in propitiation for her passionate desire to know and to think..." (38). The image of her motherly hands contrasts her use of them in a masculine yearning for learning. The desire for knowledge is a violation of the delicate education and simple opinions that Victorian society expected from middle-class women; this passion marks Dorothea as masculine, as only men were permitted a passionate pursuit of knowledge. Dorothea's masculine quest for intellectual expansion confuses the desirable performance of bourgeois femininity reflected by her body.

Dorothea also expresses a muddled, misperceived sense of conventional femininity through her bodily appearance. The manner in which one's body is adorned reveals one's expression of gender, as, according to Judith Butler, repeated acts solidify one's gender. Unlike Rosamond and her sister, Celia, Dorothea often neglects certain precepts of middle-class femininity, constructing a bodily gender presentation that drifts between the realms of feminine beauty and masculine intellect. The first words of the novel discuss Dorothea's feminine "beauty" as being "thrown into relief by poor dress" (Eliot 7). Relegated to the sphere of the middle-class female, beauty is a societal belief assigned so that she may entice a proper husband;

Dorothea's "poor dress" is based on religious conviction, where: "to her the destinies of mankind, seen by the light of Christianity, made the solitudes of feminine fashion appear an occupation for Bedlam" (8). Knowledge, theories, and opinions – these were masculine property, and Dorothea's invasion of this territory, combined with her traditional feminine beauty yields a conflicting gender identity. Dorothea's inability to decipher subtle, but imperative, conventional Victorian precepts of gender and sexuality confounds the constructed image of a proper lady that her station compels her to project. Jean Arnold's essay "Cameo Appearances: The Discourse of Jewelry in *Middlemarch*" asserts that jewelry is a fundamental mode through which to translate a woman's role in society, as jewelry was worn only by women (266). Dorothea's rejection of the female inheritance of her mother's jewelry suggests that she is rejecting the standard of bourgeois femininity set by years of historical precedence, yet a closer look shows that she rejects only a certain kind of femininity. Dorothea only declines two necklaces: "a necklace of purple amethysts set in exquisite gold-work and a pearl cross with five brilliants in it" (Eliot 12). These pieces of beautification would serve as a focal point on a women's chest, emphasizing certain bodily features that are deemed inherently feminine, reproductive, and sexually enticing. On the other hand, Dorothea cannot resist the lure of emeralds and diamonds, "slipping the ring and bracelet on her finely-turned finger and wrist, holding them towards the window on level with her eyes" (13). These adornments attract attention to the female hand, a symbol of female virginity and matrimony. Dorothea's pleasing feminine hands contrast the rough working hands of the lower classes, and the emerald ring, a symbol of wealth and status, is reminiscent of the engagement ring desired by proper middle-class young ladies. However, Dorothea simultaneously consents to and casts off the application of class-structured feminine beauty to her body.

Having lost her parents and been relegated to life with her bachelor uncle, Dorothea never developed a recognition of the gender roles in proper Victorian society. Jill L. Matus, in her essay “Saint Teresa, Hysteria, and *Middlemarch*,” explains that Lacan’s Law of the Father has privileged the male perspective and intellect, and with the lack of motherly guidance to modify or model acceptable lady-like behavior, Dorothea is drawn to masculine intellect and discards the female assets of sensuousness, vanity, and sexuality (223-224). Dorothea’s orphaned state inhibited her ability to perform encoded gender differences between male and female; instead of identifying with the like-gendered figure of the mother, Dorothea is left with the absent and distant role of the father, portrayed by her uncle. Unhappy with her uncle’s limited intellectual abilities, Dorothea’s conception of binary gender boundaries is confounded by her uncle’s failure to provide Dorothea with an appropriate female frame-of-reference through which to interpret societal class and gender norms. Her uncle was:

...blamed in neighboring families for not securing some middle-aged lady as a guide and companion to his nieces. But he himself dreaded so much the sort of superior woman likely to be available for such a position, that he allowed himself to be dissuaded by Dorothea’s objections, and was brave enough to defy the world.... (Eliot 10)

Rather than face the domestic control that a woman of appropriate standing would present in his home, Mr. Brooke refuses to enforce and enact the genteel standards of femininity upon Dorothea. Even Dorothea refutes society by opposing the presence of a feminine figure in the domestic sphere, but it seems that she does this out of dread of altering her regimented routine rather than to defy social convention. Having never been educated in the feminine codes of Victorian conduct, Dorothea is oblivious to the social significance of her protests.

Like Molly Gibson, Dorothea is ignorant of the importance society places on a female influence, as Dorothea’s upbringing parallels Molly’s in being raised without the proper, middle-

class image of a mother or wife. Dorothea is left to emulate an ideal from Biblical texts, which hindered her chances to marry. She was thought of as “if she thought herself living in the time of the Apostles” and that “such a wife might awaken you some fine morning with a new scheme for the application of her income which would interfere with political economy and the keeping of saddle-horses: a man would naturally think twice before he risked himself in such fellowship” (Eliot 9). The beginning of the novel emphasizes Dorothea’s desire for knowledge, and her only avenue for reaching it is a marriage “where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you” (10). Intellect and learning was judged to be an undesirable feminine trait, as it was believed to dull and impede a middle-class women’s domestic effectiveness. Jennifer Judge, in her essay “The Gendering of Habit in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*,” highlights society’s fear of Dorothea’s unfeminine behavior as invading the masculine imperialistic regulation of the mind (167). Middlemarch society is appalled by Dorothea’s masculine ideals, and feeling the natural cure to be the binary code of reproductive marriage, it urges her to attach herself to a class-appropriate husband. But Dorothea, inexperienced with the standards of proper feminine aspiration, seeks instead to employ marriage as a means to intellectual freedom, rather than as respectable domestic stability.

In her ardent desire for knowledge, Dorothea fails to recognize that Casaubon misreads her body as conventionally feminine. Upon meeting Dorothea, Casaubon utters:

That I should ever meet with a mind and person so rich in the mingled graces which could render marriage desirable, was far indeed from my conception. You have all – nay, more than all – those qualities which I have ever regarded as the characteristic excellences of womanhood. The great charm of your sex is its capability of ardent self-sacrificing affection, and herein we see its fitness to round and complete the existence of our own. (50)

Dorothea is ignorant of Casaubon’s misinterpretation of her desperation for learning as feminine devotion to his masculine dominance. When Dorothea insults her own intellect, she reveals her

main motive for marriage: education. Dorothea's conception that "the really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was sort of a father, and could teach you Hebrew, if you wished it" (Eliot 10), exposes her naiveté of the sexual guidelines of Victorian marriage. She does not perform the subscribed provocative bourgeois femininity. In Butler's opinion, one cannot act outside of the confines of societal convention; much as an actor's performance is illustrated upon the stage, social customs provide the discourse through which a person's gender is interpreted (525-526). Through the rhetoric of social convention, Dorothea's desire for marriage is read as the predictable feminine desire for improved wealth and status, gained through the ritual rite of marriage. Society believes that Dorothea's gender-inappropriate oddities will be contained and corrected through marriage.

