UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

BARRETT BROWNING, BRONTË, ELIOT, GASKELL AND ROSSETTI: RE-VISIONING WOMEN'S LIVES

BY

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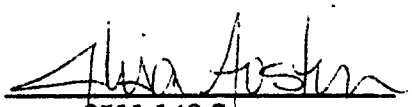

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled BARRETT BROWNING, BRONTË, ELIOT, GASKELL AND ROSSETTI: RE-VISIONING WOMEN'S LIVES in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

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To the odd souls once known collectively as the Austin family

Abstract

Over the past two decades, the growing body of feminist literary criticism has provided students and scholars of literature with a variety of critical perspectives, including African-American, Lesbian, Marxist, psychoanalytic, for examining and re-examining, and understanding literature written by women. While feminist literary criticism has made tremendous strides in re-discovering and re-reading literature by women, little work has been done in studying how women writers depicted women's relationships with other women. Accordingly, this thesis aims at expanding our understanding of Victorian women's relationships with each other by examining how they are "transformed into literature." Specifically, I will be examining the depiction of relationships between mothers and daughters, sisters, and female friends in The Mill on the Floss, by George Eliot, Shirley by Charlotte Brontë, Wives and Daughters by Elizabeth Gaskell, Aurora Leigh by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and "Goblin Market" by Christina Rossetti. In pursuing this goal, I am shifting critical focus away from relationships between female and male characters to the relationships between female characters. Critics have, for the most part, focussed on the conventional marriage-plot and have thus neglected the significance of women's relationships to the narratives of the works under examination. By neglecting these relationships, literary criticism has also neglected to give them the artistic merit they are due. In order to further understand how these five authors have chosen to portray women's interrelationships, my examination of these authors and their work will include an examination of some Victorian beliefs about women's relationships. As this thesis illustrates, Barrett Browning, Brontë, Eliot, Gaskell, and Rossetti re-visioned women's experiences in their literature and, specifically, in their portraits of female characters and of relationships between female characters.

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, the growing body of feminist literary criticism has provided students and scholars of literature with a variety critical perspectives, including African-American, lesbian, Marxist, and psychoanalytic, for examining, reexamining, and understanding literature written by women.[1] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg discusses in Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America the shift in critical perspective she needed in order to "hear women's words." Rosenberg describes what she had come to realize was a major flaw in her critical perspective on women's history:

> By returning to traditional male historical sources—advice books and children's literature, the writings of prominent male physicians, theologians, and educators—I had begun to see women, not as they had experienced themselves, but as men had depicted them. To my eyes, nineteenth-century women appeared as passive victims, without resources, isolated in a world of powerful men. Women's experience of their bodies, of their homes and families, women's relationships with their daughters and female friends, their responses to the men in their lives, their anger, their own words...did not appear in my analysis (25).

Smith-Rosenberg defined a new critical approach by going to primary documentation of women's lives: letters, diaries, and journals. Although Smith-Rosenberg is not a literary critic, her description of the necessity of shifting away from "traditional male...sources," (25) perspectives, and methodologies in order to understand women's experience applies to feminists in all disciplines. Smith-Rosenberg describes her new approach to her work as an attempt "to reveal women's experiences as women themselves described them, not as men attempted to direct them" (28).

In her important work A Literature of Their Own, Elaine Showalter takes an equally non-traditional critical approach to women's literature. Showalter's goal is to "describe the female literary tradition in the British novel from the generation of the Brontës to the present day" in order to show a "pattern of deliberate progress and accumulation" (11). Like Smith-Rosenberg's, Showalter's critical perspective is based on the ways women writers perceived themselves rather than on the ways male critics, male writers, or male historians perceived them. As Showalter explains:

> ...I am intentionally looking, not at innate sexual attitudes, but at the ways in which the self-awareness of the women writer has translated itself into a literary form in a specific place and time-span, how this self-awareness has changed and developed, and where it might lead (12).

Ellen Moers, in her book Literary Women, analyzes women's creative process by asking "what did it matter that so many of the great writers of modern times have been women? what did it matter to

literature?" (ix). Although Moers' goal is obviously different from that of Smith-Rosenberg and Showalter, her study's critical perspective similarly relies on *women's* interpretations of their experience. Moers asserts in the first chapter of her book that "Literary women speak for themselves...with finality" through their writing. Moers therefore wonders what concerns and issues women raise in their literature? how they translate their lives into literature? In explaining these topics, Moers states:

> The great writers have always chosen brilliantly, individually, imaginatively among the varying feminine facets of the human condition; and transformed this material, along with all the other materials a writer uses, into literature (xi).

This thesis aims at expanding our understanding of Victorian women's relationships with each other by examining how they are "transformed into literature" in The Mill on the Floss by George Eliot, Wives and Daughters by Elizabeth Gaskell, Shirley by Charlotte Brontë, Aurora Leigh by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and "Goblin Market" by Christina Rossetti. In pursuing this goal, I, like Smith-Rosenberg, am shifting critical perspective. Literary critics for the most part have approached these and other great works by Victorian women writers from the same perspective—with the belief that the focus of these works is to chronicle the heroine's journey to love and marriage. In short, traditional criticism accepts that these novels and poems are about women and men.

However, I believe that this approach neglects the significance of women's relationships in the narratives of the works under examination

and the extent to which these relationships expand our critical understanding of the narratives. By neglecting the literary portrayals of these relationships, literary criticism has also neglected to recognize their artisitic merit. In "Goblin Market," for example, 542 of the poem's 567 lines are dedicated to the sister relationship. Moreover, in The Mill on the Floss, there is a chapter entitled "Maggie and Lucy" but there is no chapter entitled "Maggie and Stephen." Clearly, Rossetti and Eliot deemed female relationships important enough to dedicate significant portions of a work to them and important enough to depict with richness and complexity. Unfortunately, many critics such as Tess Cosslett and Lona Mosk Packer have failed to recognize this importance and have primarily seen Barrett Browning's, Eliot's, Brontë's, Rossetti's and Gaskell's works as about Aurora and Romney, Maggie and Stephen (or Maggie and Tom), Caroline and Robert, Laura and the goblin men.[2] From my critical perspective, however, these works are about Aurora and Marion, about Caroline and Shirley, about Maggie and Mrs Tulliver—about mothers and daughters, sisters and female friends. .

By highlighting the breadth and depth of women's influence on each other, we can further illuminate our understanding of women's relationships. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg explains:

> ...nineteenth-century women lived within a world bounded by home, church, and the institution of visiting–that endless trooping of women to one another's homes for social purposes. It was a world inhabited by children and other women....Central to this female world was an inner core of kin. The ties between sisters, first cousins, aunts and nieces provided the underlying structure upon which groups of friends and their network of female relatives clustered (61-62).

An accurate representation of women's lives therefore shows that one woman would influence and be influenced by many different women in her lifetime. The nature and extent of women's influence on each other is determined not just by their 'chemistry,' but also by each woman's ascribed role in society. For instance, a woman would be influenced differently by her mother than by her sister or friend. By examining these relationships in the works of five major Victorian women writers, we may explore these influences and establish patterns.

Literary criticism of relationships between fictional characters in Victorian women's literature has focussed largely on the heroine in isolation or on the heroine in relation to a *male* character—be he father, brother or suitor. However, some studies written within the last 15 years do examine specific relationships between women in literature. Only one study explores the wide range of relationships suggested in this thesis. Louise Bernikow's Among Women discusses relationships of nineteenth- and twentieth-century women writers with their mothers, sisters, friends, and lovers. While Bernikow raises some interesting points, her study does not provide scholarly support for many of her claims about authors' relationships. In addition, Bernikow focusses on relationships between real people rather than between female characters. However, Bernikow's framework can be applied to this study of literary depictions of relationships between female characters. Bernikow poses a very interesting question:

> Two women...alone in a room. What is possible between them and who will record it? (10).

This examination is less concerned with what is *possible* between women than with what the author has *actually* recorded and *how* she has recorded it.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's definitive work The Madwoman in the Attic contains scattered references to motherhood and sisterhood in the works of Austen, Brontë, Eliot and Rossetti. However, these brief references appear in minor sections of large chapters not dedicated to the discussion of those relationships. Gilbert and Gubar disregard the subjects of women's friendship and romantic love between women. Moreover, Gilbert and Gubar's critical approach is psychological as opposed to sociological. Their discussion of sisterhood in the work of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Christina Rossetti, for example, focusses on these authors' use of sisters as a device to animate the "divided aspects of the [female] self" (156). According to Gilbert and Gubar, Jane Austen often places sisters in opposition to each other—one symbolizing traditional femininity while the other represents female self-actualization (156). Gilbert and Gubar concur with Adrienne Rich's statement that Diana and Mary Rivers, from Jane Eyre, represent for Jane the female "self dissected" into two halves: female strength and independence (Diana the Huntress) and virginity and obedience (the Virgin Mary) (364-65).[3] Similarly, Gilbert and Gubar explore the juxtaposition of the pure, obedient Lizzie with the prurient, rebellious Laura in Rossetti's "Goblin Market." In Gilbert and Gubar's psychological analysis, authors such as Austen and Brontë use sisters as symbols of fragmentation of the female psyche in order to distinguish and represent different aspects of the heroine's psychological dilemma:

to embody ideal femininity *and* to experience self-determination. Unlike Gilbert and Gubar's, my approach to the literature at hand applies aspects of sociology as well as psychology as ways of understanding the literary portrayals of *relationships* and thereby examining other dimensions of the female characters.

Another important work, and one closer to my own approach, is Cathy Davidson and E.M. Broner's The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature which considers the mother-daughter relationship in literature from antiquity to the present. Two essays in this anthology are particularly meaningful for this study: Bonnie Zimmerman's "'A Mother's History' in George Eliot's Life, Literature and Political Ideology" and Jacqueline and Laura Berke's "Mothers and Daughters in Mrs Gaskell's Wives and Daughters: A Study of Elizabeth Gaskell's Last Novel."

Bonnie Zimmerman discusses Eliot's experience with her mother and her "search for the meaning of motherhood in her novels" (Zimmerman 82). Zimmerman gathers from the novels that Eliot unsuccessfully "sought a definition [of motherhood] applicable to her own life" (82). According to Zimmerman, Eliot's heroines "cannot *be* mothers because society provides no realistic model for healthy motherhood..." (83). Eliot's disillusionment causes her to create two kinds of mothers in her novel: "the productive and the sterile":

> Rather than being a literary convention, the inability or unwillingness to bear children is a moral and political principle by which George Eliot criticizes or punishes her heroines (82-83).

Zimmerman further suggests that the drowning of Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss symbolizes Eliot's 'drowning' of her own future as a mother and representative of ideal Victorian womanhood (84). Eliot, of course, was neither.

Zimmerman attempts to illuminate Eliot's perspective on motherhood and that perspective's influence on her literary portraits of mothers and motherhood. Unfortunately, Zimmerman goes no further. While she mentions specific characters from Eliot's novels to illustrate her points, Zimmerman does not make convincing links between biography and textual analysis of Eliot's portrayal of mothers. Moreover, she does not discuss Eliot's depiction of the mother-daughter relationship at all. Zimmerman's interpretation of Eliot's concept of motherhood is not well supported. Like many Eliot scholars, Zimmerman is unable to fully and convincingly link Eliot's literary depictions of absent or ineffectual mothers with her relationship to her own mother. However, for some authors, clear connections between reality and fiction can be made.

Jacqueline and Laura Berke's essay "Mothers and Daughters in Mrs Gaskell's Wives and Daughters : A Study of Elizabeth Gaskell's Last Novel" more convincingly uses biographical detail and textual scrutiny to illuminate Gaskell's portrayal of motherhood in Wives and Daughters. The Berkes, quoting from Edgar Wright's biography of Gaskell, link the depiction of the mother-daughter bond in this novel to Gaskell's personal concept of the family:

> ...Gaskell believed...[that] stability in the community at large and in society as a whole can exist only if a foundation is laid at the family level. When individual parents fail to provide such a foundation—when they withhold affection, or even sufficient protection; when they are themselves poor and unprincipled

> models of adulthood—then the character of the offspring must suffer, perhaps irrevocably. The apple, alas, will not—cannot—fall very far from the tree (96).

According to the Berkes, Gaskell's purpose in writing Wives and Daughters was to emphasize that healthy parenting is essential in creating healthy offspring (97). Indeed, they suggest that Cynthia is "psychically maimed" by her mother's neglect. Gaskell's depiction of Mrs Kirkpatrick's neglect of Cynthia and of the effects of that neglect embody her social message.

Gaskell's social message outlines basic sociological principles, namely that primary relationships influence and are influenced by society. Certainly Gaskell, like Eliot, Rossetti, Brontë and Barrett Browning, was aware of the "angel in the house" mythology. She would have also been aware that the Victorian mother stood for this convention and thus stood in the way of daughters exploring different avenues of experience. It would be remiss to discuss any of these authors' portrayals of women's interrelationships outside of their social context because the extent to which these literary portraits of women's interrelationships stray from or adhere to Victorian society's beliefs may demonstrate how the author interpreted her own and other women's experiences with the significant women in their lives. Therefore, part of my examination of the authors and their work will include an examination of some of the Victorian beliefs about women's interrelationships.

Finally, Tess Cosslett provides a provocative, though often problematic, examination of women's friendship in the nineteenth century in Woman to Woman: Female Friendship in Victorian Fiction.

Cosslett's book is valuable primarily for providing one of the few detailed textual analyses of female friendship in Victorian women's literature. However, Cosslett focusses her topic on "the relationship of female friendship to the structure of the conventional marriage-plot" (3). In other words, Cosslett studies female friendship in relation to the male characters in the novel. Cosslett further explains that "The importance of the *idea* [my emphasis] of female friendship can be measured by its crucial role in the narrative, rather than by the whole book being 'about' a female friendship" (3).

Like Gilbert and Gubar, who see Austen's use of sisters as a method of representing the fragmentation of the female psyche, Cosslett sees female friendship in Victorian women's literature as narrative tool. She states that:

> ...a common device...is for two women who are *potential* rivals to discover or declare solidarity, and to arrange between themselves which of them is to have the man...(3).

I would argue that female friendships are *major* components of the plots of Shirley, Aurora Leigh, and The Mill on the Floss rather than as a mere device to ensure that 'boy meets girl' or as articulations of the authors' explorations of the female psyche. Cosslett's study provides an excellent example of the traditional approach to women's literature—deriving from the assumption that the heroine's relationship with a male character is the work's *raison d'être.* Cosslett appears to accept uncritically this approach and the idea that Brontë, Eliot and Gaskell's novels are "about" the ultimate marriage of the heroine and little else. She refuses to do what Adrienne Rich in her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" describes as re-visioning. For Rich, re-visioning

in feminist literary criticism is "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction..."(Rich, 35).

Since Cosslett is unwilling to consider female friendships from a new critical direction, it is not surprising that she is unwilling to explore with 'fresh eyes' romantic friendship or lesbianism in Victorian women's novels. Cosslett, in a somewhat defensive disclaimer, suggests that lesbianism as a theme in Victorian women's literature is of interest only to lesbian critics with a personal agenda. She also states assuredly that "very rarely is a female friendship set up as a substitute for or in competition with a male-female relationship" (3). Cosslett also fails to recognize the presence of romantic and sexual language and images in letters written by and received from writers such as Brontë and Eliot. I, unlike Cosslett, intend to examine female friendships in the context of a continuum which includes romantic friendship and lesbianism and to show their dominance in the narratives. Moreover, this thesis, unlike Cosslett's study, examines The Mill on the Floss, Shirley, Aurora Leigh, Wives and Daughters, and "Goblin Market" with "fresh eyes" and proceeds on the assumption that these works are 'about' women's relationships with each other.

Gilbert and Gubar argue that "the female writer's battle for self-creation involves her in a revisionary process....In order to define herself as an author she must redefine the terms of her socialization" (49). It is my contention that Eliot, Barrett Browning, Gaskell, Brontë, and Rossetti's portrayals of women's relationships with each other are re-visionary. Victorian society, that is, male-dominated society, had created

two visions of woman to suit its own needs: as mother/angel to comfort man from the impersonal and brutal world of business and industrialization and to perpetuate through her daughters the angel in the house myth, or as the monster/whore responsible for disease and temptation. Women's collective identity was defined for them, not by them.

I believe that Eliot, Brontë, Gaskell, Barrett Browning, and Rossetti re-visioned women's experiences in their literature and, specifically, in their portrayals of female characters and of relationships between female characters. Their versions of women's relationships are not based solely on the assumptions, ideals, and expectations of women that their society held, but rather on a more complete, personal understanding of women's experience which included interaction with other women. As feminist critics, we must, as Rich suggests, participate in and honour this revisionary process by examining these texts with 'fresh' eyes and new critical perspectives.

Chapter 1

Mothers and Daughters

Mothers and daughters figure prominently in the thematic structures of Wives and Daughters by Elizabeth Gaskell, The Mill on the Floss, by George Eliot, Shirley by Charlotte Brontë, and Aurora Leigh by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. To achieve a better understanding of the literary portrayals of mother-daughter relationships in these works, we must begin with a look at the Victorian ideal of womanhood, epitomized by Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House." As I will describe in more detail later in this chapter, motherhood was at the centre of the Victorian feminine ideal. It is important, therefore, to begin with an examination of this ideal in order to place the literary depictions of mothers and daughters into a social context.[1]

"The Angel in the House" (1856) is one of a series of Patmore poems extolling the virtues of love and marriage. This tale of domestic bliss provides some insight into Victorian society's view of ideal womanhood, offering a vision of a woman who is innately angelic and pure. "The Angel in the House" consists of narrative verses which recount the courtship and marriage of Felix and Honoria (whose names significantly mean "Happiness" and "Honour"). While "The Angel in

the House" itself is a fragment, a series of preludes which introduce each narrative section provide a complete picture of the ideal Victorian woman. It is in these preludes that Patmore fully outlines the narrator's philosophical musings on love, marriage, and the divinity of women.

In the prologue to the poem, the narrator considers the subject of his poem:

> 'What should I sing, how win a name,
> 'Considering well what theme unsung,
> 'What reason worth the cost of rhyme,
> 'Remains to loose the poet's tongue
> 'In these last days, the dregs of time,
> 'Learn that to me, though born so late,
> 'There does, beyond desert, befall
> '(May my great fortune make me great!)
> 'The first of themes sung last of all
> (1.Prologue.3).

The narrator's wife wonders what great theme her husband is contemplating:

> '...What is it, Dear? The Life
> 'Of Arthur, or Jerusalem's Fall?' (1.Prologue.4).

