Pregnancy and Childbirth in Victorian Literature

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Introduction

During the nineteenth century, a married woman would likely spend the majority of her reproductive years either pregnant or recovering from pregnancy. Most of these women would have given birth attended to by a handful of her female friends and family members, as well as a midwife. Though the midwife would, traditionally, be another woman, this changed as the century progressed and man-midwives increased in number. As the demographic of men practicing midwifery grew, the fields of obstetrics and gynecology took shape. Gradually, physicians overshadowed and then replaced midwives as the most legitimate birth attendants. While knowledge of female anatomy advanced, there was still an incredibly high mortality rate among both mothers and infants. Some women even resisted going to the hospital out of fear for the brutality of many gynecological practices, especially in teaching hospitals.

In the midst of this scientific advancement, there was also a change in gender roles. The ideal of the “Angel in the House” which grounded women in a domestic space, solely concerned with the management of their home, of their husband, and their children, began to be combated by the “New Woman.” The New Woman was a politicized form of womanhood that emphasized physical liberty; that is to say, greater access to physical activity, a reneging of constant chaperonage, and the ability to reject marriage and motherhood.

Despite the importance that motherhood had in a Victorian understanding of womanhood, early Victorian literature shied away from explicit references to the bodies of pregnant women. When they did appear in literature, their condition was shrouded in innuendo, while, other times, there would be no mention of pregnancy at all until the child
was born. As more explicit, but still minimal, descriptions of pregnancy began to appear in
the mid-century, reviewers scorned the practice. For this reason, literature is particularly
revealing of the Victorian conception of pregnancy, as this preference for secrecy forced
authors to craft depictions which would be understandable to readers, without drawing the
ire of the more conservative amongst them. Therefore they would employ commonly
accepted ideas about pregnancy and motherhood in order to encode the experience within
their writing.

As the fields of obstetrics and gynecology were formed and the female body was
increasingly medicalized, the middle-class mother became correspondingly less embodied,
eventually becoming an entirely spiritual, almost saintly figure. The bodily aspects of
motherhood were subsequently displaced onto working-class women. This thesis follows
the path of the development of gynecology throughout the Victorian era, and the subsequent
changes that it had on the figure of the mother.

The first step of this process was the development of the man-midwife, which
sparked the beginnings of obstetrics and gynecology as fields of medicine that could – and
should – be studied. Women began to be driven out of midwifery, though this was not
necessarily intentional. A struggle occurred between the two classes of midwives, and the
man-midwife came out on top. In order for man-midwives to be taken seriously by the
public, they had to convince women that they were an essential part of the process of
pregnancy and childbirth. With the promotion of the church, they deemphasized the female
body and its pleasures and pains, focusing instead on women’s spiritual nature and their
ability to positively influence their children to be better citizens and Christians.
Many novelists accepted this ideal of the “sentimental mother” and forwarded it in their novels, creating sacrificing mothers, who gave up their lives literally or figuratively in order to raise their children. Emily Brontë, however, moved against this idea with *Wuthering Heights*. Not only were mothers grounded in their bodies by the possibility of death, but there are no women who successfully fulfill the ideal of the “sentimental mother.” Catherine Earnshaw, for instance, is a sexual body. In her lust for Heathcliff, a racial other (“gypsy”) she poses a threat to the continuation of her husband’s lineage and, therefore, to the system of primogeniture, which good mothers were expected to uphold and raise their children to likewise uphold.

With middle-class women being disembodied, working-class women became increasingly more bodily. Due to a lack of knowledge regarding contraceptive use, among other reasons, working-class women generally had larger numbers of children. Proponents of population control, such as Thomas Malthus, sought to pass regulations that would prohibit large families, or inhibit those who had large families. Doctors distrusted working-class women and exploited them by allowing large groups of students to practice gynecological examinations on them. On account of their bodily nature, working-class women posed a threat to the British Empire’s desire to present themselves as a civilized nation.

William Somerset Maugham’s *Liza of Lambeth* recognized the cruel treatment working-class women were often subjected to, but barely opposed it. Maugham’s novel generally aligns with the culturally-held beliefs surrounding working-class women. They behave in violent, carnal ways, and fight over territory like animals. Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* presents the horror that awaits should middle-class women follow working-class women
down the path of degeneration. However, *Dracula* also presents the solution: the steady, masculine influence of a doctor.
Chapter 1: Greater than Human, Less than Man: The Disavowal of the Female Body

Before the eighteenth century, knowledge of the female reproductive body had been held almost exclusively by women. Births would have been attended by midwives and a handful of the mother’s (ideally married) female friends and family members, referred to collectively as the “gossips,” who served as both attendants and witnesses (Muir 408). During this time, there were four types of midwife. The first were licensed or “sworn” midwives, who had proven their abilities and taken an oath to be “ready to help every woman laboring with child, as well the poor as the rich” (Muir 402); the second, unlicensed midwives – the likely majority, given that obtaining a license could cost up to £2, a “considerable and very likely a prohibitive amount for many women” (Muir 398); the third, women who delivered babies but were not classified as midwives; and finally, the man-midwife or accoucher. Initially, surgeons and man-midwives would only be called upon in dire circumstances, mostly breech deliveries (Drife 311). However, they would eventually become the dominant group of birthing assistants.

Early in the development of the profession, women may have been reluctant to enlist the help of obstetricians out of fear of sexual impropriety. The female reproductive body had long been sexualized. Aristotle’s Masterpiece, published in English for the first time in 1684, quickly became the most popular text about sexuality, conception, pregnancy, and childbirth in Britain. Anatomy and conception were explained in frank language, and the pleasure experienced by both men and women was taken into account. For women, the “neck of the Womb” was given attention for its ability to “dilate with the more Ease and Pleasure in the Act of Coition” (qtd. in Doyle 21). The text included “verses that testified to the delights of the marital state and implied that women were so driven by sexual desire that
they were discontented until they married and became mothers” (Doyle 21). Later obstetricians would try to remove this connotation in order to make their profession more acceptable. When William Smellie, one of the leaders in establishing obstetrics as an academic discipline, wrote his own treatise in 1752, he stripped away this sexualized discourse. There are only two mentions of the possible pleasure one might derive during conception, both written in mechanical, sterile language. Moreover, he encouraged man-midwives to “act and speak with the utmost delicacy of decorum, and never violate the trust reposed in him, so as to harbor the least immoral or indecent design” (Doyle 22). Smellie’s treatise helped establish the foundation for the female body to be reconceived as “nurturing rather than desiring, as supportive rather than appetitive” (Malone 376).

It is a common narrative that man-midwives all but drove their woman counterparts out of business by “denigrat[ing] midwives, magnetically describ[ing] their own charms, unnecessarily wield[ing] instruments, cruelly thrust[ing] them into women, and often kill[ing] mothers and infants” (Cody 478). Midwives of the era likely would have agreed with this assessment. They framed the choice of an obstetrician over a midwife as “abandoning or slighting” your fellow woman (Cody 478). They threatened “severe experience” to those who made the choice to be attended by an obstetrician (Cody 478). These threats do hold up to some scrutiny. Women who gave birth in maternity hospitals had higher mortality rates than those who did not. It was not uncommon for puerperal fever to sweep through a ward, escalating death rates to as high as “two and eight per 100 deliveries—around 10 times the rate outside hospital” (Drife 313). However, the idea that obstetricians would foist their medical instruments upon their patients unnecessarily is easy to disprove. British obstetricians were generally proponents of conservative management.
They took pride in how rarely they utilized their forceps. William Hunter, appointed Surgeon Accoucher to the Middlesex Hospital in 1748, boasted that his forceps “had rust on them” (Drife 312). It can even be questioned whether or not obstetricians intended to replace midwives. William Smellie, though he wrote that well-suited midwives would be mostly equal to obstetricians in labors without complications, warned that each individual midwife “can hardly be supposed mistress” of the correct qualifications to make her a well-suited midwife (Smellie 431). He advised that obstetricians, when called to a labor by a midwife who has “[found] herself at a loss,” should, rather than “openly condemning her method of practice...ought to make allowance for the weakness of the sex, and rectify what is amiss, without exposing her mistakes” (Smellie 432). The passage implies that Smellie presumed medically-trained men to be superior to midwives, not due to midwives’ lack of education but instead the inherent “weakness” of their sex. However, Smellie also contended that both the attendants and their patients would benefit from a cooperative relationship between midwives and obstetricians. His remark suggests that, at least at first, obstetricians were not meant to replace midwives, but to continue to be an additional source of medical support for women.

Nonetheless, obstetricians eventually replaced midwives as the popular choice for both middle and upper-class mothers. Obstetricians and their proponents came to sing the praises of “forceps, fillets, education, masculine ingenuity, and emotional detachment” and suggested that “sensible fathers-to-be” and their wives would “naturally” choose an obstetrician (Cody 478). Somewhat paradoxically, the medicalization of motherhood, as obstetrics took the place of midwifery, contributed to the broader conceptualization of motherhood as a form of sainthood. In other words, even as women’s bodies became subject
to increased anatomical and physiological scrutiny, childbirth and motherhood became disembodied as mothers were elevated to near spiritual status.

