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Feeling “As No One Save a Woman Can”: Representations of Female Emotional Labor in  
Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and Gaskell

by  
Lanette Moss Carter

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To the Graduate Faculty:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the thesis of Lanette Moss Carter find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my husband and children, for encouraging me to achieve my dream.

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Thesis Abstract—Idaho State University (2023)

This thesis employs sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild’s process of emotional labor as a framework through which to analyze how Victorian emotions were regulated and affected by the culture and social structures of the period. Drawing on works by Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and Elizabeth Gaskell, this project investigates the lives of female characters as they perform emotional labor in public and private settings. In some cases, these enactments challenge the assumption of the feminine ideal. Other instances feature emotional labor as a form of self-preservation and economic survival. And still, another perspective focuses on emotional labor as commodified care that is susceptible to manipulation. Hochschild’s social theories of emotion can be used to challenge the veracity of domestic ideology by exposing the myth of the feminine ideal for what it truly was—emotional *work*, fraught with physical and mental costs, enacted to uphold or challenge the norms of a patriarchal society.

Key Words: Emotional Labor, Emotion Work, *Bleak House*, *Villette*, *Wives and Daughters*, Victorian, Emotions, Gender, Women, Domesticity, Feminine Ideal, Separate Spheres



## Introduction

Domesticity was one of the most influential concepts of the nineteenth century, having a profound effect on the lives of middle-class women. What started as a “set of basic housekeeping practices” expanded to become “a powerful and elaborate ideology that importantly intersected with major cultural debates” about the family, gender, sexuality, work, and socioeconomic class (Gregory 439). Domestic ideology was first conceptualized in the eighteenth century through various literatures such as sermons, conduct books, novels, and periodicals but reached full maturity in Victorian middle-class society by the mid-nineteenth century.

The foundation of domestic ideology was laid prior to the Victorian era through the influence of evangelical writers William Cowper and Hannah More, and other “minor writers,” who worked towards “setting the terms for the characterization of domesticity and sexual difference” (Davidoff and Hall 149). By the mid-nineteenth century, Sarah Stickney Ellis, “the best-known ideologue of domesticity,” as well as others, built on domestic principles from the previous century, but employed a looser “Christian framework,” thereby broadening the ideology’s influence by making it “the practice of a class rather than of a particular religious group” (182, 184).

Unlike Cowper and More, who considered the household as a place to “unite . . . the separate but complementary activities of the two sexes,” Ellis’s domestic sphere was conditioned by increased industrialization in which “[m]iddle-class families were increasingly living, or at least desiring to live, not on premises which combined workplace with living space but in homes which were separated from work”; therefore, the home became a separate domain, “occupied by women, children, and servants, with men as the absent presence, there to direct and command but physically occupied elsewhere” (181). In this space, women’s influence as wives and

mothers grew into a source of power that was intended to strengthen and improve the moral foundation of society (183). Davidoff and Hall summarize Ellis's belief that

To love was woman's duty; to be beloved her reward. Women's aim should be to become better wives and mothers. However, much improved education for girls would be necessary for the natural maternal instinct needed training and support. Women should regard good domestic management not as degrading but as a moral task and abandon false notions of refinement, accepting that they had a vital job to do at home, just as their sons and husbands had to do at work. Wives and daughters . . . should practice the domestic virtues of making others happy. (183)

The virtues necessary for women to make others "happy" were love, duty, sacrifice, and sympathy, understood within the framework of domestic ideology as inherent qualities of womanhood.

Operating within the constraints of a domestic ideal "formulated and imposed on them from a patriarchal standpoint outside domesticity" and "upheld and perpetuated as a norm by [their] acquiescence and continued re-enactment of it," women were set apart as moral guides, endowed with seemingly innate selfless characteristics that qualified them as managers, not only of their own emotions, but also of the emotions of others within their sphere (Brandin 31). As a result, women were expected to provide emotional stability, or the appearance thereof, in a turbulent and evolving society. This expectation certainly applied to women in the home; however, many single middle-class women, considered redundant by society and forced to seek employment as governesses, teachers, or nurses, also bore the burden of managing emotions in their professional capacities. Single, dependent women who exhibited emotions such as anger, annoyance, anxiety, or excessive feeling generally risked violating ideological expectations,

threatening their very livelihoods. Middle-class women, therefore, became expert emotional performers in a society that fostered unrealistic standards of feminine feeling and behavior.