He replies, "'Neither: your gentle self, my Wife...'" (1.Prologue.4). In the verses that follow, several themes emerge in Patmore's exploration of feminine virtue which illuminate Patmore's vision of women.

One of the major themes of the poem is the innate divinity of women. In Patmore's vision, women are not only supernaturally virtuous, but literally heaven-sent. In the prologue, for instance, the narrator wonders:

> 'Were you for mortal woman meant?
> 'Your praises give a hundred clues
> 'To mythological intent!' (1.Prologue.4).

Similarly, the narrator later suggests that:

> She seem'd expressly sent below
> To teach our erring minds to see
> The rhythmic change of time's swift flow
> As part of still eternity (1.1.3).

In Canto 10, the narrator states, "I loved her in the name of God/And for the ray she was of him..." (1.10.4). When Felix attends church with Honoria, woman's divinity is once again confirmed:

> And, when we knelt, she seem'd to be
> An angel teaching me to pray...(1.10.6).

Throughout the poem, the recurrent image of the rose reiterates the narrator's deification of woman. The rose has traditionally been symbolic of the Virgin Mary, "Queen of Heaven," whose purity, grace and obedience is held as the model for all women. For example, the title of the first prelude verse of Canto 4 in Book 1, "The Rose of the World," suggests that woman is the *earthly* version of the Virgin Mary. Moreover, this verse describes the creation of woman whose "...disposition is devout,/Her countenance angelical" (1.4. Prelude. 1).

Another theme in "The Angel in the House" is woman's self-abnegation. Throughout the poem, Patmore describes a woman who derives pleasure from pleasing others, whose feelings are mere reflections of her husband's, and who is indefatigable in her love and care for her husband . The narrator explains that:

> Girls love to see the men in whom
> They invest their vanities admired (1.6.3).

Similarly, the reader is told that:

> Man must be pleased; but him to please
> Is woman's pleasure (1.9.Prelude.1).

One source of women's self-abnegation, according to Patmore's model, is an awareness of their intellectual inferiority to men:

> His words, which still instruct, but so
> That this applause seems still implied,
> 'How wise in all she ought to know,
> 'How ignorant of all beside! ' (2.2.Prelude.1).

What women "ought to know" is limited to the service of others and domestic duties. Women's self-abnegation is most clearly stated in the following passage:

> Her will's indomitably bent
> On more submissiveness to him;
> To him she'll cleave, for him forsake
> Father's and mother's fond command!
> He is her lord, for he can take
> Hold of her faint heart with his hand (2.2. Prelude.1).

The image of the man holding the woman's "faint heart" is particularly powerful, implying that he controls every breath she takes. However, this image is consistent with the theme of male conquest which permeates the poem.

Despite women's divinity and intense, though limited, power, men must conquer them in order to possess them. Further, women will love them all the more for their "mastering air" (2.2.Prelude.1). In a prelude to Canto 12 in Book 1, for example, Patmore describes "The Chace" [sic]:

> ...Should she be won
> It must not be believed or thought
> She yields; she's chased to death, undone
> Surprised, and violently caught (1.12.Prelude.1).

Indeed, the woman as individual must 'die' in order to function as an angel in the house. In order to be subsumed by her role, her self must be 'violently caught' and 'killed' by her prospective husband.

A fourth theme which emerges from "The Angel in the House" is that of women as possessors of the power of charm and love. With this theme, Patmore complicates his portrait of women by introducing moral ambivalence. In the first prelude of Canto 2 in Book 1, the narrator suggests that it is woman "who wields the power of love" (1.2. Preludes.1). Also, in Book 1, Canto 12, the reader is told that women take pleasure in their "power to charm" (1.12.4). However, in Book 2 the narrator makes his most ambivalent statement about women's 'power' over men:

> To the sweet folly of the dove
> She joins the cunning of the snake,
> To rivet and exalt his love;
> Her mode of candour is deceit (2.8.Prelude.1).

This passage implies that woman simultaneously embodies the purity and goodness of the dove and the deceitfulness and cunning of the snake. This passage also clearly articulates (male) society's ambivalence towards women—she is either (or, perhaps, alternatively) madonna or whore. In addition, the Biblical allusion to Eden's serpent is obvious. While woman is the "rose of the world," she is also the snake in the rose garden. Thus in Patmore's Edenic world, woman is both Eve, the passive recipient of the Serpent's gift of knowledge *and* the actively evil and deceitful serpent.

Patmore's description of the angel in the house has become far better known than the poem itself. Feminist critics, while abhorring its message, have nonetheless found it an invaluable symbol of women's

oppression. Virginia Woolf explained in her essay "Professions for Women" that:

> [The angel in the house] used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that I at last killed her.... She died hard (1384-85).

Hellerstein, Hume, and Offen explain that "The Angel in the House"

> is a very full expression of the idealization of womanhood that is central to the theory about woman's separate domestic sphere. The angel is introduced as purer than Eve, but she is not simply innocent; she exercises power in secret and subtle ways (134).

The 'angel in the house' embodies the qualities Patmore desires most in women: purity, goodness, obedience, and self-abnegation. She is man's "holy refuge" from the world outside the home (Gilbert and Gubar 24). It is because "The Angel in the House" represents such a "full expression of the idealization of [Victorian] womanhood" that modern feminist scholars such as Gilbert and Gubar, Carol Christ, and Elaine Showalter have used it as a model for understanding and describing Victorian attitudes towards women.

I believe there are two reasons why the 'angel in the house' paradigm is particularly relevant to my analysis of mother-daughter relationships. First, the ideal Victorian woman and the ideal Victorian mother were inextricably linked. In fact, motherhood was considered by Victorians to be the peak experience in a woman's life. As Anderson and Zinsser note:

> From the mid-eighteenth-century on, generations of moralists and writers—many of them women—had followed Rousseau's argument that woman's highest glory was to devote herself to motherhood (155).

An understanding of the ideal of Victorian womanhood is therefore essential to an understanding of the ideal of Victorian motherhood.

One need not look any farther than the etching on the cover of Hellerstein, Hume, and Offen's Victorian Women to understand the emphasis Victorian society placed on motherhood (see figure 1). The etching depicts the "Stages Of Woman's Life From Cradle to Grave." A woman stands on each step of an arch. On the ascending steps, the woman grows from infancy to adolescence to early adulthood. The woman on the penultimate step holds an infant. The verse that corresponds to this figure reads: "Now bearing fruit/she rears her boys,/And tastes a mother's/pains and joys." On the uppermost stair, the woman is portrayed at fifty, followed by a depiction of her on a lower step at sixty. The verses for these two figures read respectively: "Like a sparkling fountain/gushing forth,/She proves a blessing/to the earth."; "A busy housewife/full of cares,/The daily food/her hand prepares." As the woman ages, her role as mother diminishes. The most shocking of these verses is that which corresponds to the image of the woman at ninety.[2] This verse reads: "A useless cumberer/on the earth./From house to house/they send her forth." The first third of a woman's life, this illustration tells us, is accepted as preparation for marriage and motherhood. The zenith of her life is the years spent raising "her boys."Once her role as mother is complete, she has outlived her social usefulness; she "listlessly waits for death."

The second reason 'the angel in the house' ideal is significant relates to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's observation that the mother-daughter relationship in the nineteenth century was based on an "apprenticeship

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Figure 1: Stages of Woman's Life From The Cradle To The Grave

system" (64). Essentially, this system facilitated the perpetuation of the feminine values embodied by the 'angel in the house' ideal . As Smith-Rosenberg points out:

> In those families where the daughter followed the mother into a life of traditional domesticity, mothers and other older women carefully trained their daughters in the arts of housewifery and motherhood (64).

Because the angel in the house provides us with a helpful model for understanding the Victorian mother-daughter relationship, we canapply it as a template to the literary depictions of mother-daughter relationships in the four novels examined in this chapter. This method will allow us to establish the extent to which the authors have re-visioned mother-daughter relationships.

Feminist historians agree that the 'angel in the house' ideal included "a *natural* [my emphasis] sympathy and identification between mother and daughter" (Anderson and Zinsser 156; Smith-Rosenberg). Specifically, Smith-Rosenberg comments that:

> The diaries and letters of both mothers and daughters attest to their closeness and mutual emotional dependency. Daughters routinely discussed their mothers' health and activities with their friends, expressed anxiety when their mothers were ill and concern for their cares. Expressions of hostility which we would today consider routine on the part of mothers and daughters seem to have been uncommon indeed. On the contrary,...the normal relationship between mothers and daughters was one of sympathy and understanding (64).

There is evidence to support Smith-Rosenberg's assertion; for example, in a letter to her mother dated 1845, Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell writes:

> ...I'm very much obliged to you for your interest in my soul which is quite natural as you had some hand in giving it to me, but you need not be uneasy for I think a great deal on interesting serious subjects, read the bible and pray in a very good fashion so all will come right presently.
>
> Now my dear mother believe me full of natural affection and with a desire for your growing fat (Blackwell 94).

Not all mother-daughter relationships were so warm and good-natured, however. Unlike Dr. Blackwell and her mother, Florence Nightingale and her mother had little in common (Payne). Their difficult relationship was exacerbated by Florence's decision to make nursing a legitimate and autonomous profession for women. Despite her vehement oppositions to her daughter's ambitions, she was quick to boast about Florence when she became famous (Payne). Florence did not boast about her mother. In 1857, she wrote:

> The REAL fathers and mothers of the human race are NOT the fathers and mothers of the flesh.... For every one of my 18,000 children, for every one of these poor tiresome Harley Street creatures, I have expended more motherly feeling and action in a week than my mother has expended on me in 37 years...(Nightingale 108).

Although there is very little historical data that would allow us to draw definitive conclusions about the typical dynamics of Victorian mother-daughter relationships, the information in these letters does suggest that the 'angel in the house' ideal does not match every Victorian woman's experience. Further, we can surmise from the content of the letters that the "natural sympathy and affection" that was expected to exist between mothers and daughters may have simply been

another part of the 'angel in the house' myth not always borne out in reality.

Like Florence Nightingale, George Eliot seems to have been ambivalent about her mother. Evidently, Eliot had a very close relationship with her father, but was never very close to her mother (Haight). She apparently never forgave her mother for sending her to boarding school, although Gordon Haight admits that "of her feeling for her mother one can gather little" (6). While critics generally eschew direct identification of Maggie Tulliver as Mary Anne Evans and Mrs Tulliver as Christiana Evans, it is accepted that Eliot's The Mill on the Floss is an autobiographical work with obvious parallels to Eliot's own life (Byatt 9). For instance, Gordon Haight points out that:

> Chrissey's blonde curls were always neat, while Mary Anne's straight light-brown hair defied all measures of control. Chrissey's clothes were always tidy, delighting her critical Pearson aunts...(10).

Eliot's behaviour and appearance were somewhat less than her mother had hoped for; like Maggie, she was difficult to keep clean while her sister Chrissey, in true Lucy Deane form, was 'neat as a pin.' Haight suggests that Mrs Evans was indifferent to the young Mary Anne Evans and that whatever support and affection Eliot received at home came from her father or her governess (10). Based on these critical interpretations and supporting evidence, Eliot's biographers generally assume that Eliot's relationship with her mother was less than ideal.

The extent to which George Eliot used her own relationship with her mother to inform the fictional relationship between Maggie and Mrs. Tulliver can never be known. Had Eliot said more about her

mother, it would be easier to make comparisons. I agree with Jennifer Uglow's assertion that Eliot's reticence about her mother is "hardly enough on which to build a theory of hostility and rejection" (17). However, Uglow's assertion fails to consider the continuum of emotions that may have been part of Eliot's relationship with her mother. I suggest that it is more likely that Eliot may have at times felt hostility and rejection, at times felt love and security, and, at times, many other emotions between those two extremes. Uglow suggests that Mrs. Evans' "lack of response" to Eliot is one reason why Eliot says little of her mother. However, another explanation of Eliot's reticence regarding her mother is the inappropriateness of voicing publicly ill feelings towards one's mother. Regardless of Eliot's actual feelings towards her mother, it does seem clear that their relationship was not close. The natural sympathy and affection expected to exist between Victorian mothers and daughters appears to have been limited if not absent. This absence may contribute to the fact that the majority of Eliot's fictional heroines are motherless. While Rosamund, Gwendolen Harleth, and Maggie Tulliver have mothers, those mothers are all portrayed as inadequate in some way (Zimmerman, "A Mother's History" 82). Whether Eliot's literary depictions of the mother-daughter bond were created from personal experience or from Eliot's imagination is really of little consequence. The painstaking realism with which Eliot portrays Maggie and Mrs Tulliver's relationship provides perhaps the best insight into Eliot's thoughts not just on motherhood, but also on the inhibiting effect that mothers have on daughters.

The Mill on the Floss was published in 1860. Queen Victoria had been on the throne for 23 years. In that time, the sacredness of the family had become a concept entrenched in everyday life largely due to the example set by the Queen herself. As A.S. Byatt notes in the introduction to her edition of the novel, The Mill on the Floss is a "history of unfashionable families." It is also the history of one "unfashionable" Victorian mother and daughter, and, although Maggie and Mrs Tulliver's relationship is not the key relationship in The Mill on the Floss, Eliot treats it with as much psycholgical depth and realism as she does her depiction of Maggie's relationship with Tom, the more commonly analyzed relationship in novel. The depiction of Maggie and Mrs Tulliver's relationship warrants far more critical attention than it has received.

Maggie Tulliver's relationship with her mother differs dramatically from the Victorian ideal. In particular, Maggie exasperates Mrs Tulliver because her behaviour and appearance embarrassingly contrast with those of her cousin Lucy Deane. On many occasions, Mrs Tulliver wishes Lucy were her child instead of Maggie:

> '...for my children are so awk'ard wi' their aunts and uncles. Maggie's ten times naughtier when they come than she is other days....And there's Lucy Deane's such a good child–you may set her on a stool, and there she'll sit for an hour together and never offer to get off–I can't help loving the child as if she was my own, and I'm sure she's more like *my* child than sister Deane's...(96; bk. 1, ch. 6).

The fundamental issue between Maggie and Mrs Tulliver is Maggie's non-conformity to the feminine ideal. Lucy Deane represents the perfect, "mild, blonde, goody-goody" angel in the house—obedient, tidy, pretty,

talented, deferential (Uglow 3). Maggie—intelligent, headstrong, impetuous, untidy, disobedient, passionate—could not be more different. Mrs Tulliver is painfully aware of this contrast—an awareness made all the more acute by her hyper-vigilant sisters

Like the chorus in Greek drama, the Dodson sisters express the norms and values of their society. For example, in Victorian society where girls were expected to learn "to be obedient, to be self-sacrificing, to put others first, to defer," the conventional Dodson sisters continually rebuke Mrs Tulliver for Maggie's behaviour (Anderson and Zinsser 157); Mrs Pullet exclaims after Maggie pushes Lucy into the mud, "'There it is, Bessy–it's what I've been telling you,...it's your childen–there's no knowing what they'll come to'" (165; bk. 1, ch. 10). Throughout the novel, the Dodson sisters chide Mrs Tulliver about her children, her boorish husband, and her life as a whole. In a conversation with Mrs Tulliver, Mrs Pullet, perhaps the most diplomatic of Mrs Tulliver's three sisters, says:

> 'Well, your husband *is* awkard, you know,
> Bessy....He's never behaved quite so pretty
> to our family as he should do. And the children
> take after him—that boy's very mischievious
> and runs away from his aunts and uncles, and
> the gell's rude and brown (157; bk.1, ch. 9).

Like that of the Greek chorus, the role of the Dodson sisters in The Mill on the Floss is to draw attention to the disparity between the ideal and reality. The ideal girl that Victorian society cherishes is embodied by Lucy Deane. The reality that the world contains both Lucy Deane and Maggie Tulliver has consequences for Maggie, for Mrs Tulliver, and for their relationship.

Maggie's unconventionality makes Mrs Tulliver suffer from inadequacy, guilt, embarrassment, and self-pity. On two occasions, the novel clearly dramatizes Mrs Tulliver's fear that she will be judged harshly by others because of Maggie's behaviour:

> 'Folks 'ull think it's a judgment on me as I've got such a child—they'll think I've done summat wicked' (78; bk. 1, ch. 4)

and

> ... the thought pressed upon her that people would think she had done something wicked to deserve her maternal troubles...(165; bk. 1, ch. 10).

It is important to note here that in both the above cases, Mrs Tulliver refers to 'folks' and 'people' as the source of censure. 'Folks' and 'people' represent 'everyone'; 'everyone' represents society. It is society's censure that Mrs Tulliver fears.

Maggie too feels inadequate; she too feels censure. Because Mrs Tulliver identifies herself and has been identified by others as a failure, she sees Maggie as another failure. As a child, Maggie is criticized for both her behaviour and her appearance—which she can do nothing about. Yet, she tries. When scolded about her unmaneagable hair, she cuts it off, hoping she has solved the problem and avoided further criticism. She:

> thought beforehand chiefly of her own deliverance from her teasing hair and teasing remarks about it, and also of the triumph she should have over her mother and her aunts by this very decided course of action: she didn't want her hair to look pretty...she only wanted people...not to find fault with her (120-21; bk.1, ch. 7).

As an adolescent, Maggie continues to search for acceptance. Maggie reads The Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis and

internalizes its message of self-renunciation. She renounces the books that feed her starving intellect and all things that give her pleasure, devoting herself instead to the belief that "true peace lay in resignation, in renunciation of self" (Haight 66-67). Inevitably, her efforts fail. Philip Wakem ignites her intellectual passions; Stephen Guest, her physical passions.

Maggie, like her mother, has extreme reactions to criticism. The more Maggie strives to avoid criticism, the more distant her goal becomes. The final failure in her struggle to avoid censure occurs after she returns from her journey with Steven Guest. Knowing that she has humiliated herself, her family , and Lucy Deane, Maggie returns to the Mill to seek refuge. Tom refuses to let her stay. Ironically, this scene is the only one in which Mrs Tulliver expresses maternal love and tenderness towards Maggie:

> 'My child! I'll go with you. You've got a mother'
> (614; bk. 7, ch. 1).

Though Mrs Tulliver's announcement may be a revelation to Maggie, she welcomes it nonetheless. Because of Mrs Tulliver's desire that Maggie be different and Maggie's inability to be so, their mother-daughter bond never germinated. But in this one expression of maternal love, Maggie and her mother's relationship blooms for one fleeting and precious moment that stands in contrast to everything that has gone before.