It is, perhaps, completely unremarkable to say that in the nineteenth century “childbirth was defined as woman’s paramount duty and most rewarding purpose in life” (Marland 6). Arthur Freeling, in his advice manual, *The Young Bride’s Book* (1839), referred to childrearing as the “principal” object of married women (Freeling 70). However, this idea of womanhood was a relatively new one, as for most of the eighteenth century, women were regarded mostly “as productive members of a household, obedient to the authority of a father, husband or master” (Yeo 201). Mothers were sidelined in child rearing, as fathers exercised greater control and responsibility over children’s educational and moral development. As such, early parenting advice manuals more often were addressed to fathers than mothers (Doyle 3). Interestingly, rather than managing the children, middle-class women were tasked with managing their husbands, as “the sympathetic, non judgemental affection the ideal wife offered her husband helped offset the frustrations and strains a man suffered in his workplace” (Poovey 10). Working-class women, though still idealized as fundamentally domestic, were considered to be another potential wage earner for the family, working alongside their husbands in their professions, in the fields doing farm labor, or by more scandalous means, whether that be by prostitution or on the stage (though the two were not mutually exclusive). Within this understanding of womanhood, “a mother was first and foremost a reproductive body, and she was celebrated more for her fecundity than for her ability to shape the minds, morals, and bodies of her children” (Doyle 3).

In the early to mid-eighteenth century, it was not uncommon to see pregnant women in public, making little to no attempt to mask their condition. After all, their physical bodies
were the core of their identities as mothers. Pregnant women regularly appeared on the London stage well into the late stages of pregnancy, even in breeches roles, which required them to “wear male clothing and impersonate a man” (Buchanan 284) or in notably virginal roles. For instance, Anne Oldfield, one of the most popular actresses in London, played Marcia, the protagonist’s virgin daughter in Joseph Addison’s *Cato*, so far into her pregnancy that it was joked in a letter between Berkeley and Percival that Oldfield had “a midwife behind the scenes, which is surely very unbecoming the character of Cato’s daughter” (Buchanan 285). This cultural familiarity with the bodies of pregnant women carried over into eighteenth-century literature. Authors regularly made explicit references to the bodies of pregnant women, referring to them as being either big or heavy with child. For instance, Tobias Smollet’s *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (1751), though poorly received by contemporary critics for its inability to “[preserve] propriety and nature,” was never scorned for its openness with the physical realities of pregnancy (Smollett xviii).

Pregnancy is explicitly named multiple times, its symptoms are referenced, and one woman is even referred to as “the big-bellied lady” (Smollett 41). The only complaint came from a critic who found Mrs. Grizzle’s fixation on Mrs. Pickle’s pregnancy to be “highly improbable” (qtd. Rousseau, Zomchick xliii).

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the standards of feminine propriety began to shift, and the stricter nineteenth-century ideal of womanhood began to take shape. This shift was guided by Enlightenment philosophers, who came to view emotion as a powerful “force for moral and social good” (Doyle 89). Women had long been regarded as “driven by passion, excessively sensitive,” but according to these thinkers such traits made women uniquely suited to become vessels of the nation’s moral education. Their sensitivity was
refigured as sensibility, that is, the “physical and emotional ability to feel (pain, pleasure, sorrow, joy) and to empathize with the feelings of others” (Doyle 89). This sensibility allowed women to claim “superior virtue and tenderness” compared to men (Doyle 89-90). Evangelical Christianity also played a crucial role in this shift in British femininity. Evangelicals placed greater importance on “female piety and motherhood” (Doyle 90), with particular attention paid to maternal influence, and their views eventually spread to nonevangelical sects. These qualities were channeled into an understanding of motherhood, referred to as “sentimental motherhood” by modern scholars, that placed emphasis on maternal affection and a mother’s ability to “transmit virtue” onto her children (Doyle 3).

This new form of motherhood placed women in a new position of power, which allowed women to claim greater control over their homes, leading to increased competition between them and the fathers of their children. By the 1830s, it was said that the mother “is the best guardian and instructress” for a young child (qtd. in Åström 119), while fathers were criticized for lacking “the nicety and tact” necessary for commanding domestic life, especially when it came to “individual feeling” (qtd. in Åström 119). Still, fathers demanded obedience and love from their children, qualities that were coming under strain due to the increasing demands of the rapidly industrializing workplace, which “physically separated” father and child and thereby deprived them of “material and emotional opportunities” to which women still had ready access (Åström 119).

The sentimental mother was also correlated with the nursing mother, since prescriptive writers often suggested that “virtue was literally passed from mother to child via breast milk” (Doyle 90). Breastfeeding, which had once been scorned by those who believed that it “interfered with the enjoyment of female beauty and marital pleasures”
(Doyle 108), came to be understood as a necessary action for good mothers. Hugh Smith, a medical writer who was poorly received by fellow physicians, though well-liked by the laity, wrote in *Letters to Married Women*, in the section titled “Of Mother’s Milk” that “the race of man would be more healthy, strong, and vigorous, than we can at present boast” if women followed the example of “every animal that gives suck” and concerned themselves with nothing but the tending of their children until “they are capable of providing for themselves” (Smith 65). The earlier practice of wet-nursing did not entirely fade, and was, in fact, ubiquitous amongst upper-class women, but many physicians advised women against hiring a wet-nurse if they were physically able to breastfeed. Mothers who chose not to breastfeed their children were ridiculed. One minister deplored those mothers “who, without any reason but their own indolence, the indulgence in other scenes and occupations, unnaturally assign the care of their infants to other hands” (qtd. in Doyle 96). Such women were warned that they were neglecting “nature’s law” and that such a law could not be violated without causing some harm to both the mother and her child. Scottish physician and medical writer, William Buchan, warned that refusing to breastfeed could cause “a great degree of fever in the whole system” (qtd. in Doyle 95). Others pitied these mothers for depriving themselves of the “sweetest pleasures of which the human heart is susceptible” (qtd. in Doyle 97), for breastfeeding was thought to provide both physical and emotional pleasure. One woman wrote about “what delightful employment it is to *suckle a beloved child*, who repays the kindness it receives with the sweetest caresses!” (qtd. Doyle 98-99). Buchan promised the same, writing that “all nurses concur in declaring, that the act itself is attended with sweet, thrilling, and delightful sensations of which those only who have felt them can form any idea” (Buchan 79).
Mothers were also promised that breastfeeding would “confirm” their own health, should they be naturally healthful, or “restore” them if they were sickly (Doyle 92), though how healthy a person can be when they experience discomfort or pain on a daily basis should be questioned. The physical discomforts of nursing, particularly that it caused “fatigue and anxiety” and, on occasion, pain (qtd. Doyle 99), were still noted in medical texts, but women were encouraged to discard these concerns. The authors of these texts reminded women that the pains they suffered could easily be overridden by “the deep affection of the good mother for her offspring” (qtd. in Doyle 100) and the good health of her child. Similar claims were made in regard to pregnancy. Women were told that pregnancy would “as if almost by enchantment” put a stop to “a variety of uncomfortable feelings and diseases” because of a steady and abundant flow of blood to the uterus (qtd. Faulk 41). Even sickly women were encouraged to have children, and though the reasons for that encouragement were many, the assurance of improved health lurked beneath them all. A pregnant woman was said to be “the peculiar object of his [God’s] care,” with all those around her being imparted with “an involuntary sentiment of tenderness and interest” in her welfare (Freeling 70). Of course, there was also a promise of “all absorbing” joy found in becoming “the living mother of a living child” (Freeling 70).

Much of the information women received about pregnancy and early motherhood came from advice manuals, often written by physicians. These writers warned that there were two things which were most likely to bring a pregnancy to a negative end. Firstly, women were cautioned not to heed the “counsels of the ignorant,” whether that be from “ignorant persons” (Bull 10) or the “gloomy forebodings and prophecies of popular credulity” (Bull 2). Listening to the wrong person could “[destroy] or [spoil]” a child and do
untold amounts of “mischief” (qtd. Åström 120). Thomas Bull praised women for their “feelings of delicacy,” which he called “[natural] and commend[able],” and “prevent[ed] a full disclosure of their circumstances” (Bull iii). These feelings of delicacy only became an issue when they caused women to become unwilling to consult their medical advisers with total openness.

Second, it was crucial to “preserve a serenity of temper” (Freeling 127). One’s emotions were considered to be signifiers of physical health, with strong emotions capable of “disturbing the organs of the body” (Bull 104). Pregnancy was thought to be a “peculiarly sensitive condition,” which could heighten the effects of emotions on the body. Buchan wrote that the maintenance of “cheerfulness or good-humor” should be made “superior to all other considerations” during pregnancy (Buchan 22). Women were to be “doubly attentive to preserve the utmost sweetness and serenity of temper, — to dispel the glooms of fear or melancholy, — to calm the rising gulls of anger, — and to keep every other unruly passion or desire under the steady control of mildness and reason” (Buchan 23). Writers tried to soothe women with the promise that this serenity should come naturally to them due to their “joy of becoming a mother, and the anticipated pleasure of presenting a fond husband with the dearest pledge of mutual love” (Buchan 23). If the fear of her own or her child’s death arose, it was incumbent upon her physician and her husband to “convince her that her terrors are groundless,” and that troubles such as death or miscarriage only appeared upon the “improper conduct of the women themselves” (Buchan 23). In such advice, women are made out to be solely responsible for the outcome of their pregnancies. However, they are also painted as liable to hysterics and in need of reasonable, masculine guides. The insinuation that pregnancy is so easily brought to ruin contradicts the claim these same
writers made that since pregnancy was a natural process, it would require only “a little more than ordinary prudence and care” (Bull 25).

In short, women were encouraged to ignore their physical discomforts – and even their pain – for the sake of their child’s health and future virtue, which they were told should be their greatest source of pleasure. Buchan described it best, “in the language of love, women are called angels; but it is a weak and a silly compliment; they approach nearer to our ideas of the Deity: they not only create, but sustain their creation, and hold its future destiny in their hands” (Buchan 2). During courtship and early marriage, a woman might be an angel, but in passing from maidenhood to motherhood, she was sanctified. The sacrifices a mother made for her child were equated with martyrdom. Certainly, these are both positions of acclaim, even of veneration, but neither of them are quite human. Motherhood was understood to be an almost entirely spiritual phenomena. Women could not be grounded in their physical experiences, and, as such, were rendered inhuman.

