WOMEN WRITING MEN: FEMALE VICTORIAN AUTHORS AND THEIR REPRESENTATIONS OF MASCULINITY

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Women Writing Men: Female Victorian Authors and their Representations of Masculinity

Introduction

The arguments in this dissertation rest upon the concept that gender is a social construct, as well as how the representations of gender in media (specifically, for the purposes of this dissertation, literature) play a role in how these constructed gender identities are “lived” in the daily lives of individuals. This dissertation will focus on texts written by female Victorian authors in an effort to examine how and why these authors contributed to the ever-changing definition of appropriate male gender identities at a time when the expanding middle-class, changes in industry and science, and the education of children of all social classes increased the debate over gender roles for men and women. Even more precisely, my focus is on the contributions made by female Victorian authors to the construction of masculinities in different literary genres, including the social-problem novel (Elizabeth Gaskell), sensation fiction (Mary Elizabeth Braddon), and children’s literature (Dinah Mulock Craik, Juliana Horatia Ewing, and Edith Nesbit). These female authors intervened in the debate over the appropriate gender roles for men from various social classes and in various stages of life by creating, endorsing, or condemning certain characteristics of what make an appropriate male gender identity. Furthermore, these texts are not merely reflective of contemporary common assumptions and beliefs relating to masculinities. Rather, they participate in the ongoing discursive construction of Victorian male gender identity. In terms of their representations of masculinities, the texts covered in this dissertation are, in the words of Stephen

I will argue that female authors in the Victorian period took part in this struggle over re/defining hegemonic male gender identity in different ways, in different genres, for different purposes. Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* and *North and South* intervene seek to ensure middle-class dominance over the working classes. Braddon’s novels *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* illustrate the unnaturalness of gender (and thus to call into question notions of “natural” differences between men and women, or men and other men) and broaden the definition of acceptable gender identities for men and, by extension, women. The authors of late-period children’s literature created texts that either changed or shield from change both male and female gender identities in an effort to define the proper way to educate children during a time when gender roles were undergoing changes due to innovations in industry, education, and calls for equal rights for women and non-hegemonic men.

The arguments in this dissertation rest upon the assumption that gender identities are not a naturally occurring aspect of one’s being. Rather, gender identities are entirely created, constructed, performed, and contested through language, appearance, and behavior. Judith Butler tells us that, “[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender... identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (25). Thus, gender is performative in that these “expressions” (linguistic, physical, visual) form the sum total of gender identity. There is no innate gender identity, only the expression of gender through this performance. Gender is performed through language (as a form of speech act), bodily (in terms of one’s appearance), and also
through one’s actions. As I will show, masculine gender identities for Victorian men often relied upon the ability to display a strong work-ethic, be employed, and financially provide for others (children, women, as well as unmasculine men). Furthermore, the definitions of what constitutes “appropriate” gender roles for men and women of different social classes, ethnicities, sexualities, geographic locations, and even in different situations throughout one’s day (whether they are at work, at home, tending to the sick, watching over children, etc) are constantly changing.

Greenblatt’s term “self-fashioning” helps us understand how individuals constructed and performed their gender identity, as well as how literature functions in that construction. Similar to Butler’s argument concerning gender, Clifford Geertz tells us that “[t]here is no such thing as human nature independent of culture” (49) and that culture is defined as “a set of control mechanisms…for the governing of behavior” (44). Based on these ideas concerning the primary importance of culture in our lives, Greenblatt defines self-fashioning as “the cultural system of meanings that creates specific individuals by governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment” (3-4). Furthermore, according to Greenblatt, literature operates in this system in three specific ways: “as a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon these codes” (4). Thus literature is more than just fodder for literary biography, nor is it purely a set of rules and instructions on how to behave, and neither is it merely a reflection of currently existing rules and instructions. Instead, it operates as all three. When authors go beyond merely reflecting current conceptions of gender, and start to put forth ideas about gender identity that coincide with their interests, these newer
definitions of gender identity are conceived and made “real.” Thus, the individual is exposed to this constructed gender identity and understands this construction as “real” in the sense of what they could or should be (or could not or should not be) in terms of their masculinity or femininity.

This process of identification is similar to Butler’s modification of Althusser’s concept of interpellation. Furthermore, the identification experienced by the individual in recognizing one’s own gender identity in a text, or identifies a desirable or undesirable gender identity in that text, enables the possibility of contesting and changing dominant, hegemonic gender identities. Althusser posited that the abstract individual is subjectivated (Butler’s term) when “hailed” or recognized by ideological forces. This is both a recognition and a reprimand as the process of interpellation, according to Butler, conjectures “the power and force of the law to compel fear at the same time that if offers recognition at an expense” (Bodies that Matter, 121). Added to Althusser’s concept—and focusing specifically on gender identity—Butler suggests the possibility of gender disobedience and subverting this process of interpellation through the repetition of terms such as “sex,” “masculine,” or “feminine” that “ought to be repeated in directions that reverse and displace their originating aims” (123). While Butler is referring to the general (and abstract) individual here, my use of this argument is specifically directed towards the authors of the texts analyzed in this dissertation. It is the authors who, when contesting or redefining dominant conceptions of masculinity, attempt to “reverse and displace” what they see as unsatisfying definitions of appropriate masculine gender identity so that their audience can, in turn, acknowledge new definitions of masculinity, thus eventually redefining hegemonic masculinities.
What, then, does this say about individual agency—the agency of the text’s reader? Butler’s theories have been criticized for underestimating the role of agency in performing one’s gender identity. For example, Seyla Benhabib argues that Butler seems to give little credence to the idea of agency as she diminishes notions of “intentionality, accountability, self-reflexivity, and autonomy” (20-21). While noting that Butler has gone on to somewhat modify her beliefs concerning agency in recent years, and that she “does not deny agency all together,” Kathy Dow Magnus suggests that “neither does she adequately convey the extent to which a ‘subject’ may work to determine herself in accordance with her own desires and purposes” (82). Despite the various differences between the authors covered in this dissertation, one very significant similarity is that they all convey a strong belief in the awareness of the individual in performing masculinity. The awareness of one’s own performance—and one’s desire to perform—is critical in establishing a link between the author’s purpose in constructing definitions of masculinity and the author’s belief in their audience’s ability to be influenced by the text. Partly, the authority of the author exists because the words used in the text create a gender identity that can be recognized by its audience as valid—and, perhaps, desirable/undesirable—merely due it its existence on the printed page. Through the text’s representations of masculinity the audience can see themselves (or they desire to), and also become aware of themselves being seen. “That is me,” or “that is who I wish to be,” or “that is who I should be.” Gender identities are made real through the text, and the audience’s gender identity is challenged by the authority of the printed word (as well as the supposed authority of the supposedly knowledgeable author). The audience then internalizes—just as Foucault suggests—these representations as valid, desirable, or
undesirable and then imitates these representations by modifying their gender performance accordingly.

Foucault tells us that "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Discipline 202-203). This is not to say that all discourses operate equally, or that all conceptions of masculine gender identity compete equally for a dominant status, but that these conceptions can change dominant representations of masculinity. This belief allows the text to interpellate its audience, and expect that its audience, in turn, recognize their own performance as something malleable. This is seen in Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* and *North and South* where middle class men are urged to change their attitudes towards providing care for the poor will not threaten their masculine authority. It is seen in Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* where it is acknowledged that masculine gender identity (or, at least middle-class masculinity) is entirely constructed by providing details on how to perform this construction. It is seen in the authors of late-Victorian children’s literature who all place a great amount of emphasis on how children are raised in determining the type of gender identity their children will grow up to perform.

It becomes apparent then that the language of the novel is really about power relations and the process of normalization. As I will show, the representations of masculinity in these novels construct appropriate and inappropriate conceptions of male gender identity for the reader as a way of establishing what is considered normal (and therefore desirable) in terms of gender identity. For the individual there is no real
difference between their lived lives and the lives of fictional characters. According to Greenblatt, self-fashioning
functions without regard for a sharp distinction between literature and social life...between the creation of literary characters, the shaping of one’s own identity, the experience of being molded by forces outside one’s control, the attempt to fashion other selves” (3).

In this way these novels function similarly to what Foucault calls the “normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possibly to qualify, to classify, and to punish” (184). The edifying power of literature is an element that links the different genres of Victorian fiction that I will explore in this dissertation (the social-problem novel, sensation fiction, mid-to-late period Children’s literature). It is through this edification that ideas of what constitutes “normal” male gender identity appear to endorse or contest current hegemonic conceptions of masculinity, as well as the threat of punishment for performing inappropriate, non-hegemonic masculinities. Through the language of novels, these authors seek to construct various masculinities in different ways. Elizabeth Gaskell focuses on the middle and upper classes in instructing them on how best to handle the poor, as well as illustrating the dangers for working-class men of failing to live up to their gendered responsibilities. Mary Elizabeth Braddon simultaneously details the method of constructing one’s middle-class masculinity appropriately in addition to contesting certain requirements of that performance in an effort to allow a greater variety of masculinities to successfully enter into the social sphere. The authors of children’s literature that I will examine in Chapter 4 are perhaps the most directly didactic in their efforts to instruct growing boys and parents of boys on how to best construct and
eventually perform an appropriate adult masculinity, and, like Gaskell, show what happens to boys whose masculinity is constructed incorrectly.

All of the texts covered in this dissertation display a great amount of confidence in the power of literature to shape gender identity. Greenblatt argues that “[s]elf-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language” (9). The language of literature plays a distinct role in this process of constructing and performing one’s gender identity. Though fictional, (and, again, because the space between fictional creation and the individual is a distinction without a difference for the authors and the audience) the male characters in novels covered in this dissertation help govern the individual from abstract potential to concrete reality in terms of how masculinity is lived in the everyday world. While pamphlets, medical journals, and conduct books can instruct the reader on ideal appropriate conduct (or, conversely, warn against inappropriate conduct) for men, women, boys, and girls, these texts can often function in the abstract. R.W. Connell reminds us that “[t]o understand both everyday and scientific accounts of masculinity we cannot remain at the level of pure ideas, but must look at their practical bases” (5). The belief held by these authors in the power of literature is enables them to position fictional men in the real world under the assumption that these characters are therefore able to “live out” these ideas of what is and what is not appropriate in performing one’s male gender identity.

My use of the terms “hegemonic” and “non-hegemonic masculinity” requires a brief explanation before applying those terms to my analysis of specific texts. The concept of a hegemonic masculinity rests upon the idea that there are multiple masculinities (based on race, class, and other variants), and that these masculinities are
engaged in power relations. Numerous ethnographic studies confirmed for Connell “the plurality of masculinities and the complexities of gender construction for men, and gave evidence for the active struggle for dominance that is implicit in the Gramscian concept of hegemony” (832). This active struggle for dominance fundamentally includes redefining what a “normal” male gender identity should be, and how those masculinities should be performed in the daily lives of men. Connell points out that hegemonic masculinity might not reflect the majority of men’s gender identities, but that it “embodied the currently most honored way of being a man” (832). In other words, it was the ideal masculinity that men should aspire to, and this ideal would be illustrated through “culture, institutions, and persuasion” (832).

Connell goes on to suggest that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is ever-changing. Since gender relations were historical, so gender hierarchies were subject to change. Hegemonic masculinities therefore came into existence in specific circumstances and were open to historical change. More precisely, there could be a struggle for hegemony, and older forms of masculinity might be displaced by new ones. (832-833)

This dissertation will focus on how and why conceptions of masculinity changed during the Victorian period, and specifically how female authors contributed to that change.

In *Victorian Masculinities*, Herbert Sussman provides a number of useful concepts and terms concerning nineteenth-century masculine gender identity, and in this dissertation I will adopt a number of them, specifically his use of “maleness” “masculinity” and “manhood.” While the term “male” is only used in the biological
sense, maleness designates a fantasy of essential masculinity that was understood by most Victorians as being innate. In Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* and *North and South* working and middle-class male characters illustrate this concept of maleness when they believe they are acting as men innately should. Barton’s work-ethic and Carson’s business acumen represent their respective class-based maleness. Masculinities, on the other hand, are the social constructions, or the actual performances of maleness that are based on race, class, political affiliation, and sexual preference. Finally, manhood, as defined by Sussman, is the achievement of masculinity. As opposed to the fantasy of maleness, manhood is “not innate but is the result of arduous public or private ritual and, for the Victorian bourgeois, of continued demanding self-discipline” (13). The distinctions between these terms help us understand how maleness, or the fantasized essential innate nature of men (often described by Victorians in terms of an innate energy) is actually achieved (i.e. recognized by others) through public and private ritual, and through the degrees of control required by a man’s class, race, and social affiliation. Braddon’s depiction of Robert Audley, and the anxiety he feels over not achieving manhood-status, directly illustrates how this concept of manhood is not guaranteed to every man, but must be achieved through proper action and thought. Nesbit’s portrayal of childhood middle-class masculinities illustrates the proper development towards achieving manhood, while also warning against improper masculine development.

The first chapter concerns the construction of Victorian masculinities. What characteristics defined hegemonic concepts of masculinity, and for whom? How did these constructions change depending on class, location, and other variants? I will illustrate how masculinities were defined in Victorian literature by the ideology of separate spheres
that placed men in the social sphere and women in the domestic. The visibility of masculinity will be examined in order to show the importance of appearing masculine, as well as displaying a strong and active physicality. Finally, I will argue why it is important to examine female-authored fiction concerning masculinity. The contributions of female authors to the conceptions of Victorian masculinities provide a fuller understanding of how male gender identities were shaped, performed, and contested, and the increasing role female authors play in the realm of Victorian literature is illustrated in their attempts to influence men and not only women.

The second chapter will examine Gaskell’s novels and their depictions of adult working and middle-class masculinity, as well as masculinity’s relationship to the domestic sphere. A major aspect of masculine development centers around male characters’ effort to achieve (and continue to hold) patriarchal status, and Gaskell’s novels represent this effort for working and middle-class men in terms of economic control: over a household, over the behavior of relative, over one’s own behavior, and finally, over the marketplace. In the context of gender issues related to the Industrial Revolution, Elizabeth Gaskell’s portrayal of the necessity of middle-class intervention into the lives of the working-poor in *Mary Barton* and *North and South* is a reinscription of hegemonic masculinities that places authority and power into the hands of middle and upper-class men in order to help solve issues of poverty and class tension. Conversely her representation of aberrant masculinities, of which *North and South*’s Frederick Hales is an example, is critical of how national identity and masculinity are linked in the hegemonic construction of masculinity that endows middle and upper-class men with authority.
Mary Barton and North and South depict a crisis of adult masculine identity as characters like John Barton struggle with their ambiguous working-class gender identity. Barton represents the Victorian working-class definition of adult masculinity that is strictly defined as one who works during the day, provides economically for his entire family (both immediate and distant relatives), and who closely governs the actions of those female relatives. Throughout Mary Barton and North and South working-class men are shown to be independent, active, and dominant in their working-class surroundings, yet Gaskell positions them so that they are also fundamentally dependent upon middle-class men for labor, health care, and the cultivation of their intellect. Middle-class men in these novels are defined less by their relation to feminine gender roles, and more by their ability to be providers and caretakers for their families and their workers. Gaskell constructs working-class men to be simultaneously independent and dependent by representing their gender identity as more fluid (in contrast to more strict gender divisions for the middle and upper-classes), and by showing the strong maternal influence in the development of their gender identity. Furthermore, Gaskell strengthens patriarchal dominance in these novels by representing women from both classes as they take an active and strong position yet do so only to reestablish masculine rule. Whether it is Mary Barton struggling to prove Jem’s innocence as he is charged with murder, or Margaret Hale standing between Thornton and the rioting workers, Gaskell’s women intervene in this “crisis of masculinity” for the sole purpose of re-establishing male dominance.

The third chapter will focus on Braddon’s novels as they represent a crucial (and newly developed) category of masculine development: the adolescent/young adult man. Just as Gaskell’s industrial novels reflected an interest in delineating middle and
working-class masculinities to argue for the necessity of middle-class intervention in the lives of the poor, Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* address the middle and upper-class reader, instructing them in how to construct male and female gender identities. By directly illustrating how gender identity is constructed, Braddon reveals the unnaturalness of gender identity, and undermines notions of inherent or “natural” gender roles. In terms of middle-class conceptions of masculinity, Braddon’s novels focus on the importance of physical and mental activity (specifically ratiocination), determination, hard-work (mental and/or physical), and the stabilizing function of marriage and family. Braddon associates all of these attributes with the concept of controlling male energy so that it can be channeled in appropriate ways. For female upper and middle-class readers, these two novels argue for the role of women in coercing men through the promise of sex, as well as through guilt and shame, into performing hegemonic middle-class masculinities.

*Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* are normally categorized as Victorian sensation novels, and works in this genre often simultaneously contest social norms, and, ultimately, are forced to conform to those original societal restrictions. The popularity of the genre, and specifically the growing literate populace in Britain, combined with relatively unconventional and scandalous subject matter, allowed authors like Braddon to both represent alternative conceptions of gender and to instruct a wider audience on conventional gender roles. Concerning her representations of mid-century Victorian middle-class masculinity, Braddon’s novels present the anxiety-producing unmasculine middle-class man, who is often inactive, lazy, and unconcerned with work or marriage, characteristics that are more often used in describing aristocratic masculinity.
Furthermore, these novels depict women as key components of this growth into proper masculinity by positioning them as overseer and disciplinarian to those men who do not fit hegemonic conceptions of middle-class masculinity. Similar to Gaskell’s argument for male middle-class intervention into the lives of the poor, Braddon sees middle-class women as crucial components of middle-class men’s ascension into adult masculinity, not just through sex, marriage, or child-rearing, but through their ability to observe, induce shame, and perform muse-like functions as they inspire a stronger work-ethic in men. Through the popularity of the sensation novel in the 1860’s and beyond, many authors took advantage of the genre’s scandalous and controversial subject matter to question the status quo. Here women authors were also equally subversive and conventional in their representation of gender issues, and especially male gender identity. Braddon’s depicts Robert Audley, the protagonist of Lady Audley’s Secret, in his efforts to normalize his active and heterosexual middle-class masculine gender identity, showing the consequences of this enforced gender identity. Alongside this appears Braddon’s subversive portrayal (in its call for authenticity) of a disabled masculine working-class identity in Aurora Floyd.

The fourth chapter will cover the first stage of masculine development by focusing on novels by Dinah Maria Craik, Juliana Horatia Ewing, and Edith Nesbit. In a landmark study of Victorian children’s fiction, J.S. Bratton reminds us that nineteenth-century children’s fiction was infused with “the intention of conveying moral instruction” (11). However, as the century progressed children’s literature became more varied in its subject matter. Regardless of whether these works for children focused on edifying (what a character in Edith Nesbit’s The Wouldbegoods calls “improving books”) or merely
amusing their readers, Victorian women found that this genre was especially welcoming to them, and the number of female children’s literature authors grew faster than their male counterparts. As with Gaskell and Braddon, Victorian female authors of children’s literature often walked a fine line between representing conventional depictions of masculinity, and simultaneously challenging those hegemonic conceptions of masculine gender identity in their novels. Specifically, it is the late-period children’s literature authors who began focusing more specifically on male and female gender roles, and whose representations of masculinity become the most complicated and therefore the most interesting. As I will show, as the century came nearer to a close, women authors writing children’s literature were often Janus-faced as they looked backwards in the century in presenting earlier, more conventionally masculine gender identities as well as representing increasingly challenging and progressive forms of masculinity. Even the authors of late-period children’s literature, such as Dinah Mulock Craik, Juliana Horatia Ewing, and Edith Nesbit, alternate between regressive, backwards-looking portrayals of masculinity and subversive and progressive representations that include disabled men, feminine boys, and potential paradigms of masculine development that allow for aberrant masculinities.
Chapter One

Women Authors and Victorian Masculinities

We do not often think of women authors writing men. We do not often discuss how texts written by female authors construct new models of masculine gender identity, respond to current definitions of appropriate masculine roles and responsibilities, or support hegemonic masculinities by representing certain characteristics in their male characters. The specific examination of female-authored representations of masculinity in nineteenth-century British novels demonstrates how these texts contributed to discourses concerning male gender roles. The role of author allowed women to present their ideas about conventional women’s topics such as those relating to the domestic sphere, child-raising, and the roles of daughter/wife/mother. In addition, some female authors entered into the discourse concerning conventionally male-dominated topics such as labor relations, in Elizabeth Gaskell’s case, or the proper development of middle-class males of all ages, as we see in Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Edith Nesbit.

I have identified three specific reasons for examining women writing men. First, during this period of massive changes in gender roles, female as well as male writers were compelled to address anxieties over appropriate gender identities because they held a vested interest in either perpetuating male dominance (if they believed that a male-dominated society was proper or natural) or redefining gender roles that challenged the patriarchal system. If we complicate our understanding of Victorian women writers in terms of their representations of female characters and issues of femininity and women’s rights, then we should do the same concerning their representation of masculinity and male characters since the contribution of these authors to the construction of masculinity
was crucial in defining appropriate and inappropriate male gender identities. So far the contribution of female authors to notions of appropriate/inappropriate masculinity has been largely overlooked in the study of Victorian-era literature.

Secondly, we must recognize that the construction of female gender identities influenced the construction of male gender identities, and vice versa. Because of the interdependence of female and male gender roles, the new, sometimes subversive, masculine gender identities represented in these texts challenged not only hegemonic conceptions of masculinity, but, by extension, femininity. The focus only on one side of this equation ignores the symbiotic relationship between the construction of male and female gender identities. One cannot be examined without the other. Obviously, there is a rich history of scholarship focusing on the ways that Victorian-era female authors dealt with issues of femininity, women’s rights, and the position of women in British society. Yet, if this examination were to be comprehensive then we cannot ignore how these representations of female gender identities must also contribute to redefining male gender identities as well.

Thirdly, representations of masculinities found in texts written by Victorian women authors illustrate an attempt to negotiate a place for female authors within a male-dominated industry specifically and within a male-dominated society in general. In looking at female-authored representations of masculinity in nineteenth-century British novels we find what Mary Louise Pratt refers to as a contact zone. According to Pratt, these zones are “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (34). In male-dominated Victorian society, female-authored representations of masculinity must deal with the
dominant representations of male gender identity represented by men, and that they must do it, as Pratt describes, through a process wherein they “select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture” (36). This follows Judith Butler’s theory of how texts work against hegemony by repeating and perverting the language found in the dominant discourse. However, we also find that these texts written by female authors occasionally adopt these “materials transmitted by a dominant…culture” to reinforce patriarchy rather than attempting to subvert and disrupt the gender hierarchy.

The title of my dissertation comes from Lyn Pykett’s influential article “Women Writing Woman: Nineteenth-century Representations of Gender and Sexuality.” It is not just the title that will influence this work, but also the questions asked by Pykett in her analysis of female-authored Victorian fiction. In her study of Braddon, Pykett has identified the “big question” that haunts current assessments of nineteenth-century authors, and specifically women authors of that period:

Is the writer or genre (or any other cultural phenomenon one might care to substitute) that is “recovered” by the modern (or postmodern) cultural historian a radical or a conservative, an interrogator or a reinscriber, part of the problem or part of the solution (however one is minded to define both “problem” and “solution”)? (Beyond Sensation 279)

In order to understand the complexities of women-authored Victorian fiction, Pykett suggests that we must move beyond simplistic binaries that categorize these authors as only progressive or conservative when their work was often more complex than is suggested by this binary. Voicing a similar concern, Nicola Diane Thompson suggests that we move the critical conversation regarding Victorian women writers away from
binary oppositions such as feminist/antifeminist, conservative/radical, or
progressive/reactionary in order to better appreciate the “the complexity of the
historically specific discourses and contexts in which the novels are embedded” (4).
Instead of placing authors or their texts in restrictive categories that reflect black or
white, either/or ways of thinking, we should attempt to understand whether these texts
represented masculine gender identities in backwards or forward-looking ways in order to
understand how these texts were functioning in their society. Therefore, while the texts
covered in this dissertation may present progressive or reactionary representations of
masculinity (sometimes simultaneously), they are doing so in very complex ways that
reflect and contribute to contemporary anxieties and concerns. In other words, these texts
are not merely progressive or reactionary, they are representing masculinities that
sometimes reflect aspects of the current patriarchal order while simultaneously
attempting to disrupt other aspects of that system, and we must examine these
representations in order to understand how they are doing so.

In addition, these authors are negotiating their roles as female authors within with
a male-dominated society, and, specifically, a male-dominated industry. Early in the
article Pykett asks,

[w]hat kinds of narratives about women, gender and sexuality did women
write once they had the advantage of telling their own story in fiction,
poetry, magazine articles, conduct books, pamphlets, biographies and
autobiographies? Were these stories in fact their own, or did the women
writers of the nineteenth century still write to a male or masculinist script?
(78)
This analysis opens the door to an examination of women-authored representations of men. It is this door that I wished to push open further, allowing a better understanding of how Victorian women wrote men, and how these representations coincided with or collided against hegemonic masculinities. I want to examine how the texts covered in this dissertation broke new ground in presenting non-normative masculinities, or even how these texts occasionally stuck to a masculinist script. Since the texts covered in this dissertation often simultaneously represent new modes of masculinity and echo conventionally male gender roles when entering into the discourse concerning masculine gender identities, Pykett’s appeal to move beyond restricting binaries allow us to understand the complicated role played by women novelists in the Victorian period, and the convoluted and contradictory ways that literature functioned in changing and/or solidifying conventional definitions of gender roles.

Why, then, has very little been written about concerning Victorian women-authored representations of masculinity? Perhaps one could assume a reason for this omission is that women’s position (and the position of female authors specifically) in Victorian society excluded them from influencing the male-dominated social sphere in any significant way. However, Pykett argues against this notion when she writes that “participation in the cultural domain—and particularly writing—was one of the most significant ways in which nineteenth-century women could shape and change how they understood their own gender and sexuality, and how these were understood generally,” (emphasis mine, 79). By “understood their own” Pykett suggests that nineteenth-century women writers believed that they could theoretically shape how women understood their own gender identities and sexuality. Certainly this point is valid since novel writing in the
nineteenth century became the dominant form of literature, and many women found access to the literary world through the writing of novels. The roles of individual women authors in the nineteenth century are varied in terms of success, reputation, and reception, yet it would be difficult to argue against the idea that the novel provided women with a unique access to the social sphere; access that at least presented the possibility of influencing public thought as well as government policy. This is not to say that women authors as a whole were as influential, as well-received, or had their writing read as seriously as men, but that the possibility of gender equality through the writing of novels was indeed perceived by many women. George Eliot, in her well-known critique of “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” argues this exact point when she states that

[h]appily, we are not dependent on argument to prove that Fiction is a department of literature in which women can, after their kind, fully equal men. A cluster of great names, both living and dead, rush to our memories in evidence that women can produce novels not only fine, but among the very finest; -- novels, too, that have a precious specialty, lying quite apart from masculine aptitudes and experience. (17)

Eliot’s argument that women “can” produce works of fiction that are just as valuable, or more so, as male-authored novels lends credence to Pykett’s position that women’s writing could (and, in her estimation, did) help shape and change how women understood their own gender.

However, Pykett’s argument goes further to posit the idea that women could not only help “understand their own” beliefs and attitudes about women’s gender and sexuality, but that they could also change how women’s gender identities and sexualities
were “understood generally.” With this phrase Pykett argues that women-authored fiction also shaped how men and society-at-large (“generally”) understood women’s roles. If this were so, and I certainly do not argue with this point, why then should we not assume that women writers could shape how women (“their own”) understood men and masculinity? And even how women writers could shape and change how men (“generally”) understand their own sexuality? The works written by Gaskell, Braddon, Craik, Ewing, and Nesbit contributed to representations of nineteenth-century male and female gender identities by presenting masculine gender identity that sometimes supported conventional hegemonic masculinity, and other times sought to re-define those male gender roles for different purposes in different genres.

Pykett argues that Victorian women’s writing was “to a great extent shaped by male-controlled or masculinist institutions of publishing and by a gendered critical discourse which was fairly comprehensively internalized by female writers and reviewers” (79). I follow this argument by suggesting that the texts written by the Victorian women authors covered in this dissertation often represent a masculinist gendered critical discourse, resulting in their occasional depictions of masculinity that repeated and endorsed hegemonic conceptions of masculinity even if those conceptions placed women in subservient and unequal positions. However, these texts also strategically argue for the legitimacy of new masculinities that work against hegemonic male gender identities in terms of effeminacy, beauty, disability, sexuality, and a profession/work-ethic.

This type of examination may not lead to simple conclusions, but it will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the intricacies involved in reading novels written
by Victorian women authors. Through analyzing the complex ways masculinities are represented in these texts, and understanding the complexities of the contexts in which these novels appeared, the answer to whether they are radical or conservative, feminist or antifeminist, progressive or reactionary is very often a clear, yet potentially unsatisfying, “Both.” A look at female-authored representations of masculinity in the Victorian period shows that these texts, at times, contest as well as support hegemonic definitions of masculine gender identity for the working, middle, and upper-classes. These conservative and radical representations of masculine gender identity illustrate how these texts helped shape and (re-)shape male gender identity during the nineteenth century, and how the representations varied depending on the genre in which they were written.

Victorian male authors, such as Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, and George Gissing, to name a few, were intensely interested in questions concerning manliness and the nature of masculinity. While these authors sometimes perpetuated cultural norms in their representations of male characters, they also presented subversive, counter-hegemonic representations of masculinity that argued for newer definitions of appropriate male gender roles. Alongside representations of dominant, physically active, heterosexual men who displayed a strong work-ethic, there were representations by these male authors of men who did not fit those rigidly define gender characteristics. For every David Copperfield, there is a Mr. Micawber. For every glorification of a masculinity defined by being hard-working, active, and present in the social realm (what Thomas Carlyle called the “captains of industry,”) there were characters like Augustus Melmotte. For every Angel Clare there appears a Dorian Gray.
Concerning representations of masculinity, we see similar variation in texts written by female authors. The texts chosen for this dissertation illustrate anxieties over appropriate masculine gender identity, and alternate between supporting and contesting hegemonic representations of masculinity. For example, concerning anxiety over proper working and middle-class gender identities, and the relation between men of each class, Gaskell’s industrial novels *Mary Barton* and *North and South* show an interest in urging men to adopt certain feminine traits (such as the desire to care and provide for others), but do so by depicting working-class men as dependent creatures in need of the care and provision of the strong and manly middle-class. The sensation novels of Braddon, namely *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*, focus on the maturation process of aristocratic and middle-class men, and the proper way that they must focus their energy in order to perform appropriate masculinities, as well as the cost of performing these identities in terms of what is lost or silenced by this performance. Finally, the ways late-period women authors of children’s literature represented young and adolescent masculinities is important to examine in order to show how these authors reacted to increasingly changing gender roles for men and women in the last few decades of the century. Since so much importance was placed on how a child was educated, and in what type of moral environment they were raised, Victorian children’s literature functioned as an educational tool for the proper development of gender roles. Dinah Mulock Craik (*The Little Lame Prince*), Juliana Horatia Ewing (*Jackanapes*), and Edith Nesbit (*The Story of the Treasure Seekers* and its sequel *The Wouldbegoods*) all focused on the development of young masculine gender identities, and each contested and supported hegemonic
conceptions of gender in their own way through their representations of young masculine gender identities.

All of these narratives share a very important similarity. They were written by women at a time when female authors struggled to legitimize themselves and their works as they sought to gain entry into the Victorian literary world. These female-authored representations of different masculinities, and masculinity’s relation to the domestic sphere, raise the issue of how women authors appropriated and reconstructed masculine gender identities that were then in existence. Any meaningful continuation of the discussion of masculinity in Victorian fiction must include an examination of female-authored representations of male roles if we want to avoid underestimating the active role women authors had in the debate over female and male gender identities.

It is beneficial to examine exactly how Victorian masculine gender identities were defined during the period—including what hegemonic and non-normative masculinities were represented in Victorian literature—before analyzing specific texts. In doing so we can also present an overview of the scholarly work done on Victorian masculinity, and how this dissertation contributes to that field. In addition to a long history of scholarship on Victorian women authors and their representations of female characters, issues of masculinity during the Victorian period have more recently garnered attention with works by scholars such as Herbert Sussman, James Eli Adams, and John Tosh, to name just a few. Although it is difficult to sufficiently sum up even a majority of the work done on Victorian masculinity, we can say, for the most part, that overall this scholarship understands masculinity and masculine gender identities as social constructs that are, at least, partly constructed rhetorically through journalism, sermons, poetry, the novel, or
any other form of written or spoken language. While masculinity is constructed in ways that do not use written or spoken language (through bodily action or appearance, such as one’s clothing or the visibility of facial hair, for example), written language played a critical role in constructing gender identities during the nineteenth century due to the rise in literacy rates and the affordability of printed material.

The field of literary masculinity studies in general (and Victorian masculinity studies specifically) has come into its own in the past fifteen to twenty years. While it would not be accurate to say that masculinity studies has gained equal footing in scholarship on gender issues, the inclusion of examinations of masculinity in both journals and in the classroom does bode well for its eventual acceptance as a full component of what is called “gender studies.” Not only will the rest of this chapter function as an overview of scholarship done on Victorian literature and masculinity, but it also serves to introduce this dissertation’s contribution to this field. Since Victorian literary scholarship that focuses on issues of masculinity is wide-ranging, going from Marxist, Feminist, and Post-colonial readings, to the examinations of children’s literature and nineteenth-century military paintings, it is exciting to think of how many other possibilities exist to analyze how masculinities were constructed, contested, or disrupted during the Victorian period. The progress of Victorian masculinity studies, as with the development of any field, is not a simple straight path, but one with many wide-ranging, divergent, sometimes contradictory, and occasionally far afield contributions. Furthermore, it is safe to generalize that most scholarship on Victorian masculinity (this dissertation included) focuses upon a set number of topics: the multiplicity of masculine gender identities, the visibility of masculinity, men’s relation to the domestic sphere
(including their roles as father, son, brother, and husband), how they channeled their physical and sexual energy and activity, and their role in terms of commerce and labor. These fundamental characteristics of Victorian masculinities will appear throughout this dissertation as they are used differently by each author.

First, we must note that determinants such as sexuality, class, race, etc. are reminders that any look at masculinity is really an examination of multiple masculinities. Early efforts at defining literary masculinity studies have been criticized for conceptualizing “maleness” or masculinity as a homogenous entity unaffected by social determinants. R.W. Connell argues that there is no one uniform conception of masculinity that can be traced throughout history and through every culture, religion, race, and social class. Instead there are multiple masculinities that result from different cultures having attempted to define gender for different purposes. It is even inadequate to assume that each community defines masculinity uniformly, but rather we find that there is a diversity of gender identities within each specific community.

By taking a view of multiple masculinities between communities, as well as multiple gender definitions within individual communities, Connell also shows us that these various definitions create relations of hierarchy that place certain masculinities in a dominant position, while marginalizing others. These hegemonic masculinities, “the most honoured or desired” (10) according to Connell, are not always the most common form of masculinity, and that most men of any given community are often in tension with their group’s hegemonic gender identity. For example, Sussman refers to Carlyle’s “fantasy” of masculinity for this very reason. It is clear that Carlyle’s representations of masculine gender identity were idealized, and almost impossible to live up to for most Victorian
men. In fact, the notion that these hegemonic masculinities were often incredibly unrealistic or unpractical for men of all social classes is the foundation for Sussman’s argument concerning the Victorian idealization of middle-age era monkhood. Sussman argues that Carlyle was “unable to find such real-life exemplars of the ‘wise and manful’ in the earlier Victorian decades” (31) causing him to turn to historical, or imagined historical, types upon which to base his new conception of masculinity. As I will show, all of these authors included in this dissertation present masculine gender identity as a role that must be performed and displayed to others in order for the individual to function successfully in their society, regardless of the men’s desires and preferences which do not match this idealized gender identity. For example, the idea that the boys in the Bastable family must learn the requirements of adult masculinity (namely the requirement that they must provide financially for others in socially acceptable ways) is often in tension with some of their preferred occupations such as Noel’s desire to be a poet, or their interest in earning money illegally through robbery. Nesbit takes Noel’s poet-identity and attempts to represent it as a socially acceptable male gender role, yet does so by simultaneously positioning it as a less-ideal mode of masculinity than is displayed by his brother Oswald and his physically strong and “manly” gender identity.

Related to this is the important belief that a community’s collective definition of acceptable masculinity could be seen in the lives of individuals, but has an existence beyond that individual. Masculinity is very often institutionally defined (for example, through separation of boys and girls in educational institutions and in the workplace) in relation to its supposed opposite, femininity. Arthur Brittan reminds us of the very important notion that “[m]asculinity…does not exist in isolation from femininity,” (52)
and vice versa. In other words, a community collectively defines masculinities, but these definitions are sustained in institutions, often relatively in direct comparison to their “opposite.” These definitions of masculinity are created and sustained at least partly through literature, and specifically for my purposes, through novels. Not only are these hegemonic masculinities modeled and defined in literature, they can also be challenged and changed through the textual depiction of alternative, sometimes contradictory definitions of male gender identity.

A major component of Victorian masculine gender identities are their ability to be performed visibly in the public/social sphere. John Ruskin argued that, for a man to “advance in life,” meant that “[w]e do not understand by this advancement, in general, the mere making of money, but the being known to have made it; not the accomplishment of any great aim, but the being seen to have accomplished it” (28). Braddon’s critique of the importance tied to visibly performing one’s masculinity goes against this belief of Ruskin’s. The importance placed on the visibility of masculinity is in part a result of the industrial revolution—and, specifically, of the adoption of a separate spheres ideology. When, in 1831, Carlyle wrote that “the old ideal of manhood has grown obsolete and the new is still invisible to us, and we grope after it in darkness, one clutching this phantom, another that” (29) he was describing a shift, or a re-definition of masculinity that was a result of both the dominant middle-class and the increasingly vocal working-class. James Eli Adams describes the 1830’s and 40’s in England as a time which caused confusion and a desire for re-definition of men’s gender identity, caused largely by the industrial revolution which shifted the control over work to men and home to women. The need for social recognition in performing one’s masculine gender identity
is the result of the perception of separate public and private spheres, in that this perception led to the gendering of the spheres as masculine and feminine realms for middle and working-class peoples. As numerous scholars have suggested, the establishment of these separate spheres is directly caused by the large scale move from rural to urban areas during the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. This move resulted in more men working away from home, creating less time with their wives and families, and more time spent in the public sphere.

Like Adams, John Tosh also argues that the 1830’s and 40’s illustrates a massive shift in definitions of masculinity largely because it created the separation between home and work for many British citizens. For middle and working-class men it is this separation between home and work, and therefore public and private spheres that caused confusion and uneasiness about newer conceptions of masculinity, like those expressed by Carlyle, that were defined in terms of labor and social presence. Tosh argues that “[f]rom being a site of productive work, the household was increasingly becoming a refuge from it,” (14) thereby creating the reality of separate spheres, and establishing a hierarchal relationship between men and women that solidly placed the responsibility of being the worker and financial provider onto men, and the role of homemaker, child-raiser, and source of purity and redemption onto women.

The visibility of masculinity is of great importance to Adams, and he argues that all masculinities are dependent upon audience reception (imagined or otherwise), whether the performers admit this or not. In Adams’s highly influential Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity, the author focuses on “the various ways in which male Victorian writers represent intellectual vocations as affirmations of masculine
identity” (2) Adams seeks to understand various masculinities as what he calls “styles of masculinity” (2). Most importantly, gender identities—masculine, feminine, or any variance in-between—are spectacles, and are “forms of intellectual and social authority that are established through aesthetic self-presentation to an audience” (12). For example, visibility is of special importance to what Adams defines as the dandy as well as the Carlylean Hero, even though the Hero is defined as having complete disregard for rules of social decorum and the public gaze. Taking Carlyle’s definition of the dandy as having his sole desire be “that you would recognise his existence; would admit him to be a living object; or even failing this, a visual object” (Sartor Resartus 177), Adams illustrates the dependency of masculine gender identity on the visual recognition in the social sphere. This is apparent when discussing the role of the dandy, whose “fundamentally theatrical being,” (22) as Adams defines him, is directly tied to his recognition from the eyes of the public sphere. This recognition does not only rest upon the basic presence of the man in the public sphere, but upon the way he talks, dresses, and his overall demeanor. Furthermore, the visibility of masculine gender identity is necessary even if that visual recognition is used negatively in order to positively define its attributes, as with the Carlylean Hero using his disdain for the eyes of the public to define his identity. In Craik’s The Little Lame Prince, the titular character’s crippled body is initially hidden from public sight because it would appear as a sign of the nation’s weakness to have a prince whose visible appearance did not meet the requirements of being physically active and strong. The eventual visibility of the prince is a key component in the development of his masculinity.
Adams’s analysis of the visibility of masculine gender identities is important for my purposes because it complicates the too-simple public/private spheres binary in relation to men’s gender identity. It is not simply that a masculine gender identity is dependent upon its mere presence in the social sphere (usually engaged in labor or commerce), but a masculine gender identity is also reliant upon the nature of that appearance: attire, speech, and his general deportment. To provide one example that I will expand upon in the next chapter, in Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* the presence of John Barton and his fellow Chartists in London, on the streets of Manchester, or during a meeting with the masters, is important both because of their ability to be present—and move freely in—the social sphere, as well as their physical appearance (in this example, their unhealthy look and ragged and dirty clothing) and speech (marking them as working-class) that define their gender identity in multiple ways.

In addition to one’s speech, attire or deportment, the necessity of performing or stylizing male gender identity is, for the Victorians, largely founded upon the practice of self-discipline. This performance of self-discipline also requires public recognition. Adams asserts that male Victorian writers established “the manliness of intellectual labor on self-discipline” (7) and that this characteristic was represented as egalitarian, available to any man regardless of his social or economic standing, as long as his self-discipline was recognized by others either through physical practice, or rhetorically through his own self-presentation of a masculine gender identity. Interestingly, Adams notes the increased gendering of self-discipline and self-regulation for the Victorians. According to Nancy Armstrong, beginning in the late eighteenth century, the notion of self-regulation became a characteristic of the domestic woman in that it became a component of male gender
identity to be the accumulator, and the woman to regulate that accumulation in the home. As women became defined as passionless angels – who did not need to practice self-discipline in terms of sexual desire since they had none to begin with – men were both the accumulators and regulators. However, the practice of self-discipline is insufficient unless the appearance of that practice through presence in the social realm, either physically or rhetorically, becomes recognized by others. The anxiety of the man who did not appear to practice self-discipline, such as Braddon’s Robert Audley, made him incapable of performing his male gender identity successfully until he both personally practiced as well as appeared to practice self-discipline and self-regulation.

If the visibility of masculinity was critical in the construction of a male gender identity, a man’s relation to the domestic sphere was just as important. Victorian masculine gender identities of any social class have often been defined by their relations to others. Whether it is their role as son, brother, husband, or father, their role in the family dynamic is used to legitimize or delegitimize their masculine gender identity. In A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England, John Tosh attempts to redefine Victorian men’s relationship to the domestic. While it is important to hold on to the idea of separate spheres since this conception is useful in understanding the split between masculine and feminine gender identities as far as responsibilities and possibilities, Tosh argues that the relationship between masculinity and the domestic is far more intricate than early notions of separate spheres would indicate. Tosh asserts that the home “was central to masculinity, as the place where the boy was disciplined by dependence and where the man attained full adult status as householder” (2). As I will examine in my chapter on late-period Victorian children’s literature, the middle and
working-class boy’s relation to the domestic is, as Tosh suggests, fundamental to the development of his masculine gender identity. The domestic sphere, whether for the boy or the adult man, is the place from whence he emerges as well as the place where he returns. Also, the domestic sphere functioned as the location where the masculine gender identity was formed through the boy’s relation to his parents and other family members.

If one’s masculine gender identity was formed in the domestic sphere, it was tested and potentially corrupted by temptation in the public sphere, making one’s return to the domestic sphere rehabilitating and freeing, either at the end of the day, or once he became too old to work. This is true especially for the middle-class man, as Tosh argues that the place of the home in bourgeois culture could be summed up by the proposition that only at home could a man be truly and authentically himself. While the workplace and the city crippled his moral sense and distorted his human relationships, home gave play to feelings of nurture, love and companionship, as well as “natural” forms of authority and deference; it nourished the whole man (33)

The home became associated with supposed feminine characteristics of moral purity where a man could regenerate himself after being exposed to the soul-depleting immorality of the public sphere. Sarah Stickney Ellis referred to the man, returning home after a day spent in the public sphere, having “stood corrected before the clear eye of woman” (53) to illustrate how closely tied the domestic sphere was to ideas of femininity.

Tosh goes on to look at Victorian masculine gender identities and how they functioned in the roles of husband, father, and son. Even though he is occasionally
reluctant to distinguish between hegemonic masculine gender identities for different economic classes, Tosh does provide a much more detailed analysis of the role of Victorian husband than any scholar had before. Specifically, Tosh argues that in Victorian literature the home became represented as not merely a source of moral purity for the husband and his family, but a safe haven for him from the demands of his gender performance in the social sphere. It was home that “was felt to be the only place where the vulnerability that lay behind the public mask of strength and imperturbability could be shared with someone else” and that the “sympathetic ear and the soothing tongue of the wife” (54) were believed to represent the restorative power of the home. As I will show, for the working-class men in Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* and *North and South* the home is often represented as a place of refuge from the harshness and dangerous temptations (of violence, of alcohol) that exist in the public sphere. Similarly, Nesbit’s Bastable boys routinely encounter both positive and negative forces outside of their home, only to return to the normalcy and safety of the domestic sphere. For Braddon’s Robert Audley the domestic functions as a goal and as a reward for his successful maturation process as he enters into adult masculinity.

The anxieties produced by performing one’s masculine gender identity were expected to be calmed in the confines of the home, yet the authors covered in this dissertation complicate this simple binary between domestic and social spheres by showing how those anxieties were also present, and sometimes constructed, in the home. The Bastable children become aware of their father’s failure to satisfy his responsibility to financially provide for his family when they witness repeated visitors to their home, each one a creditor demanding to be repaid. The bare shelves and walls of Barton’s home
function as a symbol of his failure to provide for his family. In *North and South* Frederick Hales’ problematic military service makes him unable to live neither in his literal home nor in his home country. In *Aurora Floyd* Talbot’s masculinity is threatened by spending too much time inside his home while his father wonders why his son “didn’t take his gun and go out on the moors, and get an appetite for his dinner…instead of moping in his own rooms all day long” (111). Spending too much time in the home is as detrimental to one’s masculinity gender identity as spending too much time in the social sphere. For example, Tosh investigates the damage done by the father who either worked from home, or did not work at all, thereby complicating the domestic/social sphere binary. According to Tosh, the stay-at-home husband/father could be “positively destructive” (60) to the family, as exemplified by George Pontifex, the violent man (and all around bad father) in Samuel Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh*. Using a source like Craik’s *A Woman’s Thoughts About Women*, a text that describes the joys of having the men out of the home during the day so that the women can enjoy peace and quiet, Tosh asserts that “a satisfying companionate marriage was best served by the husband who regarded the home as the first call on his leisure but who spent his working hours elsewhere” (60). Using Tosh’s arguments about the destructive force of the stay-at-home Victorian father, in the next chapter I will look at the disruption caused, both to himself and others, by John Barton’s increasing presence in his home after losing his factory job.

The requirements for the Victorian husband were primarily focused on being a provider, and the same can be said about the Victorian father as well. As Tosh suggests, the imperative for adult men to marry and to be a dependable economic provider were regular components of public discourse. However, expectations and responsibilities for
the middle and working-class Victorian fathers were among the least talked about qualifications for an authentic, valid masculine status. Tosh argues that the reason for this relative silence concerning the role of the father was due to its ambiguous position for the Victorians. The father’s role is sometimes unclear because, if we buy into the notion of separate spheres, then parenting becomes the domain of women, thus leaving working and middle-class men uncertain of their roles beyond providing economically for their wives and children. However, Tosh argues that the notion of separate spheres, and the idea of the domestic as morally pure and restorative, in comparison to the temptations that existed in the social sphere, created another role for men outside of being the economic provider; the protector. It was the father who was often the protector of his family in the literal sense, protecting them from intruders, kidnappers and the like, but also “in the figurative sense of shielding them from knowledge of what was disturbing or threatening” (85). In the chapter on late-period Victorian children’s literature, I will examine the effect on the Bastable children when they learn that their father has ceased to be both the provider and the protector. The awareness that their father cannot provide for them sufficiently causes the children to enter into the economic world as they attempt to earn money, but it also enables them to believe they must protect their home as well, as they literally do when they fear that someone is attempting to break into their house.

The roles of protector and provider both fundamentally link the father to the outside world; to perform either function he needs an ability to enter the outside world, and to possess an awareness of its possible dangers. The movement of the father into the social sphere could result in an absent father; one who paid little attention to the raising of his children, spent little time with them, and preferred the company of friends to that of
his wife and children. While absent fathers were common during the Victorian period—as we could assume they would be in any time period—Tosh argues that “absent fatherhood tends to be emphasized by historians because it prefigures a practice which has been so widespread during the twentieth century” (95). Instead, Tosh focuses on the over-authoritative, tyrannical father, who he sees as existing on the opposite end of the spectrum from the absent father. This father, according to Tosh, understood authority as his only contribution to the raising of children. Therefore,

To insist that the routine of the household should be subordinate to every aspect of his own convenience, to enforce tight controls on family expenditure, to treat family prayers as a means of keeping his dependents in subservience, and to mete out regular and painful punishments to his children, were all means of bolstering a man’s domestic authority in his own eyes and the eyes of others. (95)

In addition to the absent and tyrannical father, Tosh recognizes two more common fatherhood roles for working and middle-class Victorian men. The first is the distant father, who, unlike the absent father, is present often in the home, yet who withholds intimacy from his children. It is the distant father that “exemplifies the ambivalence with which so many men viewed their paternal role” (97). Tosh goes on to argue that the distant father’s reluctance to share emotional warmth and physical tenderness with his children could be based in anxiety over raising an un-masculine boy, as physical affection and open emotions became, as early as the 1830’s, to be thought of as feminine characteristics. This is in direct contrast to the fourth and final fatherhood role recognized by Tosh, that being the intimate father who is open physically and
emotionally with his children, and takes a direct role in every aspect of childrearing. What is left unanswered is how this role was performed by men despite the anxieties to which the other three fatherhood types reacted. As I will show, fathers, and specifically working-class fathers, depicted in the women-authored fiction of the period often performed these various roles at different times, rather than sticking to just one. For example, John Barton is, at different moments, tyrannical, absent, and intimate. In the next chapter I will examine how working and middle-class husbands and fathers in Gaskell’s industrial novels were represented, and how working-class husbands and fathers often performed wife/mother gender responsibilities in times of crisis. In the fourth chapter I will look at the role of fathers in children’s literature, specifically their role in serving as a template for boys’ maturation into adult masculinity.

The gender roles required of husbands and fathers have also received attention from numerous scholars. Claudia Nelson’s *Invisible Men* is a landmark work in gender/masculinity studies as it focuses on the roles of the Victorian and Edwardian father and their depictions in periodicals between 1850 and 1920. As Nelson shows, the role of the father during this period has often been overlooked, or, at best, oversimplified, by literary critics. In Nelson’s words the father’s role at this time was often, “ambivalent and antagonistic” (1), and far too often scholars assume that his role existed primarily in the public sphere. However, Nelson’s goal is to “examine men’s domestic invisibility, its manifestations and its ramifications” (2). Nelson begins her study in 1850; a date she believes is one of the last times where domesticity and masculinity existed in harmony. Beginning with the full effects of the industrial revolution, masculine gender identity was increasingly identified by a man’s profession, rather than his role as husband or father.
She ends her study in 1920 by proclaiming the end of separate spheres ideology as most women worked outside the home (at least before marriage) and the right to vote was becoming a reality for most women. Nelson examines the role of the father during these 60 years through periodicals of the time because they are “at once immediate and reflective, unified and varied” and they “serve as a magnificent digest of opinion on almost any topic” (5) even if it is understood that these writings often describe expectations rather than actual practice.

