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QUEERING THE SPHERES:

NON-NORMATIVE GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND FAMILY IN THREE VICTORIAN TEXTS

BY

RANDI MIHAJLOVIC

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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2016

QUEERING THE SPHERES:

NON-NORMATIVE GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND FAMILY IN THREE VICTORIAN TEXTS

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the Master of Arts in English degree and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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ABSTRACT

QUEERING THE SPHERES: NON-NORMATIVE GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND FAMILY IN THREE VICTORIAN TEXTS

RANDI MIHAJLOVIC

2016

In my thesis, I use a queer theoretical lens to consider three Victorian texts, Hesba Stretton's "The Ghost in the Clock Room," Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," and J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*. I apply queer theory to locate these authors' attempts to destabilize heteronormativity by depicting non-normative gender roles, sexualities, and families in texts that emphasize the Victorian ideology of separate spheres. Many scholars imagine the separation of spheres as simply relegating women to a domestic sphere that reinforced traditional values and restricted their power. However, these works demonstrate that opportunities for power and queer possibility exist within the home and family, or so-called domestic sphere. This thesis seeks to locate and celebrate these queer and transgressive possibilities.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Nineteenth-century British writing often idealizes womanhood and women's position at the center of the family and home as a contrast to men's roles in the public sphere. An ideal woman would serve a central role as wife and mother to the heteronormative nuclear family, or the supposedly *natural* family. In *Friends of the Family: The English Home and Its Guardians, 1850-1940,* George K. Behlmer describes the mid-century Victorian conception of "the natural family" as one "founded by marriage, and consist[ing], in its complete state, of husband, wife, and children" (26). As a wife and mother, an appropriate woman would then take on the duties of the home and family with the appropriate grace and dignity, acting as a moral example for her family by demonstrating qualities like selflessness, piety, morality, tenderness, and forgiveness. She would raise moral, upstanding British children and serve her husband, family, and nation by empowering and uplifting her husband—who had to go out into the unscrupulous outside world—through positive moral influence and by maintaining the home as a clean, happy sanctuary for her family. This sanctified, female ideal has often been referred to as the "angel in the house," after Coventry Patmore's 1854 narrative poem of the same name, to represent the conglomeration of idealized visions of womanhood, motherhood, and family that paint the Victorian vision of the domestic ideal, or the woman's sphere.

The confining aspects of such an ideal are immediately apparent, and many have demonstrated how women's idealized position within the family in the nineteenth century repressed women and perpetuated heternormativity. I argue, however, that nineteenth-century authors also demonstrate the power women could wield from the domestic sphere

and the queer possibilities open to the idealized female figure. Nineteenth-century authors could choose to embrace or reject certain aspects of the domestic ideal in order to create new or altered visions of womanhood and family. In this project, I consider women's almost sanctified role within British culture as the domestic ideal and the liberating queer potential of this ideal by examining three authors' selected works: Hesba Stretton's "The Ghost in the Clock Room" (1859), Christina Rosetti's "Goblin Market" (1862), and J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1871). All three authors highlight the nineteenth-century expectation that women act as the central agents within domestic life, but add queer possibilities for women and their families within this domestic sphere. These three authors present differing possibilities and do not view these possibilities in the same light: Stretton and Rossetti depict optimistic visions of queer opportunities within the domestic family sphere, while Le Fanu presents the idealizing of women's role in the domestic sphere as dangerous, depicting queer possibility as monstrous and destructive. Yet, all of these works demonstrate that queer potential exists within the home and family.

Although *Carmilla* resists an optimistic outlook for queer families and women, "The Ghost in the Clock Room" and "Goblin Market" find queer possibility within the home and family, which requires a more optimistic theoretical lens than queer theory has traditionally used. Many queer theorists believe that any assimilation into the family or nation cannot be queer—Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes family as a system that society uses to label certain behaviors and relationships as a norm in *Tendencies* (6), while in "Queer Times," Carla Freccero voices a similar viewpoint that queer analyses often work against "progressive, and thus future-oriented, teleologies as aligned with

heteronormative reproduction" (21-22). Perhaps the most famous of these theorists is Lee Edelman, author of *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive.* Edelman contends that *queer* fundamentally cannot "reinforce some positive social value; its value, instead, resides in its challenge to value as defined by the social, and thus in its radical challenge to the very value of the social itself" (6). While this approach may apply to some extent to *Carmilla*—a novel dedicated to demonstrating how female relationships seriously threaten male power and destroy the social ideals and values they've been designated to foster—the threat still comes from within the home and family from a distinctly maternal figure.

Therefore, the view of the family as fundamentally normal oversimplifies the complex motivations and structures of actual families. I prefer to explore the queer possibilities the family presents to avoid limiting stereotypes and to contribute to a richer and more accurate understanding of the family. Likewise, in *Queer Dickens*, Holly Furneaux argues that parenthood, families, and the domestic sphere can be queer, and she promotes a theory of queer optimism that suggests a future for queer families and children outside of the shame, death drive, and tragedy often associated with it (25-26). Furneaux describes queer optimism as the exploration of "queer spaces that can be inhabitable and even enjoyable" and views Victorian families as queer institutions in themselves (14). The authors I examine suggest that idealizing a maternal womanhood provided women with the power to queer British domestic ideals regarding family roles and structure and to destabilize masculine power from within the family sphere. Some of these queer and destabilizing effects include: excluding or demonizing men while sanctifying a maternal womanhood; transforming female desire to possess maternal

qualities into a desire to possess the maternal figure sexually resulting in same sex attraction and incest; blurring lines between romantic and platonic relationships; and using heterosexual marriage to perpetuate queer relationships or shaping heterosexual marriage itself into a queer institution. Queer possibilities can and do come from within the domestic sphere—to spectacular or disastrous effect depending on these authors' perspectives.

Stretton, Rossetti, and Le Fanu all focus on young unmarried females in an awkward transitional phase full of queer and transgressive possibilities. This transitional phase locates these women somewhere between girlhood and womanhood. In *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, Deborah Gorham asserts, "[A] young girl could represent the quintessential angel in the house. Unlike an adult woman, a girl could be perceived as a wholly unambiguous model of feminine dependence, childlike simplicity and sexual purity" (7). In their late teens or early twenties, these women are no longer young girls or "unambiguous model[s] of …sexual purity" (Gorham 7). However, they have not reached idealized status as wives and mothers, either. Therefore, they exist at a site between the two with the potential to embrace, subvert, or redefine ideal womanhood. In *The Girl's Own: Cultural Histories of the Anglo-American Girl, 1830-1915*, Claudia Nelson and Lynne Vallone affirm, "The Girl existed as raw potential, for she could embody either virtue (as wife and mother or spinster and sister) or a kind of depraved independence and sexual freedom (as 'fast girl' or 'New Woman')" (2-3).

Although some scholars, like Penny Kane in *Victorian Families in Fact and Fiction*, argue, "Adolescence, as an in-between time bridging childhood and becoming an adult, was a concept unknown in the nineteenth century," I find the opposite to be true

(75). Although adolescence may not have been distinguished by a particular age range, Victorians were particularly aware of the positive and negative potential for girls in this awkward phase; girls within this ambiguous space between childhood and womanhood create a site of cultural possibility as the metaphorical future of Britain as the mothers and wives that would ground the family in British values. In *The Awkward Age in Women's Popular Fiction*, Sarah Bilston further explains, "contemporary commentators regularly described the transition to womanhood as a time of great personal and social significance, a tumultuous period of dramatic possibilities and unproven potential" (6). These figures could be invested with these authors' own queer ideals, as in "The Ghost in the Clock Room" and "Goblin Market." Bilston describes, "the time in which an individual confronted adulthood became, increasingly, a phase through which Victorian women writers confronted—and reshaped—contemporary conceptions of womanhood" (6). In a similar vein, Nelson and Vallone assert that Victorians emphasized "the Girl as present or potential influence for good or evil" (6) and that adolescence "was a new and often disquieting concept in the late nineteenth century; in particular, the adolescent girl was disturbing because she might equally well act out what women were supposed to be—and what they were not" (3). Le Fanu employs such a strategy with Carmilla, who appears as an ideal, while subsequently causing horror by acting out what women were not expected to be. Although the concept of adolescence became more clearly defined as the century progressed, literary texts depicted unmarried young women at moral crossroads much earlier in the century, especially in didactic fiction aimed at adolescents. The choices a young woman could make during this awkward age set the tone for her personal future and, in a larger sense, the future of British culture and social structures

through her success or failure to meet social ideals.

Young women at this dangerous and ambiguous crossroads in life were expected to make a successful transition through their socialization in the maternal-didactic system. In *Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction,* Judith Rowbotham claims, "Would-be good girls with hopes of becoming good women were encouraged to look to fiction heroines as well as real 'good women' for guidance" (22). Maternal figures and their influence, then, become essential to the proper development of girls. Indeed, as Gorham suggests, "Much Victorian idealization of femininity was concerned with its manifestation by adult women in their roles as wives and mothers" (5). If influence from appropriate maternal figures was essential at this stage of life, influence from an inappropriate or queer mother figure could doubly threaten a girl's chances of reaching an idealized maternal womanhood. The works I examine all stress the significance and power of the woman's sphere and the ability of women, especially girls on the cusp of womanhood, to embody (or fail to embody) this ideal. I argue that nineteenth-century authors recognized the potential for the idealized maternal figure to create queer or subversive possibilities for gender roles, family formation, and female sexuality outside of a closed nuclear family fixed under patriarchal power.

This project contributes to a larger field of inquiry by adding to the emerging body of work applying queer theory to nineteenth-century literature and by promoting an optimistic outlook for queer gender, sexuality, and family structures in the nineteenth century. Although a growing body of work currently exists applying queer theory to nineteenth-century literature, "The Ghost in the Clock Room," "Goblin Market," and *Carmilla* have not been previously subjected to a queer analysis in any real depth beyond

various scholars commenting on the homoeroticism and potential homosexuality in *Carmilla* and "Goblin Market." These kinds of analyses often ignore other queer elements like asexuality and non-heteronormative family structure. Additionally, the most influential and impressive work with queer theory focuses on men rather than women. Other important work with queer theory and women in the nineteenth century bases itself in America, and significant analysis of female relationships and the maternal ideal often springs from a feminist or psychoanalytic reading of a text rather than a queer analysis. A work that considers women in nineteenth-century British literature through a queer lens fills multiple gaps.

Therefore, I use queer theory as my primary theoretical approach. Queer theory is deeply invested in the nineteenth century, primarily due to the influence of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. Foucault's account that Victorians labeled deviant sexual behaviors and practices and created homosexuality as an identity has become fundamental to queer theory. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a highly influential theorist credited for helping to found this theory, draws on Foucault and even specifically addresses the nineteenth century in her work, *Between Men*, which deals with Victorian fears regarding male homosexuality.

Most queer theorists do not work in the nineteenth century, however, and, because of the elasticity of queer theory, I must specify the manner in which I will use it within this work. The term *queer* and the application of queer theory to a text can vary in its usage among theorists. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick establishes queer theory on the basis of destabilizing and examining twentieth-century western culture's "chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition" (1). In a more recent publication,

Freccero asserts, "Queer, to me, is that name of a certain unsettling in relation to heteronormativity" (17). In most cases, these two definitions might work together; however, this is not always so. For example, one cannot easily reconcile Sedgwick's focus on blurring the line between homosexuality and heterosexuality and Freccero's definition of queer as destabilizing to heteronormativity in a case where homosexual desire and love may actually promote and perpetuate heteronormativity—an argument I will make while examining Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market." So, even like-minded theorists often rely on definitions of queer that can ultimately result in contradictions or paradoxes.

Some theorists have used these differences as a license to open queer analysis to incorporate basically anything a society would consider non-normative. I am especially interested in maintaining meaning within a theory that has been overextended in recent years due to the elasticity in the meaning of the term queer. Some have used the term queer to depict anything unusual within a text and forgotten or ignored the theory's roots in gay and lesbian, gender, and sexuality studies. Therefore, I will use queer theory in a manner that I believe best represents the spirit of the theory and best serves the purpose of locating non-heteronormativity in Victorian literature.

Most queer theorists voice concern over universalizing *queer* or using the term too broadly: Sedgwick, Freccero, and Heather Love among many others. I admire Freccero's framework for using, and abstaining from using, queer. She asserts, "If, in a given analysis, queer does not intersect with, touch, or list in the direction of sex—the catchall word that here refers to gender, desire, sexuality, and perhaps anatomy—it may be that queer is not the conceptual analytic most useful to what is being described" (22). I

share Freccero's concern of overextending queer; I do not wish to stretch the term to the extent that it is rendered meaningless, and I hope to maintain the integrity of the term by tying my queer analysis back to sexuality or gender, which still allows plenty of latitude for this project. In many cases, I do use queer theory in the most easily recognizable manner in order to investigate homoeroticism and homosexuality within a text. However, I do not limit my analysis to homosexuality alone since Victorian works often address a wealth of other non-heteronormative behaviors, genders, sexualities, and family bonds and formations.

In chapter two, I examine Hesba Stretton's "The Ghost in the Clock Room" (1859), didactic fiction from an evangelical author. "The Ghost in the Clock Room" follows a structure typical of didactic fiction with a young woman noticing the error in her ways, transforming into an ideal, and marrying. The female protagonist, Stella, moves away from the corrupting influence of the public sphere and into a domestic sphere where she thrives. Rather than reinforcing norms once she moves into the domestic sphere, however, Stella queers conventional motivations for engaging in a heterosexual marriage and becomes a part of a queerly structured family; Stella uses her marriage to maintain a relationship with her husband's father and adopted daughter, and her marriage appears asexually companionate and motivated by her desire to educate herself in the sciences. Therefore, Stretton's seemingly conventional didactic literature actually questions the value and purpose of heterosexual marriage while promoting queer family ties and queer means of perpetuating families.

Chapter three explores the queer spheres in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862). Although this work conveys a moral and includes a marriage ending that appears

like a potential return to heteronormativity, Rossetti layers this poem with subversive and queer possibility. Rossetti maintains a distinct separation of spheres, another seemingly conservative aspect; however, she uses this separation to make a concerted effort to exclude men from the woman's sphere and to elevate this sphere above the masculine economic sphere. Rossetti characterizes the male sphere as inhuman and morally bereft, while she depicts the woman's sphere as morally rejuvenative and founded on intense homoerotic bonds between women; she essentially uses the separation of spheres to place women in a position of power and superiority over men.

In chapter four, I examine how J. Sheridan Le Fanu highlights the separation between male and females spheres in *Carmilla* (1871), while emphasizing the woman's sphere as corrupt and dangerously uncontrolled. Le Fanu uses the monster Carmilla as a friend and mother to highlight the queer and destructive possibilities within female relationships, while Laura serves as the idealized adolescent girl that Carmilla can corrupt. Le Fanu depicts these female bonds as highly erotic and women as far from deserving of the idealized status his contemporary culture has afforded them. In essence, Le Fanu queers norms by refusing to idealize the female domestic sphere and by characterizing this sphere as inherently queer and threatening.

Although each work highlights the power of women within the woman's sphere and their ability to shape this sphere in queer ways, these works do not all directly promote optimistic visions of this power. Further, these works defy simple categorization by often sending mixed messages: promoting some queer possibilities while relying on some conventional aspect(s) of gender, sexuality, or family formation or framing subversion as negative at other points. The variety of these authors' visions of queer

possibility for women and families demonstrates how transgressive and queer women could be from within a sphere often imagined as designed to confine women and to restrict their power.