Now divested of a physical incarnation, the maternal body all but disappeared from the public eye. The physical signs of a pregnancy came to “[testify] to carnal knowledge” and served as an “incontrovertible marker” of sexual activity (Malone 376). Pregnancy tends to exaggerate frequently sexualized features, mainly “those parts peculiar to her organization: the bust and the pelvis,” so it was said that women were most attractive to men “during the period of activity of the reproductive organs” (Malone 377). As such, women were encouraged to minimize interaction with non-family members while visibly pregnant. The supposed “exhibitionism” required by a theatrical profession, where actresses “exposed” their “bod[ies] and emotion[s]” to the gaze of the public, was regarded as contrary to the domestic ideal (Buchanan 289). Upon marrying, women tended to retire
from the stage altogether. Those who remained involved in the theatre after marriage found it crucial to mold their public persona into that of the devoted wife and mother. They married men who also had theatrical professions and were able to maintain respectability by working alongside their husbands. To accommodate childbearing, they either took extended periods of time away from the stage to have their children or postponed their debut until their reproductive years had passed.

Literature, too, became quiet on the subject of the maternal body. The main methods of presenting pregnancy to readers became “ellipsis, euphemism, and oblique reference” (Malone 372). If pregnancy was ever mentioned by name or by inference, its physical manifestation was obscured. In 1859, an anonymous reviewer of George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* (1859) complained about the “most objectionable” practices of the novel, which “date[s] and discusse[s] the several stages that precede the birth of a child.” This practice was not particular to *Adam Bede*, and the reviewer also identifies *White Lies* (1847) and *Sylvan Holt’s Daughter* (1859) as equally troublesome. The reviewer claimed that the “punctual sequence” of Eliot’s description made the story of Hetty Sorrel “read like the rough notes of a man-midwife's conversations with a bride” (qtd. in Malone 371). It is worth considering what, exactly, this reviewer was concerned about. Suggestions of Hetty’s pregnancy begin when she appears to be “even more beautiful, for there was a more luxuriant womanliness about Hetty of late” (Eliot 324). This suggestion of heightened “womanliness” hints at the physical changes pregnancy brings about, without ever making these changes clear to those who do not “already know the code” (Malone 372). Eliot also encodes Hetty’s moment of realization of her pregnancy: “after the first on-coming of her great dread, some weeks after her betrothal to Adam, she had waited and waited, in the blind vague hope that something
would happen to set her free from her terror” (Eliot 329). Perhaps the most obvious moment comes when a stranger “[scrutinizes] her figure” and sees “what the familiar unsuspecting eye leaves unnoticed” (Eliot 338). However, even that is ambiguous. Much like the “familiar eye,” if the reader were “unsuspecting,” any suggestions of pregnancy could easily go unrecognized.

Many novels still sought to explore the realities of pregnancy and childbirth, allowing mothers a physicality that the medical sphere did not.
Chapter 2: “On Her Existence Depended That of Another”: Pregnancy in *Wuthering Heights*

In the nineteenth century, it would have been impossible for a woman to enter marriage without awareness of what awaited her on the other side of the marital bed. Unless her body itself prevented it, she would be a mother. Not only would pregnancy fulfill her duty within the family, but it was likely to bring about “the happiest changes” in her – that is, if she did not die in childbirth, as roughly one out of every two-hundred Victorian women did (Chamberlain 559). While this number is an estimate, written accounts widely document the threat childbirth posed to women. Within the *Book of Common Prayer* was a ceremony called the “Thanksgiving of Women After Childbirth”, known more commonly as the “Churching of Women,” which was held several weeks after a woman gave birth, whether the child was living or stillborn. In it, women expressed their gratitude to God for His mercy and safe deliverance from the “great danger of childbirth” (*The Book of Common Prayer* 16). While such allusions to the dangers of childbirth were commonplace, they were not emphasized – rather, as detailed in chapter one, it was the promised “happiest changes” that were given attention. Even sickly women were encouraged to have children, and though the reasons for that encouragement were many, the assurance of improved health lurked beneath them all. Of course, there was also the promise of “all absorbing” joy to be found in becoming “the living mother of a living child” (Freeling 70) and taking up one’s “proper place” as the “general fountain of cheerfulness, hope, and consolation” (Faulk 41-42).

Contemporary literature frequently dwelled on this romanticized view of childbearing. For instance, Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Ruth* (1853), which tells the story of Ruth Hilton, a dressmaker’s apprentice who falls pregnant with the child of a man who abandons
her, greatly emphasizes Ruth’s maternal feelings as offering some consolation for her tragedy. When Ruth learns that she is pregnant, her immediate response is to say “Oh, my God, I thank Thee! Oh! I will be so good!” (Gaskell 108). The Bensons, who bring Ruth into their home, hope that she will learn “to reverence her child; and this reverence will shut out sin,—will be purification” (Gaskell 111). This hope does seem to be fulfilled, as, throughout her pregnancy, Ruth concerns herself with how she will support herself once her child is born, telling Miss Benson “it must never know want, whatever I do. I have deserved suffering, but it will be such a little innocent darling” (Gaskell 112).

*Wuthering Heights* (1847) depicts no such motherly tenderness nor does it reverence the state of motherhood. None of the characters who become mothers survive to see their children reach adulthood. Catherine Linton, the one character whose pregnancy is made clear to the reader, is in a poor mental and physical state for the entirety of her pregnancy, eventually ending in her death, as well. Pitting itself against the romantic image of motherhood presented in medical and child-rearing manuals, as well as religious tracts and many didactic novels, Emily Brontë presents childbearing as something for women to fear. Threats are imposed both on a woman’s selfhood and her life, and the promise of joy or martyrdom is never fulfilled.

As discussed in my previous chapter, the strict policing of women’s temper came to be considered a cornerstone of a healthy pregnancy. Hence in Arthur Freeling’s *The Young Bride’s Book: Being Hints for Regulating the Conduct of Married Women* (1839), there is a chapter simply titled “Temper.” Two quotes are used in its epigraph: one, a verse from the book of Timothy, and the second a quote from the letters of Hester Chapone, which reads, “Gentleness, meekness, and patience, are her peculiar distinctions; and an enraged
woman is one of the most disgusting sights in nature” (Freeling 25). Husbands were cautioned against indulging these tempers, and women, when in situations that might provoke passion, should “determine to drop the argument, or quit the room” (Freeling 31). During pregnancy, this need for an even temper switched from being simply a means of avoiding conflict to being a medical necessity. An axiom at the time, listed near the end of *The Young Bride’s Book*, says, “Be careful to preserve a serenity of temper, and determine not to allow any circumstance to excite you to passion; this, of course, should at all times be observed; but at this period excitement of any sort is peculiarly prejudicial” (Freeling 127).

Certainly, Catherine Earnshaw is given to bursts of temper. Nelly Dean makes references to her “rages” (Brontë 106). Catherine herself makes threats of her “passionate temper, verging, when kindled, on frenzy” (Brontë 141). Given her temper, the axiom in *The Young Bride’s Book* would have been strictly directed toward a woman like her. The Lintons follow it to the letter. When those at Thrushcross Grange discover that Catherine is pregnant, extra attention is given to soothing her temper. Even Nelly, though she earlier admits to “[vexing] her frequently by trying to bring down her arrogance” (Brontë 77), attempts to be gentler with her mistress. She warns Heathcliff not to visit on account of Catherine’s fragile nerves – “she wouldn’t be able to bear the surprise” (Brontë 185). With the rapid transition from handling illness to handling a pregnancy, and the similar treatment of both from those around her, Catherine’s pregnancy is never something that she can be joyful about. It is nothing more than another illness, and Catherine is nothing but an invalid. As a result of this treatment, Catherine is somewhat healed from an earlier brain fever, and her passions are never given the chance to ignite. She loses the once “haggard aspect” her face once had as she “recover[s] flesh” (Brontë 188). Despite the best efforts of her husband
and their servants, and the “more tangible proofs of convalescence”, Catherine still seems to be “doomed to decay” (Brontë 189). Her eyes are consumed by an appearance of “dreamy and melancholy softness” so that they “no longer gave the impression of looking at the objects around her: they appeared always to gaze beyond…you might have said out of this world” (Brontë 188). Notably, Brontë describes the calm that has settled over Catherine in language reminiscent of death rather than simple peace of mind.

The maternal body was a difficult figure for many Victorians to parse. “In ‘making babies’ female bodies violate Western women’s liberal singularity during their lifetimes and compromise their claims to full citizenship. Ontologically always potentially pregnant, women are both more limited in themselves, with a body that betrays their individuality” (Malone 377-78). Though the idea that Victorians were squeamish to the sight of any woman late in her pregnancy is untrue, they were still obscured from the public eye by the practice of confinement. The only person who would then be subject to the woman’s confusing body would be her husband, who kept “a weirdly double and single body, both herself and not herself” within his home (Malone 378).