The study of emotion has been a central point of sociological research since the 1980s, largely because of Arlie Hochschild's groundbreaking work to develop a social theory of emotion. Hochschild argues that emotional systems have both a "private and public face," and a large body of her research explores what occurs when "the private management of feeling is socially engineered and transformed into emotional labor for a wage" (Hochschild x, 12). Hochschild's *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* addresses these particular concerns, highlighting the role of gender and class as major influences on emotion management in public and private spheres.

In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild introduces the concepts of *emotional labor* (for professional contexts) and *emotion work* (for private contexts) to describe the efforts required "to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (7). In both processes, successfully managing emotion is an unseen part of the job—a part that demands a coordination of "self and feeling so that the work seems to be effortless" because "to show . . . effort is to do the job poorly" (8). Put another way, emotional management is an interior process used to create socially appropriate outward displays that may or may not be authentic in order to achieve desirable outcomes. The distinction between these two concepts is that emotional labor is "sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*," whereas emotion work has "*use value*" (7). Because this kind of effort "calls for a coordination of mind and feeling" that "sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality," there are potential psychological costs if a disconnect occurs between what is inwardly felt and outwardly displayed. Just as physical laborers can feel

estranged or alienated from parts of their body “*used* to do the work,” those involved in professional or private service work can become estranged from aspects of their emotional selves that are required to fulfill certain expectations (7).

Employing Hochschild’s processes of emotional labor and emotion work as lenses through which to examine and critique domestic ideology and women’s roles in mid-nineteenth century literature expands our understanding of how Victorian women responded to the emotional demands placed on them. Janice Schroeder asserts emotional labor’s relevance in the nineteenth century by identifying it as “a productive rebranding of what Victorian feminists . . . already understood about the costs of private emotion management” (463). Additionally, Schroeder relates emotional labor to concepts of “sympathy, or fellow feeling” common in the “middle-class Victorian novel,” suggesting that it allows for “greater specificity about women’s practice of sympathy as work” (464). Expanding this theory, I argue that representations of female emotional labor (or emotion work) expose the otherwise unobservable efforts preceding not just acts of sympathy, but any emotion women were compelled to enact contrary to their inward feelings in order to satisfy expectations imposed on them in their personal or professional spheres.

This thesis examines representations of female emotional labor in Victorian fiction and the manner in which they challenge the veracity of domestic ideology, particularly the concept of the feminine ideal. Drawing on close readings of Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House*, Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*, and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters*, this project investigates the lives of female characters as they perform emotional labor in public and private settings. In some cases, these enactments challenge the assumption that characteristics of the feminine ideal are inherent in women. Other instances feature emotional labor as a form of self-preservation and a

means of economic survival. And still, another perspective focuses on emotional labor as commodified care that is susceptible to manipulation because it has lost “its sense of being an altruistic emotional interaction” (Hoffer 194). This study progresses chronologically through the novels by date of publication; however, it also follows a trajectory of decline in emotional labor’s ability to foster satisfying personal relationships.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I explore how emotional labor nuances Esther Summerson’s affective performances in Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House*. Esther’s entire narrative is driven by her desire to “repair the fault” of her birth by being “industrious, contented and kind-hearted,” and doing good to others in order to “win” love (Dickens 31). She views her engagement with emotional labor as necessary to fulfill these purposes. Whereas other female affective workers in Victorian literature seek their own welfare at the expense of those for whom they care, Esther’s efforts are benevolent and mutually beneficial. Representations of Esther’s emotional labor are not intended to overthrow the domestic ideal; rather, unmasking the efforts behind her emotional displays pushes against the unrealistic, idealized belief in women’s sympathetic sensibilities as innate. As a single, dependent worker, she strives to align her inner feelings with ideological and social expectations in order to maintain affectionate relationships. Ultimately, though indirectly, through her emotional labor, Esther secures a relationship based on romantic love.