Chapter 2: Queer Didacticism: Hesba Stretton's "The Ghost in the Clock Room"

Hesba Stretton portrays a young woman's moral reform and transition into an idealized womanhood in "The Ghost in the Clock Room" (1859). Stretton charts the female protagonist's progress from a flirtatious coquette groomed by her elder sister to succeed in catching a husband by marketing herself in the public sphere into a dignified, feminine ideal within a domestic sphere. This young woman, Stella, essentially rejects the public sphere for a more meaningful role within the Fraser family and home. Stella's return to a domestic sphere allows Stretton to propose ideals for a woman and family in typical didactic form. The fact that Stretton was well known in her time as an evangelical writer of moral, didactic fiction and that she adheres to many conventions of the genre in "The Ghost in the Clock Room" only makes her attempts to blur boundaries and queer gender roles and norms surrounding marriage and family formations more significant. Stella pursues an education in the sciences and attempts to maintain a close relationship with her eventual husband's father and sister, raising questions about the purpose and primacy of marriage and the heteronormative nuclear family in a genre supposedly dedicated to reinforcing family norms and traditional cultural values. Stretton demonstrates how queer possibility exists in seemingly conventional places and forms.

Because "The Ghost in the Clock Room" does not contain overtly homoerotic or homosexual scenes, a view of queer as necessarily homosexual is inadequate in addressing Stretton's queer subversion of heteronormativity. I explore queer in this work in a manner that makes binaries like heterosexual/homosexual less than useful in thinking about the complexity of family relationships and gender roles. Personal relationships between people of the same gender may hinder heterosexual ties without being

homosexual, and a person may choose asexuality in lieu of heterosexuality or homosexuality. I find such an exploration more productive since queer theory strives to break down binaries regarding gender and sexuality rather than affirm them. Stretton is a fascinating study because she opens queer potential within the family and heterosexual marriage.

Stretton wrote "The Ghost in the Clock Room" for a family audience. The story first appeared as part of a Christmas ghost story special in Charles Dickens's periodical *All the Year Round*; the Christmas publication date immediately suggests the particular climate and audience for this work. In "Victorian Christmas in Print," Tara Moore investigates the rise of Christmas publications beginning in the 1840s, which she describes as an "explosion in Christmas publications and Christmas culture" (25). Specifically, Christmas print "became a celebration of an ideology of the Victorian home" (Moore 5) and "supplied a festive fantasy for an audience with concerns about the continuance of their traditional families and nation" (Moore 6). Since, "The home became and remained the central focus for Christmas nostalgia," Christmas print was often targeted toward family reading (26). In fact, Moore claims, "Christmas reading was intended to take place in the bosom of the family, and this premise set the reader within her own understanding of one of the main ideals of the narratives: home" (51). Moore establishes two basic working principals for Christmas print culture: it dealt with the home and family and it was targeted toward a family audience. Moore's description of the audience and the general climate of Christmas print aids an understanding of how "The Ghost in the Clock Room" catered toward a Christmas family audience, eager to receive didactic moral fiction as part of the spirit of the season. This climate indicates that

Stretton was expected to reinforce cultural family values on some level by idealizing the domestic sphere and women's role within it.

This expectation extended beyond the Christmas season for Stretton as an evangelical writer who primarily wrote didactic, moral stories centered on adolescent girls and young women. After her start in Dickens's *Household Words* in 1859 with "The Lucky Leg," Stretton was often published by the Religious Tract Society. In "Unforgiven: Drunken Mothers in Hesba Stretton's Religious Tract Society and Scottish Temperance League Fiction," Deborah Denenholz Morse affirms, "By the end of the 1860s, Hesba Stretton became the most important writer for the RTS, the highly successful publisher of Christian Evangelical works" (102). In fact, the RTS even used several of her pieces as conversion literature for missionary purposes; in 1893, *The Sunday at Home* records that the RTS had translated at least two of Stretton's short stories for conversion in Bulgaria ("Monthly Record" 767).

Stretton also wrote for other publishers and magazines, achieving some renown during her long career, but she remained an evangelical who primarily wrote in the didactic genre throughout her career. *The Academy* testifies to this fact, voicing discontent toward Stretton for not "leaving the trodden way" by writing something other than didactic fiction in 1899 ("Girls' Novels in France and England" 207). Despite this complaint, Stretton obviously experienced some acclaim and success, writing primarily the same genre prolifically for forty years. In an 1894 review, *The Review of Reviews* declares, "Hesba Stretton's stories sell enormously," claiming she made at least 400 pounds for one of her short stories and adding, "Her publisher is a lucky man" ("Hesba

Stretton at Home" 47). And in 1893, *The Review of Reviews* describe Stretton's success as international with work translated into at least eleven languages.[1]

Contemporary journalism indicates that there was a demand for didactic fiction for adolescents during this period and that Victorians imagined this fiction as playing a significant role in a child's, especially a girl's, upbringing. Stretton was one of many writers primarily targeting girls and young women. Nelson and Vallone affirm that Victorians directed a great deal of energy toward developing "the 'shoulds' surrounding young womanhood," developing larger narratives of idealized girlhood that focused on young women learning to embody these ideals through "contemporaneous cultural productions—conduct manuals, diet books, institutions, novels, periodicals literature, photographs, [and] paintings" (4). Didactic fiction certainly contributed to promoting ideals for young women. Rowbotham describes common ideology of the time; "it was presumed by adults that carefully written and chosen didactic fiction could be used as a means of social control" (3). Victorian society imagined that didactic fiction would aid in the transfer of traditions and ideals to "girlish readers," and "Only through their continuation could the stability of England's civilization be maintained" (Rowbotham 18). Didactic fiction appears to have played a significant role in the cultural imagination and was a part of many middle- and upper- class women's childhoods and adolescences.

Although it's impossible to know whether Stretton's fiction served its intended purpose of teaching children moral principles, her fiction did leave an impression on many young readers and was tied to moral development. In fact, multiple journalists

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[1] The Review of Reviews claims that *Jessica's First Prayer* had been translated into "Arabic, Cingalese, Japanese, Bulgarian, Czech, Russian, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, and French" by 1893 ("The Author of Jessica's First Prayer" 635).

during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century write pieces that reminisce on favored and influential literature from their childhoods and include Stretton (especially her most popular work *Jessica's First Prayer* 1876). In 1900, *The Academy* includes her on a list of "The Best Sunday Books," indicating the moral importance of her work and the family-friendly target audience. And, in 1905, Thomas Seccombe writes for *The Bookman* and includes her on a list of "Classics of the Nursery: Or, the Development of Books for Boys and Girls" while Bella Sidney Woolf includes her on a list of "Children's Classics" in a 1906 copy of *Quiver,* and John Kirk includes her on a list of contemporary Christmas classics for children, claiming, "The whole child-world is indebted to her pen," in a 1909 piece for *Quiver* entitled "The Story of My Life" (760). Clearly, these stories remained popular years after Stretton wrote them and some even featured prominently enough in these writers' lives as children to warrant acclaim in their adulthood.

Stretton's image as a writer of wholesome, moral literature in a didactic genre widely recognized for promoting social values appears at odds with the queer and socially subversive ideals present in much of her work. In *The Writings of Hesba Stretton: Reclaiming the Outcast,* Elaine Lomax asserts,

> Her work is notable for its interaction with prominent nineteenth-century social, cultural, and political dealings, and for its engagement with many of the interests and anxieties of the period" despite critics' tendencies to dismiss her work "as belonging to a body of didactic and, to modern taste, unacceptably religious and sentimental writing, a stance which has served to foreclose more fruitful exploration of this literature. (Lomax 1)

Indeed, closer examination of her works often reveals queer and subversive elements carefully crafted into the seemingly conservative framework.

In fact, "The Ghost in the Clock Room" employs a conservative didactic framework that reinforces some social ideals only to use these recognizable ideals to queer multiple other aspects of gender, family, and heterosexual marriage. Stretton reinforces social ideals in two primary ways. First, she separates the home and family as a domestic sphere in contrast to a public sphere, creating a binary between the Fraser home as a sanctuary or Eden in comparison to the public sphere that Barbara pushes Stella into. This reaffirms well-known Victorian ideology that rejected women's roles in the public sphere and designated women's proper place as the home and family. Second, Stretton relies on the conventional trope of idealizing the female protagonist's maternal nature in order to highlight her central importance to the family as the unit's source of happiness, nurturing, and spiritual rejuvenation. Stretton uses these two ideals to frame the underlying structure of the tale as recognizably didactic with a young woman moving from the public sphere and the self-described "empty-headed folly of my girlhood" into her rightful place as a maternal figure in the domestic sphere (581). The didactic framework suggests that Stretton will lead Stella from her failing queer family and queer gender as a woman within the public sphere at the beginning of the story to a more ideal family structure and female role by the end. While Stretton certainly leads Stella toward her vision of gender and family ideals, Stretton ultimately proposes another set of queer ideals rather than forcing Stella into a heteronormative nuclear family.

Stella initially comes from a queer family as an orphan who has been raised by her elder half-sister; she describes, "I grew up as much the child of my eldest sister,

Barbara, as I was the daughter of my deceased parents" (576). This family structure certainly does not meet the heteronormative nuclear ideal with an elder half sister in a maternal role and absent parents. Stella's sister, Barbara, is also less than ideal as an example of successful womanhood since she remains unmarried and has no children of her own.

In addition to her status as a spinster, Barbara's social and financial ambition cast her as queerly unfeminine. Barbara has "built her highest hopes" on Stella being "advantageously settled" through marriage and has spent most of her life ensuring that her other sisters found appropriate marriage matches (576). Barbara's ambitions cause her to abandon ideal feminine moral principles in order to participate in the economic exchange of the public sphere by essentially selling Stella for financial and social gain. Therefore, Barbara directs her energy toward training Stella to succeed in manipulating potential suitors, suggesting Stella "concentrate" her "abilities" to gain a marriage of advantage (576). Barbara's mercenary view of courtship and marriage compromises the domestic sphere. Rather than teaching Stella ideal qualities like maternal nurturing, Barbara trains Stella to behave deceitfully to succeed in the marriage market. Barbara instructs Stella to play a part as appropriately passive, stupid, morose, and as if she wholly depends upon her suitor at the proper moments during courtship. Barbara claims, "[I]f a man believes you can live without him, he will not, give you a second thought" (576). In other words, Barbara suggests that Stella be manipulative by feigning helplessness and dependency as if she is "almost frightened and quite bewildered" in order to catch a husband of means (576). Further, Barbara claims that Stella will never marry if she continues to fail at affecting these feminine mannerisms at the appropriate

times because she will not cater to the male ego sufficiently. She warns, “Mortify a man’s self-love, Stella, and you can never heal the wound” (576). Barbara encourages Stella to wield a certain power as a deceitful and manipulative flirt. However, Barbara’s need to coach Stella in affecting these mannerisms demonstrates that this kind of femininity does not come naturally to Stella and that one must be trained in deceit to succeed in the public sphere.

Stretton repeatedly relegates deceit to the public sphere in contrast to the truthfulness and depth of character found within the Fraser home. The narrative describes women as deceitful on at least two separate occasions. The young girl of the Fraser family, Lucy, relates to Stella that Martin, her adoptive father, has told her “women are, perhaps, less truthful than men. Because they cannot do things by strength, they do them by cunning. They live falsely. They deceive their own selves. Sometimes women deceive for amusement” (578). Further, Martin declares to Stella, “Hitherto, woman and deceit have been inseparably conjoined in my mind” (579). Although one can recognize the misogynistic tone of such comments, the root of the problem seems to lie within women’s socialization process since Stretton does not characterize deceit as a natural female flaw. Stretton indicates that society encourages women to behave in unnatural ways and to lose sight of more meaningful pursuits. Barbara and social conventions appear more accountable for promoting Stella’s behavior than Stella, who has corrupted her true nature by adopting the behaviors Barbara has asked of her.

Therefore, rather than creating a moral home atmosphere and setting a good example as a proper mother for Stella, Barbara serves as a poor example by encouraging Stella to participate in the morally bereft public sphere. A poor maternal figure places

Stella at a serious developmental disadvantage within a genre (and society at large) that emphasized the role of the mother in developing moral, British children. Bilston contends, "[M]ost mid-century didactic texts depict mothers as wholesome, regulatory checks on a young woman's behavior. Mothers are also the ideal to which a girl must aspire" (26). Although Stella's substitute mother, Barbara, appears to mean well for Stella and a modern reader may sympathize with Barbara's attempt to ensure Stella achieves adequate financial and social status through the only means available to her, Victorian readers would recognize that Barbara does not act as an appropriate maternal guide and that Stella's home has stunted her moral and spiritual growth rather than fostered it. Stretton provides a pessimistic outlook for queer possibility within Stella's initial queer family structure and with the queer maternal figure, Barbara, who largely contributes to Stella's failure to embody a happy ideal womanhood.

While Barbara and her circle may have socialized Stella to behave deceitfully and to pick up the vices of the public sphere, Stretton provides Stella with a deeper maternally-directed nature that leads her toward a moral domestic sphere. Stella protests against Barbara's plans due to a moral "stirring" of "feeling in my heart" (576). Further, Stella laments that the men in her social circle lack admirable qualities and character. She declares, "[A]mong all the people I have known, I never saw one whom I could reverence, and look up to; nor, I am half ashamed to use the word, whom I could love" (576). Stella voices her disgust and discontent towards Barbara's advice due to the "original suppressed nature that I had inherited from my unknown mother, [which] was stirring unwonted feeling in my heart" (576). And, Stella increasingly ignores or rebels against Barbara in favor of following this truer nature.

Therefore, Stella's rebellion against Barbara serves as a metaphorical rejection of the public sphere and aligns her with her own deceased mother and domesticity, leading readers along in the didactic plot structure. Stella's dissatisfaction with Barbara's advice leads her directly into the home of her mother's old fiancé, Mr. Fraser. The isolated Fraser home with which Stella's mother shares an intimate connection with becomes a symbol of deeper feeling, thinking, and belonging within a moral domestic sphere. When Stella steps into the home for the first time, she describes, "An air of profound peace pervaded the dwelling. I entered it with a vague, uneasy consciousness of unfitness and treachery" (577). Stella immediately feels the moral superiority of this home in comparison to her own life with Barbara that has been corrupted by Stella's forced interaction with the public sphere. Stretton also takes care to link the home and Stella with Stella's mother on this visit. Mr. Fraser sees Stella and declares, "You are like your mother, child…you have her face and eyes; not a whit like your sister Barbara" (577).