During Catherine’s pregnancy, her selfhood begins to slip. One night, she sees her own reflection and Nelly finds herself “incapable of making her comprehend it to be her own” (Brontë 148). When Nelly covers the glass and goes to leave the room, Catherine shrieks, drawing Nelly back. She claims she shrieked because she “thought [she] was at home…lying in [her] chamber at Wuthering Heights” (Brontë 149). When she tries to recall memories of her recent past, she finds “the whole last seven years of [her] life grew a blank” and it was as if she were a child again (Brontë 150-51). In Nelly’s eyes, the “fiery Catherine” has become nothing more than a “wailing child” (Brontë 150). Her lost
memories have left her in a regressed state, as if she were a child once more, and so, when Catherine looks at her reflection, she expects to see her child self. There are, in this scene, two Catherines. One, the adult Catherine, Mrs. Linton, and the other, the child, Catherine Earnshaw. It could also be said that the two Catherines are Catherine and her child, who will, eventually, also be named Catherine.

This episode occurs before Catherine’s pregnancy is made known to the reader or, presumably, the inhabitants of Thrushcross Grange. However, Catherine’s first assertion of her impending death – “what in the name of all that feels has he to do with books when I am dying?” (Brontë 146) – comes just before this scene, and is repeated many times after until her prophecy is fulfilled by her death in childbirth, implying that Catherine is either suspicious or aware of her condition. Once it is known that “on her existence depended that of another” (Brontë 163), which Catherine is more important is made clear – it is not the mother. Nelly is resentful of the tending Catherine needs, remarking that her improvement must be inevitable, “so waited on as she was” (Brontë 163). The use of “waited on” implies that it is servitude for all involved. Of course, they want Catherine to improve, but only because the life of Edgar’s possible heir depends on it. The coming child is a chance for “Mr. Linton’s heart” to be “gladdened, and his [emphasis added] lands to be secured” (Brontë 163). Neither Catherine’s happiness nor her health matters as much as that possibility.

Interestingly, despite the intense care given to Catherine during her pregnancy, her labor is only attended to by Nelly. No reference is made to someone being sent for Mr. Kenneth, nor any other kind of medical professional, not even a midwife. Given that

Wuthering Heights takes place before childbirth was fully medicalized, it is not
unreasonable that Catherine would have very few attendants, but lacking any trained personnel at her bedside would be a strange situation for a woman of Catherine’s wealth. Nelly is almost certainly untrained. She is only “a poor man’s daughter” (Brontë 73), she has worked for the Earnshaws her entire life, and, though well educated for her status, having read “more than [Mr. Lockwood] would fancy” (Brontë 73), it is doubtful that Mr. Earnshaw had any books in his library on the subject of midwifery. She is also inexperienced, as she has no children of her own. Why, then, is Nelly the only one mentioned as being a witness to Catherine’s labor? Possibly, this was done to avoid scandal.

The relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff borders on unseemly, perhaps even enough that Edgar and Nelly could have had fears that Catherine’s child was not truly Edgar’s. When Catherine and Heathcliff see one another again after being kept apart for months, they fall into a “five minute” long embrace. Heathcliff gives Catherine “more kisses than ever he gave in his life before,” though Catherine “kissed him first” (Brontë 191). Their passion for each other leads them to crave a physical outlet for that passion, which would make a covert sexual relationship between the two possible. If the parentage of Catherine’s child was debatable, it would have depended on the attendants of her labor to extract the truth. This echoes the practice of midwives threatening to “withdraw their services during the most extreme moments of labor in order to force an unmarried mother to name the father of her child” (Muir). Upon hearing of Catherine’s death, Heathcliff asks Nelly “‘and – did she ever mention me?’ hesitating, as if he dreaded the answer to his question would introduce details he could not bear to hear” (Brontë 201). It is entirely possible that what Heathcliff is dreading are those details pertaining to the child’s true father. Catherine never mentions Heathcliff before her death, and it is unlikely that Heathcliff is the younger
Cathy’s father, given Cathy has little resemblance to her mother, and her fair hair and pale complexion align her more with Edgar than with Heathcliff. If this is the case, then the retention of extra aid for Catherine was entirely unnecessary, and Edgar and Nelly’s values and the preservation of the Lintons’ reputation were given more value than Catherine’s health.

The desire to be certain of the parentage of Catherine’s child comes from Edgar's desire to pass on his property. Catherine’s pregnancy represents the possibility that Edgar’s “heart [will] be gladdened, and his lands secured from a stranger’s grip, by the birth of an heir” (Brontë 163), therefore the father cannot be held in question. Heathcliff being the potential father poses not only the threat that the Lintons will lose control of Thrushcross Grange, but also that the Grange could pass into the hands of someone who is racially othered. Heathcliff, described as “dark-skinned,” (Brontë 4), “black eye[d]” (Brontë 1), with “black long hair” (Brontë 403), is categorized as a “gypsy” (Brontë 4). The term, though commonly associated with the Romani people, was not understood to be a race with one particular background, but was a broad category for any dark-skinned person with an uncertain heritage (Matthews 140). The gypsy’s most common crime within the Victorian novel was kidnapping, an act which posed a threat to primogeniture and otherwise destabilized the family, as children were removed from their “proper place in the mutually-informing taxonomies of race, gender and class” (Matthews 144).

Though Heathcliff never literally kidnaps any of the children within the novel, his influence over them has the same effect. He degrades Hareton by forcing him to do manual labor, refusing to educate him, and indulging each and every one of his negative habits. Cathy, safely assured of her status as Edgar’s daughter due to her light hair and fair skin,
Hareton’s pathway back into the family. Their eventual marriage not only restores the
Hareton within the Earnshaw family, but also assures that both Thrushcross Grange and
Wuthering Heights remain controlled by the proper people. The fact that it is Catherine’s
passion for Heathcliff that upsets the children’s place, the novel places blame not simply on
Heathcliff’s active role in abusing the children and denying them their birthright, but also on
Catherine for allowing it to happen.

In most Victorian novels, the death of the mother in childbirth is an event that
predates the events that take place in the novel— that is, it happens off-scene. Unlike
Catherine, these mothers are not true characters. However, this also means that they are
given no opportunity to disgrace themselves as mothers, like Catherine does. Their deaths
serve only to “devote the reader’s attention to the surviving child” (Faulk 2). For the
Victorians, a woman who died in this way was “the epitome of self-sacrificing femininity, as
they give up their very lives for their children” (Faulk 2). The child, especially, was
expected to have this view of their mother. Their feelings toward her should be that of
“unpolluted devotion” (Faulk 2). For instance, in Oliver Twist (1837), Oliver’s mother,
Agnes, dies moments after his birth, her final wish and action being to “[imprint] her cold
white lips passionately on [his] forehead” (Dickens). Oliver goes on to fiercely defend his
mother, attacking another boy when he calls his mother “a regular right-down bad ‘un”
(Dickens). Catherine should, likewise, be given the adoration owed to a martyr. Those who
knew her in life seem willing to glorify her. As she sits vigil, Nelly remarks that Catherine’s
corpse is an “untroubled image of Divine rest” (Brontë 199). Isabella grieves that they
“parted unreconciled” and claims that she “shan’t forgive [herself]” for it (Brontë 206).
Edgar recalled his wife’s memory with “ardent, tender love, and hopeful aspiring to the
better world, where he doubted not she was gone” (Brontë 222). Cathy, her own daughter, barely thinks of her at all. She has a locket that she wears around her neck with miniatures of both her mother and her father, but when Linton demands that she hand them over, Cathy refuses at first, and when she gives in, all she can bear to do is “[break] the hinges and divide[s] the case, and [give Linton] her mother’s portrait” but she tries to hide her father’s (Brontë 338). Even when Heathcliff tries to force Cathy to hand over the portrait, she refuses. It is only by knocking Cathy down and “[wrenching] it off the chain” that Cathy is able to be separated from her father’s portrait (Brontë 338). Her father is clearly of more importance to her than her mother. After all, why should Cathy hold a sentimental view of her mother? She never knew her, and her father only sparingly speaks of his memories of her.

Catherine is not the only mother in the novel to have a small-to-nonexistent part in the rearing of their child or children. In fact, every character who becomes a mother meets an untimely end. Mrs. Earnshaw, Catherine and Hindley’s mother, dies “less than two years” following Heathcliff’s arrival at Wuthering Heights (Brontë 44). Hareton’s mother, Frances, dies from consumption a few weeks following Hareton’s birth, having been weakened by labor. Isabella, who has the longest maternal lifespan, dies “some thirteen years after the decease of Catherine, when Linton was twelve, or a little more” (Brontë 221). Her motherhood and her death are first referenced in the same sentence. The majority of the resulting motherless children are left to be cared for by their various fathers, though they are provided with a maternal figure in the form of Nelly Dean. Nelly is entrusted with Cathy’s care from the time of her birth. Nelly’s “greatest troubles” come from Cathy’s “trifling illnesses, which she had to experience in common with all children” (Brontë 227). The first
twelve years of Cathy’s life are the “happiest of [Nelly’s] life” (Brontë 227). Nelly indulges Cathy by listening to the tales she tells of her “real and imaginary adventures” across the grounds of Thrushcross Grange (Brontë 231). Cathy is her “pet” and her “delight” (Brontë 256). She is not only her “pet,” but her student, too. Though Edgar is charged with Cathy’s formal education, Nelly is her moral educator. She cautions Cathy to obey her father’s orders, or else “nobody will put faith in [her] anymore” (Brontë 234). When Nelly reminds Cathy to treat Hareton well, on account of his being her cousin, she at first rejects the idea that she is related to “such a clown” (Brontë 236), but, after Nelly’s insistence that “people can have many cousins, and of all sorts...without being any the worse for it”, Cathy, though not immediately soothed, does seem willing to consider the thought, as she gazes at Hareton with “awe and horror” (Brontë 237), rather than her earlier mockery.