In the second chapter, I focus on Lucy Snowe’s problematic engagement with emotional labor in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*. The type of emotional labor in which Lucy engages differs from the previous chapter in that it is economically driven rather than domestically driven. Lucy safeguards her intense inner feelings as an act of self-preservation and projects an unobtrusive front in order to avoid surveillance and maintain employment. Lucy is motivated by desires for

economic independence and personal autonomy, but underlying these material hopes is the need for authentic connection and affection, which continually eludes her throughout the novel. I explore the contradiction of how Lucy's performed emotional behaviors benefit her professionally even as they hinder potentially romantic relationships in her personal life. Because Lucy's public and private spheres occupy the same locale, she struggles to differentiate between emotional labor in the workplace and emotion work in her personal life; eventually, she realizes that these strategies do not translate. The emotional tactics that enable Lucy to achieve independence are insufficient for fulfilling her romantic hopes.

In the final chapter, I employ Emma Brandin's theory of domestic performance to examine female characters in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* as they engage in "faking, suppressing, or displaying emotions" in order to fulfill expectations of domestic ideology (Tiwari et al. 524). Emotional labor performed by Molly Gibson, Mrs. Hamley, and Mrs. Gibson work subversively in the text to expose and challenge the artificial nature of the domestic ideal and undermine "the essentialist idea of natural gender difference and predetermination" (Brandin 31). Molly is influenced by two models of domestic performance in Mrs. Hamley and Mrs. Gibson. Mrs. Hamley embodies the cost of complete submission to the domestic ideal by sacrificing her own identity and individuality in order to engender familial devotion and stability. Conversely, Mrs. Gibson embodies domesticity and emotional labor in their most trivial and corrupted states by manipulating them to achieve social precedence to the detriment of satisfying familial relationships. This chapter illustrates emotional labor's potential to tragically undermine relationships that are intended to be the most fulfilling.

Taken as a whole, these three novels present a broadened and nuanced perspective of women's affective work in the mid-nineteenth century and demonstrate the ambiguity of

emotional labor due to its ability to produce both positive and negative outcomes in the lives of women who engaged in it. Emotional labor was a multipurpose tool with the potential to create, foster, or destroy life's most meaningful and satisfying relationships. Using Hochschild's process of emotional labor to probe these texts exposes their treatment of the feminine ideal as a myth, and women's seemingly inherent and natural ability to care as emotional *work*, fraught with physical and mental costs, enacted to uphold or challenge the norms of a patriarchal society.

## Chapter One:

### Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*: Emotional Labor, Duty, and Desire

Significant critical debate exists regarding the character and narration of Esther Summerson in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, but a thorough investigation of her affective domestic work and its implications is a relatively unexplored line of inquiry. In 2021, Deborah Logan, editor of *Victorians Journal*, claims that "Victorian domesticity as a serious scholarly investigation is, surprisingly, a comparatively new endeavor" (1). Further, she suggests that well-established theories about separate-spheres ideology and the angel in the house "have not been adequately scrutinized or revisited, despite the rise of feminist studies marking the 1970s and 1980s" (1). Acknowledging that "the very foundation of Victorian culture . . . is not quite what we thought it was," she invites scholars to ask questions enabling a fresh perspective of the "textual evidence that has always been there" (1). Responding to Logan's invitation, this chapter examines how the application of Arlie Hochschild's contemporary sociological process of emotional labor addresses and nuances the affective performances of Esther Summerson in the domestic sphere of Dickens's *Bleak House*. It should be noted that while Hochschild's research of emotional labor primarily focuses on the management of feeling in the workplace, where it is "sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*," she also provides an alternative term—emotion work—to denote the same process occurring in private contexts where it has *use value* (Hochschild 7). Both processes are performed by Esther in *Bleak House* in her various roles, but for the sake of condensing terms, I will use "emotional labor" almost exclusively to represent either performance in this chapter.