Maggie's relationship with her mother embodies the struggle between a mother who embraces her times and a daughter who is imprisoned by her times. Uglow describes Maggie as being "caught at the wrong moment in history" (3). Indeed, Maggie's death seems the

only possible outcome for a woman who cannot be what society demands her to be. Not only does society, as exemplified by the Dodson sisters, reject Maggie, but Maggie rejects society's expectations of her. Maggie's rejection of the ideal that oppresses her occurs symbolically when she pushes Lucy Deane, the embodiment of the 'angel in the house,' into the mud. Mrs Tulliver's role as mother is to pass on the angel in the house ideal to her 'apprentice' daughter. However, Maggie rejects this apprenticeship from the outset of the novel because it works against her struggle for self-realization. Clearly, Eliot's depiction of Maggie's relationship with Mrs Tulliver challenges Victorian society's attitudes towards mothers and daughters.

In Wives and Daughters, Elizabeth Gaskell provides a vision of the mother-daughter relationship even more divergent from the ideal than Eliot's. While Eliot's vision highlights the pressure on women to conform to the ideal, Gaskell's emphasizes the issue of mothering and the 'maternal instinct.' Specifically, Gaskell depicts a mother who abandons her daughter emotionally and physically, a mother who is jealous, self-serving and emotionally corrupt.

Key similarities link Molly and Cynthia's experience and Gaskell's own childhood experiences. Like Cynthia, Gaskell was sent to boarding school as an adolescent. As Winifred Gérin outlines in her biography of Gaskell, Elizabeth's father, who had remarried and had children with his second wife, did not visit Elizabeth at school. When she did finally visit her father and his new family, she, like Molly Gibson, found that she disliked her stepmother.

Of all the characters discussed in this chapter, Cynthia Kirkpatrick is perhaps the most damaged by her relationship with her mother. As an adult, Cynthia is a manipulative woman searching for someone who will truly love her. In this desperate search, she accepts the affections of almost every man who offers them. Tess Cosslett observes that:

> Cynthia is charming, manipulative, both fickle and indiscreet in her relationships with men, and incapable of love. But this combination of dangerous traits is present as the result of her deprivation of maternal love in her childhood (28).

Although Cynthia'a relationship with her mother is rarely openly adversarial, it is decidedly lacking in warmth and sincerity. Unlike the loving and devoted 'angel in the house mother,' Mrs Kirkpatrick finds having a child bothersome, a burden that interferes with her getting the most out of life. For instance, early in the novel, Lady Cuxhaven expresses her discomfort about "the way in which [Mrs Kirkpatrick] seems to send her daughter away from her so much" (125). Later, we are told of Mrs Kirkpatrick's "dislike of girls in the abstract" and of her disappointment that she gave birth to a daughter rather than a son (159). A son could have inherited a title which would have allowed Mrs Kirkpatrick to live in comfort. Moreover, the beautiful Cynthia is an unwelcome reminder to Mrs Kirkpatrick that she is no longer beautiful. Mrs Kirkpatrick's jealousy is so great that the thought of her daughter attending her wedding to Mr Gibson is abhorrent to her:

> ...she had listened quietly to Mr Gibson's proposal that Molly and Cynthia should be the two bridesmaids, still she felt how disagreeable it would be to her to have her young daughter

> flashing out her beauty by the side of her faded bride, her mother...(156).

The idea that Cynthia will "flash out" her beauty indicates Mrs Kirkpatrick's profound insecurity. To Mrs Kirkpatrick, Cynthia's beauty is an active gesture of defiance and aggression intended to humiliate her. To ensure that Cynthia is kept from attending the wedding, Mrs Kirkpatrick keeps the money provided by Mr Gibson for Cynthia's journey:

> If the letter had been written and the money sent off that day...Cynthia would have been bridesmaid to her mother. But a hundred little interuptions came in the way of letter writing: and the value affixed to the money increased; money had been so much needed, so hardly earned in Mrs Kirkpatrick's life....So she persuaded herself, afresh, that it would be unwise to disturb Cynthia at her studies (174).

While keeping the money is a reprehensible act, the fact that Mrs Kirkpatrick does so without remorse is even more repugnant. Gaskell hints early in the novel that Mrs Kirkpatrick is a less than angelic mother.

Cynthia and Mrs Kirkpatrick's relationship bears little resemblance to the Victorian ideal. On the one hand, Mrs Kirkpatrick's disdain for motherhood and for "girls in the abstract" contradicts the notion that motherhood is a woman's greatest joy in life. On the other hand, Mrs Kirkpatrick's regret that she did not give birth to a boy reiterates the importance given to mothers and sons in the verse which appears on the cover of Hellerstein, Hume, and Offen's Victorian Women. Interestingly, Gaskell emphasizes in Mrs Kirkpatrick the same egocentric ambition that Eliot emphasizes in the Dodson sisters. Perhaps

these portrayals were intended to correct Victorian society's view of women. The apprenticeship system between Mrs Kirkpatrick and Cynthia is a distorted version of the one Smith-Rosenberg outlines (Smith-Rosenberg 64). The skills passed on from Mrs Kirkpatrick to Cynthia include manipulativeness, triviality, coquetry, and deceit.

Given Mrs Kirkpatrick's indifference towards Cynthia, it is little wonder then that Cynthia is embittered and lonely. It is also little wonder that Cynthia feels she loves Molly more than anyone. Molly is the first person Cynthia has known who loves and supports her. The idea that a girl could love someone more than her own mother surprises Molly. In response to Molly's surprise, Cynthia explains that she does not believe "love for one's mother comes quite by nature" (257). That the love between mother and daughter is not innate is a remarkable assertion because it rejects the Victorian faith in the 'natural sympathy and identification' between mother and daughter.

The fact that Cynthia, who has a mother, should be far less well adjusted than Molly who has never known her mother also contradicts Victorian beliefs about mothers and daughters. What is the difference between these two young women? The difference, and this would seem to be Gaskell's point, between Cynthia and Molly is that Molly has been *mothered* and Cynthia has not. When explaining to Molly how she has been negelected by her mother, Cynthia muses, "...if only I had fallen into wise, good hands" (456). Molly was fortunate to have the wise, good hands of her father, Mr and Mrs Hamley and the Miss Brownings.

Gaskell knew, of course, what it was to be mothered without having a mother. Her cousin and aunt who took her as an infant, her uncles and her brother all provided her with the wise, good hands she needed (Gérin). While Gaskell depicts a mother-daughter relationship that is the antithesis of the ideal, it does not appear that re-visioning the mother-daughter relationship was her primary goal. Rather, Gaskell appears to be underscoring the importance of nurturing and 'mothering' a child. The sexual source of that nurturing does not appear to have been particluarly important to Gaskell.

Mothering and abandonment are also themes explored in Shirley. Brontë's mother died when she was five years old. She and her siblings were left in the care of their grief–stricken father, who did not like children, and their aunt, Elizabeth Branwell (Fraser 28-29). Though their aunt Elizabeth was a stable presence in their lives, she was not a strong one. As Rebecca Fraser notes in her biography of the Brontës, "None of Brontë children's letters except Branwell's includes an affectionate mention of her" (29). The dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship were therefore not part of Brontë's experience and mother-daughter relationships do not figure largely in her fiction. Indeed, Caroline Helstone is the only Brontë heroine who has a mother (Fraser 29). And although Caroline yearns deeply for her mother and imagines what she might be like, Brontë does not give their relationship nearly the detail and depth that she gives the relationship between Shirley and Caroline.

Caroline Helstone wonders what it would be like to know the mother from whom she was separated as an infant. The information

Caroline has about her mother is sketchy at best. For the most part, Caroline's image of her mother is composed of the few scraps of information she can collect from her uncle. Caroline knows

> ...she had a mother; though Mr Helstone never spoke to her of that mother; though she could not remember having seen her: but that she was alive she knew. This mother was then a drunkard's wife: what had *their* marriage been? (Brontë 126).

Caroline's stoic uncle seems annoyed by her need for information about her mother. He attempts to dissuade Caroline from making further inquiries by telling her that her mother does not want to see her:

> '...she thinks nothing of you; she never inquires about you; I have reason to believe she does not wish to see you' (127).

Although Caroline does not realize the falsity of Helstone's assertion until Mrs Pryor is introduced, Caroline continues to yearn for her mother. Indeed, this "mother-want" overwhelms Caroline who falls gravely ill. Caroline's frustration with the emotional barrenness of her life is summed up in the following passage:

> At last the life she led reached the point when it seemed she could bear it no longer; that she must seek and find a change somehow, or her heart and head would fail under the pressure which strained them. She longed to leave Briarfield, to go to some very distant place. She longed for something else: the deep, secret, anxious yearning to discover and know her mother strengthened daily; but with the desire was coupled a doubt, a dread—if she knew her, could she love her? (201).

This deep, secret, anxious desire foreshadows Caroline's introduction to Mrs Pryor.

Brontë's depiction of the mother-daughter relationship does not quite fit our template until Caroline actually meets Mrs Pryor.[4] Caroline's pining for her absent mother is clearly in keeping with convention. However, ideal mothers do not allow their daughters to be taken from them and if they do they make every effort to find their children again. As the story progresses, however, Caroline and Mrs Pryor's relationship evolves to become a very good example of the ideal mother-daughter relationship. Caroline is drawn immediately to Mrs Pryor as though she has a sixth sense:

> ...Miss Helstone..sympathized with the stranger [Mrs Pryor], and knowing by experience what was good for the timid, took a seat quietly near her, and began to talk to her with a gentle ease (209).

Caroline and Mrs Pryor's immediate rapport exemplifies the Victorian belief in the 'natural,' that is, innate understanding and sympathy between mother and daughter. Pauline Nestor suggests that Caroline and Mrs Pryor bond quickly because of their "sense of shared injustice and ill-treatment at the hands of [Caroline's] father..." (116). I believe the reason for Caroline and Mrs Pryor's connection is far more simple than that. Once the reunion takes place, all things between mother and daughter are as they should be according to the Victorian ideal. It is almost as though there had been no separation. Caroline calls Mrs Pryor 'mother' immediately, seemingly needing no time to absorb the truth so abruptly revealed to her. Caroline and Mrs Pryor bond quickly simply because they are mother and daughter. According to the Victorian ideal, no other reason is necessary.

It is plausible that the mother-daughter reunion in Shirley is wishful thinking on Brontë's part. As Rebecca Fraser explains:

> In later life Charlotte, although five at the time of her mother's death, said that she could remember almost nothing about her....Perhaps she consciously tried to blot out this period of her life because it was too painful to live with (29).[3]

This pain likely included the memory of her mother's death and the terrible sense of loss that ensued. Brontë may also have created Caroline and Mrs Pryor's relationship out of a dream of a similar reunion in her own life. Or, having never experienced a relationship with a mother, she may have created Caroline and Mrs Pryor's bond out of the snippets of understanding she gathered from the society in which she lived. In any case, the vision of the mother-daughter relationship that Brontë ultimately creates in Shirley very much adheres to the Victorian ideal.

Of the authors discussed in this chapter, Elizabeth Barrett Browning enjoyed the longest relationship with her mother who died when Elizabeth was twenty-two. Elizabeth's relationship with her mother was very positive. Mrs Barrett loved her children and was devoted to their education. She taught Elizabeth French and encouraged her to write (Mermin14). Dedicating an early poem to her mother, Barrett Browning wrote: "to her from whom I derived the little knowledge I possess" (qtd. in Mermin 14). The loss was hard for Elizabeth who saw her mother as a kind, loving woman whose spirit had been worn down and finally broken by her father (Cooper 35-36).

Like Aurora Leigh, the heroine of Barrett Browning's epic of the same name, Elizabeth wanted more out of life than traditional women's roles offered her; she wanted access to some of the opportunities and

privileges that men enjoyed. Although her mother supported Elizabeth's creativity, she could not see past the traditional roles of women and fully condone Elizabeth's "[bypassing] feminine domestic virtues' for a career as a writer" (Dally 18). As Dorothy Mermin notes, Elizabeth lived in a home where "gender roles were clearly marked and enforced, to the detriment of women" (13). To become the great Victorian poet that she was, Barrett Browning had to explore beyond the boundaries set for women in her time, boundaries that her parents enforced. Aurora Leigh mirrors Barrett Browning's struggle to become an artist is a world that does not readily allow women to aspire beyond the domestic ideal. Aurora Leigh is the story of a motherless woman's journey beyond the boundaries of traditional gender roles. It is also the story of a mother and daughter.

From the outset of the poem, the reader is aware that Aurora's mother has left a profound impression on her, even after many years:

> I, writing thus, am still what men might call young;
> I have not so far left the coasts of life
> To travel inward, that I cannot hear
> That murmur of the outer Infinite
> Which unweaned babes smile at in their sleep
> When wondered at for smiling; not so far,
> But I still catch my mother at her post
> Beside the door, with finger up,
> 'Hush, hush–here's too much noise!' while her
> sweet eyes
> Leap forward, taking part against her word
> In the child's riot (Barrett Browning 1. 9-19).

The one physical feature that remains in Aurora's memory her mother's "rare blue eyes" (1. 30). Aurora mourns both the thought of her mother and the person who was her mother. Interestingly, Aurora chooses to describe herself as 'unmothered' rather than motherless. The

distinction between the two is clear: to be motherless is to lack the individual who gave one birth; to be unmothered is to be without the influence, care, nurturing, and attention attributed to the role.

Aurora's father too considers her to be unmothered. In an effort to find her a surrogate mother, he takes Aurora to live in the mountains of Italy so that she can be mothered by Nature:

> ...He left our Florence and made haste to hide
> Himself, his prattling child, and silent grief,
> Among the mountains above Pelago;
> Because unmothered babes, he thought, had need
> Of mother nature more than others use (1. 109-113).

Aurora does feel a filial bond with her Italian home. As she sails away from Italy, she describes, using female images, the landscape disappearing into the horizon:

> The white hills, the blue hills, my Italy,
> Drawn backward from the shuddering steamer-deck,
> Like one in anger drawing back her skirts
> Which supplicants catch at (1. 232-235).

Aurora's painful farewell to the only home she has ever known parallels Barrett Browning's loss of her childhood home, Hope End. As Dorothy Mermin explains:

> The loss of her home was a wrenching violation
> of her strong family affection, her memory of
> her mother, and the deep sense of place that
> informed many of her early poems: it tore up
> her roots and ended her childhood (47).

For Barrett Browning, Hope End was the connection to her childhood and her mother just as, for Aurora, Italy is the link to her mother. When Aurora returns to Italy as an adult, she uses maternal images to describe the reunion:

> And now I come, my Italy,
> My own hills! Are you 'ware of me, my hills,
> How I burn toward you? do you feel tonight
> The urgency and yearning of my soul,
> As sleeping mothers feel the sucking babe
> And smile?...(5.1266-1271).

Italy figures in another link between Aurora and her mother—an oil painting commissioned after her mother's death. In remembering this time, Aurora recounts how she was initially startled by the painting as the glow of the fireplace animates the image:

> ... a sudden flame
> Which lighted made alive
> That picture of my mother on the wall (1. 125-127).

The young Aurora becomes fixated by the painting, staring at it for hours as if mesmerized by a hidden power. She creates stories about the woman in the portrait based on what she

> ...last read or heard or dreamed,
> Abhorrent, admirable, beautiful,
> Pathetical, or ghastly, or grotesque
> With still that face...(1. 146-151).

This list of contradictory characteristics is indicative of Aurora's ambivalence towards her mother's image. Over time, Aurora develops a mystical relationship with "that face." She explains that it

> ...kept the mystical levels of all forms,
> Hates, fears, and admirations, was by turns
> Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch, and sprite,
> A dauntless Muse who eyes a dreadful Fate,
> A living Psyche who loses sight of Love,
> A still Medusa with mild and milky brows
> All curled up and clothed upon with snakes
> Whose slime falls fast as sweat will; or
> Anon Our lady of the Passion, Stabbed with swords
> Where the Babe sucked; or Lamia in her first
> Moonlight pallor, ere she shrunk and blinked
> And shuddered down to the unclean...(1. 151-163).

In this passage, there are a number of symbols to consider. First, the Christian and folkloric images of ghost, fiend, angel, fairy, witch, and sprite are important because they belong to the world of imagination. The Muse alludes to Calliope, the Muse of epic poetry. The line "A dauntless Muse who eyes a dreadful Fate" then reflects Barrett Browning's use of the epic form in the poem and foreshadows Aurora's own attempt to write an epic poem. Alternatively, as both mother and Muse, the painting represents the struggle between traditional and non-traditional life. Barret Browning's mother, who refused to condone her daughter's wish to become a writer, nevertheless evokes her creative powers. The image of the mother/Muse then represents the struggle between the iconoclast woman and the rebellious writer. The mother/Muse foresees a "dreadful" fate should Aurora choose to be a writer—alienation from both the domestic world of women and the intellectual world of men. Aurora's relationship with the portrait of her mother is therefore highly ambivalent. On the one hand, the ideal mother represents love, comfort, and protection. On the other hand, the real mother represents oppressive traditional expectations for women.

The image of Lamia is another important symbol. In Greek mythology, the Lamia is agrandly evil creature whose function is to frighten children into submission. According to the myth, Lamia is favoured by Zeus. Jealous of this favour, Hera abducts Lamia's children. In retaliation, Lamia devotes the rest of her life to "enticing and devouring children" (Benét's 547). Lamia also appears in John Keats' poem "Lamia," published in 1820. In this poem, Lycius falls in love with the beautiful Lamia and marries her. At the wedding reception, held

against Lamia's wishes, Lycius' friend Apollonius realizes that Lamia's beauty is an illusion. By calling her name, Appolonius changes Lamia into her true serpentine form. Unable to accept the truth about Lamia, Lycius dies.

Both myths figure in Aurora's relationship with the painting of her mother. Like the Lamia who devours children, the painting devours Aurora's "childish wits" (1. 174). Like Lycius in Keats' poem, Aurora knows only an idealized image of her mother. Would knowledge of the real person reveal something disappointing? Was Barrett Browning's own mother her Lamia? Did Barrett Browning see her mother as a contradiction: supportive and encouraging on the one hand; bound to traditional gender roles and expectations on the other?

Barrett Browning's struggle to reconcile the real and ideal aspects of her mother parallels the depiction of Aurora's relationship with the painting. As Dorothy Mermin notes:

> ...Mary Moulten-Barrett could not provide either by precept or by example a coherent model of womanhood suitable for a poet. Instead, her submission to her husband's increasingly tyrannical sway was an example that her daughter pitied, scorned, feared, and for many years—at least outwardly—imitated (14).

As a poet, Barrett Browning was caught between her desire to explore non-traditional possibilities and the reality of traditional women's roles reinforced by her mother. Barrett Browning was in fact fettered by the 'apprenticeship system.' Aurora Leigh, on the other hand, is not. Because her mother exists only in a painting, Aurora is able to transcend the angel in the house ideal and create her own destiny. Barrett

Browning recognized then that she needed to "kill the angel in the house" embodied by mothers in order to set her heroine free.