Nelly would have double cause to prevent Hareton being ridiculed. As much as she wants to uphold proper manners in Cathy, she also has a desire to see Hareton treated well. As a very small child, “Hareton...followed [Nelly] everywhere” (Brontë 84), and even in his current state, corrupted by Heathcliff, Nelly can see “a mind owning better qualities than his father ever possessed”, though all “good things” in him had been lost (Brontë 237). Since only Nelly, Joseph, and Heathcliff have had any influence over Hareton up to that point, with Joseph and Heathcliff cast as dark influences, this implies that Nelly must be the source of his hidden goodness. His budding romance with Cathy allows for that goodness to be pulled back to the forefront. Nelly is sure that, on the day of their wedding, “there won’t be a happier woman...in England” (Brontë 381). In the end, Catherine gets none of the glory from being a mother, nor any of the joy. Since she is deceased, all the praise and joy she might have enjoyed is instead given to Nelly.
This is not to say that Nelly is an ideal maternal figure. Though she is the closest of all the women in the novel, even Nelly fails to meet the expectations of a Victorian mother. She calls the children she tends to her “pets” when they are obedient and compares them to wild animals when they disobey. Hareton is referred to as a “little lamb” (Brontë 90) while under Nelly’s care, but is exposed to “a wilderness of weeds” under Heathcliff’s (Brontë 237). When Nelly finds Cathy at Wuthering Heights and she seems unmoved by Nelly’s scolding, she ceases to be a “stray lamb” (Brontë 233) in Nelly’s view and becomes a “cunning little fox” instead (Brontë 234).

In a subversion of the proper mother-child relationship, Nelly remains submissive to Cathy, referring to the girl as “my little mistress” (Brontë 294, 376). Though she may scold Cathy for her poor behavior, reminding her that if she continues to break promises (as she promised not to go past the Craggs while her father is away) that “nobody will put faith in [her] anymore”, Cathy is not deterred (Brontë 234). Rather than accepting the scolding, she remarks that “Papa charged me nothing: he’ll not scold me, Ellen – he’s never cross, like you” (Brontë 234). Cathy expresses her displeasure with Nelly in more than just words, slapping her hand and calling her a “cross thing” when Nelly tells her to completely stop her correspondence with her cousin, Linton, not even allowing “one little note” (Brontë 271). The disobedience and aggression Cathy shows to Nelly, and Nelly’s corresponding inability to correct her behavior, shows that Nelly lacks the positive influence that maternal figures were meant to have.

In Wuthering Heights, women are unable to achieve the saintly status imbued by middle-class motherhood. Rather than being granted spiritual status, the risks inherent to pregnancy and childbirth situate them in their physical bodies and make fulfilling the role of
mother impossible. Most of them will die before they are able to do any mothering at all.

Even Nelly, who is removed from the physical realities of motherhood and presents herself as a guide for the children, is unable to fulfill all of the functions expected of a mother. The medical men who should be their protectors and the providers of logical advice, fail to be of much help at all. As such, *Wuthering Heights* returns motherhood to an earlier period, when motherhood was dictated by the physical body, rather than the spiritual act of mothering.
Chapter 3: Poor Mothers are Poor Mothers

In the early to mid-eighteenth century, nations generally accepted the theory that a large population was a sign of the “wealth and power…good government and wise leadership” of a nation (Robinson 155). Mercantilist thought generally held that “a growing population meant growing national power and influence” (Robinson 157). And in light of high infant and maternal mortality rates of the era, overpopulation simply did not seem a serious issue. Thus, “pro-natalism” – the idea that high fertility rates should be encouraged – was a current of British society.

The industrial revolution and the rise of economic philosophy (the “dismal science,” as Thomas Carlyle called it), saw a shift away from pro-natalism. For instance, Thomas Malthus’s “An Essay on the Principle of Population” (1798) argued that rapid population growth was not a boon to society, but rather guaranteed its downfall, the tenets of which would later be enshrined in the law by the creation of the New Poor Law in 1834. The British government had enacted the original Poor Law during the Elizabethan era, establishing a “social safety-net” unique to England at that time (Robinson 158). Payments to families were dependent not only on family income and members of the family who were unable to work, but also on the number of children in the family. According to eighteenth-century critics, Malthus among them, the “guaranteed living, however meager, which the system provided encouraged early marriage and large families among the poor” and erased the need to be prudent in their “personal, sexual lives” (Robinson 159). Since the children of the poor tended to grow up to be poor themselves, this caused a cycle which kept the relief rolls densely populated. By the end of the eighteenth century, “one in five of the rural population” was on the relief rolls of the Poor Law (Robinson 159). As relief was
funded by the parish through a tax on landowners, with larger numbers to support, landowners had an increasingly large amount of money being diverted away from their personal, lucrative investments in industry and commerce. The thought of easing this burden through reform of the Poor Law must have been compelling to them, making them likely allies of Malthus. They were not the only ones. Political and social elites frequently expressed support of his ideas and support for Malthus was printed widely in the press.

The rising tide of anti-natalism culminated in 1834 when the Poor Law Amendment was enacted. With the passage of this amendment, supplements to the wages of the able-bodied and employed were ended, mixed-sex workhouses were eradicated, and a woman who gave birth to a child while receiving relief payments would be rendered ineligible for receiving further payments. Interestingly, supplements were continued for the disabled and elderly, though the amount they were given was minimal. Within the Poor Law Amendment, there was also a Bastardy clause. While illegitimate children were initially the financial responsibility of their fathers, critics worried that it caused women to become “‘spiderwomen,’ entrapping men in order to become scroungers off them or off the state” (Yeo 205). The Bastardy clause, instead, placed the burden of support on the mother “thus aiming to police her sexuality and fertility as well as to save the state money” (Yeo 205). While middle-class mothers may have been viewed as the ideal woman, the reproductive bodies of lower-class women were treated as a threat to the social order. Both the economic and the medical community saw them to be an unruly, nearly animalistic population in need of strict discipline and control.

By the 1860s, obstetrics and gynecology were firmly established medical fields, brought under the control of doctors. Though midwives still attended births, man-midwives,
or physicians were often preferred by those who could afford them. For instance, Alfred Lewis Galabin’s widely read *A Manual of Midwifery* (1886) asserted, “It is a well-known rule that the accoucher should always attend promptly to the first summons from a lying-in woman” (Galabin 182). This suggests that accouchers were the first to be called upon, since Galabin assumes that there will be no attendant at all if he does not come. Galabin also makes rules as to how the woman should be dressed when the accoucher arrives. He writes, “It is preferable for the patient to be in her night-dress, over which she may wear a dressing-gown” (Galabin 183). And he goes on to detail how the room should be kept “as airy as possible and also quiet” (Galabin 182). He particularly notes that the lower classes will require extra care to assure these rules are kept, as “with the lower classes it is usual to wear till the labor is completed an old suit of the ordinary dress, including stays,” which Galabin also expressly forbids (Galabin 183). In terms of keeping the room orderly, “with the poorer classes the attendant should insist that no more persons than necessary are in the room, since, especially among the Irish, the neighbors are fond of gathering in the lying-in room” (Galabin 183). Birthing is not the only time that Galabin cautions doctors to keep a close eye on their lower class patients, and he points out multiple misdeeds among the lower classes that lead them to be supposed threats to their children and to themselves. Given that this is a text specifically directed toward those studying midwifery, Galabin’s remarks indicate a broader mistrust of the lower classes within the medical community, as well as an expectation that vigilance will be required when attending to their lower class patients.

Nonetheless, many poor women would have been glad to have such a mild relationship with accouchers. In teaching hospitals, which often doubled as charity hospitals, women were routinely subjected to humiliating or painful procedures. It was “standard
gynecological process” for a woman to be strapped to a frame with her pelvis raised and feet held up and apart in stirrups or footrests, left open for examination by groups of medical students (Lansbury 416). Presiding surgeons would often tell ribald stories and jokes, as the operating theater was “a place for robust humor as well as surgery” (Lansbury 416). Surgeons and students felt no need to censor themselves in the company of a working-class woman, since it was assumed that poorer women were already “well versed in the rougher ways of the world” (Lansbury 416). In contrast, doctors were advised to be more tender with their average (middle-class) patients, warned of the “natural repugnance” these patients might have of vaginal examination and reminded that “the first duty of the accoucher [is] to respect the modesty of his patients” (Grandin 310). Poor women, however, were not looked upon as patients, but rather as “[subjects] for study and research” (Lansbury 416). Women did not need to be in the hospital for anything relevant to gynecology to be subjected to these gynecological examinations. Anna Kingsford once reported the case of a woman who was dying from tuberculosis who “must afford yet another lesson in return for the charity she has received,” despite being unable to even open her eyes (qtd. Lansbury 416).

Female medical students, such as Elizabeth Blackwell and Anna Kingsford, were among the first to expose the cruel treatment of poor women to the public. When Blackwell saw what was considered “standard gynecological practice,” she called it “degrading cruelty” (Lansbury 416). A poor woman requiring charity inherently placed her on a lower level – only animals were so low. Together, they were “fitting subjects for painful experiment” (Lansbury 416). Blackwell saw the correlation between poor women and animals, and upon hearing of an experiment in which a dog had been pumped full of hydrogen and then set on fire, wondered when the same experiment would be performed
upon a patient (Lansbury 419). It must be noted that most experiments of this extreme quality were not conducted in Great Britain, but rather in Germany or France, though the findings were still published in British journals (Bates 19).