Stretton continues to tie images of idyllic isolated domesticity and maternal fulfillment to the Fraser home, while rejecting the evils of the public world in typical didactic fashion. Stella refers to the Fraser home as both "sanctuary" and "Eden" while demonizing her own behavior in the public sphere (578-79). She describes her intelligence and talent as essentially wasted in this sphere as "a mindless, flirting girl, whose acknowledged vocation was the hunting and catching of an eligible match; rather pretty, lively, and just sentimental enough to make me a very pleasant companion for an idle hour or two" (576). Stella's successful transition into an ideal woman comes largely from the embrace of her inner maternal nature, which is reflected in her physical likeness to her own mother within the Fraser home. Maternity and domesticity are inextricably

linked in the Fraser home. Stella claims, "I asked my nurse to arrange my hair in the style in which my mother used to wear hers…. I was satisfied to be identified with my mother" (581). Even when she stares at the Fraser home and reflects on how she has grown, the maid declares, "I thought you were your mother… I have seen her stand just so, hundreds of times" (580). Stella's visual transformation serves as an important gauge of her progress in becoming an ideal woman. Rowbotham describes, "Fiction reveals the importance of outward appearance as an indication of inner nature in the basic feminine stereotype that dominated didactic fiction in the period up to the 1870s" (23). At this point, a reader can clearly see this trope at work since Stella appears most maternal when she is linked with this ideal domestic sphere. Stella's personal growth within the Fraser home indicates the importance of a proper domestic environment to foster moral growth.

While Stretton effectively separates the immoral public sphere from the moral and rich family life within the idealized private sphere, the ideals Stretton ultimately proposes in the Fraser home are radically and optimistically queer for a genre meant to lecture young girls in conservative social values. Rowbotham asserts, "Didactic fiction was fueled by the wish to control as far as possible, if not stifle independent feminine desires to create a role and power base in society for themselves outside the limits prescribed by established society" (12). Although Stretton certainly reinforces real female power and fulfillment as outside of larger society, she also enriches and expands ideals within the domestic sphere, using a socially acceptable channel to open queer possibilities. While Stella may join the family through the socially appropriate avenue of heterosexual marriage when she marries Martin, Stretton calls the meaning and purpose of marriage into question and emphasizes the role women play within the home and family. Stretton

uses conventional conservative elements like family, domesticity, and maternal nurturing to propose her queer vision for feminine gender roles, marriage, and family.

Even the most supposedly normalizing feature of this family and home as separate from the public sphere makes the family surprisingly queer. The Fraser family is utterly isolated and rejects almost all interaction with society. In fact, the family is so anti-social that Martin won't even venture into society to find a wife. Stella has to actually enter their home and shun the public sphere before the narrative allows Martin to propose to Stella. The extent of this family's isolation makes them queer by setting them apart from culture. Edelman contends that *queer* fundamentally cannot "reinforce some positive social value; its value, instead, resides in its challenge to value as defined by the social, and thus in its radical challenge to the very value of the social itself" (6). Although Edelman rejects the queer possibility of the family because it appears as a "positive social value," the antisocial nature of this family and the ways in which they challenge even the most conventional social practices, like potentially refusing heterosexual marriage and physical reproduction, marks this family as queer.

Further, rather than imagining family as a normalizing social system that simply instructs members to follow larger cultural norms, Stretton uses the family to foster relationships outside of the heteronormative nuclear ideal and even allows the family to perpetuate itself queerly. In fact, the Fraser family is not a heteronormative nuclear ideal and has already created a queer means of perpetuating itself without marriage or biological reproduction. The elderly Mr. Fraser, his son, Martin, and an adopted daughter, Lucy, constitute the Fraser family. An old man, a single man, and an adopted daughter fail to meet the Victorian familial ideal on multiple levels. As the only son of a

prestigious family in good health, Martin should marry and reproduce in order to continue his family line. Instead, Mr. Fraser and Martin have adopted Lucy as an heir. Lucy queers the nuclear ideal first as an adopted daughter.[2] Furneaux describes adoption as queer in the manner "in which both marriage and reproduction are displaced as the only available or laudable means of family formation" (25). Further queering the heteronormative family, Mr. Fraser and Martin have purposely adopted Lucy to create a matriarchal family line. Mr. Fraser tells Stella, "We have adopted her as our heir, and she is always to keep her name, and be the founder of another line of Frasers" (577). A line founded by a woman questions the primacy of the system of patriarchal lineage typically traced through males. Stretton expands women's essential role in the family beyond typical boundaries.

When Stella does enter the family, she fills a maternal role that the family desperately requires, but, Stella manages to embody this sanctioned role in a manner that promotes queer possibility rather than serving as a normalizing force. Stella's emphasized maternal bond with Lucy and Mr. Fraser serves as a powerful incentive for her marriage to Martin, disrupting the romanticized marriage plot and redirecting attention to the significance of other family bonds. Stella describes her transformative relationship with Lucy and Mr. Fraser, extolling her own personal growth from these experiences.

> Into the dull routine of Mr. Fraser's and Lucy's life, I came (I suppose) like a streak of sunshine, lighting up the cloud that had been creeping over them. To both, I brought wholesome excitement and merriment, and so I

[2] The practice of adopting a child was actually not uncommon, however. According to Penny Kane in *Victorian Families in Fact and Fiction*, "[C]hildren were not infrequently adopted out of their original family, even when both their parents were still alive" (4). Actual practices of adoption appear at odds with the supposed ideal of the nuclear family.

> became dear and necessary to them. But over myself, there came a great and an almost incredible change. (Stretton 578)

On one level, Stella's declaration reflects popular sentiments toward the purpose of mothers in the home. In *The Mothers of England: Their Influence and Responsibility,* Victorian conduct book writer Sarah Stickney Ellis describes, "It is a fact universally acknowledged, that the healthy tone of the domestic atmosphere, as well as the general cheerfulness of the household, depend very much upon the mother" (44). Indeed, Stella becomes the "health" and "life" of the family, according to Martin (579). Stella even nurtures Lucy back from the brink of death. Martin asserts, "[S]he [Lucy] has been drooping ever since you left us, Stella; and my only hope of her recovery rests in your ministering care," while Stella describes, "All that night, I sat with the little child resting on my bosom; revived from her deathlike swoon, and sleeping calmly in my arms because she was already beginning to share in the life and joy and brightness of my heart" (581). Stella saves Lucy's life simply by embodying a maternal ideal and becoming a mother to Lucy, highlighting the restorative power of maternity on both spirit and health.

Although Stella's deep mother-daughter attachment establishes Stella as an idealized maternal figure, this relationship serves a queer function as an alternative to heterosexuality. The bond may not have erotic overtones, but their relationship repeatedly neutralizes heterosexual exchanges; Stella often runs to Lucy in scenes that disrupt these exchanges. In one of these scenes, Stella meets "one of the young men with whom I had flirted in former times" (578). He describes another unloved suitor showing off a lock of her hair to his male friends in a tavern. This exchange highlights Stella's value in the

public sphere as an object of male desire and frames the public sphere as the site of sexuality in contrast to the asexuality within the Fraser home. Stella runs to Lucy and the Fraser home after this exchange, "hastening onward to my sanctuary, I sought the presence of my little Lucy Fraser" (578). Stella chooses Lucy and the sexless "Eden" of the Fraser home over her heterosexual flirtations in the public sphere (579). The primacy of Stella's relationship with Lucy also takes over a potentially romantic reunion scene with Martin where Stella races to Lucy's side to nurse her, signifying a potentially deeper emotional attachment to Lucy than Martin.

Stella also shares a queer bond with Martin's father that distracts from, and takes precedence over, her relationship with Martin. Stretton romanticizes Stella's connection to the elder Mr. Fraser in order to strip the romance out of Stella's and Martin's relationship and to promote alternative family bonds. In doing so, Stretton avoids the conventional romantic love match as an incentive for girls' proper behavior popular of didactic fiction. Rowbotham claims, "[R]omance was plainly a useful tool in the armoury of social control for good girls" (43). Stretton takes great pains to avoid using a heterosexual love match by especially emphasizing the relationship between Mr. Fraser and Stella after Stella's wedding, when she attributes her dramatic evening reunion with Martin to an uncontrollable desire to see Mr. Fraser again that led her to run over to their home during the night and to peak into Mr. Fraser's window. Stella even concludes the narrative by asserting the primacy of her relationship with her father-in-law and claims, "Only at first, Martin pretended not to believe that on that night I stole out to have a last glimpse, not of him, but of his father: I knowing nothing of the change that had transformed Mr. Fraser's sitting-room into his own study" (581). This queerly intimate

attachment between Stella and Mr. Fraser only intensifies as Mr. Fraser confuses Stella for her mother (his ex-fiance). Stella promotes Mr. Fraser's confusion between lover, mother, and daughter; she relates, "Mr. Fraser received me as his daughter with great emotion and affection, and oftener called me Maria than Stella" (581).

Although Stretton creates queer romantic tension between Mr. Fraser and Stella, this idealized relationship transcends a physical or romantic attachment. After all, an excess of romantic passion and love led Stella's mother and Mr. Fraser to cancel their engagement after a dispute. The cliché romance tropes between Stella and Mr. Fraser are safely asexualized to allow Stretton to include the traditional romanticized plot elements without idealizing the actual marriage as a love match. This allows Stretton another means—in addition to interrupting the scene by sending Stella to the dying Lucy's bedside—of downplaying the dramatic reunion scene as a reward of romantic love for the repentant Stella.

Martin not only recognizes Stella's attachments to his family, but values these links. Even when Martin proposes, he voices the emotional attachment through his family by proposing to her as an "us" (581) and inquiring, "Does your heart cling to us as our hearts cling to you, till we dare not think of the void there will be in our home when you are gone? We did not live before we knew you" (579). Martin articulates his intent to marry Stella through the emotional connection between her and his family, proposing a union between his family and Stella rather than declaring a romantic love or indicating any kind of financial or social incentive. Even when the two dramatically reunite, Martin tells Stella that Lucy "has been pining to see you" (581). This promotes a queer family dynamic in which a woman might marry primarily to cement an elective relationship with

a member or members of a prospective husband's family rather than marrying for conventional reasons like heterosexual romance or financial gain. Stretton clearly values the bonds Stella has with Martin's family and wants to promote an asexual attachment between Martin and Stella.

Stretton's message reflects a growing ideology regarding women's roles in marriage that is typically associated with the later nineteenth century. According to Vicinus,

> [M]any feminists were attracted to the idea of celibacy for both sexes. They accepted as fact that women were innately maternal and men innately more sexually driven. They redefined motherhood as a spiritual power that could regenerate the world rather than just the family; it did not need to include a husband or pregnancy. Men, in turn, could become spiritually and physically healthier if they became more like women. Spiritually superior women would lead men in the creation of an androgynous future, in which children would be created without sexual intercourse. ("Celibate Marriages" 26)

Stretton proposes such an ideal with the "innately maternal" Stella who demonstrates regenerative powers over her new family and is not expected to physically reproduce in this seemingly asexual marriage ("Celibate Marriages" 26).

Stella is undoubtedly maternal as part of her true "feelings," even if she does not initially demonstrate these qualities. Until Stella enters the Fraser home and gains a family to "mother," she lacks an opportunity to be anything other than what Barbara and her experiences in society have encouraged. Stella's "original suppressed nature" already

possesses the capacity for maternal nurturing and love, but she learns to value these things within Mr. Fraser's household. Stella becomes a regenerative moral force within this family. Sarah Stickney Ellis sheds light on the extreme importance and emphasis on mothering. Ellis claims, "[I]t is to woman that we look for so directing the various capabilities with which she is naturally endowed, as to create around her a moral atmosphere…powerful in its effect upon the mind" (*The Mothers of England* 47). Indeed, Stella becomes the "health" and "life" of the family and changes the family for the better; Stella lifts the "sternness" from Mr. Fraser and Martin and heals the dying Lucy with maternal love (579).

Further, as Vicinus describes above, this ideal family forms without romantic love or sex; it does not require Stella to reproduce physically since the Frasers have already designated Lucy, their adopted daughter, as their heir. If one agrees with Vicinus that "[t]he cornerstone of Victorian society was the family" and "the perfect lady's sole function was marriage and procreation," the absence of any need to produce children to create a family here appears quite queer, and Stretton has complicated the notion of marriage as a means of procreation to create a nuclear family (*Suffer and Be Still* x). Stella essentially adopts the Fraser family and becomes the maternal glue that holds it together. Lomax considers this a larger trend in Stretton's work, arguing that, for Stretton, "definitions of the 'mothering' role are fluid: 'parenting', 'family' and 'home' take many forms, challenging traditional models and exposing the artificial nature of prescribed roles" (138). In "The Ghost in the Clock Room," Stretton perpetuates an idealized vision of the family with a strong maternal role in the center, but she also queers the heteronormative ideal by rejecting a wife and mother and husband and father

and their biological children as the ideal, altering the structure and purpose of the family.

Stretton further emphasizes a queerly asexual, companionate marriage through the oddly passionless and educational relationship she portrays between Martin and Stella. Stella describes her relationship to Martin as that of student and teacher. “I became to him merely a diligent and insatiable pupil, and he was to me only a grave and exacting master, to be propitiated by my most profound reverence” (578). Although Stretton places Stella in a slightly subordinate relationship to Martin as adoring pupil, she also establishes Stella as a serious student with a capacity for learning and an ability to potentially equal Martin’s knowledge.

Stella marks the two major transitions in her character as the time she spends with Lucy and Mr. Fraser and her transformation when she forgets her purpose in capturing the attention of Martin during her first use of the telescope.

> I had been frivolous, self-seeking, soulless; but the solemn study I had begun, with other studies that came in its train, awoke me from my inanity, to a life of mental activity. I absolutely forgot my purpose…. Each time I crossed the threshold of his [Martin’s] quiet home, all the worldliness and coquetry of my nature fell from my soul like an unfit garment, and I entered as into a temple, simple, real, and worshipping. (Stretton 578)

Stella enters the Fraser home under the false pretense of studying astronomy in order to attract Martin, but entirely abandons her purpose during her first visit in a dramatic moment where she experiences “floods of thought…wave upon wave, across my mind” (578). Stella forgets Martin in favor of pursuing knowledge of astronomy and expanding

her mind, but Stella's study of astronomy also holds greater significance as a metaphor for self-discovery. Stella, whose name means star, receives an opportunity to learn about stars and, consequently, herself in the Fraser home; the Fraser household provides her with multiple new opportunities for personal growth, but her education in the sciences becomes essential to her overall growth and her ultimate status as an ideal woman.

Stella's educational pursuit queers her gender since Victorian society viewed women's education suspiciously, regarding education in the sciences or any serious study as potentially unfeminine. On one hand, the positive depiction of any woman who took education seriously, "challenged a widespread conception of woman as pusillanimous creature, obsessed with the trivial concerns of drawing room and boudoir," according to Carol Dyhouse in *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (151). On the other hand, some education was desirable for women to please their husbands and function appropriately as mothers. Gorham explains, "[E]arly and mid-Victorian advice books took pains to emphasize to girls that they should always keep in mind the ultimate purpose of their education; it was to make them pleasant and useful companions to men, and responsible mothers to their children" (102). When Stella muses on how she has lost her chance to be with Martin, she refers to a missed opportunity for comforting him and learning from him—a mixture of a maternal and student relationship. Stella comments, "I had forfeited the right to sit beside him, reading the observations his pencil noted down, and chasing away the gloom that was deepening on his nature" (580). Stella, then, can serve as a source of cheer as Martin's companion. In *The Daughters of England: Their Position in Society, Character and Responsibilities,* Ellis leaves room for such a scenario when she declares, "[A] general knowledge of science…renders them [women] more

companionable to men" (42).