The other daughter in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh is Marion Erle. Critics such as Virginia Steinmetz and Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi have focussed on the role of Marion as mother. Less satisfactory critical attention has been given to the role of Marion as daughter. In her essay "Aurora Leigh: The Vocation of the Woman Poet," Gelpi suggests that Aurora Leigh contains unappealing mothers and mother surrogates (37-39), a statement that certainly applies to the depiction of Marion Erle's mother.

We are given details of Marion's relationship with her mother through Aurora to whom Marion has "told...her story out" (3.827). Out of frustration with her alcoholic husband, Marion's mother, we are told:

> ...turned
> (The worm), and beat her baby in revenge
> For her own broken heart (3.868-870).

As a result of this physical abuse, Marion "learnt early to cry low, and walk alone" (3.877). At Sunday School, Marion, perplexed and delighted at the other children's laughter, "wondered if their mothers beat them hard/That ever they should laugh so" (3.900-908). So puzzled by this laughter is Marion that she asks her friend Rose Bell about it:

> 'Your mother lets you laugh so?' "Aye," said
> Rose.
> 'She lets me....
> 'Such mothers let us play and lose our time,
> 'And never scold us nor beat us! Don't you wish
> 'You had one like that?' (3.919-925).

Marion does wish she "had one like that." As she explains to Romeny, "Father, mother, home,/Were God and heaven reversed to her...' (3.937-938).

In Aurora Leigh, Barrett Browning rejects the "angel in the house" ideal of motherhood in two ways—by showing how the conventional mother inhibits the daughter as artist and by depicting a real mother who is a demon rather than an angel. Marion's mother is portrayed as monstrously cruel; she and Marion's father call Marion:

> ...a strange, sickly child,
> Not good for much, and given to sulk and stare,
> And smile into the hedges and the clouds,
> And tremble if one shook her from her fit
> By any blow, or word even (3.1021-1025).

After being beaten herself, Marion's mother attempts to force her daughter into prostitution:

> ...she came in suddenly,
> And snatching in a sort of breathless rage
> Her daughter's headgear comb, let down the hair
> Upon her like a sudden waterfall,
> Then drew her drenched and passive by the arm
> Outside the hut they lived. When the child
> Could clear her blinded face from all that stream
> Of tresses...there, a man stood, with beast's
> eyes
> That seemed as they would swallow her alive
> Complete in body and spirit, hair and all,—
> And burning stertorous breath that hurt her cheek,
> He breathed so near. The mother held her tight,
> Saying hard between her teeth—'why wench,
> why wench,
> The squire speaks to you now—the squire's too
> good:
> He means to set you up, and comfort us.
> Be mannerly at least.' The child turned round
> And looked up piteous in the mother's face
> (Be sure that mother's death-bed will not want
> Another devil to damn, than such a look...)
> (3.1043-1061).

In this scene, Marion's mother attempts to sell her to the squire. The image of hair, a symbol of female sexuality, being forceably let down by Marion's mother indicates that Marion is being sold as a sexual trinket. Initially, Marion's face is covered by her hair, indicating that she has no identity beyond that of sexual property. When Marion brushes her hair away from her eyes, she sees the squire who is going to devour not just her hair (her sexual being) but her body and spirit as well.

Another important image in this passage is Marion's gaze at her mother. Unlike Aurora, who fondly remembers her angelic mother's "sweet eyes," Marion looks into her demon mother's face only to find teeth clenched with anger and hatred. Marion exclaims "God free me from my mother.../These mothers are too dreadful..." (3.1063-64). Marion literally frees herself, however, and runs away from her mother as if she "had caught sight of the fire of hell/Through some wild gap." (3.1196-97).

Marion continues to search for a mother-figure and finds Lady Waldemar, "the devouring anti-mother" (Steinmetz 357). Like Marion's own mother, Lady Waldemar betrays her. Gaining Marion's trust, Lady Waldemar convinces Marion to release Romney from his promise of marriage so that she can have him for herself. As Marion tells Aurora:

> She wrapped me in her generous arms at once,
> And let me dream a moment how it feels
> To have a real mother, like some girls:
> ...
> ...Though Lady Waldemar was kind
> She hurt me, hurt, as if the morning sun
> Should smite us on the eyelids when we sleep,
> And wake us up with headache (6.1001-1010).

Ultimately and, perhaps, ironically, Marion emerges as an appealing, nurturing mother in Aurora Leigh. Indeed, having suffered at the hands of two mothers, Marion declares that her true self is dead and only the mother in her survives:

> ...I'm dead, I say,
> And if, to save the child from death as well,
> The mother in me has survived the rest.
> Why that's God's miracle you must not tax,
> I'm not less dead for that: I'm nothing more
> But just a mother. Only for the child
> I'm warm, and cold, and hungry, and afraid,
> And smell the flowers a little and see the sun,
> And speak still, and am silent,—just for him!
> (6.818-827).

In her essay on Aurora Leigh, Virginia Steinmetz discusses the images of "mother-want" in the poem. However, juxtaposed with "mother-want" are images of women trying to escape their mothers' oppression. In choosing a career as a writer, Aurora must escape the angel in the house that her mother embodied while she was alive and which remains as symbol in her portrait. Marion is forced to escape the more tangible threat that her mother poses in order to survive. Barrett Browning's portrayals of mother-daughter relationships are extremely complex. Mothers, with the exception of Marion Erle, are represented as oppressive forces from whom daughters must literally and figuratively break free in order to achieve wholeness and fulfillment.

Like Barrett Browning, Eliot, Brontë, and Gaskell all worked to create wholeness and fulfillment for themselves and transcend the 'angel in the house' ideal that confined them and all other women. As illustrated in the analysis of the texts in this chapter, Barrett Browning, Brontë, and Gaskell translated that quest for wholeness and fulfillment

into the lives of their heoines. Their literary depictions of mother-daughter relationships clearly defy the "angel in the house" myth. By re-visioning the mother-daughter relationship, these women have provided us with another view of Victorian women's lives and experience—a view that is self-defined rather than male-defined.

Chapter 2

Sisters

Toni McNaron, author of The Sister Bond: A Feminist View of a Timeless Connection, has said that "the relationship between sisters...comes to us shrouded in silence and ignorance" (5). Applied to Victorian society, McNaron's statement is well-founded for three reasons. First, there is almost no historical information about the day-to-day reality of sisters' lives. Second, there are no readily available historical models, such as Coventry Patmore's "The Angel of the House," against which to compare the artistic depictions of sisterly relationships. Finally, little is revealed about sisters in Victorian women's literature because of the preponderance of orphaned heroines, including Shirley Keeldar, Ruth Hilton, Aurora Leigh, Jane Eyre, and Lucy Snowe, who lack not only parents, but siblings as well. Heroines who are not orphaned, such as Maggie Tulliver, Molly Gibson, and Margaret Hale, generally do not have female siblings.

McNaron suggests that our lack of knowledge about sisters is due to the willful ignorance of male historians; in a patriarchal society "Any social grouping that does not include at least one male figure tends to cause questions, uneasiness, even fear" (50). McNaron further states that

"uneasiness and fear" have caused the "widespread avoidance of the subject" (5). However, feminist historians have also neglected sister relationships. In The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal, for instance, Deborah Gorham describes the life of middle-class Victorian girls. While she devotes almost two pages of her study to the discussion of the typical Victorian brother-sister relationship, she does not mention sisters. It is unlikely that feminist historians such as Deborah Gorham have approached women's relationships with the "uneasiness and fear" identified in McNaron. It is more likely that feminist historians have concentrated their efforts on redrawing women's place in history *in relation to men's*. In other words, rather than focussing on women in a female world, feminist historians have focussed on women in a male world. Feminist historians have revisioned the world inadequately despite their efforts and successes in revisioning women's lives. Women's interrelationships, such as the sister bond, are still largely unexplored by feminists in all disciplines.

One feminist historian, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, has attempted to explore and understand the history of women's interrelationships although her valuable work is by no means exhausive. For example, she provides only one significant reference to the nature of Victorian sisterhood:

> Sisters helped one another with housework, shopped and sewed for one another. Geographic separation was borne with difficulty. A sister's absence for even a week or two could cause loneliness and depression and would be bridged by frequent letters. Sibling rivalry was hardly unknown, but with separation or illness the theme of deep affection and dependency re-emerged (62).

Smith-Rosenberg illustrates this "deep affection and dependency" by quoting Martha Jefferis, a Quaker from nineteenth-century America, who writes to her sister :

> Thou knowest my dear sister...there is no one
> ...that exactly feels [for] thee as I do, for I think
> without boasting I can truly say that my desire is
> for thee (63).

Like Smith-Rosenberg, Hellerstein, Hume, and Offen have attempted to describe the lives of nineteenth-century women. Their book Victorian Women is a collection of original period documents which reveal various aspects of nineteenth-century women's lives. Again, the text offers little information about sister relationships, although one diary entry offers some insight:

> That dear Mimi says such sweet charming things
> about our separation, her return, her weariness;
> she gets weary of being far from me, as I of
> being without her. Each moment I see and feel
> that I want her, at night more especially, when
> I am so accustomed to hear her breathe close
> to my ear (de Guérin 157).[1]

Louise Bernikow, who in Among Women examines women's relationships in twentieth-century literature, suggests that sisters

> ...stand for companionship, physical intimacy,
> all varieties of warmth and some vague sense
> of a circle of female protection (74).

While these three quotations are hardly enough to uncover the shroud of ignorance and silence that vexes Toni McNaron, they do reveal some characteristics of sisters' relationships: "deep affection and dependency," protection, and companionship. This chapter will examine "Goblin Market," The Mill on the Floss, Wives and Daughters, and their authors' lives for evidence of this 'deep affection and

dependency' between sisters. Other characteristics, such as sacrifice and forgivingness, that present themselves as part of the sister bond will also be explored. Thus literary evidence may contribute to developing the skeletal understanding of Victorian sisterhood offered by McNaron, Smith-Rosenberg, and Hellerstein, Hume, and Offen. More importantly, however, this exploration will provide some insight into how Rossetti, Gaskell, and Eliot envisioned the sister bond.

Without question, the hallmark of Christina Rossetti's relationship with her sister was deep affection. Christina and Maria were born three years apart into an intellectual and artistic family. They had loving and nurturing parents; their childhood was pleasant and uneventful (Battiscombe). Maria was supportive of Christina's desire to write and often transcribed Christina's poems (D'Amico 25). Christina also endorsed and encouraged Maria in her writing. Mackenzie Bell writes that "Christina had the highest opinion of her sister's gifts, and was never weary of speaking her praise" (57).

Christina and Maria also shared religious commitment. Maria, who took her final vows in the Anglican sisterhood in 1873, was Christina's spiritual mentor and one of the "most saintly persons [Christina] had ever known" (D'Amico 25). Maria's piety was a powerful model for Christina who felt that Maria tempered her behaviour and kept her on the path of righteousness (27-28). Georgina Battiscombe suggests that:

> A beloved sister, in whose company so much of her time was spent, most inevitably had some effect upon Christina. Maria, who combined an excellent brain with an extremely narrow outlook, may well have fostered and encouraged her sister's scrupulosity (161).

Mackenzie Bell observes in his biography of Christina that she had "a deep concern for all that pertained to her sister..." (57-58). When Maria died, Christina wrote:

> Flowers covered her, loving mourners followed her,
> hymns were sung at her grave, the November day
> brightened, and the sun (I vividly remember) made
> a miniature rainbow in my eyelashes.
> I have often thought of that rainbow since
> (qtd. in Bell 72).

On the other hand, some critics, such as D'Amico and Battiscombe, have suggested that Maria's influence over Christina was oppressive:

> Christina believed herself to be bad
> tempered and that her sister was somehow
> interwoven in this self-judgement (D'Amico 27-28).

Despite the fact that much is known about Christina's affection for her sister, much is unknown about any other dynamics in their relationship since almost no correspondence exists. Did they argue? Did they share secrets or give each other advice? Whatever the nature and extent of Maria's influence over Christina, there is no evidence to suggest that Christina harboured any negative feelings towards her sister. On the contrary, Christina's love for Maria never diminished; ten years after Maria's death, Christina still referred to Maria as her "irreplaceable sister and friend" (Rossetti "Letters" 152). There may well have been resentments, differences, and even disputes between Christina and Maria—but if they existed, they are unrecorded. All that we know for certain is that Christina and Maria's relationship was very much one of "deep affection and dependency."

Given Christina's love for Maria, it is fitting that her most celebrated poem, "Goblin Market," is dedicated to her sister. The poem

tells the story of two sisters, Lizzie and Laura, who, like Christina and Maria, share a deep affection for and commitment to each other. But the poem is more than a "hymn in praise of sisterly devotion" (Battiscombe 105); it is an invitation to witness the ways in which action embodies that devotion. There is simply no question that "Goblin Market" apostrophizes the love between sisters. The ways in which that love is called to action provide us with the clearest image of Rossetti's vision of sisterhood. In this vision, sisters are there:

> 'To cheer one on the tedious way,
> To fetch one if one goes astray,
> To lift one if one totters down,
> To strengthen whilst one stands' (Lines 564-67).

These actions summarize much of what occurs between Lizzie and Laura in "Goblin Market." "To cheer one on the tedious way" translates into support—the kind of domestic support Smith-Rosenberg suggests sisters provided for each other in their day-to-day lives. Indeed, the main feature of Lizzie and Laura's life is this kind of domestic support. Lizzie and Laura live together, sharing housekeeping, animal care, and meal preparation. Daily, Lizzie and Laura:

> Fetched in honey, milked the cows,
> Aired and set to rights the house,
> Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,
> ...
> Next churned butter, whipped up cream,
> Fed their poultry, sat and sewed;
> Talked as modest maidens should...(203-209).

Companionship and closeness are implicit in the performance of these daily activities. The tasks are tedious because they are routine, but they are made lighter by the presence of a sister.

"To fetch one if one goes astray" clearly refers to the protective aspect of the sister bond. Like the Christ-figure she symbolizes, Lizzie acts as the Good Shepherd tending to and protecting her sheep. Lizzie repeatedly attempts to 'fetch' Laura as she becomes more and more entranced by the goblin men's cries:

> 'We must not look at the goblin men,
> We must not buy their fruits:
> Who knows upon what soil they fed
> Their hungry thirsty roots?'
> ...
> 'Oh,' cried Lizzie, 'Laura, Laura,
> You should not peep at the goblin men.'
> ...
> 'No,' said Lizzie: 'No, no, no;
> Their offers should not charm us,
> Their evil gifts would harm us' (42-66).

Because of Jeanie's fatal experience with the goblin men, Lizzie knows that she must protect Laura from this deadly contact:

> 'Dear, you should not stay so late,
> Twilight is not good for maidens;
> Should not loiter in the glen
> In the haunts of goblin men.
> Do you not remember Jeanie,
> How she met them in the moonlight,
> Took their gifts both choice and many,
> Ate their fruits and wore their flowers
> ...
> She pined and pined away;
> Sought them by night and day,
> Found them no more but dwindled and grew grey;
> Then fell with the first snow...' (143-157).

However, Lizzie is unable to deter Laura. Ignoring her sister's warnings, Laura meets the goblin men and partakes of their deadly fruit. After her first taste, Laura, like Jeanie before her, can no longer see or hear the goblin men. She cannot, therefore, receive a second taste of their fruit—the antidote to the goblins' spell. Like Jeanie, Laura 'totters down'

towards death. Lizzie possesses a seemingly instinctive knowledge of the path to salvation—a second taste of the fruit. This knowledge gives her a spiritual power and omniscience which fortify her as she sets out to save Laura by facing the goblin men herself:

> Till Laura dwindling
> Seemed knocking at Death's door:
> Then Lizzie weighed no more
> Better or worse;
> But put a silver penny in her purse,
> Kissed Laura, crossed the heath with clumps of furze
> At twilight, halted by the brook:
> And for the first time in her life
> Began to listen and look (320-328).

Lizzie's decision to risk her own life to save her sister's makes her confront physical abuse and even face temptation. Although the goblin men attack Lizzie and try to force their fruit into her mouth, Lizzie thwarts their efforts, waiting until they are "Worn out by her resistance." With the fruit juice smeared on her face, Lizzie skips home to save or 'lift' her fallen sister.

Although the reader does not know much about what happens to Lizzie and Laura after Laura is saved, we do know that they go on to become wives and mothers. The poem's domestic frame is thus completed at the end of the poem with Laura talking to her children as a "modest [mother] should". This destiny may reveal aspects of Rossetti's own vision of female experience—any attempt by women to wander beyond the confines of traditional values and expectations is risky and even life threatening. In this vision, safety is found in the protective circle of marriage and motherhood.

We also know that Lizzie risks her life willingly and unconditionally; she does not reprimand Laura for her transgression. On the contrary, life goes on as though nothing has happened. But Laura remembers the significance of Lizzie's action; she tells her children:

> '..how her sister stood
> In deadly peril to do her good,
> And win the fiery antidote' (557-559).

"To strengthen whilst one stands" seems therefore to represent Lizzie's role after Laura recovers. After Laura is 'lifted' by Lizzie, she, with her sister's ongoing support and guidance, emerges a stronger and wiser individual. It is appropriate then that Laura delivers the poem's didactic envoi: "There is no friend like a sister."

A fall-redemption reading of "Goblin Market" is generally accepted among Rossetti scholars, but there is no agreement among them about whether the religious allegory has any parallel in Rossetti's own life. Rossetti herself insisted that no personal allegory was intended in "Goblin Market" (Bell 207). Although this claim would seem to rule out biographical explication, critics have nonetheless found the poem a tantalizing and compelling mystery. For example, in her inventive interpretation of "Goblin Market," Lona Mosk Packer suggests that its plot allegorically recounts how Maria saved Christina from falling in love with a married man, William Bell Scott (Packer). D.M.R. Bentley offers a very different theory by suggesting that "Goblin Market" allegorizes Maria and Christina's work with prostitutes. Bentley speculates that the fallen woman, symbolized by Lizzie, is seduced by the sexual fruit of the goblin men, but is saved by a 'Sister' from a religious community. Regardless of interpretation, "Goblin Market" is a compelling testimony

to the mutual support, protection, and forgiveness that arises from the "deep affection and dependency" between sisters.