The antivivisection movement, which hoped to abolish or limit the use of animals in scientific (usually medical) experimentation, capitalized on this correlation between women and animals. The movement was one of the most common charitable causes or political movements championed by women. It is estimated that approximately seventy percent of antivivisectionists were women (Bates 21). Though antivivisection was “a popular cause in poor districts,” middle-class women also made up a substantial portion of antivivisectionists (Bates 18). After all, though poor women were the most frequent subjects of public examination, middle- and upper- class women were not pardoned from unnecessary and often degrading medical treatment. The “womb, the reproductive organs, and the menstrual cycle” had become the “primary sites for medical inquiry and pathologizing” (Parsons). Therefore, many issues within women’s health – both mental and physical – were boiled down to problems affecting the reproductive system. The British Medical Journal grieved for “the women who [were] caged up in London back drawing-rooms and visited almost daily for uterine disease” (qtd. in Lansbury 418). The use of the word “caged” implies that the feeling that women were dehumanized by gynecologists extended beyond the poor and was also recognized by middle-class women. Among middle-class women, this feeling had less to do with direct cruelty, such as that which poor women experienced, and likely had more to do with feelings of confinement and control.

Records of women's intense emotional reactions to vivisections suggest that women perhaps identified with the animals subjected to the male scientific gaze. For example,
historian Coral Lansbury notes, “the women in [the] audience would sob and become hysterical, to the delight of the jeering medical students who made a point of disrupting antivivisection meetings” (Lansbury 415). Since the movement was so densely populated by women, men who considered themselves antivivisectionists were cast as “effeminate” or were “subject to accusations of unmanliness” (Bates 21). Medics, both doctors and students, cast themselves as the opposite of the feminized, emotional antivivisectionist. Proper medics “ought to be neither unduly sentimental, lest squeamishness made them shrink from their work in order to spare their own feelings, nor so insensitive that they became callous” (Bates 21). Many men of science urged doctors to be “gentlemen,” and claimed that, in the realm of experimentation “the real sacrifices were being made not by the animals but the experimenters,” who were forced to do acts they otherwise considered immoral and “ungentlemanly” in order to serve the greater good (Bates 30).

The cold, emotionless hand of the “gentleman doctor” found a more violent, sexual counterpart in the era’s pornography. The means of sexual domination were not at all dissimilar from the tools of the gynecologist. In another story, A Man With a Maid (1896), Jack the riding master contrives a device with “footholds…each comprised two pieces, which, when placed together, formed the mold of a female foot. The toepieces were secured to the floor some three feet out from the corner. To the rear of these, but sliding in grooves, [he] fixed the heelpieces…and then wall rings with attendant wrist manacles to the walls themselves” in order to keep his victims vulnerable to his advances (The Way of a Man with a Maid). In 1860, Christopher Johnston, a physician practicing in Baltimore, devised an operating chair that came to be commonly used by surgeons throughout America and England. Judging by its description, it was a close match to the machine in The Way of a
*Man with a Maid*, being described as “a frame supported on four legs, a shallow stuffed seat and a stuffed back which was maneuverable to various angles by means of a frame and ratchet. It had two attached bars ending in stirrups or footrests, which could slide in and out of a groove, or be removed entirely” (qtd. Lansbury 425). Just like the doctor, the sexually dominant man was to remain unmoved by the woman’s resistance and, if anything, only took more pleasure the more “she howl[ed], mew[ed], screech[ed], and yelp[ed]” (Lansbury 425). These stories often featured women of the upper classes. For instance, in *The Way of a Man with a Maid*, Jack’s first victim, Alice, is seen as “ladylike” and is wealthy enough that her family has multiple servants, including Jack's (and Alice’s) future victim, Fanny (*The Way of a Man with a Maid*). However, in Jack’s commands to Alice, he assumes the role of her master, while she is only a servant. His end goal is to make her into “a dull and passive surrogate of a proud and voluptuous girl” (*The Way of a Man with a Maid*). He does this by extracting from her a promise that “whatever it may be [that he desires] [she] must do it” (*The Way of a Man with a Maid*). The desire to dominate and control the female body is connected to the Malthusian anxiety around the control of fertility. That Victorian pornography often featured medical devices (or devices that resembled those one might find in a surgery) and regularly used somewhat dispassionate, clinical language was no coincidence: Victorian pornography and the Victorian medical sphere shared in common the tendency to reduce women to little more than their sex organs.

Despite the rising desire to limit the size of families (particularly families of the poor), fertility was notoriously difficult to control. Though contraception methods such as condoms and vaginal douches were frequently mentioned in birth control pamphlets as far back as the 1840s, availability was limited only to “those with the knowledge and the money
to employ them…and then the ability to negotiate their use” (Hunt 44). Even when they were employed, they were unreliable at best and still required “a high degree of self-control by the couple” (Robinson 165). Malthus and his followers did not support these methods, as they worried that such efforts could “break the link between sexual pleasure, marriage and procreation,” which would “encourage immoral behavior and undermine the foundations of the family” (Robinson 164). The only way to remain a good Christian and to have some control over the size of your family was to “avoid premarital sex, to marry late and to control fertility within marriage through abstinence” (Robinson 164). Thanks in part to the new tools of contraception and the self-control urged by Malthus and his followers, starting in the 1860s, there was a noticeable decline in fertility. By the 1940s, the “average number of births per woman [fell] to a little over two from approximately six” (Hunt 44). This decline was most prominent among middle-class women, as lower-class women did not have the same access to information surrounding contraception, or the materials necessary to carry out those methods. They relied upon *coitus interruptus* and breastfeeding. Poor women were criticized by their doctors, here, too, as they claimed that protracted periods of nursing often led to an “exhausted frame and distorted general health” (Bull 37). Should pregnancy be unsuccessfully averted, there were still two ways women could deal with unwanted children: first, abortion, and second, infanticide.

Abortion and infanticide were viewed as actions which put women in the position of animals, where virtue was not an issue, and offspring could be discarded if they were inconvenient. Abortion was first made into a criminal offence in 1803, though a distinction was made between abortions before and after the quickening – “before quickening, abortion was punishable with a fine, corporal punishment, imprisonment, or transportation for up to
14 years. After quickening abortion was punishable by death” (Sauer 84). Though medicine had obviously improved by the time he published *A Manual of Midwifery*, Galabin noted that the most prominent symptoms of early pregnancy, the cessation of the menses, changes in the breasts, and morning sickness could easily be attributed to other causes, and were therefore “sufficient only to indicate the possibility of pregnancy” (Galabin 111). Internal examinations, which Galabin believed would allow a doctor to be far more certain of his diagnosis, could still leave room for uncertainty. Even if pregnancy was detected under these circumstances, it was impossible to discern whether or not the fetus was viable until the quickening occurred. If it was such a challenge to diagnose pregnancy at a more medically-developed point in the century, it must have been even more difficult to diagnose in 1803. A woman who had a pre-quickening abortion could not be guilty of a severe crime because, until the quickening, the fetus could not be said to be either living or dead. There was a possibility that the woman was only bringing an end to a “blockage of the menses,” rather than terminating a viable fetus. By 1837, the distinction between before and after the quickening was erased, and all abortion was punishable by death, though there is little evidence that women who sought out abortions were frequently – or ever – sentenced to execution.

While the personhood of the fetus was one of the reasons cited for abortion being totally outlawed, doctors also emphasized the potential dangers of abortions to women. As much as one-third of women who underwent an abortion procedure would die as a result (Robinson 165). Doctors were aware of this risk, with Thomas Bull warning in *Hints to Mothers* “abortion is…intentionally and wilfully effected, not unfrequently at a sacrifice which is never calculated upon — the death of the mother” (Bull 104). There was also no
access to anesthesia or antisepsis, making pain during and infection after the procedure a common experience. Though abortionists were punished, as well, and more severely than their patients, this was not a result of the law itself, but the people responsible for carrying it out. The British people took pity on the women on trial for abortion. Often, these were young unmarried women, calling to mind sympathetic literary figures like Elizabeth Gaskell’s Ruth Hilton and Thomas Hardy’s Tess Durbeyfield. If a married woman found herself on trial for receiving an abortion, she often cited economic troubles as her justification.

Infanticide was treated in a similar way to abortion, at least in the courts. Very few women were convicted of infanticide, and many who were convicted recieved lenient sentencing or were pardoned entirely. Though infanticide could be punished by hanging, from the 1850s on “no woman was hanged for the murder of her own infant under one year old, legitimate or illegitimate” (Higginbotham 323). Even in cases where evidence seemed to point towards an intent to kill, such as in the case of Ellen Trollope, a domestic servant, women were acquitted of murder. Evidence presented at Trollope’s trial showed that the infant’s “throat had been cut and its skull fractured,” but she was charged with concealment of birth – which “meant that the child had been born in secret, that it had died, and that its body had been hidden” (Higginbotham 327) – and served only “two weeks without hard labor” (Higginbotham 332). The accused woman in infanticide trials were often of the working class, mostly dressmakers, domestic servants, and factory workers, who could lose their positions if their condition was discovered. If they were not workers, they were often the mothers of large families who could not afford another mouth to feed. The lenient sentences of those accused of infanticide indicate that sympathy for these women was
wide-spread, but critics such as Thomas Wakeley and barrister William Griffith claimed that “unscrupulous unmarried mothers took advantage of the courts to commit murder, callously secure that they would not be punished” (Higginbotham 323). If the courts allowed this leniency towards infanticide to continue, then the English would “soon rival the Chinese in their callous attitude to infant life” (“On Some of the Circumstances Influencing the Practice of Exposure and Child-Murder in Different Ages”).