While Dorothea desires to use marriage to gain knowledge barred to most women, Rosamond Vincy, the daughter of a successful manufacturer, conforms to social expectations, enacting her overstated femininity to improve her social status. Highly attuned to the desires of men, Rosamond accentuates the graces of her body to communicate the Victorian precepts of female sexuality and a desire for an improved marital situation. Completely aware of the lustful masculine gaze upon her body:

Every nerve and muscle in Rosamond was adjusted to the consciousness that she was being looked at. She was by nature an actress of parts that entered into her *physique*: she even acted her character, and so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own. (Eliot 117)

The narrator classifies Rosamond's bodily postures and movements as a performance and her character is that of an actress, displaying a gender that is "naturally" presented with meticulous care. Wrapped up in her fantasies and fairytale archetypes, Rosamond is obsessed with the idea of discovering a bridegroom from distant lands, and through her excessive feminine allure, she induces him to rescue her from the "ogres" and evils of Middlemarch (137). Rosamond plots to

use her extravagant performance of appealing femininity to entrap a man, “whom it would be delightful to enslave” (118), and he must be of good birth because it “presented marriage as a prospect of rising in rank and getting a little nearer to that celestial condition on earth in which she would have nothing to do with vulgar people” (166). Much like an animal on display, Rosamond portrays a tempting feminine exterior, in order to attract a mate with connections to the elite upper class.

Impatient to climb the rungs of social standing through marriage, Rosamond is cast as the villainous paradigm of excessive feminine sensual beauty juxtaposing Dorothea’s unsuitably masculine intellectual desire. The perfected performance of femininity, which Rosamond displays in her exact poses and attention to dress, gains the desired masculine attention. In “Rosamond Rescued: George Eliot’s Critique of Sexism in *Middlemarch*,” Anne E. Patrick explains that “Rosamond fits a stereotypical feminine ideal: she combines physical beauty with disinterest in ‘masculine’ concerns, and she focuses all her energies on the domestic sphere... This prepared her nicely for getting a husband, but not for relating to one” (227-228). Aware of the sexual lure of her body, Rosamond exercises the constructions of femininity to her advantage, abiding by the structured boundaries between the binary genders of male and female, while Dorothea violates parameters of femininity in her masculine desire for intellect. Lydgate, Rosamond’s husband and a representation of masculine shrewdness, finds it “troublesome to talk to such women” as Dorothea, for “they are always wanting reasons, yet they are too ignorant to understand the merits of any question, and usually fall back on their moral sense to settle things after their own taste” (Eliot 93). Dorothea’s bodily appearance may correspond to some of the feminine standards; however, her intellect is threatening to invade the masculine domain of knowledge. Lydgate appraises the wifely aptitudes of the bookish Dorothea against the ideal

facsimile of a Victorian lady, Rosamond: Dorothea “did not look at things from the proper feminine angle. The society of such women was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form, instead of reclining in paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for heaven” (95). Dorothea’s intellectually masculine nature communicates less wifely desirability than the sexual awareness and constructed beauty of the “nymph” (96), Rosamond. Dorothea’s masculine tendencies threaten the social conventions of a middle-class standard of male/female matrimony.

A nineteenth century marriage assumes the heterosexual nature of both parties; however, Dorothea’s marriage to Casaubon presents a threat to these conventional precepts. A conflict begins to develop immediately between Casaubon and Dorothea as soon as the anticipated, but unnamed, sexual expectations of the honeymoon are exposed. The carnal disappointment is evident in Casaubon: “He had not found marriage a rapturous state, but he had no idea of being anything else than an irreproachable husband, who would make a charming young woman as happy as she deserved to be” (199). Dorothea’s masculine nature is erotically unappealing; her intellect feels competitive and encroaches on his masculine domain. Butler clarifies that since reproduction is the basis for a culture’s survival, heterosexual relationships, in particular heterosexual marriages, are deemed necessary— and anything that violates this procreative structure is considered taboo and unacceptable (524). The proper Victorian marriage was inherently heterosexual, and Dorothea’s ardently intellectual and masculine presentation combined with Casaubon’s proud scholarly character generates an illicitly homoerotic partnership – a disruption of the traditional binary measure of respectability.

The sexually incompatible marriage between Dorothea and Casaubon is further exemplified by the failed honeymoon and abortive conversion of Dorothea into the motherly

Mrs. Casaubon. The ceremony of marriage legally bound the characters, but the proper execution of the honeymoon solidifies the bonds of gender roles through the carnal act of sexual contact. Helena Michie's essay "Victorian Honeymoons: Sexual Reorientation and the 'Sights' of Europe" explores how the process of the Victorian honeymoon transformed a woman both in her legal last name and in her sexual status – what Michie considers a rebirth (231-232). The incompatible combination of Dorothea and Casaubon's gender presentation prohibits the sexual transformation of the virginal Dorothea to the ideal Victorian motherly image. Upon return home from their failed honeymoon, Dorothea is associated with the color white, the color of virginal purity:

...her throat had a breathing whiteness above the differing white of the fur which itself seemed to wind about her neck and cling down her blue-grey pelisse with a tenderness gathered from her own, a sentient commingled innocence which kept its loveliness against the crystalline purity of the out-door snow. (Eliot 273).

The close blending of Dorothea with white suggests that the repulsion of Casaubon to the masculine presentation of Dorothea's gender did not allow for her transformation into wife and mother to occur. Dorothea returns home a virginal being. The lack of a proper heir for Casaubon's estate is further proof that Dorothea's masculinized body remains unaffected by the touch of her husband.

Unlike Dorothea, Rosamond and Lydgate are socially and heterosexually compatible. Their successful honeymoon results in a pregnancy, but Rosamond never makes the transition from wife to mother, as her flawless recitation of middle-class feminine sexual desirability is the only script Rosamond is capable of performing. Lydgate and Rosamond adhere to the social confines of their respective genders; neither ventures into the realm of the other. Before marriage, Lydgate feels:

...he had found perfect womanhood – felt as if already breathed upon by exquisite wedded affection such as would be bestowed by an accomplished creature who venerated his high musing and momentous labors and would never interfere with them; who would create order in the home and accounts with still magic, yet keep her fingers ready to touch the lute and transform life into romance at any moment; who was instructed to the true womanly limit and not a hair's-breadth beyond – docile, therefore, and ready to carry out behests which came from beyond that limit. (352)

However, Rosamond's new sexual desires cause her to venture outside the domestic sphere and even to invade the masculine space of the outdoors by riding horseback while pregnant, disobeying her husband's wishes in the process. Prior to marriage, Lydgate "had regarded Rosamond's cleverness as precisely of the receptive kind which became a woman," but now, discovering that her docility was only superficial, "he was beginning to find out what that cleverness was...No one quicker than Rosamond to see causes and effects which lay within the track of her own tastes and interests" (586). The critical care and excess with which Rosamond presented her femininity, aware of its power over men, has become a liability in marriage. Throughout her marriage to Lydgate, Rosamond does not submit to the prescribed wifely role, showing the cracks in her mask of ideal womanhood.