Unlike Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Gaskell did not have a sister. In fact, Gaskell knew none of her 7 siblings; 6 died in infancy before she was born and her surviving brother was lost at sea. Gaskell's father placed her into the care of relatives with whom she spent the majority of her life before her marriage at 21. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are many aspects of Gaskell's Wives and Daughters that parallel her own experience. Like Cynthia, Gaskell was abandoned by a parent and placed in a boarding school. She was never visited by her father until he remarried and, like Molly, Gaskell did not like her step-mother. However, there is no biographical antecedent for her depiction of the relationship between Molly Gibson and Cynthia Kirkpatrick. Nonetheless, Gaskell creates a portrait of a sister bond very similar to that depicted by Rossetti in "Goblin Market." Even though Molly and Cynthia are not biological sisters, their relationship exhibits the same affection, support, potential sacrifice, and forgiveness demonstrated in Lizzie and Laura's relationship.

Molly and Cynthia become step-sisters when their parents marry. Cynthia, neglected and unloved by her mother, is brought to live with the Gibsons shortly after the marriage. Although Molly and Cynthia have grown up under very different circumstances, it does not take them long to develop a rapport, thanks largely to Molly's kindness and Cynthia's "unconscious power of fascination" (Gaskell 254). As Cythnia says to Molly shortly after their introduction,

> 'I think I shall like you. I am so glad! I was afraid I should not.' (226).

Molly is initially overwhelmed by Cynthia's charm and by the prospect of having "a companion, a girl, a sister of her own age" (250):

> ...Molly might soon have been aware that Cynthia was not remarkable for unflinching morality; but the glamour thrown over her would have prevented Molly from any attempt at penetrating into and judging her companion's character, even had such processes been the least in accordance with her own disposition (255).

However, later in the novel, Molly's awareness of Cynthia's dishonesty germinates and she begins to realize that "Cynthia withheld from her more than thoughts and feelings—...she withheld facts" (497). In addition, because of Cynthia's involvement with Mr Preston, Molly is "compelled to perceive that there must have been a good deal of underhand work going on beneath Cynthia's apparent openness of behaviour..." (525). However, despite this awareness that Cynthia is not completely honest, Molly loves Cynthia and is willing to protect her.

And despite her own egocentrism, Cynthia does appear to truly love Molly and appreciate having a sister. Only two weeks after their introduction, Cynthia confesses:

> 'I do believe I love you, little Molly,... better than anyone' (257).

Molly's innate goodness appeals to Cynthia, although she sometimes appears confounded by Molly's generous disposition. At one point, she admits wistfully that Molly's "grain is different, somehow" from her own (535). Despite their differences, Molly and Cynthia support each other throughout the novel. For instance, Cynthia comforts Molly after the death of Mrs Hamley:

> Cynthia came softly in, and taking Molly's

> listless hand, that hung down by her side,
> sat at her feet on the rug, chafing her chilly
> fingers without speaking. The tender action
> thawed the tears that had been gathering heavily
> at Molly's heart, and they came dropping down
> her cheeks (256).

However, Molly later provides most of the support in their relationship.

The act which best illustrates Molly's support for Cynthia is her rescue of Cynthia from the clutches of Mr Preston. This rescue is not unlike that which occurs in "Goblin Market." Like Laura who succumbs to the goblin men's fruit, Cynthia succumbs to what she needs from Mr Preston: money. And, just as Laura must pay for the goblin fruit with a lock of her hair, Cynthia must promise to marry Mr Preston if she accepts his money. Essentially, the transactions are the same. Laura's lock of hair symbolizes her virginity which she exchanges for the goblin fruit. Cynthia's promise ultimately means the same thing—that she will give up her virginity to Mr Preston.

In addition, just as Laura believes that she will somehow be immune to the effects of the goblin fruit, Cynthia convinces herself that she can elude Mr Preston. When Mr Preston comes to fulfill the transaction, Cynthia turns to the only person she believes can help her—Molly. Molly decides to help Cynthia by meeting with Mr Preston herself. She makes herself a pledge that she

> ...would try and walk the straight path; and
> if she did wander out of it, it should only
> be to save pain to those whom she loved (525).

Like Lizzie who literally strays from the 'straight path' to save Laura, Molly must stray from the path of righteousness, risking her reputation

to save her sister by meeting Mr Preston unchaperoned. Molly's gamble fails because both because she is unable to convince Mr Preston to release Cynthia from her promise and because she is discovered alone with Mr Preston by Mr Sheepshanks. Fearing that Molly has committed a terrible indiscretion, Mr Gibson interrogates her, searching for the truth. Molly refuses to give away Cynthia's secret even though it would exonerate her. Eventually, however, the secret is discovered and Cynthia is 'saved.'

Both Molly and Lizzie put aside their own safety to save their sisters. Like Lizzie, Molly does so willingly and without reservation—she expects nothing from Cynthia in return. Moreover, Molly forgives Cynthia for her indiscretions. Even as Cynthia is reprimanded by Mr Gibson for being a "flirt and a jilt," Molly entreats her father to hear Cynthia's story before judging her (596-597). Despite the scandal, Molly and Cynthia's sister bond is strengthened and they separate with the same warm feelings with which they began:

> Both Molly and Cynthia spoke about dress as if it was the very object of their lives; for each dreaded the introduction of more serious subjects....Only when the carriage was announced, and Molly was preparing to go downstairs, Cynthia said–'I'm not going to thank you, Molly, or to tell you how I love you.'
> 'Don't,' said Molly. 'I can't bear it.'
> 'Only you know you are to be my first visitor, and if you wear brown ribbons to a green gown, I'll turn you out of the house!' (668).

The theme of sisterly love called into action appears in "Goblin Market" and in Wives and Daughters. Both Rossetti and Gaskell envision sisters who not only feel a 'deep affection' for each other, but

who are also willing to risk everything to save the other, who are willing to 'lift' the other should she 'totter down.' The rescue of one sister by another in both Wives and Daughters and "Goblin Market" suggests that one function of the sister bond is to ensure that if one sister should escape the domestic circle, the other will lead her back. In both works, one sister ventures outside the boundaries of ideal womanly behaviour and in both cases the other sister fetches her back and restores her reputation. Interestingly, Maggie Tulliver, who escapes her domestic circle, dies—perhaps because she had no sister to return her to safety.

The idea that sisters guard the boundaries of womanly behaviour appears also in Eliot's The Mill on the Floss. In this novel, however, we are presented with quite a different vision of sisterhood than "Goblin Market" and Wives and Daughters. In her portrayal of the Dodson sisters, Eliot shows sisters who are authoritarian, judgemental, self-righteous, and unfeeling. Eliot modelled the Dodson sisters after her own maternal aunts. Like the Dodson sisters who judge Maggie, Eliot's aunts were harsh and critical of Eliot's appearance and behaviour (Deakin 7).

While Eliot loved her own sister, they were not close. As Cross wrote in his biography of Eliot, Marian and Chrissey's relationship was "like that described as existing between Dorothea and Celia in Middlemarch–no intellectual affinity, but a strong family affection" (qtd. in Deakin 14). Eliot was dismayed when Chrissey stopped corresponding with her because of her union with George Henry Lewes. It was a decision that Chrissey regretted when she herself became gravely ill (Haight 277). Despite their estrangement, Eliot mourned her sister when she died. She wrote, "I had a very special feeling towards

her, stronger than any third person would think likely" (qtd. in Deakin 14).

If we look for the themes of affection, protection, risk, and forgiveness in the Dodson sisters' relationship, a very different image of sisterhood appears than in "Goblin Market" and Wives and Daughters. For instance, the kind of affection expressed between Lizzie and Laura or Molly and Cynthia simply does not exist among the Dodson sisters. There are no effusive proclamations of love nor flurries of compliments among the sisters. Instead, there are only small hints of sisterly regard. For example, Mrs Pullet tells Mrs Tulliver:

> '...you was allays my favourite sister,
> and we allays liked the same patterns'
> (157; bk. 1, ch. 9).

Similarly, as an act of affection towards Mrs Tulliver, Mrs Glegg decides against recalling her loan to Mr Tulliver (194; bk. 1, ch. 12).

The basis for these small acts of kinship lies in the Dodson sisters' solidarity which includes their unique sense of propriety and of superiority:

> The Miss Dodsons had always been thought to
> hold their heads up high, and no one was
> surprised the two eldest had married so well:
> ...not at an early age, for that was not the
> practice of the Dodson family. There were
> particular ways of doing everything in that
> family...so that no daughter of that house
> could be indifferent to the privilege of
> having been born a Dodson, rather than a
> Gibson or a Watson....In short, there was in
> this family a peculiar tradition as to what
> was the right thing in household management
> and social demeanor, and the only bitter
> circumstance attending this superiority
> was a painful inability to approve the condiments

> or the conduct of families ungoverned by the Dodson tradition (96-97; bk.1, ch. 6).

The Dodson sisters, led by Mrs Glegg, function as a unit with a single identity–their Dodson heritage. This instinct for guarding the Dodson tradition makes the sisters, particularly Mrs Glegg, critical of Mrs Tulliver. Mrs Tulliver is the one member of the unit who has failed to meet the Dodson standard in both marriage and child-rearing. Consequently, her sisters feel it is their responsibility, indeed their unquestionable right, to chastise her:

> 'Well, your husband is awkard [sic], you know, Bessy,' said Mrs Pullet....'He's never behaved quite so pretty to our family as he should do. And the children take after him–that boy's very mischievious and runs away from his aunts and uncles, and the gell's rude and brown' (157; bk. 1, ch. 9).

Similarly, when Mrs Tulliver begs her sisters to help buy back her favourite teapot, her sisters are more concerned that Mrs Tulliver's possessions, many of which bear the Dodson name, will be dispensed with publicly. It appears that the sisters are completely unaware of or unconcerned with the sense of loss Mrs Tulliver is experiencing:

> 'Ah, dear, dear!' said aunt Pullet, shaking her head with deep sadness, 'it's very bad– to think o' the family initials going about everywhere. It niver was so before: you're a very unlucky sister, Bessy! But what's the use o' buying the tea-pot—when there's linen and spoons and everything to go, and some of 'em with your full name...' (294; bk. 3, ch. 4).

These exchanges are hardly representative of the deep affection between sisters we witnessed in "Goblin Market" and Wives and

Daughters. Affection among the sisters takes the form of tactless reprimand. However, despite the fact that Mrs Tulliver is hurt by these reprimands, she is eager to improve:

> ...she had grown a little in her youth under the yoke of her elder sisters, and still shed occasional tears at their sisterly reproaches... (97; bk. 1, ch. 6).

Much of the criticism that Mrs Tulliver receives from her sisters comes in the form of advice and observation. For instance, when Mrs Tulliver's sisters are called together to discuss the Tullivers' assets, Mrs Glegg rebukes Mrs Tulliver for wanting to keep her most treasured possessions:

> 'It drives me past patience to hear you all talking o' best things, and buying in this and that and the other, such as silver and chany. You must bring your mind to your circumstances, Bessy, and not be thinking o' silver and chany, but whether you shall get so much as a flock bed to lie on, and a blanket to cover you, and a stool to set on. You must remember, if you get 'em, it'll be because your friends bought 'em for you, for you're dependent upo' *them* for everything....And it's for your own good I say this, for it's right you should feel what your state is, and what a disgrace your husband's brought on your family, as you've got to look to for everything—be humble in your mind' (290; bk. 3, ch. 4).

The important aspect of Mrs Glegg's speech is her belief that it is for Mrs Tulliver's *own good* that she be scolded. Criticism is the way in which the Dodson sisters believe they protect each other and communicate concern. However, unlike Lizzie and Molly, the Dodson sisters do not intend to protect their sister from harm. Rather, they are

protecting their collective family identity. Paradoxically, the Dodson family code includes loyalty. So, although they criticize and judge Mrs Tulliver, they do not abandon her when she needs help and filial comfort. After Mrs Glegg and Mr Tulliver quarrel, for instance, Mrs Tulliver soothes herself with the knowledge that "she would talk everything over with sister Pullet tomorrow..."(134; bk. 1, ch. 8).

In contrast to Lizzie and Molly who put themselves in danger for their sisters, the Dodson sisters take no such risks. While they do provide some financial and moral support to Mrs Tulliver, they do not expend an unusual amount of effort on their sister's behalf. They fulfill the requirements and expectations of their code, but little more. Moreover, they behave as if their acts represent the epitome of benevolence. As Mrs Glegg says of Tom's new responsibilities after his father's financial demise:

> '...he's got to bear the fruits o' his
> father's misconduct, and bring his mind
> to fare hard and to work hard. And he must
> be humble and grateful to his aunts and
> uncles for what they're doing for his
> mother and father, as must be turned out
> into the streets and go to the workhouse
> if they didn't help 'em' (293; bk. 3, ch. 4).

Despite the harsh and inflexible tone of Mrs Glegg's speech, the very fact that she is present and willing to help Mrs Tulliver speaks of a commitment to her sister and her sister's family. Similarly, although the Dodson sisters disapprove of Mrs Tulliver's marriage and of her unruly children, they continue to play an active role in their lives. This involvement implies a forgiveness for the choices in life that Mrs

Tulliver has made–choices that have not been consistent with 'the Dodson way.'

The Dodson sisters' relationship is not easy to categorize. It is apparent that their harsh, critical words are incongruent with their actions. While they chide Mrs Tulliver, they also show her protection, and forgiveness and are physically present to support her. Further, Mrs Tulliver depends on her sisters and derives security from their proximity though their censure often brings her to tears. For example, after her husband's quarrel with Mrs Glegg, Mrs Tulliver:

> ...cried a little in a trickling way as she put on her nightcap; but presently sank into a comfortable sleep, lulled by the thought that she would talk everything over with sister Pullet tomorrow... (134; bk. 1, ch. 8).

Eliot's portrayal of the Dodson sisters shows us a complex and multifaceted relationship. Unlike Rossetti's portrayal of the sister bond, Eliot's depiction of the Dodson sisters is not at all idealized. Instead, the relationship among the Dodson sisters demonstrates the complexity and intractability of this bond.

Each of these three sister relationships supports Smith-Rosenberg's assertion that "deep affection and dependency" existed between sisters. However, each of the portrayals offers a specific view of the way that affection and dependency operate in different contexts, among women of different ages. Rossetti and Gaskell's portraits confirm the presence of affection, protection, risk, and forgiveness in the bonds between sisters. Eliot also explores these themes, but shows how they can become subverted by the expectations and demands that also exist between sisters. Eliot provides other details about the sister bond as well. For instance,

Eliot shows that sisters may operate within their own age-based hierarchy: Mrs Glegg is the oldest sister and therefore the matriarch of the Dodsons. In addition, Eliot shows how sisters adhere to and proudly maintain their maiden identity. Mrs Glegg, Mrs Deane, Mrs Pullet, and Mrs Tulliver are Dodson daughters first and other men's wives second—a fact that contradicts the "angel in the house" notion that a woman's identity is righfully subsumed by her husband's.

Rossetti, Gaskell, and Eliot offer visions of Victorian sisterhood that help to uncover the "silence and ignorance" that has shrouded this significant female relationship. The value in examining these authors' vision of Victorian sisterhood lies in the opportunity to use them as models against which to compare other literary depictions of relationships between sisters. In doing so, students and scholars can further their understanding and analysis of individual authors' visions and re-visions of the sister bond.

Chapter 3

Friends

A young Victorian woman was influenced not only by the female members of her immediate family, but also by female friends beyond her kinship network. Such female friendships, the subject of the last chapter of this thesis, play central roles in The Mill on the Floss, Shirley, and Aurora Leigh. A brief survey of the beliefs of several Victorian commentators will provide a historical framework for this analysis of the literary representations of female friendship.

Victorian social commentary about women's friendships reflects a range of opinion, from the very negative to the very positive. On one hand, many Victorian social commentators believed that female friendships were nothing more than meaningless bonds of empty sentiment (Nestor). For example, in an 1870 edition of The Saturday Review, the author of an essay entitled "Friendship" explains:

> Women's friendships with each other have long been the occasion for lofty ridicule on the part of the superior creature who dares to doubt their genuineness; and the girl's gushing passion for her schoolfellows has passed into proverb when we wish to speak of rootless love. And certainly women do go through an immense deal of make-believe together; but, like the girl's sisterhood with

> handsome young ensigns and collegians, it is more a rehearsal of the serious business than anything else... (78).

The "serious business" for which a woman rehearsed was her marital relationship. This writer also believed that women could only form serious friendships " ...when both [were] verging towards middle age, when neither [was] wife or mother, and when one [had] a stronger character than the other..." (78). In other words, female friendship substituted for the marital bond both before marriage and when a husband's death terminated a woman's role as wife.

Dinah Craik also saw women's friendships as substitutes for the marital bond. She said of women's friendships:

> ...two-thirds of them spring from mere idleness, or from that natural *besoin d'amour* which, for want of natural domestic ties, makes this one a temporary substitute (168).

Craik devoted an entire chapter of her book A Woman's Thoughts About Women (1858) to the subject of female friendship and introduced the chapter with the following comment:

> Few observant persons will allege against ours, that even in its lowest forms our friendship is deceitful. Fickle it may be, weak, exaggerated, sentimental—the mere lath-and-plaster imitation of a palace great enough for a demigod to dwell in—but it is rarely false, parasitical, or diplomatic. The countless secondary motives which many men are mean enough to have—nay, to own—are all but impossible to us; impossible from the very faults of our nature—our frivolity, irrationality, and incapacity to seize on more than one idea at the same time. In truth, a sad proportion of us are too empty-headed to be double-minded, too shallow to be insincere (165-66).

Other commentators, such as Eliza Lynn Linton, were far more vitriolic than Dinah Craik. Linton, an outspoken anti-feminist, wrote in The Girl of the Period that women were intrinsically evil, shallow, jealous of and antagonistic towards each other (Nestor 13-14). Some social commentators even questioned whether women were capable of friendship at all (12).

Not all women of the period held negative views about women's friendships, however. As Deborah Gorham explains, some Victorian social commentators felt that female friends were important sources of support for each other and valuable in reinforcing the ideals of Victorian womanhood that young women were taught at home:

> Although home was seen as the centre of a girl's life, friendships outside the family circle were nonetheless acknowledged to play an important part in her development...[H]er ability to make...friendships was seen as a mark of her depth as a person....The first serious female friendship in a girl's life was seen as a significant turning point in her adolescent development (Gorham 113).

According to Gorham, Victorian society believed that friendship between young women helped to reinforce the "feminine qualities of sympathy and expressiveness" and "encourage[d] the development of a personality capable of intimacy and the mutual sharing, with other girls and women, of a domestic environment" (113-115).