Clearly, Stella wants to make Martin happy, but Stretton also indicates that Stella learns for herself and, therefore, pushes the boundaries of social acceptability. Stella's desire to learn would be suspect to Victorians since, "Victorian society was always likely to equate intellectual ambition in women with selfishness" (Dyhouse 73). Further, Ellis voices a fear of young women "diving too deep" and sacrificing "any portion of… feminine delicacy" (*Daughters of England* 42). Stella's genuine desire to learn appears to serve dual purposes as a mutual source of interest with Martin and a genuine intellectual interest, but Stretton ensures that Stella's desire to learn appears self-motivated and further pushes the boundaries of acceptable female behavior by designating science as the subject of Stella's intellectual interests; Stella's interest in science risks her idealized femininity.

Further, Martin's respect for and encouragement of Stella's intellectual interests establishes this relationship as different from previous relationships. Stella does not have to feign stupidity in order to please Martin or to demonstrate a capacity for self-sacrifice in the face of male interest as Barbara has instructed. Stella's and Martin's relationship appears queerly asexual and built on mutual respect unlike Stella's flirtatious and sexually charged relationships in the public sphere. Stretton paints Stella's experience in society, and socially encouraged female courtship behavior, as degrading to women and female potential because Stella's value in the public sphere relates to her physically attractiveness, sex appeal, and charm. In contrast, Martin appears to value Stella's intellect.

Stella and Martin's mutual intellectual interest places them in a potentially equal

companionate marriage. Vicinus describes the promotion of asexual marriage as a component of growing feminist rhetoric later in the century where, "Relations based on companionship rather than sexual intimacy might overcome the gender inequality that characterized traditional Victorian marriage" ("Celibate Marriages" 26). Further, in *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*, Sharon Marcus asserts, "[T]he feminist bildungsroman deploys amity to help female protagonists acquire the autonomy that makes them equal to their husbands" (91), and Vicinus claims, "Courtship was often conducted in terms of moral or social improvement rather than emotional compatibility" ("Celibate Marriages" 26). In short, Stretton's desexualized intellectual and companionate ideal in 1859 queers her contemporary social ideals for gender roles in a marriage.

Stretton further queers norms for family formation by suggesting that heterosexual marriage may not be ideal at all, especially if it is pursued in the way society currently sanctions it. In a significant learning moment, Stella notes, "It is not always our duty to marry; but it is always our duty to abide by right" (579). Therefore, marriage is not always the ideal, and Stella follows this advice when she decides to reject another suitor in favor of potential spinsterhood. She describes, "[B]efore me lay a monotonous and fretted life with Barbara, and a solitary, uncared for old age;" but, she still embraces this potential future over a marriage to a wealthy suitor (579). Further, Stretton's examples of unhappy marriages reinforce some marriages as less than ideal. A maid openly informs Stella, "Mr. Fraser's first marriage had been for money, and was not a happy one, so he had grown something stern" (580). Stretton also implies that Stella's mother's marriage to her father was unhappy; Stella refers to it as an "error" (580). Even

Martin intends to live a single life until he meets Stella, and his family has accepted and even prepared for Martin's elective bachelorhood by adopting Lucy.

Stretton also questions the primacy of heterosexual marriage in other works more or less directly. In "The Christmas Child" (1888), another didactic Christmas piece written later in her career, Stretton explicitly rejects heterosexual marriage in favor of elective singlehood for women. Stretton promotes independent women who demonstrate ideal maternal qualities and adopt children. The only marriage in "The Christmas Child" has disastrous consequences for the young woman involved, who is subsequently abandoned with child and wanders as a fallen woman presumed to be a ghost. Many other works implicitly offer happy alternatives to marriage as well. *Little Meg's Children* (1870) ends with two families travelling together across the sea: one family constituted by a single mother, Mrs. Blossom, and her young adult daughter and the other made up of a single father, Mr. Fleming, and his children. Further, "The Withered Daisy" (1861) ends with a deeply bonded brother, Godfrey, and sister, Emma, living together after the brother's fiancé betrays him by marrying another man. Stretton questions the primacy of marriage in forming family bonds across her career from mid to late century.

Rejecting heterosexual marriage as a fundamental ideal and basis for family formation would have contradicted Victorian social ideals. In *A Prison of Expectations,* Steven Mintz explains the emphasis, especially from evangelicals, on perpetuating marriage as a form of preserving British values. "Convinced that certain traditional institutions and hierarchies were essential if society were not to collapse, Victorian moralists desperately believed in the importance of preserving marital unions" (Mintz 135). Further, marriage was often considered a fundamental aspect of legitimate

womanhood. In *Daily Life in Victorian England*, Mitchell explains, "[M]arriage held so central a place in the conception of ideal womanhood" (267). Bilston describes,

> In much socially conservative Victorian discourse, womanhood was produced by marriage; 'woman' almost necessarily meant 'married woman'. A young girl attained adult status suddenly, almost instantaneously, through the performative 'I do' of the marriage vow, a conceptualization of maturation that left little space for emotional growth and development. However, a host of women writers effectively countered such notions of maturity-as-wifehood by plotting and charting the transition to womanhood as an emotional, psychological experience. (Bilston 6)

By establishing Stella's transition into idealized womanhood as based on her maternal bonds and intellectual experience and by rejecting heterosexual marriage as defining ideal womanhood in other works as well, Stretton repeatedly rejects marriage itself as the defining experience of womanhood, highlighting the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual experience as transformative. Despite Stretton's perceived status (then and now) as a conservative, evangelical writer, she challenges marriage as the only means for a woman to become an ideal or for a woman to build a family.

In "The Ghost in the Clock Room," Stretton's asexual marriage based on a couple's mutual interest in science and the woman's desire to adopt a family rather than create her own nuclear family appear starkly queer and surprisingly feminist for a genre that Rowbotham describes as "inevitably" designed to "set itself to counteract the perceived threat of nineteenth-century feminism to established values, particularly with

respect to the family" (42). Instead, Stretton appears more aligned with later feminist visions. Vicinus claims, "Feminism, in a variety of forms, was intrinsic to the idealistic goal of celibate intimacy" ("Celibate Marriages" 25), and she further asserts, celibacy's "attraction for feminists, political radicals, and intellectuals suggests a powerful undercurrent of discontent with heteronormative sexuality" by the end of the century ("Celibate Marriages" 27). Therefore, Stretton's ideals in the mid-century appear surprisingly subversive and are especially significant in destabilizing our tendency to categorize didactic fiction as a representation of heteronormative ideals with no room for social commentary that might empower women or offer alternatives to the heteronormative nuclear family. Stretton demonstrates how even the most didactic and religious-based literature may have queer and optimistic potential for female empowerment and queer family formations.

Chapter 3: Christina Rossetti's Queer Woman's Sphere in "Goblin Market"

Like Hesba Stretton's "The Ghost in the Clock Room," Christina Rossetti's narrative poem "Goblin Market" (1862) positions itself as a morality tale with clear warnings of the consequences of deviant behaviors through a tale of two sisters, Laura—a wayward and subsequently redeemed young woman—and Lizzie—an idealized model of female propriety and maternity. While in the forest, the two sisters hear the calls of goblin men selling their fruits. Despite the cautionary tale of Jeanie, a young woman who has died and lost her chance of becoming a bride after sampling the goblin fruit and Lizzie reminding Laura that they should return home to avoid these goblin men, Laura decides to stay in the forest, where she exchanges a lock of her golden hair in order to eat and suck their goblin fruits—a metaphor for sexual desire. After succumbing to her desire, Laura returns home to Lizzie, and waits to hear the goblin men call the next day. She realizes, however, that she can no longer hear the goblins or see them, and she becomes depressed and falls into ill health. In order to save Laura's life, Lizzie seeks out the goblin men and attempts to purchase fruit to take home to Laura, but the goblin men try to force her to eat the fruits with them by verbally and physically abusing her and smashing fruits onto her face. Eventually, the goblin men give up, and Lizzie returns home covered in fruit juices due to her act of self-sacrifice. Laura then consumes the fruit and juices and reverts to her original, golden self.

The narrator then ends the poem by situating the tale firmly in a moral context by stating, "Afterwards, when both [Lizzie and Laura] were wives/ with children of their own… "Laura would call the little ones/And tell them of her early prime" (544-45; 548-49). Further, the moral nature of the story manifests itself in the ultimate lesson to

readers, “For there is no friend like a sister/In calm or stormy weather;/ To cheer one on the tedious way,/ To fetch one if one goes astray,” (562-66). Journalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century certainly recognizes a moral at the center of this poem. In 1895, Lily Watson of *The Leisure Hour* asserts, “It were easy to read a moral into this story” (246), while an 1862 copy of *The Saturday Review* claims that “Goblin Market” “deduces a moral at the close in favour of sisterly affection” (“Goblin Market and Other Poems” 595). This moral promotes notions of female propriety in significant ways: through the example of proper maternal behavior in how Laura and Lizzie teach moral behavior to their own daughters in the last stanza of the poem, through reminding readers of proper behavior and the existence of a social code of propriety throughout the poem, and by promoting wifehood and maternity as the ultimate goal and reward for women throughout the poem.

This poem appears to establish the kind of conservative, prudish, heteronormativity that the Victorian period has earned a reputation for with a constant didactic emphasis on proper behavior for women and a happy ending in which both main characters become wives and mothers. Although “Goblin Market” appears as didactic literature typically directed toward adolescent girls on the surface, Rossetti likely did not intend the poem for such an audience or purpose. Instead, Rossetti may have used the moral and didactic structure appropriate for female authors in order to promote subversive and queer ideals for femininity and sexuality and to voice social criticism toward the public economic sphere and men’s roles in this sphere. Rowbotham argues that women writers could use such a structure “without alienating a male-oriented society” to “broaden and modify this central element in the feminine tradition in their

own interests" (13). Like typical conservative literature, Rossetti's poem reinforces the separation between the spheres and women's proper place as within the domestic sphere and central to the family as a source of spiritual rejuvenation. However, Rossetti separates these spheres to an unusual degree by privileging a utopian woman's sphere that contrasts the morally bankrupt, inhuman, and destructive male economic sphere. Although both Stretton and Rossetti highlight the restorative capability of their idealized maternal figures, unlike Stretton in "The Ghost in the Clock Room," Rossetti separates the morally bereft public sphere as distinctly male from an idealized woman's sphere where women cement bonds and avoid, or recover from, male corruption through erotic maternal-didactic bonds.

Therefore, "Goblin Market" does not appear to be intended as typical family-friendly literature for multiple reasons. Contemporary journalism suggests that the poem was initially published for and received by a mature audience. An 1862 copy of *The National Review* includes "Goblin Market" on a list of "Books of the Quarter Suitable for Reading Societies (199), while various contemporary reviews celebrate "Goblin Market" for its artistic merit. *The National Review* in 1862 asserts, "The principal poem has rare delicacy and beauty of a modest kind, and several of the sonnets are fine" (199). Mrs. Hon Norton of MacMillan's magazine declares, "[I]ncomparably the best of her compositions is the "Goblin Market," which may vie with Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner,' in its degree, for the vivid and wonderful power by which things unreal and mystic are made to blend and link themselves with the everyday images and events of common life" (404). *The Academy* writer Richard Le Gallienne praises Rossetti and her work with "Goblin Market," claiming, "To say that Miss Rossetti is the greatest English poet among

women is to pay regard to a distinction which, in questions of art, is purely arbitrary" (130).

The poem was appreciated as art before it was directed toward adolescents as a moral story. In "Goblin Market as a Cross-Audience Poem: Children's Fairy Tale, Adult Erotic Fantasy," Lorraine Kooistra establishes the first publication of "Goblin Market" in a volume of poetry for adults, and Kooistra claims that "Goblin Market*"* appeared targeted towards adolescents beginning late in the century when a headmistress incorporated the poem into her classroom textbook (184-85). Even with "Goblin Market's debut as children's literature" at the end of the century, Kooistra points out, "[I]t is equally clear that a definite sector of the juvenile population has been targeted: those on the threshold of sexual maturation and womanhood" (185). Other editors from the late 19th century to the late 20th century who have included the poem in their children's collections often make similar moves by targeting a more mature juvenile audience or significantly altering or cutting out sexually explicit scenes—most often altering the healing embrace between Lizzie and Laura.

Another indication that Rossetti did not write this poem with a middle- or upper-class adolescent audience in mind is the strong presence of sexuality and the negative consequences for succumbing to sexual temptation.[3] According to Rowbotham, "The assumption of innocence in middle-class girls meant that, unlike working-class girls, it was neither useful nor desirable to display to them in fictional form the seamier side of life to be met should they stray from the paths of righteousness;" instead, "It was more

[3] The original 1862 edition of "*Goblin Market" and Other Poems* also includes at least one other poem with vivid erotic imagery "The World" and another poem about a fallen woman, "An Apple Gathering," indicating that Rossetti explored the temptation of sexual desire and transgression as one of the potential themes within this book of poetry.

effective to dwell on the positive aspects of feminine conformity by looking at the rewards that might accrue overtime to the good girl" (43). "Goblin Market" may end in happiness and a reward, but a significant portion of the poem emphasizes Laura's decay due to her sexual transgression, making it an unlikely choice for mid-century adolescent reading.

These later revisions, the recommendations that the poem be taught to older female students, and the inclusion of sexual images and negative consequences suggests that Rossetti did not intend to create a family-friendly morality tale, and, even if she did, "Goblin Market" was not received as such when it was published. So, what is the purpose of framing the story as a morality tale? *The Saturday Review* in 1862 indirectly sheds some light on the effect of writing within a conservative frame. While voicing confusion and discontent over the use of a magical sister bond as an allegory, *The Saturday Review* latches onto the ending as redemptive for Rossetti.

> It is satisfactory to know that both Laura and Lizzie were in due course married, and lived happily ever afterwards—also that Laura used to call their little ones round her, and tell them in sober seriousness of her own adventure and Lizzie's devotions, as an inducement to the cultivation of family affection and trust. Where the moral inculcated is so excellent and proper, it may seem ungracious to complain of the unreal texture of the fable through which it is conveyed.
>
> ("Goblin Market and Other Poems" 595)

This reviewers' dislike of the fantasy elements in favor of the seemingly conservative end is not surprising. In *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, Rosemary Jackson argues that

Christina Rossetti is one of many female writers of fantasy who "fantasize[s] a violent attack upon the symbolic order" (103), and that female Gothic and fantasy writers often "employed the fantastic to subvert *patriarchal* society—the symbolic order of modern culture" (104). In "Goblin Market," Rossetti uses fantastic metaphors with goblins for men and magical fruit for sex in order to convey queer and subversive messages without openly attacking the status quo. Indeed, multiple contemporary journalists comment on the unusual nature of some of these scenes, especially the rejuvenating exchange between Laura and Lizzie, while avoiding any deeper analysis. *The Athenaeum* claims that Laura rejuvenates "by a process which is the least distinct part of the story" ("Goblin Market, and other Poems"), and *The Saturday Review* voices discontent with the magical manner in which Laura heals "without any apparent reason for the change" ("Goblin Market and Other Poems" 595). Norton, a journalist writing for *Macmillan's Magazine* declares, "The 'Goblin Market,' by Miss Christina Rossetti, is one of the works which are said to 'defy criticism.' Is it a fable—or a mere fairy story—or an allegory against the pleasures of sinful love—or what is it? Let us not too rigorously inquire, but accept it in all its quaint and pleasant mystery" (401-02).