In addition to examining the roles of husbands and fathers, the role of the son has received a good amount of scholarly attention. As we have seen, masculine gender identity is defined differently based on various social-classifications, including class, race, profession, etc. Tosh provides us with another very helpful way of differentiating these multiple masculinities by detailing the variances in gender identity based on the individual’s age. The boy and the man, as Tosh argues, are defined differently in terms of how their culture understands their responsibilities, and what is acceptable in terms of their body image, their displays of physical affection, and their relation to other men and women. Tosh suggests that the progress of middle-class boys from infancy to adulthood was marked by well-defined stages. The first stage begins with the acknowledgement around the age of six that the child is male, and is therefore dressed in breeches or trousers signifying a fundamental split from a female child. This switch from petticoat (which young boys often wore) to trouser was symbolic as well as material, as it provided more freedom of movement for the young boy, allowing him to play outside in more rough-and-tumble ways than could female children. The next stage was marked by the boy’s removal from the home to begin his schooling. Here, there is a marked difference
between the middle and working-class boy, as the working-class boy often progressed right into his exposure to the working world, bypassing the schooling process. The movement from petticoats to breeches, from home to school, and from school to work, was then followed by (or performed simultaneously with the move from the school to work) with the completion of maturation process through marriage and fatherhood.

Tosh and others too often separate their analysis of Victorian masculinity between the categories of boys and adult men; however we must add the then-emerging role of the adolescent or young adult to these categories. I will examine adolescent masculinity in the third chapter, specifically focusing on Braddon’s Robert Audley who is moving from this category to the realm of male adulthood. This establishment of this third category—adolescence or young adulthood—is directly tied to the Victorian period. As Chris R. Vanden Bossche tells us

the Victorians were very much concerned with the question when one stopped being a child and became an adult. It was during the Victorian era that the years from age 13 to 24 came to be regarded as a distinct epoch in individual development: adolescence […] [This stage] was regarded as a complex social, psychological, and moral process that was intimately linked to the Victorian ideal of the independent, mature and cultivated adult self. (82)

Especially for middle-class concepts of masculine gender identity, this adolescent man is caught between the responsibilities of boys and the demands of men. He is, to take a common pop-psychology term, experiencing a “post-adolescent idealistic phase” in which he alternates uncomfortably between boyish behavior and adult masculinity. The
young Victorian adult man perceives a social pressure to abandon his boyish behavior and to fully adopt an adult masculine identity based on his working or middle-class social standing, his race, and his sexual affiliation\textsuperscript{ix}. Braddon’s depiction of Robert Audley’s frustration and difficulty in rejecting his youthful gender identity and replacing it by performing his adult masculine gender identity complicates this even further, as I will show in the third chapter. Robert’s difficulty stems both from his status as adolescent man, but also his move from upper to middle-class standing where he must learn to work and provide for himself and others.

While not acknowledging this adolescent stage explicitly, Tosh does define this stage, in part, in terms of sexual development. With the responsibility of sexual education resting on the shoulders of the father, many middle and working-class boys received little to no knowledge about sexuality other than the dangers of sexual behavior outside the confines of marriage. However, this is another point in which class differences determine expectations for male gender identity. As Tosh argues, for the upper-class young man “domestic servants were sexually vulnerable” and there were “undoubtedly instances of the ‘young master’ taking sexual advantage of his position” (107-08). For middle and working-class young men in larger towns and cities experienced their first exposure to sex via prostitutes. Despite the masculine status-building attributes of sexual activity, it was the move towards marriage and family that cemented the progress from boyhood to adult man. The perceived pressure to marry (and, specifically, the pressure to enter into the world of adult heterosexual relationships), and the benefits of being seen as a married man will be explored further in my analysis of Braddon’s fiction.
While I do not directly address issues concerning male homosexuality in this dissertation, for many of the male characters of these novels homosexual panic becomes a very real element in their gender performance. This is especially true of Robert Audley and characters in *Aurora Floyd* for whom there are fears of appearing too attached to other men. As well as a need to enter into heterosexual marriage to avoid any doubts about their sexuality and heterosexual identity. Furthermore, the developing masculinity in the boys of Nesbit’s Bastable children and the portrayal of the effeminate and “delicate” Tony in Ewing’s *Jackanapes* illustrates how the hegemonic heterosexual definition of masculinity was often defined negatively in comparison to the unmanly and effeminate boy/man.

Common to many of these arguments is a focus on the appropriate ways to channel one’s energy, whether that is physical activity in terms of labor, sexual desire, or the attention given to how a man relates to his wife or family members. In *Victorian Masculinities*, Herbert Sussman looks at constructions of masculinities in the early Victorian period, and focuses on this notion of appropriately directed energy. Specifically, Sussman is concerned with definitions of Victorian masculine gender identities offered by “representative figures” (1) – Carlyle, Robert Browning, Pater, and the Pre-Raphaelite Brothers. Sussman’s controlling argument is that these authors metaphorically link masculinity to monkhood. The reason for this is that the lives of monks provided Victorian authors with a way to negotiate a controlled (both mentally and physically) manly body within an artistic life. For these authors the monk becomes “the extreme or limit case of the central problematic in the Victorian practice of masculinity, the proper regulation of innate male energy” (3). Carlyle, Browning, and
other male Victorian authors struggled with presenting a conception of masculinity that was neither out of control (Browning’s representation of male insanity and extreme sexual appetites exemplify this) nor too tightly controlled (which, paradoxically, would lead to bodies and minds which could not be controlled). For Victorians, Sussman argues that masculinity becomes an issue of “setting the intensity of discipline” (3) and that for most male authors the distinction needed to be made not only between female and male sexuality, but between working and middle-class sexuality as well. As I will examine further in the next chapter, working-class sexuality was often represented as crude, base, and uncontrolled in comparison to the healthy depiction of the controlled mental and physical energy found in appropriate middle-class gentlemen.

As with sexuality and the relationship between male and female gender identities, social class and the relationship between masculinity and commerce function as major determinants in establishing a male gender identity. In “Laboring Fathers: Parenthood, Class, and Gender,” Lynn M. Alexander posits that reform-minded Victorian artists sought to depict working-class fathers in domestic situations in order to argue against their violent reputation amongst middle and upper-class readers. Using examples from literature and the visual arts, Alexander examines how reformers attempted to counteract the prevailing notion of the working-classes as somehow subhuman (as Nelson argues in *Invisible Men*) by presenting working-class men as feminine (or at least emasculated, or non-masculine). This is achieved in the portrayal of men who are not entirely separate from the domestic sphere, but who are nurturing and caring fathers. Alexander understands this effort to present feminized or emasculated working-class men to be an attempt to calm fears of working-class rebellion. In other words, the message apparent in
this works is that these nurturing, caring working fathers are too emasculated (due to their entry into, and involvement in the domestic sphere) to be much of a threat to the middle and upper classes. Furthermore, using Gaskell’s John Barton as an example, Alexander reads this character as a warning that if issues of workers’ rights and fair wages were not addressed, these seemingly feminized and emasculated men could eventually become murderous and animal-like. According to Alexander, the main cause of violence amongst working-class men stems from their inability to fulfill their basic gender requirement; providing economically for their families. This notion of men turning towards violence and destruction as a means of fulfilling gender responsibilities because they cannot provide financially is one that I will use in my analysis of Gaskell’s works.

While lacking in an explicit awareness of masculinity as a social construction, Robin Gilmour’s *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (1981) was nonetheless an important early text that would lay the groundwork for later examinations of Victorian notions of masculine gender identity and its relation to social class and the world of commerce. Gilmour suggests that the concept of the gentleman was for most Victorians “a cultural goal, a mirror of desirable moral and social values,” (1). Furthermore, it is the notion of “the gentleman” that Gilmour sees as lying “at the heart of the social and political accommodation between the aristocracy and the middle classes” (2) that was a powerful assumption behind many legislative and social reforms during the mid-Victorian period. This concept of the “gentleman” serves as a template for male characters in a number of texts analyzed in this dissertation. For Gilmour it is the notion, rather than the actuality, of gentlemanly status that worked to placate or satisfy middle class men and their “desire to be accepted by the traditional hierarchy” (9). The
linking of gentlemanly-like characteristics (which included appearance as well as moral character) to the idea (again, if not actuality) of social mobility allows us to see how gender identity functions in a larger scope beyond the personal.

Gilmour is also one of the first to analyze the Victorian concept of “manliness” and, most interestingly, how it appears to Dickens, Carlyle and other mid-period writers to be the opposite of eighteenth-century notions of the gentleman. As Gilmour suggests, the outdated eighteenth-century gentleman appeared by the mid-nineteenth century to be cynical, detached from social and political issues, and secretive. I will examine this concept of the disappearing gentleman in the chapter on Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* where anxiety over the outdated model of the gentleman is being replaced by the strong, active middle-class man. The “manliness” of the mid-Victorian gentleman included a strong social presence, as well as a positive attitude in terms of reform and improvement (of one’s self and one’s country). And while Gilmour largely focuses on the “gentleman” and its relation to the aristocracy and middle-class, this positive attitude towards reform and improvement affected the working-classes as well.

Often working alongside these class and economic-based conceptions of masculinity in the Victorian period were issues involving an ideology of separate spheres. While the construction of a separate spheres ideology was based around conceptions of appropriate gender roles for middle-class men and women, these definitions of gender identity were held up as standards of behavior by Victorian authors (who were most often middle class) for the working class as well. As I will examine further in the chapter on Gaskell, Victorian working-class notions of masculine gender identity were in part constructed through the writings of middle class men and women in newspapers,
periodicals, novels, government reports, and ethnographic studies. Furthermore, writings that documented working-class life ostensibly to encourage legislative reform often helped construct differences between the middle and working classes in terms of gender identity. In their look at Victorian masculinity and the urban poor, Dan Bivona and Roger Henkle (2006) suggest that “[w]hile the Victorians wrote about the slums for a variety of reasons and motives…many of the images that they constructed served the purpose of self-definition of an emerging-and largely male-professional class” (4). In other words, the development of cultural representations of poverty in Victorian England served to document the living and working conditions of England’s urban poor as well as establish the difference between the bourgeoisie and the working classes. This documentation of urban poor on the part of largely male, middle-class writers helped to imagine a new definition of “the gentleman” that associated him with self-discipline, and differentiated him from older, rank-based categories of masculine gender identity that were increasingly being thought of as effeminate, such as the “dandy”. As I will show in the fourth chapter, this is further complicated in the last few decades of the period where the establishment of the “manly” author is competing with alternate non-hegemonic conceptions, such as Oscar Wilde and the representation of the author as a “dandified man.”

Sussman (1992) argues that Victorian poets fought against being thought of as unmanly, more so than novelists or other types of writers. This gendered separation between the masculine novel and the feminine poem was grounded in a pre-Victorian/Romantic conception of the poet that was in direct contrast to the active and publically visible Victorian conception of middle-class masculinity. In his examination of Tennyson and Browning, Sussman argues that the Victorian male poet found himself
caught in a bind between fulfilling hegemonic male responsibilities (being present in the commercial sphere, displaying tempered emotions, and having an active physical presence) and fulfilling commonly held attributes of the poet which included effusive emotions and isolation from the commercial sphere. While Tennyson’s early poetry tended to associate the poet with feminine characteristics, Sussman argues that later in his career “Tennyson sought to re-masculinize the poet with his attempt to reconcile poetic identity with entrepreneurial masculinity by investing in the masculinist modes of warfare and commerce” (186). Browning also sought a re-conception of the poet in terms of middle-class masculine characteristics. Namely, “Browning dramatizes a constellation of male sexual energy, commercial success, and artistic potency that seems to reconcile artistic achievement with entrepreneurial manhood” but that he also turned the “whiggish Victorian narrative of male sexual/commercial/artistic liberation upon itself to show that the emergence of the male poet into the supposedly free individualistic activity of capitalism generates new forms for imprisoning male desire” (187). In other words, this re-conception of the masculine male poet, rather than increasing the possibilities for acceptable male identities, further limited Victorian men in strict gender roles. In Nesbit’s Bastable books, Noel, one of the young Bastable boys, writes poetry primarily. His older brother Oswald sees Noel’s poetry (and the gender identity Noel is constructing based on being a poet) as effeminate, and counter to Oswald’s own physically active and strong gender identity. Nesbit suggests that Noel’s poet-identity is a legitimate conception of masculinity, yet is still markedly “unmanly” in comparison to Oswald. It is this conception of a not-quite masculine, but non-feminine grey area that Nesbit simultaneously contests and supports by often depicting Noel as a legitimate model of
boyhood masculinity and as a sickly, physically weak boy who needs his stronger brother’s protection.

Depicting intellectual activity (such as the act of writing) as equal to physical action is tied to the establishment of a dominant middle class. The importance of establishing the middle-class author as “active” in ways both mental and physical also led to representing “true” men as those who were physically active, often aggressive, and especially those who ventured far from their homes to fight in wars or explore the colonies. In the fourth chapter I will look at how these representations of active soldiers/colonizers in literature served as models of appropriate masculine gender identity for young boys especially. Joseph Sramek argues that early-to-mid-century tiger hunting in India was largely symbolic in that it offered the British a way to prove their physical and mental strength, and therefore validate their dominance over the colonized peoples. By showing mastery over the natural environment, British men could “prove their manliness and their fitness to rule over Indians” (659). Sramek proceeds to conflate this desire on the part of the British to dominate the natural environment (and therefore prove their superiority over Indians) with the traditional masculine gender responsibility of protecting the safety of one’s wife and children. This coincided with the reintroduction of the “chivalric gentlemanly ideal” providing a “powerful rationale for British tiger hunting began to develop in India: the supposed need for British hunters to protect Indian men, women, and children from the savage creature” (667). Imperialism demanded that men not only protect their own families, but be so “manly” that they would co-opt the masculine gender responsibilities of the colonized people and protect their wives and children as well. While Sramek deals with a type of colonial masculinity here, this type
operates no differently than masculine gender identity in England. Sramek’s article supports a direct link because masculine gender performance and physical action, in that the hunting of tigers (and subsequent protection of women and children) would signify masculinity instead of the non-masculine of the non-active.

Late period Victorian adventure fiction, such as those texts that Bradley Deane calls “lost world fiction,” often presented new constructions of masculinity. Deane describes lost world narratives as a “perverse offspring of the imperial romance and the utopian novel” (206). These narratives often focused on past civilizations (usually represented as barbaric and primitive) and contemporary protagonists who learn the values of such barbarism. In terms of gender, Deane argues that these narratives reject mid-Victorian constructions of masculine gender identity in exchange for ones that value raw strength, bodily size, justified violence, and a strong homosocial commitment to other men. The boys of Nesbit’s Bastable family are avid readers of these types of texts, and their interest in them reflects their development of a masculine gender identity that favors physical activity and strength. Craik’s representation of the disabled Prince Dolor illustrates the requirement for physical and mental action in constructing an appropriate male gender identity. Similarly, Joseph Kestner examines how “Victorian imperial battle painting represents the intensification of the male body as a site for negotiating masculinity through empowering political, economic, and racist programs” (51).

Furthermore, Kestner argues that the men affected by these paintings were not merely though who attended Royal Academy exhibitions, or who read illustrated guidebooks, but because of innovations in producing cheap reproductions these images were seen by men in all social ranks and locations. In his book, *Masculinities in Victorian Painting*, Kestner
goes on to argue that the depiction of hairless male nude bodies represented the power of the phallus, yet in my opinion the author seems to ignore how these depictions could also have signaled an embrace of androgyny and homoeroticism.

This dissertation will examine masculinities that are defined by their ability to be visibly recognized and validated in the social sphere, their relation to the domestic sphere, their heterosexuality (as performed by an entrance into heterosexual marriage), and their display of a strong work ethic and ability to financially provide for others. Complicating these representations of masculinities in Victorian fiction is the fact that these representations were created by female authors who reacted differently to hegemonic conceptions of male gender identity. We find that they contested and supported, looked backwards and forwards. Regardless of whether they were supporting hegemonic masculinities and thereby strengthening male patriarchy, or were criticizing the very notions that separate the sexes, the female authors covered in this dissertation contributed to the discourse that defined masculinities. This dissertation seeks to illuminate these contributions to better understand how gender identities (both male and female) were discursively constructed in the literature of the Victorian period by authors (both male and female).
Chapter Two

Moneyed, Bloodstained, Hard, and True Men: Elizabeth Gaskell’s Construction of Middle-Class Male Authority in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*

In 1831, Thomas Carlyle wrote that “the old ideal of manhood has grown obsolete and the new is still invisible to us, and we grope after it in darkness, one clutching this phantom, another that” (29). Carlyle is describing an ideological shift in ideals of masculinity that affected the aristocracy, the dominant middle-class, and the increasingly vocal working-classiv during the first half of the Victorian period. This re-definition of masculine gender identity was largely the result of the adoption of a separate spheres ideology. While Carlyle references an earlier (obsolete) generation of men who defined their masculinity in relation to leisure and dandyism, he gives voice to a new conception of masculinity brought forth by the Industrial Revolution that associated a man’s identity with a man’s work. About a decade later Carlyle’s *Past and Present* would again influence the construction of a masculine gender identity that was defined largely by what work the man produced. Carlyle argued that “there is perennial nobleness, and even sacredness in Work” and that “a man perfects himself by working” (53-54). Labor of any kind becomes a spiritual endeavor for Carlyle, as “the evil passions of so many men (with the Devil in them, as in all of us) he has to vanquish” (54) through his work.

James Eli Adams describes the 1830’s through the 50’s as a period that “marked the loss of a central point of identity and social reference,” (6) caused largely by the
Industrial Revolution as it shifted the control over labor to men, and home to women. Adams argues that this period demanded re-definitions of masculinity in terms of the role of fathers, the opportunity for upward class mobility, sexual norms, and independence, especially as fewer men were self-employed, and even less owned their own homes. Specifically, Adams argues that during this time middle-class Victorian authors sought to define intellectual labor as equal to manual labor, which was associated more strongly with working-class men. The growing separation between working and middle-class Victorians, and the increasing problems of urban poverty caused by this split between classes, brought the notion of changing gender roles for men into the public discourse. These newer conceptions of both working and middle-class masculine gender identity brought about the need for a new conceptualization of relations between the classes based on post-industrial capitalism. Debates about the relationship between workers and factory owners, and differences and similarities between working and middle-class male responsibilities and duties flourished during the period from the 1830’s to the 50’s. With the onset of the “Hungry Forties” a number of Victorian authors argue for solutions to poverty amongst the working-classes, with many proposing the need for middle-class philanthropy.

In Mary Barton and North and South, Elizabeth Gaskell constructs working-class masculine and feminine gender identities that offer solutions to poverty in England without granting the poor working classes any notions of independence. In this chapter I will argue that Gaskell’s intervention in these debates was to ascribe to middle-class men the responsibility of providing for the poor financially, intellectually, and morally, while simultaneously portraying the working classes as fundamentally dependent upon the
middle classes. These novels show Gaskell intervening in the contemporary re-definitions of working-class masculine gender identity by comparing and contrasting it to working-class femininity as well as defining it in relation to the feminine domestic sphere. In suggesting that working-class masculinity is closely related to feminine gender roles—and that both masculine and feminine working-class gender identities more easily overlap—these novels situate middle-class men as more purely (i.e. authentically) masculine, and therefore more authoritative.

The two novels’ advocacy for middle-class dominance is clear as they portray the working class (and, specifically, working-class men) as fundamentally dependent upon middle-class charity and authority. An acceptable middle-class masculine gender identity ought to be, at least in part, based upon their responsibility to financially care for the working classes. Endowing middle-class men with the role of ultimate provider to the working classes allows them to display nurturing characteristics conventionally represented as feminine, but without threat to their dominant masculine gender identity. For Gaskell to represent middle class men as the most dominant she needs to depict the aristocracy as largely irrelevant while simultaneously depicting the working-class as dependent, often helpless creatures who, in many ways, are children in relation to middle-class men who function as the ultimate patriarch. Throughout *Mary Barton* and *North and South* working class men are shown to be independent, active, and dominant in their working-class surroundings, yet their gender identity is more fluid—displaying conventional feminine characteristics and performing traditional feminine roles such as nursing the sick and caring for newborns. While such feminine traits are represented positively, they simultaneously suggest that working-class men are less capable of
providing for their families and thus require middle-class aid, thereby strengthening middle-class dominance.

The novels depict working-class male dependence and the necessity for middle class men to be providers and caretakers, and therefore suggest the need for men of both classes to adopt conventional feminine characteristics and values. However, middle-class men in these novels are defined less by their relation to feminine gender roles, and more by their ability to be financial providers and caretakers for their families as well as their workers thereby assuring their dominant position. Gaskell constructs working class men as simultaneously independent and dependent by representing their gender identity as more fluid (in contrast to more strict gender divisions for the upper-classes), and by showing the strong maternal influence in the development of their gender identity. Furthermore, Mary Barton and North and South strengthen patriarchal dominance by representing women from both classes as they take an active, strong position yet do so only to reestablish and re-define masculine rule. In other words, maternal influence in these novels functions merely to reestablish patriarchal authority. Whether it is Mary Barton struggling to prove Jem’s innocence as he is charged with murder, or Margaret Hale standing between Thornton and the rioting workers, the female characters intervene in this “crisis of masculinity” for the sole purpose of re-establishing and re-defining male dominance in order to cure England’s social-ills, such as poverty and an uneducated and potentially dangerous working class.

Gaskell as Woman Writer
Before we examine *Mary Barton* and *North and South* it is important to look at how Gaskell functioned as a woman writer and consider the responses she received for her examinations of working and middle-class gender roles. The preface to *Mary Barton* enables us to better understand how her contributions to the debate concerning male gender identities were received in the literary world. Gaskell’s idea to change the setting of *Mary Barton* from a rural to an urban environment, in addition to her argument that she “always felt a deep sympathy with the care-worn men” (5) in Manchester, exemplifies a broadening of available (or appropriate) topics for Victorian women writers in the mid-century, as well as a re-definition of previously accepted gender identities\(^{16}\).

Through her acquaintance with working men and women in Manchester, Gaskell began to express a feeling of kinship with them, inspiring in her a sense of responsibility to tell their stories in her fiction. The “deep sympathy with the care-worn men” allows her to envision a novel that would depict the lives of working class women and men, thereby increasing the scope of appropriate subject matter for Victorian women writers.

However, the representation of working class men and women in Gaskell’s fiction is especially interesting considering the formation, and simultaneous contestation, of gender roles concerning the domestic and social spheres at that time. While the notion of separate spheres, famously described by Sarah Stickney Ellis in *The Women of England* (1839), was constructed based on the lives of middle-class men and women, scholars have argued for its application to working class men and women as well\(^{17}\). While there are certainly significant differences between hegemonic gender roles for working and middle class men, working class men leaving their homes each morning to work in factories was one factor in the emerging split between the social and domestic spheres for
the working-classes. However, it is important to note that this split between domestic and social spheres is neither as clearly established, nor as significant for the working classes as it was for the middle classes, since many working-class women worked alongside men. The construction of these nebulous separate-but-not spheres enables Gaskell to define working-class masculine gender roles and their relation to the domestic in an easier, less complicated way than in representations of middle-class masculinity. Yet, as I will show, the problematic relationship between working-class masculinity and the domestic in Gaskell’s fiction causes complications and anxiety for her male characters.

Gaskell’s own anxiety about her representations of working-class life is evident in the novel’s preface. While this effort to tell the tale of the working man (to “give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses this dumb people” (5)), and to expose the lives of the poor and their working conditions, was shared by male writers of the time, the preface is tinged with uncertainty and an awareness of inappropriateness on her part that is not found in similar male-authored representations of working class men. In trying to understand the meek tone to Mary Barton’s preface, it is important to remember that its inclusion was not Gaskell’s idea but that it was recommended by her publisher Edward Chapman. Chapman had asked for an “explanatory preface” to be written for the novel, to which Gaskell replied that if he believed the book required such a preface then she will “try to concoct it,” but that she “[had] no idea what to say” (Letters 58). Her initial response was to include a preface explaining that her novel was “no catchpenny run up since the events on the Continent have directed public attention to the consideration of the state of affairs between the Employers, & their work-people” (58). The preface Gaskell eventually concocted argues for the importance of depicting the
working conditions in Manchester, while simultaneously adopting a tone of
defensiveness and submissiveness. In the preface Gaskell writes that it is “not for [her] to
declare” (5) whether workers’ complaints of bad treatment at the hands of the owners is
well-founded. She then equates her representations of economic issues with the parable
of the widow’s mites. In Mark 12:38-44, Jesus praises a poor widow for her contribution
of two mites (the least valuable coin) because that is all she had to give, while those far
richer than the widow did not give, in proportion, nearly as much. Gaskell’s allusion
functions as a bit of self-praise for doing what she can, but also diminishes her efforts to
realistically depict working-class life in Manchester by gendering her argument, implying
that it is in some way inferior to the contributions of (male) authors. Finally, in an effort
to peremptorily defend her novel, Gaskell explains to the reader that “I know nothing of
Political Economy, or the theories of trade” (6) despite being familiar with her father’s
extensive writings on the subject, as well as her friend Harriet Martineau’s nine volume
*Illustrations of Political Economy*, whose section on Manchester was a direct influence
on *Mary Barton*. This apologetic tone to the preface undermines whatever radical work a
novel about working-class suffering and outrage might accomplish.

David Ellison suggests that “Gaskell registers the political content of worker
grievance, while withdrawing narrative support” (489). Catherine Gallagher argues that
these narratorial disavowals “were designed to keep the nineteenth-century readers’ own
opinions from interfering with their ability to follow Barton’s tragedy” and that they
“prevent the reader from becoming distracted by the issue of whether or not Barton’s
ideas are objectively true” (73). While I agree with Ellison and Gallagher, I would add to
their readings that Gaskell’s disavowals are intrinsically tied to her role as woman author
as she uses her novel to urge for middle-class intervention into the lives of the poor thereby making a statement, from a female viewpoint, about the importance of nurturing and caretaking in economic matters.

Though *Mary Barton* was published under a male pseudonym, her gender was apparent to a number of critics and reviewers. This anxiety over inappropriateness in depicting issues of labor, or issues dealing with the social sphere in general, was well founded, as numerous reviews and obituaries written about Gaskell attest. In his review of *Mary Barton* in the *Edinburgh Review*, W.R Greg begins his critique by establishing the author’s gender when he writes that “it is understood to be, and indeed very palpably is, the production of a lady” (402) before going on to criticize the book’s depiction of labor disputes as “imperfect, partial, and erroneous” (403). Greg assures the reader that the woman author succeeds through her “intimate” and “sympathetic” depiction of the characters, yet fails in her presentation of a “false philosophy” and “inaccurate descriptions” of labor issues (403). The anonymous reviewer in *British Quarterly*’s gives overwhelming praise to the “touching simplicity and force with which many of the cottage scenes are depicted” (119) but declares that it is “under the influence of the very common misapprehensions entertained respecting the laboriousness of occupation in the factories” (121). John Forester’s *Examiner* review praises the novel’s emotional depictions of working-class life, but declares that *Mary Barton* is definitely not a political novel, and that Gaskell’s “fault is the occasional use of somewhat commonplace materials of effect, and the handling of questions now and then beyond her reach” (709).
Many reviews of *North and South* were similar in their praise of the author’s
depictions of characters and emotions, while simultaneously being critical of her
representations of labor issues. Henry Fothergill Chorley’s review in *The Athenaeum*
approves of *North and South*’s natural dialogue, and praises Gaskell for her “eye for
character” while noting that she “calls out for pathos skillfully” (qtd, in Norton, 418).
However, Chorley goes on to fault the one-sided presentation of labor strikes and ends up
defending Gaskell for having “an earnest, if a mistaken, desire to do good” (419). *The
Spectator* judged *North and South* to be an improvement over Gaskell’s earlier works, yet
noted that when Gaskell “passes into a higher sphere she is indebted to speculation for
her ideas” (341). It was not only male critics that found fault with Gaskell’s attempts to
write about the business world. Writing in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Margaret
Oliphant argued that the portion of the novel focusing on labor disputes fails because “it
is Mr. Thornton’s fierce and rugged course of true love to which the author is most
anxious to direct our attention; and we have little time to think of Higgins or his trades-
union, in presence of this intermitting, but always lively warfare going on beside them”
(568).

Upon her death, overviews of Gaskell’s career tended to favor her more
“domestic” fiction, such as *Cranford* and *Wives and Daughters*, over her earlier industrial
novels\textsuperscript{xx}. In referring to Gaskell’s novel *Ruth*, David Cecil argued that she had “dealt with
subjects outside her imaginative range” and was pleased with *Cranford*’s return to the
“domestic” and the “humorous.” (235) Chorley called Gaskell “one of the most powerful
and finished female novelists of an epoch singularly rich in female novelists” (qtd. in
Hamilton, 179). However, Chorley then proceeds to praise *Cranford* and *Wives and
Daughters for their “quiet” stories that “involve no mission” (179). A reviewer in The Saturday Review rejects Mary Barton and North and South for being one-sided, while proclaiming Cranford “the most perfect of Mrs. Gaskell’s creations” (179) Finally, Cecil sums up the prevalent view of Gaskell’s abilities as a writer by arguing that she is “less obviously faulty than that of her [female] contemporaries” which, according to Cecil, is due to her “tidy feminine mind” (235)

Upon reading this we might assume that Gaskell’s defensiveness and meekness stem from a sense that she has stepped outside the bounds of acceptable subject matter for women authors, and that perhaps Chapman’s recommendation for an “explanatory preface” planted this suggestion in her head. This interpretation certainly seems legitimate in light of how some critics evaluated her career by favoring her “domestic fiction” over her social-problem novels. However, the success (critically and financially) of Martineau’s Illustrations, complicates this idea that mid-century Victorian women writers were not supposed to be writing about economic issues, or if they were, then it was certainly not appropriate for them to argue for specific points of view on issues of trade unions. If it is not merely that Gaskell sought to position herself as an authority on class issues or trade unions, then what else could be the cause of critics’ reaction to Mary Barton and North and South? There is another factor prevalent in Gaskell’s novels, specifically in those two books, that works towards explaining the reticence running through the preface to Mary Barton, and that is Gaskell’s representations of male gender identity in relation to economic and social issues. In other words, it is Gaskell’s contributions to the construction of Victorian working and middle-class masculine gender
identity in her “social-problem novels,” in addition to her ideas concerning economic issues that call into question the appropriateness of her fiction.

Gaskell certainly had hints that her first novel was overstepping some boundary line concerning gender issues with her publisher’s insistence that she change the novel’s title from “John Barton” to *Mary Barton*. This suggestion was begrudgingly accepted by Gaskell despite her continued insistence that the novel’s protagonist was John and not Mary. Her letters after the novel’s publication reveal her displeasure in seeing the book misunderstood by her middle-class audience. Despite the success of *Mary Barton*, Gaskell continued to insist that her novel was being mis-read. She witnessed the novel being used as propaganda both for and against worker’s rights, but lamented that “meanwhile no one seems to see my idea of a tragic poem; so I, in reality, mourn over my failure” (*Letters* 68). In her opinion readers and critics were not focusing on the men in the novel, specifically the character of John, but instead were giving too much attention to the character of Mary. Or, if they did focus on issues of trade disputes and working and living conditions in Manchester, they did so without taking seriously her depictions of suffering, anxiety-ridden men. To a friend she wrote that

“John Barton” was the original name, as being the central figure to my mind; indeed I had so long felt that the bewildered life of an ignorant thoughtful man of strong power of sympathy, dwelling in a town so full of striking contrasts as this is, was a tragic poem…So many people overlook John B or see him merely to misunderstand him” (70)

Misunderstanding John Barton, or overlooking him completely, is to neglect the examinations of working-class masculinity present in Gaskell’s fiction. While some
modern critics, such as Williams and John Lucas, have argued that Gaskell’s inclusion of
the love story and the murder plot distract attention away from the more important class
issues in the novel, a more thorough reading of the novel would take gender issues into
account as well, thereby making the love story and murder plot essential to the novel.
This is not to say that her representations of masculinity are somehow separate from the
debates between owners and workers, or the riots in North and South. Rather, the
representations of masculinities go hand-in-hand with those issues as the novels define
the gender identity of the male characters in relation to their work and their home at a
time where conceptions of masculinity (for both middle and working-classes) were going
through fundamental re-definitions. I will begin with an examination of working-class
masculinity in Mary Barton, and then look at how Gaskell continued to represent middle-
class masculine gender identity in North and South.

Mary Barton: The Moneyed Man and the Bloodstained Man

Raymond Williams considered Mary Barton “the most moving response in
literature to the industrial suffering of the 1840’s” (87). And since its publication it has
taken its place as one of the most well-known Victorian “social-problem” novels. In the
preface of the novel Gaskell explains that her first notion was to write a novel set a
century earlier in “some rural scene” (5) but later thought “how deep might be the
romance in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the
town in which I resided” (5). Gaskell’s decision to write about current social issues
instead of writing an historical novel was fortuitous since the depiction of rural settings
and earlier generations and cultures in fiction was becoming passé to Victorian readers; it
was poets such as Robert Browning, Tennyson, and others who increasingly sought inspiration from the past. Williams’s greatest praise of *Mary Barton* is that the novel focuses upon “the intensity of the effort to record, in its own terms, the feel of everyday life in the working-class homes” (87). The choice to write about Manchester, and the working conditions she saw there, fit into a larger ideological shift favoring art and literature that directly reflected the current state of England, resulting in the critical and commercial popularity of the “social-problem” novel. Certainly, we can say that by the 1840’s a significant amount of the literature produced in England was focused on the “condition of England” question. In 1845 Disraeli’s *Sibyl; or The Two Nations* was published, followed by Kingsley’s *Yeast* (1848) and *Alton Locke* (1850). Also, Charlotte Bronte’s *Shirley* was published in 1849, though the novel differs from other “social problem” novels in that it is set in the early part of the century. 1848, the year *Mary Barton* was published, was a tumultuous year in England and in all of Europe. The “Hungry Forties” were in effect in England. 1848 saw revolutions in Italy, France, Austria and Germany. Political instability throughout Europe began to cause fears of similar insurrection in England, namely a revolt from the working-classes which, according to Norman McCord, constituted almost 70 percent of England’s population at the time. 1848, nine years after the Chartists’ revolt in Newport, was also the year the Chartists attempted to petition Parliament for the third and final time. Taking all of this into account, Gaskell’s first novel appeared at a time when issues of working-class rights were at the forefront of many minds.

The depiction of death and disease amongst the working-class in Gaskell’s first novel inspired Louis Cazamian to assert that “*Mary Barton* lays down irrefutable
concrete evidence for thinking intervention to be necessary‖ (220). Certainly she was not alone in expressing the need for intervention. In Habits and Customs of the Working Classes (1867), Thomas Wright railed against radical newspapers who sought to convince the working class man that “he is an outraged and oppressed individual, against whom all classes of society are leagued” (353), and called for what he believed to be more accurate journalistic representations of their supposed happy lives. Gaskell also sought to help the working classes through the printed word. For Gaskell, middle-class intervention was needed to cure social ills associated with working-class poverty, and that justification for this intervention can be found in the novel’s representation of working-class masculinity. In Gaskell’s constructions of working-class masculinity, the male characters’ gender identity is closely tied to the services they provide to others at home, as well as the work they do in the social sphere. This makes the male characters’ gender identity dependent upon their work, their possessions, and their ability to be present in the social sphere where their masculine gender identity can be validated by other men.

xxiii The link between money/possessions and the ideal masculine gender identity is very similar for both rich and poor men; the difference between working-class John Barton and middle-class John Carson is largely a matter of amount and ease of attainment of money/possessions. In Mary Barton Gaskell presents two categories of masculine gender identity: the moneyed man and the bloodstained man. These two categories apply for both working and middle-class men, and Gaskell’s representations of masculinity in Mary Barton are defined by the ease with which men can move from category to category, as well as how each category is based on the man’s relation to the domestic and social spheres.
In the novel, the moneyed man is he who possesses enough money to provide for his family and friends. As a result of obtaining some amount of money, the moneyed man assumes a dominant position not only over women and children, but also over other men as it serves to mark his ability and desire to work. This dominance allows the moneyed man to make decisions, plan a course of action, and, in some cases, to determine the authenticity of other men’s gender identities. For the most part, the source of this money is important. Money earned from hard work is the easiest and most respected way of achieving moneyed man status, yet money earned from pawning one’s possessions, as John Barton does early in the novel, can work in an emergency. Money and possessions earned through inheritance or investment pose no threat of being defined as a bloodstained man since they are gained in a manner society deems “legitimate.” At no point does money earned (or stolen) from disreputable means qualify a man for moneyed man status since this actually places him in the shameful category of the bloodstained man.

In Mary Barton the amount of money possessed by the moneyed man is relative to his social class; therefore a little bit of money for John Barton places him in this category, while a significantly larger amount is needed to recognize Carson as the middle-class moneyed man. Another difference between the working and middle-class moneyed man is that, for the middle and upper class man, money and possessions are not earned solely through labor but through inheritance and investment. Just as the belongings owned by the working-class man are testament to his work-ethic and successful employment, money and possessions owned by middle and upper-class men function as proof of their masculine status and ability to provide for others. Furthermore,
the powerful status of the working-class moneyed man, being so dependent upon the amount of money possessed by him, can quickly be gained and lost as the moneyed man gains or loses his fortune. The working-class man, much more than men like Carson, are dependent upon other moneyed men for their income, making their status as respectable moneyed man even more tenuous because their ability to earn money is it not entirely (if it all) in their control.

The first half of *Mary Barton* explores the status of the moneyed man, both the working-class example in John Barton, and the middle-class example in John Carson. The second half of the novel centers on the bloodstained man, another category of masculine gender identity that is in many ways the opposite of the moneyed man. After the murder of Harry Carson, both Jem and John lose almost all authority and power associated with being the moneyed man, and instead become what the novel calls the bloodstained man. The bloodstained man is stigmatized\textsuperscript{xxiv}, being one who has stepped outside the boundaries of acceptable masculine gender identity, either through criminal activity (as in this case), or through behavior deemed immoral or inappropriate to current hegemonic conceptions of masculine duties and responsibilities. It is irrelevant that only John is guilty of murder because it is the *appearance* of inappropriateness and inauthentic masculine gender identity that carries weight with the society portrayed in the novel. If the moneyed man’s status and power are directly tied to the possession of money, and therefore his ability to provide for those in the domestic sphere (family, the sick or elderly), the bloodstained man’s lack of status and power is tied to his inability to be present in the social sphere. Accused of murder, Jem cannot present himself in the social sphere due to rumors and the loss of respect from fellow men, nor can he continue to
work and earn an income. Even after his acquittal, Jem is not allowed to return to work, and rumors continue to follow him as he moves back and forth from Manchester and Liverpool. After murdering Harry Carson, John disappears for a lengthy amount of time, only to return to his home where he becomes somewhat of a hermit, unable to bring himself to re-enter society now that he has lost his status as moneyed man and exchanged it for the stigmatized role of bloodstained man.

Early in the novel John Barton becomes associated with the moneyed man category, and this connection immediately gives him the ability to take an active control of the situation. Even though, in comparison with the Carsons, Barton is relatively destitute, he does possess some material goods. These possessions are the result of Barton’s previous labor and a strong work-ethic that represent a working-class masculine gender identity that is validated by his society. The most important defining characteristic of the moneyed man is his ability to take charge of a situation, make decisions, and, most significantly, provide for others; money and/or possessions enable the moneyed man to perform these actions. After the fire in the Carson mill, Barton learns that the Davenport family (whose patriarch Ben cannot provide for them after losing his job), is suffering from illness and extreme malnutrition. Upon seeing the poverty and sickness in the Davenport home, Barton decides to give the Davenport family his food, and pawn his own clothing and jewelry for money to buy them more food and medicine. Indeed, the moneyed man is so invested with authority that even the decision to pawn items (thus, a decision that will enable him to become the moneyed man who fulfills his masculine responsibility to provide for others) empowers Barton, immediately giving him the ability to take control of the situation. This decision, and
merely the ability to pawn possessions, authenticates Barton’s masculinity since those possessions were, it can be assumed, purchased with money earned from honest work. He declares that they “mun do summat for ‘em” and tells Wilson to “stop here” (55) while leaving to bring back supplies. Even the mere idea that he will soon become the moneyed man by providing for the Davenports gives Barton dominant status over Ben Davenport, whose complete lack of money and immobile status makes him so ineffectual that he does not even get dialogue.

Here Barton achieves the title of moneyed man through a performance of his masculinity in the public sphere, yet this performance arises out of necessity since the Davenports would not have been in this position had Carson offered better employment, higher wages, and better medical care for the workers. Barton realizes that the children need medicine after supplying the Davenports with more food and clothing. Upon making this realization we read that “Barton (being the moneyed man) set out to find a shop in London Road” (58). Barton’s status as moneyed man enables him to move freely between the domestic and the social spheres, since his possession of money marks him as a legitimate and active commercial agent. Men without money would be useless in this sphere since they would be unable to contribute to the exchange of money for services. In *The Condition of the Working Class*, Engels argued that the relation between the middle and working-classes in Manchester was governed by separation and invisibility. While in Manchester Engels was surprised by the “so systematic a shutting out of the working class from the thoroughfares, so tender a concealment of everything which might affront the eye and the nerves of the bourgeoisie” (87). Yet the novel has Barton moving freely, with confidence and purpose, in the social sphere, as he is described having “reached a
druggist’s shop, and entered” (58). More evidence of Barton’s comfort in the social
sphere is seen in his interaction with the druggist, which goes smoothly and efficiently,
with both men providing opinions on the matter, and Barton’s ability to purchase
medicine validating his dominant position. Though *Mary Barton* does not present the
streets of Manchester as necessarily dangerous places, Elizabeth Starr suggests that the
novel presents “appropriate times and reason to be in public, and pedestrians who exceed
these…face particular scrutiny” (388). While this is especially true for women (such as
Esther, whose presence on the streets quickly associates her with prostitution), Barton’s
moneyed man status gives him an authority in public. The description of Barton’s ability
to move along Manchester’s thoroughfares, in contrast to Engels’s observations,
illustrates the power of the moneyed man in *Mary Barton*. The novel stresses the need for
the middle class to provide for the working classes through the sympathetic portrayal of
men such as Ben Davenport who have lost their ability to be in a position of authority,
and the depiction of Barton who, because he has a relatively significant amount of
money, can temporarily claim some level of authority.

In this scene, the character of George Wilson also provides us with an image of
someone who lacks moneyed man status. George’s masculine identity is not defined as
the moneyed man since he lacks possessions he could pawn or enough money to purchase
anything for the Davenports. Here we see how varied and complex masculinities are in
Gaskell’s novel as his status as non-moneyed man does not automatically place him in
the shameful category of the bloodstained man. Instead, George occupies a liminal space
wherein his masculinity temporarily crosses over into conventionally feminine duties –
but only in a time of emergency, and only in a conventionally masculine way. Barton’s
efforts to financially provide for the Davenports inspires George to do what he can, which, since he lacks money, means that “he gave heart-service, and love-works of far more value” (56). Although the narrator urges the reader to value George’s “love-works” higher than Barton’s moneyed man authority, this suggestion is coupled with a critique of the society that has forced George to perform this role rather than allowing a woman to do so. As Barton is out buying medicine, we read that “[m]eanwhile, Wilson had done what he could at Davenport’s home” (59). Instead of going out to purchase food and medicine, Wilson “soothed, and covered the man many a time; he had fed and hushed the little child, and spoken tenderly to the woman” (59) in his effort to provide. George’s emotional contribution (and not financial, as with Barton) to the Davenports recalls Gaskell’s allusion to the widow’s mites in the novel’s preface. This comparison to Barton’s actions and Gaskell’s Biblical allusion feminizes George’s efforts to give “heart-service” and “love-works.” Even before George’s feminized efforts to provide for the Davenports, his masculinity was threatened by his inability to financially provide for his own family. We are told that since Wilson “had no work at all […] his son, working at an engineer’s, and a steady man, obtained wages enough to maintain all the family in a careful way” (54). Initially, it would seem that by drawing a comparison between Barton and George, Barton’s moneyed man status places him in complete authority over George’s feminized masculinity. Yet, the novel argues for the authenticity of this feminized working-class masculinity. Instead of money, George provides love-works and acts of compassion, and this sympathetic and charitable personality type is, like the widow’s mite, of a greater, or at least equal, value to the contributions of the moneyed man. However, we are not allowed to forget that these acts are performed only because
the situation is in a critical state, and that George would not be forced into performing these feminized duties if he was provided with greater middle-class assistance.

A fundamental difference between the categories of the moneyed man, non-moneyed, and bloodstained man is the ability to take socially-determined appropriate action. As with Barton’s role in helping the Davenports, the moneyed man can take action because he obtains some amount of money and possessions, whereas the non-moneyed/bloodstained man cannot due to his inability to be accepted in the social sphere. For working class men in the novel taking action occasionally even gains precedence over the ability to be a financial provider. Of all the “manly” traits described in the novel, including an intellectual curiosity, strong work-ethic, and a dominant presence in the domestic sphere, it is physical action that is valued highest of all for the working classes. As we would expect, Barton’s estimation of Jem is centered upon his ability to work and care for his family. Barton believes that “Mary might do worse, when her time came, than marry Jem Wilson,” who is described as being a “steady workman at a good trade, a good son to his parents, and a fine manly spirited chap” (41). Even though it is impossible to overestimate the importance of money in the construction of male gender identity (as long as that money is earned legitimately, i.e. through hard work), Gaskell’s representation of working-class masculinity depicts the ability to act as equally important. While it is not surprising that Barton’s evaluation of Jem focuses on his ability to work, as well as his relationship to his family, it is interesting how highly Barton values Jem’s “manly” spirit and brave actions. With Jem, Gaskell situates manly action and bravery over financial capability, even if the ability to take action is largely dependent upon the possession of money. Jem displays how much of a “manly spirited chap” he is in his
rescue of two men from the burning mill. To elevate Jem’s masculine gender identity further, he is bestowed with such titles as “the hero” and “the brave man” (48-49) in this section. These heroic actions are evidence enough of Jem’s masculinity that Barton decides that “if Jem Wilson wanted Mary he should have her tomorrow, if he had not a penny to keep her” (52). In this instance, despite the male character’s sometimes overwhelming feeling of being financial responsible for a family, Jem’s courageous actions alone are enough to prove his masculine worth.

Whether it is saving people from a burning mill, or walking to London to appeal to Parliament, the novel presents the worth of “manly” actions as being equal to, if not greater than a strong work-ethic. Similar to Jem’s heroism during the mill fire, Barton’s efforts to enter into the world of politics follows this belief in the power of action in establishing one’s masculinity. David Rosen argues that the “connection between masculine potency and social and economic power seems to have been alive in the minds of many marginalized men” (20) in the early to mid-nineteenth century. And, in tracing the rise of Chartism, Gareth Stedman Jones points out that during the 1830’s and 40’s many workers expressed a fundamental belief that gaining political power would lead to upward class mobility, even if they contradictorily believed that their “real enemy was the bourgeoisie, and the revolution [they] would have to effect would amount to the overthrow of this class” (92).

Following the destruction of the Carson mill (and his heroic actions during the blaze), Jem’s ability to retain a job (a job based on physical, rather than intellectual, labor) continues to strengthen his dominance over unemployed men such as Barton. He provides for his family after the deaths of his father and twin brothers, and displays such
a strong physical presence that his mother and Mary acknowledge his authority. After learning that his infant twin brothers have died from an illness, Jem’s physicality (and the possibility of physical action his body promises) validates his dominant position in the household as his “sturdy frame shook with strong agony” so much so that Mary and Jem’s mother “were frightened, as women always are, on witnessing a man’s overpowering grief” (71). Jem’s performance of working-class masculine gender identity is so successful that it is even acknowledged by those who barely know him; an example of which is his acceptance of responsibility over Mary’s well being placed upon him by Esther. After attempting to warn Barton that his daughter is at risk of becoming a fallen woman, Esther believes that Barton is incapable of taking corrective action to save Mary. Instead she tries to convince Jem that he must save Mary from what Esther believes will be a life of alcoholism and prostitution following her eventual jilting by Harry Carson. Esther’s confidence in Jem’s ability to rescue and provide for others goes so far as to lead her to acknowledge that Jem could have once saved her as well. She tells Jem that “[s]ome years ago you might have saved me, as I hope and trust you will yet save Mary” (145) yet she is now even beyond his power. However, Jem accepts the responsibility to care for others as he “promised that if aught earthly could keep her from falling, he would do it” (145). Gaskell’s choice to elevate the importance of physical action for working class men (and, occasionally, working class women, such as Mary’s efforts to provide Jem with an alibi) becomes necessary since the obtainment of money and social status is so tenuous, especially compared with those abilities for middle class men.

While it seems as if Gaskell is showing us that the possession of a small amount of money by working class men allows them to perform the role of the moneyed man, the
novel eventually suggests that both money and actions prove unreliable on their own without any assistance from the government or from men like Carson. This ultimate need for assistance again forces her working-class male characters into a dependent position in relation to the middle-class “men of business.” The procurement of money, and the moneyed man status that accompanies it, is so unreliable that the novel presents an alternative method of validating working-class masculine gender identity by describing the importance of strong physical action. Yet, this method is shown to be equally undependable once those physical actions are perceived to be inappropriate (as in the murder of Harry Carson) or when the opportunities for physical action become scarce due to unemployment and illness brought about from poor living conditions. Once these methods prove unreliable, Barton commits murder; an act that is deemed necessary by a handful of men, but is ultimately judged to be socially inappropriate. Barton’s murder of Harry, and the blame for the death that falls upon Jem, places each of them into the category of the bloodstained man; a man who lacks all respect from working and middle class men, who cannot obtain work, and who is finally forced to leave the country or die as a result of failing to construct an appropriate masculine gender identity.