The author of an article entitled "Friendship," published in Victoria Magazine in 1871, offered a rebuttal to the article on friendship which appeared in The Saturday Review :

> A woman's friendship with a man cannot possibly be so near as with a chosen friend of her own sex, supposing her to be unmarried, for between women

> friends there is necessarily more sympathy, and therefore more true tenderness, more gentle charity, towards weaknesses, and faults, and sins, more gentle overlooking of things....Last, but not least, there is what may justly be called a chivalrous spirit existing between women who are friends..." (545).

Also, in an essay entitled "Some Aspects of Friendship," which appeared in an 1876 edition of Blackwood's Magazine, Anne Mozley outlines the more noble aspects of friendship and admits that "All that has been said of friendship in general, applies, of course, to female friendships..." (310).

Themes emerge from both sides of the debate about female friendship. Those who were critical of women's ability to form meaningful friendships assert that the female defects of shallowness, intellectual inferiority, jealousy, and frivolity thwart this bond. Conversely, those who believed women's friendships to be meaningful discuss the themes of mutual support, generosity, and affection. Accordingly, the approach of this chapter will be to examine the literary representations of female friendship in The Mill on the Floss, Shirley, and Aurora Leigh for evidence of any or all of these themes and to examine the manner in which they are manifested. As in the first two chapters, this method will help suggest if and how the authors re-visioned the bond between female friends.

George Eliot cherished close friendships with many women, including Bessie Parkes, Harriet Martineau, Cara Bray, Sara Hennell, and Barbara Leigh Smith [Bodichon]. Barbara Leigh Smith in particular endeared herself to Eliot; they remained friends from the time they met in June of 1852 until Eliot's death in 1880 (Haight 105). Ina Taylor suggests that Eliot's friendship with Leigh Smith "was the most intimate

Eliot had with a woman, reaching a deeper level of understanding than she achieved with either Cara Bray or Sara Hennell" (115). Eliot and Leigh Smith shared a disdain for convention. As Taylor and Haight outline in their biographies of Eliot, Leigh Smith was the 'illegitimate' daughter of Benjamin Leigh Smith, a politician who successfully pursued a young working-class woman named Anne Longden. Together Leigh Smith and Longden had five children, but never married. They remained a happy family until Anne's death from tuberculosis. Barbara Leigh Smith followed her father's unconventional path. She became an influential voice in the women's movement, working particularly hard on improving married women's property rights (Haight; Taylor). She admired those who took a stand against convention, which is likely the reason she was attracted to George Eliot.

The attraction was mutual. Eliot was drawn to Leigh Smith immediately, admiring her "strong noble nature" (qtd. in Nestor 149). Eliot once said of Leigh Smith that she was "the first friend who had given any symptom of knowing me" (Eliot, Letters III: 63). Indeed, Leigh Smith understood Eliot so well that she recognized her as the author of Adam Bede, knowing instinctively that George Eliot and Marian Evans were one and the same (Taylor 170-71). Leigh Smith also unconditionally supported Eliot's decision to live with the already-married George Lewes, and told her that she "would stand by her as long as [she] lived" (qtd. in Nestor 150). Leigh Smith did just that. In addition, she and Eliot were completely involved in each other's lives. As Pauline Nestor explains:

> [Leigh Smith] was absorbed in Eliot's domestic concerns, offering advice on servants and the

> careers of Lewes' sons, lending her paintings for decorations and her country cottage for holidays and helping to nurse Thornton Lewes in the months before his death (150).

For her part, Eliot was interested in and encouraged Leigh Smith's career as an artist. In addition, Eliot supported Leigh Smith's work for women's rights despite the fact that she had reservations about the goals of the women's movement (Taylor 187-89; Nestor 161). Although Eliot had ambivalent feelings towards women in general, her feelings towards Barbara Leigh Smith were very certain (Nestor 149-61). Their friendship exemplified the themes of mutual support, affection and generosity.

Many aspects of The Mill on the Floss have been studied by feminist scholars, but Maggie's friendship with her cousin Lucy Deane remains virtually unexplored by feminist literary critics. Like Eliot's portrait of other female relationships in The Mill on the Floss, her depiction of Maggie's friendship with Lucy is rich and complex. As children, Maggie and Lucy seem unlikely to become friends. Lucy Deane is the embryonic angel in the house that Maggie will never be. No one is more aware of this fact than Maggie's mother who is endlessly frustrated by Maggie's inadequacies. Mrs Tulliver compares Maggie to the porcelain Lucy Deane, who has "got a row o' curls round her head, an' not a hair out o' place," and wonders why Lucy was not her child instead of Maggie (60-61). Interestingly, Lucy is oblivious to the differences the adults see between herself and Maggie. Even as a child, Lucy sees Maggie's talents and strengths rather than her deficiencies. To Lucy, Maggie is interesting and creative. When Tom invites Lucy to

look at a toad, for instance, Lucy feels that Maggie must participate as well:

> Still Lucy wished Maggie to enjoy the spectacle also, especially as she would doubtless find a name for the toad and say what had been his past history; for Lucy had a delighted semi-belief in Maggie's stories about live things they came upon by accident....Lucy, for the life of her, could not help fancying there was something in it, and at all events thought it was very pretty make-believe. So now the desire to know the history of a very portly toad, added to her habitual affectionateness, made her run back to Maggie and say, 'O, there is such a big, funny toad, Maggie! Do come and see' (161-62).

Cosslett suggests that Maggie and Lucy symbolize the struggle between the "rebellious, unconventional heroine" and the "'angelic' friend (16). In such a scenario, according to Cosslett, the purpose of the angel is to "assimilate" her rebellious opposite "to conventional 'womanly' roles" (16). Although Maggie and Lucy represent opposing sides of this struggle, Maggie the intellectual and Lucy the perfect angel in the house, there is no rivalry between them. And rather than Lucy trying to assimilate Maggie, Lucy seems the only one to recognize, appreciate, and support Maggie's individuality.

In addition to this lack of rivalry between Maggie and Lucy, their relationship also lacks the frivolity and vacuity considered by some Victorian commentators to be typical of female friendships. Even in the most carefree period of her friendship with Maggie, Lucy shows herself to be a understanding and caring companion. For instance, in preparing for Maggie's arrival, Lucy sensitively and insightfully describes

Maggie's situation to Stephen and explains her desire to provide Maggie with a haven from her troubled domestic life:

> 'Maggie was at school with me six years ago, when she was fetched away because of her father's misfortunes, and she hardly had any pleasure, I think. She has been in a dreary situation in a school since uncle's death because she's determined to be independent....That is why I want her to come to me now, and have a long, long holiday' (472).

Indeed, Lucy generously ensures that all of Maggie's needs are met. For instance, the choosing of some new dresses for Maggie from Aunt Pullet's collection is a task "that Lucy...entered into with some zeal" (492).

Lucy is also one of the few people in the novel who recognize and comment on Maggie's beauty. When Mrs Tulliver despairs over Maggie's dark skin, for example, Lucy replies, "A painter would think Maggie's complexion beautiful" (493). Lucy also sees the potential for a relationship between Maggie and Philip Wakem. When Maggie tells Lucy that Tom has forbade her to see Philip, Lucy responds with surprise:

> 'Is Tom such a tyrant as that?....I'll take the responsibility then—tell him it was my fault (496).

Lucy is willing to protect Maggie from Tom's wrath in order to see Maggie happy with Philip. She also offers to speak to Tom in order to convince him to free Maggie from her promise never to see or speak to Philip. This offer not only illustrates Lucy's interest in Maggie's happiness, but also her blatant disregard for Tom's bullying. Like Lizzie in Rossetti's "Goblin Market" who boldly faces the goblin men to save her sister, Lucy is willing to face Tom to save Maggie from unhappiness.

No less significant an example of Lucy's love for Maggie is the tenderness she shows as she listens to Maggie's confession:

> The narrative lasted long, for Maggie had never before known the relief of such an outpouring: she had never before told Lucy anything of her inmost life; the sweet face bent towards her with sympathetic interest, and the little hand pressing hers, encouraging her to speak on (497).

Eliot explores in detail Lucy's willingness to work *actively* on Maggie's behalf, to protect Maggie, to take risks for Maggie.

The depth and strength of Maggie and Lucy's friendship is most clearly demonstrated in the penultimate chapter of the novel. In this chapter, Maggie returns to St. Ogg's in shame after having been away overnight with Stephen Guest. Her life in ruins, Maggie turns to Tom for comfort and understanding. Tom is unable, however, to step out of his role as punitive judge. Unwilling to recognize Maggie's pain, Tom chastizes her:

> 'You have been using Philip Wakem as a screen to deceive Lucy—the kindest friend you ever had. Go and see the return you have made her: she's ill—unable to speak—my mother can't go near her, lest she should remind her of *you*' (613).

However, Tom underestimates Lucy's strength of character. Ultimately Lucy speaks for herself. Risking her own reputation, she steals out of her home in order to see Maggie. In their final meeting, Lucy's words to Maggie reverberate with constancy, love, and unfaltering friendship:

> 'Maggie!'
> The face was there—changed, but all the sweeter: the hazel eyes were there, with their heart-piercing tenderness....
> ...Lucy threw her arms around Maggie's neck and leaned her pale cheek against the burning

> brow....
> 'Maggie, dear, be comforted,' said Lucy now,
> putting her cheek against Maggie's again.
> 'Don't grieve.'...
> 'I know you never meant to make me unhappy
> ...it is a trouble that has come on us all:—you
> have more to bear than I have—and you gave
> him up, when—You did what it must have been
> very hard to do' (641-42).

In this moving scene, Maggie and Lucy, beloved friends, "clasp each other again in a last embrace" (643). As Lucy says as she prepares to leave Maggie, "When I come back and am strong, they will let me do as I like. I shall come to you when I please then" (642).

While Tess Cosslett does offer an extensive examination of Maggie and Lucy's relationship in Woman to Woman, she emphasizes the role Maggie and Lucy's friendship plays in helping the novel reach its natural conclusion. She suggests that this "scene in which two women *affirm* [my emphasis] their friendship, and one gives up a man to the other, is necessary before the final male-female coming together " (36). However, what Cosslett reads as an affirmation is quite clearly a *reaffirmation* of Maggie and Lucy's friendship—for its own sake. As Cosslett states earlier in her argument, "The narrator clearly expects the readers to be surprised by such an instance of female friendship....she stresses the rarity, implying its precious quality" (31). Maggie and Lucy's friendship *is* rare both in terms of Victorian literary convention and in terms of Victorian society's beliefs about female friendships. Eliot disregards Victorian literary convention by depicting Maggie and Lucy's friendship with as much detail as she does other relationships in the novel. Moreover, Maggie and Lucy's relationship is not portrayed as

a "rehearsal" for the "serious business" of courtship with and marriage to a man. Their friendship exists for its own reasons, separate and distinct from their relationships with men and their relationships with their female family members. Eliot creates in The Mill on the Floss a bond between two women which, though tested, proves resilient and genuine. Clearly, Eliot's representation of female friendship contradicts the notion that female friendships are shallow, insincere and frivolous. Maggie and Lucy's relationship exemplifies mutual support, affection, loyalty and acceptance between friends.

Unlike George Eliot who had a large circle of friends and acquaintances among the literary community, Charlotte Brontë was a [illegible] who both abhorred visiting and having company (Shelston 11-12). However, two women outside of Brontë's family who played important roles in her life: Elizabeth Gaskell, and Ellen Nussey.[1]

Brontë was immediately and uncharacteristically attracted to Mrs Gaskell (it was unsual for her to like anyone quickly). Rebecca Fraser describes Brontë as "quite captivated by this warm, impulsive and determined woman" (381). Moreover, Brontë was extremely fond of Gaskell's writing, particularly her novel Ruth. Brontë was also fond of Gaskell's daughters which, as Alan Shelston notes, was also unusual:

> For Charlotte to have overcome her consitutional dislike of children in this case was no mean testimony of her affection (11).

On the other hand, while Gaskell admired Brontë as a person, she was more measured in her admiration for Brontë's writing. According to Alan Shelston:

> Mrs. Gaskell seems in some ways to have been less able to reciprocate the literary praise which she received from her friends. With the exceptions of a careful account of the genesis of Jane Eyre, whose public reputation as a work of genius she tends to accept somewhat automatically,...her comments in the Life on the Brontë novels are usually restricted either to relating them to particular incidents and circumstances in their authors' lives, or to recording reactions to them in the Reviews....It is not...stretching the evidence too far to suggest that Mrs. Gaskell, while she was familiar with, and in many respects admired, the literary productions of the Brontë sisters, was not entirely comfortable about them (11-12).

Gaskell seemed to be more captivated by Brontë's appearance and strength of character than by her writing. This emphasis shows in Gaskell's description of her first impressions of Charlotte Brontë in a letter which appears in The Life of Charlotte Brontë:

> ...the little lady worked away and hardly spoke, but I had time for a good look at her. She is (as she calls herself) *undeveloped*, thin, and more than half a head shorter than I am...(417).

It was Brontë the woman who attracted Gaskell. The better she knew Brontë, the more she felt compelled to write her biography. Alan Shelston notes:

> ...everything she discovered about Charlotte Brontë intensified her determination to lay before the public an account of her life that would reveal the full extent of her moral excellence (24).

Rebecca Fraser suggests that Brontë and Gaskell's relationship was based on a "natural affinity" for each other (383). Alan Shelston adds to this assessment by suggesting that Brontë and Gaskell's friendship was

as much the result of their being different as of their being alike. And while it would seem to create a conflict for Gaskell to write a biography of an author with whose writing she was not "comfortable," Gaskell's biography was less a literary review than a testament to a woman whom she admired. Alan Shelston identifies two factors which he believes led Gaskell to write The Life of Charlotte Brontë. The first is Brontë and Gaskell's "shared religious faith and, above all, a sense that the true expression of that faith was to be found in the subjugation of self to duty..." (13). Second, Gaskell saw Brontë as embodying "all the qualities with which she had invested her fictional heroines" (13). For these reasons and because of her love and admiration for Brontë, the woman, Gaskell wrote the "life of [her] dear friend, Charlotte Brontë" (Gaskell, Life 60).

However, an even closer friend made Gaskell's biography possible. As Rebecca Fraser correctly notes, a great deal of what we know about Charlotte Brontë we owe to Ellen Nussey (494). Ellen Nussey provided Gaskell with moral and practical support to write the biography and, more importantly, Nussey also provided Gaskell with some 350 letters written to her from Charlotte Brontë.

There is no one who likely knew Charlotte Brontë better than Ellen Nussey. They met in 1831 at a girls' school at Roe Head and remained close until Brontë's death in 1855. Some literary historians see Brontë and Nussey's relationship as representing far more than committed friendship; they regard it as a long term lesbian affair and one of the best kepts secrets in Victorian scholarship. As Elaine Miller states at the outset of her article entitled "Through All Changes and

Through All Chances: The Relationship of Ellen Nussey and Charlotte Brontë":

> The idea that Charlotte Brontë, the apparent goddess of heterosexual romance, was in love with a woman for most of her life, in a way that would today be described as lesbian, might come as a shock, yet it is not entirely new (29).

Miller's argument is well documented and convincing. She cites many biographers who concur with her argument and uses several passages from the Brontë-Nussey correspondence to further support her argument. For instance, the following excerpt from a letter from Brontë to Nussey written in September of 1836 lends support to Miller's hypothesis:

> Ellen I wish I could live with you always, I begin to cling to you more fondly that I ever did. If we had but a cottage of our own I do think we might live and love on till Death without being dependent on any third person for happiness,
>
> Farewell my own dear Ellen (Brontë Letters, 1. 146).

Other excerpts from the correspondence support Miller's argument as well. In a letter to Nussey dated December 1836, Brontë writes:

> I wish I could come to Brookroyd for a single night, but I don't like to ask Miss Wooler.... I wish you were here, all in the house in bed but myself, I'm thinking of you my dearest (Brontë Letters, 1.148).

In yet another letter, Brontë writes again of her desire to live with Nussey:

> If I could always live with you and daily read the bible to you, if your lips and mine could at the same time drink the same draught from the same pure fountain of mercy, I hope, I trust, I might one day become better, far better, than

> my evil wandering thoughts, my corrupt heart,
> cold to the spirit, and warm to the flesh will
> now permit me to be....I go on constantly seeking
> my own pleasure, pursuing the gratification of
> my own desires....I adore the purity of the Christian
> faith, my theory is right, my practice horribly
> wrong (Brontë Letters, 1. 147-48).

This letter to Nussey seems to indicate an awareness of feelings, thoughts, and perhaps actions that are "warm to the flesh." There is a great deal of support for Miller's hypothesis in the Brontë-Nussey correspondence. Yet, the possibility that Brontë and Nussey had a romantic relationship has been disrcounted by most feminist critics. Critics have been reluctant to label women's relationships, whether fictional or real, as lesbian because of an inevitable lack of proof, specifically proof of sexual contact. However, as Bonnie Zimmerman notes in her important essay "What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Literary Criticism" establishing proof

> ...is an almost impossible historical task,
> as many have noted, for what constitutes proof?
> Women have not left obvious markers in their
> private writings. Furthermore, such a narrow
> definition 'names' lesbianism as an exclusively
> sexual phenomenon, which, many argue, may
> be an inadequate construction of lesbian experience,
> both today and in less sexually explicit eras (204-05).

Similarly, Sheila Jeffreys echoes Lillian Faderman's point that sexual contact cannot be assumed to have been a part of pre-twentieth century romantic friendships:

> ...if we accept that proof of genital contact is
> required before we may include any relationship
> between two women in the history of lesbianism,
> then there is a serious possibility that we will end
> up with no lesbian history at all (22).

Without 'proof' it is easy to dismiss Miller's hypothesis as incorrect or flawed especially because her hypothesis casts into question the sexual orientation of one of English literature's icons. However, as a way of approaching Shirley with "fresh critical eyes," this discussion will assume that Miller is correct—that Brontë's relationship with Ellen Nussey was romantic and that it informed Brontë's depiction of Shirley and Caroline's friendship. This examination of Shirley and Caroline's friendship will therefore focus on the theme of affection and the way in which that affection is expressed.

Written in 1849, Shirley is the story of two women: one a strong, independent business woman, the other an unsatisfied woman who seeks a meaningful existence. Unlike the other relationships discussed in this chapter, the affection between Shirley and Caroline is highly romantic and for the most part takes the form of courtship. One of the most immediately striking features of Shirley and Caroline's relationship is Shirley's adoption of the role of courtier, a "grave but gallant little cavalier" (Brontë 212). The two women fall into their roles easily, each seeming to take her 'natural' place: the independent, assertive Shirley as courtier; the shy, inexperienced Caroline as blushing recipient to her suitor's affections. In her role, Shirley relishes the title of "lord of the estate." She refers to herself as Captain Keeldar or Shirley Keeldar, Esquire and is referred to as 'he' by Mr Helstone (213-215). As lord of her estate Shirley is financially independent and in control of all her affairs. Brontë gives Shirley a mind for business that allows her to

function as an equal in the world of men. Interestingly, Brontë also gives Shirley a masculine name. As Shirley herself says:

> ...I am no longer a girl, but quite a woman and something more. I am an esquire: Shirley Keeldar, Esquire, ought to be my style and title. They gave me a man's name; I hold a man's position; it is enough to inspire me with a touch of manhood;...really I feel quite gentlemanlike (213).