Lydgate also places restrictions on Rosamond, with her floral splendor and majestically posed swan neck, by prohibiting her from regulating her domestic domain. This causes her to look for fulfillment through other men, who will allow her to perform the feminine duties essential to her gendered middle-class existence. Mary Wollstonecraft in her work "*A Vindication of the Rights of Women and the Wrongs of Women, or Maria* warns:

The woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams, and that they cannot have much effect on her husband's heart when they are seen every day, when the summer is passed and gone...she will try to please other men...When the husband ceases to be a lover – and the time will inevitably come, her desire of pleasing will then grow languid, or become a spring of bitterness; and love, perhaps, the most evanescent of all passions, gives place to jealousy or vanity. (45)

Rosamond has never learned to master the conventional role of wife and mother, and instead she has been bred to please and to value male appreciation of her feminine charms. Once that element has evaporated from her marriage to Lydgate, Rosamond seeks attention from other masculine prospects. Rosamond's accomplished feminine charms are no longer deemed pleasing or necessary, so she seeks another masculine audience who will admire her perfected middle-class precepts of feminine artifice.

Looking for intellectual fulfillment in her first marriage, Dorothea contends with her husband for the symbol of dominance, intelligence. Using his death, Casaubon assembles a metaphorical steel collar in an attempt to force Dorothea into her genteel, wifely role of subjugation. Afraid of the intellectual relationship forming between his cousin, Will Ladislaw, and Dorothea, Casaubon creates a codicil to his will, prohibiting Dorothea from marrying Ladislaw, after Casaubon's demise, by nullifying her inheritance. Dorothea's yearning for intellect presents a threat to Casaubon's manhood, and she becomes the masculine community against whom Casaubon is struggling to gain respect for his intellectual endeavors. She becomes his unwelcome critic:

And this cruel outward accuser was there in the shape of a wife – nay, of a young bride, who, instead of observing his abundant pen scratches and amplitude of paper with the uncritical awe of an elegant-minded canary-bird, seemed to present herself as a spy watching everything with a malign power of inference. (200)

Perceiving his wife as vying for his masculine dominance, Casaubon uses society's prescribed regulations to reassign feminine subservience to Dorothea, maintaining the reigning masculine role for himself. As Dorothea attempts to spout her critical and unladylike opinions, Casaubon is quick to belittle and admonish her behavior:

Dorothea, my love, this is not the first occasion, but it were well that it should be the last, on which you have assumed a judgment on subjects beyond your

scope....Suffice it, that you are not here qualified to discriminate. What I now wish you to understand is, that I accept no revision, still less dictation within that range of affairs which I have deliberated upon as distinctly and properly mine. (Eliot 374)

Casaubon uses his masculine power to confine Dorothea to the suppressed domestic realm. Through his command, Casaubon quells the threat to his manhood, but when a competitor, Ladislaw, appears to desire his wife's body, Casaubon must secure his property, the right to ownership belonging only to men. Clifford J. Marks's essay "*Middlemarch*, Obligation, and Dorothea's Duplicity" asserts that Casaubon's codicil is a way not only to control Dorothea's intellect, but also to allow him to contain her sexuality and her body. Marks further explains that this display of masculine power, Casaubon's hand reaching for Dorothea's body from beyond the grave, is a type of necrophilia, a dead body's sexual yearning to possess a live one (36). Men are the inheritors, so placing limitations on Dorothea's wifely inheritance asserts physically restrictive boundaries upon Dorothea's body, imposing the proper female gender role on Dorothea.

Unlike Dorothea's lack of femininity, Rosamond's abundant feminine allure and seductive plotting chances upon Will Ladislaw – compelling the destruction of Rosamond's perfected bourgeois feminine respectability and reputation. Inviting Ladislaw into her home, the feminine jurisdiction, Rosamond captivates him with her feminine swan-like neck and dexterous flowery melodies. She invents a romance where:

Will Ladislaw was always to be a bachelor and live near her, always to be at her command, and have an understood though never fully expressed passion for her, which would be sending out lambent flames every now and then in interesting scenes. (Eliot 753)

Rosamond remains unconcerned with the socially destructive rumors that are originating from her improper connection with Ladislaw, but when the rumors reach Dorothea, Ladislaw could

not allow his fate to be forcibly intertwined with Rosamond's. When he confronts Rosamond, Ladislav confesses his affection for Dorothea, causing Rosamond's false feminine façade to fall to ruins:

Rosamond...was almost losing the sense of her identity, and seemed to be walking into some new terrible existence...all her sensibility was turned into a bewildering novelty of pain; she felt a new terrified recoil under a lash never experienced before...When Will ceased to speak she had become an image of sickened misery: her lips were pale, and her eyes had tearless dismay in them. (779)

When her lavish bodily charms fail to induce Ladislav into her idealistic fantasy, Rosamond falls into desperation. Never having had a man decline her delicate advances, Rosamond is devastated, upsetting her "natural" middle-class feminine projection of the gentle blooming flower.

The circulating rumors about Ladislav and Rosamond in an intimate affair forces Dorothea, as Rosamond's rival, to acquiesce to suitable femininity through her perceived loss of Ladislav to Rosamond. Dorothea feels a sense of betrayal – Ladislav had given her the impression that she was the only woman he could ever love. In a state of crisis, Dorothea:

...lay on the bare floor and let the night grow cold around her; while her grand woman's frame was shaken by sobs as if she had been a despairing child... There were two images – two living forms that tore her heart in two, as if it had been the heart of a mother who seems to see her child divided by the sword, and presses one bleeding half to her breast while her gaze goes forth in agony towards the half which is carried away by the lying woman that has never known the mother's pang. (786)

Torn apart by warring gender expectations, Dorothea's admitted love for Ladislav allows her to break through her masculine barriers of logic and forge into the passionate realm of the female. Dorothea is reborn into femininity by her acceptance of conventional heterosexuality; she exchanges her quest for masculine intellect for the expectations of the "two images" of wife and mother. She displays this newfound feminine appeal by discarding the widowhood's black crape

for the expression of “second year” availability in the “three folds at the bottom of [her] skirt and plain quilling in [her] bonnet,” looking “like an angel” (789). This alteration of garments is a reflection of Dorothea’s inward surrender to society’s conception of her future middle-class feminine fate of marriage.