The ease with which the reviewers forgive or dismiss the subversive or queer moments of the poem based on the women's marriages at the end, which they perceive as a return to a recognizable heteronormative ideal, is particularly significant. So, although The Saturday Reviewer voices confusion and discontent over "what the allegory is" in "Goblin Market, the reviewer approves of the resolution in which "Laura and Lizzie were in due course married, and lived happily ever afterwards" ("Goblin Market and Other Poems" 595). This indicates that, by employing a recognizable moral, didactic structure

with a metaphorically fallen and an idealized sister with happy marriages in the conclusion, Rossetti could potentially protect her own reputation while layering this simple structure with queer and subversive moments.

Therefore, I must establish the moral, didactic framework of the poem that supports contemporary social ideals as a foundation before moving to the queer and subversive aspects. The poem consistently emphasizes the proper behavior that will lead a young woman to wifehood (and eventually motherhood). Although both women "talked as modest maidens should" and performed their chores (209), one can see Lizzie as a symbol of female propriety in contrast to Laura as the wayward sister even before Laura takes the fruit; in the first mention of the women, they hear the goblin men calling and each responds differently, "Laura bowed her head to hear/Lizzie veiled her blushes" (34-35). In other words, Laura bows her head in false modesty to hear the goblins better while Lizzie blushes out of actual modesty. Further, after Laura returns from partaking in the goblin men's fruit, Lizzie immediately demonstrates her propriety in contrast; "Full of wise upbraidings," Lizzie instructs Laura, "'Dear, you should not stay so late/Twilight is not good for maidens" (142-44). Lizzie exemplifies ideal behavior by abnegating any desire to go to the goblin men and by reinforcing behavioral standards to Laura. This appears obvious when Lizzie immediately follows her counsel about avoiding late hours with a warning tale about Jeanie, a young woman tempted by the goblin men who suffered the consequences.

Lizzie moves beyond her status as a good sister in contrast to a naughty sister and into an idealized maternal role when she takes on the responsibility for her sister's moral education as well. Rossetti reflects Victorian social ideals that, according to Rosenman

and Klaver in *Other Mothers: Beyond the Maternal Ideal*, valued a mother as "a spiritual influence and moral instructress" through her guidance and example as "pure, self-sacrificing, and devoted" (2). One sees Rossetti perpetuating women as the source of moral instruction within the ending and the saintly depiction of Lizzie, but also through the narrator's suggestion that maternity serves as the ultimate goal or reward that one may lose as a consequence of socially deviant behavior. In the case of Jeanie, her transgression denies her a future as a mother. Of course, she loses any future at all in death, but Rossetti highlights the fact that she has lost her chance to become a bride when, "She [Lizzie] thought of Jeanie in her grave/ who should have been a bride" (312-13). Lizzie then concludes her memory of Jeanie by adding, "While to this day no grass will grow/ Where she lies low"—eerily indicating that nothing grows even on her grave (158-59). These lines suggest that Jeanie's death may have factored less significantly than the loss of her potential to reproduce. Jeanie will never produce British children, and her grave cannot even sustain plant life in consequence of succumbing to temptation and sampling the goblin men's fruits.

Like Jeanie, Laura also jeopardizes her future as a mother by sampling the goblin men's fruits—a clear metaphor for sex. The poem refers to sex more and less overtly. For example, readers learn that Jeanie, "But who for joys brides hope to have/ "Fell sick and died/ In her gay prime" (314-16). The reference to "for joys brides hope to have" would certainly suggest sex before marriage as the cause of her suffering and death while simultaneously establishing sex as something a good girl may look forward to within the bounds of marriage. Unlike Stretton who eschews sexual desire, Rossetti acknowledges that the promise of future fulfillment of sexual desire may be used to control young

women. This incentive is not enough for Laura, however, who wants to gratify her desires now and spirals increasingly out of control. Laura also becomes "one longing for the night" (214) and experiences "passionate yearning" (266), which often manifests itself through metaphors of burning, fire, and unquenchable thirst as in the lines, "I ate and ate my fill/ Yet my mouth waters still" (165-66).

Thirst and fluids function as the reigning metaphor for sex, desire, and procreative capabilities within "Goblin Market." Sucking and drinking become important and highly eroticized. During Laura's encounter with the goblin men, she consumes the men's fruit by sucking out the juices. The narrator describes how Laura "Then sucked their fruit globes fair or red…. She sucked and sucked and sucked the more/ Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;/ She sucked until her lips were sore;" (128; 134-36). This unquenchable, uncontrolled thirst represents desire as destructive.

The unquenchable thirst also combines with repeated images of Laura's loss of fluid. For example, in addition to her golden lock of hair, Laura's goblin fruit sucking costs her a tear, "She dropped a tear more rare than pearl" (127). And, ultimately, her sucking of juices results in an increasing loss of her own fluids and reduces the potency of her own bodily fluids as metaphor for her sexual promiscuity as a woman unable to control her body and for her loss of maternal reproductive potential. This image also appears when Laura weeps after the exchange "as if her heart would break" (268), and Rossetti includes her dejected walk home after failing to hear the goblin call with "her pitcher dripping all the way" (263). Laura even unsuccessfully tries to use her tears to grow one of the seeds she took from the goblin fruits but the seed "never felt the trickling moisture run…And burns the thirstier in the sandful breeze" (287; 292). Like Jeanie

whose grave cannot even sustain plant life, Laura's fluids cannot grow fruit; she loses her reproductive potential as she essentially dries up and withers away as a consequence of her sexual promiscuity. "Her hair grew thin and grey;/She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn/ To swift decay and burn/ Her fire away" (277-80) and "her tree of life drooped from the root" (260). Laura trades her golden youth for gray and decay and, in exchange for the goblin men's juices, she gives up the juices of her own life force.

Laura's lack of control over her desire manifested as a loss of her own moisture, extreme thirst, and decay contrast Lizzie, a model of self control and selflessness, who appears soaked in fluids, golden, maternal, and full of reproductive potential in order to heal a desiccated Laura. After rejecting the offer to partake in goblin fruits herself and suffering the subsequent wrath of the goblins in her attempt to save Laura, Lizzie returns covered in goblin juice, "Of juice that syrupped all her face,/ And lodged in dimples of her chin,/ And streaked her neck which quaked like curd" (434-36) and asks Laura,

> "Did you miss me?
> Come and kiss me.
> Never mind my bruises,
> Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
> Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
> Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
> Eat me, drink me, love me;
> Laura, make much of me: (Rossetti 465-72)

Laura drinks from Lizzie in an act that parallels Laura's original erotic act with the goblins, suggesting an overtly sexual nature to this reunion. This exchange also heals

Laura, who begins to regain life juices. “Tears once again/ Refreshed her [Laura’s] shrunken eyes/Dropping like rain/After long sultry drouth” (487-90). This time the tears signify a regaining and overflow of life fluids rather than a loss. In opposition to the deadly effect of heterosexual premarital sex, sister eroticism and exchange of fluid appear as a restorative alternative that allows Laura to regain her lost life force. Lizzie offers her body as an erotically charged and sacrificial platter and Laura’s burning once again indicates the presence of her passion and desire. “She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth/ Her lips began to scorch” (492-93), and “Swift fire spread through her veins, knocked at her heart” (507). Modern criticism has noted the most obviously queer aspect of this scene: the queer female eroticism. For example, in “Issues of Gender and Lesbian Love: Goblins in ‘The Garden Lodge,’” John H. Flannigan asserts, “Rossetti’s poem is in fact remarkable for its unusually vivid suggestion of an incestuous lesbian sexuality” (29). Indeed, the scene is loaded with eroticism; however, Rossetti elevates the queer physical act to an almost holy level by linking erotic desire with Lizzie’s self-sacrifice and Laura’s transformation into an ideal.

Therefore, although the physical sucking and drinking parallel Laura’s erotic experience with the goblin men, Laura’s desire for Lizzie has greater significance. In *Intimate Friends,* Vicinus describes how “Romanticism’s veneration of feeling” was partly responsible for “a concerted effort to spiritualize all love” in the nineteenth century where, “Desire was not denied, but it was deemed morally superior if its bodily nature was subsumed to its spiritual potential” (xviii). Rossetti’s background as a Romantic manifests itself in this scene’s depiction of transformative eroticism. The desire Laura gains from drinking from Lizzie manifests as a “Swift fire” that “spread[s] through her

veins, knocked at her heart/ Met the fire smouldering there/ And overbore its lesser flame" (507-09). Laura's intense desire during this erotic encounter overcomes and replaces her heterosexual desire.

However, this time the actual fruit juice from Lizzie's body tastes bitter, which indicates a significant change from her initial uncontrollable delight with the goblin men. Unlike her first encounter in which she sucks in frenzy until her lips actually become sore, Laura begins to gain control. Although the first tastes from Lizzie may act as "swift fire" and threaten to lead her into unrestrained passion again, she regains some self-control and an awareness of the superior sacrificial-maternal love Lizzie has demonstrated. Therefore, Laura has recognized the destructive effects of heterosexual desire and premarital sex in comparison to the selflessness, significance, and the superiority of female love that moves beyond base desire. In this erotic encounter with her queerly maternal sister, Laura's desire comes not just from an intense love and appreciation for her sister's sacrifice, but from an attraction to her as an idealized maternal symbol that Laura herself has failed to achieve and now hopes to emulate.

Laura combines a desire *to be* an idealized maternal didactic figure like her sister with a desire t*o have* her idealized maternal sister. Though it may surprise the modern reader, Victorian culture socialized young women to idolize and desire idealized female figures. Marcus contends that various elements of Victorian culture, like dolls and fashion, "encouraged girls and women to desire images of femininity, without marking such desires as queer or lesbian" (9). Further, two scholars, Kathryn Kent and Martha Vicinus, consider how these desires were institutionalized in boarding schools by the end of the nineteenth century in Britain and America. Although "Goblin Market" was published

mid-century—before boarding schools became widely popular institutions—one can substitute boarding school instruction for the didactic literature of the mid-century to see how society encouraged a romanticized and eroticized relationship between girls and their idealized didactic maternal figures; this relationship holds particular relevance in understanding Laura's attraction to the figure she wants to emulate. In "Distance and Desire," Vicinus establishes "that the strong emphasis upon self-control and public duty was incorporated into the love of a schoolgirl for an admired teacher or older student" in British boarding schools (212). In *Making Girls into Women*, Kent sheds some light on the mixing of desires to have and to be an ideal woman when she examines nineteenth-century American literature, cultural norms, and their impact on queer relationships among girls and young women, especially in boarding school. Kent's theory applies to nineteenth-century British culture because of the Victorians' similar emphasis on a maternal-pedagogical system. Kent claims, "[T]he intense maternal-pedagogical system that compelled young girls to internalize the mandates of bourgeois womanhood ended up inciting in them other, less normative desires and identifications" (2) and claims that often these "less normative desires" manifested themselves as "[d]esires to have produced out of, and inseparable from, desire to be" (239). This homoerotic socialization process creates ideal women through female-female eroticism, indicating that homosexual love and eroticism may actually reinforce one's idealized gender role rather than call it into question. This complicates the notion of queer sexuality as necessarily tied to queer gender; homoerotic bonds between women served as a significant part of the process of feminization.

Further, the homoerotic spiritual transformation Laura goes through also rejects the primacy of marriage as the catalyst for creating an idealized woman in favor of homoerotic bonds. Like Stretton in "The Ghost in the Clock Room," Rossetti refuses to make heterosexual marriage the defining marker of idealized womanhood in favor of other bonds. In this case, Laura's erotic exchange with Lizzie combines sexual desire with spiritual transformation. Laura's desire for an idealized maternal figure like Lizzie overtakes her physical desire—symbolized as an appetite for the goblin fruit and juices gone sour during her intimate encounter with Lizzie—and the transformation becomes increasingly spiritual. Laura transitions into an idealized maternity through her ability to control her desire and self-regulate out of her love and respect for Lizzie. Vicinus describes how, in a relationship of this nature, "self-discipline became a manifestation of love" ("Distance and Desire" 212), and "Bodily self-control became a means of knowing oneself; self-realization subsumed the fulfillment of physical desire" ("Distance and Desire" 215). Laura learns to value self-restraint and self-awareness in an effort to emulate the maternal-didactic figure she loves by metaphorically recognizing the bitter taste of uncontrolled sexual desire. The erotic exchange between the sisters, then, becomes more important as the manifestation of the maternal-pedagogical system. "Goblin Market," popular conduct books like Ellis' *The Mothers of England* and *The Daughters of England*, histories of the period, a variety of secondary critical sources, and popular culture of the period, highlight maternal tutelage as a social system designed to instruct girls on proper behavior, but also as a means of encouraging young women to look up to and emulate successful maternal female figures.

In "Goblin Market," Lizzie appears to Laura not just as a behavioral model then, but

as a desirable maternal figure that she can consume and subsequently embody. Lizzie is illuminated, figuratively and actually, as a moral figure able to resist the onslaught of goblin temptations and abuse. “White and golden Lizzie stood/ Like a lily in a flood…Like a beacon left alone/ In a hoary roaring sea/ Sending up a golden fire” (408-09; 412-14). Lizzie withstands the onslaught and returns Laura’s actual and figurative goldenness to her as a moral figure since “Her [Laura’s] gleaming locks showed not one thread of grey” once she awakens (540). Laura imbibes her maternal idol and absorbs Lizzie’s ability to stand as a beacon of light for others through erotic intimacy and a fluid exchange that allows Laura to regain her position as an ideal moral guide to the next generation of good English mothers and sisters.

While Rossetti elevates female love and power, she leaves men oddly absent from most of the tale. She notes that each woman has become a bride and had children since the incident, but no husband makes an appearance in the poem. In fact, the goblin men serve as the only real male presence within the poem. Flannigan remarks on “the curious gender portrayals in “Goblin Market”—the fact that the only men in the poem are goblins who appear in various animal shapes, from cats to wombats” (28) and concludes that Rossetti’s “men grotesques” appear “unfit for commerce with Lizzie and Laura” (29). Flannigan does not elaborate on his analysis of ”Goblin Market,” preferring instead to analyze “The Garden Lodge” by Willa Cather; however, his comments deserve further analysis. The goblin men are indeed the only real male presence and Rossetti does distance goblin men from human men twice by claiming that goblin men sell something much different than human men—“men sell not such in any town” (101; 556)—and through the exaggerated animal qualities,

One had a cat's face,

One whisked a tail,

One tramped at a rat's pace,

One crawled like a snail,

One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry,

One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry. (Rossetti 71-76)

However, the separation between goblin men and human men through animal characteristics does not hold. Rossetti also compares Laura and Lizzie to animals like doves, pigeons, and swans; in fact, the goblin men and the young women actually share similarities since they are both categorized as dove-like or pigeon-like within the poem. The only major difference is that Rossetti depicts the women as peaceful, prey animals and the men as predatory and aggressive animals. In other words, Rossetti compares everyone in the poem to animals, but the goblin men can quickly transform into more vicious animals, while the women's natural state remains peaceful. Lizzie's experience with the goblin men highlights their ability to woo women or to behave aggressively if a woman rejects their smooth talking. The goblin men initially appear "chattering," "fluttering," "gliding" and Rossetti describes how they "hugged her and kissed her [Lizzie]/ squeezed and caressed her (345-49); their character quickly changes, "No longer wagging, purring/But visibly demurring/Grunting, and snarling" (391-93) and they become aggressive and predatory when "They trod and hustled her/Elbowed and jostled her/Clawed with their nails/Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking" (399-402). The animal imagery slips seamlessly into sexual assault and aggression with the last word "mocking" and continues in this direction in the next line, "Tore her gown and soiled her

stocking/Twitched her hair out by the roots" (403-04) and when they forcibly "held her hand and squeezed their fruits/Against her mouth to make her eat" (406-07). The line between animal and predatory man appears thin and is further demonstrated by the "market" dimension of the poem.