According to the novel, working class men are in a state of emergency. They find it difficult to provide for their families due to the unreliability of work, and, even if they retain their jobs as Jem does, their association with other men puts them at risk of being labeled as bloodstained. Lisa Surridge suggests that this “crisis of masculinity” in both Mary Barton and North and South affects both middle and working-class men. For Surridge, Gaskell’s two novels “represent a broad range of contemporary views on the nature of manliness and the erosion of masculine power in the contemporary working-
class family,” (332) with a strong connection to Chartist discourse, as well as depicting a failure of middle-class masculinity due to a disconnect between men and their wives and children. I will return to Surridge’s arguments about Gaskell’s depictions of middle-class masculinity later in this chapter when I turn to an examination of North and South, but Surridge’s link between the novel’s portrayal of working-class masculinity and the language of Chartism is critical in our understanding of how Gaskell represents men like Barton, Jem, and Job as entirely dependent upon the middle classes to successfully perform their gender roles. This dependence upon the middle-class masters is reflected in Chartist discourse. As Angus Easson has demonstrated, Gaskell draws on Chartist language in the novel, most directly through Barton’s impassioned speeches. This use of Chartist discourse situates working-class masculinity in a state of emergency, threatened by the encroaching dominance of the factory owner over the working-class household. Jetta Schwarzkopf also suggests that this “crisis of masculinity” during the “hungry forties” is exemplified in Chartist beliefs concerning the fundamental importance of patriarchal rule for the working classes. Schwarzkopf cites the speeches of Chartist leader Joseph Raynor Stephens as illustrating the Chartist position on the threat working-class masculinity is under due to industrialization. According to Stephens

> The holy headship of his own household has passed away from the man. He is no longer king and keeper, good shepherd and feared father over those, who by the ties of blood and kinship ought to have belonged to him. They are his and not his…He would fain have them to himself but is not strong enough to hold them. He cannot win bread for them to eat; unless they have bread they must die. (qtd. in Schwarzkopf, 49)
Despite her appropriation of some Chartist rhetoric, there are significant differences between Gaskell’s politics and those of the chartists. First, the novel suggests that the solution to poverty is not to reinstate the working-class man as “king and keeper” of his home, but to position the middle-class man as patriarch instead. While Chartists such as Stephens argued that working-class men were no longer “king and keeper” because their ability to work and provide for their family was in the hands of men like Carson, Gaskell builds upon this argument by asserting that middle-class charity is not merely the morally appropriate thing to do, but it is the only method that can prevent workers like Barton and Jem from becoming bloodstained men who are shut out of the social sphere entirely due to their desperate acts brought about by poverty. In the novel’s final pages Jem comes to the conclusion that it is God’s will that men like Carson provide for the poor since the split between workers and masters is irreversible due to industrial progress that has placed the means of production in the owners’ hands. Gaskell does not represent the working-classes as Luddites in *Mary Barton* since the male characters seem to accept technological innovation as a natural progression. Jem tells Carson that

> I’ll never misdoubt that power-loomos, and railways, all such-like inventions are the gifts of God. I have lived long enough, too, to see that it is His plan to send suffering to bring out a higher good; but surely it’s also a part of His plan that so much of the burden of the suffering as can be should be lightened by those whom it is His pleasure to make happy, and content in their own circumstances. (332)

While the six points of the People’s Charter petitioned for equality in representation\textsuperscript{xxvi}, Gaskell’s position that God has willed this split between the classes, resulting in an
essential inequality between the two does not technically contradict the charter since theoretically a society could have legislative equality but still retain a master/worker relationship that fundamentally places the master in a more esteemed, more powerful position. Therefore, it is God’s will for those who are “content in their own circumstances” to help those who are not. Furthermore, Gaskell does not put much faith in legislative reform to help the poor, as we see with Barton’s disastrous experience in London, and the few derogatory references in *Mary Barton* and *North and South* to the Factory Acts of 1844 (namely the minimum age requirement for children to work in factories). Instead, Gaskell sees the possibility of true reform and assistance for the poor to lie in individual charity by the middle class, not in appeals to Parliament. Carson’s ideas for reform, and Thornton’s “experiments” in *North and South*, are valued far higher than legislative proposals.

When Gaskell appeals to the middle classes to help the poor, she does not do so in subtle terms. *Mary Barton* suggests that if the middle classes do not attempt to help provide for the poor then the working-class men will fail to function as they should in society. The failure of performing working-class gender roles is depicted in language that would not be out place in the Book of Revelation. The out-of-work men who possess neither money nor the opportunity to perform brave and “manly” acts look towards “the mere repetition of old proverbs” to tell them that conditions will improve, yet they find that religion has failed them as these proverbs strike the men as “false and vain sayings, so long and so weary was the pressure of the terrible times” (101). While the novel tells us that it takes much to kill men such as these, death is probably the preferable option since she describes them as “worn, listless, diseased creatures, who thenceforward crawl
through life with moody hearts and pain-stricken bodies” (101). The men’s attempts to appeal to Parliament, as well as a meeting with the masters, prove to be humiliating, emasculating experiences. Lacking work and the opportunity to act bravely, Barton is relegated to the domestic sphere during the day, a position antithetical to working-class masculinity that requires men to be out of the home during the day as they work. Rather than viewing the domestic sphere as one of purity and sanctuary from the temptations from the social sphere, Barton’s presence in the domestic sphere during the day turns violent. We are told that Barton finds no solace out of doors since he is unemployed and yet

If her father was at home it was no better; indeed, it was worse. He seldom spoke, less than ever; and often when he did speak they were sharp angry words, such as he had never given her formerly. Her temper was high, too, and her answers not overmild; and once in his passion he had beaten her.

(104)

He tells Mary that he is sorry for beating her, but that he was able to do so because, he says, “I’m not the man I was” (105). Barton’s understanding of his own violence exemplifies Gaskell’s argument that working-class men are entirely dependent on the employment given to them by the middle classes.

To further establish how dependent these men are on the middle class these men begin suffering almost immediately after they lose their jobs. This is no slow decline in living conditions, but an instantaneous decay. The men and children of the Davenport family die. George Wilson dies. Jem’s infant twin brothers die. Indeed, the first half of the novel is so filled with death, and specifically the deaths of children, that critics have
referred to the novel’s “motif of the dying child.” Barton turns to physical violence, drug use, and eventually murder as he is transformed from the moneyed man to the bloodstained man. Jem, even after he is acquitted on charges of murder, finds that he can no longer function in the social sphere due to his fallen, bloodstained status. He appeals to Mr. Duncombe, his former master, in an effort to reclaim his old job, yet finds that his status as bloodstained man is permanent. As he awaits an interview with his old master, “many of those employed in the works passed him on their return from breakfast; and, with one or two exceptions, without any acknowledgement of former acquaintance beyond a distant nod at the utmost” (324). Even though Duncombe would like to re-hire Jem, “he agreed under the circumstances it was better he should leave the country” (324). Without the intervention of the middle class into issues of working-class masculinity, the workers will turn to violence (amongst themselves and against the middle-class), be driven out of the country (eventually causing a labor shortage), but Gaskell also threatens a complete breakdown of barriers between masculine and feminine gender roles that would undermine the supposed naturalness of gender difference. Gaskell suggests that these things are all the result of men like Carson failing to help alleviate the suffering of the working-classes.

If the middle class is not actively assisting the poor, then, as we see with the Davenport scene, the poor attempt to help themselves. Patsy Stoneman argues that Mary Barton illustrates the need for mutual-aid amongst the working-classes\textsuperscript{xxvii}, where “the result was a ‘feminsation’ of working-class men who performed from necessity the roles of child-care, sick-nursing and housekeeping” (69)\textsuperscript{xxviii}. According to Stoneman this nurturing aspect of working-class men is natural in Gaskell’s view, and the strikes,
assaults, and murder committed by the working-class men in Gaskell’s novels are understood to be an “enforced and psychologically damaging expression of essentially nurturing motives” (69) imposed by middle-class authority. I argue that George’s love-works are performed out of necessity, not because of men’s “essentially nurturing motives,” as Stoneman argues xxix. Instead they should be read as a sign of Gaskell’s complex picture of working-class masculinity—a gender identity that is constructed from a mixture of maternal and paternal, and domestic and social spheres. The common middle and upper-class conception of the working-classes (men in particular) as aggressive, violent, ignorant brutes is subverted by Gaskell’s sympathetic depiction of kind, empathetic men like Barton and George Wilson. *Mary Barton* suggests that middle-class men need to adopt working-class men’s ability to be charitable and nurturing, although the novel translates George’s love-works into middle-class provisions of employment and money, thereby avoiding the same “feminsation” of the middle-classes. George’s nurturing in this scene is done out of dire need, in that the presence of a healthy female in the Davenports home would automatically eliminate the need for George to perform these duties, and, furthermore, with middle-class assistance this emergency situation would never have arisen.

George’s role in comparison to Barton’s dominance does not preclude either man from performing each other’s tasks. Indeed, Gaskell presents complex working-class masculinities, specifically as she depicts a very fluid masculine gender identity made possible by its close relation to the domestic xxx. The close association between working-class masculinity and the domestic enables men to perform conventionally female duties, and Gaskell argues that this is acceptable only in extreme situations xxxi. Gaskell’s
“feminsation” of working-class men extends only so far, and she does not argue for a hybrid gender identity that would include both feminine and masculine responsibilities and duties. George is described as being “as tender as a mother” (81) while assisting his disabled wife, yet this is meant as a compliment to George’s ability to perform wifely/motherly acts when there is no other option available. Similarly, Job’s re-telling of how he and Jennings brought the infant Margaret from London back to Manchester shows how working-class men can care for a baby without the assistance of women, while simultaneously illustrating that this should only be done in an emergency, and only for a brief period of time.

In another example of working-class men crossing boundary lines out of necessity, upon returning to the Davenport’s home for the first time (before venturing out again for medicine), Barton momentarily begins to perform very motherly actions. He carries Mrs. Davenport closer to the fire, wrapping her in a blanket to keep her warm, and then prepares some gruel and feeds it to her using a “battered iron table-spoon (kept when many other little things had been sold in a lot), in order to feed baby” (57). Barton’s feeding of the infantilized Mrs. Davenport is not the only motherly/wifely act he performs; he clothes and feeds Ben Davenport as well. These duties performed by Barton cause some level of anxiety for him, partly due to his fear that any or all of the Davenports will die, but also because his duties, while done out of necessity, do not fit with his status as moneyed man. Conversely, George’s non-moneyed man gender identity is more appropriate for these types of duties. Barton is “thankful when Wilson re-appeared” (57) both because Wilson brings hot tea, but because his re-appearance in the Davenport home enables Barton to re-take his dominant position as moneyed man, a
status he quickly takes advantage of by leaving the home once more to purchase medicine.

In the scene with the Davenports, Barton’s role as moneyed man is tied to his responsibilities as a father, as we see when he begins to take care of the Davenports in George’s absence. The bestowing of the “moneyed man” title is indicative of a successful performance of fatherly responsibilities since it suggests that the man has enough money, earned respectably from working, to provide for his family and friends. Conversely, the lack of money can push men towards performing nurturing domestic duties (as with George), but it also strengthens their ability to practice self-control. According to Tosh, Victorian self-control meant that a man needed to be “[s]ilent, reserved, and unshaken by waves of emotion” and that to “reveal inner pain, whether through tears or depression, was a sign of weakness” (184). Tosh defines self-control and self-discipline as one the most important characteristics for the Victorians in establishing working and middle-class masculinity. The self-control practiced in this example is the ability to go without food or comfort while attempting to provide for others.

An important distinction is made here between feminine self-sacrifice and masculine self-discipline/self-control. Barton’s duties and responsibilities as a father have been learned from and modeled after his mother. We are told that Barton learned how to nurture from his mother, and this explanation provides a clear example of how Gaskell defines working-class masculine gender identity in relation to the feminine, and specifically the responsibilities of the father in relation to the mother. As a child he had seen his mother hide her daily morsel to share it among her children, and when he, being the eldest, had told the noble lie, that “he was not
hungry, could not eat a bit more,” in order to imitate his mother’s bravery, and still the sharp wail of the younger infants (102).

He can bear hunger, while his mother goes without food. The difference between these is not merely linguistic. Rather, it provides Barton and George with the ability to attribute their own actions (for example, their strength of will and their suffering of pain and discomfort involved with going without food) to their masculine gender identities. It also enables them to draw a distinction between their performance of motherly/wifely duties with the Davenports from their responsibilities as the authoritative moneyed man who procures food and medicine for the sick. Again, Gaskell does not argue that the working-class man is a hybrid feminine/masculine creature, but that, even though his gender identity is more fluid than that of men like Carson, he can adopt feminine characteristics only in times of emergency, and that he does so in a conventionally masculine fashion.

Gaskell’s definition of working-class fatherhood (at least partially learned from mothers, comprised of duties that occasionally cross gender lines) is compared with middle-class conceptions of fatherhood. According to Stoneman, Gaskell’s definition of middle-class fatherhood is “separated from motherhood and based on ‘innate’ authority” and is “indeed a cheat as a paradigm for class relations because the working class cannot acquire in turn the authority of the ‘father’ and ‘grow up’ into a class of owners” (72). This argument positions the “innate” paternal authority of the middle-class against the supposed maternal authority of the working classes. For Gaskell, this creates a separation between the classes that prevents the working classes and their maternal-based conception of fatherhood from ever achieving middle-class standing. In comparison to middle-class men, Barton and George do not fit in the post-industrialized world where
male and female realms are distinctly divided. Moreover, Barton and George’s ability to function easily in both the domestic and social spheres (performing duties that are both conventionally masculine and feminine) will not enable their masculine gender identity to be acknowledged as legitimate in bourgeois society due to its much more stringent disconnection between the social and domestic. While Gaskell presents other differences between working and middle-class conceptions of masculinity, the fluid gender roles of John and George are unmistakable markers of their lower-class status.

While this maternal-based conception of fatherhood for working-class men is positive because it allows George and John to help care for the Davenports, it nevertheless restricts their social mobility. In part this is due to the construction of a separate spheres ideology. Since the separate spheres ideology was constructed based on middle-class men and women, and while industrialization separated the home from one’s workplace for both middle and working-classes, it did so more significantly in bourgeois society. It is unclear whether Barton considers it possible to move up from factory worker to factory owner. He certainly believes in the possibility, at least in an idealized world, of a more egalitarian society. Yet what that social equality means for him, apart from a belief in more equal wealth between owners and workers, is never specified. For Christoph Lindner, John’s trip to the druggist’s shop, past all of the other stores advertising their goods, illustrates his lack of interest in these material goods because his possession of them does not seem achievable. These lighted shops “do not fill Barton’s thoughts with consumer fantasies for the very reason that such fantasies, for the novel’s factory workers like Barton, remain just that” (380).
However, class mobility is a possibility for Mary. While daydreaming about being married to Harry Carson, Mary fantasizes of the day when she should ride from church in her carriage, with wedding-bells ringing, and take up her astonished father, and drive away from the old dim, work-a-day court for ever, to live in a grand house, where her father should have newspapers, and pamphlets, and pipes, and meat dinners, every day—and all day long if he liked (73).

Like her father, at no point does Mary consider it possible to achieve middle-class standing through work, but only through marriage. The novel even depicts this method of social mobility through marriage as unrealistic. Esther predicts that Mary’s relationship with Harry will lead her to becoming a fallen woman, and she tells Jem that he can still save her from a life of homelessness and prostitution because “[Mary] is innocent, except for the great error of loving one above her station” (145). Harry himself laughs at the idea of marriage between him and Mary, telling Sally that he had hinted to Mary that marriage is not his objective, and that he “never dreamed she could have been so foolish as to have mistake[n] [him]” (123).

Mary’s fantasy of social mobility through marriage includes a re-definition of her father’s working-class masculine gender identity. This re-definition of Barton’s masculinity is aligned with the aristocratic model of masculine gender identity in that it situates him almost completely inside the domestic sphere (where he could have his “newspapers, and pamphlets, and pipes, and meat dinners, every day”); since their new wealth would prevent him from venturing outside it in order to work. However, a life of money that is not obtained through work is not something Barton can comprehend, much
less desire. After Mary urges him to take money from charity, he explodes, telling her “I don’t want money, child. D—in their charity, and their money. I want work, and it is my right. I want work” (103). For Barton’s working-class masculine gender identity, work is not merely a way of obtaining money (although that is a vital attribute of it), it is most importantly a way to validate his masculinity by showing himself and others that he is physical, social, and not dependant on others. As important as work is, it does not seem to Barton or Mary that working—by itself, at least—could lead them to obtaining middle-class standing.

Stories of social mobility provide the theoretical possibility of masculine independence for dependent working class men even if the possibility of such movement up the socio-economic ladder becomes less and less possible due to middle-class dominance. As a sign of this increasing impossibility, how social mobility would actually be accomplished in _Mary Barton_ is often unclear. The novel presents social mobility as highly unlikely at best, and impossible at worst, and in doing so Gaskell makes the need for middle-class charity more important since the working classes cannot lift themselves up from poverty on their own. If social mobility is difficult or even impossible, how does the novel explain John Carson, who grew up poor and is now firmly ensconced in bourgeoisie society as a factory owner? The novel offers up the idea that class and gender distinctions are now much more solid and unwavering than in previous generations where men like John Carson could elevate his socio-economic standing through hard work. Late in the novel Carson provides an explanation of the ease of class mobility a generation earlier. In attempting to understand Barton’s suffering, and the suffering of all the poor in Manchester, Carson sees a distinction between his own upbringing and the poverty he
had seen that day in visiting Barton’s home. In his mind, the poverty Carson experienced as a child was “honest, decent poverty; not the grinding squalid misery he had remarked in every part of John Barton’s house” (319). In Mary Barton the ability to identify more sophisticated differences amongst levels of poverty is left to the working classes, instead of the more general view of “grinding squalid misery” that Carson sees. Carson sees a more rigid and clear difference between the poverty he experienced early in his life and the poverty he witnesses as an adult. Even to his son there appears a difference between the poverty his father experienced and the poverty of the Bartons. Harry tells Sally that his father would never forgive his marrying “one so far beneath [him] in rank” (123) despite his own mother being a factory girl when she married his father. To this Harry adds, “but then my father was in much such a station; at any rate, there was not the disparity there is between Mary and me” (123). Inherent in Harry’s remarks, and indicative of this younger generation of men, is a more rigid class division that, for the middle class, cannot be overcome through marriage or work despite the belief of working-class women like Mary who still believe in marrying up.

Another way of understanding Carson’s social mobility a generation earlier, and the novel’s portrayal of the difficulty of social mobility presently, is to appreciate the profound effect of separate spheres ideology from the 1830’s onward by illustrating the differences before and after this ideological shift. A primary effect of separate spheres ideology was to solidify class and gender distinctions. Women worked in the home, and men outside of it. Women handled domestic duties, while men labored for pay in order to provide financially for others. Working class men labored physically while many middle class men and women promoted the idea that intellectual labor was as valid a form of
labor. Gaskell offers a critique of separate spheres ideology, at least for the working classes, by showing how easily working class men move between the domestic and the social spheres in *Mary Barton*. According to Stoneman, the elder Carson’s ability to climb the social ladder is no longer possible due to the reliance on maternal authority for the working classes, and has resulted in poverty much more severe than Carson experienced. Separate spheres ideology has enabled middle class men like Carson to fully separate male and female duties and responsibilities in ways that Barton and George have not (or, out of necessity, cannot). The Carson men are far more independent than the working-classes, and are placed in an exaggerated fatherly role as providers of money and labor to their workers. Barton and George are positioned as dependent women/children as a result of their dependence upon “men of business.” Again, the masculinity of the working classes overlaps with feminine gender identities, and in this case these nebulous and overlapping gender roles disallow the possibility of upward social mobility.

The middle classes are indeed different from the poor in Gaskell’s novel, and it is not just because they have more money. In *Mary Barton* Gaskell presents a number of binary oppositions between middle and working-class men that come close to asserting essentialized differences between the classes. Despite Barton and Mary’s inability to believe in the prospect of social mobility through work, and the separation between the classes that this creates, a major thrust in the novel is its argument for understanding and empathy between classes. This desire for understanding and empathy between the working and middle-classes presupposes a fundamental difference between the rich and the poor, and it is through Gaskell’s representation that working class men are depicted as
more feminine (or, at least, less masculine) due to their reliance on emotion versus rationality. Working class men are more emotional, while the middle class men are unfeeling and lack empathy (until Carson’s final display of emotion). Jem is respectful of women, while Harry uses them for his own enjoyment. Carson sees the world in terms of numbers and facts, while Job understands the importance of emotion and feeling. While Laurie Buchanan argues that Barton is shaped by “masculine codes of conduct that prohibit integration of feminine feeling with masculine rationality” (98), and certainly Barton struggles with expressing emotion (other than anger), all of the working class men in the novel cross over into the feminine realm through their insistence on empathy and nurturing. As Jem explains to Carson late in the novel

You can never work facts as you would fixed quantities, and say, two given facts, and the product is so and so. God has given men feelings and passions which cannot be worked into the problem, because they are for ever changing and uncertain. (333)

Jem’s argument for the importance of “feelings and passions” portrays working class men as feminized male creatures because of their dependence on men like Carson and the middle class, while simultaneously suggesting to the middle classes that they should have more “feelings and passions” by expressing greater interest in caring for the poor.

In addition to these oppositions, Gaskell draws a sharp distinction between labor and the ability for middle-class men to gain and sustain authority because that authority depends so much on money and the achievement of “moneyed man” status. Even though Gaskell presents a masculine gender identity continuum through her depiction of similar gender categories for both working and middle-class men, the differences between them
make all the difference in terms of attainment and sustainment of patriarchal status. Specifically, while the category of moneyed man crosses class boundaries in the novel, the attainment and continuation of this status differs greatly depending on the man’s economic class position. For the working classes it is easy to lose the privileged status of being the moneyed man. Barton is described as not being mindful enough of the ease with which he could (and does) lose his moneyed man status after the closing of the mill. According to the narrator he is “a good, steady workman, and, as such, pretty certain of steady employment” but that he “spent all he got with the confidence (you may also call it improvidence) of one who was willing, and believed himself able, to supply all his wants by his own exertions” (24). It seems that Barton’s fault lies in being too confident in his abilities to continually provide economically for his family, as well as being too shortsighted in terms of saving some of his income. While this critique of his abilities to be the economic provider initially seems to lay the blame on Barton, the narrator quickly retreats from this critique and begins to explain that it was because “his master suddenly failed” (24) and that unstable economy had lead to seeing “some sign of depression of trade” (24) in every mill Barton goes to in his attempt to gain new employment. This brings about the debate over who (or what) controls the market. Whether, as Barton argues, it is the masters who control it, or, as Carson argues, it “depends on events which God alone can control” (332), is a major point of contention for Gaskell and her critics, many of which criticized the novel for being too simplistic and one-sided in its argument for workers’ rights. However, the novel never makes it clear whether the blame for the Bartons’ poverty should be placed on Barton’s irresponsible handling of money, on the
Carsons’ having “suddenly failed” in their employment of men like Barton, or, finally, on God who, according to Carson, controls everything.

While the debate over the causes of poverty is never settled, we see that the most important difference between the owners and the workers is in the middle-class man’s ability to hold on to his privileged (moneyed) status. If Barton’s pawning of his possessions (purchased with money earned through honest labor) momentarily makes him the moneyed man, his lack of employment quickly removes him from that category. Meanwhile, the Carson men are depicted consistently as moneyed men, and their status never appears threatened in the novel. For example, the Carson men do not worry about providing economically for their family, nor do they shift between performing conventionally masculine roles to performing feminine duties as the working-class men do when they lack money. Even following the loss of one of their mills in a fire, the Carson men do not lose the privileged patriarchal status as George and Barton do after losing their jobs. With the mill having burnt down, the Carsons are described as living happier lives once they no longer have to spend their days in the mill. In a sharp contrast to the depiction of working-class homes, upon entering the Carson home George sees Carson and Harry reading (“the father a newspaper, the son a review”) and “lazily enjoy[ing] their nicely prepared food” (63). The leisure time of the Carsons is described in direct contrast to the poverty and suffering of the workers depicted explicitly in the novel’s first few chapters. Instead of feelings of anxiety over employment and providing for their families, the Carsons enjoy the leisure time that is made possible by the destruction of their mill. In addition to depicting middle class men as performing their moneyed man status more consistently, it is their unthreatened status as moneyed men...
that allow the middle class men in the novel to have a less complicated, less anxiety-ridden relationship between themselves and the domestic sphere. This functions as a critique of the middle class, in that Gaskell’s depiction of the leisurely Carsons enjoying themselves while the factory workers struggle and die illustrates a lack of sympathy for those workers, and a failure for the middle-classes to provide employment and wages to them. Jem’s insistence on “feelings and passions” is evident as the Carson men simply do not feel enough for them to take more action in caring for the poor.

While the novel presents working and middle class men as being a part of the domestic sphere (much closer than separate spheres ideology would suggest), middle-class men do not perform nurturing, motherly duties as do Barton and George. Instead, John and Harry Carson enjoy being able to spend their leisure time at home with their family. Alternately, the novel presents us with “the homes of those who would fain work, and no man gave unto them—the homes of those to whom leisure was a curse” (53). For Barton and George, leisure time (and therefore time spent in their home, most notably during the daytime hours) is time away from work. If they are not working, then that time spent in the domestic sphere is a “curse” because it is a sign of failure, of not being able to provide for their family. However, leisure time spent in the domestic sphere in the evening, or on an earned day off, as I will show in the next chapter, becomes a reward for hard work and a successfully performed moneyed man position.

For the Carsons, the domestic sphere is also a reward for their privileged status, but one that can be enjoyed more often and more thoroughly because they are wealthier and do not have their moneyed man status threatened. Gaskell describes these “happy family evenings” (53) with the fathers spent at home with their families, thereby implying
that it is their work that makes their family (notably their daughters) unhappy since it limits the time their father and brother can spend at home. These fathers “shut up during a long day with calicoes and accounts, had so seldom had leisure to enjoy their daughters’ talents” and that the days and nights were spent happily “now that the men of business had time for domestic enjoyments” (53). These “men of business” are separate from Barton and George, who we could call “men of labor,” because their wealth allows for increased leisure time that is often self-determined instead of being given to them by their employers. For Barton and George, the moneyed man status allows them to financially provide for their families, but the independence allowed by this status is finite as it is largely dependent upon the employment given to them by “men of business.”

Carson illustrates a much more independent version of the moneyed man since he can financially provide for his family as well as enjoy leisure time with them at his own discretion. He is represented in the novel as the supreme capitalist success story. We are told that Carson grew up in poverty, but somehow (and this is never specified in the novel) raised himself to a comfortable middle-class status as a factory owner. According to the working-class perspective in the novel, a consequence of Carson’s social mobility is that his elevated moneyed man status includes more responsibilities, most notably the need for him to financially take care of the lower-classes as well. This need for the owners to provide for the workers is most directly explained in Job’s final insistence to Carson that

*the masters has it on their own conscience, you have it on yours sir, to answer for to God whether you’ve done, and are doing all in your power to lighten the evils that seem always to hang on the trades by which you*
make your fortunes […] If we saw the masters try for our sakes to find a remedy, even if they were long about it, even if they could find no help, and at the end of all could only say ‘Poor fellows, our hearts are sore for ye; we’ve done all we could and can’t find a cure,’ we’d bear up like men through bad times. (333-334)

In Job’s understanding of the owner’s moneyed man status, those who earn their fortune (and who therefore construct their masculine gender identity) through the labor of the poorer classes, must then become responsible for those workers’ well-being. Just as the working-class men feel responsible to provide for the women and children in their families (not to mention their fellow men in extreme circumstances), the owners must increase their sphere of dependants by including their employees.

The notion that factory owners were responsible for the care of their workers was a rather common belief in the mid-nineteenth century. Specifically, it was commonly believed that the owners did much to cultivate the intellect of their workers. W.R. Greg, writing as an “anonymous correspondent” in the Manchester Guardian xxxvi, criticized the novel for not depicting the many charitable acts factory owners perform for their employees. For Greg, if Mary Barton is meant to be an accurate representation of industrial life then “it appears very strange that no notice whatever is taken of what has been done by the masters for improving the condition of the workmen” (7). These initiatives include “mechanics institutions,” “libraries founded expressly for [workers’] benefits,” and many other “institutions [where] every stimulus is given to self-culture, to the expansion of the mind” (7). Instead Greg finds that Gaskell depicts the masters as “upstarts from the very dregs of society” (7) who express little interest in the welfare of
their workers. Greg’s defense of the masters illustrates a more broad definition of the responsibilities held by masters for their workers. According to Job, the masters are responsible for providing basic needs, such as steady work, enough pay to support a family, and necessary medical care. David Thiele suggests that Greg’s defense of the masters’ charitable efforts increases the scope of their responsibility towards their workers to include education and moral instruction, and that Gaskell did “avoid directly presenting institutional solutions” in *Mary Barton* and *North and South* (266). While I agree that Gaskell does not “directly” present institutional solutions to issues concerning poverty, both novels do insist that it is the master’s responsibility to provide for those less fortunate. Again, these conceptions of middle-class masculine gender identity must include a strong desire to be a symbolic father to the poor, which specifically means that they should provide financially for the lower classes by offering employment or providing medical care and an education.

Whether or not Gaskell accurately represented the masters’ efforts to care for their workers, this sense of responsibility of the middle class to help the poor (or even to *appear* to attempt to help, as Job suggests) constructs both classes’ masculine gender identity, and places the middle class in a dominant position over the poor. For Job, the owners’ attempts to help would enable the workers to “bear up like men,” and for Carson this attempt would further support his moneyed man status. While Carson’s moneyed man status is certainly strengthened as he becomes the provider for an even larger group of dependants, working-class masculinity becomes constructed by becoming dependent upon another man for financial help. If both working and middle-class masculine gender identity is defined generally as being independent, a financial provider, and a safeguard
to his family from the evils of the world, then Carson’s masculine gender identity is definitely secure. Furthermore, working class men like Job find themselves in a liminal position as they are providers who are also provided for by men like Carson. In the novel middle class men find their masculine status secure, while working-class masculinity is always threatened, and always a source of anxiety due to their inevitable dependence upon other men for money, work, their health, and, especially in *North and South*, their education. Despite the dependent position of working class men, this very dependence upon the middle class somehow allows them to “bear up like men,” according to Job. That their independent masculinity is dependent upon middle class men to provide for them is not a contradiction but a complex conception of how working-class masculinity is defined by Gaskell. In this construction middle class masculinity is positioned as superior to working-class masculinity, and, in gendered terms, middle-class men are placed in the father role with working class men in the female/child position.

Based on this hierarchal representation of working and middle-class masculinity, it makes sense that Victorian working-class notions of masculine gender identity were largely constructed through the writings of middle class men and women in newspapers, periodicals, novels, government reports, and ethnographic studies. Specifically, writings that documented working-class life ostensibly to encourage legislative reform often helped construct a hierarchy between the middle and working classes in terms of gender identity. In their look at Victorian masculinity and the urban poor, Dan Bivona and Roger Henkle suggest that “[w]hile the Victorians wrote about the slums for a variety of reasons and motives….many of the images that they constructed served the purpose of self-definition of an emerging-and largely male-professional class” (4). In other words, the
development of cultural representations of poverty in Victorian England served to document the living and working conditions of England’s urban poor as well as establish the difference between the bourgeoisie and the working classes. The insistence on providing charity (individually, legislatively, or both) to the working poor, enables middle class men to feel superior as they become providers to these infantilized and feminized working men \textsuperscript{xxxvii}.

For some critics it is not merely that working-class gender roles overlap, but that Gaskell presents the poorer classes as having a strong maternal association that is in direct contrast with the patriarchy of the middle class. Hilary Schor’s analysis of maternal language in \textit{Mary Barton} argues for this representation of a maternal authority for the working class in contrast to the paternal authority of the middle class. Shor argues that the novel’s “disruption of genre, its gothic use of the mother’s return” and the repetition of the maternal figure in the text “might be seen as disrupting the symbolic order” (34). Indeed, this reading of \textit{Mary Barton} presents an all-powerful maternal figure for the working classes. According to Schor, “Gaskell imagined a maternal authority that would make of England a home; that would cure the condition of England; that would feed the hungry workers; that would redeem the lost children” (34). However, Schor points out that as the novel progresses this maternal authority seems to be downgraded to mere maternal influence. By the end of the novel Aunt Esther is dead, Mary Barton is now Mary Wilson, “and the voice of the dead mother presumably silenced” (34-35). So how does a novel filled with active, vocal women (daughters, mothers, aunts, nieces) end up endorsing patriarchal authority? Furthermore, how does a separate spheres ideology that seemingly presents a clear distinction between Carson’s paternal-based understanding of
male gender identity and that of the maternal-based working-class conception of fatherhood fail to account for the novel’s final declaration of patriarchal rule?

In *Mary Barton* and *North and South* Gaskell’s female characters intervene during a crisis of masculinity where the men have momentarily failed to live up to their patriarchal obligations. These women speak up, act, and even gain momentary authority with the end result of reestablishing patriarchal rule, but re-defining it by including more nurturing, caring elements. Since *Mary Barton* illustrates a failure on the part of the middle classes to intervene in this crisis by caring for the poor, as a temporary (and ultimately unsuccessful) replacement for the intervention of the “men of business” the novel places Mary in a position of authority. However, her attempts are made so that the masculine gender identity of Jem and her father can be reestablished, and their dominant position re-taken, rather than functioning as sign of what Schor identified as maternal authority in the novel. Despite Mary’s elevation to a position of authority in reaction to her father’s absence and Jem’s arrest, we can begin to understand how maternal authority becomes downgraded to maternal influence since Mary’s actions serve only to reinstate male dominance by novel’s end. Mary’s active role in the novel is borne from necessity, and just as Barton and Wilson were able to momentarily perform feminine gender roles when they needed to, Mary temporarily achieves moneyed man rank but only in reaction to Barton and Jem’s demotion to bloodstained man status. She is not an image of castration serving to uphold the symbolic order, as Laura Mulvey might suggest, but something akin to a transvestite in that she appears in the social realm as an active, masculine presence despite her “essential” feminine nature, which, Gaskell suggests, makes her authority temporary and ultimately submissive to masculine rule. Mary’s
sense of authority as she decides to take action in clearing Jem’s name while simultaneously avoiding implicating her father is clear as she felt that “[e]verything rested on her” (217). This authoritative position allows Mary to venture into the social sphere in ways she has not done before, even though she is employed and a part of the business world. Her authority, bolstered by a small amount of money she possesses, allows her to pay for services, demand information, and travel freely amongst the industrial areas of Liverpool that are almost entirely populated with men.

Despite this, Gaskell does not represent Mary as achieving full moneyed man status. Since she is a woman her position of authority is limited, and its end goal is not to retain dominance, nor to provide financially for others, but merely to reestablish patriarchal rule by freeing her lover and protecting her father’s good name. Regardless of her temporary authority, Mary finds that she is not allowed to enter into the conversations of men, even when they are discussing Jem’s case, as she can only listen passively to their discussion. Furthermore, Mary’s physicality is not strong enough to retain a masculine position of authority. Through Mary’s physical and mental condition the reader witnesses her difficulty in fulfilling patriarchal responsibilities. The train to Liverpool leaves her “bewildered” (246), she finds that “she must rouse herself from the torpor of mind and body which was creeping over her; the result of much anxiety and fatigue” (247), and the trip results in a days-long illness that incapacitates Mary. As Susan Bordo suggests, the reader is “no longer given verbal descriptions or exemplars of what a lady is or of what femininity consists” but we “learn the rules directly through bodily discourse” (170). Through Mary’s “torpor of mind and body” we learn that she cannot remain in a position of authority. This “bodily discourse” shows how limited
Gaskell’s women are in retaining this authority and power, and Mary’s lengthy recovery period after her trip to Liverpool removes her from the action allowing men to again take over.

While the working-class moneyed man is able to move easily between the domestic and social spheres, and the conception of fatherhood for the working class-men in the novel is based in part on maternal models, at no point does *Mary Barton* or *North and South* suggest the possibility of sustainable female authority. Even Margaret, an example that seemingly contradicts this point, proves ultimately unsuccessful at achieving authority. Although she is able to provide for herself and Job through her singing, Margaret is eventually brought back under patriarchal control by novel’s end through her successful cataract operation (it was her blindness that allowed her to seek employment as an entertainer rather than working in a factory) which allows her to cease earning money and marry Will. Just as with Mary, Margaret must take an active role out of necessity, yet when this need abates the female characters return to their submissive positions.

Schor argues that “Gaskell appears to have trouble imagining a world without authority” (37). The move to Canada in the novel’s final chapters hints that Gaskell had difficulty imagining a construction of authority in England that would avoid “setting up another structure of authority that will silence people like John and Mary Barton as effectively as did the structure she set out to criticize” (37)\(^{xxix}\). As I have shown, the criticisms leveled against this structure of authority in the novel are aimed squarely at the middle class for their unwillingness to support their dependents, which included their families as well as the poor. While Schor wants Gaskell to argue for true equality
between the classes (even if she accepts that Gaskell cannot portray true equality between sexes) the solution to the “Condition of England” problem is clear; England’s social ills can be cured (or at least lessened considerably) if the middle class takes an active role in caring for the poor. The close association between working-class masculine and feminine gender identities, with men like George and John temporarily performing women’s roles, and Mary and Margaret momentarily becoming figures of authority, ultimately leads to their dependent position under middle-class dominance. What Laurie Buchanan identifies as Gaskell’s strive “towards an androgynous ideal” (98) is indeed true for the working classes (the ability for John, George, Mary and Margaret to cross gender lines is beneficial for their survival), yet this potentially positive gender androgyny is always undercut by the more rigid gender divisions performed by her middle-class characters. *Mary Barton* presents this gender-mixing amongst the working-classes as necessary, yet it ultimately limits their ability to be independent. The true hero of the novel is not John, Jem, or Mary, but Carson whose ideas on how to help the poor point towards an idealized future. After finally being convinced of the need for the middle classes to help the poor we are told that

> Many of the improvements now in practice in the system of employment in Manchester, owe their origin to short earnest sentences spoken by Mr. Carson. Many and many yet to be carried into execution, take their birth from that stern, thoughtful mind, which submitted to be taught by suffering. (335)

After he has been taught by the poor that he and his class are duty-bound to take care of them, Carson becomes the ultimate patriarch by planting the seeds that will eventually be
born into the world. Schor’s suggestion that Gaskell has difficulty imagining a world without authority implies that it is her goal to depict such a society, whereas *Mary Barton* actually wishes for a strong middle-class authority to fulfill their responsibilities by caring for the poor. Since much of the novel focuses upon working-class masculinities, the intricacies of middle-class masculine gender identity are left relatively unexamined.

The more rigid gender divisions, consistent moneyed man status, and the ease with which the middle-class man exists in the domestic sphere during the day are asserted as characteristics of middle-class masculinity, yet Gaskell presents these qualities as homogenous and stable. In the next section I will show how Gaskell provides a much more detailed and complicated representation of middle-class masculinity in *North and South*.

**North and South – The True Man and the Hard Man of the Middle-Class**

Responding to criticism of her first novel, in 1850 Gaskell wrote to a friend that “I know, and have always known, that I have represented but one side of the question, and no one would welcome more than I should, a true and earnest representation of the other side” (119). Four years later she would take it upon herself to begin publishing what she believed to be a “true and earnest” representation of the “other side”: the strong but sensitive middle-class man in *North and South*. By complementing *Mary Barton*’s intervention in the discourse constructing working-class masculine gender identity, *North and South* illustrates a similar intervention in the dynamic transformations of middle-class masculinity. As opposed to the fluid, but ultimately dependent, gender identity of working-class men in *Mary Barton*, here we find a representation of the rigidly defined
and thoroughly independent masculine gender identity of middle-class men. In *North and South* successful middle-class masculinity is defined as stable, consistent, having a strong work ethic, an overwhelming desire to provide for one’s family, and a deep desire to help the poor—all characteristics that extend the domestic, fatherly male role into the public sphere. Continuing Mary Barton’s insistence upon middle-class intervention in the lives of the workers, it is this last masculine characteristic—the responsibility the middle-class must have towards providing for the poor—that we find asserted over and again in *North and South*. The novel traces the development of John Thornton as he takes steps towards performing a successful middle-class masculine gender identity. Thornton begins as a “hard” master, largely unconcerned with the needs of his workers, but who, through Margaret’s influence, softens into a patriarchal provider who is also sensitive and caring towards those who are less fortunate. Although *Mary Barton* endorsed a charitable attitude towards the working-classes for men like Carson, *North and South* goes further towards promoting a more feminine definition of masculinity for middle-class men while retaining their authority. This definition of middle-class masculine gender identity requires them to be empathetic and charitable, yet remains conventionally masculine by not allowing middle-class men to display these qualities in the same intimate way as women. Furthermore, a woman plays a critical role in constructing a man’s middle-class masculine gender identity by allowing him to enter into heterosexual marriage, thereby enabling him to be the patriarch both at work and at home.

Just as in *Mary Barton* where Gaskell gave name to the categories of moneyed man and bloodstained man, she again conveniently provides the reader with linguistic markers to define successful and unsuccessful middle-class masculine gender identities.
Compared with the moneyed and bloodstained man, in *North and South* Gaskell gives us the “true man” and the “hard man.” The “hard man” lacks sympathy for the poor, and is almost exclusively interested in earning more money despite whatever suffering this pursuit may cause to others. These are men whose “hearts [are] so hard that they’ll not do a kindness to them as needs it” (266). In contrast we find the “true man” who still believes in the necessity of philanthropy yet is still the controlling, dominant patriarch.

In criticizing Thornton’s initial uncaring attitude towards the suffering of his employees, Margaret says that his workers “all look upon him as what the Bible calls a ‘hard man’—not so much unjust as unfeeling; clear in judgment, standing upon his ‘rights’ as no human being ought to stand, considering what we and all our petty rights are in the sight of the Almighty” (152). Thornton provides his own definition of what middle-class men should be, and it builds upon Margaret’s sentiment that men should take an active and heartfelt interest in the welfare of others. However, this definition also insists on the need for middle-class independence as well. In discussing with Margaret the differences he sees between a “gentleman” and a “true man,” Thornton explains that a “true man” is a “higher and a completer being than a gentleman” (150). This “true man” is defined by Thornton as those men whom “we consider…not merely with regard to his fellow-men, but in relation to himself—to life—to time—to eternity” (150). The suggestion is that the “gentleman,” like the “hard man,” does not take an active interest in those less fortunate, whereas Margaret’s definition of the “true man” does not take into account his individual sovereignty, as well as his ability to define himself apart from his relations to others.

Finally, the novel’s representation of middle-class masculinity results in a somewhat
schizophrenic gender identity that is split between the “hard man” during working hours, and the “true man” outside of the factory. According to Higgins, Thornton is two chaps. One chap I knowed of old as were measter all o’ver. T’other chap hasn’t an ounce of measter’s flesh about him. How them two chaps is bound up in one body, is a craddy [puzzle] for me to find out. (308)

Higgins identifies the two main types of middle-class masculinity in North and South, and wonders how both types can coexist simultaneously in the same person. Through the course of the novel we see an attempt to unite the middle-class man’s “two chaps” into one homogenous whole, thereby combining their strongly independent, capitalist, and individualist patriarchal status with one who has a “soft” heart, and a belief in the necessity of helping the poor.

While critics such as Rosemarie Bodenheimer warn against treating North and South “as part of some other question— in comparison with Mary Barton, [or] as one in a larger group of industrial novels,” (281) my readings pair the two novels because together they form a sustained and detailed contribution to the issue of changing gender roles during the early to mid-nineteenth century. In viewing the two novels as complementary, it is interesting to note that Gaskell’s first and third novels share many similarities. Just as the original title of Mary Barton was meant to be “John Barton,” Gaskell preferred the name “Margaret Hale” for her third novel, yet she eventually agreed to the title North and South based on Dickens’s suggestion. Where Mary Barton focused on the poor and their relation to the middle-class, North and South takes as its subject matter the lives of the owners and masters, specifically in their relation to the workers. In some ways Gaskell depicts middle-class men as being just as similar as they are different from her
representation of working-class men. Both groups of men express a strong desire to be consumed with work, and with providing for their wives and children. Also, both working and middle-class men practice self-control in terms of expressing their emotions. The roles of working and middle-class women are also similar in both novels. Where Mary temporarily assumed an authoritative position in order to reestablish the dominance of working-class men, Margaret similarly works towards clearing her brother’s name and defending Thornton from the attacks of the rioters in an effort to establish the dominance of these men over middle-class women as well as the poor. Furthermore, it is Margaret’s ability to use her inheritance to buy back Marlborough Mills that enables Thornton to reclaim his dominant status, resulting in his ability to eventually marry Margaret (we assume), and become both master of his mill and of his home. Most importantly, North and South continues the ideological stance taken in Mary Barton concerning the need for the middle-class to assist the poor in providing financially, medically, and intellectually through efforts to educate them. Williams argues that the novel is less interesting than Mary Barton because its emphasis “is almost entirely now on attitudes to the working people, rather than on the attempt to reach, imaginatively, their feelings about their lives” (92). As Williams points out, Gaskell is far less concerned with advocating workers’ rights in North and South, and this is precisely because the novel focuses on constructing and endorsing the “true man” middle-class masculine gender identity as a way of easing class tensions through its endorsement of middle-class philanthropy, and unifying male middle-class identity during this period of uncertain gender definitions.

Gaskell felt that she had become a different author since writing her first novel. In an 1850 letter she explains that her opinions on economic issues had fundamentally
shifted since the publication of *Mary Barton*. In writing to Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, a friend who had urged her to write more in the vein of her first novel, Gaskell explains that “whatever power there was in *Mary Barton* was caused by my feeling strongly on the side which I took; now as I don’t feel as strongly (and as it is impossible I ever should)” the writing of a similar novel would be a “weak failure” (119). Instead Gaskell’s thoughts now concern the lives of the masters, arguing that she “can not imagine a nobler scope for a thoughtful energetic man, desirous of doing good to his kind, than that presented to his powers as the master of a factory” (119). However, Gaskell, perhaps smarting from the criticism of her first novel, declines the opportunity to write about the masters, instead suggesting that she “should like some man, who had a man’s correct knowledge, to write on this subject, and make the poor intelligent working-people understand the infinite anxiety as to right and wrong-doing which I believe the riches bring to many” (120). Gaskell’s true interest remains the need for understanding between the middle-class men who serve as ultimate providers, and the working-classes who need to be educated about the “infinite anxiety” suffered by those men.

Despite Gaskell’s insistence that she believes differently than she did before, *North and South* does not represent a radically different ideology concerning class issues from what is presented in *Mary Barton*. Instead, the novel constructs a more detailed continuation of its support of middle-class dominance, and depicts working-class dependence on the middle-classes even more strongly than in *Mary Barton*. Rather than illustrating Gaskell’s changed opinions, it is her increased investment in the middle-class’ ability to cure social ills, along with the issues of national identity brought about by the Crimean War and British citizen’s increased exposure to foreign cultures, that separate
the two novels. *North and South* is consumed with educating middle-class men on how to be “true men,” who are defined as men who are the ultimate providers, taking care of their own families as well as the poor, while simultaneously retaining independence from others. If in *Mary Barton*, as Schor suggested, Gaskell had trouble imagining a world without authority, *North and South* reads didactically as a blueprint for successful male middle-class power in England.

Regardless of the similarities between the two novels, differences between them are the result of *North and South*’s political context and its author’s changing beliefs, and these differences should be addressed. If *Mary Barton* emerged from the poverty of the “Hungry Forties” and functioned as an impassioned call to arms to motivate the middle-class to help the poor, then another national crisis partly explains Gaskell’s motivation in exploring middle-class masculinity in *North and South*. In the middle of the nineteenth century Britain had entered into the Crimean War, taking part in its first full fledged military conflict in nearly forty years. While few English novelists directly addressed the war in their fiction, it was apparently on Gaskell’s mind as she wrote *North and South*. As Stefanie Markovits points out, Gaskell’s letters to Dickens and Parthenope Nightingale (Florence’s older sister) during this period reflect her interest in the war, and especially in how closely those around her are following news of the battles. She writes to Dickens that some “fine-spinners in a mill at Bolton, earning their 36 shillings a week, threw up their work and enlisted last week, on hearing of the sufferings in the Crimea, for they said they could neither sleep nor eat for thinking how the soldiers wanted help” (324). And to Parthenope she writes of “poor little factory babies” (359) who are being christened “Florence” in sympathy and admiration of Nightingale’s efforts
in the war. In comparing *North and South* to *Mary Barton*’s somewhat limited scope in subject matter, Julia Sun-Joo Lee suggests that the character of Frederick, whose role as sailor “introduces an international context to [*North and South]*” (450) particularly by responding to the Crimean War; he represents the dangers of cosmopolitanism and exposure to foreign cultures. As part of a mutiny against his dangerously inept captain while sailing on the Orion, Frederick becomes a fugitive, described as a “traitor of the blackest dye” and a “base, ungraceful disgrace to his profession” by a “wicked newspaper” (100). In response to these charges Frederick becomes unwilling to return to England to go to trial. Lee argues that part of Margaret’s unease with Frederick’s decision to renounce his British citizenship and live in Spain is the result of her xenophobia, as Margaret worries that “Frederick…is metamorphosing from Englishman to Spaniard” and that he has become “‘infected’ and hispanicized, as if nationhood is a disease that crosses somatic boundaries” (473). Frederick, while depicted in somewhat sympathetic terms (he is never represented as someone to be despised or even shamed as are the bloodstained men in *MB*), is not a part of successful British middle-class masculinity because he does not submit to British law. In Margaret’s opinion, “Frederick is an outlaw” (32) and an outlaw flaunts the authority of middle-class men. 

It is not Frederick’s supposed crime that makes him a threat to British middle-class authority. Rather, it is his refusal to submit to the rule of law in evading police, ceding his patriarchal authority by removing himself from the social sphere, and renouncing his citizenship that places him outside the definition of British middle-class masculine gender identity. For Mrs. Hale, Frederick’s role in the mutiny is not a shameful act, but represents a strong and independent masculine spirit. She tells Margaret that
“loyalty and obedience to wisdom and justice are fine, but it is still finer to defy arbitrary power, unjustly and cruelly used—not on behalf of ourselves, but on behalf of others more helpless” (100). In other words, Frederick’s ability to rise up against tyranny on behalf of his fellow soldiers paints him as a “true man” since he displays a strong desire to protect those unable or unwilling to protect themselves. While a “wicked newspaper” may attack Frederick’s character, Gaskell defends his mutinous actions but condemns his unwillingness to defend himself against those attacks. The real charge against Frederick is that he is allowing others to define him rather than following Thornton’s definition of a “true man” who considers himself independent and capable of self-definition. Even in his brief appearance in the novel Frederick’s male authority is evident. Upon entering the Hale home Margaret immediately becomes submissive. After preparing food for him she “went in like a serving-maid” and was “proud of serving Frederick” (225). Frederick’s instant ability to command authority in his household is explained by R.W. Connell’s concept of the “patriarchal dividend.” This phrase refers to the method in which “men gain a dividend from patriarchy in terms of honour, prestige, and the right to command” (82). While Connell is referring to all men, it is especially true in terms of middle-class males like Frederick who obtain this dividend simply by being born male. Yet despite possessing this dividend, Frederick’s decision to not stay in England after returning briefly to see his mother before she dies, functions as a relinquishment of his patriarchal authority. And while Mr. Lennox, in talking to Margaret, attempts to reestablish Frederick’s masculine gender identity by reinstituting his military rank by referring to him as “Lieutenant Hale,” Frederick’s fugitive status and renunciation of British citizenship causes Margaret to state that he “is lost to [her]” (348) as he is,
according to Lee, “relegated…to the national and geographic margins…sacrificed for national stability” (475).

I do not intend to follow this argument since Lee brilliantly examines the novel’s overall unease with foreign influences and cultural hybridity (and it’s not only Margaret, Dixon also worries about traveling to Spain and being forced to convert to Catholicism). However, I do wish to argue that the context in which *North and South* was written increases the importance the author places on defining England’s middle-class men. At a time when British men and women were being exposed to other cultures it becomes even more important to define and assert national identity. Following Benedict Anderson’s notion of imagined communities, we can see how Gaskell’s attempts to define authentic middle-class masculine gender identity in *North and South* (and alternately defining the unsuccessful man in Frederick) function in establishing Britain’s national identity at a time of war. Indeed, Anderson highlights the mid-nineteenth century as a time where middle-class identity throughout Europe was largely created and sustained through the printed word. As opposed to aristocracies which had created a class identity “outside language” through “kinship, clientship, and personal loyalties,” it was the “bourgeoisies [who] were the first classes to achieve solidarities on an essentially imagined basis” as they came to “visualize in a general way the existence of thousands and thousands like themselves through print-language” (76-77). Thus, the novel’s representation of British middle-class men during the Crimean War functions as a method of establishing a strong national identity through the printed word. In defining what men are, and therefore what England is, we find an attempt to define what British men should not be as well. Frederick is neither a “true man” nor a “hard man,” but a non-man that the novel cannot
endorse as representative of British middle-class masculinity. In *Mary Barton* Gaskell moves Jem to Canada, and provides a happy end for him there because he attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to defend himself against the charges weighed against him. Frederick’s unsuccessful performance of masculine gender identity serves as a warning to those men who risk failing to live up to their middle-class male responsibilities.