Having embraced her feminine role, Dorothea seeks to confront Rosamond’s socially deviant behavior, in an attempt to suitably amend a faltered marriage. Upon meeting Rosamond, Dorothea no longer projects a masculine identity, challenging the conventional image of a man; instead, her upper-class femininity presents a threat to Rosamond’s refined bourgeois feminine poise. Dorothea enters Rosamond’s domestic territory as:

...not only the ‘preferred’ woman, but had also a formidable advantage in being Lydgate’s benefactor; and to poor Rosamond’s pained confused vision it seemed that this Mrs Casaubon – this woman who predominated all things concerning her – must have come now with the sense of having an advantage, and with animosity prompting her to use it. (793)

But when Dorothea offers an unglowed hand to her, Rosamond realizes that not all women must be deemed competitors. Elizabeth Langland suggests that Dorothea plays a role parallel to Harriet Cumnor in *Wives and Daughters*, whose upper-class influence dispels the social stigma of gossip on Molly’s feminine reputation (96). Langland contends that Dorothea’s superior class status is connected to the Lydgate’s financial dilemma, but Dorothea’s social influence is better suited to the feminine sphere, restoring public faith in Rosamond’s wifely fidelity, much like Harriet Cumnor’s genteel influence reinstated Molly’s virginal status. In succumbing to the social pressures of proper feminine performance, Dorothea has enacted her social worth, as its value is interpreted through the image of the female.

Dorothea ends the novel portraying a conventional wife and mother; her pursuit of knowledge finally mollified in its use as a wifely assistance to her husband’s occupational

concerns. Though she still lingers in the masculine terrain of intellect, the confrontation between the newly sexually awakened Dorothea and the gracefully sentimental Rosamond has solidified Dorothea's proper feminine desire for a heterosexual marriage, while replacing Rosamond's excessive feminine display within the confines of her bourgeois marriage. Observing this proper structure, Rosamond's poised and plentiful feminine presentation becomes: "basil...a plant that flourished wonderfully on a murdered man's brains" (Eliot 835). Though back in domesticity, Rosamond still displays excessive femininity and a plotting social nature, causing frustration and failure for Lydgate, never allowing him to complete his medical research.

In the finale, Dorothea adheres to society's demands of gender norms, disappointing even "many who knew her" (836). However, Dorothea realizes Butler's notion that performing one's gender according to society's proscribed notions grants certain public rewards, while enacting one's gender outside the designated thresholds triggers undesired punishments, marginalizing the unwanted, clumsy actors to the peripheries of civilization. As a widow already an ambiguous creature on the edges of society, Dorothea's acceptance of her love for Ladislaw urges her into fulfilling the suitable role of wife and mother, leaving behind the masculine inheritance of money and the actions she could have performed through the combined aid of Casaubon's money and her logic.

JUDE THE OBSCURE: THE FATE OF MARRIAGE AND FLEEING FROM RESPECTABLE FEMININITY

She wore a murrey-coloured gown with a little lace collar. It was made quite plain, and hung about her slight figure with clinging gracefulness. Her hair, which formerly she had worn according to the custom of the day, was now twisted up tightly, and she had altogether the air of a woman clipped and pruned by severe discipline, an under-brightness shining through from the depths which that discipline had not yet been able to reach. (Hardy 139)

Reflected in her plain attire and intellectually rebellious nature, Sue Bridehead, much like Molly Gibson and Dorothea Brooke before her, lacks motherly guidance through the attractive presentation of bourgeois femininity. Sue values the masculine realm of intellect rather than the conventional enticing beauty of femininity. However, her body reflects certain middle-class feminine precepts, causing Sue to bounce between masculine intellect and socially expected feminine bodily presentations. In contrast to *Wives and Daughters* and *Middlemarch* with their suitable marriage roles of upper-class respectability, *Jude the Obscure*, written on the cusp of a literary transition into Modernism, focuses on the working class, the collapse of Victorian matrimony, and the blurring of the socially predetermined binary genders roles of masculine and feminine. Distinct from Molly and Dorothea, Sue displays masculine attributes but loathes the alluring manipulation of feminine bodily traits used to gain the attention of the opposite gender. Since Sue detests proper feminine conduct, she disconnects from her body in order to subvert suitable feminine characteristics, resulting in a confused presentation of gender. Arabella Donn, a working-class connoisseur of feminine pretense, acts as a contrast to Sue's deviant exhibition; Arabella's performance of desirable feminine excesses serves as the impetus for Sue to submit to respectable conventional matrimony. When Arabella marries into the middle-class, she exercises her superior status by inducing Sue into the modest feminine role of wife. Consequently, Sue

obeys her husband's intellectual authority, and unlike Molly or Dorothea who attain happy companionate marriages, Sue suffers the unhappy and confined role of a proper wife.

As a working class child lacking feminine guidance, Sue displays a propensity for masculine behaviors, rejecting the lady-like conduct expected by middle-class society. Sue was reared by her father, but contrasting Dorothea's and Molly's situations, Sue's working-class parents were divorced. Having been "brought up by her father to hate her mother's family" (117), Sue was taught to abhor marriage and the feminine roles of the refined wife and mother; instead, she emulates the intellectual and coarse demeanor of her father. Without a mother to depict social norms or to revise her masculine inclinations, Sue is permitted to run wild outdoors amongst the boys "with her little curls blowing..." (Hardy 119). During this time, Sue's projection of gender is appraised by her aunt, a motherly corrective force who signifies society's disapproving evaluation of Sue's enactment of unrefined masculine behaviors. Sue defies her aunt by acting like:

"A pert little thing, that's what she was too often, with her tight strained nerves. Many's the time I've smacked her for her impertinence. Why, one day when she was walking into the pond with her shoes and stockings off, and her petticoats pulled above her knees, afore I could cry out for shame, she said: 'Move on, Aunty! This is no sight for modest eyes!'" (Hardy 117)

Contrary to the expected feminine presentation of modesty, Sue improperly displays her feminine body by lifting her skirts to a masculine audience. Strict rules of female dress communicate social messages of class and femininity, but in her state of undress, Sue disrupts the proper arrangement of dress necessary to respectable class and feminine gender performance.

Along with her improper dress, Sue embraces the masculine connection with the outdoors, traditionally proscribed for Victorian women. Trapped within the domestic confines of marriage, Sue flees through windows and framing, thereby defying the imposed limitations of

her suitable femininity. Victorian men traverse the area outside the home – the entrance to that world being the door. U. C. Knoepfelmacher’s article “Hardy Ruins: Female Spaces and Male Designs” articulates the division of space: men occupy the space outside the home, while women inhabit the domestic sphere of the home (1055). Sue rebels from her scripted position by escaping the all-female Training School through “the back window of the room in which she had been confined” (150). Sue uses the open window as a physical means of escaping the social boundaries of middle-class femininity. Like Foucault’s image of the Panopticon, gender and class are invisibly maintained and internalized through an agreement between the subjugated and dominant that “each individual is fixed in his place. And, if he moves, he does so at the risk of his life, contagion, and punishment” (551). After spending the night alone with the studious Jude Fawley in his lodging, Sue leaves through the door to return to the Training School and is observed when the landlady’s “head was thrust out of an upper window of [Jude’s] lodging and quickly withdrawn” (163), causing the ruin of Sue’s respectable feminine reputation. After the loss of her reputation, Sue becomes aware of the social implications locked within the physical location of her body. Though society views Sue’s role as that of the angel trapped within a socially constructed tower, her intellectual desires compel her to flee from the conventional domestic role of the female.