Rossetti's "men grotesques" are also paired with human men through their reliance on economic exchange (Flannigan 28). Gorham relates the basic notion in which "The public sphere of business, politics, and professional life was defined as the male sphere" (4). Further, men and goblin men share a potential parallel through their use of women as commodities. However, the "curious gender portrayals" do not appear to come from the goblins' position as specifically "unfit for commerce with Lizzie and Laura," as Flannigan suggests (29). The goblin men appear well within their rights as men to participate in economic exchange, but Rossetti establishes the marketplace as the realm of men and goblins and demonizes the masculine economic exchange in general. Rossetti engages in social commentary on the unnatural and problematic nature of men treating women as commodities. In one scene, she disrupts a tender and harmonious image of Laura and Lizzie sleeping, "like two blossoms on one stem" (188), by suddenly describing the girls' hair as "tipped with gold for awful kings" (191). The idea of women as commodities interrupts this scene of harmony between sisters. The use of women as commodities like gold "for awful kings" comes across as cold and inhuman in contrast to the loving intimacy the sisters share. In "Of Mothers and Merchants: Female Economics in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market",' Elizabeth Campbell describes, "[O]nly the women, the "maids," are endowed with humanity…Immediately set up is a dichotomy between merchant/inhuman and female/human…The merchant goblins, representations

of a male subjectivity controlled by a market ideology, are "little men," but also less-than-human beings" (399). The inhumanity of the goblins belongs to men in general. One can see the horrific consequences of the male desire to treat women as valuable only as long as they maintain their virginity and valueless once men have taken their value as commodities in the way that Jeanie (permanently) and Laura (temporarily) lose the goldenness and blooming of their youth and quickly wither away when seduced by the goblin men.

Although Rossetti sympathetically casts women, even fallen ones like Jeanie and Laura, as victims of the goblin men actively trying to destroy them, these women do appear guilty of actively participating in the masculine market economy rather than remaining in their sphere where they can maintain the moral high ground. When Laura gives up her golden curl to the goblin men, she actively participates in the market system and trades her youth and virginity—her value as a commodity. Campbell further explains how,

> Their [Jeanie's and Laura's] "trade" with the goblins may superficially represent illicit sex, as most critics of the poem assume; but more important, it represents a breach of the sexual code, a denial of Victorian female sexuality. In other words, the poem suggests that women's involvement with the market denies them their right to motherhood, reproductivity, and nature's cyclicality. (406)

Therefore, by making this trade, Laura both loses her value and potential to attract a future husband and function reproductively and adopts a somewhat queer gender by

participating in the masculine world of economic exchange instead of her sanctioned female gender role.

Alternatively, Lizzie gains success by operating within an idealized feminine gender role. Although she first attempts to exchange money for the fruit, Lizzie fails and retreats to a female gender role where she is passive and subjected to sacrificial physical and emotional suffering for Laura's benefit—the embodiment of a maternal figure as "pure, self-sacrificing, and devoted" (Rosenman and Klaver 2). Her victory in winning the juices she needs for Laura is just as significant as her happiness that the coins still jingle in her pocket on the way home. Lizzie remains pure and feminine, not just for facing temptation and refusing "to pay too dear" by giving up her virginity, but, for winning Laura's health with love, sacrifice, and other elevated maternal qualities rather than buying Laura's health and happiness with money, suggesting the highest virtues and ideals still come from outside the masculine sphere (311). Lizzie essentially reaffirms Victorian ideology that "women had to be kept safe at home; their perfect compliance, obedience, and refinement would make them too easy to victimize in the competitive public world" (Mitchell 267). In fact, Lizzie demonstrates that an ideal woman must be a victim in the public sphere. Laura, though not an ideal, is also a victim of the public sphere, which indicates that suffering in this goblin-filled domain is inevitable for women who venture into it.

Laura may subvert gender ideals when she attempts to participate in the market, but this transgression defies simple binaries; Laura adopts a queer gender role outside of ideal femininity, but she does not become masculine. Instead, she remains distinctly feminine through her victimized position and through her ultimate failure and

degradation in this sphere. In other words, Laura demonstrates how one's gender can break out of the binary of masculine-feminine; she is queer through her failure to embody feminine gender norms, but not truly masculine because she wields almost no power in the economic sphere and suffers a decidedly feminine fate.

Rossetti locates female power as outside of the men's economic sphere, providing Lizzie with an enormous amount of power within the separate women's sphere. Nelson and Vallone describe this kind of female power that challenged male power "by virtue of the moral influence with which women and children were credited, their very otherness lent them an oppositional power over the public sphere from which they were supposed to be excluded" (5). Essentially, Lizzie's moral superiority and power come from outside of the economic sphere. Campbell further illuminates the elevation of the woman's sphere in the place of a market-driven male one when she claims, "Rossetti's fantasy challenges the prevailing ideology of production and consumption by relocating human value in reproduction and motherhood. In so doing, she offers a 'female economic' that could serve as a prototype for twentieth-century feminists" (394).

Although Campbell rightly expresses Rossetti's emphasis on female value as reproductive and maternal in contrast to Rossetti's analysis of the evils of the male-driven marketplace, I am hesitant to celebrate the female economics Rossetti proposes without reservation. Rossetti still confines women to the domestic sphere as forces of moral good in contrast to the immorality and commerce of men in their sphere. Although she emphasizes this division in order to elevate women, she rejects female access to the economic sphere. Rossetti's idealized version of female worth appears limiting because Lizzie restores Laura's vitality out of female love and power, but, in doing so, she also

makes Laura a suitable commodity once again and restores Laura's socially sanctioned feminine position. Lizzie remedies Laura's queer gender through her demonstration of an ideal womanhood and returns Laura to the well-established status quo as a wife and mother by the end of the poem. Therefore, despite the queer potential of the scene, the end goal appears disturbingly like a return to heteronormativity.

Despite these reservations, I would still argue that Rossetti achieves a significant feat in using a moral, didactic structure to voice powerful social commentary on the abuses of women by men and to demonstrate female power. Although Rossetti does not tear down the boundaries between the spheres like modern readers may wish, she does make significant choices that empower her female characters. Dyhouse examines rhetoric on female empowerment in the nineteenth century and asserts,

> We cannot argue that if a nineteenth-century writer or thinker failed to make a central attack on the sexual division of labor or failed to reject the notion of 'separate spheres' then she (or he) was not properly a 'feminist'. The implication of such a stance would be that the nineteenth century produced very few feminists at all. (142)

I include Dyhouse's claim, not to substantiate an argument that Rossetti is or is not ultimately a feminist, but to demonstrate that subversion was possible from within this sphere. Rossetti disrupts the careful "moral balance" Victorians established for men who had to abide by the "capitalist values in the public world of commerce" and wanted to imagine the domestic sphere as counteracting the negative effects of the public sphere (Gorham 4). According to Gorham, men viewed the domestic sphere as "presided over by females for the express purpose of providing a place of renewal for men, after their

rigorous activities in the harsh, competitive public sphere" (4). Instead, Rossetti relegates men to their sphere and repurposes the woman's sphere as a source of rejuvenation for fellow victimized women. She denies men the pleasure of partaking in the very moral benefit they hoped to enjoy by idealizing the separation.

Further, one need not accept the ending as a return to heteronormativity; sisterly love and maternity seem to be the ideal and the real end goal. After all, the happy ending scene depicts the two sisters together with their children—husbands mentioned but absent. In *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature*, Carolyn Oulton asserts that female friendships were "usually displaced only by the inevitable love plot. Certainly, it was understood that this triumph of marriage…would signal a diminution or disruption of the friendship through which the plot itself might well have been mediated" (7). In this case, marriage does not appear to have displaced or weakened this female bond. The sisters may have married men, but the ending signifies that this marriage may have served to further their relationship rather than keep these women apart. These two women are together, after all, telling their story to their children and nieces. This ending scene appears as a typical home and hearth story that a heteronormative nuclear family would share, and, yet, the husbands are oddly absent. These absent husbands reinforce the separation of the domestic and male sphere once again, and Rossetti allows the two sisters to use the family—supposedly a heterosexual mechanism—to promote their queer relationship.

The notion that male-female relationships might be unnatural, disruptive, or damaging in comparison to female-female relationships appears progressive, and, although one can imagine the "happy" ending as a heteronormative resolution that moves

away from queer through heterosexual marriage and reproduction, the ending also celebrates and perpetuates queer behaviors through a positive outcome that can support an optimistically queer outlook. “Goblin Market” has some interesting implications for queer optimism and queer futurity because it falls in a rather odd position as a poem imbedded with celebrated queer lesbian eroticism that ultimately leads to a “happy” marriage ending that also perpetuates queer lesbian sister love within future generations. Although queer theorists have often imagined the family as a site of reproducing cultural norms, Rossetti suggests that women might send queer ripples through future generations and help to subvert cultural norms and to combat masculine power structures.

Chapter 4: Queer Women as Destructive in Le Fanu's *Carmilla*

Like Christina Rossetti in "Goblin Market," J. Sheridan Le Fanu creates a monster to comment on the power and corruption of one of the gendered spheres in his gothic novel, *Carmilla* (1871). However, unlike Rossetti who demonizes the men's sphere, Le Fanu attacks the woman's sphere and notions of idealized womanhood. Le Fanu casts the powerful, well-bred, maternal character, Carmilla, as an actual monster in order to highlight female friendships and mother-daughter relationships as inherently queer and dangerously outside of masculine control. The vampire, Carmilla, demonstrates the danger in regarding women as idealized moral figures within the home and family by highlighting the ease in which a position of maternal authority can open queer and subversive possibilities that reject or corrupt traditional British values and ideals and subvert male power.

As a monstrous Other, the vampire Carmilla represents a horrifying Non-British woman and mother. However, in "Dirty Mamma: Horror, Vampires, and the Maternal in Late Nineteenth- Century Gothic Fiction," Angelica Michelis highlights the supernatural Gothic genre's ability to extend past Otherness and into the Victorian home when she argues, "The anxieties played out in Gothic texts can be related to anxieties about the institution of the family itself and its discursive interrelations" (16). In other words, Victorian authors could explore queer aspects of the family and provide veiled cultural commentary by creating monstrous Others, and Le Fanu contrasts the monster Carmilla with an idealized adolescent woman, Laura, and, subsequently, demonstrates how Carmilla corrupts Laura as a symbol of "the quintessential angel in the house" as a "model of feminine dependence, childlike simplicity and sexual purity" (Gorham 7).

Carmilla begins with the narrator, Laura, describing her family and home and reflecting on a strange and terrifying childhood incident in which a strange and lovely woman entered her nursery to comfort and hold her before biting her and disappearing. Laura then describes the peaceful solitude she now lives in with her father, governesses, and servants and her desire for female companionship due to the isolated location of her home. A carriage accident brings Carmilla, a lovely and enigmatic stranger, to stay in Laura's home. At first meeting, Laura recognizes Carmilla as identical to the lovely woman who terrified her as a child in her nursery. However, Carmilla easily manipulates and charms Laura into ignoring this apprehension, and Carmilla gains the admiration of everyone in the household. Carmilla and Laura then engage in a queerly intimate relationship in which Carmilla performs and mixes roles as a mother, lover, and companion in order to morally and sexually corrupt Laura and (to attempt) to take her life. Laura becomes increasingly ill as a result of this relationship and is eventually saved from physical harm when Laura's father and a group of men execute Carmilla. By the time Carmilla is destroyed, however, she has already highlighted the queer possibility within female relationships.

Laura's father does not respond to, or recognize, Carmilla as a threat to Laura until Carmilla has done significant damage to Laura. In *Our Vampires, Ourselves,* Nina Auerbach casts Laura's father as laughably foolish for this failure, claiming, "Like many Victorian fathers, Laura's is a venerated fool, impervious to the plot that brings a vampire to his castle, laughing ever more affably as his daughter drifts closer to death" (45-46). Although Laura's father is absolutely ineffective, I would argue that he fails primarily by remaining in his appropriate gender role and failing to play a maternal role that would

monitor the woman's sphere that Laura and her relationship with Carmilla belong to. After all, Laura's father appears to be a decent and respectable man; he demonstrates affection towards Laura and behaves as a gentleman toward Carmilla, a young noble woman in trouble. However, he is also appropriately removed to his own masculine sphere and distanced from Laura. Ellis laments this paternal separation in Victorian society, asserting, "Fathers of families in the present day, and the fact cannot be acknowledged without serious regret, are for the most part too deeply engaged in the pursuit of objects widely differing in their nature from those which belong to the moral discipline of the home" (*The Mothers of England* 108).

Le Fanu physically manifests the separation between Laura and her father with their distance apart in their home; Laura's father's room is in a distant part of the castle from Laura's room. After Laura becomes concerned about Carmilla' safety during the night, she calls for her governesses and declares, "[W]e rang the bell long and furiously. If my father's room had been at that side of the house, we would have called him up at once to our aid. But, alas! He was quite out of hearing, and to reach him involved an excursion for which we none of us had courage" (Le Fanu 44). Laura's father is so far away from Laura in her time of need that he cannot hear the bell and getting to him would require "an excursion."

Laura's father also demonstrates his distance from Laura through his inability to understand the significance of Laura's phase of life or the threat Carmilla presents to Laura. This represents popular ideology; Mitchell explains, "Mothers were made responsible for moral and spiritual guidance, as well as for supervising all of the household's practical affairs. Fathers were typically distant and reserved" (147). Because

of the distinction between men's and women's spheres of responsibility, Laura's father does not properly understand Laura's development and the significance of having an appropriate female within or above her social status to serve as a moral influence and model of behavior or to monitor female friendships.

Mothers held the responsibility for ensuring that children remained innocent from immoral outside influence and, therefore, mothers needed to ensure the domestic sphere remained a moral haven. Maternal guidance was especially important in overseeing that daughters engaged in appropriate friendships. Gorham explains, "While friendships between girls were important, they could also be dangerous, and girls were advised to choose their friends with care" (113). Gorham further describes, "The best way to guard against the formation of undesirable friendships was for girls to consult their mothers. Even in the late-Victorian period, girls were told that they should never correspond with anyone new without the 'sanction' of their mothers" (114).

Laura obviously cannot confer with her mother because her mother died when she was very young. However, her mother does recognize Carmilla as a threat and makes contact with Laura from beyond the grave. In the night, Laura hears, "Your mother warns you to beware of the assassin," and sees a vision of Carmilla "standing, near the foot of my bed, in her white night dress, bathed, from her chin to her feet, in one great stain of blood" (44). Laura misunderstands the warning, however, and Laura's mother fails to fulfill her maternal duties. Even with the power to visit her daughter after death and the desire to fulfill her responsibilities, her mother fails to live up to her idealized status and responsibilities. Victorians imagined a mother's responsibility to foster her adolescent daughter's innocence as fundamental, and Le Fanu casts doubt on women's basic abilities

to do even this. Therefore, Le Fanu highlights families without a strong mother figure to oversee children's education and moral development and to ensure that children associated with appropriate persons as vulnerable to corrupting influences, but he also suggests that mothers alone may not be sufficient at responding to these threats.