Through the character of Frederick we have seen how the novel’s subtle response to the Crimean War, and the revolutions that spread throughout Europe in the late 1840’s and early 1850’s, illustrate an increased importance in defining England’s men during this time. It is the novel’s focus on the “true men” that provide a definition of successful British middle-class masculinity. In opposition to the absent Frederick, the insistence on middle-class male presence in the home and at work underlies all of the representations of middle-class masculinities, from the failure of the absent Frederick, to the philanthropic Mr. Hale and Thornton. Surridge argues that “Gaskell suggests strongly that the emotional poverty of middle-class families arises from their absent fathers” (338). Though Surridge is focusing primarily on the Carson family in *Mary Barton*, *North and South* illustrates the dangers of absent fathers in working and middle-class homes as another means of endorsing strong middle-class male authority. Boucher’s suicide (similar to the suicide of Thornton’s father) leaves the family helpless and in need of male authority. Upon hearing of Boucher’s suicide, Margaret’s first instinct is to remind Mrs. Boucher that God functions as a replacement patriarch, asking “[w]ho has promised to be a father to the fatherless?” (272). Yet this appeal to faith falls flat, as Mrs. Boucher does not trust in God’s ability to provide financially for their family as would a
husband. Gaskell asserts that it is left to the middle-class, namely Thornton and other owners, to provide for the poor.

*North and South* argues for the necessity of male presence in the work-place as well as the home. In her first novel Gaskell portrayed working-class masculine gender identity as being largely defined through a contradictory combination of independence amongst other working-class people and an inherent dependence on the middle-classes. In *North and South* the solution to changing gender roles for middle-class men is to similarly combine two qualities that appear incongruous to characters like Higgins, with his notion of the “two chaps” existing in the same body. Men must balance between firmness and softness in order to accomplish this performance of a successful middle-class masculine gender identity. Thus the novel suggests that middle-class men adopt feminine characteristics, but only to an extent since they must not cede authority by appearing too feminine. The firmness is apparent in men like Thornton and Hale who perform determined actions and express strong, unwavering opinions. Hale’s decision to move to Milton is met with resistance from his daughter and wife, yet he rejects their complaints with a sturdy and emotionless demeanor as Gaskell describes him sitting in “rigid stillness” and looking at Margaret “in the same steady, stony manner” (38) until she accepts that his decision is final. For Thornton, those who are self-indulgent (and who are therefore not firm men) are looked upon “with contempt for their poorness of character” (79). He tells Margaret that he would rather be a man toiling, suffering—nay, failing and successless—here, than lead a dull prosperous life in the old worn grooves of what you call
more aristocratic society down in the South, with their slow days of careless ease (75).

At this point the “true man,” at least according to Thornton, is closer in character to working-class men like Barton who just want to work in order to perform their masculinity than they are to the aristocracy. Beth Fowkes Tobin argues that middle-class authors like Gaskell and Dickens were often “portraying the upper classes as careless, self-indulgent and incompetent” (3) as a method of increasing middle-class authority over the poor. These similarities seem more obvious when we take into account the novel’s insistence on what we can call middle-class male softness; a characteristic that is defined throughout the novel as a genuine, heart-felt desire to help the poor.

Since both working and middle-class men display similar dichotomies between firmness and softness, how does Gaskell differentiate the two groups? A fundamental difference between the working and middle-class men in Gaskell’s work lies in how they go about expressing their concern for those less fortunate. To avoid the fluid gender divisions Gaskell presents in her working-class characters, the “true man” of the middle class takes a hands-off approach by supplying the ideas for reform and intervention while simultaneously constructing a barrier between themselves and those for whom they are providing. Gaskell wrote that she struggled in creating the middle-class industrialist Mr. Thornton, a character she described as at once “large and strong and tender, and yet a master” (321). She refers to her difficulty in constructing a character who displays this combination of characteristics as her “next puzzle” (321). In solving this puzzle, Gaskell followed her own example she provided in the character of Mr. Carson. Just as Carson is converted in the final chapters of *Mary Barton* to an awareness of his responsibility in
caring for his workers, Thornton, Hale and other middle-class men of *North and South* go about fulfilling their “tender” obligations by enacting policies and making decisions. However, they do not perform the caretaking themselves in the same intimate way as do Barton and George in their motherly care of the Davenports⁴⁹. Upon seeing the miserable meal being eaten by Higgins, Thornton wishes to provide food for his workers so he establishes a cafeteria stocked with food of a higher quality than his workers usually consume. Even though he is assisting his workers by improving their diet (as well as paying for their children to go to school), Thornton states that he was careful to “leave them free, and not to intrude [his] own ideas upon them” (329). According to Sussman, Thornton successfully justifies middle-class authority by constructing this cafeteria “creating in Carlylean fashion a male community, an industrial St. Edmundsbury, within the walls of the mill” (65), yet Thornton’s philanthropic “experiments” as he calls them, venture outside the walls of the mill as he very much imposes his “own ideas upon them.”

Though his commitment to providing for the workers in his own factory eventually cause Thornton to go bankrupt, we can draw a parallel between Thornton and Frederick’s morally right actions and the negative consequences that follow. The difference between Thornton and Frederick is that Thornton stands by his decision to give his workers better food, education for their children, and secure employment. In facing the possibility of losing his factory, Thornton tells his mother that even though he “must give up business” he will “pay all men” (384). This allows Thornton to remain in the novel as a successful representation of middle-class masculinity. A “true man,” he
displays softness in his desire to help his workers, and firmness in his ability to stand by his decision and suffer the loss of his business as a result.

Jo Pryke argues that Thornton’s decision to lose his business rather than firing his workers is the result of his new found belief in equality between himself and those men. Thornton sees that he and his workers lead “parallel lives, very close but never touching,” (381) and that his decision to eat with the men in the factory cafeteria is remarked upon by Mr. Bell who claims that “[n]othing like the act of eating for equalising men” (330). Pryke sees Thornton’s sense of equality with his workers as the character’s saving grace; with Thornton understanding his workers’ suffering “in human terms” that is a “negation indeed of his earlier denials of wider responsibilities, or assertion of the benignly developing and self-righting nature of the system” (38). While Thornton’s ability to understand the suffering of the poor is integral in his character’s development into a “true man,” Gaskell’s representation of this “equalising” between working and middle-class men is betrayed by her own text as well as undermined by the fundamental difference between the dependent working man and the independent patriarchal master. While the working-class men in Mary Barton were individualized and given a voice, the same types of men in North and South are often represented together in groups rather than individually, and are sometimes characterized as something less than human. Groups of working-class men are represented as one creature, walking with “many voices” and “many steps” but with “one distinct, slow tramp of feet” (268). The group of rioting working-class men are described as being “inarticulate as that of a troop of animals,” (162) and as “wild beasts” (161). The cries of young working boys are not human sounds, but are equated with “the distant sea, lapping the sandy shore with measured sound” (55).
Margaret even urges Thornton to “speak to your workmen as if they were human beings” (161) in an effort to humanize them in his eyes.

Gaskell again presents two incongruous beliefs concerning class relations. The argument for equality between the classes is made over and again, yet, as in her first novel, Gaskell portrays the workers as fundamentally dependent upon the charity of the middle-class. The split between the worker and the master is just as rigid here as in *Mary Barton*, even if the belief in the possibility of upward social mobility remains stronger than before. These incongruities are used to explain the need for middle-class authority over the working-classes. Thornton tells Mr. Hale that industrialization, which he calls a “reaction” (77) to pre-capitalist ideology, has enabled men to rise up in social class. It is this reaction that caused “more factories, more masters; more men were wanted” resulting in the “power of masters and men [becoming] more equally balanced” (77). Thornton exemplifies Robin Gilmour’s look at the Victorian notion of “gentlemanhood”. Gilmour’s analysis of Samuel Smile’s popular 1859 work *Self Help* shows us how this notion of the “gentleman” was “essentially classless” (99) in terms of its belief in the possibility of self-improvement and self-discipline regardless of social/economic standing. According to Gilmour, post-industrialization the “gentleman” became the idealized masculine gender identity for every economic class, and it is entirely irrelevant whether the actuality of achieving “gentlemanhood” was possible so long as the idea that it was possible existed. For Thornton social mobility is very much possible, though this more “balanced” power between masters and workers resulted in men who can rise up in social rank and those who cannot. Thornton believes that
It is one of the great beauties of our system, that a working-man may raise himself into the power and position of a master by his own exertions and behaviour; that, in fact, every one who rules himself to decency and sobriety of conduct, and attention to his duties, comes over to our ranks; it may not always be as a master, but as an overlooker, a cashier, a book-keeper, a clerk, one on the side of authority and order. (78)

It is the opportunity for any working man to rise up in social rank to the middle-class level of “authority and order,” and for those who are unsuccessful at this attempt, they have only themselves to blame as they are, for Thornton, “their own enemies, certainly” (78). Thornton’s belief in the ability to climb the social ladder is strengthened through personal example, as he rose from shop-worker to factory owner “through his own exertions and behaviour.” Indeed, Thornton’s father serves as another example of unsuccessful middle-class masculinity, since he committed suicide after losing all his money and forcing his family into poverty. The failure of Thornton’s father to be his family’s provider leads to Thornton’s opportunity to validate his own masculinity by returning years later to pay off his father’s creditors and rise to the middle-class.

Taking this view on social mobility, the working-class men are simply those who have failed to rise in social standing due to a flawed masculine gender identity (possibly due to a lack of self-control, no work-ethic, or a refusal to be the provider). They, in Thornton’s words, are “their own enemy” and because of this character flaw they require assistance from the middle classes. Despite evidence that it is possible to work your way up into the middle class (unlike Carson, we know how Thornton accomplished this), the novel continually portrays the working class as dependent creatures under middle-class
authority. To further argue the need for middle-class assistance in helping the poor, the novel portrays the working-classes as children, or adolescents, which at least seems a marked improvement over being represented as animals. Mr. Hale believes that “the masses were already passing rapidly into the troublesome stage which intervenes betweens childhood and manhood” (111). He goes on to suggest that a “wise parent humors the desire for independent action, so as to become the friend and adviser when his absolute rule shall cease” (111). Though Hale’s comments imply that the “masses” are in the process of rising to a higher economic and social status, it is still the duty of the middle class to parent them. To complicate this further, Gaskell lays the blame on those working-class men who do not rise to the middle class since we are told they all have the opportunity to do so. The novel argues that it is only a select number of men who are able to rise above their class (Thornton is the only clear example in North and South) while the rest need the master’s assistance in the form of labor, wages, health care, and education. The narrator states that the “question always is, has everything been done to make the sufferings of [the poor] as small as possible?” (64). Mr. Hale’s belief in the necessity for working-class education places him the category of the “true man” who can define himself against the Church of England, and stand firm in his decision despite the suffering of his wife and daughter, while simultaneously expressing a strong desire to help the poor. He even goes to Higgins’ home uninvited to educate him on the relationship between workers and their masters.

Initially Thornton believes that his authority over the workers exists only during working hours and that he does not see that “we have any right to impose leading-strings upon them for the rest of the time” (112). North and South traces his development into a
“true man” who believes in the necessity of imposing “leading-strings” for the workers’ own benefit, an attitude held by Mr. Hale throughout the novel. By the end of the novel Thornton has increased his intervention into the lives of his workers and their families to include their diet and education. One of his steps towards becoming a “true man” requires him to realize

how much and how deep was the interest he had grown of late to feel in his position as a manufacturer, simply because it led him into such close contact, and gave him the opportunity of so much power, among a race of people strange, shrewd, ignorant; but, above all, full of character and strong human feeling. (380)

The reason the novel gives for endorsing an all-inclusive intervention into their lives is that the working classes are unable to govern their own behavior without an authoritative middle-class man to save them from themselves. During a strike, Margaret notices that working-class men have become increasingly dangerous. She notices “unusual loiterers in the street” and the “more ill-looking of the men…hung about on the steps of the beer-houses and gin-shops, smoking, and commenting pretty freely on every passer-by” (121).

And like Barton’s turn towards domestic abuse, Bessy comments that her father will “get angry and mad—they all do—and then they get tired out wi’ being angry and mad, and maybe ha’ done things in their passion they’d be glad to forget” (125).

This notion of the wickedness and danger resulting from an uneducated and unemployed working-class populace was certainly not rare in eighteenth and nineteenth-century British fiction. Tobin draws upon the work of late eighteenth-century writer and philanthropist Hannah More to illustrate how common this trope of the savage and sinful
working-classes was in British discourse concerning middle-class intervention into the lives of the poor. Tobin argues that throughout all of More’s writings there was an assumption that the “rural poor and even the poor of the new industrial towns, like Nailsea, are morally depraved and living in a state of sin and ignorance” (114). Beliefs similar to More’s concerning the sinful lives of the poor color most Victorian industrial fiction. Furthermore, Tobin suggests that the educational technique endorsed by More and others “involved a combination of surveillance and coercion” (117). Thornton’s charitable “experiments” are closely tied to personal contact between the middle and working-classes, and appear in the novel as a detailed method of reform that any master could copy in his own factory. Horton argues that Gaskell’s use of the word “experiment” to describe Thornton’s plan reflects “her deliberately scientific approach—after the somewhat hit-and-miss interventions that she depicts in *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*—to questions of social conflict and inequality” (205). To add to this, the use of the term “experiment” accurately reflects the cold, sterile, impersonal nature of Thornton’s efforts. These reforms are not the types of hands-on actions performed by Barton and George. Instead, Thornton’s “experiments” involve face-to-face interaction that is simultaneously distanced by close observation instead of corporeal contact. Thornton provides food for his workers and their families as he observes them eating, and, even when he joins them, he is still distanced from these men because of his authority over them. Almost all of the middle-class characters in the novel enter into the homes of the workers to observe their living conditions, yet those workers are not invited into middle-class homes. While Williams argues that Gaskell is not concerned with the thoughts or feelings of the working classes in *North and South*, she is, however, very much concerned with their
behavior. The stress placed on observing the poor as a means of social control is described by Foucault as a disciplinary power that operates through visibility “at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory invisibility” (187). Couched in terms of equality and symbiotic relations between the classes, the “true man” of North and South is one who provides labor, wages, sustenance, and education to the poor as a means of achieving ultimate authority and control over them.

In achieving this ultimate authority over the working-classes, the novel suggests that women must assist men in order to reestablish and redefine their dominant status. Thornton’s business fails, and he is only placed back into that position of factory owner due to Margaret’s assistance. Nancy Armstrong has argued that

those cultural functions which we automatically attribute to and embody as women—those, for example, of mother, nurse, teacher, social worker, and general overseer of service institutions—have been just as instrumental in bringing the new middle-classes into power and maintaining their dominance as all the economic take-offs and political breakthroughs as attributed to men. (26)

For Gaskell, the relationship between men and women is not as equal as Armstrong and other critics have suggested, but it follows the complicated definition of “equality” used throughout Mary Barton and North and South. Just as Gaskell uses the term “equal” to describe the ideal relationship between worker and master, relations between women and men are also symbiotic but ultimately based on middle-class male authority and dominance. Though, as in Mary Barton, we are again presented with female/maternal influence rather than female/maternal authority. This is not to say that the female
characters do not wield much power. For example, the effect Margaret has on Lennox and Thornton after she rejects their proposals is striking. Jill Matus argues that the “[i]ntense emotional experience such as Thornton experiences after Margaret’s rejection has the effect of undoing the equanimity and balance of the self, disturbing bodily as well as psychic composure” (39). After the rejection Thornton experiences “positive bodily pain—a violent headache, and a throbbing intermittent pulse” (191), for which he must visit the countryside and work on practicing self-control to help remedy his pain.

Margaret’s power to influence both Thornton and her father’s entire philosophy concerning the relationship between masters and workers also shows the strong influence displayed by women in the novel. It is Margaret’s influence that helps turn Thornton from the “hard man” to the “true man,” thus enabling him to finally be a successful businessman and, eventually we assume, a providing husband and father. However, just as Mary’s efforts to clear Jem’s name functioned to only reestablish his successful working-class masculinity, the female characters of North and South use their power to assist in establishing middle-class male authority rather than asserting an authority of their own. In Mary Barton and North and South Gaskell’s gender politics certainly provide more opportunities for women than, for example, existed in most of Dickens’s fiction. Female authority is not allowed to exist on its own behalf, but only if it serves to assist in constructing the authority of a man’s masculine gender identity.

Marriage in North and South functions as the final component of a successfully performed middle-class masculine gender identity. It is Thornton’s final step towards becoming a “true man,” and again we see how the novel constructs masculinity by using female influence and assistance to establish male dominance. Sussman argues that
Thornton and Margaret’s marriage provides narrative closure that “comes not from union with other males…but by entry into heterosexuality through marriage” (66). This entry into heterosexuality further validates Thornton’s masculinity by allowing him to become master of his factory and his home, as well as provider to his workers and his wife and children. Marriage (and subsequently having children) produces a visible means of performing one’s masculinity by providing evidence of virility and heterosexuality. Thornton and Margaret’s eventual marriage would provide Thornton with his own family to provide for apart from his mother and sister who function as a sort of starter family.

By novel’s end the successful performance of Thornton’s “true man” status requires a woman, not just as a wife and mother to his children, but to prevent the tender and nurturing aspects of his “experiments” from being perceived as too feminine. In the next chapter I will focus more specifically on the requirement of marriage for the construction of middle-class masculinity, and how Braddon’s novels critiqued this requirement. Here, *North and South* shows how entry into heterosexuality through marriage can allow Thornton to display emotion safely (in the last few lines of the novel Gaskell describes his voice as “trembling with tender passion” (394)) without fear of appearing unmanly. Furthermore, the “two chaps” identified by Higgins are formed into one homogenous whole due to the successful entry into heterosexual marriage. In contrast to *Mary Barton*, Stoneman sees gender in *North and South* as “axes which intersect rather than coincide” (119). She also suggests that Thornton and Margaret “have challenged the ideological lies which polarise gender identity” (137). Although the novel presents Thornton’s softening as he goes from “hard” to “true man” due to Margaret’s influence, and Margaret achieves authority by providing Thornton with the opportunity to
reclaim his factory, these gender division are made rigid again by the end of the novel.
Margaret is described as “glowing with beautiful shame” and telling Thornton that she is
“not good enough” (394-395). After being presented with flowers Thornton gathered
during his visit to Helstone, Margaret says he “must give them to [her]” while he
responds “you must pay for them” (395). In the end Margaret is “That woman” and
Thornton is “That man” (395) suggesting Gaskell’s assertion of rigid gender divisions
between middle-class men and women. Combined with Gaskell’s representation of fluid
gender roles for the working-classes, it is these rigid gender divisions that further
strengthen Gaskell’s assertion of male middle-class authority in response to changing
gender definitions surrounding the burgeoning middle-class, and establishment of
separate spheres ideology.
Chapter Three
Supporting and Subverting: Conventional and Challenging Masculinities in M.E. Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*

_The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest whenever war is just, whenever conquest necessary._

- *John Ruskin, “Of Queen’s Gardens”, 1865*

“Of Queen’s Gardens” identifies action as the single most important attribute in performing a masculine gender identity. Whether that action is physical (as in the act of discovering or defending) or mental (through the process of speculation and invention) the definition of masculinity by the 1860’s focused on the absolute necessity for male activity. Kate Millet argues that Ruskin’s lecture “is an expression of the more normative beliefs of the Victorian middle class at the moment of their most optimistic and public profession” (89). “Of Queen’s Gardens” was immensely popular in the last half of the nineteenth century, in England as well as America. Matthew Sweet notes that *Sesame and Lillies* (the collection that featured “Of Queen’s Gardens”) had gone through eight editions by 1882 and thirty-five editions in America by 1900. The lecture helped define men, namely middle-class men, as creatures that were always moving and never stagnant.
Whether they were moving out of the house on their way to work, engaging physically and intellectually in their occupation, or moving around the social sphere and contributing economically to British society, men were defined by their ability to be in motion. However, Ruskin’s definition of a man as a continually active force simultaneously defines the unmasculine man who would be characterized by physical and mental stasis.

A definition of masculinity that is based on mental and physical activity—and the argument that intellectual labor was as important and worthy of respect as physical action—allows middle-class men to gain authority because it places them in superior positions to both working-class men (because their work was physical and not intellectual) and upper-class men (because their activities were not deemed labor). The elevation of intellectual labor as equal (at least) to physical work also begins to level the playing field for working middle-class women (such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon) who were allowed to produce intellectually and therefore claim authority as workers and providers. As Gaskell’s industrial novels reflect an interest in delineating middle- and working-class masculinities to argue for the necessity of middle-class intervention in the lives of the poor, Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* draw differences between middle and working-class masculinities, but also between middle-class and aristocratic male gender identities as well. Throughout these two novels the emerging middle class is presented in contrast to the almost animal-like working classes, as well as the increasingly ineffectual (and increasingly characterized as effeminate) aristocracy. In terms of middle-class conceptions of masculinity, these novels focus on the importance of physical and mental activity (specifically ratiocination), determination, hard-work
(mental and/or physical), and the stabilizing function of marriage and family for middle-class men. Braddon follows other Victorian authors (Carlyle, for example, as discussed in the previous chapter) who sought to equate mental labor with physical work. For Braddon especially this similarity also functions as a distinction since mental labor (requiring formal education) separates the middle-class career-man from the working-class laborer. Coupled with a strong work-ethic and an identity tied to their role as husband and father, the mental labor of middle-class men also divided them from the aristocracy who, as I will show, display almost no work-ethic in these novels, and therefore present a less ideal masculinity than the middle-class characters.

Although they shared an investment in middle-class conceptions of masculinity, Braddon’s novels differed in form and genre from Gaskell’s. In addition, the critical reception most sensation novels received largely dismissed the genre by using the epithet “popular fiction” to describe them. Despite the criticism leveled at Gaskell’s novels, most reviewers labeled Mary Barton and North and South as “serious novels,” thereby giving her a level of acceptance and respect missing from treatment of Braddon and other sensation writers. The domestic novels of the 1840’s and 50’s were quickly being replaced (in popularity, not in critical approval) by the sensation novels of the 1860’s. For women novelists especially, the popularity of the sensation genre allowed greater opportunity to earn a living through writing. Calling the 1850’s the “heyday of English domestic fiction” Monica Fryckstedt points out that by the 1860’s aspiring women writers in England “were most likely to try their hand at sensation novels, imitating Miss Braddon and Mrs. Henry Wood” (21) rather than the industrial or social problem novels of the 40’s and 50’s. Lady Audley’s Secret and Aurora Floyd are usually categorized as
Victorian sensation novels, but some critics have more recently began using the term “Victorian gothic” to describe these texts, due to their appropriation and domestication of the gothic genre.\textsuperscript{liii} Wilkie Collins’s \textit{The Woman in White} (1860) and Mrs. Henry Wood’s \textit{East Lynne} (1861) are often credited as the first examples of Victorian gothic/sensation novels, but Braddon’s novels differed slightly, but importantly, from other novels in this genre. As P.D. Edwards explains, Braddon’s works “largely dispensed with both the Dickensian grotesqueries, ingenious masquerades, and intricately convoluted story-lines favoured by Collins, and the melodramatic emotionalism, pietism and histrionics—also deriving from Dickens—of Mrs. Henry Wood” (vii). In contrast to these generic characteristics, Braddon’s novels focused more on realistic depictions of crime, deceit, and the psychological.

Braddon’s ability to represent the more quotidian aspects of sensation fiction was noticed by Henry James, who, in an article published in \textit{The Nation} in 1865, praised the author for representing “those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors” (108).\textsuperscript{liv} James’s argument illustrates one reason for the controversy caused by the sensation novels of the 1860’s. These novels were able to domesticate and realistically represent current anxieties, mysteries, and fears, blurring that line that Greenblatt refers to when he argues that self-fashioning functions best when there is not a clear distinction between literature and “real” life. This was a characteristic that separated sensation fiction from the 18\textsuperscript{th}-century gothic novel as well as the Newgate novels of the 1830’s\textsuperscript{lv}. Winifred Hughes argues that gothic/sensation novels from the 1860’s functioned as a “pervasive mode of confronting and processing hidden fears, anxieties, and obsessions behind the dominant Victorian cultural institutions” (260), and it is these
representations of current cultural and intimate psychological issues that allowed authors like Braddon to intervene in debates such as those concerning male middle-class gender identity.

As the quote from Ruskin that begins this chapter suggests, men (namely working and middle-class men) who successfully performed their masculine gender identity did so through mental and physical activity, as well as channeling their “energy” in appropriate ways. Present in *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* are un-masculine men (of all social classes) who are not active in the way Ruskin suggests, and who do not focus their “energy” appropriately. These novels present the cultural pressure for these men to transform—to change their behavior and their desires—and adopt a heteronormative masculine gender identity. *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* show the benefit of adopting these hegemonic masculinities, namely through the gaining of social acceptance, and rewarding this transformation with success in one’s career and in romantic relationships. However, they also show the cost by revealing how alternate male identities are lost or shunned. For women, these costs and benefits are similar in that the female characters can gain power in a patriarchal system only by functioning as sources of this pressure to transform, thereby ensuring the continuation of the patriarchal system that oppresses them.

In *Lady Audley’s Secret* Braddon’s depiction of Robert’s difficult transformation disrupts the notion of a “natural” gender identity, and instead demonstrates that one’s gender is a constructed performance. Even if Robert’s gender identity is a constructed performance rather than a natural characteristic of his sex, his belief in the necessity of
his transformation (and, most importantly, his successful achievement of that gender identity) helps to maintain middle-class authority and dominance. The novel ends happily for every character except the villain Lady Audley. Robert reconstructs his masculinity and achieves a happy ending through his entry into heterosexual marriage, made possible by his success at his career, and appropriately (i.e. heterosexually) channeled feelings for his friend George. Again, this “happy ending” is achieved through the suppression of alternate masculinities, namely the repression of homosexual desire, and, in Robert’s case specifically, an asexuality that is not interested in heterosexual marriage and establishing a family. The importance of marriage and the establishment of a home and family for one’s masculinity cannot be overstated. Tosh argues that “[t]o form a household, to exercise authority over dependents, and to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining and protecting them—these things sets the seal on a man’s gender identity” (108).

Furthermore, the authority and dominance achieved by middle-class men is done so through the containment of women (namely Lady Audley) who seek to gain authority as well. By placing Lady Audley into a mental institution, her power and influence can be contained and she no longer poses a threat to masculine authority.

This notion of suppressed (or, in the least, shunned) masculinities is even more apparent in *Aurora Floyd*. This novel presents the reader with variation amongst masculinities that go beyond the aberrant male gender identity of Robert Audley. In this novel, Braddon provides a more diverse representation of possible and acceptable masculine gender identities than she does in *Lady Audley’s Secret* while still revealing the benefits and the costs of the ultimate dominance of hegemonic middle-class men. The novel’s male gender identities cross class lines, and suggest a more radical idea
concerning the appropriateness of active middle-class masculinity by arguing for the legitimacy of multiple masculinities. Whereas Robert Audley’s male gender identity is reconstructed and performed in a socially acceptable manner by novel’s end (thus presenting a singular hegemonic conception of acceptable masculinity), the men in *Aurora Floyd* represent various conceptions of their gender identity based on class, profession, and physical appearance. In terms of aristocratic masculinity, the novel suggests that this conception has ceased to fulfill a function in modern industrialized England. In addition, the novel critiques the notion that a legitimate masculine gender identity must be partially based on its visual recognition in the social sphere. Through the characters of James Conyers and Stephen “Softy” Hargreaves, *Aurora Floyd* shows how unreliable (and dangerous) it is to judge one’s masculinity by their physical appearance as a requirement in performing ones’ masculine gender identity.

Both novels show that literature plays a role, for good or ill in the social construction of masculinity. In *Aurora Floyd*, Lucy, an avid reader of High-Church novels, is too influenced by literary conceptions of masculinity that cause her to ask

> How could Aurora be otherwise than wretched in the companionship of a gentleman who had neither a straight nose nor dark hair? Some women never outlive that school-girl infatuation for straight noses and dark hair. Some girls would have rejected Napoleon the Great because he wasn’t ‘tall’, or would have turned up their noses at the author of ‘Childe Harold’ if they had happened to see him in a stand-up collar. If Lord Byron had never turned down his collars, would his poetry have been as popular as it
was? If Mr. Alfred Tennyson were to cut his hair, would that operation modify our opinion of ‘The Queen of the May’? Where does that marvelous power of association begin and end? (221)

Because of its large audience (especially in comparison with the readers of Gaskell’s industrial fiction, for example) Braddon’s novels were able to, as Kate Flint argues, “encourage their consumers not just to take cultural references as part of a social backcloth, but to enter into an active process of interpretation which invites recognition of their own active, rather than passive, role as readers” (283). Lucy’s understanding of masculinity is heavily influenced by the literature she has read. Specifically it is her passive reading of this literature that has not enabled her to question these conceptions of masculinity represented by Byron and Tennyson. *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* function as Braddon’s attempts to actively weigh the costs and benefits regarding hegemonic conceptions of masculinity by drawing on the ability of literature to influence “that marvelous power of association” for her readers that, amongst other things, defines masculine gender identity.

**Detection and a Strong Work-Ethic – *Lady Audley’s Secret***

Braddon’s representation of an aristocracy that is quickly dying off functions as an overarching framework for understanding the crisis of masculinity presented in *Lady Audley’s Secret*. With the emergence of the middle-class during the Victorian period ideas of masculinity were compared to and contrasted against the “male-ness” represented by the aristocracy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By
mid-century the aristocratic male was often portrayed as isolated, inactive, immoral, and effeminate. The changing social make-up during the Victorian era, the emergence of the working middle-class, and their growing numbers in comparison to the dwindling numbers and slow decline of the aristocracy’s influence forced a change in how that society defined male and female gender identities. Women, as has been much documented, became the angels of the house while men’s identity, and specifically their purpose in Victorian society, became closely tied to what physical, intellectual, and religious work they produced. By the time *Lady Audley’s Secret* began its serialization in late 1862 the accepted social definition of working and middle-class masculinity was closely tied to the idea of being a good worker. The aristocratic man of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries that could spend his days lounging about was being replaced with the physically strong, very active middle-class man who, if he was to be thought of as a man at all, must be found working outside the confines of the home during most of the day, if not through manual labor than through intellectual activity. The question then becomes what must one do to establish the new representation of male-ness in the Victorian period, and what happens to men who do not fit into that new category? Those men who did not fit into this newly constructed idea of masculinity were pushed to the margins, and became a threat to that society’s hegemonic conception of masculine gender identity. Those men become a type of monster that must be either tamed or killed in order to remove the counter hegemonic threat to middle-class conceptions of masculinity, and therefore help to establish that masculine norm.

Robert’s initial unmasculine masculine identity appears as a type of monster that does not fit aristocratic or middle-class conceptions of male gender identity. The
transformation of Robert from this monstrous creature into successful middle-class masculinity enables the novel to have a happy ending, as the monster is finally contained and transformed into a non-threatening man. In *Monster Theory*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues that cultures create their monsters at specific historic and cultural moments. Thus the monster is a “construct and a projection” that contains that culture’s “fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy” (4). Victor Frankenstein’s creation is the most literal example of this, as it embodies the fear of technological and scientific advancements that may cause destruction and pain, the desire to be god-like in creating life, the anxiety produced by a man failing to take responsibility for the thing he has created, and the fantasy of a scientific breakthrough in which the dead can be re-animated. Another example would be the way Dracula (and the vampire in general) comes to represent the fear of sickness and disease spread through blood and other bodily fluids, as well as the threat of foreign (sometimes colonial) natives invading the homeland.

Initially, Robert’s pre-transformation presence in the novel threatens to smash the clear distinctions between male and female, men and women, and masculine and feminine; distinctions that were then urgently being constructed for the growing middle classes. Initially, Braddon positions Robert as an indefinable unmasculine man, monstrous because of his inability to fit into any single category of masculine gender identity. In terms of his lazy attitude and aversion to work he fulfills the stereotype of the ineffectual aristocratic man. This type of man was satirized by Anthony Trollope who, in *The Way We Live Now*, describes the character of Sir Felix as a man who
had never done a day’s work in his life. He could lie in bed. He could eat and drink. He could smoke and sit idle. He could play cards; and could amuse himself with women – the lower the culture of the women, the better the amusement. Beyond these things the world had nothing for him.

(511-512)

Braddon’s Robert Audley is similar to Sir Felix; except that Audley’s economic standing betrays this aristocratic status. He is situated amongst other working men in London, yet he avoids doing actual work, and chooses to remain absent in the social sphere while he reads French novels all day in his chambers. According to Cohen, the monster cannot be easily categorized or defined. Monsters are “disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration” and that the monster is dangerous because it is a “form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions” (6). The monster appears, as Cohen argues, at a time of crisis in which a binary opposition is being constructed or contested. Often, the monster presents a third category, a hybrid combining the two oppositional categories into one ambiguous category. Robert appears at a moment in which the definitions of masculinity are changing for men of all economic classes, and he is, in a way, stuck between the old representations of manliness and the new. He is neither the new, strong, working, Victorian man, nor the old aristocratic conception of masculinity, and neither is he feminized enough to be labeled effeminate.

In Lady Audley’s Secret Braddon illustrates a shift in conceptions of masculinity most vividly through the novel’s depiction of aristocratic and middle-class men, generally
avoiding the multiple representations of working-class men found in *Aurora Floyd*. The aristocratic man, represented in the novel by Robert’s uncle Sir Michael Audley, is defined in terms of stasis, mental and physical relaxation, and a lack of purpose in life. Using Ruskin’s terminology, Sir Michael Audley is not a doer, a discoverer, creator or a defender. Words like “sheltered” and “solitude” and “still” (4) are used in describing Audley Court, thereby emphasizing its disconnect from the energy and progress of urban areas. Its grounds are “broken” “dry” and “overgrown” (1). Sir Michael is “tired” (4) and prone to drifting to sleep after short walks around Audley Court. The life of the aristocratic man is presented as a creed outworn. Braddon’s portrayals of aristocratic ways of living show them to be disappearing due to their ineffectualness and disconnect from current British society. The growing separation (ideologically if not geographically) between rural and urban areas, and the class distinctions made between the rural aristocracy and the urban middle class was a cause of concern for some who valued the aristocratic conception of manliness. Famously, in “Shooting Niagara: And After” (1867) Carlyle suggests that the best hope for England would be for the aristocracy to retreat to their estates in preparation for a battle against the vulgar life found in London and other major cities. What Carlyle saw as “cheap and nasty” in London was conversely represented as active, hard-working, self-made middle-class masculinity by other writers. Contributing to this more active and urban conception of masculinity, sensation novels regularly depicted the aristocracy as out of touch, lazy, and mostly ineffectual. In *Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* Wilkie Collins’s Mr. Idle tries his hand at urban, active masculinity only to find himself not cut out for that kind of life. The aristocracy is depicted as inherently lazy with Mr. Idle “dreaming away the time which his fellow-
apprentice gets through so actively out of doors” leading him to resolve “never to be industrious again” (60).

Replacing the lazy, purposeless, and geographically isolated aristocratic man is the more energetic, harder-working, city-dwelling middle-class man represented by Robert and George Talboys. Whether the novel is arguing that the two class-based definitions of masculinity are in conflict with one another (as I will show Aurora Floyd details this conflict in more direct terms), Lady Audley’s Secret does present the waning of aristocratic manliness, and the move towards middle-class masculinity. By end of the novel, even though the movement away from the outdated aristocratic definition of masculinity and towards the new active man is complete, and “Audley Court is shut up” (446), Braddon does not depict this transition as being accomplished easily.

As I will examine later in the chapter, the anxiety produced by Robert’s ambiguous gender identity is compounded by his increasingly close connection to his friend George. Robert’s unmasculine behavior as he avoids working and being the financial provider, along with his homosexual panic-inducing feelings for George problematize Robert’s gender identity, and the novel begins to conflate gender and sexuality. Pre-transformation, Robert’s gender comes close to be defined as nearly hermaphroditic. He is biologically a male, yet displays conventional Victorian unmasculine, even feminine, traits, and this make not only his gender identity questionable, but his sex as well. Critics such as Thomas Laqueur and Londa Schiebinger have examined the ways that Victorians sought to differentiate the distinctions between men and women. Tracing the way women’s and men’s genitalia have been analyzed and
understood, Laqueur uses medical texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth century to show how ancient ideas of women’s genitalia (ideas positing that women’s sexual organs were only a turned-inward version of the man’s genitalia, for example) were used to argue for the passivity and domestic nature of women versus the out of doors, more active nature of men. This dichotomy, of course, led many to see women’s roles as domestic, indoors, mostly physically inactive, and men’s as active, working, and physically tough and firm. Schiebinger even uses illustrations of skeletons to show how gender distinctions were taught as being natural and genetic. Using anatomical illustrations from an 1829 medical textbook, Schiebinger points out that even those seemingly harmless depictions of the human skeleton were infused with cultural values. The illustration of the male skeleton, for example, is compared to the skeleton of a horse while the female skeleton is compared to that of an ostrich. Strength vs. beauty, speed and power vs. grace and elegance, the differences between men and women shown through these anatomical illustrations were thought to be completely natural. Furthermore, the men and women who did not fit those constructed gender categories, those who were somehow different from these hegemonic conceptions of sex and gender identity, must be thought of as unnatural. Their difference, like Robert’s unmasculinity, would be considered monstrous.

Robert’s initial gender ambiguity is a product of changing definitions and categorical boundaries for male gender identity, but it is still a product that must either be normalized or shunned. Cohen goes on to argue that the “monster is difference made flesh” and that those differences which the monster makes real, makes tangible are usually “cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual” (7). The Victorian period was one in
which categorization and ratiocination was highly important. Conceptions of the normal body, the normal sexual practices, the normal diet, the normal dress, the normal marriage, and the normal way to raise a child were of the utmost importance in the nineteenth century. Those of the abnormal body were to be gawked at in freak shows and circuses. Those with abnormal sexual practices were to be institutionalized and studied. The Victorian gothic monster is a product of this culture’s fears and fantasies.

As the reader is introduced to Robert, his penchant for leisure, namely his love for reading French novels and smoking his cigars and pipe (not to mention his complete aversion to working) place him uncomfortably outside the hegemonic conception of middle-class masculinity. Before moving ahead with my analysis of emergent middle-class masculinity in the novel, it is important to explain exactly how I am defining Robert, with his aristocratic lineage, as a middle-class man. Due to the practice of primogeniture, Sir Michael’s wealth would not be passed on to his nephew Robert (whose parents are not mentioned in the novel). Because of this, Robert would be left to establish his own wealth through entrepreneurship. Hence, Robert’s employment as a barrister signals his entrance into middle-class standing, theoretically at least until he can earn enough money to be absorbed back into the upper classes. The supposedly temporary movement of young aristocratic men into the ranks of the working middle class in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was meant to ensure the continuation of the gentry, but also resulted in the growing numbers of middle-class men. As Harold Perkin explains, this practice simultaneously produced “the upward flow of new men into the landed elite” that was equally “matched by a downward flow of younger sons into the middle ranks” (61). Robert is certainly a product of the aristocracy, yet he expresses two
contradictory emotions concerning his aristocratic background that illustrate this change towards a middle-class conception of masculinity. Concerning his feelings of kinship with the aristocracy, Robert views Audley Court as his home. We are told that “[e]very changing outline in the landscape was familiar to him” and that his love for Sir Michael is “perhaps the strongest sentiment of Robert’s heart” (213). Yet, Robert knows that the life led at Audley Court is coming to an end, and that “the day must come on which the oaken shutters would be closed” (214). Robert speculates that “had he lived in the time of Thomas a Kempis, he would very likely have built himself a narrow hermitage amid some forest loneliness, and spent his life in tranquil imitation of the reputed author of The Imitation” (214). Yet imitation of the aristocratic modes of living (or, as the reference to Thomas a Kempis suggests, an imitation of medieval life) is not an option made available to Robert. The way of life he may desire is now made impossible. Industrialization, and the creation of an active middle-class masculine gender identity, provides a reason for his lack of options. Upon finding the hard to locate village of Crescent Villas, Robert witnesses the end of one way of life and the beginning of the modern industrial life as the large old houses in the village “lay half embedded amongst the chaos of brick and mortar rising around them…new terraces, new streets, new squares led away into hopeless masses of stone and plaster on every side” (227). The only option left for Robert is to establish himself amongst the “chaos of brick and mortar” through working at a career.

While Robert’s ancestry suggests that his position as a type of self-made man who earns his money through hard work is merely temporary, Braddon replaces aristocratic values with those of the middle-class man, promoting them as the successful performance of hegemonic middle-class masculinity. Robert’s success is not dependent upon his
gaining elite status, but rather it is through his acceptance of a male gender identity that is defined by a desire to work hard, and to direct his energy into appropriate channels, such as his entrance into heterosexual marriage and eventual fatherhood. Therefore, Robert enters into middle-class standing in order to earn his fortune, yet the novel’s ending suggests that the goal is not to reclaim his aristocratic lineage, but to exemplify and endorse middle-class masculinity while simultaneously lamenting the cost of this transformation, namely the exclusions of alternate masculinities and the literal and figurative violence done to women in the process of forming an acceptable middle-class masculinity.

In the beginning of the novel Robert’s identity is closely tied to the aristocratic model of masculinity, and can best be described in terms of wasted energy. He is “the most vacillating and unenergetic of men” (39) who is in direct contrast to “the most animated of men” (40). We can understand why this behavior places Robert in an ambiguous position concerning his masculine gender identity if we examine the Victorian conception of innate male energy, and the importance of controlling and focusing this force. According to Sussman, the “central problematic in the Victorian practice of masculinity” is “the proper regulation of an innate male energy” (3). The most important aspect of Victorian masculinity (middle-class masculinity especially) can be found in Sussman’s use of the word “regulation.” Ruskin’s suggestion that men are the doer, the creator and the explorer is balanced with his argument that intellectual energy (namely his affinity for rational thought) is for specific purposes and physical energy for others. Unrestricted sexuality, aggressiveness, and intellectual curiosity are no more a sign of masculinity than is the total lack of these attributes. Lynda Nead has asserted that the
Victorians expressed “a code of sexual mores which condones sexual activity in men as a sign of ‘masculinity’” (6). Yet, as Sussman argues, Victorian masculinity was defined as a regulation of male energy, as well as understanding appropriate methods and times to express that power.

Obviously then, one way of directing one’s energy appropriately (and therefore to successfully perform this hegemonic masculine gender identity) is through hard work. Robert’s energy, physical as well as mental, is both misused and depleted. His time wasted reading French novels and smoking his cigars and pipe misuses his male energy, which makes his transition to middle-class masculinity difficult since he continually expresses a lethargic attitude\textsuperscript{lvii}. Robert’s aversion to work is problematic since the Victorian concept of working and middle-class masculinity was closely associated with the actual labor men did for a living. In Past and Present Carlyle writes that one should “know what thou canst work at; and work at it like a Hercules” and that “a man perfects himself by working” (54). Using Carlyle’s definition Robert’s masculinity is definitely in question. Robert is described as having a “lymphatic nature” with a “lazy bent [to] his mind” (89). Sir Michael thinks of him as a “good-natured nonentity…whose brain had been somewhat overlooked in the distribution of intellectual gifts” (282). And when Lady Audley accuses him of being insane, Alicia rejects this accusation because she wonders “[h]ow should such a sluggish ditch-pond of an intellect as his ever work itself into a tempest?” (330). His mental and physical laziness are remnants of the dying-off aristocratic conception of masculinity, and the novel argues that those characteristics need to be replaced with a strong work ethic, and the ability to think actively and rationally. Robert has become a barrister, his name “was inscribed in the law list” and “if
these things can make a man a barrister, Robert Audley decidedly was one” (32). Even though Robert does not initially express a yearning to make this transition to the middle-class conception of masculinity outside of making a few shallow gestures, he does display a self-awareness of his un-masculine behavior. After “he had exhausted himself with the exertion of smoking his German pipe, and reading French novels” he would often nap under a shady tree and “tell grave benchers that he had knocked himself up with overwork” (32). In contrast to men who are very physical active, and who direct their male energy into appropriate channels, Robert’s awareness of his inappropriate behavior argues that this transition to a new, middle-class conception of masculinity is at least partially achieved through shame and embarrassment, a point I will return to later.

For Braddon, the unmasculine man does not present a counter-hegemonic conception of masculinity in the sense that it challenges conventional masculine gender identities, or that is part of an organized intellectual movement, but instead it functions as a step in the process towards achieving a successful male gender identity. Braddon’s use of the sensation fiction genre allows her to present an outside figure in Robert. However, his successful transformation by the end of the novel demonstrates the social pressure to conform to hegemonic conceptions of masculinity that insists on a man having a clear “honest purpose” to his life, while also subverting social pressure by undercutting the strength and validity of that hegemony by showing its unnatural-ness. For working and middle-class Victorians labor was not a desirable activity merely because one wanted to obtain more money and material goods. Rather, hard work became a moral virtue in and of itself, and that if economic gain was achieved it was the icing on the cake rather than the cake itself. Sally Mitchell writes that the “values associated with evangelical religion
helped promote the growth of business and the advance of middle class men” and that due to any feeling of job security it was important to Victorian men to “make themselves irreplaceable – and they were comforted by feeling that steady, hard work was morally excellent” (261). For working and middle-class men a sense of importance and responsibility was strongly desired in order that they could feel themselves useful to society. By doing your part in the increasingly interconnected urban world through physical or intellectual labor, the working or middle-class man was not only gaining economic benefits but a higher moral and ethical status as well. This is in direct contrast to the isolated aristocracy exemplified by Sir Michael, who seems to have no such purpose or responsibility to his society, and serves no obvious function in relation to others. We are told that Robert “had learned what it was to have an honest purpose since the disappearance of George Talboys” (144), and this “honest purpose” marks a difference between middle-class and aristocratic men, as well as masculine middle-class men and those who do not fit the hegemonic conception of masculinity. And though Robert continually questions his “honest purpose” (for example, asking himself “How is it all to end?” (150) as he worries he is doing more harm than good) he does not relinquish his responsibility brought about by this newfound purpose.

The difficulty in Robert’s growth from unmasculine outsider to a successful masculine gender identity is compounded by his initial lack of belief in the moral value of hard work. This implies that a strong work-ethic is not an innate or natural part of a man’s identity, but it is instead a learned trait. His role as unmasculine man appears threatening in the ways that it points out the un-naturalness of the masculine ideals expressed in Carlyle’s writings. The notion that gender is learned and not inherent is a
double-edged sword. This idea could allow gender identities that do not fit the conventional definition to be viewed as acceptable and appropriate since they no longer can be defined as “unnatural,” but it could also prompt society to re-double its effort to normalize a person’s gender identity. Foucault says that since the nineteenth-century “normalizing...has become one of the major functions of our society” and that “each individual, wherever he may find himself subject to [the universal reign of the normative] his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements” (304). We are told that Robert had been persuaded by his friends to join the law profession, a decision that comes not out of his own desire to achieve economic gain, gain moral superiority, or establish a good reputation in the working world but instead resulted from his own inability (or unwillingness) to argue against his friends’ advice. Peer-pressure worked to coerce Robert into obtaining a profession as

his friends had advised him to increase [his income] by being called to the bar; and as he found it, after due consideration, more trouble to oppose the wishes of these friends, than to eat so many dinners, and to take a set of chambers in the Temple, he adopted the latter course, and unblushingly called himself a barrister. (32)

Robert’s choice to become a barrister is significant, as it illustrates his more aristocratic standing in society as well as his apparent dislike of doing any more actual labor than is required of him. Mitchell also notes that the job of the barrister was not one that demanded great effort on the part of the man holding that title. It was not uncommon for “young men of good family to study law and live in shared chambers without ever
intending to practice” and that the position was a “good excuse” to “meet influential people who might help one obtain a government post” (67). We can see that Robert is not an aberration in his profession, although the pressure placed upon him from outside sources seems to be a critique of his laziness, or rather his unmotivated nature, as well as his isolation inside the confines of his home. Robert confines himself within his chambers, venturing outside only when the weather gets too warm. Carlyle writes that “[i]solation is the sum total of wretchedness to man” and “to be cut off, to be solitary” is “truly a work of the Evil one” (263). The gender-role distinctions between men and women at this time seems to dictate that Robert should be out of doors, working and earning money and moral capital instead of being the angel of his chambers. Just as Adrienne Rich writes about the ways patriarchal societies have literally and figuratively confined women’s movement (both in the home and in the workplace), Robert’s self-confinement in his chambers works against that same patriarchal system by rejecting the idea that he should be outdoors during the day working.

While obtaining the profession of barrister is a small step towards normalizing Robert so that he can become an acceptably masculine middle-class man, his career does not go far enough to actually inspire in him a desire to work hard and be social. Vicki Pallo touches on Robert’s unmasculine masculinity and its transformation over the course of the novel as she argues that it is the role of detective that represents new methods of rational thought that finally allows Robert to perform a socially acceptable masculine identity. In reading Robert as a character who “in many ways contradicts the established norms of society” Pallo argues that he eventually “becomes an agent of societal control, wielding his power in order to maintain the acceptable standards of law and discipline
within his society” (470-471). Pallo suggests that this transformation stems from Robert’s acceptance of methods of detection\textsuperscript{21} (including surveillance, questioning subjects, and obtaining evidence).

I would add that it is Robert’s embrace of rational, organized thought (which is tied to Braddon’s endorsement of intellectual labor as a valid means of “work”) that is most important in his transformation. The establishment of intellectual labor as equal to physical “work” broadens the methods of performing one’s masculine gender identity. Specifically, the novel focuses on rational thinking as means of labor. Inspired by the disappearance of George, Robert begins to feel a compulsion towards organizing his thoughts in order to solve the mystery. One way this is accomplished is through the creation of what he calls his “Journal of facts.” The journal includes a tightly organized numbered series of tasks he must complete, thoughts concerning the disappearance of George, and speculations about the solution to this mysterious event. Robert’s creation of the “Journal of facts” instantaneously changes his attitude towards his profession. He becomes “proud” of his journal, and remarks to himself that “I ought to have pursued my profession instead of dawdling my life away as I have done” (100). Robert’s appropriation of rational, organized thinking allows his own gender identity to be more easily organized and categorized. In seeking to avoid the gender and sexual anxiety produced by his ambiguous behavior, Robert finds that rational and organized thought provides a clear, direct, and simple way of understanding male gender identity. In addition, his sudden interest in organized, rational thought becomes obviously more phallic as he inserts his journal “in that very pigeon-hole into which he had thrust Alicia’s letter—the pigeon-hole marked \textit{important}” (101). Furthermore, he eventually secludes
his “Journal of facts” behind lock and key, “carefully” unfolds it, and resumes “numbering the fresh paragraphs as carefully as he had numbered the old ones” (155) illustrating how important and detail-oriented his attraction to rational thought has become.

Braddon positions this interest in rational thought as the motivating factor in Robert’s transformation into a responsible and successful middle-class man, and her role as women writer/intellectual laborer enables her to establish this transformation not through physical activity (or physical evidence) but primarily through intangible things such as language (specifically correspondence and the words of female witnesses). Intellectual activity, specifically ratiocination, becomes the method through which Robert can channel his male energy appropriately. Robert’s labor does not require him to work with wood or steel, nor does he produce tangible, practical items. Intellectual labor requires the use of the intellect, and here Braddon begins positioning intellectual labor as, at least, equal to physical labor, or possibly more powerful than the work done in factories. Robert performs his intellectual labor in ways that are mainly domestic, and in areas coded as feminine such as Lady Audley’s dressing-room, and the perusal of women’s letters and diaries. His intellect, which before had been consumed with leisure, reading French novels, and avoiding actual labor, is now directed towards the solving of a supposed crime and the discovery of Lady Audley’s secret. The focus remains solely on language with Lady Audley’s background being the prime interest of Robert’s detective work. There is no murder weapon to discover, nor does Robert search for physical evidence to tie Lady Audley to the disappearance (and possible murder) of George. Instead the focus of Robert’s investigation is entirely on language, and specifically the
words of women. He seeks out the truth of his friend disappearance in letters and diaries, in newspaper announcements, and in spoken interviews. His entire search rests on his ability to logically organize these bits of language to form a complete and rationally thought-out narrative of Lady Audley’s deceit and criminal activity.