Indeed, Shirley's first gesture of kindness towards Caroline is one of 'gentlemanlike' courtship:

> She had selected a little bouquet of one brilliant and two or three delicate flowers relieved by a spray of dark verdure: she tied it with silk from her workbox, and placed it on Caroline's lap; and then she put her hands behind her, and stood, bending slightly towards her guest, still regarding her, in the attitude and with something of the aspect of a grave but gallant little cavalier. This temporary expression of face was aided by the style in which she wore her hair, parted on one temple and brushed in a glossy sweep above the forehead... (212).

Not only does Shirley behave like a gentleman courting , but Brontë suggests that Shirley's hairstyle gives her a 'masculine' appearance. In a subsequent chapter, Shirley speculates about who she would choose to be her wife if she were a man (217). This exercise is nothing more than wishful thinking since Shirley can never choose a 'wife':

> If she had the bliss to be really Shirley Keeldar Esq., Lord of the Manor of Briarfield, there was not a single fair one in this and the two neighbouring parishes, whom she would have felt disposed to request to become Mrs Keeldar, lady of the manor (217).

It is important to note here that Shirley finds the thought of truly being lord of the manor with the ability to marry a woman 'blissful.' However, Mrs Pryor does not find Shirley's reverie blissful at all:

> 'My dear, do not allow that habit of alluding
> to yourself as a gentleman to be confirmed:
> it is a strange one. Those who do not know you,
> hearing you speak thus, would think you affected
> masculine manners' (217),

There are several possible implications in Mrs Pryor's comment. The most obvious of these implications is that Mrs Pryor is aware that having "masculine manners" includes having an attraction to women. Moreover, Mrs Pryor indicates that Shirley must not let others notice this "habit." Obviously, Mrs Pryor is aware not only that Shirley is different, but that Shirley must be more discreet.

Shirley Keeldar, Esq. meets the prospective Mrs Keeldar in Caroline Helstone. Just as Shirley and Caroline are leaving to warn Robert Moore of the threat to his mill, Shirley tells Caroline that she would be "a docile wife...to a stern husband" (331). Does Shirley wish she could be Caroline's "stern husband"? Shirley's jealousy of Robert Moore would seem to answer this question. When Shirley realizes the mutual interest between Caroline and Robert, she informs Caroline

> 'I could have found it in my heart to have dogged
> Moore yesterday evening with dire intent: I have
> pistols, and can use them.'
> ...'I feel indignant; and that is the long and the
> short of the matter,...all my comfort...is broken up
> by his maneouvers. He keeps intruding between
> you and me: without him we should be good friends,
> but that six feet of puppy makes a perpetually
> recurring eclipse of our friendship. Again and again
> he crosses and obscures the disk I always want
> to see clear: ever and anon he renders me to you
> a mere bore and nuisance" (264).

Since Shirley and Caroline are already 'good friends' with Robert Moore intruding on them, Shirley's indignation suggests that she believes they could be more intimate if he were not present. One cannot help but wonder if the contrived entrance of Louis Moore into the narrative provides Shirley with a way to stay near Caroline. If this is so, it clearly reflects the consideration Brontë gave to Harry Nussey's proposal of marriage. Although Brontë declined Nussey's proposal, she considered it because it would mean Ellen could live with her (Brontë Letters, 1. 173).

An important similarity that Shirley shares with Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" is the role that the forest/wilderness plays in symbolizing and expressing the characters' sexuality. In "Goblin Market," for instance, Lizzie and Laura are lured into the haunted glen—a place which represents sexual temptation and, for Laura, experimentation. Similarly, Nunnwood is the haunted glen in Shirley and the venue for a particularly intimate exchange between Shirley and Caroline which occurs during their first excursion together. In this setting Shirley and Caroline discuss the negative impact that men have on women's intimacy. As they walk through the forest, Caroline asks:

> '...what third person is there whose presence
> would not spoil our pleasure?'
> 'Indeed, I know of none about our own ages–
> no lady at least, and as to gentlemen—'
> 'An excursion becomes quite a different thing
> when there are gentlemen of the party,' interupted
> Caroline.
> 'I quite agree with you—quite a different thing to
> what we were proposing.'
> 'We were going simply to see the old tress, the
> old ruins; to pass a day in old times, surrounded by
> olden silence, and above all by quietude.'
> 'You are right; and the presence of gentlemen

> dispels the last charm, I think. If they are of the wrong sort...irritation takes the place of serenity... (221).

Symbolically, this scene is highly sexual. As Tess Cosslett correctly notes, the ruins of the nunnery symbolize a place that is solely for women—a place completely separate and apart from men (122). However, the fact that the nunnery is in ruins suggests that the love bond betwen Shirley and Caroline may also be unable to stand up against modern times. Cosslett explains:

> As the scene progresses, the 'Nature' they appreciate and identify with becomes more nurturing and explicitly female, but also associated with ruins and the distant, vanishing past. The projected expedition to Nunnwood promises entry into a secret, secluded female space, a long-lost female world (122).

In Nunnwood, Shirley and Caroline enter a world with a topography symbolic of the female body with its dark crevices and curves (Moers):

> '...to penetrate into Nunnwood...is to go far back into the dim days of the eld. Can you see a break in the forest, about the centre?'
> 'Yes, distinctly.'
> 'That break is a dell; a deep, hollow cup, lined with turf as green and short as the sod of this common....'
> 'We will go–you and I alone, Caroline– to that wood, early some fine summer morning...' (221).

Nunnwood itself symbolizes the focal point of female sexual energy: it is a place where women once shared lives together. It is Shirley and Caroline's destination; it is a place they say they must go together, but

significantly, never do (Cosslett 112). One interpretation of these unfulfilled plans could be that Shirley and Caroline's sexual relationship is never consummated.

Another sexually charged scene occurs after the visit to Nunnwood. In this scene, Caroline explains to Shirley how she feels differently when they are alone:

> 'Shirley, I never had a sister—you never had a sister; but it flashes on me at this moment how sisters feel towards each other. Affection twined with their life, which no shocks of feeling can uproot, which little quarrels only trample an instant that it may spring more freshly when the pressure is removed; affection that no passion can ultimately outrival, with which even love itself cannot do more than compete in force and truth. Love hurts us so, Shirley: it is so tormenting, so racking, and it burns away our strength with its flame; in affection is no pain and no fire, only only sustenance and balm. I am supported and soothed when you—that is, *you only*—are near, Shirley' (265).

Caroline's distinction between love and affection is an important one, Clearly, affection is associated with Shirley, a woman. Love then is experienced with men. As in "Goblin Market," male love/sexuality is seen as destructive, a force which "burns away [women's] strength." Caroline herself emphasizes that *only* Shirley's affection can sustain and soothe her. In the above scene, Caroline and Shirley, as though exchanging vows, confirm that they are "really friends" despite the "black eclipse" that men represent for them (265). Caroline concludes this confirmation of affection by "drawing Shirley towards her...'chance what may'" (265).

Though Cosslett adamantly opposes reading Shirley from a lesbian perspective, she nonetheless makes an interesting point which supports a lesbian reading:

> In the presentation of Caroline and Shirley's friendship there are several hints that the female world they belong to cannot be represented fully in terms of current convention....though the female friendship is developed more than in other novels, it nevertheless gives the sense of something that can never fully take place (112).

What can never take place, due to the inevitable intrusion of gentlemen, Victorian social norms, and literary convention, is the fulfillment, whether spiritual or sexual, of Shirley and Caroline's romantic bond.

In her book The Self Conceived, Helen Moglen also discusses Shirley and Caroline's relationship. Unlike Cosslett, Moglen recognizes that Shirley and Caroline's relationship develops and flourishes because of mutual interest in each other, not mutual interest in marrying Robert Moore. As Moglen states:

> Between most women competing relentlessly with one another for husbands, relationships are superficially polite but equally blocked and frustrated. It is, of course, the intelligence and decency of Caroline and Shirley, their mutual awareness and shared concerns, which make their friendship possible (173).

However, Moglen's exploration of Shirley and Caroline's relationship stalls short of discussing the possibility that their bond is romantic. Moglen speculates on why Brontë's depiction of Shirley and Caroline's relationship seems "truncated and frustrated":

> Despite Charlotte Brontë's attempt...to discover in the friendship between women an alternative to the alienation and hostilities that existed between the sexes, her probing exploration yielded the image which was, while well-intentioned, deeply flawed: truncated and frustrated by personal ambivalence. ...In its incomplete expression, it seems in fact only half conscious....The girls' [sic] thoughts are not wholly presented" (180-81).

If Shirley and Caroline's relationship does mirror Brontë's bond with Ellen Nussey, how could it be complete? how could Shirley and Caroline's thoughts be "wholly presented" given Victorian society and literary convention? Further, Brontë's and Nussey's religious devotion could only permit her a truncated relationship with Ellen Nussey. Shirley and Caroline's relationship is similarly truncated because it is as far as convention and imagination would let Brontë go. As critics we must explore the symbolism of landscape, language, and gesture to make the depiction of Shirley and Caroline's relationship complete and a wholly conscious expression of love between women.

Tess Cosslett correctly notes that the depiction of female friendship in Shirley is "more developed than in other [Victorian] novels." However, this portrayal also gives us another perspective on the theme of affection. While the affection that Maggie and Lucy express for each other is no less intense that that expressed between Shirley and Caroline, it is *qualitatively* different. This difference may well be the result of Brontë's relationship with Ellen Nussey which was qualititatively different than Eliot's relationship with Barbara Leigh Smith. In other words, Brontë was able to re-vision the bond between female friends in

Shirley because she experienced a unique, qualitatively different female friendship.

The final novel to be examined in this chapter, is Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh. Elizabeth Barrett Browning did not have many close women friends. In fact, during her many years of seclusion, she, like Charlotte Brontë, disliked visitors of any kind; most of her relationships, with the exception of family, were maintained through letter-writing (Mermin 126). Her most extensive correspondence was with Mary Russell Mitford, a woman nineteen years her senior. Because Mitford lived in London, the two women did not see each other often but remained close by writing letters (Mermin 126).

As Dorothy Mermin outlines in her biography of Barrett Browning, Mary Russell Mitford and Elizabeth Barrett Browning were introduced by John Kenyon in 1836. Mitford, who remained single all her life, lived with her "profligate father who mercilessly exploited her" (58). Mermin theorizes that Mitford's unhappy life with her father caused her to "immediately [attach] herself to the young poet whose ambitions she fostered almost as lovingly and even more boldly than Mary Moulten-Barrett had done" (58).

Mitford, an established writer herself, depended heavily on Barrett Browning for emotional support and advice:

> ...the relationship between [Mitford and Barrett Browning] gradually shifted as the younger woman offered not only sympathy but advice in Miss Mitford's various perplexities: her literary projects, her troubles with publishers, her financial difficulties, her servant's pregnancies, her selfish and extravagant father's illness, and her efforts to resettle her life after his death (Mermin 81).

In turn, Mitford was completely devoted to Barrett Browning and enormously supportive of her career. She wrote to Barrett Browning:

> My love and ambition for you often seems to be... like that of a mother for a son, or a father for a daughter....I sit and think of you, and of the poems that you will write, and of that strange, brief rainbow called Fame....the position that I long to see you fill is higher, firmer, prouder than ever has been filled by woman. It is a strange feeling, but one of indescribable pleasure. My pride and hopes seem altogether merged in you (qtd. in Mermin 58).[2]

As Mermin notes, Mitford also provided Barrett Browning with important practical assistance such as the sharing of her knowledge of publishing. Not the least of Mitford's gifts to Barrett Browning was one small, and now famous, Spaniel named Flush.

Because of her reclusive attitude, Barrett Browning disliked Mitford's visits though, because Mitford lived in London, they occurred infrequently (Mermin 126). However, Barrett Browning enjoyed their epistolary relationship immensely. Their letters were full of literary news, 'gossip' about mutual friends, affection, and encouragement (81). They had many differences of opinion, one of which was about Robert Browning. Mitford disliked Robert Browning and was saddened to see her dear friend 'lost' to him (149). Nonetheless, she and Barrett Browning remained friends until Mitford's death in 1855. While Barrett Browning and Mitford's friendship was different than the bond between George Eliot and Barbara Leigh Smith, it stands as another example of a female friendship which embodied the themes of mutual support, generosity and affection.

Examining Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh for evidence of these themes is difficult for two reasons. First, unlike Eliot's The Mill on the Floss and Brontë's Shirley, which rely on a third person omniscient narrator, Aurora Leigh is told in the first person. This difference limits the extent to which Marion's perspective can be explored. Second, the relationship between Aurora and Marion does not comprise a major part of the novel's narrative. Nevertheless, Aurora's story includes evidence that affection, support, and generosity characterize her relationship with Marion.

At their very first meeting, Aurora describes her immediate attraction to Marion:

> She touched me with her face and with her voice,
> This daughter of the people. Such soft flowers
> From such rough roots? The people, under there,
> Can sin so, curse so, look so, smell so...faugh!
> Yet have such daughters (Barrett Browning, 3.805-809).

To her cousin Romney, Aurora praises "this good, true, noble" Marion:

> 'Here's one, at least, who is good,' I sighed, and
> touched
> Poor Marion's happy head, as doglike she,
> Most passionately patient, waited on,
> A-tremble for her turn of greeting words;
> 'I've sat a full hour with your Marion Erle,
> And learnt the thing by heart,—and from my heart
> Am therefore competent to give you thanks
> For such a cousin' (3.279-287).

Upon learning of Romney's motives for marrying Marion, Aurora is "baffled" and "chafed." She turns immediately and kisses Marion, finding "refuge in the woman." For Aurora, Marion represents a

"window open," a source of escape from Romney's calculated vision (3.348).

Later, Aurora learns that Marion was moved by her gestures of kindness and affection. In the letter to Romney which informs him of her decision not to marry, Marion writes:

> 'Most of all,
> Your cousin!—ah, most like you! Ere you came
> She kissed me mouth to mouth: I felt her soul
> Dip through her serious lips in holy fire' (4. 938-941).

Two years later in France, Aurora and Marion's relationship is renewed after a chance meeting where Marion is reluctant to acknowledge Aurora. However, Aurora is passionate and persistent:

> 'I lost my sister Marion many days,
> And sought her ever in my walks and prayers,
> And, now I find her...do we throw away
> The bread we worked and prayed for,–crumble it
> And drop it,...to do even so by thee
> Whom still I've hungered after more than bread...
> (6. 449-554).

Their relationship quickly grows to the point where, in a supreme gesture of generosity and support, Aurora invites Marion and her son to live with her in Italy. Aurora loves and cares for Marion and will do what she can to help her friend. As Aurora explains to Marion, "...if I loved you not,/I should not, Marian, certainly be here" (6.694-5). Unlike Romney's proposal, Aurora's is based only on her love for Marion rather than on a personal socio-political agenda. In the elevated language of the epic, Aurora says to Marion:

> 'Come with me, my sweetest sister,'...
> 'And sit within my house and do me good
> From henceforth, thou and thine! ye are my own

> From henceforth. I am lonely in the world,
> And thou art lonely. Come,–and henceforth thou and I
> Being still together will not miss a friend,
> Nor he a father, since two mothers shall
> Make that up to him (7. 117-125).

Aurora and Marion's friendship is extremely unconventional within the context of Victorian society. They are able to express their support, generosity and affection in a relationship that crosses class boundaries. Moreover, they are able to live together without the financial support of a male spouse.[3] Finally, they together raise a child outside of the traditional Victorian family. As Tess Cosslett observes:

> ...Aurora and Marion's friendship is created both as
> a social phenomenon and as part of a pattern of
> imagery of female solidarity (52).

Accordingly, Aurora and Marion's relationship is portrayed as successful because they work together and care for each other. By comparison, the false, "Lamia-like" Lady Waldemar fails in her goal to win Romney because she deceives and uses other women.

Aurora and Marion's friendship also stands in sharp contrast to Aurora's relationship with Lady Waldemar. Aurora's stinging 'first impression' of Lady Waldemar foreshadows their antagonistic relationship:

> She had the low voice of your English dames,
> Unused, it seems, to the need to rise half a note
> To catch attention,—and their quiet mood,
> As if they lived too high above the earth
> For that to put them out in anything:
> So gentle, because verily so proud;
> So wary and afraid of hurting you,
> By no means that you are not really vile,
> But that they would not touch you with their foot
> To push you in your place; so self-possessed

> Yet gracious and conciliating, it takes
> An effort in their presence to speak truth:
> You know the sort of woman,—brilliant stuff,
> And out of nature (3.345-358).

Although Lady Waldermar suggests that she and Aurora be friends, her purpose is to enlist Aurora's help in preventing Romney and Marion's marriage.

Eventually, Marion Erle, in telling of Lady Waldemar's treachery, exposes the serpent underneath the façade of charm and beauty. As she considers Romney and Lady Waldermar's union, Aurora asks herself:

> Would I show
> The new wife vile, the husband mad?
> No, Lamia! shut the shutters, bar the doors
> From every glimmer on thy serpent skin!
> I will not let thy hideous secret out (7.168-172).

Later, in a vitriolic burst of loathing, Aurora writes a letter to Lady Waldemar, issuing the following threat:

> You are very safe from Marion and myself;
> We'll breathe as softly as the infant here,
> And stir no dangerous embers. Fail a point,
> And show our Romney wounded, ill-content,
> Tormented in his home, we open mouth,
> And such a noise will follow...
> ...
> And so I warn you. I'm...Aurora Leigh
> (7. 363-374).

In this passage, Aurora and Marion are presented as a united front. They share concern for Romney's well-being, calling him 'our Romney.'

This sense of solidarity would certainly seem to weaken Tess Cosslett's theory that rivalry exists between heroines in order to establish who 'gets the man.' Cosslett suggests that, like Maggie and Lucy's

relationship in The Mill on the Floss, the friendship between Aurora and Marion serves to fulfill the plot of the novel—that is, Aurora's ultimate marriage to Romney. Cosslett states that:

> Marion is to be strong enough to stand alone without Romney, and Aurora is to realise her need for him; and the final understanding is to come about by each woman in turn giving up the man to the other (53).