Continuing to oppose feminine characteristics, Sue defies the barriers to masculine intellect. Rather than the feminine silence of repression embodied by most working class women, Jude notes that Sue does not “talk like a girl – well, a girl who has had no advantages” (154). In performing this masculine middle-class education, Sue violates the standard of feminine intellectual inferiority, venturing into the academic realms inhabited by men. The article “Sue Bridehead: ‘The Woman of the Feminist Movement,’” by Kathleen Blake, explains

that Sue is demonstrative of a liberated woman of the late nineteenth century: “This type of woman who gravitates toward men more than ever before because masculine contact, in contrast to her constrictive feminine circle, means ‘light, freedom, and instruction’” (709). Through learning, Sue claims liberties denied to women by the limitations of feminine decorum. In an attempt to abandon feminine restriction, Sue slips from the social and physical confines of her feminine school to the masculine open fields near Jude’s bachelor abode. Attired in Jude’s clothing, Sue announces:

“I have no fear of men, as such, nor of their books. I have mixed with them – one or two of them particularly – almost as one of their own sex. I mean I have not felt about them as most women are taught to feel – to be on their guard against attacks on their virtue....” (Hardy 155)

Cloaking her body in masculine intellect and attire allows Sue to walk amongst men as if she were one of them. Like Butler’s example of a transgendered individual, Sue’s body becomes more identified with masculine ideologies, and in doing so, she becomes a threat to other masculine performances.

Further confounding the social classification of Sue’s gender, Sue is described as both a sexless being and a being with unconventional erotic yearnings, distinguishing her masculine presentation from her feminine form. William Deresiewicz argues that Sue’s ambitions to live, think, and be free like a man prohibit her from accepting the preordained rules of wedlock and motherhood. Deresiewicz further details how Sue’s masculine intellectual desires pull her in one direction and her feminine physical desires in another, so Sue causes her body disappear (60). Instead of reflecting the Victorian societal expectations of corporeal femininity, Sue attempts to erase her body from existence, so that all that remains is a translucent projection of a vanishing female form. Jude describes Sue as a “phantasmal, bodiless creature,” who “has too little animal passion” (Hardy 273). The evaporation of Sue’s attractive figure denotes her denial of middle-

class feminine strictures. Lacking a body to display her marital eligibility or class status, Sue attempts to avoid the fate of marriage and “the social advantages it gains;” instead, it is “a dignity and an advantage” that she is “quite willing to do without” (273). Outside of the confines of marriage, Sue can use the brilliance of her mind to invent her intellectual independence.

When Jude desires the feminine aspects of Sue’s body, Sue separates herself from her feminized body, projecting a diminishing physical image. Idealizing Sue’s image, Jude ascribes socially encoded elements of desirability to “the photograph of a pretty girlish face,” including a reference to the Victorian concept of the Angel of the House dressed “in a broad hat with radiating folds under the brim like the rays of a halo” (82). Jude’s association with Sue deepens, and with it, Jude’s desire for Sue’s body intensifies. Faced with a masculine yearning for her body, Sue emulates the qualities of an angel – with a translucent figure and sexless appearance. Jude’s passion to possess Sue’s body represents society’s desire to reassign feminine features to Sue’s vanishing body. Jude addresses Sue as: “you spirit, you disembodied creature, you dear, sweet, tantalizing phantom – hardly flesh at all; so that when I put my arms around you I almost expect them to pass through you as through air!” (258). The ideal vision of the Victorian middle-class angel converted into a curse, Sue was morphing into that sexless creature: an angel. Laura Green’s “‘Strange (In)Difference of Sex’: Thomas Hardy, the Victorian Man of Letters, and the Temptations of Androgyny” claims that for the weaker sex, “the proper development of reproductive capacities is inconsistent with significant intellectual labor. Thus women’s intellectual aspirations are absolutely limited by the imperative to reproduce. When women ignore this imperative, the result is monstrous androgyny that threatens humanity itself” (541). The survival of the species solidifies the imperative nature of male/female binary gender roles.

Inadvertently, Sue is uniting both masculine and feminine physical traits, creating an androgynous performance – a menace to society’s heterosexually reproductive culture.

While Sue’s androgynous gender performance is a threat to society, Arabella Donn, Jude’s wife, employs the heterosexual appeal of her body to present a veneer of middle-class femininity. Arabella uses the sexually desirable aspects of her body, to entice Jude into marriage. Playing a coy game of sexual enticement, Arabella hides an egg in her bosom: “which was wrapped in wool, outside of it being a pig’s bladder, in case of accidents,” warning Jude: “you don’t come near me. I don’t want it broke, and have to begin another” (Hardy 59). Suggestively drawing attention to desirable facets of the female body by placing the egg in her bosom, Arabella symbolically fashions a uterus out of wool and a pig’s bladder. Both her breasts and the fabricated womb are related to heterosexual reproduction and to the feminine ideal of motherhood. The egg symbolizes Arabella’s fertility and value to heterosexual procreation, while the uterus, in which she hides the egg, represents the motherly, nurturing characteristics desirable in a woman. With these methods, Arabella sexually induces Jude into the expression of desire through the proper strictures of marriage.

Rather than disassociating from her feminine figure, as Sue eventually does, Arabella exaggerates her feminine presentation to gain the social standing that she desires. Aware of her low social status, Arabella needs to marry, and the way in which Arabella manipulates her body ignites a flame of sexual desire in men. Her exceptional gift of performing her enticing femininity shows in her created dimples, where “this production of dimples at will was not an unknown operation, which many attempted, but only a few succeeded in accomplishing” (42). Jude’s inexperience with women leaves him easily affected without detecting Arabella’s extreme feminine falsities. Elisabeth G. Gitter’s essay “The Power of Women’s Hair in the Victorian

Imagination” indicates that woman’s hair is suggestive of the weaving of a tapestry or web, which can be used to ensnare men. Gitter goes on to say that a woman combing and displaying her hair conjures the myths of mermaids “who sit on rocks singing and combing their beautiful hair” and whose voices lead men to their deaths (938). When Arabella finally concedes to her fraudulence, she explains that false hair pieces are common “with the better class” where “every lady of position wears false hair” (Hardy 62-63). By adorning her body, Arabella believed she had ensnared “a husband with a lot of earning power in him for buying her frocks and hats” (62). These articles of clothing are costumes which permit Arabella to both conceal her working class status and to observe the conventions of a fashionable middle-class lady.