With an absent mother and a father who has remained at a socially appropriate distance rather than assuming maternal responsibilities, Laura must look for maternal guidance from other sources. Laura describes one of her governesses as a kind of surrogate mother, "whose care and good nature in part supplied to me the loss of my mother" (2). Although her father has provided for Laura as far as governesses and formal education, a governess would not serve as an appropriate replacement for a mother. Ellis claims, "[T]hat part of education which consists in storing the memory, may possibly be committed with propriety to other hands; but as a mother's instruction is properly more moral than intellectual, that far more important part of education which consists in forming the habits of children, and thus laying the foundation of character, must belong to the mother" (*Mothers of England* 93). In other words, a governess simply could not fill the role of a mother; the most important aspect of a child's development, forming their character, was the responsibility of the mother. Like Ellis, then, Le Fanu rejects the possibility of any good substitute for the natural mother, while he also voices a lack of confidence in even well-meaning natural mothers' abilities.

Laura especially needs appropriate guidance due to her potentially dangerous stage of life between childhood and womanhood. Bilston notes, "Victorian writers commonly acknowledged the existence of an awkward age, a developmental interval between childhood and womanhood" and that this age range might apply to a girl

between the ages of 13 to 27, but appears especially prevalent in depictions of girls between the ages of 15 to 19 (3-4). Laura fits within this stage as a seemingly innocent and naïve young woman of 19. This transitional awkward age is significant since Victorians developed anxiety over the position of girls in their society. Nelson and Vallone assert that Victorians emphasized "the Girl as present or potential influence for good or evil" (6). The novel suggests that this is a critical time as well by describing Laura's stage of life as spring verging on summer. For example, Carmilla refers to Laura's stage of life when she muses, "Girls are caterpillars…to be finally butterflies when the summer comes" (31). While Bertha's guardian, General Spielsdorf, reflects this sentiment when he describes Bertha, his niece of presumably comparative age, as in the "spring of her hopes and beauty" (57). Laura should bloom into summer, then, under proper maternal tutelage and influence. Carmilla jeopardizes Laura's chance of reaching her "summer," and, therefore, her potential future as an ideal British woman who will marry and produce British children. This age of childish innocence converging with sexual awakening places her at a stage of life where maternal-didactic guidance is essential.

Laura's father is either unaware of the power of female influence on a young woman of Laura's age or dismisses the possibility when he brings Carmilla into the home with no knowledge of her character, making the decision within minutes of meeting Carmilla's mother. On one hand, Laura's father is influenced by Laura's pleas. Laura relates, "I plucked my father by the coat, and whispered earnestly in his ear: 'Oh! Papa, pray ask her [Carmilla's mother] to let her stay with us—it would be so delightful. Do pray" (12). Laura's naivety and innocence shine as she tugs her father's coat like a child

and begs for a friend, which, in turn, highlights her vulnerability and the need for her father to carefully screen outside influences. Laura's father responds to Laura's wishes by proposing Carmilla as the "best consolation" for his daughter who has "just been disappointed by a cruel misfortune, in a visit from which she had long anticipated a great deal of happiness" (12). Laura's father refers to the "cruel misfortune" in which a young lady, Bertha, who had been intended as a companion for Laura has died, and he imagines that he can replace one upper-class young lady with another as a companion for Laura. He apparently has no interest in screening companions on any basis beyond ensuring they come from the appropriate social class.

Indeed, Laura's father invites Carmilla into his home based on Carmilla's and her mother's appearances as belonging to the upper class. Laura describes Carmilla's mother as one who appears to be "a person of consequence," and Laura's father certainly recognizes their class status when he chivalrously assures Carmilla's mother that caring for Carmilla "will confer a distinction and an obligation upon us" (12). Laura's father and governesses also judge Carmilla by her noble appearance rather than investigating whether or not she is a suitable companion for Laura. In a conversation among Laura, her father, and her governess, the governess declares after meeting Carmilla, "I like her extremely… She is, I almost think, the prettiest creature I ever saw; about your [Laura's] age, and so gentle and nice" (15). Laura's father seems to share this sentiment and expresses approval and pleasure in his interactions with Carmilla for most of the novel. In contrast to Carmilla's appearance and affectations, Laura's father comments on the "ill-looking pack" of servants and Laura's governess mentions the "hideous black woman" within the carriage Carmilla arrived in and who have since departed. While Laura's

household members recognize part of Carmilla's party as potentially dangerous, they entirely fail to consider Carmilla as a threat because of her apparent age, class status, and beauty.

Carmilla first appears as an ideal for a young unmarried woman of her age and class, but she quickly demonstrates an ability to assume any influential role she desires. She physically manifests her ability to change roles from passive young woman to dangerous predator through her ability to shift into "a sooty black animal that resembled a monstrous cat" (Le Fanu 39). Her shape-shifting ability helps her hide the monster lurking under her seemingly harmless exterior. Carmilla can embody the role of "innocence, gaiety, a charming companion" long enough to gain entry into a home as an appropriate adolescent companion for Laura. Carmilla's supernatural ability further highlights the danger of idealizing female adolescence rather than recognizing the threat these seemingly vulnerable, innocent, and refined young women may pose.

Carmilla's perceived status as an idealized young woman provides her with a great deal of freedom in her access to Laura. Mitchell explains how an "an unmarried young woman of good family could not go anywhere alone. Even in her parents' house, she could not be in any room with a man who was not a close relative unless a married woman or a mature servant was present" (155-56). As a female, Carmilla is discounted as a sexual threat, and Laura's father allows Carmilla intimate access to Laura. The two spend hours and days together without supervision. This lack of supervision allows for multiple romantic scenes with intimate touches and embraces: Laura describes Carmilla's "infatuations," which include hand holding, blushing, heavy breathing, and kissing, and

refers to Carmilla's declarations of love, such as "You are mine, you shall be mine, you and I are one forever" (23).

Laura's father fails to recognize the romantic potential of female relationships. Relationships between women—especially between an older and younger woman could become a source of sexual corruption. Oulton claims, "Towards the end of the century the nature of romantic friendship itself came under increasingly severe scrutiny. The possibility of a sexual element was increasingly likely to be acknowledged" (129). In fact, Vicinus describes the ultimate lesson of Carmilla as "a warning to fathers: pretending to maternal love, a sexually experienced woman can steal a girl's affection and destroy her appetite for marriage" (*Intimate Friends* xxvi). Le Fanu suggests that a parent should beware the potentially dangerous eroticism inherent in female friendships at Laura's age. Through Laura's father's ignorance and her mother's absence and ineffectiveness, Carmilla becomes a source of maternal influence through their unsupervised female friendship and opens the first queer possibility through erotic friendship. Le Fanu keys in on the lack of supervision over these women as troubling. Oulton describes a rising anxiety toward female friendships as the century progressed, especially as a response to New Woman fiction that "oppose[d] male interference in female relationships as potentially harmful and disruptive" (74).

Carmilla also opens queer possibilities in performing a maternal role as a surrogate mother. Carmilla exploits maternal absence, praying on upper-class homes with young women absent proper maternal influence in her choice of both victims—Laura and Carmilla's previous victim, Bertha. She chooses these homes, not just because these homes lack an appropriate maternal figure to ascertain threats to these young women's

development, but because the absence of these mothers allows Carmilla to take on a role of maternal authority. Carmilla especially fills a maternal role for Laura as an ancestor from her mother's line. Although Laura is unaware of this blood relation to Carmilla at the time, Le Fanu adds this piece of information in order to further queer this female relationship. Carmilla exploits the maternal void and takes on a queer role that represents the dangerous instability inherent within female roles and relationships as friend, lover, and mother, placing queer potential distinctly within the woman's sphere where homosexuality and queer transgression become a part of womanhood in its forms of friendship and maternity. Like Rossetti in "Goblin Market," Le Fanu considers queer female bonds a mark of femininity rather than a masculinizing attribute; females and the woman's sphere become fundamentally queer.

Further, the absent British mother and the presence of an actual monster in a maternal role provide an opportunity for Le Fanu to voice contemporary social anxieties about women, especially maternal figures, as a potentially destabilizing and corrupting force within the woman's sphere. Le Fanu is not alone in exploring the mother figure. Rosenman and Klaver note a trend within the century, describing, "As the sanctification of motherhood gained its full ideological force in the nineteenth century, the successful or failed performance of maternity became the ubiquitous subject of social debate and textual representation" (1). Further, Michelis characterizes fin-de-siècle gothic writing specifically as "fascinated and haunted by a concept of anxiety that is intrinsically related to the cultural meaning and construction of the maternal and the figure of the mother" (2). In other words, nineteenth-century fiction, especially the gothic, often provides commentary on, and insight into what Nelson refers to as the "halo of sanctity"

surrounding motherhood during this time period, the social pressure on mothers, and the general fascination with maternity during this period (*Family Ties in Victorian England* 12).

Victorian society promoted maternity as an essential component of the domestic ideal; mothers were expected to possess qualities like purity, selflessness, and tenderness while nurturing and serving as teachers and moral guardians. Ellis demonstrates the importance of mothers when she refers to "the vast amount of responsibility resting upon them" (*Mothers of England* 23). Ellis goes on to claim, "[A]ll the statesmen of the rising generation, all the ministers of religion, all public and private gentlemen, as well as all men of business, mechanics, and laborers of every description, will have received, as regards intellectual and moral character, their first bias, and often their strongest and their last, from the training and the influence of a mother" (*Mothers of England* 23). Mothers sculpted the next generation of men and the next generation of women that would perpetuate this cycle. Therefore, a mother also had a responsibility to properly raise daughters since, "[I]t is to women that we still must look for the training of future generations" (*Mothers of England* 24). In other words, British society placed a great deal of emphasis on the mother's role in creating future British mothers and daughters. For young women to achieve an ideal maternal status, they relied not only on their mother's direct influence, but also her personal example. Rowbotham describes the necessity for adolescent girls "to have an image constantly before them on which to model themselves, and the best image they could have was presumed to be their mother. Such an interpretation of the maternal role makes it particularly understandable why a motherless family, especially if there were girls, was an object of concern as well as pity" (25).

The threat within *Carmilla,* then, comes from both the absence of a British mother and the presence of a bad replacement mother. Carmilla's position of influence as a monstrous maternal substitute threatens Laura's development during both the early childhood and adolescent encounters. Carmilla fills the maternal void on their first encounter when six–year-old Laura wakes in the middle of the night. Laura explains this event early in the novel.

> I was vexed and insulted at finding myself, as I conceived, neglected, and I began to whimper, preparatory to a hearty bout of roaring; when to my surprise, I saw a solemn, but very pretty face looking at me from the side of the bed. It was that of a young lady who was kneeling, with her hands under the coverlet. I looked at her with a kind of pleased wonder, and ceased whimpering. She caressed me with her hands, and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling; I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again. (Le Fanu 3)

Carmilla first appears to Laura as a maternal figure who soothes a neglected and distraught child and puts her back to sleep. The young lady meets maternal ideals as appropriately feminine in her "pretty" appearance and through her nurturing capabilities; but, she also appears as a "solemn" figure of authority while maintaining her otherwise comforting body language. As an ideal maternal figure (at least in appearance), Carmilla appears strangely attractive to Laura. Laura's desire for Carmilla's maternal companionship pushes the boundaries of maternal-child and erotic love.

This appears even more obvious when the serenity of this mother-child moment quickly turns to horror when Laura claims, "I was wakened by a sensation as if two

needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly. The lady started back, with her eyes fixed on me, and then slipped down upon the floor, and, as I thought, hid herself under the bed" (4). This scene illustrates queer possibilities for a mother-child relationship and links the maternal and erotic inextricably. Prior to this incident, Laura describes herself as "one of those happy children… kept in ignorance" (3). This experience not only corrupts Laura's innocence, but, as Haefele-Thomas suggests in *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic: Transgressing Monstrosity*, "the mother figure and the paedophilia queer turn out to be one and the same" (103). The mother becomes inextricable from the queer.

Carmilla's nighttime visit to Laura's bedroom and the sensory description often lead critics to focus on the eroticism of this scene alone rather than the wealth of queer possibilities suggested by examining Carmilla as a maternal figure. Even when critics do mention Carmilla as a maternal figure, they often acknowledge this aspect only briefly. For example, in "Repossessing the Body: Transgressive Desire in 'Carmilla' and Dracula," Elizabeth Signorotti analyzes this nighttime visit and notices a connection with Carmilla as a maternal figure when she claims, "The 'young lady' who caresses Laura for a moment plays the replacement mother to the orphaned girl, but she is decidedly no mother. The homoerotic overtones of the ensuing attack on Laura's breast eclipse the initial mother-child dynamic and establish the nature of the two women's ensuing relationship" (612). In other words, Signorotti sees Carmilla as a potential mother figure, but then discontinues her analysis of Carmilla as a maternal figure once Carmilla penetrates Laura and the scene becomes overtly sexual. This scene does establish the

homoerotic petting and intimacy that continue throughout the novel, but the erotic does not "eclipse" the "mother/child dynamic."

The maternal nature of this first meeting cannot be as easily dismissed as Signorotti suggests. After all, Carmilla's bite goes beyond a physical and sexual penetration of the body. As a vampire, Carmilla actually drinks a life-giving substance in the form of blood from Laura's breast—a direct reversal of the mother-child role initially set up when Carmilla enters to soothe and nurture a whimpering child. From just this reversal, one can assume that what makes Carmilla "decidedly no mother" is not a casual showing of un-motherly attributes, but her initial motherly appearance contrasted by an extreme reversal of typical motherly actions when she penetrates and feeds from a child (Signorotti 6). Haefele-Thomas also briefly recognizes the significance of Carmilla as specifically the "antithesis" of this idealized mother as an infanticidal mother who would sexually corrupt and drain her child of life rather than nurture (103).

Victorians were fascinated with improper maternal behavior or negative influences that might produce improper children "not grounded in the principles of true knowledge," as Ellis describes (*Mothers of England* 24). According to Nelson, since mothers held such sanctified roles, authors who wanted to criticize the role of mothers often killed off biological mothers and replaced them with wicked stepmothers. The evil replacement mother allowed authors to explore mother-child relationships without attacking the hallowed image of the biological mother directly (*Family Ties in Victorian England* 13). Carmilla serves as such. Rather than nurture a good British child and fill Laura full of British principles and truths, Carmilla's infanticidal behavior serves as an extreme version of maternal failure. Le Fanu uses infanticide, a concept Catherine

Hancock describes, in "It Was Bone of Her Bone, and Flesh of Her Flesh, and She Had Killed It: Three Versions of Destructive Maternity in Victorian Fiction," as "particularly fascinating to Victorians," in order to represent a widespread fear that the mother might serve as the actual source for the "decay of human health and moral values" (300). Carmilla's bite serves as the physical manifestation of a maternal figure contributing to a child's decay and represents an extreme case of a failed Victorian mother: the monstrous infanticidal mother.