While Robert’s entry into domestic/female areas may mark him as feminine, his role as the solver of mysteries and the enforcer of law helps to establish his masculinity. The ability to take disparate pieces of information and organize them in a rational way enables masculine domination through the use of detection and law. Ronald Thomas claims that

the literary act of transferring the authority to tell the secret story of the individual suspect to a designated professional expert is also a political act, one that corresponds historically to the reform of the English criminal code, the decline of aristocratic power, and the insistent rise of the modern professional police force in England. (177)

While Robert is not a professional detective, his use of detective methods such as interviewing witnesses, researching documents, surveillance, and contemplating motives enables him to function as a *de facto* member of the police. Here we see Braddon focuses on the masculine world of detection, ratiocination and law, and show how those elements of the social sphere are shaped by the domestic sphere and used to legitimate a masculine gender identity only as long as the person enters into those areas as the enforcer of masculine law. And as D.A. Miller suggests, policing moved from conventional law
enforcement “into the closet…into the private and domestic sphere” (ix), and this is illustrated by Robert’s entry into domestic/female areas during his detective work.

Finally, Braddon places masculine rationality in direct contrast with its opposite: insanity. Specifically Braddon equates insanity with femininity and rational thought with masculinity. Certainly there is a long literary history of equating femininity with insanity, and especially its use as a trope in sensation/gothic fiction. From Matthew “Monk” Lewis’s poem “Crazy Jane” to Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* female insanity became increasingly common in nineteenth-century fiction at the same time it became more common in the culture as a whole. Elaine Showalter argues, in her landmark work *The Female Malady*, that

in a society that not only perceived women as childlike, irrational, and sexually unstable but also rendered them legally powerless and economically marginal, it is not surprising that they should have formed the greater part of the residual categories of deviance from which doctors drew a lucrative practice and the asylums much of their population. (73)

In Braddon’s novel this equation requires reading insanity as a loss of intellectual control, and rational thought as the epitome of control and order, specifically for men. As a means of containing Robert and avoiding having her secret discovered, Lady Audley attempts to convince Sir Michael that his nephew has been driven insane following the disappearance of George. She claims that

Robert Audley is mad…What is one of the strongest diagnostics of madness—what is the first appalling sign of mental aberration? The mind
becomes stationary; the brain stagnates; the even current of the mind is interrupted; the thinking power of the brain resolves itself into a monotone…the mind becomes turbid and corrupt through lack of action.”

(287)

Lady Audley’s definition of insanity is the opposite of Ruskin’s assertion that men are active beings. In further speculating on the cause of his supposed insanity, Lady Audley wonders if “perhaps he reads too much, or smokes too much” lxiv (286). If middle-class masculinity is to be defined as having an active intellect and physical body, the stagnant and stationary mind is anything but masculine. In addition to equating insanity with femininity (or, getting away from the binary, we should categorize it as unmasculine) Braddon differentiates and hierarchizes middle-class masculinity from working-class masculinity by portraying the lower classes as equally out of control, and therefore potentially mad. Phoebe describes her husband Luke as being “scarcely ever sober after dark, and when he’s drunk he gets almost wild, and doesn’t seem to know what he does” lxv. According to the novel, insanity is defined as a lack of an intellectual control that is necessary for middle-class men, in addition to a lack of physical control found common amongst the working classes lxvi. We can see the power of middle-class men’s regulation when Robert asserts his authority over the working-class locksmith (Mr. White) who he calls to his chambers. Robert uses his intellectual and physical control to claim dominance over the man as he “looked straight into the man’s dingy face…[as] Mr. White’s eyelids dropped under the young barrister’s calm scrutiny” (150). The power of Robert’s gaze—conveying his class authority, as well as his intellectual superiority (not to mention his clean appearance in comparison to White’s “dingy face”)—is all that is
needed for Robert to force White into submission. Again, as Sussman argues, the key to a successful middle-class masculine gender identity is regulation of both intellect and the body, not in its unchecked excess.

Missing from the construction of Robert’s masculine gender identity is an interest in functioning as the provider to his family. In contrast, George, also a product of upper-class lineage (he describes his father as a “rich man” (18)), is the novel’s representation of a more successful middle-class masculinity since his entire being is defined by wanting to financially provide for his wife and child through his own labor. He leaves for Australia in order to strike it rich, and the note he leaves for his wife illustrates his belief that his role as husband and father is fundamentally tied to his ability to financially provide for them. He explains that

I never had loved her better than now when I seemed to desert her; that I was going to try my fortune in a new world; and that if I succeeded I should come back to bring her plenty and happiness, but that if I failed I should never look upon her face again. (21)

George’s efforts to provide for his family allow the transition from aristocracy to middle-class masculinity to occur, and this change does not go unnoticed by him. He tells Miss Morley that while in Australia he “wondered whether that dashing, reckless, extravagant, luxurious, champagne-drinking dragoon could have really been the same man who sat on the damp ground gnawing a mouldy crust in the wilds of the new world” (21). This acceptance of financial responsibility, as well as his embrace of a strong work-ethic,
positions George in a superior role above his ambiguously-gendered friend, and allows him to claim patriarchal dividend.

Yet, however much George portrays the conventional attributes of the middle-class man in his endeavors to financially provide for his family, Braddon suggests that the authority attached to this successful gender performance is easily lost if the pursuit of masculinity is handled in less than admirable (i.e. socially acceptable) ways. George’s endeavor to establish his masculine gender identity results in numerous complications, especially for Helen/Lucy and their child. By leaving England in order to become a more socially acceptable man, George relinquishes his masculine responsibility to be the authority figure in his home. While men left their homes in order to serve in the military, leaving one’s wife and child to pursue a kind of “get rich quick scheme” is not as acceptable as serving your country and representing the Empire overseas. This example shows again how an successful masculine gender identity is achieved through performance, and not a natural, inherent characteristic of males. Braddon’s critique here is that a man’s absence from the home for reasons that are even slightly suspect shows how tenuous their hold on authority is by illustrating how quickly they lose that control over their families once they are away.

Despite this criticism of get rich quick schemes vs. hard, honest labor, the novel insists that George’s masculine gender identity is something to be admired. He has earned his masculine gender identity through a strong desire to be a providing husband and father, which is something—the family as well as the desire to provide for them—that Robert sorely lacks. Since George displays a desire to work hard, provide for his family,
and to enter into heterosexual marriage (as well as fathering children), George’s masculinity is unthreatened even when he shows unmasculine characteristics. More so than Robert, George appears feminine. He is even described as having a “handsome brown eyes, with a feminine smile in them” (13). In addition to showing feminine characteristics, at one point George is associated with cowardice when he is described as “a sort of Bamfylde Moore Carew” (102), the vagabond, self-named “King of the Beggars” who, if his memoirs are to be believed, avoided responsibility and service to his country at every turn. Yet, despite this unmasculine descriptions, the concept of patriarchal dividend—of the respect and sense of entitlement owed to him because of his masculinity—is seen when George reclaims his role of father when being reunited with his son and places Robert in the role of mother/wife. Also, when discussing his grief over losing his wife George, because of his earned masculinity, is allowed to compare himself with British soldiers who “were wounded in India” and “came home bringing bullets inside them” (49). This masculine authority over Robert—positioning himself as husband over Robert’s wifely duties in taking care of him, and drawing allusions between himself and soldiers wounded in battle—also enables him to engage in seemingly un-masculine behavior without a threat to his masculinity. Because of his earned masculinity George can spend his days lazily sitting indoors, smoking his cigars and pipe without the threat to his heterosexuality that Robert faces.

If George’s masculinity is in contrast to Robert’s, the relationship between the two men simultaneously complicates and clarifies each other’s masculine gender identity. From their first meeting in the novel, Robert’s feelings towards George imply a stronger bond between the two men than logic would initially dictate. They are childhood friends
who met each other while attending public school together at Eton\textsuperscript{lvii}, but as far as the novel makes clear the two men have only seldom come into contact during their adult lives. One could argue that no other character in the book feels as strong as an attachment to someone else as Robert does to George. Numerous times in the novel Robert expresses anxiety over how strongly he feels for his friend. He wonders whether he “should care so much for the fellow,” and asserts that he will “go to the very end of the world” (94) in order to find George. Furthermore, the strong attachment between the two men is tied to their time spent at Eton. There are two references in the novel to Robert and George’s time spent in school together. The first appears when the two men reunite and “talk over those good old times when they were together at Eton” (32). The second reference to their schooldays suggests a stronger relationship than that of two men recalling their old school. Following George’s disappearance, we are told that

[i]f any one had ventured to tell Mr. Robert Audley that he could possibly feel a strong attachment to any creature breathing, that cynical gentleman would have elevated his eyebrows in supreme contempt at the preposterous notion. Yet here he was, flurried and anxious, bewildering his brain by all manner of conjectures about his missing friend, and, false to every attribute of his nature, walking fast.

“I haven’t walked fast since I was at Eton,” he murmured (82)

At once Braddon associates the strength of the feeling between Robert and George, and the renewal of actions, thoughts, and emotions that Robert has not experienced since his schooldays. The formation of this very strong relationship between Robert and George
occurred in the largely female-less environment of British public schools. In *Making a Man of Him* Christine Heward examines how schools such as Ellesmere College defined and enforced appropriate masculine gender identity through dress-codes, discipline, academic and athletic competition, and hierarchy based on intellectual and physical strength. Sexual behavior between British schoolboys at institutions like Eton was quite common. Paul Deslandes examines the ways in which educational institutions during the Victorian period functioned in the establishment of cultural values and norms. Deslandes argues that ideas of gender and sexuality (including, most importantly, sexual difference) did not “function merely at the level of discourse for students keen to articulate their distinctive educational experience and particular brand of masculinity” (9) but that instead these ideas influenced nearly every aspect of the students’ lives in those educational institutions. Despite detailing the ways in which homoeroticism often dominated the undergraduate experience, Deslandes goes further to argue that these “homoerotic yearnings” evident in some rituals and traditions performed a “vitally important education in heterosexual romance and heterosocial contact” (9). For instance, Deslandes focuses on boat races at Oxford and Cambridge as an example of a ritual that combined both homoeroticism (glorification of the masculine body, close teamwork between boys) with an important heterosexual message to be learned (boat races were one of the few events at which females were invited to watch).

Experiences at Eton for young Robert and George could have established, and even encouraged homoerotic relationships. By placing the formative period of George and Robert’s relationship in an all-male institution like Eton, Braddon suggests that masculinity requires female influence as Robert and George both must leave that all-male
world and enter into normative heterosexuality through marriage in order to successfully perform their male gender identity. Calling school “a crucial link in ruling-class male homosocial formation,” Sedgwick argues that “the young male at those same public schools would have seen or engaged in a variety of sexual activities among males” (176)lxix. Indeed, the homosocial nature of Robert and George’s friendship can best be understood using Sedgwick’s examination of male-to-male relationships in the nineteenth century. For Robert and George, the lessons learned at boys’ schools, such as the relation between homoeroticism and heterosexuality provide him with a framework through which to read homoerotic attraction as training for their inclusion in the decidedly heterosexual world of adulthood.

The attachment between Robert and George is more challenging because it transgresses the boundaries of a “normal” friendship and begins to move more towards a homosexual rather than a strictly homosocial (i.e. acceptable) relationship between the two men. Initially, we see that Robert is inactive, unmotivated, and clearly not interested in fulfilling the roles of the Victorian man (worker, provider, physically strong). George is described in nearly the opposite way. Overly determined to provide for his family and taking a great deal of pleasure in his work, George represents almost an exaggerated example of the Victorian ideal of masculinity. Yet it is when George suddenly goes missing that he and Robert’s conventional friendship changes to one of desire, and Robert’s unmasculine behavior and emotions threaten his heterosexual identity. Robert begins to describe his fondness for George in more elaborate terms as he recalls, tenderly and emotionally, his passionate love for him. While at times Robert describes his feelings for George in terms of a father/son relationship (as he does when he expresses the feeling
that he is “a man who has an only son whose life has gone wrong” (86)), Robert more often behaves as George’s romantic love interest. He pines so much for his missing friend that his entire identity in relation to others becomes that of a grieving widow.

Specifically, Robert’s sense of responsibility over George’s son positions Robert as surrogate father/mother in a novel where most of the female parents are dead, unfeeling, or insane. Robert asserts that “it shall be [his] business to secure his safety” (162). His sense of responsibility over the young boy functions both as an example of Robert’s very strong feelings for George, and as a method of training for Robert as he begins to accept his adult-male responsibility of being a financial provider. These feelings towards his friend are not one-sided. After Robert has successfully solved the mystery of George’s disappearance and George is brought back into the pages of the novel, he tells Robert that “I yearned for the strong grasp of your hand, Bob; the friendly touch of the hand which has guided me through the darkest passages of my life” (444). Yet statements such as these are made possible only once Robert and George’s masculine gender identity has become valid through each man’s desire to be a financial provider to their families, but most importantly due to their entry into heterosexual marriage.

Women function as the strongest influence for men to perform (and to reform if they behave as Robert does in lounging about smoking pipes and reading French novels) their masculine gender identity in Braddon’s novel. As Sedgwick suggests, often in literature homosocial relationships resist becoming homosexual when a female character becomes involved typically as a focus of romantic rivalry between the two men. In this way Braddon presents her female characters as in a conventional manner, more like angels in the house who are guiding men towards appropriate behavior. We see in Lady
Audley’s Secret that relationships between women, while certainly defined by power, are less threatening and more easily understood than the anxiety-producing relationships between the men. Lady Audley holds great influence over her maid Phoebe Marks (and to a lesser, more problematic way, over her husband Luke Marks) but the relationship between the two women, which is friendly and intimate, motherly and sisterly, is not represented by Braddon as a homoerotic relationship. Women’s interest in other women, and specifically their power over other women, while certainly based in class and economic distinction (Lady Audley is a lady, while Phoebe is described as a “rosy-faced country girl” (198)) can be seen as more congruous than could a similar relationship between two male characters.

Despite the relatively conservative depiction of women’s roles in Lady Audley’s Secret, Braddon’s representation of murderous, bigamous women attracted harsh condemnation from some contemporary critics. Published in the North British Review in 1865, W. Fraser Rae’s article “Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon” attacks the author for her immoral and socially irresponsible depictions of women. According to Rae, Braddon’s novels lead the reader to conclude “that women are born to attempt to commit murders, and to succeed in committing bigamy” (202-203). The relationship between being a female author and presenting these scandalous female characters was not lost on most critics, as Jennifer Phegley argues, “Braddon’s personal life often became a subtext that interfered with assessments of her professional work” (90). This is especially true of Rae’s evaluation of Braddon’s novels. Rae’s assault on Braddon’s work becomes personal as he suggests that an “authoress who could make one of her sex play [such a role], is evidently acquainted with a very low type of female character” (190). The real
danger in Braddon’s portrayals of these despicable female characters, according to Rae, is that “[i]nto uncontaminated minds they will instill false views of human conduct” and that sensation novels “represent life neither as it is or as it ought to be” (202).

Braddon’s portrayal of unconventional female characters might be enough to warrant negative reactions from critics, but I would suggest that the truly upsetting aspect of these female characters is their ability to influence and construct male gender identities. Rae’s argument, as indicative as it is of Victorian uncertainty in the appropriateness of certain types of fiction for female readers, is really a response to the more subversive element in Braddon’s work. It is not, as Rae suggests, that the bigamous and murderous female characters in Braddon’s novels could provide an unrealistic and unhealthy example to “uncontaminated minds” but rather it is that her portrayal of women’s role in shaping men’s gender roles upsets the patriarchal structure of the time. In other words, it is not that Lady Audley is a bigamist, or that she attempts to imprison Robert in a mental institution, but that all of the women in the novel (even the pure as snow Alicia) provide a strong influence over men and their behavior, thereby suggesting that true power resides with the female characters rather than the somewhat helpless, highly malleable men.

Conventionally, Lady Audley should have acted as a romantic interest for the two men if the move from homosocial to heterosexual was to be completed. Instead, she is presented as a mutual object of fear, dislike, and anger for George and Robert. In The Descent of Man Darwin argues that the “sexual struggle” between men and women is of two different kinds. One is the struggle between members of the same sex, usually the
male sex, in which the struggle is to “drive away or kill their rivals, the female remaining passive” (391) waiting to be taken by the victor. The other type of “sexual struggle” is also between members of the same sex, but this time it is not to fight or kill off their rivals but instead to compete with their rivals so the female can choose which is the stronger of the two. Neither model applies to George and Robert, as neither of the two men try to win Lady Audley’s heart. George is, of course, horrified to see what has become of his wife, and Robert is simultaneously defending his Uncle, his name, and his close friend in battling Lady Audley. After the containment of Lady Audley’s power and after the transformation in Robert’s masculinity has begun it seems that he begins to revert back to his earlier ways largely because there was not a heterosexual love interest waiting as the prize for his battle. He fought Lady Audley instead of George. His prize was finding his male friend, not heterosexual romance. Here Braddon shows how carefully constructed a masculine gender identity must be in order for it be successfully performed. Robert confusedly competes with the masculine (in her attempts to gain authority) Lady Audley, and wins a male prize instead of a female wife. Again, the naturalness of a man’s gender identity is shown to be anything but natural as Braddon illustrates the correct (and confused) ways one must go about building and performing their masculine gender identity.

Yet, Lady Audley is not the only female character in the novel to exert a strong influence on men and their gender identity. Alicia first introduces an element of homosexual panic into the narrative when she exclaims “What a dreadful catastrophe!...since Pythias, in the person of Mr. Robert Audley, cannot exist for half an hour without Damon, commonly known as George Talboys” (84). On its surface Alicia’s
reference seems to be only to the strong bonds of friendship between Robert and George, yet as Richard Dellamora suggests, this allusion to Pythias and Damon was loaded with homosexual connotations for Victorians. Dellamora argues that Arthur Henry Hallam’s use of the allusion in an 1831 letter to Richard Milnes places it in a homosexual context when combined with his denial that he was “once an enthusiast” a term that “Shelley, Hallam’s father, and later Pater use to denote a male committed to sexual and emotional relations with other males” (27). Even though the word “enthusiast” is often used to refer to religious excesses, using this word alongside the reference to the two Greek lovers (as Dellamora describes them) Dellamora suggests that “Hallam specifies the context of Milne’s investments in male relationships” (27). Nemesvari argues that Braddon alludes to a “historical moment in which the homosocial bond between men was often initiated and confirmed by sexual relations” (522), and thus exposes the “foundational secret” of masculine desire. More importantly, Braddon reveals this “secret” through the gaze of a female character. Alicia’s ability to accurately pinpoint George as her rival for Robert’s affection—since he is the one standing between her and Robert—allows her the ability to introduce a sense of homosexual panic into his mind. Robert’s only response to this allusion is to assert that George is “a very good fellow” (84) which is certainly not a denial of homoerotic desire for his friend, but merely a hint that Robert believes George may not return those feelings. Braddon uses the character of Alicia as a normalizing force as she attempts to sway Robert away from his interest in George and towards her, and specifically towards thoughts of heterosexual marriage between him and her. She attempts this through introducing shame and embarrassment—by implying that there is something uncommon, or inappropriate going on between Robert and George. Similar to
Gaskell’s use of Mary or other female characters that momentarily go beyond their submissive roles, Alicia’s normalizing gaze, in true Foucauldian fashion, is meant to correct what is determined to be deviant.

Alicia proceeds to make Robert feel ashamed of being lazy, continuing Braddon’s use of female characters to help shape aberrant masculinities into acceptable hegemonic gender identities through shame or embarrassment. Having introduced homosexual panic into Robert’s mind, Alicia criticizes his aversion to working by telling him, sarcastically, to “pray amuse yourself in your own way; loll in an easy-chair all day…spoil my lady’s window-curtains with your cigars, and annoy everybody in the house with your stupid, inanimate countenance” (114). Alicia goes as far as implying that Robert is entirely submissive by telling him that “you would let a man hit you, and say ‘Thank You’ for the blow, rather than take the trouble to hit him again” (115). Alicia’s ability to embarrass Robert functions similarly to Gaskell’s use of female characters that help wayward men reclaim their dominant positions in the household. This suggests that women (both the conventional Alicia and the unruly Lady Audley) play an active and necessary role in establishing male middle-class patriarchal dominance, while simultaneously serving as instructions on how both men and women can contain and reform aberrant masculinities.

To compare the two characters, Alicia’s ability to influence Robert and George’s masculine gender identities is similar to Lady Audley’s in that both women, arriving at the same destination from opposite directions, result in a normalizing influence found in Alicia, and a threat to their masculinity in Lady Audley. Alicia is a far more conventional female character whose life revolves around shaping and conforming a man’s masculine
gender identity (mostly so that he and she can eventually marry, thereby validating her own female gender identity as a wife/mother). Conversely, Lady Audley is a threat to masculine dominance, and though she is an influence on masculinity by inspiring Robert’s work-ethic, her threat must be removed if normalcy (largely symbolized by heterosexual marriage wherein the male is the dominant figure) is to be returned.

While Lady Audley’s power and threat of female dominance functions as motivators for Robert, and Alicia’s instills shame and embarrassment into him, Clara Talboys functions as an ever present observer and reminder of the inevitability of Robert’s entry into heterosexual marriage. For female characters such as Alicia and Clara, the investment in influencing Robert’s development into an appropriate masculine gender identity is a concern for the status quo—and for the continuation of their conventional feminine gender identities. Finding Clara where he did not expect her, Robert is taken aback “[t]hat the sister of his lost friend should be here—here where she could watch his every action, and from those actions deduce the secret workings of his mind, tracing his doubts home to their object” (257). In an interesting play on Robert’s ambiguous sexuality, the power of Clara’s observation—a constant, ever present reminder of Robert’s mandatory eventual acceptance of heterosexual marriage—is increased by Clara’s resemblance to George. She “has [his] lost friend’s face” (258) and “had brown eyes, like George’s” (197). If Robert is experiencing strong love and affection for George, than Clara’s resemblance to his friend allows Robert to channel those desires in a safer, heterosexual manner because she is a woman.
Furthermore, just as Alicia found it necessary to shame Robert into becoming active, Clara must always be present physically or mentally for Robert in order to secure his transformation into hegemonic middle-class masculinity. In addition to feeling the power of Clara’s observation, Robert begins to express a sense of responsibility for her that will allow him entry into the role of husband and father by the end of the novel. He cannot fathom disappointing Clara as he asks himself, “[w]hat am I to do, then, if I mean to keep my promise to Clara Talboys?” (240). Above Lady Audley’s threatening power, and Alicia’s guilt and shame, Braddon positions Clara’s omnipresence and her ability to instill in Robert a sense of responsibility as powerful motivators in helping shape a man’s masculinity. Clara leaves Robert “half-bewildered by the passionate energy of her manner” causing George to proclaim “Heaven help those who stand between me and the secret…for they will be sacrificed to the memory of George Talboys” (202).

Interestingly, while Robert’s un-masculine/feminine nature and his homosocial relationship to George are in the process of transformation as they are being pushed towards becoming “normal” and heterosexual by the novel’s female characters, Robert still remains largely uninterested in working, marriage, and creating a family. In the midst of investigating George’s disappearance, he fantasizes about an idyllic world where men have very little exposure to or knowledge about women. In this passage Braddon begins to create the possibility of a new type of masculinity, something she does more so in *Aurora Floyd*. This new type of masculinity can be successfully masculine in its independence and authority, but, at the same time, is in direct contrast to hegemonic conceptions of male gender identity due to its rejection of sexuality of all forms, and its disinterest in being a husband or father. According to Robert’s fantasy, the man “comes
here, heart whole and happy, with no better experience of a woman than is to be learnt at
a flower-show or in a ball-room” (247). This women-free life is remarkable for its
embrace of pre-sexual masculinity. He wishes for a time where he had little knowledge of
women in general, but little “experience of a woman” as well. And what little experience
he may wish to have had with women, it would not have gone sexually past the minimal
physicality of the ball-room. He continues to pine away for an existence where he has “no
more familiar knowledge of the creature than he has of the far-away satellites of the
remoter planets; with a vague notion that she is a whirling teetotum in pink or blue gauze,
or a graceful automaton for the display of milliner’s manufacture” (247). Robert’s desire
for women to be far away from him, and for them to be nothing more than a child’s toy or
a mannequin, recall his schooldays at Eton, a world without much, if any, exposure to
women. He even goes as far as to seemingly blame all problems on women by remarking,
“[w]hat a world it is, and how these women take life out of our hands. Helen Maldon,
Lady Audley, Clara Talboys, and now Miss Tonks—all womenkind from beginning to
end” (237). In contrast to his homoerotic desires for George, Robert’s fantasy here seems
to be pre-sexual, or even asexual in that, in this passage at least, he does not desire men
but merely rejects any desire for women. In this fantasy Braddon presents a wholly
unique form of Victorian middle-class masculinity that is not defined through its relation
to women by situating the man in the role of son, lover, husband, or father, but a
masculine gender identity that is defined regardless of women yet is also not defined by a
desire for other men. This pre- or asexual adult masculinity is somewhat similar to the
desire-less feminine gender identity of the angel of the house in that it presents men as
more innocent, virginal creatures. Yet, it is different from this conception of femininity
because Robert’s fantasy does not contain notions of sacrifice, submissiveness, or any particular conception of piety. The fantasy retains a sense of individuality and independence found in hegemonic conceptions of middle-class masculinity, while avoiding relations with women that are necessary for entry into heterosexual marriage and fatherhood.

When Robert’s anti-women fantasies do not include the wish for women to be inanimate, and/or millions of miles away from him, he expresses a strong disinterest in entering into marriage. Often his disinterested attitude towards marriage and family reveals an angry streak in Robert\textsuperscript{lxii}. Upon meditating on the depressingly small number of “thoroughly happy” days one has in their lifetime, of which Robert seems to equate with “solitary days of pleasure,” (203) his thoughts quickly shift to the idea of marriage:

\begin{quote}
Look at marriages! Who is to say which shall be the one judicious selection out of the nine hundred and ninety nine mistakes? Who shall decide from the first aspect of the slimy creature, which is to be the one eel out of the colossal bag of snakes? That girl on the kerbstone yonder waiting to cross the street when my chariot shall have passed, may be the one woman out of every female creature in this vast universe who could make me a happy man. (203-04)
\end{quote}

While Robert does not dismiss entirely the idea of marriage\textsuperscript{lxiii} the prospect of it does seem irrational and even impossible. Despite the construction of Robert’s “normal” masculinity throughout the novel he still retains thoughts that resist that transformation. The transformative experience of Robert’s investigation into George’s disappearance
allowed him to transition from an inactive to an active man, yet it did not fully inspire him to enter fully into the adult heterosexual sphere by becoming a husband and a father. Furthermore, this transformation seems only temporary, as Robert quickly reverts to a more passive and less motivated person who lounges about reading and smoking his cigars and pipe. The construction of Robert’s masculinity, as represented by Braddon, is shown to be difficult, further questioning the supposed naturalness of gender.

Despite Robert’s temporary change back to unmasculine characteristics, Braddon shows the eventual impossibility of Robert’s asexual fantasy by depicting the inevitability of Robert’s entry into adult heterosexual masculinity. The world Braddon depicts will not allow a different form of masculinity that does not fit the conventional definition. In part, this compulsory sexuality/heterosexuality is a result of women’s influence as Braddon depicts the role women play in shaping and supporting hegemonic masculinity. Braddon’s representation of Robert’s fantasy is a creation of an alternative discourse, one that is in contrast to the “get a job, get a wife, have a kid” discourse of normative middle-class Victorian masculinity. However, as Braddon shows, this alternative discourse that presents the asexual man is also one that is denied authority and power, as well as denying that authority and power to women. Robert’s fantasy remains a fantasy because it would deny him masculine authority, and thereby upset the conventional patriarchal system of gender relations. As Foucault argues, it would be erroneous to read a depiction like Braddon’s of adult asexual masculinity as being repressed by Robert and the society he lives in, but instead it appears as a category of sexuality to be studied and scrutinized as non-normative. And again, as we see in
Braddon, one way that this scrutiny is accomplished is through surveillance and coercion by female characters.

Robert has become a changed man in that he has been exposed to the responsibilities of being a father (through his temporary guardianship of George’s son) and of being a husband by fulfilling his responsibilities towards Clara to solve her brother’s disappearance. Yet, Robert remains unsure of what to do with this life and eventually looks towards women as the solution to his problem rather than the cause. His thoughts drift towards marriage, yet he believes that he can enter the realm of heterosexual marriage/romance while still retaining those “feminine” character traits marked by his inactive lifestyle and aversion to work. The generic requirements of the sensation novel demand that Braddon not allow Robert’s aberrant masculinity to go completely unchanged\textsuperscript{xxiv}. It is Robert’s love interest in the novel, Clara, who, upon receiving a marriage proposal from Robert, tells him that she will only marry him if he devotes himself to his work. Robert reacts somewhat sarcastically yet positively to this ultimatum, thinking

\begin{quote}
[h]ow pleasant it was to be lectured by the woman he loved! How pleasant it was to humiliate himself and depreciate himself before her! How delightful it was to get such splendid opportunities of hinting that if his life had been sanctified by an object, he might indeed have striven to be something better than an idle \textit{flaneur} upon the smooth pathways that have no particular goal; that, blessed by the ties which would have given a solemn purpose to
every hour of his existence, he might indeed have fought the battle earnestly and unflinchingly (436)

His derogatory and sarcastic use of the term “flaneur” is interesting both because of its French origin, and because of its association with modern urban life. Robert’s “flaneur” contrasts a foreign conception of urban masculinity that is defined by idleness and purposeless, whereas the novel’s definition of adult middle-class British masculinity is again focused upon mental and physical activity, most importantly the act of providing for women and children. Like George, Robert has already taken steps toward becoming the working man who provides for his family. For example, during George’s disappearance Robert takes it upon himself to fulfill the responsibilities his friend has placed upon him by making Robert the guardian of his son and providing for his education. Yet, despite Robert’s entry into the realm of fatherhood, he is still a single father without a wife to complete the image. For Robert’s heterosexuality and masculinity to be finally proven, for its construction to be completed in the novel, he must marry a woman. And yet he is unable to perform that function unless, he is told, he begins to act more conventionally “masculine.” In other words, it is a woman who seeks to instill homophobia in the male characters by implying that she will not marry Robert, and in fact telling him that he cannot enter into the realm of heterosexual marriage until he stops acting so “un-masculine” and begins to behave more like a “man’s man.” This move away from un-masculine behavior is a warning against his asexual fantasies as well as his homoerotic desires. Women’s complicity in the establishment of patriarchal norms and values is evident here as Clara acts as the last obstacle as well as the final goal in Robert’s transformation. It is a woman, and not Robert himself or other male characters
in the novel, that introduces notions of homophobia into Robert and George’s homosocial relationship, as well as into Robert’s lifestyle to show how much a part women are—how indoctrinated they are—in the patriarchal system.

The final step in the construction and establishment of Robert’s “normal” masculinity is the rejection of his former lifestyle and the adoption of a new, strictly heterosexual, way of life. This is accomplished through Robert’s entry into heterosexual marriage/romance. Foucault argues that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the “marriage relation was the most intense focus of constraints; it was spoken of more than anything else […] it was under constant surveillance” (37). The constraints put upon the married couple that Foucault refers to are related to the cultural belief in the transformative nature of the act of marriage. According to Helena Michie, “[w]hatever the reality of individual experiences, ideas about sexuality and marriage were linked to a culturally powerful discourse of climactic transformation in which men, and especially women, were thought to become different people” (420). Marriage, and the expected loss of virginity that would accompany it, was and still is seen as a pivotal moment of change in one’s life. More so now with the loss of virginity than with marriage, the idea exists still in our culture that both physically and mentally one will transform instantly when, as Michie puts it, two bodies become one flesh. The transformation from individual to couple and from self-dependency to inter-dependency marks the final move in the progression towards normal heterosexual adulthood. For Robert it is the final move away from the ambiguous gender roles he exemplified from the beginning of the novel, and away from the image of him as a border creature living somewhere between masculinity
and femininity and towards a fully acceptable and understandable categorization of his masculinity.

How then, does marriage finally change Robert into the acceptable Victorian man? After receiving his orders from Clara, as well as his commands from Clara and George’s father to rescue George, Robert returns to Fig-Tree Court a “new man.” This “new man” now sees the world and his place in the world differently. In a chapter appropriately titled “Restored” we are told that he is now a man with “new hopes, new cares, new prospects, new purposes” and that he sees the world so differently that he cannot understand how the world seemed so “neutral” and “tinted” to him before his began his transformation (441). The world is no longer “neutral” to Robert because the gender distinctions which blurred the boundary lines before have been almost firmly established. He begins to see more clearly his position in society having now been restored to his “natural” (which Braddon has denaturalized through her depiction of his constructed gender performance) place as masculine Victorian man. The final chapter of the novel, “At Peace” is also appropriately titled. After Robert’s masculinity has been “restored” he is at peace in the world as he is no longer a threatening monstrous creature that challenges Victorian norms of gender and sexuality. The reader is informed that the new Robert is a “rising man” who has “distinguished himself in the great breach of promise case of Hobbs v. Nobbs, and has convulsed the Court by his deliciously comic rendering of the faithless Nobbs’s amatory correspondence” (445). Robert is now a success, distinguishing himself in his profession and well-liked by his peers.
For Robert there still exists a sense of pleasure in leisurely sitting and smoking. Yet there are a few important differences between the novel’s final images of Robert relaxing, talking, and smoking and the first glimpses we were shown of him in his chambers. Previously, Robert had leisurely spent his days inside his home at Fig-Tree Court, yet now he spends “summer evenings” in his smoking-room. His days are now spent working instead of reading and smoking, so that Robert partakes in this activity appropriately as the way to end a long hard day of work. Also, Robert’s previous behavior was isolated and solitary whereas now he and George are “summoned by Clara and Alicia to drink tea, and eat strawberries and cream upon the lawn” (446). The inclusion of women into Robert and George’s activities provide a boundary line that prohibits any behavior on their part from being construed as homosexual. In addition, “Audley Court is shut up” (446) providing an example of the waning days of the aristocracy, and an example of the end of the effeminate behavior of the aristocratic man.

Finally, we are told that “the meerschaums and the French novels have been presented to a young Templar, with whom Robert Audley had been friendly in his bachelor days” (446). The remnants of Robert’s un-masculine gender have been done away with now that he has been fully transformed into a “normal” masculine man. He works diligently and has become successful in his profession. He has, through marriage, firmly established a boundary line in his relationship with George. And, again through his marriage, he has become a proper family man with a wife and child. The Robert that appeared threatening and unusual, that seemed to transgress categorizations of gender and sexuality at the beginning of the novel has been shaped and constructed through societal pressures into the happy heterosexual family man at novel’s end. What seems a pat and
unsatisfying “happy” ending to Robert’s struggle with his masculine gender identity is the result of Braddon’s rejection of alternate masculinities. As I will show in the next section, *Aurora Floyd* does not shy away from endorsing different, non-hegemonic masculine gender identities.

**Deviance and Multiple Masculinities in *Aurora Floyd***

Denise Hunter Gravatt has recently argued that, though critics have focused on Braddon’s representation of female dominance and “questionable” masculinities within the context of male same-sex relationships, “little consideration has been given to her depictions of gender deviance within the context of heterosexual relations” (110). While Gravatt is interested in how Braddon upsets traditional power dynamics by representing dominant women and submissive men, *Aurora Floyd* presents us with deviance amongst male masculinities that go beyond the aberrant masculinity and asexual fantasies of Robert Audley. In this novel Braddon is able to represent more progressive conceptions of masculinities. *Aurora Floyd* provides a fuller representation of the spectrum of possible and acceptable male masculine gender identities. As Marlene Tromp argues, *Aurora Floyd* is a quintessential sensation novel especially concerning its depiction of gender identities, since the genre “did indeed say anything and everything, the genre itself disrupting the boundaries that had been established by ‘proper’ literary endeavors” (101). These gender identities cross class lines, and present a more radical argument concerning the appropriateness of active male middle-class masculinity. Whereas Robert Audley’s masculinity was shaped and performed acceptably by novel’s end thereby
presenting a successful hegemonic conception of acceptable masculinity (even if that performance was undermined by the “unnaturalness” of his gender), the men in *Aurora Floyd* present more varied conceptions of masculinity, and the novel does not force change upon these characters as she did with Robert.

Though the novel was serialized between 1862 and 1863, Braddon presents the events of *Aurora Floyd* taking place roughly five or six years earlier. In addition to setting it years earlier, the novel is different from *Lady Audley’s Secret* in that its characters and events are mostly rural. Reading the novel it is almost as if London, Manchester and other industrialized urban areas did not exist. Braddon begins the novel with a description of the “Kentish woods” as unsullied by industrial progress. The area is described as lush, clean and brightly lit. There is no evidence of the smog in London and Manchester, instead Braddon describes the “labouring men’s cottages, gleaming white from the surrounding foliage” (5) and the “village churches and prim school-houses” that are steeped in a “luminous haze, as the twilight shadows steal slowly upward from the dim recesses of woodland and winding lane” (5). Similar to Sussman’s arguments about Carlyle and the Pre-Raphaelites (specifically the aesthetic Pre-Raphaelites, the second form of the Brotherhood who focused on eroticized medieval settings) who looked to an earlier, more easily gender-divided time in order to represent strong, active masculinity, Braddon’s choice to place the events of the novel in a largely rural, almost pre-industrial setting, presents a society where alternate masculinities could exist. In addition to this, Braddon sets her novel a decade in the past, and while this is not nearly as extreme as looking backwards towards the medieval period, Braddon does draw an important separation between the time of the novel’s publication and the setting of the novel, most
directly in referring to the events of the novel as playing out in “days that are gone” (459). Specifically around this time (1850’s and 60’s) writers recognized a distinction between an Old England and a New. As Raymond Williams points out, writers such as George Eliot were, at this time, setting their novels in the recent past. In his _Change in the Village_ (1912), George Sturt sets 1861 as a sort of date of death for “rural England” by citing enclosure as the beginning of the end. He juxtaposes images of the “old heath” with roads described as “noisy with the motor-cars of the richer residents and all the town traffic that waits upon the less wealthy” (7). In _The Country and the City_ Williams warns against the “sentimental and intellectualised accounts of an unlocalised ‘Old England’” (10) by citing Sturt’s book, and argues that there is long history of using “the good old days” as, in Williams’ words, “a stick to beat the present” (12). Braddon does juxtapose the recent past—rural, quieter—with a present that is concerned with rigid order, ratiocination, and stricter roles based on gender and class. In _Lady Audley’s Secret_, the modern industrial world of London barristers is not open to non-normative masculinities, but the setting for _Aurora Floyd_ is a more open and less civilized world where men of different economic classes mingle and affect each other far more than in Braddon’s previous novel. Yet, here too Braddon suggests that these “days that are gone” are indeed gone, replaced by, to name one attribute, a stricter code of masculinity. This current, more rigid view of masculinity has largely rejected the aristocratic masculine gender identity represented in _Aurora Floyd_ by Talbot Bulstrode and John Mellish, as well as those non-normative working-class masculinities that are represented in the characters of Softy and James Conyers.
Talbot Bulstrode and John Mellish embody a conception of nineteenth-century aristocratic masculinity (the gentleman) that is presented in a more complicated manner than in *Lady Audley’s Secret*. Bulstrode and Mellish present an alternative view of masculinity that harkens back to a conception of England’s glorious past. While Braddon does not go as far as she did with Audley Court in symbolizing the increasing irrelevance of the upper classes, Bulstrode and Mellish, and the wealthy rural life they represent, remain secluded from major British cities that were then being solidified as the country’s areas of real power and influence. In *Aurora Floyd* there is a distinct separation between the industrialized, bustling, complicated life led in the 1860’s, and the “pure and unsullied life” (60) of the previous generation. Braddon describes the current state of England as “ugly,” “crooked” and “unholy,” (60) and she suggests that the cure to the nation’s problem rests in re-defining what is meant by the term “gentleman.”

To illustrate two opposing definitions of the term, the narrator places the Prince Regent and the Prince Consort in direct contrast with one another. The former “played practical jokes, and held infamous orgies, and persecuted a wretched foreign woman, whose chief sin and misfortune it was to be his wife; a gentleman who cut out his own nether garments, and left the companion of his gayest revels…to die destitute and despairing” (60). As represented by George IV, this “bad” gentleman is defined by his unserious nature, sexual openness, cruelty to women, and lack of loyalty to his friends.

In contrast, Braddon recalls the nation as it mourned over the death of Prince Albert. After describing the “dull light of the December day” where the “poorest put aside their work-a-day troubles to weep for a widowed Queen and orphaned children in a
Braddon describes the true gentleman who is “the tender husband, the watchful father, the kindly master, the liberal patron, the temperate adviser, the stainless gentleman” (60). This conception of gentlemanhood agrees with John Henry Cardinal Newman’s definition of the gentleman. In *The Idea of a University* Newman argued that a gentleman “has his eyes on all his company; he is tender towards the bashful, gentle towards the distant, and merciful towards the absurd” (209) in addition to being accepting of different opinions (including different religious beliefs). According to the narrator, the morally pure Prince Albert is the template for what British men all of classes should aspire. He represents aristocratic gentlemanhood, the kind that Robin Gilmour describes as being “a mirror of desirable moral and social values” (1). However, even though we are told that Bulstrode and Mellish follow Prince Albert’s model of gentlemanhood, neither man shows much interest beyond their personal wants and desires. They are more in line with Matthew Arnold’s satiric representation of the aristocracy as “Barbarians” who are defined by their “passion for doing as one likes” and their belief in “staunch individualism” (100). Bulstrude and Mellish (to varying degrees) are self-focused, self-interested, and secluded largely from the growing economic centers in England. What does their seclusion and relative ineffectualness say about Braddon’s view of modern British men? Bulstrode and Mellish’s aristocratic model of masculinity (while far more appealing than the “bad” gentleman represented by George IV) is still out-of-touch with the growing, bustling social/economic sphere, where, as I will show, the middle-class man has all of the authority. The novel portrays Bulstrode and Mellish as relics of England’s past with no real hint that their influence and power in British society will return. They play their part in the relatively wide spectrum of masculinities
present in the novel, yet as I will show their authority does not spread much past their estates, and their power pales in comparison to that of the working and middle-class male characters.

Of the two, Bulstrode’s masculine gender identity is closest to Braddon’s representation of Prince Albert. It is this pure sort of upper-class masculinity that separates and secludes Talbot from the rest of society, making him too self-focused to be a part of the social sphere. Initially, Bulstrode is described in terms of his military experience and his role as a Member of Parliament, at least until the “young man should succeed to the baronetcy and Bulstrode Castle” (79). His introduction to the novel is immediately followed by his title “Captain of Her Majesty’s 11th Hussars” (30). However, Talbot’s military masculinity is not that of the active and rugged solider whose purpose is not to reason why, but to do or die. Rather, Talbot represents the aristocratic military man whose service in the military, while increasing his status as an accomplished man, does not define his identity as much as does his wealthy, inactive, aristocratic lifestyle. We are told that “having run through life’s excitements and amusements…he was too tired of himself and the world to care much whither his friends and comrades led him” (30). This sense of aristocratic masculine ennui presents Talbot in contrast with the conception of middle-class masculinity that demands intellectual and physical activeness. While a strong work ethic—or commitment to social issues such as poverty or the need for educating the working classes—is nonexistent in Talbot, his sense of honor (characterized by his aristocratic lineage) is how he defines his masculinity. Though “in the ordinary affairs of life he was as humble as a woman or a child” (31) Talbot’s sense of honor inspires in him a manly reaction similar to Ruskin’s notion of the “defender.”
We are told that any slight to his reputation results in “the sleeping dragon of pride which had guarded the golden apples of his youth, purity, probity, and truth, awoke and bade defiance to the enemy” (31). Yet, Talbot’s “defiance” is only in reaction to a slight against his character, not because it inspires him to defend or protect others, or provide for those less fortunate.

This is not to say that Talbot’s masculinity, like Robert’s, is in need of transformation by novel’s end. Instead, Braddon presents Talbot largely unchanged by the end of the novel, at least in terms of his aristocratic masculine gender identity. Though he enters into adult masculinity through marriage, Bulstrode remains the self-focused, inactive and rural form of aristocratic manliness that Braddon depicted as becoming extinct in *Lady Audley’s Secret*. If Robert is George IV and Talbot Prince Albert, both forms of aristocratic masculinity are too self-focused to survive. Talbot’s form of masculinity is largely ineffectual, and is show to be, over the course of the novel, replaced by an active middle-class masculinity that seeks to provide for others, be it family or the poor. At no point does Talbot show an interest in those below him in rank, nor does he express a desire to contribute to the common good or define his identity through being a successful worker. However, Braddon is not interested in portraying simply-defined men in *Aurora Floyd*, and this conventional depiction of the ineffectual aristocratic man is complicated through Talbot’s awareness of his position in aristocratic society. Braddon makes it clear that Talbot differentiates himself from that lazy and careless conception of aristocratic masculinity (the George IV type) by claiming an active intellect and an avoidance of smoking, drinking and gambling which he associates with the
elegant ignoramus whose sole accomplishments consist in parting his hair, waxing his moustache, and smoking a meerschaum that has been coloured by his valet, and who has become the accepted type of military man in time of peace. (32)

Talbot’s claim that he is “tired of the army” since it is “dull work now the fighting is all over” (52), separates him from the other aristocratic men who serve in the military only for the status and not for the action (or to do service to one’s country).²

Talbot represents a purpose-driven aristocratic masculinity (as witnessed by his “shocked” reaction to Aurora’s “purposeless manner” (53)), that is somehow distinct from the purposefulness of the middle and working class man, even if Talbot’s purpose remains unclear. Talbot’s opposition to the “elegant ignoramus” who embraces his military identity only in times of peace signals the kind of patriotism missing from the problematic masculine gender identities of Robert Audley and Gaskell’s Frederick Hales, and situates Talbot amongst middle and working-class conceptions of masculinity that value war-time service. However, Talbot himself does not believe that his interest in scientific pursuits, his patriotism, and his aversion to gambling and tobacco and alcohol position him closer in kind to the emerging middle-class man. Instead, Talbot’s conception of this “elegant ignarus” is that he is “beneath a gentleman” (32). He fancies himself as an older type of aristocratic man, one that, as Braddon’s portrayal of Sir Audley suggested, is quickly dying off. Talbot sees the demise of the “gentleman” as a result of the aristocracy acting too much like the lower classes. Namely, it is the role of entertainment (gambling, smoking and drinking), and also the decreasing status of
aristocratic women, that are to blame for the demise of the gentleman. Like Robert, Talbot wants to avoid adult heterosexuality by not becoming too closely associated with women. Viewing a dance floor filled with “dark beauties in pink, fair beauties in blue” (33) he sees this display of femininity as a trap that has been laid out for him, “those familiar nets of gauze and areophane, and he had escaped them all” (33). Again, as with Robert’s asexual fantasy of a world with limited or no knowledge of women, Talbot partly blames the opposite sex for the downfall of the aristocracy. He goes as far as to express a desire to never marry and therefore provide the world with no more Bulstrodes, rather than have his name “tarnished by an unworthy race, or dragged through the mire of a divorce court by a guilty woman” (33).

We can think of Talbot’s masculinity as a type of pure aristocratic gender identity, and one that is taken to such extremes that this hyper-masculinity (unrestricted in its excess) distances him from others. His self-control is taken too far, thereby taking a conventionally masculine trait (self-discipline and control) and showing how excess of anything can be detrimental to one’s masculine gender identity. The extreme nature of his masculinity produces fears in other men and women. Specifically it is Talbot’s gaze, and his resolute firmness in terms of order, rationality and proper manners that produces shame in those who do not live up to his strict standards. His “cold grey eye struck a silent awe into the hearts of men and women, with its straight penetrating gaze that always seemed to be telling them they were found out” (38). It is this moral firmness that, in his mind at least, makes him unable to be loved by a woman, or even by his family. He wonders whether he would have been loved by his family had he gone into debt, or sullied the Bulstrode name by being dismissed from the military. In Talbot’s mind this
sense of moral superiority creates a barrier between him and others. It is his complete independence from others—he needs no help repaying debts, or in covering up scandalous behavior—that creates what he calls an “icy barrier” (39) between himself and others. He does not form a connection with Floyd’s servants as Mellish does. Floyd’s servants express a liking for Mellish “a great deal better than Captain Bulstrode, who had been too ‘igh and ‘aughty’ for them” (110). Here again we see that regulation of behavior is critical to men of every social class, yet over regulation is just as damaging to one’s gender identity as not enough. In his desire to achieve an unstained reputation, and his ability to be in control of his behavior as well as his needs, Talbot strives to be that moral and social mirror for other men. If these aspects of Talbot’s gender identity are a mirror that operates as a goal to which other men aspire, then it is his overregulation that conversely serves as a warning against total social independence. Furthermore, the “icy barrier” between Talbot and others is a rejection of the belief in the symbiotic relations with others no matter the social class that Gaskell proposes so strongly in her urge for middle-class intervention in the lives of the poor. The type of aristocratic masculinity exemplified by Talbot is too cut off from social interaction, and too independent in a society where relative independence and individuality is a mark of appropriate masculine gender identities.

In addition to his “icy barrier” Talbot’s masculinity is complicated through his supposed unmasculine behavior after breaking off the engagement with Aurora. After leaving Aurora because of his suspicions about her past, Talbot appears unmasculine to his family due to his inactivity and preference for staying indoors. Sulking around the castle, Talbot’s father wonders “why he didn’t take his gun and go out on the moors, and
get an appetite for his dinner…instead of moping in his own rooms all day long” (111).

In contrast, John Mellish is defined by action and energy. Mellish is an “old friend and school fellow” (56) to Talbot, but their relationship is not as problematic as that of George and Robert Audley. In *Lady Audley’s Secret* the relationship between the two old schoolmates was complicated by homoerotic desires and, most importantly, by a lack of a clear female figure that would enable the two boys to compete against each other in order to win her affections. While Sedgwick (quoting Levi Strauss) argues that in English literature the “normative man” will use a woman “as a ‘conduit of a relationship’ in which the true partner is a man” (26), we see little of that focus on male bonding or even repressed homosexual desire between Mellish and Bulstrode. In this novel Aurora plays the role of the erotic female figure of desire that allows Mellish and Bulstrode to actually define their heterosexuality through their competition for her. This competition for a woman’s affection creates a strong (and safely heterosexual) bond between the two men. Talbot’s first reaction is to recognize that not only Mellish, but that “[a]ll Rugby might turn up against him in a day or two, and dispute with him for Aurora’s smiles” (66). Her smile represents recognition and approval of the man’s heterosexuality, and her presence gives the men a distinct reason for interacting with each other. In *Lady Audley’s Secret* that female figure was absent, and George and Robert had neither business concerns nor romantic rivalry to give a reason for their close relationship. By positioning Aurora as a prize for either of the two men, Braddon can represent feelings of intimacy between Mellish and Talbot without risk of threatening their heterosexuality. To return to Deslandes, the idea of competition between men (athletic, professional, or romantic) is made safely heterosexual when the “prize” is a woman. By having women operate as the
“prize,” or at least observers to the competition, Deslandes argues that competition “made heterosexual sociability crucial to defining ‘normal’ male sexuality and the performative (or enactive) nature of masculinity” (157). Whereas Lady Audley did not function as interest observer or “prize” for Robert and George, Mellish and Talbot see Aurora as the girl on the sidelines waiting to see which man will win her. However different Aurora’s presence makes the relationship between Mellish and Talbot, like George and Robert they must finally enter into marriage to secure their heterosexuality, and in this way Mellish believes himself the winner of the rivalry between him and Talbot. We are told that he “was not jealous” and “[s]ecure in wife’s love and truth, he was ready to face a regiment of his old admirers” (149) even though he is “pleasantly ignoring that the captain has resigned all pretensions to Miss Floyd’s hand nine or ten months before his own offer had been accepted” (156). Unlike Talbot who loses this competition with Mellish due to his jealousy and suspicions, Mellish is confident in his wife and his ability to compete with any other man for her attention.