While Arabella converts the costume of femininity to her advantage, Sue’s androgynous conduct, a perceived danger to the constructions of a middle-class binary system of gender, results in Sue’s expulsion from society. The Victorian culture contains strict gender criteria, dividing male and female to ensure heterosexual reproduction. According to Butler’s theory of social punishment or marginalization for improper display of gender, Sue’s refusal to comply with societal expectations activates penalties designed to correct any undesired behavior and convert it into a socially approved performance. Victorian society deemed it improper for Sue to hide out in Jude’s home during her escape from the intellectual limitations of her girls’ school, and although she did not participate in a sexual act, a neighbor observing Sue’s morning departure tarnishes her virginal reputation. As a result, Sue is shunned: “the principal’s orders were that nobody was to speak to Bridehead without permission” (Hardy 149). Relegated to the outskirts of her social world, Sue is deemed a contagion that must be cured or eradicated. Unless Sue conforms to the regimented strictures of bourgeois femininity, she will be restricted from interacting with respectable society. Sue decides to insert herself back into civilization through

marriage. Sue recognizes that social propriety does not permit men and women to be friends, as it only recognizes reproductive heterosexual “animal desire” (177). Though Sue remains critical of bourgeois prescribed gender regulations, she terminates her intellectual friendship with Jude, committing herself to the common parameters of marriage.

Sue’s transgression against feminine virtue is expunged through the transformation that occurs through the emulation of the middle-class ceremony of marriage, converting Sue from an assumed virginal seraph to a sexual creature within a socially acceptable context. Michie states that during the middle-class honeymoon the bride’s change in name and legal status signifies a sexual change:

...The honeymoon did – or was supposed to do – the difficult cultural work of reorientation: from a female body indicatively singular, virginal, and asexual to a body perhaps desiring and legibly sexual, and from a world essentially domestic and homosocial to a world defined around heterosexuality. (131)

To conventional Victorian society, Sue’s marriage and subsequent honeymoon is a sign that Sue is no longer a pure young maid, against whom allegations of indecencies can be levied, but a sensual matron, from whom sex is a silent necessity for motherhood. However, Sue’s disconnection from her body stimulates an aversion to the sexual desire required for a standard Victorian honeymoon, so when Sue returns from her honeymoon, her evident sexual dissatisfaction causes observers like Jude to doubt Sue’s feminine adaptation. Recognizing Sue’s unhappiness, Jude refuses to refer to Sue as “Mrs. Phillotson;” instead, he calls her “dear, free Sue Bridehead” (Hardy 199). Even Sue discards the imposed femininity and status of her married name, declaring: “I am not Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies” (216). The failure to consummate her marriage is suggested by her personal rejection of her marital name and by Jude’s rechristening

of Sue with her maiden name. As a result, Sue's honeymoon of feminine renovation is a failure, leading to her eventual divorce from Phillotson.

Meanwhile, Arabella also never learned to perform the role of a wife; she is inept in her execution of proper daily domestic tasks. Jude comes to know "in the secret center of his brain, that Arabella was not worth a great deal as a specimen of womankind," and that "his wife was absolutely useless in a town-lodging, where he at first considered it necessary for them to live" (61-62). An outsider to the boundaries of middle-class, Arabella can only imitate prescribed conventional female attributes; she had no education, so she learned to mimic the visual characteristics in an attempt to enhance her worth. Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women and the Wrongs of Women, or Maria* argues that if a wife is educated solely in the methods of pleasing, then her charms will eventually become wearisome and a point of contention between the married couple. Wollstonecraft maintains that marriage should be based on a friendship that will sustain itself through time, rather than a sexual attraction, which will cool over time (39). Having been seduced and entrapped into marriage through a fabricated pregnancy, Jude is oblivious to Arabella's counterfeit presentation of bourgeois femininity until after the ceremony, which cements the two in their ascribed roles of husband and wife. Though Jude was previously sexually attracted to Arabella's abundant and artificial femininity, during the wedding night Arabella reveals her treacheries of false hair, lower-class associations while employed as a barmaid, and the feigned pregnancy. These revelations cause Jude to develop "a feeling of sickness" at the fictitious middle-class exhibition of Arabella's lower-class body. Not being a member of the proper social class, Arabella's prospects were limited, unless her social value is increased through marriage. When Jude recognizes Arabella's deceptive reproduction of femininity, it instigates the dissolution of their marriage by enacting the lower-class

“extraordinary spectacle she now presented, bonnetless, her disheveled hair blowing in the wind, her bodice apart, her sleeves rolled above her elbows for her work, and her hands reeking of melted fat” (Hardy 73). Arabella unveils her working class feminine façade to society, and the gaze of the appalled audience dispels the thin veneer of desirability upon which their marriage is founded.

After the destruction of her first marriage, Arabella reasserts herself into middle-class standing by remarrying. Meanwhile, with Sue already married off, Jude seeks solace for his tormented heart in the confines of the local bar. Jude encounters Arabella working at the bar. He notices “that her hands were smaller and whiter than when he had lived with her,” and on one hand “she wore an ornamental ring set with what seemed to be real sapphires – which they were, indeed, and were much admired by the young men who frequented the bar” (191). Rather than drawing attention to the reproductive aspects of her body – as she did with the egg enticement – Arabella uses an expensive ring to direct the gaze to her dainty, white hands. As with Molly Gibson and Dorothea Brooke, Arabella’s delicate hand represents feminine respectability. The ring, a symbol of wealth and economic position, leads men to scrutinize the attractive feminine features of her white hand, an emblem of marriage. Jean Arnold proposes:

Fashion products thus capture the aesthetic imagination of the material culture, turning the female body into a spectacle of beauty, and within this visual realm, no product has more power to signify and communicate more ideological messages than jewelry. (269)

These new messages, signified by the jewelry accenting Arabella’s hand, draw Jude to Arabella’s new feminine appeal. This feminine attractiveness induces Jude to spend the night with Arabella, instead of meeting Sue for an intellectual encounter.

Arabella may express feminine sexuality, but she is incapable of fulfilling the role of conventional motherhood. It was believed that Victorian women were naturally competent

mothers, and that it was a woman's natural responsibility to become a wife and then a mother.

William A. Davis, Jr.'s work "Reading Failure In(to) *Jude the Obscure*: Hardy's Sue Bridehead and Lady Jeune's 'New Woman' Essays, 1885-1900," contrasts Victorian ideals, represented by Lady Jeune's conservative arguments, with the New Woman of the Modern Age, embodied by Hardy's female characters. Lady Jeune argues:

"Every woman regards the position of motherhood as the one ordained for her...The maternal instinct is so strong in every woman's nature that, bad as she often is, there always remains that one break in the clouds of her dark life – the love of her child." (qtd. in Davis 56)

Lady Jeune claims that a mother's biological connection to her child naturally confers upon the mother the organic wisdom of nurturing her child. Arabella physically satisfies the role of motherhood, having given birth to a child, but Arabella lacks maternal instinct. Having shipped her son off to live with her parents and not seeing him for years, "Arabella had looked him over with a contemptuous expression that was as good as saying, 'You are very much what I expected you to be'" (Hardy 290). Even upon the death of her child, Arabella is devoid of the nurturing features expected of a mother, speaking in "placid bluntness about 'her' boy for whom, though in his lifetime she had shown no care at all, she now exhibited a ceremonial mournfulness that was apparently sustaining to the conscience" (366). This lack of maternal connection unveils the lower-class nature that sleeps beneath the protective mask of middle-class femininity, which Arabella is so adept at performing.