However, Aurora's disdain for Lady Waldemar is as much the result of the latter's treatment of Marion as it is of her desire to possess Romney.

Aurora and Marion develop a sustaining and fulfilling friendship because that relationship provides them with support, love, understanding and affection. Just as Maggie and Lucy's relationship is separate and distinct from their relationships with others, so is Aurora and Marion's relationship separate and distinct. The depiction of Aurora and Marion's friendship does more than just challenge Victorian notions about women's relationships. Aurora and Marion's relationship also challenges Victorian notions of class. Barrett Browning, like Brontë, shows that the bond between women can break down artificial social boundaries. Given Victorian views towards women and social class, it is clear that Barrett Browning's depiction of female friendship is both re-visionary and radical.

Each of the three authors discussed in this chapter experienced female friendship differently and, accordingly, each has created a unique vision of female friendship. What is consistent in each of these representations, however, is the notion of support and affection, and generosity exisiting between female friends. Not one of the literary portrayals examined supports the idea that female friendships were

shallow or deceitful. Barrett Browning, Eliot and Brontë all experienced having close female friendships and were able to translate that experience to literature. They have created friendships between women of different social backgrounds and between women with different aspirations, and explored different levels of intimacy. Essentially, however, Barrett Browning, Eliot, and Brontë's message is the same—that the bond between female friends is nurturing and supportive and, to some extent, a source of protection.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to expand our understanding of Victorian interrelationships as they were portrayed in works by George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, Christina Rossetti, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. This goal was accomplished by comparing the literary depictions of the relationships between mothers and daughters, sisters, and friends to some Victorian beliefs about those relationships and by shifting critical focus away from the "conventional marriage-plot" to the significant female relationships in the works. Exploration of female relationships in The Mill on the Floss, Shirley, Aurora Leigh, Wives and Daughters, and "Goblin Market" confirmed that the authors' portraits did differ, in some cases significantly, from the beliefs Victorian society held about those relationships. For example, the depictions of relationships between mothers and daughters, particularly in The Mill on the Floss and Wives and Daughters, did not support the Victorian concept of motherhood. In addition, the portrayals of female friendship also contradicted some Victorian social commentators' beliefs that women's friendships (if they could exist at all) were shallow and trivial. Sisters are portrayed as having significant influence in each

other's lives and, unlike the ineffectual "angel the house," willing to act on each other's behalf regardless of personal risk.

Three themes emerge from the literary depictions of women's relationships discussed in the previous chapters. First, mothers are portrayed as obstacles to their daughters' attempts at self-actualization. They embody social conventions that act as barriers to the daughters' growth. Mrs Tulliver, Aurora's mother, and Mrs Pryor all inhibit their daughters' desires to reject the restrictions placed on them by their society. Mrs Tulliver, for example, desires that Maggie be like Lucy—the quintessential "angel in the house" apprentice. Mrs Tulliver, with her limited intellect and pedestrian concerns, is the antithesis of her daughter Maggie whose displays of will and desire for intellectual stimulation are repeatedly quashed by Mrs Tulliver's criticism and lack of understanding. The more Maggie tries to break free from the fetters of "womanly" behaviour, the more she feels alienated from her mother and aunts. The more Mrs Tulliver tries to impart her expectations of womanly conduct to Maggie, the more Maggie struggles against those expectations. The scene in which Maggie pushes Lucy perhaps best symbolizes Maggie's rejection of the expectations placed on her by her mother.

Aurora's mother and Mrs Pryor also inhibit their daughters from reaching beyond their ascribed roles. While Aurora's mother acts as Aurora's muse, inspiring her to write, she paradoxically acts as a deterrent to Aurora's venturing outside the domestic sphere. Aurora's mother represents tradition and, while she was alive, embodied the "angel in the house" ideal.[1] Indeed, Aurora's mother "could not bear the

joy of giving life,/The mother's rapture slew her" (1.34-35). Through her mother's death, however, Aurora is more free to explore other possibilities in her life. Thus, in Barrett Browning's rendering of the mother-daughter relationship, the angel in the house/mother must indeed be "killed" in order for the fictional heroine/daughter to escape her powerful influence.[2]

To a lesser extent, Mrs Pryor also inhibits her surrogate daughter's desire for self-realization. It is not Shirley's conduct or behaviour which disturbs Mrs Pryor, but rather Shirley's 'masculine' affectations. Mrs Pryor is quick to criticize Shirley's pronouncement that "there was not a single fair one in this and the two neighbouring parishes, whom she should have felt disposed to request to become Mrs Keeldar, lady of the manor...". (217). Mrs Pryor's reminds Shirley that her musings are "strange" and she must "not allow that habit of alluding to [herself] as a gentleman to be confirmed" (217). The usually sharp and loquacious Shirley is silent—a silence which symbolizes her inability to give voice to her true desires. Realizing that she cannot hope to experience fulfillment in reality, Shirley looks out a window and watches a bird who unlike her, is completely free. By reminding Shirley of society's expectations of womanly behaviour, Mrs Pryor represses Shirley's desires to lead a different life: to be 'Captain' Keeldar and to have a 'Mrs' Keeldar as well.

Ironically, in Gaskell's portrait of the mother-daughter bond, Mrs Kirkpatrick's *failure* to be an angelic mother prevents Cynthia from being the kind of woman she wishes herself to be—honest and honourable, a woman like Molly. Mr Gibson's assessment that Cynthia is "a jilt and a

flirt" neatly sums up the woman Cynthia has become due to her mother's neglect. As Cynthia tells Molly,

> 'Would you remember how very difficult it has sometimes been to me to act rightly?'... 'We won't speak of mamma, for your sake as much as mine or hers; but you must see she isn't one to help a girl with much good advice or good—Oh, Molly, you don't know how I was neglected just at a time when I wanted friends most....if I had only fallen into wise, good hands.' (486).

With proper nurturing, care and 'mothering,' Cynthia might have become a fine "angel in the house." However, as 'apprentice' to Mrs Kirkpatrick, Cynthia is doomed to become as manipulative and deceitful.

A second theme which has emerged from this examination is that of sisters acting as guardians of womanly behaviour. While it is ostensibly a mother's job to pass on the expectations and ideals of womanly behaviour, sisters ensure that, should one of them attempt to wander beyond the domestic sphere, the other will risk everything to fetch her back. Laura's journey into the haunted glen to meet the goblins, for example, can be seen as a symbolic journey beyond the domestic sphere. Laura leaves behind the obedient Lizzie and their picturesque domestic life in favour of a taste of something exotic, exciting, and sexual—something unangelic. Lizzie knows, however, that such a journey is ultimately fatal for women. Nonetheless, Lizzie risks her own life to draw Laura back within the 'protective' domestic circle.

Just as Laura bargains with the goblins, the enterprising Cynthia Kirkpatrick enters into an informal contract with Mr Preston. She promises she will marry Preston because he lends her money. In her

journey beyond the domestic sphere then, Cynthia manipulates men for monetary gain, is a "flirt and a jilt." Molly saves Cynthia from embarrassment and scandal by meeting with Mr Preston herself and urging him to cancel his contract with Cynthia. Like Lizzie, Molly risks a great deal in order to ensure that her sister is returned to the safety of the domestic sphere.

Unlike Molly and Cynthia whose domestic sphere reflects their society's norms and expectations of appropriate womanly behaviour, Mrs Tulliver's domestic sphere reflects norms established by her sisters. While Lizzie and Molly try to ensure that their sisters' behaviour and actions do not breach social boundaries, the Dodson sisters, particularly Mrs Glegg, work to ensure that the Dodson code is not breached. The Dodson sisters maintain order, not through personal sacrifice, but through criticism and judgement.

Only outside the family circle—away from the pressures to conform to the "angel in the house" ideal—does it appear that women can be supported in their wishes to move beyond the domestic sphere. Female friends offer the only arena for women to explore fulfillment, yearning, and desire—all of which are truncated or frustrated in relationships with female family members. In this the third theme of this examination, female friends support not only each other's wishes to test social boundaries, but also each other's uniqueness. As illustrated in Chapter 3, for instance, Lucy Deane is the only member of Maggie's female world who recognizes her beauty; to Lucy, Maggie's hair is not unruly, her skin not too dark. Like Laura's venture into the haunted glen, Maggie's trip with Stephen can also be regarded as a symbolic journey

beyond the domestic sphere. Maggie returns from this journey in shame. However, Lucy, who ostensibly has been hurt the most by Maggie's transgression, forgives Maggie and tells her, "...you are better than I am..." (643). Lucy breaks off her comment to Maggie with "I can't...," suggesting that Lucy realizes that she could never make the journey beyond the boundaries of womanly behaviour that Maggie has.

Aurora Leigh is similarly supportive of Marion Erle. Marion is forced outside the boundaries of the domestic sphere by her social class and by the fact that she has a child out of wedlock. Despite these 'disadvantages,' Aurora and Marion find common ground. Because of her desire to be a writer, Aurora, like Marion, is alienated from her society. Aurora offers her moral support and practical support; Marion offers Aurora the opportunity to, at least vicariously, experience motherhood. Indeed, their migration to Italy together as a family represents the only successful escape any of the characters in the novels discussed in this thesis make from the domestic sphere. In Italy, Aurora and Marion are self-sufficient and free to be who they wish and do what they wish.

For Shirley and Caroline, Nunnwood is their Italy and a place to which they never go. Both characters struggle individually with the expectations their society has of them; both characters dream of a life beyond the restrictions of the domestic sphere. Caroline wishes desperately that she could have a vocation to give her life meaning. Shirley wishes she could remain the independent lord of her estate. Neither wish can come true. During their walk in Nunnwood Common, Shirley and Caroline discuss the pleasures of life without men, agreeing

that they cannot be themselves when men are present. It is only alone that Shirley and Caroline talk of such things. In Nunnwood, Shirley and Caroline can imagine different lives, but cannot or will not complete the journey towards realizing different lives.

It is difficult to speculate about why in the works examined in this thesis there appears to be greater tolerance, if not support, for non-conformity in the depictions of female friendships than in the depictions of sisters. Brontë in particular explores women's emotions most intensely in her depiction of female friendship. Perhaps she as well as the other authors recognized that, unlike sisters, female friends were not influenced by family pride or 'code of honour.' Certainly in the portraits of female friendship, the reader has a greater sense than in the other portraits that the author is questioning women's roles in Victorian society. However, while these literary portraits are clearly re-visionary in that they offer perspectives of women's interrelationships that diverge from Victorian popular opinion, they are not radical. These portraits exist within the confines of Victorian literary convention in which the heroine either absorbs traditional feminine values, as do Shirley Keeldar and "Goblin Market's" Laura, or, like Maggie Tulliver, is destroyed by them. Thus, if we were to draw a metaphorical line between conventional depictions of women in Victorian women's literature and re-visionary depictions of women, the authors discussed in this thesis would be standing with feet on either side of that line. For instance, though Caroline's relationship with Shirley is portrayed as fulfilling and gratifying, though they both admit that men "eclipse" their friendship and prevent it from being "something" more, both characters marry at

the end of the novel. While Brontë can envision a complex and meaningful female friendship, she cannot write a novel in which the heroine eschews marriage in favour of that friendship or a meaningful career. Similarly in The Mill on the Floss, Victorian society and literary convention doom to failure Maggie's bid to escape her mother's expectations of womanly behaviour.[3] The heroine who "breaks the rules" cannot be seen to succeed. It is perhaps the conventional endings to these works which have so frustrated modern readers—particularly feminist readers.

This thesis is, of course, only a beginning. The limits of this project preclude the examination of more works by each author, the examination of more authors, and the examination of how women's interrelationships are portrayed by women writers over time. Each of these perspectives would provide valuable additional insight into this topic. However, if one of the goals of a Master's thesis is to add to a body of knowledge, this thesis has been successful. As mentioned at the outset of this work, there are few scholarly studies which discuss literary portrayals of women's relationships with each other. This lack of information has created an enormous gap in our understanding of how women writers translated women's experience into literature. Hopefully, this thesis helps to fill that gap.

Notes to Introduction

[1]Many feminist critics, besides those I have mentioned in the Introduction, have made important, if not integral, contributions to feminist literary scholarship over the last 20 years by providing unique approaches to their topics. Each of these critics approaches women's literature from a slightly different angle, thus offering students and scholars a variety of models with which to explore literature by women. It is important to note, however, that, despite the diversity of these critical perspectives, each is based on the knowledge that women have been *excluded*—excluded from the literary canon, excluded as historians of their own past. As I have outlined, Smith-Rosenberg's critical perspective evolved from her realization that she had excluded from her research what women had to say about themselves. Showalter's and Moers' critical perspectives are similarly based on women's self-perception.

Other feminist critical approaches to literature involve questioning the oppressiveness of the literary canon. For example, in her important essay "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," Annette Kolodny reminds us that the literary canon is an arbitrary structure developed by men to understand the present as well as the past (151-52). As Kolodny points out, scholars and students have mistakenly believed (or been led to believe) that admission to "the canon" is based on excellence. Women's exclusion from the canon implies that they are unworthy. This male view of literature, according to Kolodny, is rigid and she questions the definition of merit:

> To put it bluntly: we have had enough pronouncements of aesthetic valuation for a time; it is now our task to evaluate the imputed norms and normative readings that, in part, led to those pronouncements (158).

For Kolodny, any critical approach to women's writing must be pluralistic—that is,

> ...responsive to the possibilities of multiple critical schools and methods, but captive of none, recognizing that the many tools needed for our analysis will necessarily be largely inherited and only partly of our own making (161).

Lillian Robinson similarly questions the (male) literary canon in her essay "Treason in Our Text" Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon." Robinson suggests that feminism offers alternatives to "the male-dominated membership and attitudes of the accepted canon" and the job of feminist critics is "to demonstrate that...inclusion [of works by women] would constitute a genuinely affirmative action for all of us" (106; 118).

In Writing a Woman's Life, Carolyn Heilbrun also discusses exclusion. While Heilbrun's focus in this book is on autobiography and biography, she states that many female characters in literature have been excluded, their stories untold. Heilbrun, like Smith-Rosenberg, Showalter and Moers, works to discover and rediscover how women have written their lives. Heilbrun states:

> Women of accomplishment, in unconsciously writing their future lived lives, or, more recently, in trying honestly to deal in written form with lived past lives, have had to confront power and control. Because this has been declared unwomanly, and because many women would prefer to think (or think they would prefer) a world without evident power or control, women have been deprived of the narratives, or the texts, plots, or examples, by which they might assume power over—take control of—their own lives (17).

In studying women's biography, Heilbrun focusses on the importance of women writing about themselves rather than about men:

> The choice and pain of the women who did not make a man the center of their lives seemed unique, because there were no models of the lives they wanted to live, no exemplars, no stories (31).

See also Kate Millett's Sexual Politics which feminist theorists Toril Moi and Maggie Humm view as a "classic," marking the beginning of contemporary feminist literary criticism in North America.

[2] A quick survey of any anthology of literary criticism, including feminist literary criticism, reveals very little discussion about these relationships in fiction. For example, in Elizabeth Abel's anthology Writing and Sexual Difference, two essays on Eliot's The Mill on the Floss are included. Neither essay mentions Maggie's

relationship with Lucy; instead each focuses on Maggie's relationship with Tom and with Stephen.

[3] This fragmentation can also be seen as representative of women's conflicting desires—that women what both to adhere to the convention and to experience self-actualization.

Notes to Chapter 1

1 It is worth mentioning at the outset that, while aspects of Caroline's, Shirley's, and Molly's characters adhere to the "angel in the house" model, each heroine becomes ill at some point in the novels. These illnesses suggests the characters', and perhaps the authors', psychological inability to fully accept social convention.

[2]The inaccuracy of this image should be noted as most Victorian women were mothers between the ages of twenty and forty—few women lived to be ninety.

[3] The idea that Brontë might have "blotted out" the memory of her mother's death is somewhat surprising given her correspondence in which she candidly discusses her grief over her sisters' deaths.

[4] In fact, it is indicated that Mrs Pryor willingly relinquished custody of Caroline, earing that she would become like her father. Caroline and Mrs Pryor's relationship is not depicted as stereotypical; Brontë uses very real characterization in her representations.

Notes to Chapter 2

[1] It should be noted here that this passage is excerpted from the diary of a nineteenth-century woman living in France. Cultural differences between the French and the British may affect the ways in which sisters related to each other.

Notes to Chapter 3

[1] I have deliberately chosen only two of Brontë's woman friends. I have discussed Gaskell because she represents a female friend from within the literary community. Nussey is discussed both because she was Brontë's dearest friends and because Brontë's relationship with Nussey was, as I discuss in this chapter, qualitatively different from her relationships with other women. However, other women, including Mary Taylor, figured prominently in Brontë's life as well. Brontë met both Taylor and Nussey at Roe Head. Helen Moglen states that "Charlotte Brontë loved and respected Mary Taylor. She was much influenced by her ideas; inspired by her fervor" (168). Taylor, whose family were Radicals and Nonconformists (Fraser 62), became a radical feminist as an adult. Fraser suggests that Taylor's political enthusiasm was a neat complement to Brontë's reclusive and morbid personality (69). In the Taylors' home, Brontë "was treated without condescension and found there kindred spirits to her own family" (69). See both Fraser and the Brontë correspondence for more detailed accounts of Brontë's relationship with Taylor.

[2] It is interesting that Mitford avoids comparing her relationship with EBB to that between a *mother and daughter.* Certainly their age difference would have made such a comparison logical. The Freudian interpretations of Mitford's use of the father-daughter and mother-son analogies are obvious, suggesting that Mitford was sexually attracted to EBB. It is equally possible that Mitford simply had no model for a mother fostering a daughter to upon which to draw.

3 This image two women experiencing fulfillment and autonomy away from men is the image of completeness that is missing from Brontë's depiction of Shirley and Caroline.

Notes to Conclusion

[1]This is not to say that Aurora's mother is not integral to the development of Aurora's creative psyche. Aurora's preoccupation with her mother's portrait allows

her to incorporate its ambivalent images into her imaginative life—a process that proves essential to her creativity.

[2] This point is supported by the fact that most heroines in Victorian women's literature are motherless. Clearly the authors were aware that the heroine must be free of the "angel in the house" apprenticeship system in order to have novelistic adventures. Eliot's depiction of Maggie Tulliver certainly underscores the danger and futility of fighting an "angel in the house" who is alive and well.

[3] It should be noted that Eliot is the only novelist who portrays all three kinds of relationships between women examined in this thesis. The panoramic view of women's relationships she provides in The Mill on the Floss is typical os her struggle throughout her work and her life for completeness and comprehensiveness.

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