## Emotional Labor as a Productive Rebranding

Long before 1983, when Hochschild coined the term “emotional labor” to describe the process by which one induces or suppresses feeling “in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others,” middle-class women in nineteenth-century England engaged in emotion management (Hochschild 7). Janice Schroeder bridges the gap between nineteenth-century women’s affective work and emotional labor by classifying the term as “a productive rebranding of what Victorian feminists . . . already understood about the costs of private emotion management” (463). In other words, emotional labor addresses the work underlying Victorian female sympathy. Schroeder also explains that “Terms such as *sympathy*, *duty*, and *woman’s mission* . . . were social memes that, like *emotional labour*, signified middle-class women’s ‘natural’ calling as emotion managers” (463). Women’s affective work in the nineteenth century, like emotional labor today, was meant to appear natural and effortless, when in fact, it was a conscious and deliberate coordination of feeling and self.

As nineteenth-century sympathy grew into a source of domestic power, the middle-class Victorian novel used sympathy as “a way to differentiate between public and private spheres, to define gender difference, and to defend the legal status quo regarding marriage” (Ablow 3). Schroeder explains that the novel’s “plots and modes of characterization . . . had a unique ability to promote an increasingly feminized attitude of sympathy towards both marginalized individuals and one’s own family” (464). However, current emotional labor studies offer new insights that broaden our understanding of Victorian sympathy, turning the critical gaze back towards the one who sympathizes. Schroeder continues,

What Hochschild’s term offers to our understanding of the nineteenth-century novel vis-à-vis sympathy is greater specificity about women’s practice of sympathy as work. More

than *sympathy* . . . the term *emotional labour* allows for a detailed examination of the quotidian demands of the workday and the physical and mental costs paid by the emotional labourer herself. (464)

Understanding nineteenth-century sympathy in light of emotional labor presents a more problematic view of middle-class domestic ideology represented in many Victorian novels, specifically contradicting the assumption that women's ability to care was innate or natural. Esther's narration in *Bleak House* highlights her struggle to align her own feelings with Victorian domestic ideology, gesturing towards Dickens's own ambivalence about women's supposed innate sympathetic sensibilities.

This chapter explores how Esther's traumatic childhood and social status make emotional labor an essential part of her life, not only to secure a livelihood, but also because it is inextricably linked to her sense of purpose and being. Esther's affective work becomes part of a deep-rooted strategy to "win" love, even as it exposes the potential harm of such work when its sustained performance causes a "fusion of self and work role" (Wharton, "Consequences" 162). Esther's emotional labor wins a love that is, at best, merely reliable and secure, through her engagement to her guardian, John Jarndyce. Although this love feels inadequate to Esther, feeling rules dictate that as a dependent woman, she should be "very happy, very thankful, [and] very hopeful" (Dickens 692). While emotional labor provides the framework through which Esther wins a dutiful love, it also indirectly contributes to her realization of romantic love. Esther wins Jarndyce's genuine affection through her emotional labor which ultimately leads him to privilege her desire over his own. Through Jarndyce's intervention, Esther is given—rather than laboring for—the love she truly desires.

The following analysis of Esther's emotional labor differs from other critical commentary about affective performance in literature due to its focus on how her intent to win love makes the work of emotional labor not merely a *tolerable* performance, but rather a *desirable* means to an end, in spite of its negative effects. The physical and mental costs of Esther's affective work are a form of penance for a misunderstood and misguided guilt instilled in her as a child by her godmother, Miss Barbary. In this light, Esther's emotional labor is personal as much as it is social or political, and pivotal in her efforts to heal the wounds of her past. The predominant motivation for affective performance of other female service workers in Dickens's novels is to improve their situation, financially and/or socially, but Esther's deepest motivation resides in a past for which she seeks atonement—to “repair the fault” with which she was born (Dickens 31). These distinct motivations color Dickens's characters' engagement with emotional labor. Whereas other female laborers discussed in this chapter seek their own benefit at the expense of others, Esther's efforts are mutually beneficial.