While Arabella clumsily dons the falsified, scripted concerns and feminine functions of a middle-class wife and mother, Sue submits to the roles of wife and mother but is punished for performing these roles outside of the sacrament of marriage. Due to Sue's divorce combined her aversion to marriage, Sue and Jude never participate in the established middle-class rite of matrimony, and even though they portray the ideals of masculine and feminine gender roles,

living as a companionate couple, society banishes the couple into the margins of society. Jude is castigated for his refusal to comply with society's demands, and as a result, the only employment he can obtain is offered by:

...the poor people who lived in his own neighborhood, and knew what a cheap man this "Jude Fawley: Monumental Mason" (as he called himself on his front door) was to employ for the simple memorials they required for their dead. (274)

The couple publically proclaims the alteration of Sue's last name – constructing the bond of wedlock through utterance – but society repudiates their declaration and admonishes them for their refusal to follow middle-class morals. William Davis states that the death of Sue's children is her punishment for living outside of the social boundaries dictated by society; she must atone for her gender nonconformity (58). Sue's sexual expression – revealed through the existence of her illegitimate children – serves as a threat to the foundation of middle-class constructions, and as such, she must be either assimilated or destroyed.

Arabella's new societal standing and feminine expression provokes Sue to categorize Arabella as a rival for Jude's affection, and Arabella's feminine competition compels Sue to conform to the feminine precepts of respectable society. This carnal competition converts Sue's marginalized androgynous gender expression into a bodily representation of established middle-class femininity. Upon observing Arabella, Sue detects flaws in Arabella's bourgeois feminine façade, and she wishes:

For a moment that Jude could behold her forerunner now, with the daylight full upon her. She may have seemed handsome enough in profile under the lamps, but a frowziness was apparent this morning; and the sight of her own fresh charms in the looking glass made Sue's manner bright, till she reflected what a meanly sexual emotion this was in her, and hated herself for it. (Hardy 282)

Setting her own looks in opposition to Arabella's falsified femininity, Sue grudgingly recognizes the traditional appealing feminine details of her own body. Sue is aware of the previous sexual

relationship and marital claim that Arabella possesses on Jude, and Sue's jealousy prompts her to acknowledge the social significance that marriage has on safeguarding Jude's masculine desire from Arabella's voluptuous feminine body. Arabella warns Sue to gain the protection of marriage because "life with a man is more businesslike afterward" where "money works better," and that if Sue avoids marriage that she would "find it an awful bother later on" (283). Arabella offers this warning just prior to the murder of Sue's children by Arabella's son. For her refusal to obey middle-class strictures, Sue suffers the ultimate punishment – the destruction of her unlawfully conceived children by Arabella's lawfully created son. This drives Sue to surrender to the arms of her first husband, Phillotson, representative of the prescribed standards of middle-class femininity and marriage that Sue has devoted her life to opposing.

Though Molly Gibson of *Wives and Daughters* and Dorothea Brooke of *Middlemarch* retain aspects of their masculine intellects, Sue remains relegated to the realm of the female body. Conforming to the Victorian middle-class expectation of marriage, Sue seems to comply with bourgeois femininity through limited intellectual expression. Mary Ann Mason Burki's essay "Women in the Nineteenth Century as Seen through History and Literature" remarks that Victorian "science defined women as intellectually weak, with lighter brains and less emotional control" (197). After Sue accepts the role of the obedient female, a distinct difference in Sue's intellectual presentation is perceptible. Where Sue's "intellect once scintillated like a star," now she is "getting as superstitious as a savage" (Hardy 360). The murder of her children instructed Sue in the methods of fate: the concrete grasp that the Victorian middle-class has on the respectable representation of femininity. After reconciling, even Phillotson detects a difference in Sue, which he interprets as having "done little more than finish her education" (378). Her intellectual pursuit at an end, her affiliation with Jude now demolished, and their illicitly

conceived children slaughtered; there is nothing to inhibit the restoration of her rightful marriage, the feminine performance of wifely bonding, and the solidifying of feminine sexuality to her once ethereal body.

While adhering to her respectable feminine role, Sue's embodiment of a proper wife causes her to descend into unhappiness. Though Molly's and Dorothea's submission to feminine roles develop into contented and companionate marriages, Sue "never found peace since she left [Jude's] arms, and she never will again until she's" escaped her fate through death (431). Where once Sue had defied society by divorcing and choosing to further abstain from marriage – without refraining from a sexual partnership with a man of her choosing – Sue's accepts her matrimonial fate, forcing Sue to acknowledge her proper feminine side. Suffering the consequences of retribution for a societal wrong, Sue loses her children by the righteous hand of Jude's rightful heir, Arabella's son. Losing her last child in a premature birth – a representation of the fate of children born without the fortification of marriage – and no longer in control of her own body, Sue must return to the realm of rightful marriage. Conforming to the prescribed doctrines of femininity, Sue refuses to question the role of wife or mother, for fear of the reprisal middle-class society will use to amend her masculine behavior.

CONCLUSION

Defiant of social class and gender expressions, Molly Gibson of *Wives and Daughters*, Dorothea Brooke of *Middlemarch*, and Sue Bridehead of *Jude the Obscure* all mature in an unrestricted masculine environment, lacking the feminine direction that a mother would supply. As a child raised without a mother, Molly explores the masculine territory of natural science instead desiring a new dress to display her appealing feminine qualities. Molly's longing for knowledge causes her to be socially evaluated as an undesirable wifely partner. Unlike Molly's educational freedoms, Dorothea's strict religious views prevent her from discovering masculine intellectual freedom; performing the social roles of a wife, Dorothea attempts to fulfill her desire for masculine intellect through conventional marriage. Once married, Dorothea rejects the middle-class display of her wifely worth through attire and feminine behavior. Sue rejects the idea of socially prescribed traditional marriage because her parents divorced when she was a child. Witnessing her father's hatred for her mother, Sue develops a hatred for the femininity exhibited by her mother, and she embraces vocationally directed education, rather than the ignorant beauty of a feminine wife. While Sue's aversion to conventional femininity stimulates her disconnection from her body, Sue's body develops a transparent quality, and she evades the constrictions of traditional femininity by fleeing from the domestic boundaries through a window into the masculine region of intellect and nature. Without a mother to instill the attractive feminine standards of Victorian society, each woman adopts a masculine gender presentation.