One reason for this difference between Mellish and Talbot can be found in Mellish’s more modern conception of aristocratic masculinity, yet this representation is also subverted as the novel feminizes Mellish’s gender identity. By winning the romantic rivalry against Talbot his masculinity is validated. In addition, his masculinity is validated when he is nearly worshipped by the middle and working class men he encounters, such as “an old army of servants at Mellish Park, who adored him and tyrannized over him after the manner of their kind” (58). The poor love him for his generosity—he is compared with Prince Albert—and while Talbot mopes in his castle after breaking off the relationship with Aurora, Mellish tells Mr. Floyd that he will “bear
it like a man” (119) if Aurora refuses him. Most importantly he is compared favorably with Muscular Christianity, a movement that was gaining steam by the time Braddon was writing *Aurora Floyd*. The narrator suggests that “the Rev Charles Kingsley would have delighted in this big, hearty, broad-chested young Englishman” (57) whose energy, joyous personality, and honesty make him instantly likeable and loveable in ways that Talbot is not. According to Donald Hall, Muscular Christian novels like those of Thomas Hughes and Kingsley responded both to the Women’s rights movement and the perception of the Tractarians as effeminate by presenting women as inherently weaker and less intelligent than men. More than this, Muscular Christianity, specifically in novels such as *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, is “virtually defined [by] a pattern of anxious and often violent expressions of desire for control” (328). The aristocratic/Muscular Christian man’s desire for control over women is evident in the novel. Tromp argues that Bulstrode and Mellish are focused on controlling Aurora’s body through literal and figurative violence, and Jeni Curtis suggests that the novel’s happy ending is predicated on Aurora’s sexuality being “constrained and conventionalized, no depths and all surface” (86).

While I agree with Hall’s assertion that many works by Muscular Christian authors (Hughes, Kingsley, F.D Maurice) feature a strong aversion to anything that is not male and Christian (women as well as marginalized masculinities), *Aurora Floyd* actually subverts those traits of Muscular Christianity by feminizing Mellish. Braddon’s comparison between Mellish and Muscular Christianity simultaneously and contradictorily makes him more and less of a strong and dominant male figure. While honesty, charity, and strong and active physicality are all characteristics of hegemonic
masculinity as well as Muscular Christianity, in Mellish these attributes are balanced with unmasculine traits as well. He is largely subservient to his wife in ways that contradict his Muscular Christianity, and Braddon compares Mellish to young girls numerous times. Mellish is “cruelly henpecked” (142), he “simpered like a school-girl” when Aurora becomes better loved by their servants than he, and he is described as being “as open to flattery as a school-girl who distributes the contents of her hamper among a circle of toadies” (59). Mellish’s problematic masculinity exceeds Talbot’s, as once the two men learn about Aurora’s previous marriage, as well as her possible involvement in that man’s murder, Mellish breaks down in tears as Talbot “linked his arm about him, and drew him away almost as tenderly as if the big Yorkshireman had been some sorrowing woman, sorely in need of manly help and comfort” (408) resulting in Mellish becoming “submissive as a child beneath his guidance” (415).

The feminizing of Mellish is not merely a critique of Muscular Christianity as much as it is an illustration of the growing ineffectualness of aristocratic men. Mellish is strong, active and dominant, yet is simultaneously submissive to both his wife and friend. Talbot represents control and appropriately channeled energy, yet does so excessively, resulting in his inability to “be a man.” Both men are held up to a standard of masculinity that they are unable to achieve. Lucy holds a “vague wish that her husband had been a little more like the heroes in the High-Church novels, and a little less devoted to Adam Smith, McCulloch, and the Cornish miners” (218), yet the aristocratic men in the novel are neither as they do not display the masculine piety found in High-Church novels like Charlotte Yonge’s *The Heir of Redclyffe*, nor the urban working and middle-class model illustrated by economists and Cornish miners. Though Mellish is aware of his failures to
validate his masculinity as he wishes “to do something” (368)—such as build schools, or almshouses—he accomplishes nothing of the sort in the novel. Furthermore, the narrator draws an unfavorable comparison between the selfish and inactive Mellish and Florence Nightingale and Elizabeth Gurney Fry in order to criticize the lack of philanthropy amongst the upper classes. In both examples, Braddon depicts Mellish as impotent since he is aware of his masculine shortcomings but is unable to actively change his masculine gender identity due to his aristocratic status. Again, even though Braddon seemingly endorses this conception of masculine gender identity, she undercuts that endorsement by illustrating how outdated and inadequate aristocratic men are in mid-nineteenth century England. After the murder of James Conyers, Talbot and Mellish are unable to solve the crime or figure out the mystery of Aurora’s past as they become largely passive players in the second half of the novel. As with *Lady Audley’s Secret*, Braddon again represents the dying aristocracy and the ineffectualness of aristocratic masculine gender identities in contrast to the authority of a middle-class heterosexual masculinity that is active, providing (for families and those less fortunate), and devoted to rationality and logic.

If Talbot and Mellish are unable to be truly dominant, Braddon represents the middle-class characters in the novel (and there are a wide range of masculinities within that category of “middle class”) as those who wield real power and authority. Braddon endorses the “gentleman” as the model for masculine behavior at the same time she positions middle-class men as more acceptably masculine than the upper classes. While Pykett argues that Talbot’s “route to masculinity is the discovery of the secrets of the family, and the simultaneous discovery of a vocation” (55), neither he nor Mellish actually do any work. Where the aristocratic men fail due to their inability to take action
and influence the events of the novel, characters like Captain Prodder, the doctor, and the constable succeed. After the murder of Conyers, Prodder informs Mellish that “decision and prompt action are indispensable in these sad catastrophes” (295), two attributes that Mellish and Talbot are incapable of displaying. The middle-class characters in the novel possess the power and authority that enable them to roam freely from urban areas to aristocratic estates, to interrogate and cast suspicion on other men, and to assert their masculinity without being challenged.

Through examining the dead man’s clothes, interrogating witnesses, and finally pointing blame at the guilty party, these men restore the orderliness of the community as Talbot and Mellish watch helplessly and thereby reveal the lack of authority and power of the aristocracy. The murder of James Conyers creates chaos since it is seen as an unnatural act that defies social law. It upsets the order of their society so much that Mellish cannot remember whether he left Prodder’s company minutes or hours previously as his “ideas of time were annihilated by the horror of the catastrophe” (304). In order to reestablish order, the constable, detective, coroner and the rector must, through logic and rationality, solve the circumstances of the crime and punish the guilty, as they provide a service to others as well as taking their place as dominant figures that possess knowledge and skills that others lack. Before her past is known—and the murder of Conyers solved—Aurora possesses that knowledge and therefore assumes a position of authority. Or, as Karen Tatum argues, perhaps Aurora does not possess that knowledge, but the male characters “create the myth that women possess dreadful, hidden secrets in order to secure their identity by positing Aurora as being a mysterious terror of power they can then detect” (503).
Whether Aurora’s authority is earned or projected upon her by the male characters, it is usurped once the middle-class men of the novel assert their power. Just as Robert Audley learns the authority that comes with ratiocination, *Aurora Floyd* gives us the constable, Mr. Dork, who represents the law as defined by rationality and possession of knowledge, and Mr. Grimstone, the detective, who is only focused on doing his duty “and doing it conscientious” (449). Grimstone in particular vocalizes the difference between himself and upper-class men telling Talbot and Mellish about his “hard day’s work” but qualifying his statement by explaining that “perhaps neither of you gentleman—not being professional—would think much of what I’ve done” (428). What is earned by “being professional” is a valid masculine gender identity that allows these men to be the doer and the discoverer. In comparison, what Mellish and Talbot lack is a clear purpose that provides a distinct service to others. The aristocratic men live in an insular society, largely cut off from the urban centers as they spend most of their time on their estates rather than taking part in the daily interaction found in larger urban areas. Talbot and Mellish are tied to their rural estates, while the working and middle-class characters are significantly more mobile as they do their work in towns, workshops, and pubs. Dork, Grimstone, Prodder and others are products of the social sphere that was created by the industrial revolution and the massive shift in population from rural to urban areas. In comparison, Mellish and Talbot appear antiquated and irrelevant.

Of all the examples of middle-class masculinity in the novel, Captain Samuel Prodder and Grimstone are the epitome of Victorian middle-class masculine identity. Prodder is a self-made man who has earned his entry into bourgeoisie status and has led such an “out-door life” that the exposure to sun has caused him to be mistaken for “some
one of those countries in which the complexion of native fluctuates between burnt sienna, Indian red, and Van-dyke brown” (232). The description of Prodder earning his living by travelling around the world practically echoes the quote from Ruskin’s *On Queen’s Gardens*. Along with the novel’s other middle-class characters, Prodder is free to move anywhere he pleases, and can even pass as a gentleman by donning different clothing. Grimstone is defined by his job (he refers to his occupation as his “business” and his “business” envelops him day and night), and his strong work-ethic and occupationally-defined identity make him the character with the most power and authority in the novel. Above all other characters, Grimstone is able to use his masculine gender identity to enter freely into the homes of the aristocracy, the servants’ quarters, pubs and inns, and, most importantly, into the marketplace. Grimstone’s entrance into the largely working-class marketplace contrasts with the relatively quiet and immobile world represented by Talbot and Mellish. The marketplace is filled with “the clamour of buying and selling” as “noisy countrymen” and “dealers…endeavour to simultaneously satisfy the demands of half-a-dozen sharp and bargain loving housekeepers” (439). Represented here is a life of physical and intellectual action, as well as a desire/need for serving and satisfying others that conflicts with the mostly self-focused and non-philanthropic aristocratic society. Grimstone distinguishes himself from the aristocracy in his ability to enter and participate in the marketplace, but his independence of movement and thought mark him as middle class in comparison with the butchers and housekeepers.

Braddon also differentiates middle-class masculinity from working and upper-class men through their ability to avoid emasculating comparisons, such as the allusions depicting Mellish as a school girl. The men are able to defend their masculinity largely
through their strong work-ethic. In other words, they are so preoccupied with labor that they do not have time to mope around their homes like Talbot, or to behave as Mellish does when he “fell on his friend’s breast and wept aloud” (457) after the arrest of Softy for Conyers’ murder. Indeed, Grimstone realizes what is at stake if he were not to perform his duties as a detective by finding Softy when he exclaims “I’m jiggered if I don’t find him” (442), with “jiggered” being a now obsolete euphemism meaning the same as “buggered”. However, none of the middle-class male characters have their masculinity threatened, unfavorably compared, or difficult to perform as Talbot and Mellish who found themselves impotent in living up to the standards of aristocratic masculinity.

When changing the focus from aristocratic male characters to those in the middle and lower classes, Braddon’s novel makes its most radical move by calling into question a major requirement of middle and working-class masculinity. *Aurora Floyd* directly critiques an assumed essential (and assumed natural) characteristic of masculine gender identity: the idea that masculinity must be, at least partially, validated by others through visual means. While a successful masculinity is performed through displaying a strong work-ethic, earning money legitimately and legally, providing for others, the male body is also a part of this equation as it must appear in the social sphere (especially during the daytime hours as it functions as a sign of employment), and it must be visually acceptable. What is meant by “visually acceptable” is that the male body must appear to others as strong, pleasing/handsome, and capable. These visual components function as proof that the man can (and does) perform those other requirements of a successful male gender identity.
However, Braddon presents a critique of this belief in *Aurora Floyd*. Through the characters of Conyers and Softy, Braddon illustrates how appearances can be deceiving in terms of performing a male gender identity, and suggests that far too much importance is placed on the visual element of masculinity. Conyers appears as a strong, attractive man, and yet is eventually revealed to be a villain. Softy, discriminated against because of his “ugly” appearance and physical disability, finds his masculinity impossible to perform successfully because of his appearance. The representation of these characters, even though they are problematic due to their “villain” role, still critique the idea that if a man is visually acceptable (i.e. present in the social sphere, physically strong, handsome) then his gender identity is validated by others, and he is able to perform his masculinity successfully. Braddon creates a working-class sexual object in Conyers as his masculinity is defined by his physicality, not because of his physical strength, but through his beauty instead. However, this physical beauty deceives others only so long before they reject him as a villain; they quickly come to understand that he fulfills no other requirement of masculinity other than his physical appearance. Softy functions as the de facto villain in the novel due to his mistreatment of Aurora’s dog, the murder of Conyers, and the overall unpleasant reaction others have to him as a result of his disability. Yet the novel argues for his inclusion in society by implying that his antisocial and violent behavior is directly caused by his rejection from society due to his “ugly” physical appearance.

It is not a healthy work-ethic or functioning in the role of provider that allows Conyers’s masculinity to be validated by others; rather it is solely his handsome and strong physical appearance. This initial validation allows him to be placed in a position of authority in the social/business sphere over the “grooms and stable-boys” who “bowed
down to him, and paid court to him as they had never done” (184) to the previous trainer at Mellish Park. It also allows him to enter successfully into the world of heterosexual romance as the aristocratic Aurora also mistakes his physical beauty for a socially acceptable masculinity when she falls in love and marries him at an early age. Lucy, as stated earlier in the chapter, is confused as to how her cousin Aurora could be content with John Mellish’s unsatisfactory appearance, thus implying that Lucy would have approved of her cousin’s marriage to the more handsome Conyers instead. Conyers himself even recognizes that his appearance is enough to validate his masculinity, and views his looks as a commodity as his “handsome face was a capital with which [Conyers] knew very well how to trade, and he took the full amount of interest that was to be got for it without compunction” (184-85).

Even though Conyers eventually performs the role of the “bloodstained man” in the novel, his physical attractiveness is enough for others to initially validate his masculine gender identity. In this critique, Braddon does not hide Conyers’s “bloodstained man” position from the reader (in fact she makes a point to describe the “worthless soul” (315) that exists underneath his beautiful exterior). He is a working-class sexual object whose masculine gender identity rests solely on his attractiveness rather than his mental or physical work-ethic, or physical strength. However, it is made clear to the reader that this physical beauty only masks an illegitimate masculine gender identity. Conyers is described as a “man about whose beauty there can be no dispute” but without an intellect to match as “you give him a mind as aesthetically perfect as his face and figure, and you recoil on discovering what a vulgar, every-day sword may lurk under that beautiful scabbard” (181). Nor is he much of a worker when he is described as
“extravagant, lazy, luxurious, and selfish” (185). Robert Dingley argues that Braddon places so much importance on Conyers’s physical attractiveness that this beauty makes him sexually ambiguous (or possibly homosexual) as well as obscuring his very working-class origins. While I do not agree with Dingley’s suggestion that Conyers’s “homosexuality…is founded on glancing allusions and telling silences” (17), it is apparent that Braddon presents a working-class masculinity that goes beyond heterosexuality and working-class status into a sort of pansexual physical beauty that is recognized by poor and rich, men and women.

Once all of the characters come to recognize that they have been deceived by good looks, and that Conyers is indeed a “bloodstained man,” it is Aurora who is especially chastised by the narrator for being misled by a pleasing face and attractive body. She finds “behind her school-girl’s fancy for a handsome face, for violet-tinted eyes, and soft-brown curling hair” a man who is “a liar, a schemer, a low and paltry swindler, a selfish spendthrift, extravagant to wantonness upon himself, but meaner than words could tell towards others; a profligate, a traitor, a drunkard” (393). In other words, Conyers does not fit any requirement for a successfully performed masculine gender identity other than his physical appearance and presence in the social sphere. He is not a provider for others (providing only for himself, and this he does in excess), he is not honest, he cannot control his intake of alcohol (another sign of little control and discipline), and he does not earn his living or seek wealth honestly, but chooses rather to be a schemer and swindler. The novel warns us that this illusion created by a man’s physical appearance can lead to death and destruction.
Similarly, negatively judging a man’s worth by his unattractive physical appearance can also result in death and destruction because it limits the possibility of an “ugly” man to achieve a successful masculine gender identity due to societal discrimination, forcing him down a criminal path. These men are bloodstained, but not because of a conscious act of defiance or law-breaking, rather it is because they are given no opportunity to do otherwise. According to Braddon’s critique of British society, Conyers’s physical beauty is used as a commodity to buy his entry into society, and Softy’s unattractiveness makes him less than a man. Both judgments are made based on the two men’s physical appearance, and both, according to the novel, are invalid (and dangerous) methods of judging the validity of one’s masculinity. Softy recognizes that his appearance has limited his ability to earn a successful male gender identity. While staring at Conyers as he sleeps, Softy remarks “[p]erhaps I might have been good for summat if I had been like you…You’ve no call to hide yourself from other folks…The world’s smooth enough for you” (251). Softy understands that Conyers’ good looks enable him to be present in the social sphere, and not merely because he is a “moneyed man” or because he is honestly employed, but merely because he looks acceptable.

Conversely, Softy lacks the beauty possessed by Conyers, and Braddon turns him into an object of sympathy, suggesting that because of his disabled body and “ugly” features he was not given a chance to perform his masculinity the way that the attractive, visually pleasing Conyers had. As excessively described as are Conyers’s good looks, Softy’s unattractiveness is described in similarly extreme language. He is described as having an “ugly leering face, which looked like one of the hideous decorations of a Gothic building” (327). He also has “an ugly glitter in his eyes, and shaggy tufts of red hair
meeting on the bridge of his nose, and big splay feet, which seem made to crush and destroy whatever comes their way” (134). Furthermore, Softy is frequently compared with “some viperish creature,” (169) or a “slow ponderous serpent, sneaking towards its prey” (194). Yet, just as soon as the reader is given numerous descriptions of Softy’s unattractiveness we are simultaneously chastised for thinking badly of those men who do not fit conventional notions of physical attractiveness. The narrator reminds the reader that it is “both wicked and unjust; for we have no right to take objection to a man” (134) because of his unattractive features.

While Conyers is considered handsome and Softy is not, both men are disabled, and the amount of beauty each man possesses enables Conyers’s disability to be overlooked while Softy’s defines his entire character. Conyers had damaged his leg in a horseracing accident and walks with a limp, while Softy was given his nickname after a hunting accident that left him, according to Mellish’s servant, “a little bit touched in the upper story— a little bit ‘fond,’ as we call it here” (135). Because of his beauty, Conyers’s limp is not one of his identifying characteristics, and instead becomes an unimportant aspect of his physical appearance. However, Softy’s disability, paired with his unattractiveness, becomes his most identifying feature. Being “fond” largely excludes him from working-class society, as well as excusing his violent or anti-social behavior even though he has masculine interests, such as his fascination with guns that is described as “that innate love of these things which seems to be implanted in every masculine breast, whatever its owner’s state or station” (259). This practice of excusing and exclusion risks depicting Softy as unmasculine since he, unlike Conyers, is not accepted anywhere he goes. He cannot function in the social sphere, and because that is a
fundamental requirement for masculine gender identities of all social classes, Softy is unable to perform a successful masculinity.

Specifically, this exclusion from society makes him unable to work; an action that his working-class masculinity is dependent upon. Softy would have performed a more legitimate and successful masculine gender identity than Conyers does, had he not been discriminated and judged based on his physical appearance. Martha Stoddard Holmes found that the “distinction between abled and disabled bodies in Victorian culture (and our own) was produced partly in terms of the distinction between men and women and beliefs about what ‘naturally’ characterized each gender” (94). For the Victorians, Holmes argued that what “naturally” differentiated each gender was their relation to the domestic sphere, with the women occupying that space while the man leaves the home to work. Being seen outside the home, where she must work, or worse yet, beg for money, was a characteristic of the disabled woman. Similarly, the disabled man is marked by his tie to the domestic sphere, either due to his invalid status or as he “roams the streets without a regular workplace” (94). Once Softy is dismissed from his job his masculinity becomes threatened. Braddon then presents him as criminally-minded, which functions as a replacement occupation for him; an occupation that is, however, illegitimate and cannot earn him a successful male gender identity. Grimstone, especially, is in awe of his impressive criminal talents, noting that “[a]mother man would have never been able to stand against the temptation of changing one of those notes; or would have gone without wearing that identical waistcoat; or would have made a bolt of it the day after the murder…but not your ‘Softy’!” (437). Softy’s ability to be a criminal earns him some
level of respect, similar to Sherlock Holmes’ assessment of Dr. Moriarty as “the Napoleon of Crime”.

With these depictions of masculinities that are judged by their physical appearances, Conyers and Softy serve as a warning to readers that the appearance of male gender identity—the notion that men should or should not visualize their masculinity in certain ways—is unreliable. The sensation novel genres allows Braddon to show the benefits of enforced hegemonic masculinity by restoring middle-class male authority, as well as reveal the costs that required men to be visually appealing or else be excluded from society. As the century progressed more varied representations of masculinity would appear in the works of Oscar Wilde, Samuel Butler (namely in The Way of All Flesh), and in gothic/supernatural novels such as The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Dracula, amongst others. In the next chapter I will examine how women-authored children’s literature responded to these changing ideas of masculine gender identity in the last few decades of the nineteenth-century.
Chapter Four

“I never felt so pleased to think I was not born a girl”: Women-authored Representations of Young Masculinity in Late-Victorian Children’s Literature

This chapter examines how children’s literature written by female Victorian authors dealt with the development of masculine gender roles in children. Specifically, in children’s literature written in the last few decades of the Victorian period we see a reaction to the rapid changes in conceptions of gender. Roderick McGillis writes that the end of the nineteenth century “brought concerns about children and adolescence, sex and sexual identities, end-times anxieties and fears of degeneration” (xii) that were reflected in literature intended for children. Julia Grant adds that

just as the traditional gender roles of adult women and men were being challenged by the politics of feminism and the transformations in work and leisure that accompanied urbanization, little boys became the object of intensified scrutiny by both parents and professionals for signs of gender deviations. (830)

Children’s books were especially invested in this idea of defining the appropriate ways to raise both boys and girls, with the specifics of what was “appropriate” changing from author to author. Conventional notions of gender granted special authority to female author’s of children’s literature because women were deemed more knowledgeable about raising children than men. However, looking at late-period Victorian children’s literature does not provide easy answers in terms of whether these authors were doing progressive or reactionary work concerning male gender identity. In exploring late-Victorian
children’s literature it becomes apparent that the authors’ representations of masculinity reflect a struggle between older, more conservative and rigidly defined conceptions of masculinity, as well as newer, more progressive ideas about what is acceptable concerning gender roles and gender identities.

Dinah Mulock Craik, Juliana Horatia Ewing, and Edith Nesbit provide a broad spectrum of representations of masculinity ranging from the reactionary and backwards-looking, to the subversive and progressive. Novels such as Craik’s *The Little Lame Prince* (1875), Ewing’s *Jackanapes* (1884), and Nesbit’s Bastable novels, specifically *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899) and *The Wouldbegoods* (1901), run the gamut from progressive depictions of masculinity (Craik) to conventional and conservative definitions (Ewing) to, finally, a combination of both the conventional and the progressive (Nesbit). In broad terms, late-Victorian conventional definitions of boyhood masculinity required boys to be physically active, display leadership qualities, and have a vested interest in doing the “right” thing, whatever that might be. Craik’s text focuses on the importance for boys to be empathetic and able to perform the duties of a leader while also allowing those who do not fit the conventions of a hegemonic masculine gender identity (especially concerning body shape and size) to still perform a successful masculinity, thus broadening the range of acceptable male gender roles. Ewing’s *Jackanapes* presents a restrictive, conventional view of proper masculine gender identities as a moral response to supposedly immoral late-Victorian literature. Finally, Nesbit’s novels concerning the Bastable family will be the main focus of this chapter as they best illustrate the tension between older and newer conceptions of masculinity.

These novels combine forward-looking ideas (a move towards gender and class equality,
the embrace of Socialism, the depiction of capitalism as an immoral force that corrupts society), with elements of more conventional gender identities, namely the patriarchal gender roles defined by separate spheres ideology.

One reason for the increasing importance and popularity of children’s literature (for children and adults) over the course of the Victorian period was the industrial revolution. A result of industrialization was improvements in public education. And one effect of improvements in education was an increase in England’s literacy rates. The increasing affordability of reading material due to improvements in printing technologies and better distribution of commercial products, combined with a growing interest in educating more of Britain’s populace than merely the wealthy classes, led to the increasing popularity of literature for children and adolescents. Because of this growing popularity the demand for authors to supply that literature enabled more authors (male and female) to find success in the literary world. Diana Dixon has found that the five children’s periodicals in print in England in 1824 had increased to 160 by 1900 (63). The number of periodicals aimed towards a younger audience grew alongside the number of novels and collections of stories and fairy-tales for children. As Claudia Nelson suggests, in the early nineteenth century the bulk of these narratives “typically emphasize[d] either Evangelical religion or secular rationalism” (74). However, as the century progressed children’s literature became more varied in its subject matter. Regardless of whether these works for children focused on edifying (what a character in Nesbit’s *The Wouldbegoods* calls “improving books”) or merely amusing their readers, Victorian women found that this genre was especially welcoming to them as they could capitalize
on conventional female gender roles that positioned them as mother-figures. Indeed, the number of female children’s literature authors grew faster than their male counterparts.

As Siobhan Lam has found, rigid gender divisions in children’s literature were common late into the nineteenth century. Lam uses Charles Scribner’s 1894 catalog *Popular Books for Young People* as an example of how children’s literature both reflected and created gender identities for children, and how they sometimes stressed rigid differences between boys and girls. The catalog has separate categories for books for boys and books for girls, with the books for boys largely focusing on physical strength and agility, violence, and adventure (usually concerning with finding or earning wealth and power, such as pirate tales and war narratives). These books reinforce the idea that boys should mature into adult men who are focused on their presence in the social realm, physicality, and gaining/earning wealth and status. The books for girls, as Lam show, argued that the fairer sex should be “charmed by domestic scenes” that centered on learning homemaking skills, and preparing for the role of wife/mother, rather than being enticed by “racy tales of adventure at sea or at war” (“Boys will be Boys, and Girls should be Girls”).

However, in contrast to these conventional conceptions about gender differences, the last few decades of the century offered up competing definitions of gender identity such as the Dandified Man and the New Woman. The representation of dandyism in the late nineteenth-century by authors such as Oscar Wilde and Algernon Charles Swinburne ran counter to hegemonic masculinity in its focus on flamboyant dress, lazy physicality, foreign influences, and open sexuality. As an example of literature that reacted negatively towards dandyism, Kirsten Drotner, in *English Children and their Magazines*, points out
that *Boys’ Own Magazine* “enthusiastically propagated the schoolboy's maxims: "Never sneak, never weep, never lie, and never trust foreigners" (107). The New Woman similarly represented a progressive conception of female gender identity that promoted equality and suggested the dangers of conventional marriage and the domestic sphere. Eliza Lynn Linton criticized what became known as “The Girl of the Period” for losing a sense of appropriate female gender identity by writing that “[n]o one can say of the modern English girl that she is tender, loving, retiring, or domestic” (106).

The last few decades of the century brought about anxieties over appropriate gender identities and cultural degeneration that were explored in children’s literature. Lily Philipose has argued that mid-to-late 1800s brought about a surplus of children’s literature because “writing for the young (and in some cases writing fantasy for the young) gave writers greater license freely to explore controversial political, social, or metaphysical issues in a time of a religious and social upheaval” (133). Authors like Frances Hodgson Burnett, Charlotte Yonge, Julia Horatia Ewing, and Dinah Mulock Craik were all mid-to-late period Victorian authors who found success writing adult fiction, but even greater acclaim when they began publishing works aimed at younger audiences. Common amongst the three authors covered in this chapter (Craik, Ewing, and Nesbit) was that their children’s fiction was often written with adult readers in mind. Also, whether the subject matter consisted of the adventures of young boys or young girls, the intended audience was not separated along gender lines. For these reasons many of the “messages” found in their children’s fiction were applicable both to growing girls and boys, but also to adult men and women (specifically parents or guardians) who were charged with raising children.
If we are to understand late-period Victorian children’s literature as an educational tool—aiming to educate children and their parents/guardians on what their authors believed were appropriate gender roles for boys and girls, amongst other lessons—then it is important to look at reasons why authors felt such an education was necessary at this time. The passage of the Forster Education Act (otherwise known as the Elementary Education Act) in 1870 allowed for the conception of a modern system of education in England enabling mass education (or at least the possibility for such education). The anxiety over how to properly educate the lower classes (or, even, whether to educate them at all) may have resulted in the Forster Act’s emphasis on educating the populace only in terms of encouraging the middle and working classes to be informed citizens. It became important to educate the masses on issues of government and politics following the passage of the Second Reform Bill in 1867, as it enfranchised male heads of households of course, but also any adult male who paid taxes directly, which included lodgers as well. This legislation nearly doubled the amount of voters in England.

However much the ruling classes felt the need to educate the masses (especially the males, obviously) on issues of government, the actual effect of the Forster Education Act was to encourage mass education on every subject. For example, Jose Harris argues that, even though sectarian teaching was excluded from schools, teaching the Bible was allowed causing the Forster Act to promote the vague teaching of Christian morals for the masses (191). Overall, the Forster Act, as Linda K. Hughes suggests, “lengthened working-class childhoods by postponing employment” (37), and the lower classes joined the middle and upper class children in establishing a lengthy period in early life devoted to the education and development of one’s intellect as well as character. This was true for
both girls and boys, as the Endowed Schools Act in 1869 allowed for the creation of over 90 schools for girls between 1869 and 1899. As Sheila Fletcher suggests, “[a]t a time when, to all intents and purposes, secondary schools for girls did not exist, when hardly anyone wished them to exist, this Act created them” (2). In this way children’s literature became an important teaching tool, not just to educate the reader about proper citizenship, but as well on issues of moral development and appropriate gender roles. Children’s literature was to function in the educational system and at home. I will show how three late-period Victorian women authors sought to enter into the dialogue concerning the construction and performance of male gender identities for the middle and upper-classes, and how these authors endorsed models of masculinity that would feature what they believed to be the best aspects of the soon-to-be-ending nineteenth century.

**Dinah Mulock Craik**

Dinah Mulock Craik, who is now better known for her adult fiction, such as *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), or *A Life for a Life* (1859), gained immense fame during her life for her juvenile fiction, most notably *The Lame Little Prince and his Travelling Cloak* (1875). As Sally Mitchell points out, Craik’s early children’s stories (published between 1846 and 1855) were highly didactic (not to mention somewhat poorly written). They featured male and female central characters who were taught to be unselfish, charitable, and honest, and who learned that “these traits lead both to practical success and to a flow of love and admiration from other people” (80). Following this period, Craik’s fiction for children began to feature elements of fantasy and folklore. Her most important work in this genre is *The Fairy Book* (1863), the anthology she edited on
Alexander Macmillan’s request. Unlike other anthologies of folktales and mythology that appeared around this time (George Cruikshank’s *Fairy Library* is one, Juliana Horatia Ewing’s *Old-Fashioned Fairy Tales* is another), Craik’s book did not introduce contemporary moralistic elements into the tales. Finally, Craik went on to combine ancient folktales and fantasy elements with the more realistic narratives found in her earlier fiction. According to Mitchell, Craik “began to write simple books based on everyday life for and about the children she knew,” (86) following the birth of her godchildren and the adoption of a daughter. The most popular of those “simple books” was *The Little Lame Prince and His Traveling Cloak* (1875). In Craik’s book we find a combination of fantastical narrative elements and realistic characters. Through this combination, the text presents a progressive definition of masculinity that transgresses current hegemonic conceptions concerning the male body. It also creates the possibility of multiple legitimate masculinities that are largely based on feminine characteristics yet are still recognized as valid male gender identities.

Set in a fictional country called Nomansland, this book concerns the “crippled” Prince Dolor whose uncle usurps the throne and sends the prince far away to be locked in a tower for the rest of his life. Through the intervention of a type of fairy godmother, the prince is given a magical cloak that allows him to travel all over Nomansland, thereby educating him on the terrain and wildlife of his country. Most importantly Dolor is educated on the reality of poverty as he flies over the poorest parts of the country. Ultimately, the uncle is killed during a revolution, and Prince Dolor is returned to the throne.
Mitchell argues that much of Craik’s fiction for children sticks to an androgynous model for male and female children, especially in her early works where “the children in these stories tend towards a single-sex ideal,” (81). Furthermore, Craik “guides her readers to maturity by giving them opportunities to feel the glow of approval and self-approval that comes from taking care of other people” (82). In her later fiction Craik uses male protagonists who work towards redefining proper masculine traits. In *The Little Lame Prince* Craik’s depiction of a physically disabled prince enables her to comment not only on notions of gentlemanly behavior but also on the importance for men of any social class to be active and present in the social realm. Craik uses Prince Dolor to represent an ideal performance of gentlemanly masculinity both for the upper-classes to emulate and the lower-class to aspire to as well as demand of those above them in social class. This definition of aristocratic/gentlemanly masculinity is heavily influenced by a middle-class conception of masculinity that requires a strong, physically active male body for its performance. Nomanland, the name of the fictitious nation in *The Little Lame Prince*, functions ironically since, in the end, the country is filled with different types of men—from the nameless townspeople, the active King, the conventionally masculine yet deceitful Crown Prince, and, finally, to the physically disabled yet still masculine Prince Dolor. If, as Craik suggests, the book is a parable, then the lesson being taught to the reader is that even the “lame” prince can perform acceptable masculine responsibilities and display hegemonic masculine characteristics.

*The Little Lame Prince* can best be read as a *bildungsroman* focusing on Prince Dolor’s development into an appropriate aristocratic gentleman. In this text (different from *Aurora Floyd*, for example, where there was a distinction between the gentlemanly
behavior of Prince Albert and the prince regent) the role of the aristocratic gentleman serves as a model of ideal behavior for men in the middle and working classes. As Robin Gilmour argues, the idea of the gentleman was for most Victorians “a cultural goal, a mirror of desirable moral and social values” (1). Interestingly, the model of gentlemanly behavior takes its cue from the definition of middle-class masculinity, specifically the notion of having a strong, physically active body. Dolor’s gentlemanly gender identity is made problematic upon his birth for numerous reasons. First, an accident that causes him to be disabled initially prevents his ability to be physically fit and active. As we have seen in examining Victorian industrial novels and sensation fiction, males of any social class were expected to visibly embody physical strength and activity. For Prince Dolor the problem of his physical disability is compounded by his regality as he functions as a visual symbol for Nomansland. Like Softy, Dolor’s body is “marked” by his disability. In “The Politics of Health” Foucault argues that the idea of a norm (and specifically a normal body) is used as a “principle of coercion” as it regulates and classifies the body. The disabled body then, as Rosemarie Garland Thomson suggests, is marked as not-normal since it deviates from this ideal. Thomson explains that “power is veiled by a rhetoric of neutrality” (40), meaning that the neutral or unmarked body becomes an emblem of power and authority. While Craik had initially depicted Dolor as a genderless creature, once others become aware of his disability—and that his physical appearance deviates from his norm or “neutrality”—his masculinity becomes very important. Upon learning that their prince cannot use his legs, Dolor’s nameless subjects express concern as they exclaim, “[A] prince, and not able to stand on his own legs! What a dreadful thing! What a misfortune for the country!” (11). It is required that Dolor be a visual and
physical symbol of the strength of Nomansland, and his inability to stand on his own legs (without, it is implied, the assistance of anyone or anything) brings about concern and shame for the country as a whole.

We can assume that the nameless people concerned about the prince’s legs expect the soon-to-be monarch to be physically independent and free of any bodily markings that they interpret as weak or representative of a mental deficiency. These nameless people who are shocked by prince’s crippled legs are not the only ones concerned. The Crown Prince also expresses anxiety over the crippled boy’s role as the country’s patriarch when he worries about how it would appear to have a king “who can never stand to receive his subjects, never walk in processions, who, to the last day of his life, will have to be carried like a baby” (17). When Dolor’s father watches his son play with another boy, he becomes aware of the difference between the able-bodied child and his own son who he sees “dragging himself about with his arms rather than his legs, and sometimes trying feebly to crawl from one chair to another” (12). This difference between the two boys is remarked upon by the father, who now believes that “all is not right with his son” (12). The stigma is placed upon Dolor, and from then on he is thought of as unmasculine and not fit to inherit the throne. His crippled legs mark him as being unmasculine because they undermine the sense of independence and physical strength necessary for a strong male gender identity. After this stigma is attached to Dolor his father loses almost all interest in his son as we are told that “[the father] interfered very little concerning his son” after finding out that he could not use his legs, and that the “whole thing was too painful, and his majesty had never liked painful things” (15). The process of emasculation continues as the prince is placed permanently outside the
category of acceptable masculine gender identity once the Crown Prince suggests that the doctors stop their treatments, and that they leave him to live the rest of his life without the use of his legs.

To further emasculate Dolor, the young boy is continually compared to his mother. Like the dead or absent mothers in Ewing’s and Nesbit’s fiction, Craik eliminates the role of mother as she, though her writing, becomes a surrogate mother figure, instructing children on how to behave. Even before Dolor’s mother dies she is an absent figure in his life due to her frequent illnesses. The King “has grown used to her absence” and found that “they could go on quite well without her” (5). Just like his mother, Dolor is similarly absent from the social realm as his disability causes him to be “seen very seldom by anybody” (18). Dolor’s absence from the social sphere is more damaging to his gender identity than his mother’s because of the importance of visibility and presence in the social/business sphere for men. However little Dolor’s mother was present in the social realm, her absence even after her death does not stop other people from comparing Dolor to his mother. He was named after her (masculinizing her name, Dolorez), and is said to look like her. More importantly, his disability—the characteristic responsible for others’ belief in the complete impossibility of him achieving an acceptable male gender identity—is said by some to be “something inherited, perhaps from his dear mother” (14). The blame for the prince’s failure to be appropriately masculine is placed on the mother instead of the patriarch (the actual reason for his disability is an accident caused by a female attendant dropping him after he was born), thus cementing his status as an unmasculine boy.
Dolor’s infant gender identity is continually associated with his mother and is categorized, not specifically as feminine, but more accurately as not-male. Here Craik is deviating from a simple gender binary that argues what is not male is female, and vice versa. Dolor is not described in feminine terms, nor are there any comparisons made between him and other female characters that would categorize him as effeminate. Instead, we are consistently told that he simply is not masculine. In the beginning of *The Little Lame Prince* his gender identity is in that nomansland between male and female gender identities as he must learn how to be male despite his physical disability.

Like Softy, Dolor is (at least initially) prohibited from functioning in the social sphere as he could if his body was unmarked. After the prince is whisked away to be locked in a tower for the rest of his life his unmasculine gender identity is no longer a threat to the patriarchal structure of the royal family nor does he continue to be a problematic male symbol for the country. Up until this point in the novel Craik’s depiction of Dolor as a boy whose gender identity is complicated by his disability is rather standard territory in terms of representations of disabled men. He is depicted as unmasculine, unfit for public office or any profession where he holds a position of authority, and is placed away from the social realm where his physical differences cannot be viewed—“Prince Dolor was seen no more” (20). However, Craik forges new ground by depicting Dolor’s maturational process into something of a bi-gendered figure that is neither conventionally masculine nor feminine, but something new entirely. And, more importantly, unlike Robert Audley or Softy, Dolor is not a threat to acceptable and conventional male gender roles, but is able to be recognized and accepted as a legitimate man. The breaking away from a simplistic (and limiting) gender binary calls into question
the very notion of single hegemonic masculinity that represents the ideal, and instead creates the notion of multiple masculinities that can all be accepted as legitimate. Dolor’s physical development points towards this bi-gendered nature as he is described as simultaneously disabled and strong, masculine and unmasculine:

Prince Dolor was now quite a big boy. Not tall—alas! He never could be that, with his poor little shrunken legs; which were of no use, only an encumbrance. But he was stout and strong, with great sturdy shoulders, and muscular arms…His face, too, was very handsome; thinner, firmer, more manly; but still the sweet face of his childhood—his mother’s own face. (70)

Alan Richardson argues that Dolor’s “gender identity is not so much androgynous (although it could be mistaken for such) as fragmented, his masculine and feminine aspects disjointed and ill-fitting rather than harmoniously blended” (9). Richardson sees the feminine and masculine halves of Dolor as separate though linked, instead of, as I argue, an example of Craik’s depiction of a new type of male gender identity. We see that Dolor’s masculinity is not fragmented, but recognized as successful when he is eventually accepted by the people of Nomansland, not as an unmasculine creature (or some type of bi-gendered abnormality), but as a “brave man” who proves to be an excellent provider for others. To signify this we are told that the people of Nomansland “knew that good was coming to them whenever he approached them” (102). Before he can achieve that acceptable masculine gender identity that contains a disabled body and a
feminine foundation, Dolor must learn how to be a man through awareness, charity, and mental and physical activity.

As he begins to mature, Dolor begins his path towards a legitimate masculine gender identity by expressing his desire for activity, and Craik complicates this idea of learning to perform one’s gender identity by implying that certain aspects of maleness are innate. Craik depicts Dolor’s “continual entreaty ‘What can I do? What can you find me to do?’” (26) as an expression of the boy’s inherent male desire to be the doer. This is not a learned trait; Dolor’s understanding of what it means to be male is completely nonexistent since he is taken care of by a woman and only sees one man (a “black man” who is “deaf and dumb” (24)). This man does not fit the hegemonic conception of masculinity displayed by the King since he is deemed an unmasculine other due to his racial and ethnic identity, and because he cannot speak or hear and therefore cannot function in the social realm. In other words, Dolor has no visible model of masculinity while he lives in the tower, and his constant demand for activity—for wanting something “to do”—appears as an innate masculine characteristic.

If the desire “to do” is innate in Craik’s book, it is not sufficient in developing one’s masculine gender identity. Instead it is an education through literature that is necessary for Dolor to develop his masculinity. Dolor “suddenly took to books” (26) that were given to him by the “black man,” and it is this literature that enhances and supports this desire “to do” by providing him with the knowledge of what can be done. The books read to, and read by, Dolor “informed him of everything in the outside world, and filled him with an intense longing to see it” (26). Dolor expresses this innate desire “to do” or to be active physically and not just intellectually, but this mental activity is insufficient in
performing his masculinity. Craik’s belief in the educational power of literature is evident here, but it also suggests that literature alone is insufficient because it only gives one the information, or the knowledge of what can be accomplished, while not supplying that opportunity to actually “do” something. The information gained through literature inspires Dolor to wonder “what it feels like to be on the back of a horse, galloping away, or holding the reins in a carriage, and tearing across the country, jumping a ditch, or winning a race, such as I read of or see in pictures” (54). This wondering on Dolor’s part makes him realize how many things there are that he “should like to do” (54). If this desire to be active was not already depicted as a masculine trait, Craik makes this clear by having Dolor aspire to be in a position of authority (“holding the reins”), being aggressive and nearly violent in his activity (“tearing across the country”), or simply dominant over others (“winning a race”).

Added to this is Dolor’s realization that he must display a sense of independence if he is going to perform a successful masculine gender identity. Here again Craik argues that mental activity is a key component towards achieving a legitimate masculinity, just not the only component as actual physical activity is then required in order to display that mental and physical independence. Craik’s argument also works hand-in-hand with her role as author by implying that the words in the text are important as they instruct and re/define appropriate male gender identities, but it is action that is further required. In other words, you must read my book, but it is just as important (if not more so) that your thoughts and behavior change after you put my book down.

Tosh suggests that, for the Victorians, “energy, will, straightforwardness and courage were the key requirements” for a masculine gender identity, but that
independence was the “key attribute of manliness” (111). The desire “to do” is innate, but Dolor’s quest for independence begins once he learns that he was born to be a king, and is therefore innately aristocratic. Continuing Craik’s investment in the power of the written word, Dolor learns of his upper-class lineage through writing. The nurse, unable to break her promise by telling Dolor that he is a prince, chooses instead to write down the words “You are a king” (72). The power of those written words instantly changes Dolor’s sense of his self. His confidence immediately improves when he realizes that “[I]ame as he was, anybody could see he was born to be a king” (72). After learning the rest of his family’s history (also through written language), including his uncle’s successful plot to usurp the throne, Dolor quickly becomes invested with a sense of purpose, something that he previously lacked. The sense of purpose, of having responsibilities to others and duties that must be performed, is a significant step in the process of turning Dolor into an aristocratic man. It is the nurse that provides the impetus for this change through her written words, but also through her speech since she tells Dolor that he must “get out into the world, and fight for your rights like a man” (72). Dolor understands that he must “learn to be independent” and that “he had always depended upon his nurse for everything” (73). Not having the use of his legs complicates Dolor’s efforts to be independent, but he begins by learning how to dress himself, and declaring that he will use his magical cloak to enter into the social realm and go out into the world, no matter how it hurts me—the world of people active
people...[t]hey might only laugh at me—poor helpless creature that I am; but still I might show them that I could do something. At any rate, I might go and see if there was anything for me to do. (73)

Dolor is a voracious learner, and the narrator informs the reader that he “never gave up his lessons till he had learned them all” (71). Quickly then, Dolor learns that there is more involved in performing aristocratic masculinity than merely being independent. For Dolor, the process involved in learning to be independent is not limited to dressing one’s self, proclaiming one’s self to be a king, or just being present in the social realm. The construction of aristocratic masculinity includes these characteristics, but must also contain conventional requirements for a masculine gender identity such as being mobile, displaying a strong work ethic, as well as embracing the responsibility to provide for those less fortunate. Again we see Craik mixing the fantastical elements of her narrative with more realistic and practical lessons about constructing a male gender identity as Dolor’s magical cloak enables him to be independent in terms of movement. When his fairy godmother initially gives him the cloak, which she calls a “traveling cloak,” Dolor tells her “I don’t want a cloak, for I never go out” (30). The ability to move freely, something that Dolor does not have, is integral for the boy’s masculine gender identity because men—active, independent creatures—require the means to move freely rather than being limited to one location. The cloak’s magical powers enable Dolor to move, and, upon his return to Nomansland, a less magical device helps Dolor’s mobility: a “council of eminent surgeons and mechanicians” that invent for Dolor a “wonderful pair of crutches, with the help of which, though he never walked easily or gracefully, he did manage to walk so as to be quite independent” (102). Whether it is the magical cloak
or the crutches, Dolor learns that his physical disability does not limit his mobility, and he obtains independence of movement.

A strong work ethic is also something Dolor needs in order to perform his aristocratic masculinity successfully. However, he becomes aware that work means different things to men of different economic statuses. As a result of flying around on the magical cloak, Dolor becomes educated on various topics including the flora and fauna of Nomansland, the living conditions of working and middle-class people, and even the history of his country. This education reveals to Dolor that “men work, and it must be so grand to be a man—a prince too; and I fancy princes work harder than anybody—except kings” (71). Dolor’s realization that “men work” is repeated a number of times in the book. He learns that his experiences flying on the magical cloak should not just be for pleasure but for learning, inspiring him to proclaim that “big boys do not always play. Nor men neither—they work” (74). Dolor’s decision to give up pleasure and play in exchange for education and work inspires him to take a closer look at the people of Nomansland, especially the working-classes. As he flies over them in his magical cloak, Dolor witnesses the debauchery of the poor as he sees that “dirty children play in gutters all day…men reel tipsy or women fight…even young boys go about picking pockets, with nobody to tell them it is wrong” (76). Just as Gaskell insisted that Carson and Thornton were in need of an education concerning their role as providers for the working-classes, Dolor also learns that his role is to instruct and provide for them. For Dolor “work” means charity and ruling over the working class in order to tell them what is right or wrong.
Dolor’s conception of what work he needs “to do” becomes evident when he tells the nurse that his nation seems divided in two between the rich and the poor, and that he wonders “[c]an’t the world be made a little more level? I would try to do it if I were king” (78). Here Dolor accepts that it is his responsibility as an upper-class man (much less the king) to help provide for those less fortunate. Again, just as with Gaskell, this notion is similar to Carlyle’s conception of the “Captain of Industry” in that we are presented with a societal need for a strong leader, a factory owner, a king in order to bring about peace and prosperity. We assume that, as king, his uncle has done little to help provide for the poor, thus resulting in the immorality and depravity of the working-classes that Dolor sees as he flies over. The result is a revolution that unseats the king. Revolutionaries call “for no government at all” (82), however the coup does not result in anarchy for Nomansland, but instead allows Dolor to claim the throne after his uncle’s death. Dolor’s acceptance of his work ethic and the responsibility to provide for the poor, as well as his independent mobility, allow Dolor to finally achieve a successful masculine gender identity.

However, the reign of King Dolor does not last long as he eventually decides to leave Nomansland forever. Then what do we make of the ending that once again moves Dolor away from the social realm and back into the mysterious world—the place where he matured and learned what being a man meant? One possible reading of this ending would be that Craik is suggesting the ultimate impossibility of a bi-gendered, disabled masculine gender identity. That, while Dolor was a popular king, and helped his people tremendously, his gender identity remains too problematic and must be removed. Is his removal necessary in order for a more conventional man, such as the Prince Regent,
whom Dolor describes as “a fitter King for you than I” (107), to take his place to ensure the country’s future? King Dolor’s departure is permanent—“[he] was never again beheld or heard of in his own country”—but his temporary reign was not purposeless since “the good he had done there lasted for years and years” (108). His departure makes *The Little Lame Prince* similar to other endings of Victorian fantasy novels where the hero returns home, the protagonist wakes from a dream, and the magical world depicted in the book disappears. For example, this type of ending is found in the *Alice* books, Edith Nesbit’s *Enchanted Castle*, and Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies*. Sarah Gilead argues that, in much Victorian fantasy literature, this move back to reality at novel’s end questions the purpose of the narrative. Among other questions asked by Gilead, the notion of whether this “return” undermines the more subversive elements of the novel are applicable to our understanding of the ending of *The Little Lame Prince*. Gilead questions whether the return “neutralizes the social criticism implicit in the fantasy” or “[d]oes the frame, as a ‘safe’ container, enable the fantasy to challenge the norms of reality?” (278).

However, while this interpretation is certainly valid, Dolor’s final departure from Nomansland could also be read as a definitive expression of male authority and dominance coming from an individual who, by rejecting the throne—the ultimate position of authority and power—is thereby proving just how successful his unconventional masculinity really has become. Craik presents such a progressive definition of masculinity in Dolor that she takes it a step further and endows him with the utmost in authority: the power to say “no.” Dolor’s ability to reject the social acceptance he craved (and then finally earned) is a far more powerful and dominant act than remaining king of Nomansland until his death. This rejection of social acceptance makes
him more appropriately masculine since it functions as a signifier of independence.

Craik’s unconventional narrative actually reverses the normal structure of fantasy novels in that Dolor’s time spent in the tower and flying around on the magical cloak is the “reality” of the narrative, and his time spent in Nomansland is the “fantasy” from which he must depart by novel’s end. This ability to actively reject “the fantasy” of Nomansland and return to the “reality” of magical cloaks is similar to Tennyson’s Ulysses who also leaves his home country willingly. However, Dolor is unlike Tennyson’s Ulysses in that Dolor goes further by declaring that he will never return, and that he is ultimately independent of the society he originally sought acceptance from. Craik has smashed the distinction between marked/unmarked bodies, and thus made valid the possibility for multiple successful masculinities.