The bite, however, further complicates Carmilla's potential status as a mother/ anti-mother figure because of its reproductive potential. Carmilla's bite does represent death and potential infanticide; however, it also possesses the power to reproduce and create a kind of new life. The novel itself states, "It is the nature of vampires to increase and multiply, but according to an ascertained and ghostly law," and that, in order to reproduce, a vampire "visits living people in their slumbers; they die, and almost invariably, in the grave, develop into vampires" (82). Carmilla visits Laura at night and waits for Laura to fall back to sleep, so this nighttime visit and penetration could function reproductively. Laura doesn't die directly after this bite, so a reader has no guarantee that the bite will or will not inevitably result in reproduction based on the novel's explanation of the vampire's reproductive process. Both Michelis and Haefele-Thomas support the idea of Carmilla as a "maternal, reproductive body" (Michelis 15) and an "undead maternal 'other'" (Haefele-Thomas 106). Auerbach even makes a case that another female vampire originally created Carmilla; she examines Carmilla's statement that "strange love" made her a vampire and contends, "Though she leaves her lover's gender unspecified the word *strange,* the Swinburnian euphemism for homosexual love, suggests

that Carmilla's original maker was female" (40). Whether or not one agrees with Auerbach that Carmilla originated at the hands of a female vampire, the novel asserts that all vampires have the potential and the desire within their fundamental natures to reproduce, and Carmilla has followed the vaguely established "ascertained and ghostly law" which describes the process of reproduction as one in which a vampire "visits living people in their slumbers" (Le Fanu 82).

Carmilla's ability to reproduce supernaturally makes her exceptionally powerful as a mother unbound by typical social and biological constraints and, therefore, outside of male influence. Perhaps the most obviously queer aspect of a vampire mother like Carmilla is that she can reproduce with another female and does not require a male at all. Carmilla's fangs stand in for the phallus and invest her with the power to reproduce through physical penetration. It appears queer and subversive to male power that homoerotic love or passion could result in the creation of a child at all, and female vampires' gender even appears queer because they have the power to reproduce through physical penetration—a biologically male trait. A homosexual relationship with reproductive capabilities would destabilize one of the fundamental purposes of heterosexual marriage: creating children. Carmilla's reproductive process allows her to remain powerfully autonomous within the woman's sphere by excluding men from any role in female vampires' sexuality or reproduction.

The absence of a man in Carmilla's reproductive process serves as an extreme manifestation of the separation of men from the domestic sphere and the process of raising children since women held the responsibility for overseeing childrearing. Carmilla's potential to reproduce physically and culturally outside of masculine influence

indicates that she has the power to create children in her own queer and subversive image rather than perpetuate sanctioned British ideals. Therefore, Le Fanu emphasizes the separation between the spheres as dangerous, suggesting the woman's sphere may be potentially corrupted and full of unchecked queer behavior since it exists outside of male control. Le Fanu presents a problem, where distinguishing the spheres fails to do its job of limiting female power and idealizing women's position within the home also becomes dangerous because it glosses the inherent queerness of womanhood and maternity.

Carmilla's mode of reproduction further queers notions of idealized motherhood through the pleasure Carmilla gains during a reproductive act in the place of the pain of traditional childbirth. This queers the Victorian notion that mothers gained moral superiority as parents through pain and sacrifice for their children through pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting. Carmilla's reproductive capabilities do not require personal pain and sacrifice on her part. She engages in a selfish and pleasurable erotic act rather than demonstrating "an innate female predisposition to sacrifice for others" or following the "sanctifying process" of continual self-sacrifice that made motherhood a heavily idealized position (Nelson 46). Carmilla represents a substantial threat to the concept of the mother because she can reproduce, but does not have to go through the supposedly purifying self-sacrifice and pain of motherhood. Instead, Carmilla's "cruel love" sacrifices her child as a victim and the sexual and potentially selfish origin of motherhood refuses to make way for a more idealistic vision of maternity removed from the body (Le Fanu 38).

Carmilla appears to link the maternal with the body inextricably throughout the novel. In her initial nighttime visit, Carmilla presents herself as a mother figure in the

form of nurturer/nurse to Laura. Guiding and nurturing served as essential aspects of motherhood, and nineteenth-century society demonized women who did not perform their jobs as nurturers. Ellis goes as far as to describe a mother with "neither the skill to influence nor the dignity to control" her children as "one of the most melancholy aspects of human life" (*Mothers of England* 19). Nineteenth-century society took proper motherhood seriously and, as nurturers, mothers were expected to encourage their children's spiritual and mental development. However, as Mitchell notes, "Despite our [present] sentimental belief that Victorians worshipped motherhood and family values, most mothers did not do much child care" (149). Therefore, a middle- or upper-class mother could serve as a successful mother without engaging in the bulk of the actual physical care of the child. In fact, the typical middle- or upper-class mother might have little to do with the physical care of her children in the sense of bathing, dressing, and feeding. A nurse would typically tend to a child's physical needs. The mother's removal from the physical acts of nursing signified class status and kept the mother separate from the physical nursing aspects common to our modern concept of motherhood.

Since Victorians associated ideal mothering with the child's spiritual and mental development and removed from the child's actual body, the role of nurturer could supposedly be separated from the "Victorian sexualization of nursing" (Furneaux 178). The erotic and homoerotic aspects of nursing—in the form of caring or healing—often appear in Victorian literature in regard to both genders, and Furneaux describes the nurse-patient interaction as a relationship in which "confidences are exchanged, clothes removed or readjusted, soothing caresses administered to aching limbs, and basic wants given utterance" (178). Therefore, it is not difficult to imagine that an author could

sexualize a child-nurse relationship into the pedophilic or homoerotic. The very language used to describe this interaction translates to the child's bedroom; children require help dressing, often require "soothing caresses," and often communicate only "basic wants" at a young age. Although a middle- or upper- class mother might not find herself providing basic nursing care, according to Nelson, she would be expected to spend time with her children and oversee the nursery, and a mother could potentially engage in nursing behavior, especially if she chose to breastfeed her infant (*Family Ties in Victorian England* 51-52).

One can see a fine line between nurturing and nursing, and these behaviors almost always included elements of each other and could move into the erotic easily. For example, both nurturing and nursing behavior require "soothing." Soothing touch requires physical contact while crossing into the emotional and mental. While in Carmilla's embrace, Laura claims, "[H]er murmured words sounded like a lullaby in my ear, and soothed my resistance into a trance, from which I only seemed to recover myself when she withdrew her arms" (22). Carmilla appears maternal through Laura's description of her nurturing embrace and soothing lullaby-like words of reassurance, but the embrace goes beyond a mother's reassurance; Laura experiences "tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable… mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust" (22). Maternal nurturing/ nursing behavior becomes erotically charged here, while conflating the two creates a sense of disgust. The connection between maternity and the body not only eroticizes the mother-child relationship, but also attacks rosy idealized visions of maternity. Le Fanu takes maternity from a socially sanctified role to a physical and queer sexual relationship. Motherhood itself appears full of transgressive possibilities.

Carmilla's sadistic maternal passion further degrades maternity through a pornographic association that many Victorians would have recognized. Marcus explains that Victorian pornography "helps to explain how the family could…be a site of homoerotic desire," and that representations of maternal punishment appeared in both pornography and women's magazines in the 1870s (143). In Victorian pornography, the flagellation subset featured sexual acts in which women would orgasm by inflicting pain on younger girls. Marcus provides the example of older women "punishing girls and penetrating girls with fingers and dildos while birching them" (143). Carmilla, as the morally degenerate Other, engages in this type of sadistic behavior with Laura. In a parallel of the pornographic scene Marcus describes, Carmilla feeds off of physically harming Laura's health by draining her blood while penetrating her with her fangs and satiating her desire for blood. Further, Laura claims that Carmilla enjoys Laura's health decline through "renewed adoration" and "ardour" that "always shocked me like a momentary glare of insanity" (Le Fanu 42). Laura acknowledges Carmilla's sadistic reaction to her suffering, and Carmilla illustrates typical sadistic behavior when her "ardour" causes Laura's physical pain and when her passion only increases with Laura's suffering. Of course, one cannot categorize all Victorians as avid consumers of porn, and, therefore, one cannot assume that every woman or man would have seen this pornographic material. However, many men and women would have recognized at least the potential for erotic fantasies about physical punishment from maternal figures.

Laura's father, Bertha's uncle, and a squad of men do violently execute Carmilla, but, even as Le Fanu attempts to cast female power and relationships as monstrous, uncontrolled, and only dispatched after men step in to the woman's sphere, the threat

doesn't end with Carmilla's demise. Carmilla's sexual and psychological corruption appears to have a lasting effect on Laura. Le Fanu indicates that Carmilla has queered Laura permanently, and the older, seemingly unmarried and childless, narrator version of Laura admits, "[T]o this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory" and that "often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla" (83). Further, the prologue reveals that Laura has died after writing the manuscript. This bleak piece of information and Laura's own assertions that Carmilla has maintained a presence in her mind indicate that Carmilla has impacted Laura for life and, potentially, negatively impacted Laura's ability to reach the summer of her life: an idealized status as a British mother. Unlike Stretton's Stella and Rossetti's Laura, Le Fanu's Laura appears totally free from fault; Laura's failure is not a personal shortcoming in the more typical fashion of the fallen woman representation in Victorian works. Laura has not ventured outside of her home, disobeyed her parents or conscience in order to consort with a lover, or made any kind of conscious choice to contribute to her status at the end of the novel. Laura is, instead, a victim of the deficiencies of a Victorian socio-cultural system that privileges women with an idealized status and assumes women will perpetuate these social ideals in their interactions with each other. *Carmilla* represents the danger of a separate idealized woman's sphere of responsibility outside of masculine control.

Carmilla presents a lingering threat in a larger sense as the eerily familiar monster already present in British homes as a queer and destabilizing female force preying on the deficiencies and ambiguities inherent in idealizing these figures. Oulton describes the fin de siècle as a period of "crisis and re-evaluation…. [and] a deeper crisis of identity in Victorian society as a whole;" *Carmilla* is the product of the general growth of anxiety

over Victorian identity towards the end of the century coupled with the gothic genre's emphasis on highlighting cultural anxieties (129). Despite Le Fanu's attempt to illustrate the depravity of feminine power and influence in the most negative of lights, he creates an oddly empowering view of women as so powerful they may never be controlled by men within the present socio-cultural system. All of the flexibility and queer potential within the woman's sphere that he casts as monstrous appears potentially freeing from another perspective.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

"The Ghost in the Clock Room," "Goblin Market," and *Carmilla* all conclude by upholding heteronormative ideals in some form or another—either a marriage plot ("Goblin Market" and "The Ghost in the Clock Room") or the destruction of the queer threat (*Carmilla)*. However, they all find radically queer possibilities within the very structure imagined as the center of cultural values and British identity: the family. And despite their conclusions, they all permanently unsettle heteronormativity in some way. Stretton's non-reproductive companionate marriage and the incentives for this marriage don't disappear, Rossetti's elevation of female intimacy and power remains, and Laura appears to never become a wife or mother due to the corrupting influence of Carmilla. Although many theorists would reject any analysis of the family as the site of queer possibility, these texts demonstrate that queer and subversive potential can come from within the family.

Stretton, Rossetti, and Le Fanu all invest women in the domestic sphere with an impressive amount of power and recognize the queer potential for families, despite very different backgrounds and outlooks on the queer potential they establish. Stretton depicts a woman choosing an asexual companionate marriage based on her affinity for his family and her own desire for intellectual improvement as an ideal in "The Ghost in the Clock Room." In "Goblin Market," Rossetti empowers women within the sphere that men have supposedly relegated them to, depicting this sphere as superior in its female intimacy and its ability to negate corrupting male influence, and excluding men from any significant role in this sphere. Le Fanu poses the idealized woman's sphere as dangerously powerful and uncontrolled in *Carmilla,* and his dark outlook toward queer possibility only

reaffirms that female power was never comfortably mitigated. Whether optimistic or pessimistic in regards to feminine power or other queer possibilities, all of these authors employ a seemingly conservative framework and demonstrate that queer possibility comes from places we may not expect.

Locating queer potential in even seemingly conservative or didactic texts about the family is important for multiple reasons. On the most basic level, queer explorations into a wide range of literature will only continue to destabilize contemporary notions of this era as a golden time of family and family values. In reality, Victorian families were complex institutions and never as controlled as has been popularly imagined. Mintz explains this contemporary tendency to look to Victorian families as a symbol that "suggests a more stable and ordered past, a model of hierarchical organization, deference, and discipline contrasting sharply with our own disordered times" (xi). In reality, as Ellen Brinks asserts, "Victorians possessed far more playful and inclusive attitudes toward representation of girls' gender and sexual queerness than we have allowed ourselves to imagine" (134).

Therefore, this kind of study changes the way we imagine our contemporary family ideals and forces us to think critically about our own culture rather than framing our notions of family as liberated in contrast to a simplistic image of Victorian families. In fact, Victorian families allowed for freedoms and flexibility in ways that contemporary western culture does not. For example, female friendship appears to encompass a wider range of feelings and intimacy than contemporary notions of friendship between two women. Marcus even argues, "[M]ainstream femininity was not secretly lesbian, but openly homoerotic" (3). Victorians acknowledged homoerotic bonds within female

friendship and, although some clearly found this disturbing (like Le Fanu), others accepted this as part of a complex socialization process for girls; an intimate attachment to a maternal-didactic figure simply served as an important part of development. Further examination of Victorian families indicates that western culture has not necessarily become increasingly flexible in its outlook toward socially acceptable genders and sexualities.

This project, then, also highlights a failure in the limited way our contemporary culture, and even some scholars, think of queer in terms of heterosexual/homosexual and man/woman. This binary serves as the very "endemic crisis" queer theory should be addressing (Sedgwick 1). Stretton, Rossetti, and Le Fanu depict queer genders and relationships that defy simple categorization. Stretton demonstrates how asexuality contrasts heterosexuality without falling into the simple binary of hetero/homo, and Rossetti and Le Fanu reinforce the fact that a woman attracted to another woman need not be masculine. Rossetti depicts the homoerotic socialization process of young girls during this era as a means of queering one's sexuality while entirely feminizing one's gender, and Le Fanu depicts Carmilla's gender as queer because she fails to meet gender ideals while remaining starkly maternal and feminine, refusing to be categorized as masculine.

This work also strives to illuminate the worth in examining women's roles in the family and home within the broader category of the domestic ideal. There is now an abundance of work addressing the domestic ideal in broad strokes, but fewer works engage in sufficiently separating and explicating women's specific experiences and roles within this larger ideal or destabilizing this conglomeration into component parts that

may result in more complex and empowered visions of Victorian womanhood. For example, additional work might direct itself to engaging with maternity and the maternal aspect of womanhood since most work lumps together all aspects of womanhood under the "angel of the house" ideal. A study of queer maternity could be especially intriguing, but any work that complicates female experiences would help to combat the oversimplification that often seems tied to the domestic ideal, suggesting that men subjected women to the domestic sphere and women passively accepted this position as victims. This seriously underestimates women, and we reinforce patriarchal myths of the domestic ideal when we refuse to look for ways women actively challenged and subverted male authority from within this domestic sphere. Works like "Goblin Market" and *Carmilla,* which pose the separation of spheres as backfiring on masculine authority, are essential in contributing to an understanding of how a separate sphere for women provided opportunities for women to shape this sphere and their roles and relationships in it in surprising ways and outside of male interference.

It's important that we continue to interrogate gender and family ideals, celebrating the queer elements and outlooks in all kinds of literature, from didactic fiction like Stretton's "The Ghost in the Clock Room" to seemingly misogynistic Gothic literature like *Carmilla.* Recently, some substantial inquiries into queer Victorians have pursued such goals, but there is certainly a great deal more to explore. The results of such study often provide a basis for an optimistic outlook toward the ability of Victorian women and families to open queer possibilities that reflect and suit their own needs and desires.

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