An introduction to heterosexual relationships prompts the main female characters to alter their gender presentations from the intellectually masculine to the attractive beauty of femininity. Molly, playing the role of father or brother, intervenes on Cynthia's behalf to resolve a

surreptitious engagement; however, Molly's inappropriate interaction triggers Hollingford gossip to question Molly's bourgeois feminine virtue. This scandal immerses Molly into the world of middle-class masculine and feminine boundaries and heterosexual pairing. Harriet Cumnor, through her upper-class standing, rescues Molly from her masculine misunderstanding of feminine precepts, and assists Molly in properly communicating her middle-class femininity. When she displays an interest in masculine intellectual endeavors, Dorothea is punished by Casaubon for violating the feminine borders of intellectual inferiority. Dorothea's desperate plea to assist Casaubon with his masterpiece is deemed a critical affront, altering his view of Dorothea as a charming and dutiful wife to a judgmental and disapproving opponent. After his death, Casaubon utilizes a codicil to impose his masculine force and keep Dorothea in her feminine place. However, it is not until Dorothea faces the possibility of losing Will to Rosamond's graceful femininity that she abandons the economic security and the masculine ability to influence the intellectual realm outside the home and accepts her feminine attraction to Will Ladislaw. Unlike Dorothea, Sue avoids remarrying and disengages from her body, but society's rejection and the loss of her children born outside the sacrament of marriage forces Sue to observe the role of wife by returning to the middle-class social construct of marriage and her first husband. The acknowledgement of heterosexual attraction to a masculine figure stimulates Molly's, Dorothea's, and Sue's conversions to the conventional performance of femininity.

These masculinized women evade middle-class feminine restrictions until the contrast of an ideal woman performing the excesses of femininity arrives to thrust each of them into their prescribed roles of wife and mother. Cynthia's appealing middle-class feminine performance of graceful ignorance and her plentiful charms outshine Molly's unattractive masculine projection of intellect. Molly refuses to admit her attraction to Roger, but Cynthia's apathetic beauty

entices Roger into an unwanted proposal. The manner in which Cynthia carelessly discards Roger, the marriage not containing the social and economic advantages desirable to Cynthia and her mother, distresses Molly, forcing her to admit her feminine affection for Roger. Imprisoned within the forced feminine strictures of Casaubon's departed grasp, the widowed Dorothea, faces the flawless flowery appeal and overly refined beauty of Rosamond, who uses her feminine performance to harvest masculine attention. Dorothea's masculine desire to economically improve her community, rather than to attend to the management of the home, is overshadowed by Rosamond's alluring dress and enactment of pleasing accomplishments. As rivals for Will Ladislaw's affections, Dorothea confronts Rosamond, influencing Rosamond to adhere to middle-class social pressures and return to her unfortunate marriage. Sue also conforms to bourgeois values and returns to her miserable marriage, after her conversation with Arabella – who falsely arranges attractive middle-class feminine attributes. The widowed Arabella desires to entice Jude from Sue's arms, and in her refusal of the conventional roles of husband and wife, Sue lacks the protective bounds of marriage to prevent Arabella's contrived feminine assaults. Eventually, Sue obeys the social demands of femininity; like Molly and Dorothea, Sue satisfies the conventional role of wife.

Though they accept their roles of wives and mothers, Molly and Dorothea refuse to abandon their intellectual pursuits. Molly and Dorothea's marriages fulfill Mary Wollstonecraft's notion of companionate marriage, where women are helpmates to their husbands; in order to accomplish this, women cannot be overly refined and delicate beauties. Instead, wives must be educated enough to assist their husbands, rather than an unhelpful and encumbering childish flower like Rosamond, her husband's "basil plant" (Eliot 835). Both Molly and Dorothea are assumed to have companionate marriages, but Sue suffers the destructive union

of two unhappy strangers. Since Molly marries a scientific intellectual much like her father, one can determine that Molly will carry on her masculine interest in scientific observations of nature, as that is what bonded Roger and Molly in her time at Hamley Hall. In the same vein, Dorothea is said to be her husband's helpmate, lending her husband "wifely help" while still known in certain circles as a wife and mother. This implies that in some circles, Dorothea was known as more than just a wife and mother, extending her masculine intellect to places outside the feminine parameters of the home. Though Molly and Dorothea adopt the upper-class feminine roles of wife and mother and learn to present feminine beauty, neither denies their masculine intellectual curiosity.

Rather than a content and companionate marriage, Sue completely submits to femininity, fatally succumbing to an unhappy marriage. Both Molly and Dorothea are examples of the upper classes, while Sue is representative of the working class, whose very survival depends upon breaking certain feminine constraints. Working class women were employed outside the home and involved in physically straining activities, like Arabella's butchering of a pig, which would breach middle-class delicate femininity. Middle-class femininity is tethered to marriage, as a woman could improve her social standing if she attractively performed proper femininity. Sue enters into her first marriage to escape the public's question of her feminine virtue, but divorces her husband for fear of performing her wifely duties to a man she finds sexually unappealing. Using Phillotson for his social value, Sue's unconventional disconnection from her body cannot allow her to perform her obligation and consummate the marriage; however, once forced back into marriage and femininity, Sue regains respectability and social forgiveness in her bodily submission to Phillotson, legally binding the two together. But Sue was never meant to be a housewife, a job in which she never excels, and even Arabella notes that Sue's incarcerating

herself in the jail of an unfortunate conventional marriage will never cause her to find the intellectual freedom she desires. Sue will never discover peace until she can escape her unhappy marriage through death.

Ending in heterosexual marriage, only two of the women, Molly and Dorothea, find happiness in a masculine and intellectually stimulating environment of marriage, while Sue is left to wither in her feminine struggles against her domestic wifely role. *Jude the Obscure*, being composed at the burgeoning of modernism, creates a working-class contrast to the upper and middle-class illustrations of wives and mothers. Hardy's novel demonstrates the destructive qualities of the Victorian defined gender roles and the damaged social necessity of conventional marriage.

The feminine extremes of the rival characters reveal how women both uphold the standards of conventional middle-class femininity and threaten the concept of traditional marriage. As shown by the fathers who do not impose feminine strictures upon their daughters, it is not hegemonic masculinity that upholds binary gender constructions. Elizabeth Langland's Introduction to *Nobody's Angels* claims that:

...the conflicting class and gender ideologies, as they are represented in etiquette guides, management manuals, cookery books, and charitable treatises...position [the Victorian middle-class woman] as a key figure in erecting class barriers, in policing and maintaining borders, in contributing to a rhetoric that "naturalized" class difference, and in justifying and perpetuating the status quo. (21)

Cynthia, Rosamond, and Arabella maintain the separation of masculine and feminine by setting a standard with their excessively feminine middle-class performances. These women seem to be the arbiters of both gender and social standing, which are bound together through the institution of marriage. It is not until the remarkably feminine rival characters arrive to contrast the

masculine inclinations of Molly, Dorothea, and Sue that these three heroines conform to the standards of Victorian gender performance. In the end, gender is constructed; it is:

...what is put on, invariably, what is under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds. (Butler 531)

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