**Juliana Horatia Ewing**

In contrast to Craik, Juliana Horatia Ewing sought to protect England’s boys from becoming too unmanly. In the preface to her *Old-Fashioned Fairy Tales*, Ewing explained the two guiding principles behind her fiction for children. In addition to suggesting that brevity is the soul of children’s literature, and that therefore the writer should avoid “discursive or descriptive” writing, Ewing adds that there are myths and types, occurring in the myths of all countries, which are common properties, to use which does not lay the teller of fairy tales open to the charge of plagiarism. Such as the idea of the weak outwitting the strong; the failure of man to choose wisely when he may have his wish; or the desire of the sprites to exchange their careless and
unfettered existence for the pains and penalties of humanity if they may thereby share in the hopes of the human soul. (1)

Using these principles as the basis for her writing, Ewing illustrates an important step for late-period Victorian children’s literature as she moved away from writing conventional fantasy and fairy tales towards creating children’s literature that was based more in the every day. Ewing’s *Jackanapes* (1884) is an example of this move towards realism in children’s fiction as it avoids fantastical settings, characters, and incidents in favor of narratives that depict English children and adults, factual events (such as the use of the Napoleonic Wars in *Jackanapes*), and everyday scenarios. Furthermore, in *Jackanapes* the focus is primarily on the parents and guardians as the narrative stresses the importance of *how* a boy is raised in determining whether he eventually achieves a successful masculinity.

We can read books like *Jackanapes*, with its restrictive, conventional views of proper masculine gender identities as a moral response to the decadence of late-Victorian literature. This focus on more realistic settings, characters, and scenarios in Ewing’s fiction for children can partially be attributed to her conservative beliefs in opposition to certain types of literature she deemed to be obscene. Specifically, Ewing expressed a strong dislike of what Robert Buchanan called the “fleshly school” of literature. In response to Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “Nuptial Sleep” Buchanan argued that

Here is a full-grown man, presumably intelligent and cultivated, putting on record for other full-grown men to read, the most secret mysteries of sexual connection, and that with so sickening a desire to reproduce the sensual mood, so careful a choice of epithet to convey mere animal
sensations, that we merely shudder at the shameless nakedness. We are no purists in such matters. We hold the sensual part of our nature to be as holy as the spiritual or intellectual part, and we believe that such things must find their equivalent in all; but it is neither poetic, nor manly, nor even human, to obtrude such things as the themes of whole poems. It is simply nasty. Nasty as it is, we are very mistaken if many readers do not think it nice. (Victorian Web)

Ewing certainly agreed with this assessment of this literary trend, and extended her displeasure to modern novels as well as poetry, even calling into question Rossetti’s masculinity by claiming his writing was not “manly.” In an 1882 letter Ewing commented specifically about works like Sabine Baring-Gould’s Mehalah: A Story of the Salt Marshes (1880) and Thomas Hardy’s novels. Ewing places her works in contrast to authors like Gould and Hardy by implying that her writing is more moral and valuable than theirs. Ewing writes:

I’m not very young, nor I think very priggish; but I do decline to look at life and its complexities solely and entirely from a point of view that (bar Christian names and the English language) would do equally well for a pig or a monkey…But—IF—I am something very different, and very much higher, I won’t ignore my birthright or sell it for Hog’swash, because it involves the endurance of some pain, and the exercise of some faith and hope and charity. (254)

The models of masculinity presented in Ewing’s fiction are restrictive in their old-fashioned representation of male dominance. And though she also depicts unmasculine
men they, unlike Prince Dolor, never fully achieve a successful masculine gender identity. Instead they are used as an example of undesirable masculinities. As conventional as Ewing’s old-fashioned depictions of masculinity are, this text supports notions of social construction, as her boys and men are not entirely innately masculine or unmasculine (although she does argue that their God-given masculine characteristics do play a large part), but that how (and by whom) they are raised largely determines whether they mature into appropriate masculine gender roles. The parents in *Jackanapes* operate (if they are “good” parents) as a disciplinarian regime, shaping their children through praise and shame in true Foucauldian fashion.

*Jackanapes* is a short novel whose structure is based on numerous binaries. There are the French vs. the English (the novel is set during the Napoleonic wars), the city life vs. the rural, and older generations brought in contrast to England’s youth. Using these binary oppositions as a structure for her narrative, Ewing’s novel concerns the life and tragic early death of a rural character named Theodore (nicknamed “Jackanapes” due to his rambunctiousness). Jackanapes begins life father-less, and vows to continue in his father’s position as a cavalry officer. Upon receiving guidance and encouragement from his grandfather, Jackanapes eventually becomes an officer in the army and dies heroically saving the life of his childhood friend, Tony. Although *Jackanapes* is a slight novel, the text is still able to impart a didactic lesson on the proper masculine roles for boys and men. By showing the development of a boy into a grown man Ewing is able to establish the relationship between proper attitudes and activities for boys, and how those attitudes and activities directly relate to the adult man’s gender identity.
In addition to the binary oppositions listed above, Ewing contrasts the proper masculinity of Jackanapes with the “delicate” gender identity of Tony. This delineation positions Jackanapes as an appropriate model of masculinity for the book’s readers. As a boy he is depicted as an aggressive, physical creature, and those who influence his upbringing most (his guardian and grandfather), are supportive of these characteristics. In his pursuit of a newly hatched chick, Jackanapes is described as “his own master” who “by courage and energy, become[s] the master of that delightful downy, dumpy, yellow thing” (17). Also, his brave (physically and mentally) goal of riding the red pony “Lollo” enables him to display the courage and physical strength of a man much older than he is at this point in the narrative. Even though he is warned that he might kill himself, or at least cause himself serious injury by attempting to ride the horse, the narrator informs the reader that “Jackanapes did not fall” (23).

In contrast to Jackanape’s conventional masculinity, his friend Tony is described in nearly the opposite terms. While Jackanapes is physical, Tony, as described by his mother, as “delicate—meaning that he was more finely strung, more sensitive, a properer subject for pampering and petting than Jackanapes” (20). Tony’s mother continues by blaming Jackanapes for leading her son into situations that cause him to be injured or frightened. However, Jackanapes’s guardian disagrees, and prefers to define “delicate” in a way that blames Tony’s mother for improperly raising her son. Jackanape’s guarding defines Tony’s “delicates” nature as “more puling [whiny], less manly, and less healthily brought up than Jackanapes” (20). If Tony is simply less manly than Jackanapes this is because he is being raised that way (he is “less healthily brought up”), and is not, as his mother suggests, because he is inherently “delicate.” This places the “blame” for Tony
being “delicate” on how his mother is raising him; however, as we will see, the novel suggests that his lack of “manly” characteristics can be fixed before they become permanent.

Even though Ewing seems to present the masculine/unmasculine binary in sharply defined terms, childhood gender roles in *Jackanapes* are not as clearly separated from each other as their adult counterparts. In terms of boyhood masculinity, Ewing suggests fluidity between masculine and feminine gender identities for children. In this way, Craik and Ewing agree about the benefit of boys learning feminine traits in order to develop their masculinity. Furthermore, for Ewing, social construction requires an innate foundation. The father-less Jackanapes is raised by “an old maid” (18), and because of this he receives pity from Mrs. Johnson who laments the lack of a strong male figure for the young boy. However, the village preacher suggests that a little feminine influence on young boys (and vice versa) would be healthy. According to the preacher, God “bade the young men to be pure, and the maidens brave” (18). This reversal of standard gender roles confuses the congregation, and when asked if the preacher meant the reverse, he responds that “Nature” has made girls pure and boys brave, but that children would benefit from learning from the opposite gender, and that Jackanapes specifically “was none the worse, at his tender years, for learning some maidenliness—so far as maidenliness means decency, pity, unselfishness and pretty behavior” (19). Thus, Jackanapes’ physical, active, and aggressive boyhood masculinity requires the learning of “maidenliness” in order to develop his adult masculine gender identity.

While this may come close to suggesting that children are in some ways un-gendered (or, like Dolor, somewhat bi-gendered), this depiction of Jackanapes and his
friend Tony posits that the preacher’s suggestion is merely one step in the maturational process. Furthermore, the preacher’s message follows the argument that boys are inherently masculine (as God created them to be), and that how they are raised and educated determines whether their essential masculine natures are corrupted or left as God intended. With Jackanapes, Ewing implies that he is being raised and educated correctly, and that even though he may benefit from learning some essential feminine characteristics, he must do so only with the goal of becoming more masculine by the time he matures into adulthood. Tony, then, is a warning sign to the reader. This warning is not specifically for the child reader, but the adult (assumedly parent or guardian) who may learn the dangers of raising their sons incorrectly. As Jackanapes’s guardian suggested, Tony is “delicate” because of his mother, and that this course could be corrected so that Tony may mature into an appropriate masculine gender identity.

Of course Tony’s “delicate” gender identity remains, and this results in Jackanapes’ death. Tony’s incorrectly established masculinity must have consequences in order for him to serve as a warning. As they mature into adults, Tony and Jackanapes continue to display the masculine/unmasculine characteristics of their youth. Ewing firmly establishes a link here between the adult man and how he was raised and educated as a child. Jackanapes matures into an exemplar of masculinity—brave, active, handsome, and determined to help those less fortunate (children, women, and Tony). As “Master Jackanapes” he functions as a symbol of local and national identity as “village pride had been stirred by one or two visions of Master Jackanapes whirling about on his wonderful horse” (36). He is described in heroic terms with the narrator informing the reader that “his close golden mop of hair gleamed in the hot sunshine as brightly as the
steel of the sword flashing around it” (36). Jackanapes is the success story of England’s battle against the French specifically, but any foreign peoples in general. He is the product of proper English child rearing, and is depicted in extreme terms, without a flaw to mar his perfect British masculinity.

Another binary established in the novel’s introduction turns out to be false, as Ewing initially sets up a contrast between villagers and soldiers. The villagers believe that the soldiers are a hindrance to their way of life, or, as the section title suggests, “Soldiers in peace are like chimneys in summer” (8-9). However, the rest of the novel proves that this dichotomy between the villagers and the soldiers is artificial, as the peace and security of the village is entirely dependent upon the sacrifice of the soldier. Jackanapes is the symbol of the British military, and it is through his example that this binary opposition is dismantled. Furthermore, Jackanapes becomes not only a symbol for British national identity through his display of military strength and integrity; he also becomes symbolic of the empire. Ewing criticizes those villagers who initially separate themselves from their country’s imperialism:

whilst our most peaceful citizens were prosperous chiefly by means of cotton, of sugar, and of the rise and fall of the money-market (not to speak of such saleable matters as opium, firearms, and “black ivory”), disturbances were apt to arise in India, Africa, and other outlandish parts, where the fathers of our domestic race were making fortunes for their families. (9)

As Donald Hall argues, “Ewing is insightful in that she recognizes that domestic calm and wealth are often linked to foreign oppression, but, of course, does not use the
opportunity to criticize colonial exploitation” (54). It is not that Ewing fails to use the opportunity to criticize imperialism; instead the novel fully supports the British government’s efforts to colonize. Jackanapes (and the military he represents) form a national identity founded upon the absolute necessity of military might, imperialistic efforts, and a manly desire to protect and provide for those less fortunate. After his death caused by saving Tony’s life, Jackanapes takes his place as part of “a heritage of heroic example and noble obligation, not reckoned in the Wealth of Nations, but essential to a nation’s life” (46). In an effort to counteract the immoral and dangerous literature she believed was becoming increasingly popular (one consequence of which would be to damage England’s national identity and therefore threaten British military and imperial strength), Ewing offers the highly didactic and moralistic character of Jackanapes. He, unlike the depictions of masculinity found in “fleshy school” poets like Rossetti and Swinburne, is strong, brave, and certainly not “delicate”. Ewing rejected the type of characters that she read about in Baring-Gould’s novel, preferring to write about men who believed “that life has an aim beyond the lusts of the flesh” instead of men “whose desires are summed up in the desire of more suet pudding and gravy” (254). Jackanapes fulfills that role for Ewing as she uses the genre of children’s literature to return conceptions of appropriate British masculine gender identities to the way they, she believed, had been and should be again.

Edith Nesbit

In her influential biography of Nesbit, Julia Briggs declares that the author “is the first modern writer for children” (xi). Anita Moss argues that Treasure Seekers “stands
squarely between Victorian and modern children’s literature” (226). With its winking references to other fiction (children’s novels or otherwise), its unreliable narrator (who unsuccessfully attempts to hide his identity from the reader), and use of slang, the novel looks ahead to children’s literature of the twentieth century. Nesbit’s children’s books look forward in terms of their narrative innovations and ideas about what constitutes a proper maturation of boyhood masculinity into adult masculinity. However, *Treasure Seekers* and its sequel *The Wouldbegoods* also occasionally depict backwards-looking conventional masculine and feminine roles for the children that anchor the books firmly in Victorian separate spheres ideology that demanded the outdoors active lifestyle for boys/men, and the nurturing and domestic routine for the girls/women. While *Treasure Seekers* moves towards a type of gender equality (and *The Wouldbegoods* pushes even further towards that goal) obstacles appear that block that progress. Specifically, these obstacles stem from the backward-looking conventional gender roles that position males in a dominant position over females such as the focus on physical strength, the glorification of being a soldier, and the strong presence in the social sphere. Fittingly, this dissertation ends with an in-depth examination of two novels that combine forward-looking aspects with a focus on the past, namely the conventional gender roles established earlier in the Victorian period.

Nesbit’s Bastable books are concerned with surrogate parents. We see absent mothers or fathers in Craik and Ewing, but in the Bastable books the need for both a surrogate father and mother functions as a key plot device. The Bastable children are faced with a dead mother and a failed father. Because of failure of the Bastable father to provide financially for his family, the children are constantly attempting to replace his
father-role with their Red Indian Uncle or with their friend’s father. Yet the void created by the absence of mothers in first two Bastable books is not filled with other female characters. Through the novels, Nesbit’s authorial persona functions as a mother figure to the readers. The Bastable books replace mothers with novels, and the seriousness of this replacement is felt in the text’s efforts to teach the girls how to mature into adult women, but even more so in their attempt to form the young boys into men.

While a good amount of criticism has been written addressing Nesbit’s depiction of submissive and domestic little girls, I will change the focus in order to illustrate the emphasis placed upon the proper maturation from boyhood to adult masculinity in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* and *The Wouldbegoods*. According to Tosh, for the Victorians “the journey to manhood began in domestic dependence and ended in domestic authority” (122) and between those two points the boy/man needed to establish independence and a strong masculine gender identity. In *Treasure Seekers* and *The Wouldbegoods*, Nesbit details this path for the boys of the Bastable family. The first novel addresses the importance of the boys’ understanding and acceptance of their roles as financial providers once their father has failed in his masculine responsibility. Whether or not their father is at fault for his business failing, the children, perhaps naively, see it as his failure to provide for them financially. The children’s awareness of their father’s failure causes them to believe that they cannot be dependent on him any longer and must learn to provide for themselves. Much of the comedy in the two books comes from the irony of the difference between the children’s perspective and the reader’s. Thus, although the children do correctly perceive that something is amiss with their financial situation, their vague understanding of what that means and their efforts to deal with it
themselves, in the absence of adults, is comedic. Underlying the humor, however, lies the perceived imperative for the boys to mature into financial providers. As with Ewing, how the children are raised (and by whom) is seen as critical in the development of an adult masculinity. In the Bastable books, Nesbit instructs young boys on how to become men even if their fathers—their models for appropriate masculine gender identity—appear to have failed to perform their duties while their mothers are completely absent. After learning this lesson of masculine provision, the second novel address the need for the boys to become gentleman by expressing sympathy and a desire to care for those less fortunate—including girls and adult women, but also the poor and the working-class.

Claudia Nelson includes the Bastable books in her description of “the turn-of-the-century habit of writing children’s books for adults” (150). However, Nesbit’s novels about children are not addressed merely to adults, but to young readers as well. Briggs, in responding to an article written by Erika Rothwell, suggests that these novels “were addressed to children and adults simultaneously, with the expectation that they would be read in different ways, like a pantomime that includes different types of jokes for different people” (72). In addition to this, as opposed to the third-person omniscient narrators in Craik and Ewing, Nesbit has a young boy (Oswald Bastable) narrate the books. Nesbit could more directly influence the children on proper gender roles by having a young first-person narrator who functions as a surrogate for the reader. Oswald’s view of the world, as I will show, is in line with his young age as he displays a naïve point of view at times. This allows young readers to identify with Oswald and older readers to find humor in his youthful and occasionally wrongheaded views.
*Treasure Seekers* begins with the knowledge that the Bastable family is experiencing financial difficulty due to the father’s failed business, and this financial difficulty is recognized by Oswald as an emergency that the children must handle. The Bastable children (Dora, Oswald, Dickey, the twins Alice and Noel, and Horace Octavius, in order of age) take it upon themselves to “restore the fallen fortunes…of the ancient House of Bastable” (11) by attempting to find buried treasure, earn money through various occupations, and even marriage to a wealthy princess. The children believe it is they, and not their father, who are responsible for earning money for their family, and this idea is the organizing principle of the novel as it stitches together the episodic narrative. While initially the Bastable boys and the girls believe it is their responsibility to save the family by being financial providers, it is the boys who very quickly take control as the boys and girls begin to fall into conventional gender roles. The failed father, and specifically the realization that their father cannot provide for them financially, functions as the first step towards maturity for the boys, causing them to realize the importance and inevitability of becoming adult men. Oswald tells the reader that the children “felt their fall very much” and begins reminiscing about all of the material goods, the “turkeys and geese and wine and cigars come by the carrier at Christmas-time, and boxes of candied fruit and French plums in ornamental boxes with silk and velvet and gilding on them” (111), that their father brought home before his business failed. Now Oswald notes that “there is seldom anything nice brought from London, and the turkey and prune people have forgotten Father’s address” (111). This signals the children’s early awareness (or lack thereof) of how business in the social sphere operates. From the child’s point of view being a financial provider means that
materials goods are abundant, and that other adult men ("the turkey and prune people") come into contact with you in order to exchange goods for money. Once the money is gone, their father’s ties to the social realm have been broken, their address has been forgotten.

The children’s father is relatively ineffectual in the novel, and his signs of masculine weakness are understood by the children as evidence that they need to mature and become providers themselves since they can no longer depend on the family patriarch. Throughout the book Nesbit places the onus for financial recovery on the boys rather than the girls through the placement of Oswald as the narrator and de facto leader of the children, while suggesting that the girls are better suited for domestic concerns such as darning socks and taking care of sickly Noel. However, the girls do take part in the attempts to earn money. Specifically, they usually contribute ideas. For the children this establishes a symbiotic relationship between the genders, and points towards gender-equality as both the boys and the girls need each other to perform their gender roles.

The initial step in transforming the boys into men is to symbolically kill the father by acknowledging him as incapable of fulfilling his masculine responsibilities, thereby proving the need for his replacement. Nesbit accomplishes this by suggesting that adult males have already lost faith in their father, and that he is no longer a respectable gentleman. Oswald notices that “a great many people used to come to the door…and said they were calling for the last time before putting it in other hands” and that “once a long, blue paper came; a policeman brought it and we were so frightened” (13). At first Oswald tries to deny his father’s failures. For example, after the girls tell him that their father had been crying, Oswald displays his naïve view of the world by rejecting this and explaining
that “only cowards and snivelers cry, and my Father is the bravest man in the world” (13). This naïve view of his father’s situation does not last very long, and the children’s belief that their father has failed in some very significant way is eventually brought about by their awareness that the adult world is increasingly finding fault with him, even to the point that the law (the representation of true masculine authority) is now seeking to punish him for his failures.

Regardless of whether the Bastable father is actually fault for failing to provide financially for the family, the children perceive this as a crisis and see themselves as the ones who can save the family. The children fully equate a successful adult masculinity with presence in the social realm, and, by extension, the lack of presence in the social realm with a failed masculinity. This conception of adult masculinity requires men to give money to others, but here the children (at least the older ones) observe that money (or something valuable) is being asked of their father who cannot satisfy the demands upon him. The financial provider has turned into the debtor, and law enforcement has become involved in order to punish him for failing to live up to his responsibilities. This awareness immediately sets the children on the path towards adult gender roles.

Late in the novel the boys themselves become enforcers of the law by attempting to catch a supposed robber as he breaks into their home. Fittingly, the boys come across the robber while pretending to be thieves themselves, as childhood games come directly in contact with the serious adult world of law. Upon discovery of the bona fide burglar the male children take their place as enforcers of the law rather than violators of order. After taking one of their father’s guns in order to play as thieves, the boys turn the gun on the man who they think is a real robber after discovering him seemingly breaking into
their house using a screwdriver. After learning that the man they thought was a thief was only their father’s friend who had come over to fix the lock on their door, the children and the man coincidentally discover a third robber (a real one this time) breaking into their home. However, before the real burglar is caught the children talk to the “robber” and gain sympathy for the man who was “brought up to the law” (189) yet claimed to have been reduced to criminality due to his failed attempts at legitimate professions. The sympathy for the supposed robber is a sign of gentlemanly behavior, as the novel suggests that it is not proper to despise those beneath you in social status, even if they are attempting to break into your home. By having the children give the robber food and drink, and engage him in long conversations, Nesbit argues something similar to Gaskell’s plea for philanthropy on the part of the middle class. All of the children learn to embrace rather than reject the criminal, and the boys specifically learn that sympathy for those less fortunate is a mark of gentlemanly behavior.

The actual robber’s plea to be let go enables the children to directly associate their father with criminality, and this sympathy towards the criminal leads to sympathy for their father. Alice urges the others to let the robber go free, suggesting that it would be cruel to punish him, asking “if he’s got a little girl like me, whatever will she do? Suppose it was Father!” (195). It does not take much effort on the part of the children to imagine their father as a thief since their estimation of him has already begun to deteriorate once they became aware of his inability to provide for their family (and since their understanding of robbers/thieves comes solely from adventure books). Both *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* and *The Wouldbegoods* feature the children replacing their father with multiple surrogates in their quest to mature and become responsible, and
equating their father with the criminal world roundly eliminates him as a possible patriarch. While this episode allows the children to have sympathy for their father, their sympathy does not go so far that they can cease looking for surrogate father figures. The father is mostly ineffectual as a true authority figure even though he appears as a caring and loving parent who is capable of helping his children out of the multiple situations they become involved in while treasure hunting. However, he is ineffectual as a financial provider, and the children believe that this, above all other characteristics, is what defines adult masculinity.

In looking at Nesbit’s later fiction, namely *The Railway Children* (1906), Chamutal Noimann suggests that the absent father motif found in many of Nesbit’s novels can be read “as a metaphor for the absence of patriarchic hierarchy in England” and that this absence “allows for change and exposes often undetected obstacles to reform” (368). The argument continues that Nesbit’s involvement in the Fabian Society, and her socialist beliefs in general, influence her to include an argument in her novels against all systems of government that would stifle reform, and the absent father symbolizes the ineffectual British government that stands in the way of human progress. Noimann argues that “Nesbit requires radical reform to produce not only a just, social democracy but also a society that is gender-blind, with equal opportunities for men and women of all classes” (368). The Bastable novels show this progress towards this gender-blind society that Noimann sees in Nesbit’s later fiction, but this “radical reform” is still competing with rigid patriarchal nineteenth century gender roles that position the male as the dominant figure in both the domestic and social spheres. The removal of the literal
father figure does not change the beliefs concerning gender that ultimately reinforce patriarchy.

For example, the male children are still set to follow their father’s example even though he is symbolically removed from his position as patriarch of the Bastable family, thus calling into question the unreliability of this patriarchal system. In true accordance with the patriarchal system, the unmasculine father still remains the head of their household despite his ineffectualness. According to Oswald, all of the boys are set to go to Rugby and Balliol (―my Father’s college‖), and Dicky “wants to go into Father’s business” (240-241). The father, a product of Dr. Arnold’s school as well as the relatively liberal Balliol College\textsuperscript{xxxv}, remains the model for the boys’ maturation despite his failure to fulfill fundamental male gender responsibilities. There is the possibility that Nesbit was being somewhat facetious in ending \textit{Treasure Seekers} by promising that the boys would follow their father’s educational path, yet there is nothing in the tone or language used to suggest anything other than a happy ending for the family as they move into “the big house on the Heath” where their financial concerns would be taken care of by their “Indian Uncle” (240). Indeed, the language of this section echoes Luke 2:42-52, a passage that describes the twelve year old Jesus staying behind in Jerusalem in order to remain in the temple while listening to and debating a group of doctors. The similarities between Nesbit’s language here and Jesus’ response to his parents that he remained there in order to “be about my Father’s business” transform this passage into a moralistic teaching moment.

Left on their own, the boys seek a way of achieving legitimate masculine gender identities, and to do so they require the assistance of the girls. With the boys attempting
to fulfill their father’s responsibilities, the girls function as replacement mothers by
nurturing Noel when is sick, preparing food for the group, coming up with ideas and
plans to earn/find money, and serving as the moral centers of their family\textsuperscript{lxxxvi}. Oswald
notices the absence of the mother figure when they have to explain to others that theirs is
dead. In a general sense Oswald is made aware “how different it was from when Mother
was here, and we are different, and Father is different, and nothing is like it was” (149-
150). Others notice the lack of mother figure as well, such as one of the ladies to whom
they try to sell their own liquor who wonders whether “they have anyone to teach them
better?” (155). In other novels the lack of matriarchal figure could mark a break with the
past, and a move towards the establishment of the New Woman, yet Nesbit offers nothing
of the sort, and chooses instead to depict the Bastable girls as moral centers necessary for
purifying their male siblings\textsuperscript{lxxxvii}. Apart from the domestic duties the girls perform, the
oldest, Dora, is charged with the responsibility of keeping the boys from getting into
trouble. On her death bed the mother urges Dora to “teach them to be good, and keep
them out of trouble and make them happy” (156). Nesbit suggests the impossibility of
performing all of the requirements of a conventional female gender identity in Dora’s
attempt to accomplish these goals as she expresses frustration over how to simultaneously
keep them out of trouble and make them happy, telling the others that “all of you hate me
for it” (156).

One reason for Dora’s frustration can be found if we examine the book’s notion of
“trouble” when it comes to young boys. Certainly, trouble is found whenever they do
something they are not supposed to do (nearly every attempt in The Wouldbegoods to do
good ends up getting them in “trouble”), yet even if Dora and the mother understand
trouble as something that should be avoided, breaking the rules is an important aspect of establishing one’s masculine gender identity. R. W. Connell argues that although “getting into trouble” is largely antithetical to performing an acceptable adult male gender identity in that it establishes a barrier between the man and the social sphere (the Bastable father is in trouble for failing as a businessman and being unable to pay his debt, and is therefore not accepted into the social realm). However, for boys trouble is a “means of maintaining order, the order of patriarchy, via the subordination of women and exaltation of one’s maleness” (136). In terms of developing a masculine gender identity, “trouble” enables the boy to display ambition and a manly spirit while simultaneously ensuring patriarchal order by placing girls/women in the role of peacekeeper. Using the previous example, the boys get into trouble while pretending to be robbers only to be true enforcers of the law once they apprehend the “real” thief. The experience begins to validate the boy’s masculinity by allowing them to display courage, as well as express a desire to maintain order. Similarly, once their plan to have their dog attack Lord Tottenham only to “rescue” the Lord in hopes of earning a reward fails, the boys are given a lecture by the man on being a gentleman. Alice, the only girl with them, and therefore the only person involved who is charged with the responsibility of keeping them out of trouble while somehow making everyone happy, puts her hand on his arm as she apologizes profusely as a sign of subservience. Following this experience, the Lord nods to the boys whenever he meets them “so he can’t really be going on thinking us ungentlemanly now” (138) illustrating the boys’ rise in stature as their gentlemanly identities have been established in the eyes of Lord Tottenham.
According to Perry Nodelman, most children’s fiction from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century featured children getting into trouble only to learn important lessons from the experience. Being such a common trope of children’s fiction, the idea that getting into trouble can teach important life lessons appears to modern readers as de rigueur in children’s literature. However, a less examined aspect of this trope is how the lessons learned from getting into trouble often function as methods of indoctrinating the children into hegemonic gender roles. In looking at Lucy Maud Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) Nodelman identifies the structure of the novel to be a series of situations where “Anne learns to not to be so enthusiastic and unrestrained” (6), thereby taming the wildness of young girls and transforming them into restrained and proper adult women. By getting into trouble, the Bastable boys learn more about what it means (and does not mean) to be a gentleman, and the lessons they learn are part of the process that will turn them into adult men. Furthermore, in *Treasure Seekers* and *The Wouldbegoods*, the children never get away with doing anything bad or improper, but they learn that their actions are always discovered and observed by the adult world.

The process of self-governing has begun once Oswald learns that trouble leads to punishment which leads to forgiveness which leads to acceptance by adult male figures. As Foucault says, the “judges of normality are present everywhere” (304). Foucault argues that “he who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (202-203). The majority of the time it is adult males who are the observer/discoverer, and Oswald learns that if he is to
become an adult man he must become his own observer. This lesson is taught through observation and language. In late-Victorian children’s literature the punishment for doing wrong would more often consist of a lecture or any intellectual/emotional punishment (such as inspiring a sense of guilt or shame in the child) rather than corporeal punishments that were common in children’s fiction earlier in the period. Jackie Horne’s look at corporal punishment in Sinclaire’s *Holiday House* illustrates how the Victorian belief in whipping, spanking or other physical punishment (or, at least, the threat of such punishment) would help to curb misbehavior in children, leading to the structure of much Victorian children’s fiction consisting of “misbehavior, punishment, and forgiveness” (22). Corporal punishment is largely nonexistent in Nesbit’s Bastable books, and is instead replaced by guilt and shame. Yet, the pattern of trouble, punishment, and forgiveness remains even in the absence of corporal punishment. Often the forgiveness for getting into trouble involves being rewarded for handling the situation as best one could. After the trouble involved in apprehending the robber, Oswald’s courage and honesty are rewarded through approval by the adult males. Oswald tells the reader that “Father slapped me on the back, and said I was a young brick, and our robber said I was no funk anyway” (199). Following this, the family is treated to a large feast, and they are allowed to stay up past midnight. The approval from the adult males is recognition of Oswald’s masculinity, and this process of getting into trouble, being punished, and being forgiven/rewarded has led him to a profound realization about his own gender identity. Enjoying the feast, staying up late, and, most importantly, receiving praise from adult males, Oswald remarks that “I never felt so pleased to think I was not born a girl. It was
hard on the others; they would have done just the same if they’d thought of it. But it does make you feel jolly when your pater says you’re a young brick!” (200).

In the Bastable books, learning how to be a young gentleman (or a “young brick” as Oswald says) is often taught to the children by understanding what is ungentlemanly, a word used in both novels to mean either unmasculine or feminine. By examining a number of examples that illustrate ungentlemanly behavior in the novels we can establish a definition of acceptable male gender identity. First, when the boys begin searching for buried treasure, each of the boys take their turn digging, except for their next door neighbor Albert (or “Albert-next-door” as he is usually called), who refuses. Albert is urged to “take his turn [digging] like a man” (25). Here the children, and not just the adult, function as observers/enforces of hegemonic masculinity. This pressure for Albert to do his fair share of digging does not just come from boys, but from the girls as well. Alice (who is contesting restrictive female gender roles through her tom-boyish gender identity) tells him to “come—be a man” (25) after Albert refuses to dig. The result is that both the boys and girls pressure Albert to take his turn, rather than allow him to behave in an unmanly fashion. In this example, the children are enforcing a code of masculine behavior that relies on physical strength, but also on the idea that every man must do at least an equal amount of work as other men. Richard Holt argues that for the Victorians, “[t]rue manliness was held to reside in the harmonious growth of the physique and character…[a] manly boy was strong of body and pure of heart” (89). Albert’s problem here is that his refusal to dig is a refutation of both the physical and intellectual/emotional aspects of developing masculinity. Even before this example, Albert’s masculinity was problematic. He lacks a literal father figure since his father is dead (although his
surrogate father figure, his uncle, also serves as a model of masculinity for the Bastable boys). Furthermore, he is described as being “very tidy” while wearing “frilly collars and velvet knickerbockers,” even though Oswald “can’t think how he can bear to” (23). His lack of a biological father is used to explain his effeminate dress and personality, yet he is able to redeem his gender identity to some extent by not being “a liar like some boys are” (27). Albert’s punishment for initially resisting to display physical strength and do his fair share of the digging is to be buried in the hole only to be saved later by his uncle. The embarrassment and possible danger of being buried is recompense for Albert’s resistance against conventional male gender roles. Since Albert emerges from the hole unscathed, the safety of the situation allows him to learn his lesson to “take his turn like a man,” so that he can change his behavior and become a man rather than suffering a worse punishment (such as a serious illness, injury, or even death) that may have permanently precluded him from performing his masculinity acceptably.

This event establishes the ability of children’s literature to influence behavior. Upon finding his nephew buried up to his neck, Albert-next-door’s uncle wonders if the boys used physical force to get Albert into the hole. Oswald explains that they did not have to, but used “only moral force” instead. According to Oswald, moral force is “making people do what they don’t want to, just by slanging them, or laughing at them, or promising them things if they’re good” (28). Teaching children and adults how to properly perform their gender roles by using language and rejecting physical force as being either ineffective or just unbecoming of a gentleman supports the use of literature to instruct as well as entertain. According to the novel, the children are right to use this “moral force” as nothing in the text contradicts its use, or suggests that there is anything
wrong with “making people do what they don’t want to.” We may wonder why the novel endorses such an authoritarian system of governance like Oswald’s use of moral force, especially in terms of the author’s advocacy for socialism and more progressive gender roles for boys and girls. Yet, as Moss points out, Nesbit’s interest in equality was tempered by certain conservative aspects of her lifestyle. Moss writes that Nesbit’s Commitment to social change, for example, did not always mesh with her taste for elegance. Her interest in children of all social classes did not quite square with her frank admission that she wrote for middle-class children and usually about them as well. Although she posed liberated identities for children, she was sometimes guilty of cruel and unjust treatment of her own children. Despite her advanced social views, she could not support women’s efforts to secure essential rights…[n]or did Nesbit’s desire for social justice and a humane order quite coalesce with her sometimes conservative idealization of the past. (225)

Nesbit’s complicated views on social and gender equality, as well as her “conservative idealization of the past” are witnessed in Oswald’s use of moral force to pressure Albert into performing conventional masculine gender roles that reinforce a patriarchal structure. In this example, Oswald’s moral force implies that he is the bearer of proper male behavior since he believes that he can determine what is manly and what is not, and can, through rhetoric, force others to change their behavior or appearance. These strict and restrictive gender roles come into conflict with the more progressive aspects of the novel that position girls and boys as equal.
In *Treasure Seekers* and *The Wouldbegoods* Oswald continually functions in the role of exemplar of proper middle-class masculine gender identity. Even when he momentarily acts in an ungentlemanly fashion he learns quickly and changes his behavior accordingly. For example, while the children are attempting to come up with ideas for how to earn money, Oswald suggests that they try to rob passersby on a nearby road. He is quickly chastised, by Dora of course, for how “very wrong” (17) it would be to break the law. As a means of shaming Oswald for his idea Dora goes on to say that robbing strangers is the same as “pickpocketing or taking pennies out of Father’s great-coat when it’s hanging in the hall” (17). In an effort to keep Oswald and the other boys out of trouble, Dora associates robbing strangers with robbing one’s own father\(^{lxxxix}\). This association brings together the notion of breaking the law (as in committing theft) and breaking the symbolic law of patriarchy by having the son usurp the father’s dominant position. This idea is so repulsive that, after Dora’s chastisement, Oswald quickly abandons his idea, and reverses his stance on theft by suggesting they help save rich gentleman from highway robbers instead. As inspiration for this plan, Oswald cites Dick Turpin, the famous eighteenth-century English rogue, and Claude Duval, the seventeenth-century robber often referred to as the “gentleman highwayman” because of his aversion to violence and his aristocratic clothing\(^{xc}\). Oswald’s admiration for men like Turpin and Duval is presented in the novel as a boyish understanding of the world that must be abandoned in order to achieve adulthood. Later in the novel, Dickey suggests that it would be interesting to be a robber, especially if you “would only rob rich people, and be very generous to the poor and needy, like Claude Duval” (180). Dickey’s understanding of Duval actually fulfills a number of requirements for performing a hegemonic
masculinity. He obtains wealth, and although this is done illegally, Duval only steals from the rich who are either too immoral to earn our sympathy or who do not need that much money anyway. He also provides for those less fortunate, and displays sympathy for those in need—both signs of a successful middle-class masculinity as well as Nesbit’s socialism. However, there is tension here between that progressive view of an acceptable masculinity, and the more conventional and conservative ideas that restrict Nesbit from radical reform. Alas, Dora attempts to keep the boys out of trouble as she quickly reminds Dickey that “it is wrong to be a robber” (180).

The Lord Tottenham episode also provides an example where “ungentlemanly” behavior is associated with disorder or dishonesty. If theft is wrong because it is dishonest and disruptive of the patriarchal order, lying operates similarly because it misrepresents order and truth. Lord Tottenham questions whether Oswald was going to take the reward he was about to give them after he is “saved” from the dog attack, and Oswald replies that he would not have, even though he knows that the lie he is telling is “most ungentlemanly” (135). Albert’s sole redeeming masculine quality was that he did not lie to his father, and Oswald understands this yet violates the rule anyway in order to avoid making himself appear even more ungentlemanly. However ungentlemanly Oswald’s lie was he also uses language to own up to the lie by admitting it in the pages of the novel.

Whether it is in the act of proving one to be ungentlemanly by speaking or writing a lie, or when “slanging” or “promising” are used as moral force to promote dominant masculine gender roles, language is a preferred method of constructing gender identities in these novels. However, we also see language and action compete as the dominant
method of displaying one’s gender. As I will show, this extends to the notion that intellectual activity is equal to physical activity in performing masculinity, which serves as another example of how Nesbit is caught between older models of masculinity that are defined through physicality, and more progressive notions that are based on language and the written word. The novel’s characters often use language in order to positively or negatively define one’s masculinity. Both the girls and the boys tell the male children to “be a man,” or criticize certain behaviors as being ungentlemanly. Oswald embraces the term “young brick” as validation of his masculinity. In terms of the written words, the boys, Oswald specifically, are highly influenced by fiction and nonfictional accounts of masculine adventures (namely Kipling, who is esteemed by the boys above all other authors).

Language creates and solves gender-based arguments, such as when Dickey and Dora begin arguing after Dickey’s assertion that “he’d heard that nagging women drove a man from his home, and now he found it was quite true” results in Oswald telling him to “shut up and not make an ass of himself” (202) in order to solve their disagreement. Not only does language help establishes one’s masculinity, but it can assert the superiority of racially-based British masculinity as well. In a disagreement between the Bastable father and the children’s Indian Uncle, we are told that “Father was not going to be beaten by a poor Indian in talking or anything else—so he spoke up too, like a man” (215). The Indian Uncle, whom the children assume is “the Red kind” (231) only to be a little disappointed when they find out he is merely a British colonist living in India, even uses language to assert his supremacy when he tells the Bastable father that “Oswald, he’s a man! If he’s not a man, I’m a nigger!” (230). Not only does the Indian Uncle use
language to assert white British superiority\textsuperscript{xci}, his authority as the moneyed man gives his speech extra importance as he is able to say “Yes” to the father’s business proposal, thereby reversing the downturn in the Bastable’s finances.

In another example of the power of the word, the boys discover that language trumps action in the publishing world. After meeting with the newspaper editor in an attempt to get Noel’s poetry published, Oswald is disappointed (and a little confused) to read the editor’s account of the meeting as he “saw a sort of story thing in a magazine, on the station bookstall…it was not at all amusing…[i]t said a lot about Noel and me, describing us all wrong” (68). Their version of truth is put in doubt by the power of the printed word. This is troubling for Oswald because he understands that the printed word is a more powerful tool than speech since it can be disseminated much more widely, especially when it appears in the public sphere in a magazine on the station bookstall. Oswald also puts a tremendous amount of faith in the printed word. His constant references to other writers, and the books that he has read, show him to be an astute, active reader. This role of active reader seemed to be a gendered characteristic, as Dora indiscriminately absorbs everything she reads without displaying an ability to interact with those texts, or to apply them to her life the way Oswald does in using literature as inspiration and instruction. Susan Gubar argues that Oswald’s “selectivity illustrates Nesbit’s interest in conceptualizing children as active receivers of texts, capable of improving on—not just slavishly adhering to—other people’s stories” (413). In an example of this, Oswald uses the printed word himself in the pages of Treasure Seekers in order to counteract the editor’s depiction of himself and Noel. In an extensive parody of fin-de-siècle British journalism, the children even attempt to start their own
newspaper. The lengthy excerpt from their newspaper illustrates the playfulness and eventual unreliability of language as it features an entire section titled “Instructive” (that consists of uncertainties, things overheard, and outright guesses), serialized stories that are either never finished or become so convoluted that the author abandons them, imaginatively translated poetry, and contradictory advice by the paper’s editors.

As powerfully as language functions in the novel, action occasionally rivals its power in establishing masculine gender identity. After attempting to be a detective by monitoring suspicious activity in the neighbor’s house Albert’s uncle chastises Oswald by saying “many unpleasant things about how it was ungentlemanly to spy on ladies, and about minding your own business” (45) even though he was only attempting to discover whether the neighbors were in danger or had been injured. Even when expressing the best intentions, having the mere appearance of behaving improperly is just as damaging to one’s gender identity as actually performing the immoral action. The higher importance placed upon appearances correlates to men’s responsibility to be present and visible in the social realm, and this specifically illustrates the idea that masculinity is performed and validated through visual means. Oswald’s true motives are irrelevant (he tries to explain but is told to “shut up”), but Albert’s uncle privileges action over speech by suggesting that Oswald appeared as if he were spying on women, and that the appearance of impropriety is enough to describe his actions as ungentlemanly.

Language also fails when the boys blur the line between reality and fantasy, specifically when they claim to be of a higher economic status in order to marry into wealth. The episode when the children meet an actual princess proves the inability for language alone to establish gender identity, no matter how much Noel may believe in the
power of words xcii. Upon meeting a young girl in a park, Noel, who, being the poet in the family, invests much authority in written or spoken language, jokingly introduces himself as “Prince Camaralzaman” and is surprised to find that the girl is an actual princess, being the fifth cousin of Queen Victoria. Taking Noel at his word, the girl is also surprised to find that he is not as low-born as she assumed, telling him that “I thought at first you were a common boy” (73). Initially, Noel’s ability to claim aristocratic status merely through his speech functions as an illocutionary act that establishes his high-born persona merely though his introduction as a prince. Yet, these speech acts alone are not valid methods of establishing one’s masculine gender identity in Nesbit’s novels. The princess notices that the children are not accompanied by any maids or governesses, and she wonders where their carriage is located, to which Noel responds with an even more obvious fabrication that their carriage is “drawn by griffins, and it comes when we wish for it” (77). Noel’s fantasy is understood by the princess to be fictional, as she comments that carriages such as Noel describes are “out of a picture book” (77). However, even though the young girl has her suspicions, it is not until an adult enters their conversation that the children’s true class status is revealed. After introducing the Bastables as princes and princesses, the adult woman laughs and says “they’re only common children” (78). Since the young princess responds positively to the news that the children are merely common (she wants to play with only common children from then on), Treasure Seekers gestures towards the possibility of future equality between the classes.

In the absence of language as an effective method of establishing gender identity, the boys try to display their masculinity by attempting various occupations in order to mature into adult men, and thereby fulfill the responsibility of providing financially for
their family. Initially it is Dickey, and not Oswald, who believes that they should legitimately earn the money to restore the fallen fortunes of the Bastable family rather than acquiring it through treasure seeking or being criminals. Through the failure of digging for treasure, and obtaining money through improper or illegal means, all of the boys decide that a profession is necessary in becoming adult men. Most of the occupations attempted by the children, such as being an explorer/prospector, salesman, or detective, fit comfortably with a male gender identity that is based on laboring in the social realm and being physically active. In contrast to these conventionally masculine occupations, Nesbit presents the job of author as a potential profession for men even though the occupation is largely isolated from the social sphere, and definitely does not require physical strength. Noel’s role as the poet/author in the Bastable family supports this idea that writing is not dependent upon being outside of the home or being physical strong, and that intellectual labor is equal to physical work. This is not to say that the text’s depiction of the author as a successful masculine gender identity is not complicated by societal assumptions of the effeminacy of the writer (especially the poet). Upon being asked if he is a poet by the newspaper editor, Oswald balks at this suggestion, explaining that he “can’t think how he could have asked” and that he “is said to be a very manly-looking boy for his age” (62). Oswald then goes on to describe Noel as “disgustingly like a girl in some ways” (62) as a means of showing his conventionally masculinity in relation to Noel’s seemingly effeminate male gender identity. Despite all of this, Treasure Seekers presents Noel’s gender identity as successful in its depiction of authorship as intellectual labor. Furthermore, this depiction of Noel’s masculinity is especially heterosexual regarding his pursuit of marrying a princess.
Nesbit’s portrayal of the sickly, often physically weak Noel (he “gets a cold on the chest at the least thing” (72)) is in contrast to the models of masculinity found in the boys’ favorite literature. Noel’s gender identity is exclusively defined by intellectual activity and he displays no signs of physical strength. The boys’ appreciation for Kipling stories (namely *The Jungle Book*), as well as periodicals such as Edwin John Brett’s *Boys of England* xciii, is interesting since those texts support the notion of intellectual labor but only in addition to bodily strength and an adventurous outdoorsy spirit as components of acceptable male gender identity. Noel’s poetry is often humorous but is almost never filled with Kipling-style adventure. Nonetheless, the role of author is presented as an equally valid masculine occupation, and while intellectual activity is an attribute of masculinity in Kipling and Brett, Noel’s physically weak/mentally strong character is nowhere to be seen in those authors’ writing. This alternative to the Kipling version of masculinity is presented as an equally successful male gender identity in the Bastable books, and Nesbit’s role (like Gaskell) as middle-class and female is also strengthened by validating intellectual activity as equal to (if not greater than) physical activity.

One way the role of author is endorsed as a valid masculine occupation is through the depiction of male writers who are equal parts adventurer and author, such as Albert-next-door’s Uncle who “has been to sea, but now he writes books” (27). Lacking the effeminate characteristics of Noel, Albert-next-door’s Uncle is more conventionally masculine, and his position as a professional writer is more easily accepted by all of the Bastable boys, especially Oswald, the one who most often defines masculinity as physical and social. More often than the children’s own father, Albert’s uncle functions as an instructor to the boys, again, especially Oswald, by teaching them lessons about
appropriate behavior in order to help the progress of their maturity into adult men. Here his role as author benefits him in his role as educator, and the instructive power of literature is evident to the children. By the end of The Treasure Seekers, Oswald realizes that “[r]eal life is often something like books” (238) and the belief in the author as acceptable male profession is supported by men like Albert’s uncle xciv. Just like the efforts by Albert’s uncle, the boys’ attempts at becoming working men are meant to solve the financial problems created by their father. All of the various occupations attempted are notable for the children’s growing awareness of the social/business realm, as well as their understanding of their dependence upon adult men, at least until they achieve adult manhood. However, according to the novel an important part of the development of the boys’ masculinity is their growing awareness that adult men are not always the openhearted providers they seem to be (or, in terms of gender responsibilities, should be). Sedgwick has emphasized how men in late Victorian England were dependent upon male mentors and friends (especially in the context of all-male institutions) in order to progress in their education, moral or intellectual development, or in their profession. Nesbit’s twist on the necessity of male mentors is to provide the Bastable boys with models of adult masculinity that contradict their childish view of the world that assumes that all adult men are helpful, honest, and fair. Their father’s failure in providing financially for them is the first lesson in the unreliability of adult men, but their exposure to the often unfair and unkind world of adult business is critical for their maturation and the development of their male gender identities. Their exposure to scam artists through their experience selling sherry begins to bring about an
awareness of their own naiveté as well as the knowledge that the adult world is not to be entirely trusted.

Also, the newspaper editor’s exploitation of the boy’s efforts to have Noel’s poetry published showed the parasitic nature of adult men who use children for their own gain. In the chapter title “G.B.” (the children’s abbreviated term for “Generous Benefactor”), the boys receive the most direct lesson in the ungenerous and untrustworthy world of adult men. The children come to Mr. Rosenbaum (whom they assume will be their G.B. by kindly giving them money to start their own business), only to find that Rosenbaum is suspicious of the children, and wonders whether their father sent them there in order to beg for money, or to agree to a loan that they would not legally be obligated to repay since they are minors. After learning that the children are there unbeknownst to their father, and that they wish to “restore the fallen fortunes of the House of Bastable,” Rosenbaum initially agrees to give the children a pound under the agreement that Dickey repays the loan once he reaches the age of twenty-one. This act initially proves to the children that the adult male world of business is filled with generous and helpful men. The G.B.’s promise to loan them some money, as well as his response that he will “trust to your honour…between gentleman, you know” (122) when Dickey suggests that they sign a promissory note, corresponds to this naïve view of the adult world. However, in a moment that reeks of anti-Semitism Rosenbaum begins to stare at the money, “looking at it as if he thought it very beautiful” (123), then decides to only give the children “fifteen shillings, and this nice bottle of scent,” telling them that “[i]t’s worth far more than the five shillings I’m charging you for it. And, when you can, you shall pay me back the pound, and sixty per cent interest—sixty percent, sixty
percent—“ (123). Rosenbaum’s reversal, a switch from being generous to being concerned about what profit he can make off the children, is a moment of epiphany for the boys that allows them to see the adult world as selfish and unkind. Though Rosenbaum eventually decides to extend Mr. Bastable’s loan after this encounter with the children, according to Gubar this meeting “unsetsles the whole idea of benevolent adult intervention” (424) for the children, and is an important push towards understanding the adult masculine capitalist world where they will not be given anything, but can only exchange what they have (fifteen shillings and a bottle of scent for a repayment of a pound plus sixteen percent interest, hard work for a successful masculine gender identity, innocence for experience) for what they need as adult men.

After the children have lost the innocent view of the adult world where they expect generosity and unselfish behavior from men in the social sphere, the next step in the boys’ maturation is to understand the importance of caring for those less fortunate once they are in a position to do so. Here Nesbit’s progressive views concerning gender roles become more apparent. After being something akin to “adopted” by their Indian Uncle, the worry over money is nonexistent in the next Bastable book, The Wouldbegoods. Replacing that anxiety over money, and being able to financially provide for one’s family, is the desire to achieve gentleman status by doing “good” acts and to cease being naughty children. After attempting to enact scenes from the Jungle Books, in which they use their Indian Uncle’s possessions as props, the children are sent to live with Albert’s uncle in the country for the remainder of the summer. Just as the desire to become the family’s breadwinner through appropriate means (i.e. become a worker) organized the episodic narrative of Treasure Seekers, the children’s idea to form the
“Society of the Wouldbegoods” or, under its alternate title, the “Society for Being Good In” (27) gives structure to this second book in the Bastable series. Members of the “Society of the Wouldbegoods” agree to do “be as good as possible” and to perform “some kind action to a suffering fellow-creature” (26) as often as they can. The tenets of their society are based on Nesbit’s socialist beliefs, a society that is somewhat gender-equal as it contains both the female and male Bastable children (plus their two cousins, Denny and Daisy), yet still prescribe separate roles for boys and girls. Even though the novel is dominated by a male narrator—and focuses more directly on the boys development into gentlemen with the (often morally-based) assistance of the girls—the gender equality that is accomplished by the inclusions of boys and girls in the same society moves Nesbit further towards a more radical, progressive view of gender roles.