This comparison to the Chinese reveals the fear at the heart of the anxieties surrounding poor mothers. Should the middle class begin to follow their lead and reject motherhood, England would lose its status as a great nation and would be reduced to the status of a supposedly lesser nation. Poor women, therefore, had to be controlled in order to prevent the country’s downfall – or at least a decrease in the country’s power. Middle class women were threatened by the treatment of lower- and working-class women, reminded of what could become of them should they fail in their duties as mothers. Novels often explored this anxiety with a mix of sympathy and fear.
Chapter 4: The Fear of Imperfect Mothers in *Dracula* and *Liza of Lambeth*

The rise of the New Woman posed a threat to those who hoped to maintain, and grow, the power and size of the middle class. The problem arose, not from the New Woman’s insistence on rational dress and exercise, but her “frank and open” attitude toward sex and ambivalence to, or outright avoidance of maternity – “she felt free to initiate sexual relationships, to explore alternatives to marriage and motherhood, and to discuss sexual matters such as contraception and venereal disease” (Senf 35). This movement was not built to appeal to lower-class women, but to middle-class women. The lower classes did not have the funds to wear “irrational” clothing, they often worked jobs that required some degree of physical exertion, and they were assumed to already have a knowledge of sex. Worries began to rise that many middle-class women would begin to shirk their duties, while the lower classes would continue to reproduce. *Dracula* (1897) and *Liza of Lambeth* (1897) explore the same fears surrounding the possible degeneration of middle-class women to the same perceived animalism of lower-class women. While *Dracula* approaches this fear from a middle-class perspective, *Liza of Lambeth* is focused on the lower classes.

*Liza of Lambeth* was written while William Somerset Maugham was a medical student and an obstetric clerk at St. Thomas’s hospital in Lambeth, a working-class district in London. Maugham had no interest in actually pursuing a career in medicine, and only did so to get an experience of life that would allow him to become a better writer. Later critics would call *Liza* “the first English novel of consequence to treat the slums realistically and objectively” (qtd. in Peschel 78). It can therefore be assumed that Maugham was writing from experience when he described the crowded street on which Liza and her mother live, “the number of babies was prodigious; they sprawled about everywhere, on the pavement,
round the doors, and about their mothers’ skirts. The grown-ups…were invariably nursing babies, and most of them showed clear signs that the present object of the maternal care would be soon ousted by a new arrival” (Maugham 33). The number of children has rendered them unmanageable by their mothers, who are too occupied by the present, and future, babies to be worried about their older siblings. As such, they have the run of the streets. It can be assumed that these children are, therefore, not receiving the degree of care, and the education deemed proper by the middle-class. One mother has so many children that Liza’s mother, Mrs. Kemp, sees it as “a pity the Lord don’t see fit ter tike some on ‘em” (Maugham 46), though this is not because she sees the number of children as excessive, but because of the burden they have put on their mother.

In a blatant act of anti-Malthusianism, Mrs. Kemp, quoting her deceased husband, claims, “when a man can ‘ave a family risin’ into double figures, it shows ‘e’s got the backbone of a Briton in ‘im. That’s the stuff ‘as built up England’s nime and glory!” (Maugham 152). She expresses pride in having “come from a very prodigal family” (Maugham 152). Both Mrs. Kemp and all of her siblings had children “in ter double figures, except [Liza’s] Aunt Mary, who only ’ad three — but then she wasn’t married” (Maugham 151). She expects the same prodigiosity of Liza. “I’ve ‘ad thirteen children” she tells her daughter, “I shouldn’t wonder if you didn’t ’ave as many as me” (Maugham 151). Despite the trouble that she knows a large number of children can cause, she still accepts her now deceased husband’s proclamation that “every man’s fust duty is ter get as many children as ’e bloomin’ well can” (Maugham 152).

The working class are seen as having large sexual and literal appetites. Liza and many of her neighbors gather at Chingford for a meal. Before the meal, a coachman mocks
them, calling out, “the animals is now goin’ ter be fed” (Maugham 48). Once they begin to eat, they are said to “[devour] their provisions like ravening beasts [emph. added]...in large mouthfuls which they shoved down their throats unmasticated” (Maugham 48). In seeing their eating habits, “the intelligent foreigner...would have understood why England is a great nation. He would have understood why Britons never, never will be slaves. They never stopped except to drink, and then at each gulp they emptied their glass; no heel-taps!” (Maugham 48). They continue on in this way until there is no food or drink left. This way of eating is not about enjoying their food – if they are swallowing without ever chewing their food, it is likely passing through the mouth too quickly to be tasted. Their ravenous appetites are also associated with sexual desire, as once they have satisfied their hunger, they partner off and go into the woods together, “that they might discourse of their loves and digest their dinner” (Maugham 49). Tom, Liza’s friend who hopes to marry her, despite Liza’s own disinterest, “had counted on the expansive effect of a full stomach to thaw his Liza’s coldness, and he had pictured himself sitting on the grass with his back against the trunk of a spreading chestnut-tree, with his arm round his Liza’s waist, and her head resting affectionately on his manly bosom” (Maugham 49). Though Liza thwarts Tom’s attempts by inviting Jim Blakeston, with whom she will eventually have an affair, and his wife to take a walk with them, Liza still allows Tom to kiss her after he takes her home – though she is kissed by Jim “without resistance” only a short while later (Maugham 92).

The animal-nature of the working class is extended beyond their carnal desires and includes acts of violence. Jim Blakeston’s wife attacks Liza in the street for “robb[ing her] of [her] ‘usband,” calling the other woman “a prostitute” (Maugham 154). Liza pounces on Mrs. Blakeston with her fingers “spread like claws” and scratches down her cheeks,
drawing blood (Maugham 154). Despite the order Liza’s “seconds” try to bring about by calling “time!” and “showing her how to stand and hold her arms” (Maugham 154), the fight remains chaotic. Spurred on by the crowd that gathers, they become increasing more violent with one another, though most of their attacks remain focused on their finger-nails or teeth, “scratching, tearing, biting, sweat and blood pouring down their faces, and their eyes fixed on one another, bloodshot and full of rage” (Maugham 155). This fight mimics the kind of fight two animals might have over a mate, although reversed from what is considered natural, as it is two women fighting over a man.

In order to counteract the sheer number of working-class children being born, the middle class would need to assure that their women were ready and able to assume motherhood. Lucy Westenra is portrayed as the most desirable Victorian woman, gaining proposals of marriage from three men, implying that there is something about her that would make her a particularly good wife. Having come from a wealthier family, Lucy is able to attend the school at which Mina is a school-mistress, suggesting that she would have learned the “etiquette and decorum” Mina references teaching (Stoker 191). The word “sweet” is used to describe Lucy more than twenty times, both in regards to her appearance and to her disposition. Mina calls her “sweetly pretty,” especially when she is in “her white lawn frock” (Stoker 77), white being a common signifier of virtue, and of chastity in particular. Lucy’s three suitors do not call attention to her beauty when they propose to her, instead praising her virtue. Dr. John Seward hopes to win Lucy because he believes he will be “very unhappy” if he does not have her to “help and cheer him” (Stoker 69). He expects her to be capable of assuming the traditional wifely duties of the help-meet – caring for the husband – which would also be likely to make her a good potential mother. Quincey Morris says that it
is “better worth being late for a chance of winning [Lucy] than being in time for any other
girl in the world” (Stoker 71). He praises her honesty twice, calling her “honest-hearted”
(Stoker 71) and telling her that it is her “honesty and pluck” that won his favor (Stoker 72).

This is not to say that Lucy is an ideal woman. Though Mina admires Lucy for being
“so sweet and sensitive that she feels influences more acutely than other people do” (Stoker 102), she also “greatly fear[s] that she is of too supersensitive a nature to go through the
world without trouble” (Stoker 103). This fear is brought about when Lucy is left “full of
pity” after a man kicks his dog, “then took it by the scruff of the neck and half dragged and
half threw it on the tombstone on which the seat is fixed,” leaving the dog “crouched down,
quivering and cowering” (Stoker 102). Though Mina is also “very fond of animals” she is
not as impacted by the scene of abuse, calling it only “a little thing” (Stoker 102). The scene
inspires enough pity for her to take some action to soothe the dog, though she does so
“without effect’ (Stoker 102). Despite her own extreme pity for the dog, Lucy cannot bring
herself to try to soothe it, instead staring at it “in an agonized sort of way” (Stoker 103).
Unlike Mina, she does not see the pain as a separate experience, she feels it herself, putting
her in a state of agony similar to the dog’s, including the frozen stance. Like the
antivivisectionists, Lucy sees herself reflected in the figure of the suffering animal.

As Lucy heals following a brief period of illness, she gains “an appetite like a
cormorant,” which is large enough that Arthur tells Lucy that she is “getting fat” (Stoker 122). This is not the first time that Lucy’s weight has been mentioned, as Mina also
references Lucy growing “a trifle stouter” when she frets over the postponement of Arthur’s
arrival (Stoker 86). Even though women with fuller figures were preferred in the 1890s,
“stout” and “fat” still held negative connotations, suggesting a glutton rather than a
womanly figure. Lucy is not simply putting on flesh that she lost while in an anemic spell, she has become prone to overindulgence. However, Lucy has not entirely surrendered herself to her appetite – she is stouter, but not stout, she is getting fat, but cannot yet be said to be fat. Her softness is more indicative of her good health and high spirits, with descriptions of Lucy’s weight often immediately followed by a mention of her “lovely rose-pink” cheeks (Stoker 86) or her physical activity, such as the “walks and drives, and rides, and rowing, and tennis, and fishing” Lucy partakes in with Arthur (Stoker 122).

Lucy’s affection for her two rejected suitors verges beyond friendship. Despite Dr. Seward’s promise that “if [she] ever wanted a friend, [she] must count him one of [her] best” (Stoker 70) and Quincey’s statement that Lucy has “made [him] a friend” which is “rarer” and “more unselfish” than a lover, Lucy does not necessarily see the need for limiting her romantic connections. Even after she refuses Quincey, he still asks for “one kiss,” which Lucy gladly provides, since Quincey was “brave and sweet…and noble, too, to a rival…and he so sad” (Stoker 72). She writes to Mina, “why can’t they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?” (Stoker 72). This wish is eventually fulfilled in the blood transfusions given to Lucy by her three suitors, as well as Van Helsing. After giving Lucy his blood, Arthur feels “as if they two had been really married and that she was his wife in the sight of God” (Stoker 194). As Van Helsing identifies, this would make Lucy, “this sweet maid”, into a “polyandrist” (Stoker 196). If this were the case, she would also be unknowingly leading Van Helsing into sin, as, though his wife has “no wits,” he is still married to her “by Church’s law.” Though he abides by the Church’s law enough to be faithful to his wife, a spiritual marriage to Lucy would make him into a “bigamist” (Stoker 196). This mingling of blood is not only symbolic of the
consummation of marriage, but also hints at the presumed result of consummation: the birth of a child.

Lucy’s appetites – both literal hunger and a desire for sex – though strong in life are magnified by her vampirism. Her body is still soft, but “the purity” she once had has turned “to voluptuous wantonness” (Stoker 234). “Voluptuous” is first used to describe Lucy at the moment of her death, but rather than describing her body, she is said to have “a soft, voluptuous voice,” the likes of which Seward claims “[he] had never heard from her lips” (Stoker 180). She asks Arthur to kiss her, but when Van Helsing intervenes, throwing Arthur back from Lucy’s bedside, Lucy snarls like an animal, “a spasm as of rage flit[s] like a shadow over her face; the sharp teeth champed together” (Stoker 180). This moment is repeated when the troop encounters Lucy in the cemetery. With a “languorous, voluptuous grace” she calls out to Arthur, “Come to me, Arthur. Leave these others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you. Come, and we can rest together” (Stoker 234). This links her two appetites, as her desire to hold him is expressed as her arms “hungering” for him. Her true purpose, of course, is not intimacy of any kind, but to drink Arthur’s blood. The parallel between drinking blood and sexual activity is made earlier in the novel when Dracula’s three brides attempt to feed off of Johnathon, saying “he is young and strong; there are kisses enough for us all” (Stoker 49). The simultaneous fulfillment of a desire for sex and hunger cast the vampresses as prostitutes – Lucy, in particular, as she wanders the street at night as a literal “lady of the night.”

In giving into their carnality, the vampresses are viewed as little more than animals. While Johnathon watches from behind half-closed lashes as he is nearly ravished by Dracula’s brides, “the passage emphasizes the fearful and repulsive aspects of the sexual
relationship itself. In his mind the voluptuous woman is transformed into a carnivorous animal; and finally he reduces her to a mouth filled with sharp white teeth” which one bride presses up against his throat before Dracula interrupts (Senf 41). Later in the novel, when encountering her in the cemetery, Lucy’s suitors have the same response. When they first see her, she is clutching a child against her chest, “growling over it as a dog growls over a bone” but upon seeing them, “[draws] back with an angry snarl, such as a cat gives when taken unawares” (Stoker 234). This is a fulfillment of Lucy’s earlier sympathetic association with the kicked dog. Rather than simply seeing herself as being like an animal, she has become one herself.

Both Lucy and Dracula’s brides are thwarted in their attempts to feed off of men, and instead feed primarily on the blood of children. When Dracula catches his brides attempting to feed off of Johnathon, he offers instead a bag “which moved as though there were some living thing inside it” and, when one of the brides opens it, emits “a gasp and a low wail, as of a half-smothered child” (Stoker 51). The brides then close around and disappear with the bag. The still-squirming child, hidden within the bag and distinguishable only by its movements, calls to mind the fetus that cannot be said to be alive until the quickening has been felt. Carrying this child away to be drank from and killed, still within the bag, suggests a late-term abortion.

As the “bloofer lady”, Lucy lures young children away from their homes. They return home with wounds on their necks “such as might be made by a rat or small dog” (Stoker 198). The neighborhood children play a game where they emulate the bloofer lady and “[lure] each other away by wiles…even Ellen Terry could not be so winningly attractive as some of these grubby-faced little children pretend—and even imagine themselves—to
be” (Stoker 197-198). As a good mother might, Lucy has begun to have an impact on the children, though it is for her own benefit, not theirs. This is made especially clear when Lucy, upon seeing her suitors approaching, “[flings] to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast” (Stoker 234). The possibility of seducing a man – of getting a larger meal – is of greater importance than the child.

The vampires are not just threats to children, they are themselves child-like. Dracula is said to have a “child-brain” (Stoker 376). When Mina is under Dracula’s control, she begins to behave like a child. After she is bitten by Dracula, Jonathan says that Mina sleeps “like a child” (Stoker 358) or “like a little child” (Stoker 359). Vampirism is passed through the drinking of blood, but not, as is seen in many other works, by the vampire drinking its victim’s blood. Rather, vampirism is allowed to take root when the victim drinks the vampire’s blood. The one time this act is seen on the page is when Dracula attacks Mina “his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom...a thin stream [of blood] trickled down the man’s bare breast...The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten’s nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink” (Stoker 311). Dracula feeding Mina from his chest is reminiscent of breastfeeding. The act’s similarity to a kitten having its face held into a bowl of milk creates the necessary parallel between blood and milk. The act could also be compared to the blood transfusions given to Lucy by her suitors and Van Helsing.

Though Mina is shown to have the same appetites as Lucy, she never surrenders to carnality, and therefore never fully succumbs to vampirism. She eats alongside Lucy and writes in her diary that they “should have shocked the “New Woman” with [their] appetites
(Stoker 103). She is even suggested to have sexual desires that go beyond what is proper. On a walk through London, “Jonathan [holds Mina] by the arm, the way he used to in old days before [she] went to school.” Mina notes that this action is “very improper”, but does not let the shame of it “[bite] into [her]” (Stoker 191), since she and Jonathan are married. Even if they are married now, at one point, before they were married, they had gone about in the same manner. Nonetheless, Mina never rejects her traditional role as a submissive wife – “she learns shorthand and train schedules so she can help Jonathan in his work, but she generally chooses to remain supportively in the background except when he asks her for assistance” (Senf 46). Mina sees motherhood as an inevitability for her, coming from an innate aspect of her character, “we women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother-spirit is invoked” (Stoker 254). When Arthur cries in front of her, she comforts him by letting him rest his head against her shoulder. This makes her think of “the baby that some day may lie on [her] bosom” as she “stroke[s] his hair as though he were [her] own child” (Stoker 254). After the defeat of Dracula, the novel skips over the physical aspects of maternity: Mina’s pregnancy, the birth of her son, and nursing or breastfeeding, signifying Mina’s triumph over the body.

Though she does lead the troop to Dracula, Mina has little to do with Dracula’s ultimate defeat. In the end, it is the men who are responsible for ending a threat which has, primarily, affected women. Women, on the other hand, are likely to cause trouble. Lucy’s mother clears away the garlic flowers that would have kept Dracula from entering Lucy’s room, then leaves the window open. A maid steals the crucifix that would have kept Lucy from transforming into a vampire. Mina is only able to be of help because “she has man’s brain—a brain that a man should have were he much gifted—and a woman’s heart” (Stoker
However, once Van Helsing decides that “after to-night she must not have to do with this so terrible affair,” Mina must “say good-bye to this work” (Stoker 259). He worries that “her heart may fail her in so much and so many horrors; and hereafter she may suffer—both in waking, from her nerves, and in sleep, from her dreams” (Stoker 260). The only other person Van Helsing looks to for approval is Seward, the only other doctor in the group, rather than to Mina, herself, or at least her husband, though Johnathon does later say that he is “truly thankful that she is to be left out of our future work, and even of our deliberations” (Stoker 195). The decision to leave Mina out of their work echoes an earlier conversation Van Helsing and Seward had, when Seward first told Van Helsing of Lucy’s illness. Van Helsing urges Seward to keep some thoughts to himself, reminding him, “you tell not your madmen what you do nor why you do it; you tell them not what you think. So you shall keep knowledge in its place, where it may rest—where it may gather its kind around it and breed” (Stoker 135). They must wait to tell until they have reached some degree of certainty about their thoughts. Likewise, “the work [of defeating Dracula] is to be a sealed book to [Mina], till at least such time as we can tell her that all is finished, and the earth free from a monster of the nether world” (Stoker 274). For Mina to know this information would put knowledge “out of place,” even though it is knowledge which directly affects her – it is not long after being excluded from the work that Dracula feeds Mina his blood.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the concept of the mother shifted further away from the eighteenth century ideal. Rather than the bodily processes of pregnancy and childbirth, mothers were increasingly associated with the work of “mothering” – that is, of educating and influencing the child. Working class women, regarded as closer to nature, did not experience the same shift. Instead, they assumed everything that the middle-class
mothers cast off. They were made so bodily that they became almost animal. *Wuthering Heights* critiqued this dynamic, suggesting that middle- and upper-class women were still situated within the body, and were often incapable of the work of “mothering.” It also responded to the idea that pregnancy and childbirth did not need to be feared, as two women die as a direct result of childbirth. *Liza of Lambeth* reveals the fears that surrounded lower-class mothers, showing the animalistic image that middle-class audiences expected. *Dracula* finds in motherhood (and its degeneration) an object of Gothic horror, but finds in medical men a solution to those fears.
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