“The Wouldbegoods” as a society dedicated to benevolence and charitable acts is, as Alice explains, partly based on the Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Society. The YMMIS, started by Reverend Dr. Enoch Mellor (1823-1881) was formed alongside the Young Women’s Mutual Improvement Society as a separate (and obviously male-only) society dedicated to the moral improvement of its members, just as its sister organization helped save the moral character of young women (something that is perhaps lost on the children as their understanding of what evils women need to be saved from is innocent and child-like). It is unclear whether Alice is unaware or merely uninterested in the existence of a women’s group in her decision to base “The Wouldbegoods” on a male-centric society xcvi. In addition, more gender-blending is taking place with the knowledge that much of The Wouldbegoods, as Briggs has found, was taken from Nesbit’s series of autobiographical articles titled “My School-Days,” which appeared in twelve episodes
from October 1896 to September 1897 in the periodical *Girl’s Own Paper*. Described by E. Honor Ward as containing mostly “stories and educational and improving articles” (“A Short History of the G.O.P.”), *Girl’s Own Paper* undoubtedly had a majority female audience as its readership. In “My School-Days” Nesbit places herself as narrator as she recounts the same events that would later be included in *The Wouldbegoods*, only with a male narrator as a replacement and a stronger emphasis on doing “good.” Alice’s idea to base their male/female society on an all-male institution, the novel’s origins in a female-oriented publication with a female narrator, and the switch to male narrator for the fictional version illustrate how Nesbit was pushing her narratives away from more rigid gender binaries.

Moss accurately describes the novel as containing “a strong element of parody of the moral tale,” and suggests that Nesbit follows Wordsworth, Blake, and George MacDonald in believing that being good “was not a matter of following a narrowly conceived set of social and moral rules” (230). *The Wouldbegoods* is steadfast in its presentation of the maturation of boys into adult men following a very conventional definition of middle and upper-class masculine gender identity in the previous novel. Specifically, this maturational process depends upon the boys accepting their responsibility to be charitable and generous to those less fortunate as an integral characteristic of gentlemanhood. Furthermore, *The Wouldbegoods* follows the innocence-shattering events of *Treasure Seekers* by suggesting that the children must begin giving up the influences of their youth. The fact that the reenactment of Kipling’s books leads to punishment for the children, and therefore inspires them to be good, suggests that those types of adventure books must, at some point, be left behind in exchange for what
Oswald sees as books that attempt to improve and educate the reader. In criticizing his condescending aunt, Oswald compares her to Miss Murdstone, but thinks that she would not understand the reference because, he says, “I don’t suppose she has ever read anything but Markham’s History and Mangnall’s Questions—improving books like that” (6) In Oswald’s opinion “improving books”, like Mangall’s Historical and Miscellaneous Questions, operate differently than do books like David Copperfield. Dickens et al. is for pleasure, while Mangall is for boring tasks such as learning. Just as Craik instructed the reader to look for “meaning” in her book, instead of reading it “straight on,” there is awareness by Victorian authors that children’s literature need not also be instructional, and that reading for enjoyment is a valid aim. With didactic children’s literature, Oswald would no doubt see a difference between Nesbit’s fiction and earlier nineteenth-century works like Captain Marryat’s novel Masterman Ready (1841), with its Evangelical message presented directly and artlessly. However, while there is a difference between these texts, both “improving books” and books by authors like Nesbit and Dickens function as instructive texts whether Oswald understands this or not. As with the Bastable boys following their father’s footsteps in the end of Treasure Seekers, the desire to be good, to do good, and to accept the responsibility in helping those less fortunate is no less didactic or conservative of a message than in the types of books Oswald abhors.

Initially, Oswald understands being sent to the country only as a way for the adults to get the children out of their way for the summer and not as a punishment for being naughty (he feels that they were already punished, and cannot be punished twice for the same offence). While the apparent intended result of this non-punishment is to help the children “learn to be good” (19), Oswald is at first more interested in the
freedom involved in their summer in the country rather than the lesson in being “good” that the vacation eventually becomes. If the primary “message” being taught in *Treasure Seekers* is that the children, the boys especially, will need to one day enter the adult world by becoming money-earners rather than relying on the support of adults, the main lesson being taught in *The Wouldbegoods* concerns the importance of middle and upper-class charity, again especially for the boys since they are in the role of provider. More than this, the novel focuses on the need for the children to learn the correct way to help those less fortunate. Upon creating the “Society of the Wouldbegoods” the boys’ first few attempts at helping those less fortunate results in harming or hampering the work of the lower-classes they sought out to assist. After Oswald remembers that their mother would often tell the children that “you ought to be very kind and polite to servants, because they have to work very hard, and do not have so many good times as we do” (64), the children become interested in helping those servants and workers they see laboring around them.

This interest in helping becomes gendered as Oswald begins making references to being a “hero” by helping those who are poorer than they. This gendering of the hero complicates the gender-equality of the narrative and shows how Nesbit is sometimes stuck between presenting older and newer conceptions of masculinity. In *The Wouldbegoods*, any mention of “hero” is always described in masculine terms, and specifically associated with being a soldier. In the last few decades of the nineteenth-century and the beginning of the twentieth, England was involved in the first and second Anglo-Boer wars, multiple campaigns in Africa, the second Anglo-Afghan war, and the Mahdist war in Sudan. The glorification of the soldier has a large effect on the boys’ understanding of masculinity. Early on after the children see a battalion of soldiers they
recognize them as heroes, and begin pretending to be them the next day. Later, in a dispute with his sisters, Oswald again plays the role of the hero/soldier as he is described as having “felt all the feelings of the hero when the opposing forces gathered about him are opposing as hard as ever they can” (85-86).

*TheWouldbegoods* instructs readers on the proper way to go about this philanthropy, and the text illustrates this point though the children’s numerous failed attempts to help others. For most of the novel these groups of people identified as being less fortunate are usually the servants, or the working-classes laboring in the surrounding farms. However, Oswald and Albert’s uncle place women in this category as well. He knows that “it is ungentlemanly to play tricks on women” (64), and Albert’s uncle tells Oswald that a “man is bound to protect girls and take care of them,” and that this responsibility is “one of the ‘rules of the game’” (166). For the purposes of defending, protecting, and providing financially, the women in the novel are placed in the same category as the servants and the workers.

The first major failed attempt to help others is the result of Oswald’s carelessness, ignorance, and inattentiveness. The children learn that there is to be an angling competition in an area of the river near Albert’s uncle’s house. Upon walking along the river bank, the children see what they think is a barge stuck in the mud in a low section of the river. To help this supposedly stranded barge, the boys decide to open the sluice up-river by hammering away at the locks using crowbars. This work becomes decidedly gendered as the boys do the physical work, and Oswald makes sure each boy works equally as he “felt it would not be manly to stand idly apart” (93) and not perform any of the physical labor. The rushing water from the opened sluice causes the barge to tip over,
placing its cargo at the bottom of the river. Furthermore, a flood is caused that night by heavy rains and the fishing competition is ruined. Even worse, Oswald’s cricket ball, which he leaves on the roof, becomes lodged in the gutter pipe and leads to Albert’s uncle’s house becoming flooded as well. Though well-intentioned, this attempt causes damage because to the children’s naive understanding concerning how and why the adult world functions as it does. This is similar to getting into “trouble” in that both actions are necessary in order to learn proper behavior, and thus eventually become accepted by the adult male world. Despite the failure of this attempt, and the financial repercussions involved (the Bastable father must pay for the barge’s lost cargo), Albert’s uncle tells the children that they “mustn’t give up trying to be good” (102).

In another failed attempt, Dicky’s effort to help the dairy farm workers backfires due to his inability to communicate effectively with the working-classes. While Dicky was looking “for something useful to do” (30) he notices that a window in the dairy will not open fully, and decides to fix it in order to be helpful to the workers. However, the workers do not notice Dicky’s work and they prop the window open with a milk pan as they usually do. This causes the window to push completely open, resulting in the milk pan being lost somewhere in the moat. His plans having backfired, Dicky begins to worry because as he thinks about “all of the men…out in the fields and they haven’t any spare milk-pans” (31). Doing harm to the workers rather than helping them is ungentlemanly behavior, just as losing money instead of earning money threatens the boys’ masculinity. To solve this problem, Oswald decides that the children will all attempt to drag the moat so that they can find the pan. However, this causes more problems for the children as Dora injures her foot badly on a jagged piece of tin. Dicky’s philanthropic intentions
prove disastrous just as they do with the attempt to help the stranded barge. However, Oswald sees it as their “duty” to fix the problems they have created, explaining that “[i]t was our duty, and it was interesting too. This is very uncommon,” (32). Even after being punished, something Oswald finds to be unfair, he still believes that “we did it not to please ourselves, but because it was our duty” (40).

If, as Albert’s uncle explains, taking care of women/girls is “one of the ‘rules of the game,’” (166) doing one’s duty is also defined as a requirement for an appropriately performed masculine gender identity. In the many examples in the book where the boys attempt to help the poor and the women only to find that their efforts make those people’s lives more difficult, it is stated that it is the boys’ duty is to fix the problems that they have created. The sense of responsibility is linked with their obligation to provide financially in that both duties focus on the protection and establishment of the family’s honor. When the boys do something that is understood to be “bad” in relation to their aims of doing “good,” the duty to fix or solve the problems they have created is tied to their understanding of the reputation of their family as well as their individual selves. Finding the milk-pan is both morally the right thing to do, as well as being necessary so that others do not think that Oswald, Dicky, or the entire Bastable family is irresponsible and unkind. When Noel and H.O mistakenly believe that they have caused a foreign army to invade England, it is their cousin Denny who suggests that all of the family must work together if one of them is in trouble. Daisy claims that she was not responsible for the invading army, but Denny replies that “it was we had done it, so long as it was any of us, especially if it got any of us in trouble” (259). By stating that their responsibility is shared “so long as it was any of us,” the novel creates this tension between more conventional
notions of masculine responsibility for others, with the idea that this duty applies to girls/women as well.

Yet, this gender-equality concerning a sense of duty is only hinted at before the novel further defines this trait as masculine. Nesbit uses this sense of a tightly knit family that looks out for each other to define it as a conventionally masculine trait. Oswald is pleased to hear Denny say this because it proved that he “was beginning to understand the meaning of true manliness, and about the honour of the house of Bastable” (259). According to Oswald then, the meaning of true manliness is, at least in part, dependent upon the establishment and protection of the family’s honor, helping others (especially those less fortunate), and taking one family’s member’s problems and helping solve them together. Thomas Hughes, in *The Manliness of Christ*, argues that true manly courage, as evidenced by Christ, involves “self-sacrifice for the welfare of another,” (19) and “tenderness, and thoughtfulness for others” (18-19). As Claudia Nelson points out, through defining a major building block of manly courage and bravery on concepts such as tenderness, empathy, and sacrifice Hughes does not restrict manliness to just men, but he suggests that women are able to possess these traits as well. Also, it is interesting that Daisy, in her initial refusal to share the blame, has yet to learn that it is her role as girl/woman to protect the boys from getting into trouble, as Dora learned from their mother before her death. Again, Nesbit’s Bastable books function as instructors to girls, boys, and adult men and women.

This episode also correlates proper manly behavior with serving in the military, and again the glorification of the soldier presents an obstacle towards the notions of gender equality found elsewhere in the text. The boys are complete in awe of the military
men, and the notion that they are helping defend England from a foreign army makes Oswald feel “manly” (268), and to tell others about their experience in a “modest yet manly way” (269). The correlation between manliness and the military, in this example anyway, makes sense as it is a means to provide for one’s family as well as protect and defend them and their country.

Despite the comingling of masculine and feminine traits in defining “the meaning of true manliness,” Nesbit is far from endorsing a type of androgyny. In terms of children’s literature, Nelson argues that by the end of the Victorian period Darwinism inspired a new emphasis upon boys to perform adult heterosexual masculinities through marriage and procreation in order to ensure the biological survival of the species, and that “[e]ven if producing the asexual adult were possible, it came to seem undesirable” (“Sex and the Single Boy” 542). While Nesbit does argue for some overlap between conventional male and female responsibilities in these books, the belief in sharing both blame and praise proves too feminine for the Bastable boys, and androgyny is averted in favor of strong masculine gender identities that avoid or hide feminine traits. The novel suggests that repression and secrecy is the best way to deal with those characteristics that are necessary, or unavoidable, but prove to threaten one’s masculinity by being too feminine. Oswald’s middle name, Cecil, that is described as being “a name no manly boy would like to be called by,” (292) is hidden from the reader, and only given when it is unavoidable. Similarly, the suggestion that the definition of true manliness is dependent upon such a feminine characteristic as sharing blame and praise must also be repressed. However strong the notion that family members must stick together and share the blame for their mistakes is, the importance of masculine individuality still returns by novel’s
end. Oswald formally disbands the “Society of the Wouldbegoods” by explaining that they “have tried the society for being good in, and perhaps it’s done us good. But now the time has come for each of us to be good or bad on his own, without hanging on to others” (274). Embracing masculine individuality—the belief that ultimately one is defined by what one does or does not achieve or accomplish—is an important step in the maturational progress of the boys and the girls, as well as helping support the male dominant society depicted in Nesbit’s Bastable books.

This move towards self-representation is similar to the privilege Nesbit gives to action over the power of speech in constructing one’s identity. James Catano argues that the nineteenth-century “provided ample opportunity for the shift from direct linguistic self-representation to indirect self-display via production and product” (61-62), and Oswald’s decision to disband the society in favor of an “every man for one’s self” philosophy is indicative of that shift as it is a call to do or not do, achieve or fail to achieve, and produce good acts or become ungentlemanly.

Finally, Nesbit tempers The Wouldbegoods’ radical notions of gender-equality by concluding the novel with a wedding as so many other early Victorian novels (for children or adults) often did. Nesbit’s inclusion of an overused trope of Victorian novels contributes to separate the Bastable books from the other Victorian children’s literature. The wedding-ending produces a structure for The Wouldbegoods that makes it appear closer in form to the Bronte sisters’ novels, for example, than anything written for young children. The wedding-ending provides the very structure necessary for the boys’ appropriate entry into adult heterosexual masculinity. In The Wouldbegoods, the marriage between Albert’s uncle and a woman the children initially mistake as his grandmother
reestablishes the complete family unit just as Albert’s uncle completely eclipses the children’s biological father and becomes their model for successful adult masculinity. The missing mother is replaced by a woman the children begrudgingly accept, and Albert’s uncle enters into the world of heterosexual marriage thereby showing the boys how to appropriately mature into adult men. The ending of *Treasure Seekers* secures the children a surrogate father, instills in the boys the responsibility for providing financially for others (and doing so in respectable and appropriate ways), and provides a plan for their educational and professional futures.

The conclusion of *The Wouldbegoods* also pushes the boys one step further in their maturational process by introducing them to the required step of entering into heterosexual marriage in order to secure the continuance of the conventional family for them to provide for and protect as adult men. While Oswald expresses little enthusiasm for this future entry into marriage, he does not argue against the idea, telling the reader that “I suppose people have to marry,” (290). If he does object to this notion of marriage or (hetero)sexuality, he represses those feelings as we read that “[i]f Oswald repines sometimes, he hides it. What’s the use? We all have to meet our fell destiny” (290). The indoctrination into conventional masculine gender roles is not complete (Nesbit would write two more Bastable books following *The Wouldbegoods*), and even Oswald, the oldest Bastable boy, is not an adult male, but neither is he a boy since he is described in the novel’s final pages as a “manly boy” (290). Even though the maturational process is still ongoing, the foundations are laid down, and any resistance against the responsibilities of middle-class masculine gender identity are repressed since, as Oswald
knows, there would be no use in challenging the inevitable entry into conventional conceptions of adult middle-class masculinity.
Conclusion

Christopher Lane suggests that “[i]f we can actually look at blind spots in the theory itself as we’re trying to use it to engage with texts, a great deal of really important interpretive work could still take place” (8-9). It is this type of theoretical blind spot that I have attempted to address in this dissertation. When Lyn Pykett wonders “[w]hat kinds of narratives about women…did women write once they had the advantage of telling their own story?” (78) the other half of that question, “what kind of narratives about men did women write?” also needs to be asked. Focusing on how female novelists represented issues concerning femininity but not masculinity in their texts merely provides us with one half of the equation since one cannot be examined without the other. By analyzing female-authored representations of masculinity during the Victorian period we have a more comprehensive understanding of how male gender identities were shaped and contested during the period. We can also understand how female authors negotiated their role in the debate over appropriate gender roles.

The idea of examining women writing men came through re-reading Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s The Madwoman in the Attic, specifically the section of the first chapter titled “Male images of women.” Gilbert and Gubar write that “before the woman writer can journey through the looking glass toward literary autonomy….she must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of “angel” and “monster” which male authors have generated for her” (16-17). This argument planted yet another question in my mind. Yes, yes, but also, what about those female images of men. How did these authors represent men in their work? Did they examine issues of masculinity?
Did they assimilate them in their writing? Did they create representations of masculinity that transcended those male images of men?

These types of questions began to couple, in my mind, with the issue of authority. What authority did female authors have during the Victorian period? The complexity of this question caused me to ask a more specific question concerning the authority these different authors, at different times, writing in different genres, actually had. In *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Edward Said examines the word authority, linking it to the word author. For Said the words author and authority are grounded in notions of power, specifically

- of the power of an individual to initiate, institute, establish—in short, to begin; (2) that this power and its product are an increase over what had been there previously; (3) that the individual wielding this power controls its issue and what is derived there from; (4) and that that authority maintains the continuity of its course. (83)

From this way of thinking I asked myself a far more specific and far more generative question: How did female authors, at a time when they were struggling for legitimacy and authority, represent the dominant gender? Furthermore, in the process of researching and writing this dissertation, taking into account issues of social/economic class and the effects of separate spheres ideology (in addition to the issue of authorial authority) made clear the complexities of these representations of masculinities.

Separate spheres ideology had such a profound effect on gender roles during the Victorian period that all of the authors covered in this dissertation defined their male characters in relation to their visible presence in the social/business world. That they did
so in different ways speaks to the necessity of examining women writers writing men. Gaskell’s novels illustrated the importance of a visible presence in performing one’s masculinity, as well as defining who is allowed to appear in that social sphere. Braddon’s *Aurora Floyd* criticized the very notion of validating one’s masculinity through their visible appearance. The physical appearance of Craik’s Prince Dolor worked against him initially, but he performed his masculinity successfully by the end of the book. All of these novels, as different as they are, shared a very important similarity. They were written by women at a time when female authors struggled to legitimize themselves and their works as they sought entry into the Victorian literary world. In addition, these authors also had to understand their own role in the social sphere since the publication of their novels moved them from the relatively isolated domestic sphere to the male-dominated world of publishing, even if the novel was initially published anonymously as was *Mary Barton*. Similarly, the ways that these texts represented masculinity has been left largely unexamined in discussions concerning gender identities in Victorian literature. Attempting to analyze these representations of masculinity moves this aspect of these novels into the social sphere of scholarship, thus allowing us to discuss the very active role female authors played in the debate over female and male gender identities.

Another important similarity between all of the authors covered in this dissertation is the notion that the authority and dominance of the middle-class often prevailed over any ideas concerning gender and class equality. Gaskell’s investment in the idea of middle-class charity must not, in her conception of gender and class relations, alter the patriarchal structure in any significant way. Both *Mary Barton* and *North and South* end with the male, middle-class dominated society reaffirmed. Braddon’s novels,
too, do not look beyond the dominance of middle-class males despite their depictions of alternate, non-hegemonic masculinities. The varied work of late-period children’s novels written by women (whether they were conservative, progressive, or some combination of both) did a little more towards representing ideas concerning gender equality. However, especially in Nesbit’s case, these gestures towards gender and class equality were betrayed by representations of masculinity that were defined by male physical strength (the idea of the solider) and by solidifying separate spheres ideology that placed girls/women in subordinate positions. Furthermore, to ensure male, middle-class dominance all of these novels represented the need to police men (usually this done by women, but also by other men) to make certain that these men were performing their masculinities acceptably. Whether it was the eyes of others in the social sphere that judged whether men were bloodstained or not, or the roles female characters play in influencing and shaping male gender identity, these novels stressed the need for masculinity to be viewed, judged, and influenced through social pressure.

In the introduction to this dissertation it was noted that the language of the novel is really about power relations and the process of normalization. Throughout the examination of Gaskell, Braddon, Craik, Ewing, and Nesbit I have shown that the representations of masculinities in those novels construct appropriate and inappropriate conceptions of male gender identity for the reader as a means of establishing what is considered normal (and therefore desirable) in terms of gender identity. To quote again from Greenblatt, concerning notions of gender identity these novels are “fields of force, places of dissension and shifting interests, occasions for the jostling of orthodox and subversive impulses” (*The Power of Forms*, ii). Thus, these women gained some level of
authority by creating texts that did not merely reflect but also redefined hegemonic conceptions of male gender.

While all of the authors examined in this dissertation contributed significantly to the debate over appropriate male gender roles and responsibilities, I believe that we as scholars have barely scratched the surface. As I look over the relatively scant amount of scholarship on Victorian women writing men, I ask myself why hasn’t more been written? What about the Bronte sisters and other female novelists in the long and varied Victorian period? What about George Eliot and her fascinating representations of masculinity in *Adam Bede* and *Daniel Deronda*? What about the poets like Eliza Cook who, in her poem “Teddy O’Neale” yearns for the man who has left her in order to earn his fortune, but whom the speaker would prefer poor rather than absent? What is Christina Rossetti saying about the decidedly male world of commerce and its relation to female desire in “Goblin Market”? What did the female authors of conduct manuals have to say about men and masculinity? How did a female journalist like Alice Meynell, in her essay “Unstable Equilibrium,” contribute to the discussion of gender identities by writing about men’s legs in comparison to women’s feet (at risk of spoiling a fascinating essay, Meynell argues that men’s legs and women’s feet are the most attractive part of the male and female body respectively)? And moving beyond the printed page, how did female painters like Emily Mary Osborn depict male subjects and what did those depictions say about male fashion, the male body, or sexuality? Or what about the sculptures done by female artists like Mary Thornycroft, specifically her statue of a young Prince Alfred clutching a bunch of grapes? How did these women (and other Victorian female artists) negotiate their role in a patriarchal society? What did their representations of
masculinities suggest about issues of female gender identity, women’s rights, and class differences?

By continuing this topic of scholarly research we can bring forth these representations and ask how they contributed to definitions of hegemonic masculinity. We can better understand the role of literature (written by both men and women) in the general discourse concerning male gender identity. In his landmark work *Victorian Masculinities*, Herbert Sussman argues that a goal of his book is to show the multitudes of masculinities in the Victorian period, as well as “to be attentive to the way each male artist and writer shapes the possibilities of manliness available to him within his cultural moment” (14). Absolutely, but why stop with the “male artist” instead of also being attentive to how each female artist shaped conceptions of masculinity? Why look at masculinities available to “him” and not also to “her”? These novels, and their representations of masculinities, are contact zones (to use Mary Louise Pratt’s term), where female authors grappled with dominant representations of gender identity, and sought their own equal position alongside male authors. Through the type of analysis done in this dissertation we can not only learn about Victorian masculinities and the pressures men faced in performing their gender identities, but also about how a socially subordinate group attempted to gain authority by entering into the dominant discourse concerning the role of men and masculinity.
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1 While Greenblatt is focusing specifically on the Renaissance, his ideas concerning how one’s identity is constructed and “lived” can be applied to other time periods as well.

2 One important exception is Gaskell’s lack of confidence in the working classes to have an awareness of their identity as a performance, at least to the degree that she credits the middle classes with having as she instructs them on ways to change their performance in order to best handle the working classes.

3 The foundation for this type of examination has already been laid. A fascinating article, “How to Be a Gentleman without Really Trying: Gilbert Markham in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall” by Sarah Hallenbeck is an example of the approach I wish to take in examining female-authored texts and their representations of masculinity. Hallenbeck’s article (published in 2005 in Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies) is an example (and there are only a few) of scholarly examinations concerning representations of masculinity by nineteenth-century women authors. Establishing that Anne Bronte’s novel presents Gilbert and Arthur as binary opposites, Hallenbeck turns to Bronte’s position as a woman writer and examines her contributions...
to the constructions of hegemonic masculinity. Hallenbeck’s argument is that, because the novel presents Gilbert’s story in his own words (and specifically by having the story told through a letter written by Gilbert and addressed to another man), this narratorial displacement “operates to overcome Brontë’s situation as the female author of a book largely written to instruct men about proper masculinity” (9). As Hallenbeck rightly points out, it is not just that Bronte sought to address issues of masculinity, but that she, rather bluntly, instructs the reader (male or female) on appropriate male gender identity, as well as illustrating an anxiety over women writing men. Hallenbeck’s questioning concerning the propriety of women writers whose texts endorse specific masculine gender identities allows me to go further in investigating the issues inherent in the representations of masculinity in texts written by other Victorian women authors.

iv See Andrew Dowling (2001) who, In Manliness and the Male Novelist in Victorian Literature, examines how Victorian male authors voiced concerns over issues of masculine gender identity and concludes that “the Victorian male novelist was, in fact, deeply concerned about questions of manliness and that these concerns are reflected in his literature” (1). Dowling’s contribution to the field of Victorian literary studies has established that male authors sought to represent masculinity in specific ways, and that their representations reflect contemporary anxieties about masculinity, as well as representing non-masculine men in order to define appropriate male gender identity through a negative example. While it is important here to examine how any author reflects, or wrestles with, cultural norms in their writing we must also understand that they were not merely reflecting cultural norms in their novels, but creating and defining gender identities as well.


vi For an example of how this role of protector was endorsed and perpetuated for men see Sarah Stickney Ellis’s praise for fathers whose “stronger powers of protection brought into action to defend the little helpless one from heedlessly inflicted pain,” The Mothers of England, (136). Or, her description of the father who, holding his daughter, “folds her tenderly in his arms, toils for her subsistence and comfort, and watches over her expanding beauty that he may shield it from all blight,” The Daughters of England, (301). Or in Dinah Craik’s “Concerning Men—By a Woman,” published in Cornhill Magazine in 1887, where the author explains that a man’s “selfishness…his hardness and masterfulness” are “in one sense a necessity, else he would never be able to fight his way and protect those whom he is bound to protect.”

vii Nelson admits this date is somewhat arbitrary, but is also the date that is the endpoint in Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall’s Family Fortunes which presents masculinity and domesticity without the division of public and private spheres. Davidoff and Hall argue that “Far from carrying the blustering certainty of the late Victorian paterfamilias, early nineteenth-century masculine identity was fragile, still in the process of being forged and always measured against the background of condescension from the gentry as well as the long tradition of artisan pride” (229).


ix In David Copperfield, David describes this adolescent in-between stage as one of uncertainty and unreality by claiming “I know that my juvenile experiences went for little or nothing then; and that life was more like a great fairy story, which I was just about to begin to read, than anything else” (255)

x The construction of the terms heterosexual and homosexual in the Victorian period had a profound impact on men’s relationships with other men. Richard Dellamora (1990) uses Foucault’s assertion that the modern definition of homosexuality was established around 1870 to examine the ways individual subjects respond at the very moment when codes of sexuality are being enacted or enforced, specifically in the Victorian era.
Dellamora examines the relationship between Tennyson and Hallam in order to trace a shift in acceptable male-to-male relationships during the nineteenth century, and provides a lengthy analysis of how gender studies, Queer theory, and body theory have impacted Victorian studies.

The introduction (and popularity) of social-problem novels of the 1840’s and 50’s, along with the increasingly negative effects of laissez faire economics, brought much attention to working-class men in mid-Victorian literature. Richard Menke (2000) focuses on Kingsley’s *Alton Locke*, particularly to examine the ways the novel attempts to legitimize working-class subjectivity through literary production. Through the character of Alton Locke (the working-class tailor/poet), Kingsley seeks to combine the condition of England question with literary production. The failure of the novel, according to Menke, inadvertently highlights the difficulty (if not impossibility) of working-class men to exercise free will. Kingsley’s novel displays this failure though denying Alton “linguistic access to the correct forms of literary language, institutional access to publication or patronage, material access to the time and tools necessary for writing literature, socio-literary access to the appropriate genres and traditions” (88).

See also Anne Windholz (2000). Windholz examines the exportation of the British “gentleman” to the colonies, arguing that, especially late in the Victorian period, many British men felt that the colonies (including Canada and the former colony of America) provided them with opportunities to prove their masculinity in ways that the British isles did not. Windholz also notes “hunting” as a way of proving one’s masculinity in a foreign land.

See also Peter Stearns’s *Be a Man! Males in Modern Society* (1990). According to Stearns, Victorian masculine gender identity was largely defined in militaristic terms. For most Victorian men (or almost any economic class) “the nineteenth century, effectively launched and ended by major wars, was a militant, indeed military century” (68).

Anna Clark (1995) points out that the term “working-class” was first used around this time, often tied to debates concerning the 1832 Reform Bill.

John Tosh (1999) argues that this period illustrates a massive shift in definitions of masculinity largely because it solidified the separation between home and work, for the middle and working-classes. It is the large-scale move from rural living to urban areas, and the decreasing number of men who stopped working from their home and began working away from it, that caused confusion and difficulty concerning newer conceptions of masculinity expressed by authors like Carlyle.

This move also signals an increasing interest in addressing current issues and problems through the novel. The belief in social-reform through novels, and specifically by depicting current economic social ills, resembles Walter Benn Michaels’s recent assertion that modern American and British fiction should give up representing the past and solely concentrate on the economic institutions that continue to make social injustices possible.

See Catherine Hall’s *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*. Hall argues that many working-class men and women adopted the ideology of middle-class domesticity. Tosh (1999) presents a similar argument.

See Richard Menke (2000) for an examination of how Victorian male authors sought to represent working-class men as a means of legitimizing authorship as authentic labor.

Thomas Carlyle, accurately guessing both the gender and the identity of the author of *Mary Barton*, wrote to congratulate Gaskell on her novel, and urged her to write more about the economic realities faced by the working-classes. Carlyle suggested that Gaskell go “still deeper into this subject, and of bringing up Portraits of Manchester Existence still more strikingly real” (Letter, 8 November 1848).
As Thomas Recchio explains, *Cranford* became Gaskell’s best known work after her death in large part due to the novel being reprinted numerous times in school editions in the early part of the 20th century, all with introductions describing the novel as indicative of Gaskell’s charming prose. Furthermore, these school editions resulted in *Cranford* contributing to the construction of British national identity in England as well as in America.

E. B Browning’s “The Cry of the Children” and *Aurora Leigh* have been read as examples of female-authored literature that addresses social-sphere issues in a manner appropriate for female authors by focusing on children and parenting rather and only indirectly addressing legislative reform. See Taylor (2008) and Schatz (2000).


Of course, it was not just men that worked in the factories and elsewhere, yet despite women’s financial contribution to the home, the patriarchal structure of many Victorian working-class families delegated most authority and responsibility to the men of the home. See Stevenson (1991) for an analysis of Gaskell’s problematic representations of working women.

I use Erving Goffman’s definition of social stigma, which he explains as a process where “while the stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind…he is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted and discounted one.” (131).

There is some social criticism here in that Barton’s ability to maintain his moneyed man status is tied to the availability of labor, which is in the hands of the middle-class factory owner.

Interestingly, the Charter demands a “vote for every man twenty one years of age, of sound mind, and not undergoing punishment for crime” showing the disdain held for those bloodstained men who had not legitimately performed their masculine gender identities.

In a letter to Mary Howitt in 1838 Gaskell cites “the beautiful truth” (33) in Wordsworth’s “The Cumberland Beggar” while relating the care poor people have for each other.

See also Cazamian (1973) who argues that “the workers…made thousands of tiny sacrifices daily in automatic response to the promptings of common humanity” (72).

Lynn Alexander (2008) presents a similar argument that reform-minded Victorian artists sought to depict working-class fathers in domestic situations to work against their violent reputation amongst middle and upper-class readers.

See Young (2008) for information on male nurses during the Crimean War, and Windholz (2000) for an examination of Victorian emigrants’ adoption of domestic duties while away from England.

This illustrates how thoroughly (and quickly) the idea of separate spheres took hold during this period. Previously, it was more common for working or middle-class men to have a much closer relationship with their infant children. This is exemplified by William Cobbett’s 1830 pamphlet *Advice to Young Men* where he writes that “I have fed and put them to sleep hundreds of times, though there were servants to whom the task might have been transferred” (176).

Job’s muddled description of John’s beliefs at the end of the novel hardly illuminates this point. According to Job, John does not believe in (or want) complete equality, but merely wanted empathy and the desire to help from the middle-classes.
And Mr. Bell in *North and South* depicts this sort of marriage as not only unrealistic, but highly undesirable as well. Upon convincing Margaret that many people have lied, or cheated in their past, Bell adds to this list of unfortunate acts that people attempt to cover up, “a great number of folk, thinking themselves very good, have odd sorts of connexion with lies, left-hand marriages, and second cousins—once-removed” (359). With “left hand marriages” being a term used to refer to the marriage between a wealthy man and a lower-class wife.

Of course, Carson’s own role in creating this “grinding squalid misery” is somewhat lost on him as his mind is filled with wonder at the “different lots of the brethren of mankind” (319).

Pawning is an acceptable method of obtaining money only if the possession being pawned is, as in John’s case, rightfully the property of the owner.

Carson is described as reading the conservative *Manchester Guardian*, while Barton reads the more radical and subversive *Northern Star*. As Thiele (2007) argues, this difference in reading material suggests that Gaskell is criticizing Carson and other owners for being out of touch with their workers’ interests and well-being.

Bivona and Henkle also analyze the construction of the slum-adventurer, a middle-class man venturing into the slums to document the poverty therein, as part of an attempt to equate writing to physical labor thereby legitimizing authors as hard-working laboring men. This attempt to include writing as a means of physical/manual labor also distances middle and working-class men at the same time that it attempts to equate them. The factory worker is filthy, undernourished, and uneducated, while the middle-class man (also a hard worker as he writes) is clean, educated, and in charge of his own labor.

Her sense of authority does stem from guilt as she and others believe that the murder of Harry Carson was entirely her fault. Job “was strongly inclined to believe that Mary was aware of this [her blame]; only that, too late repentant of her light conduct which had led to such fatal consequences, she was now most anxious to save her old playfellow, her early friend, from the doom awaiting the shedder of blood” (218). Regardless of her sense of guilt, Gaskell positions Mary as the men’s only hope due to the masters’ reluctance to provide more for the working-classes.

Similarly, Amy Mae King argues that Gaskell presents a move away from the current condition of England in order to solve society’s ills. King posits that in *Mary Barton* Gaskell invites her readers to see the rural not as a flight from contemporary urban–industrial reality but as a literal cure for its worse ills” (257) namely the reliance upon herbal medicines and medical treatments. I am arguing that Gaskell presents the solution to England’s class issues, but also implies that bloodstained men like Jem have no place in that society.

From Matthew 25:24: “Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown and gathering where thou hast not strawed.”

“Sovereign” in the Nietzschean sense of one who is responsible for others not due to social mores, but though his own free will. Thornton and other “true men” in the novel believe they are doing what is right simply because it is right (or because God wants them to), not because it is socially acceptable to do so.

The novel stresses the importance for “true men” to be independent (in some sense “hard”) as well as sympathetic towards the poor. Men who are too soft are referred to as “fools or not true men” (123).

Gaskell would continue to change her mind about the novel’s title even after it began serial publication. In late 1854 she wrote to Dickens that “a better title than N&S. would have been ‘Death& Variations’. There are 5 deaths, each beautifully suited to the character of the individual” (324).
Louis Cazamian draws a parallel between Gaskell’s focus on the working-classes in *MB* and her emphasis on the middle-classes in *N+S*. Cazamian also suggests that Gaskell’s change in focus is partly caused by the Crimean War and the European revolutions of 1848. Cazamian argues that “this changed point of view inevitably gave Mrs. Gaskell a new perception of the problems” (226).

John Peck (1998) argues that almost no English fiction directly referenced the Crimean War while it was taking place, yet a number of novels by soldiers were in the process of being written during those years.

This is in contrast to a character like Peter Jenkyns in *Cranford* who does not renounce his British citizenship, but instead returns from exile in order to take a place of authority in the nearly all female town. Eileen Gillooly (1999) argues that Peter’s return, and subsequent reestablishment of male authority, is what enables the novel to end happily.

Grieg, Kimmel, and Lang (2000) add to Connell’s definition of the patriarchal dividend, by suggesting that “it is equally clear that men’s ‘patriarchal dividend’ is mediated by economic class, social status, race, ethnicity, sexuality and age” (7).

In *Sylvia’s Lovers* Gaskell presents a pre-industrialized take on national identity when Daniel Robson, reacting to the violent actions of the press-gangs, comments that “Nation here! Nation theere! I’m a man and yo’re another, but nation’s nowhere” (39).

Even when some actions come close to crossing gender boundary lines, Gaskell asserts the masculine nature of those actions. An interesting example of this is when Thornton purchases a basket of fruit for the Hales and chooses to deliver it himself. Thornton finds that must travel through “the busiest part of town for feminine shopping” while being observed by “many a young lady” (197). Gaskell redeems Thornton’s masculinity by having him cross class-lines instead of gender-lines as the narrator compares him with a “porter or an errand boy” (197) instead of the other women in the shopping district.

1 It even inspired the creation of a sorority organization called the Queens of Avalon in the early 1900’s. This organization regarded “Of Queen’s Gardens” as “the textbook of the society, to be studied as thoroughly, attractively, and devotedly as possible, its mottoes to be illuminated by the members and its choicest lines memorized” (qtd. in Sweet, 178-179).

2 This treatment of sensation novels as non-serious works of literature remains to this day. Sally Mitchell, in her introduction to Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne*, writes that “[m]ost serious novels stimulate thought; they may force readers to face unpleasant truths about human nature. Popular fiction provides emotional indulgence; it avoids analysis and lets readers escape from the tensions that grow out of social conditions or their own nature” (xviii).

See Brantlinger (1982) for examples of the largely negative critical reception received by the major sensation novels of the 1860’s.

See Winifred Hughes’s *The Maniac in the Cellar* for more on the relationship between sensation novels and the Gothic tradition.

James also called Braddon the “founder of the sensation novel” but preferred Wilkie Collins whom he argued deserved “a more respectable name” (593) than Braddon.

Sensation novels were accused of almost being too current. In 1863 Henry Mansel wrote in the *Quarterly Review* that all a sensation novelists had to do was “keep an eye on the criminal reports of the daily newspapers” and the novel would virtually write itself (1863, 501).
Greg Howard argues that the novel is less about conflict than it is about contrast, positioning Sir Michael as an “ineflectual aristocrat” in contrast to Robert who “represents the emergence of the self-sufficient progenitor of a new, industrialized economy” (34).

Robert almost seems to display the symptoms of the (now-debunked) “disease” spermatorrhea, which was thought to be the result of excessive discharge of sperm, usually through masturbation. See Ellen Bayuk Rosenman (2003) for more on how the Victorians understood this “disease”.

He makes similar gestures, equally insincere, to appear masculine in aristocratic terms. Venturing to Essex during hunting season, Robert brings along “half a dozen French novels, a case of cigars, and three pounds of Turkish tobacco” (113) but nothing concerning hunting. Just like the working-class men, the “honest young country squires” see through his performance, surmising him as “a person utterly unworthy of any remark whatsoever” (113).

Robert’s penchant for foreign items (German pipes and French novels) also problematizes his masculine gender identity. Apart from the dangers of the foreign, a common concept in gothic/sensation fiction, Robert’s interest in these things suggests his lack of interest in a strong national British identity. That he gives these items away in the novel’s last chapter signals his complete transformation into British middle-class man.

While Robert’s interest in French novels portrays him as something less than masculine, in *Aurora Floyd* French men are described as aggressively sexual beings. Aurora’s unescorted trip from France to England causes anxiety for the Floyd’s housekeeper who worries about Aurora “all alone amongst a pack of moustachioed Frenchmen!” (23).

The job of the barrister in the Victorian period was separate from the job of the solicitor. The solicitor did much of the grunt work; taking statements and affidavits, traveling around the country in order to track down witnesses and obtain documents, and dealing more directly with the plaintiffs and defendants in the particular legal case that they were working on; while barristers almost exclusively worked in London, doing the bulk of their work arguing in court before judges. Comparatively, as Mitchell points out, “barristers were the gentlemen of the legal profession” (66).

See Mary Seraly Cropp (1998) for further analysis of Braddon’s use of detective tropes.

In *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* Catherine Spooner examines how this fascination with female insanity in nineteenth-century sensation/gothic fiction because commodified, with “Crazy Jane” hats and a plethora of merchandise stemming from *The Woman in White*.

Sussman argues that Robert Browning, Tennyson and Carlyle also associated male insanity with loss of control (74).

Jill Matus points out that, while Robert’s French novels are marked as unmasculine, they at least provide an acceptable moral framework that is not found in what Lady Audley reads. Matus argues that “while these French novels may sap his energy, they leave his morals intact. He is less susceptible therefore than Lady Audley, who is an avid and clearly corrupted reader of romances and yellow-papered novels, thought by their more vituperative critics to be dangerous to feminine health and moral well-being” (337).

Braddon also presents working-class men in *Lady Audley’s Secret* as animal-like in contrast to the more evolved middle and upper-classes. Luke is “bull-necked,” “animal in expression” and “not unlike one of the stout oxen grazing in the meadows round about the Court” (26). This continues in *Aurora Floyd* where Softy is continually compared to animals.
For women, and specifically Lady Audley, her “insanity” is shown through her behaving much like a conventional middle-class man. She is active, mobile, rational (her scheme is well thought-out), and she seeks to become the enforcer of law by attempting to diagnose Robert as mentally ill. Lady Audley’s masculine-like behavior is a threat to male dominance, and thus her incarceration is necessary in order to ensure the authority of men like Robert.

See Colin Shrosbree (1988) for her analysis concerning the findings of the Clarendon Commission and the Public School Acts, specifically their negative appraisal of Eton’s curriculum and the use of “fagging”.

Robert Morrell has examined the education of British boys in the colonies (namely in Natal, South Africa) during the last few decades of the Victorian era. Morrell found that the emphasis was more on the physical than intellectual, with masculinity being shaped largely by initiation practices, physical punishment, and harsh living conditions.

See Jennifer Kushnier (2002) who argues that in references to Eton Braddon is providing a critique of the English public school system, specifically because it does not adequately prepare boys for their entry into adult heterosexuality. Maureen Martin (2002) argues similarly that if, in Victorian England, a boyhood spent in a public school facilitated a young man’s entrée into a leadership role in the public sphere, it complicated his introduction to the husbandly role expected of him in the domestic sphere. The homoerotic atmosphere in which the pubescent sexuality of public school students flowered was at odds with the heterosexuality demanded of grown men (483).

See Jill Matus (1993) for more on Braddon’s use of maternal insanity.

Rae also criticizes Braddon for presenting scenarios where “the chief end of man is to commit murder” (202), yet the focus of the attack remains on her depiction of female characters.

Rosenbam (2003) argues that Robert often suppresses anger in exchange for a masochistic desire for suffering.

His comparison of women to snakes and eels suggests a certain physical disgust with them as well as an allusion to Eve, therefore blaming women for the fall of man, and even adding a phallic element to his view of women.

Loesberg (1986) argues that the structure of nineteenth-century gothic/sensation novels influenced and was influenced by discussion of parliamentary reform in the 1860’s. Specifically, Loesberg sees the question of identity formation and less in gothic/sensation fiction was primarily depicted “in its legal and class aspects rather than in its psychological aspect” (117) common in other genres of literature.

Baudelaire’s definition of the “flaneur” (published in *Figaro* in 1863) is not as clearly “unmasculine” as Robert’s use of the term suggests. The flaneur is a direct part of the social sphere. He is a product of industrialization, and one who is a spectator of life, a lover of life. Yet this man is not a physically active man in the sense of one who works hard at their profession, and nor are they concerned with marriage or family in the traditional sense. Baudelaire argues that the flaneur “makes the whole world his family, just like the lover of the fair sex who builds up his family from all the beautiful women that he has ever found”.

Walter Benjamin inextricably links the flaneur to modern, industrial life. In Benjamin’s reading, the flaneur is a product of modern life, and one whose identity is entirely fluid in that he can enjoy “the incomparable privilege of being himself and someone else as he sees fit...[l]ike a roving soul in search of a body, he enters another person whenever he wishes” (50).
Following Benjamin’s concept of the flaneur, Susan Buck-Morss argues that the idling urban man is a positive product of capitalism. According to Buck-Morss, [the flaneur] looks to a regime in which cutsbacks in labor-time, automated production, and the saturation of markets would be, not the cause of crisis, but the intended, humane result. Rather than resulting in personal tragedy for individuals which disciplines them and brings them back into line, it would mean the collective actualization of the potential for happiness and freedom which a socially organized technology might achieve” (137).

lxxvii Though Braddon is reminding the working and middle classes that the aristocracies suffer even more than they do here, the novel is explicitly addressed to the upper and middle-class reader. At one point, the narrator urges the reader not to forget that “when you quarrel…[y]our servants enjoy the fun” (177).

lxxviii See Joseph Sramek (2006) and Joseph Kestner (1996) for further analysis of how Victorian masculinities were tied to military service. Sramek argues that many late Victorian and Edwardian aristocratic men used photographs of them standing next to dead tigers while in India as a method of proving their masculinity defined by courage and violence. Kestner looks at the rise in interest concerning paintings of military battles during the mid-to-late Victorian period.

lxxviii Their schoolboy relationship can stay at the non-erotic level of friendship because of this rivalry over a female figure. Aurora is always present in their interactions with each other, preventing any behavior between the two men becoming homoerotic. Late in the novel Talbot pleads with John that “we were boys together at Rugby, and have backed each other in a dozen boyish fights. Is it kind of you to withhold your friendship from me now, when I have come here on purpose to be a friend to you—to you and Aurora?” (406).

lxxix The OED defines this usage of the word “jigger” as being “[u]sed as a vague substitute for a profane oath or imprecation.”


lxxxi The American Psychological Association (APA) defines bi-gender in terms of an individual’s ability to shift between conventionally masculine and feminine gender identities at their choosing. My use of the term is slightly different in that I am arguing for more of a hybrid gender identity that is simultaneously both masculine and feminine while being completely neither at any time.

lxxxi It is important here to point out that Dolor’s knowledge of the working-classes is limited to what he sees while flying far above them. This distancing between himself and the poor is similar to the Carsons in *Mary Barton* who remain separated from their workers. Unlike Thornton in *North and South* Dolor never overcomes that separation between himself and his people, nor does Craik suggest that he should.

lxxxiii That he is a man is not lost on Ewing, as she continually defines British national identity only through male figures in *Jackanapes*. See Jackie Horne (2004) for a detailed look at Ewing’s *Six to Sixteen* and how that novel associates the female body with British nationalism.

lxxxiv Ewing’s support of the British imperialism comes from first-hand experience as she was the wife of Major Alexander Ewing (1830-1895). Ewing lived with her husband while he was stationed in Canada, but her poor health did not allow her to join him while he was serving in Malta and Sri Lanka.

lxxxv Specifically the college was intellectually liberal, and in terms of religion as well. Allison Sulloway notes how pleased Gerard Manley Hopkins was with the intellectual atmosphere at the college, yet suspicious of its liberal view on religion, writing that “Hopkins found the intellectual maturity of Balliol wonderfully bracing…but as a devout Tractarian he must have been quite suspicious of Balliol’s liberal tone and its influence upon young men of wavering faith” (9).
While the focus is on the construction of masculinity in these novels, Nesbit also shows a range of possible feminine gender identities with the girls in the family. They range from traditional sister/wife/mother rules that are concerned with nurturing to more tomboy-ish roles that are as progressive as the male gender roles, such as Noel’s.

Nick Freeman (2008) argues that Nesbit displayed some proto-feminist depictions of women in her non-children literature, namely her often anthologized story “Man-Size in Marble”.

In the novel’s illustrations, Albert is sometimes drawn with curly hair in contrast to the Bastable’s boys straight hair. This adds to Albert’s unmanliness, and, along with his clothing, seemingly depicts him (or at least his looks) as aristocratic and therefore not masculine.

This also reverses the association made later between the actual robber and their father. Here their father is a victim of lawbreaking, and later he is the lawbreaker himself.

The appeal of Claude Duval for Victorians was cemented by Edward Solomon and Henry Pottinger Stephens’s very popular 1881 comic opera *Claude Duval*. The opera presented Duval as a dashing and attractive man, who was very popular with women. The September 17, 1881 *Punch* describes the piece as “a bright, sparkling opera, and, like the hero himself, who comes in on horseback, it is well mounted” (125).

See Gubar (2001) and Mavis Reimer (1997) for more on Nesbit’s complicated assessment of colonialism in her children’s fiction.

Another example of a failed speech act is found when the boys write their full names and the purpose of their visit when meeting with the editor. This written example of their adult masculinity (they are there for “[b]usiness very private indeed” (60)) fails once the editor sees that they are children.

See Springhall (1990) for an excellent overview of Brett’s career.

The boys do encounter a female author, Mrs. Leslie, who is interesting for her ability to write about girls as well as boys. This ability increases her reputation in Oswald’s eyes, as her poetry about boys “shows that some grown-up ladies are not so silly as others” (55). Oswald’s appreciation for her boy-centric poetry, she writes about how “There are so many things to do—/The things that make a man of you” (56), that Oswald prefers to think of her as a transvestite rather than a woman. Oswald finally describes Mrs. Leslie as not “like a real lady, but more like a jolly sort of grown-up boy in a dress and hat” (57). Gubar, identifying Mrs. Leslie as Nesbit’s “explicit self-portrait,” argues that Oswald’s preference for Mrs. Leslie’s poetry over Noel’s illustrates how children’s literature authors often “speak for children better than children speak for themselves” (422-423).

There is an undercurrent of anti-Semitism in the novel’s depiction of Mr. Rosenbaum, and perhaps this also functions as an educational moment for the children on who can be trusted.

Alice also claims that their society is based on the S.P.G (the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts), even though Noel believes the acronym stands for the “Society for the Propagation of the Jews”. That the societies used as a bases for “The Wouldbegoods” are all Christian-based or ganizations provides another example of how late-period Children’s literature was less didactic yet still as religious/moral as their earlier counterparts.

*The New Treasure Seekers* (1904) also features the boys, Oswald in particular, becoming very aware of how the poor live, and the difference between his economic class and the poverty found in London and other major metropolitan areas. In that novel, while searching for their dog Pincher who has run away, the class differences between the Bastables and England’s poor come to the forefront. Once again it is literature
that functions as the most effective teaching tool in their maturational process. Oswald explains that “it does not make me comfortable to see people so poor and we have such a jolly house. People in books feel this, and I know it is right to feel it, but I hate the feeling all the same” (99-100). Briggs describes this scene as reflecting “middle-class embarrassment and guilt, feelings clearly associated with the liberal dilemma” (241). These feelings of guilt and embarrassment are necessary for the maturation into adult masculine gender identity because, as Gaskell also argued, Nesbit believes that the “gentlemen”—the hegemonic conception of the true, successful, appropriate form of masculinity—must include an awareness of the lives of those less fortunate, as well as a desire to help financially or otherwise. As the events of The Wouldbegoods suggest, because these acts can often hamper or harm the working-classes, charitable acts, in the name of doing “good,” must be learned, and Nesbit chooses to teach children and adults through literature. Although Nesbit, through Oswald’s narration, had previously critiqued those “improving books,” and scoffed at Laurence Houseman’s suggestion that she pattern The Wouldbegoods on books like Mary Louisa Charlesworth’s very didactic Ministering Children, she ultimately endorses the same type of moral message found in more moralizing children’s literature. Briggs points out that Nesbit’s later writing, namely The Story of the Amulet (1906), The Railway Children (1906), and Harding’s Luck (1909) increasingly stressed the importance of middle and upper-class charity as a moral imperative that often used Christian notions as the basis for her arguments (242).

 xcvi Like Craik, Hughes also continually compares manliness and masculinity to animals.

c And continuing in the emphasis placed on masculine individuality versus feminine Socialism, Daisy tries to instruct the boys by referring to Charlotte Yonge’s The Daisy Chain by explaining that it is about motherless children who, amongst other things, learn how to be better mothers. When asked by Daisy if the boys knew about this book, Oswald briskly informs the reader that “We didn’t” (193) thereby rejecting Daisy’s (and Yonge’s) feminine influence.