Female service workers experienced an acute sense of precarity and ambiguity in Victorian England, which may offer a partial explanation for the varied (and sometimes unprincipled) methods used by these women to meet their particular needs. The social stratum they represented was considered uniquely problematic. One year before the serial publication of *Bleak House*, the Census of 1851 “revealed that as many as 30 percent of women between the ages of 20 and 40 were unmarried, with a surplus of half a million women over the population of men” (Phegley 151). This social condition led W. R. Greg to write an essay in 1862, entitled “Why Are Women Redundant?” in which he pointedly declares that unmarried middle and upper class women who have to “carve out artificial and painfully sought occupations for themselves” were a “problem to be solved” and an “evil and anomaly to be cured” (436, 440). Greg was not

the only one addressing these issues. In *From Spinster to Career Woman: Middle-Class women and Work in Victorian England*, Arlene Young concludes: “That these issues were so persistently presented as questions suggests the level of uncertainty that prevailed throughout the second half of the nineteenth century about how best to respond to such challenges” (15). Dickens’s inclusion of “redundant women” in his novels, then, also places him in conversation with Victorian society as they grappled with such a complex and complicated issue.

### **Esther and the Dependent Female Worker**

Esther’s plight is similar to many of Dickens’s dependent female characters—Mrs. General in *Little Dorrit*, Mrs. Sparsit in *Hard Times*, and Rosa Dartle in *David Copperfield* occupy similar roles. Abigail Arnold characterizes such women as “dependent,” because they are “unmarried, lacking in family, money, and social position, and thus dependent upon the support of others” (315). These women are “caught between the positions of family member and worker,” and rather than existing as separate realms, as Victorian society dictates, they are interdependent: “the emotional serves to shape individuals’ economic fates” (316). This interdependency directly contradicts separate-spheres ideology, risks placing workers at odds with their own authentic emotion, and obscures the relationship between them and their employers. Arnold observes,

Many of Dickens’s novels feature female characters who, as housekeepers, companions, or governesses, attempt to navigate emotional intimacy with their employers. Such factors as these women’s ages, their specific positions, and the arrangements of the households within which they work all influence their differing relationships to emotional labor, but these figures also share commonalities, particularly in the ways that the

connections they form with their employers are not subsidiary to but an essential part of their work. (317)

In other words, Arnold emphasizes that although Dickens's female characters' connection to emotional labor differs, the crucial and often tenuous work these female characters perform to establish emotional intimacy with their employers is not only similar, but also paramount to their success; that these relationships must be *navigated* implies careful and sometimes difficult maneuvering on the part of a female worker in order to avoid her own misfortune.

Mrs. General, Mrs. Sparsit, Rosa Dartle, and according to Lauren Hoffer, even Esther Summerson, "exploit their positions as companions to achieve their own goals" (194). Hoffer's article "She Brings Everything to a Grindstone," focuses on Rosa's problematic position as an affective worker in *David Copperfield*. As Mrs. Steerforth's female companion, Rosa "warps sympathy so that it is useful to her and damaging to the recipient, rather than salutary" (202-203). Hoffer argues that Dickens uses Rosa's character to explore representations of sympathy as "self-serving" and "disruptive" (209). Conversely, although Esther's role as a companion is similar to Rosa's, her motivations for emotionally laboring are informed by benevolence and good will. In this view, it can be argued that Hoffer's claim that Esther "exploits" her position—a term that is almost always negative when describing people or property—is a mischaracterization. Rosa's emotional labor, like that of Mrs. General or Mrs. Sparsit, is "corrupted and distorted to serve [her] own selfish aims" (Hoffer 191): Rosa's manipulated sympathy exposes and critiques the Steerforth family (191); Mrs. General tries to make herself indispensable to the Dorrits in order to "raise her status, and . . . move from the role of the Dorrit daughters' companion to that of Mr. Dorrit's wife" (Arnold 333); Mrs. Sparsit also hopes for a marriage of convenience, to Mr. Bounderby, but after he marries another, she seeks his ruin by

sabotaging his wife, Louisa. In stark contrast, Esther uses emotion management to ultimately “do some good to some one, and win some love to [herself]” (Dickens 31). These examples illustrate that the motivations for which Dickens’s female characters perform affective labor varies in type and intention as well as exposing an ethical facet that is promising for future analysis. Due to their precarious social positions, dependent female characters who engage in emotional labor weigh the costs of their performance against their own particular needs, and in many instances, suffer personally for a measure of stability.

The social role of dependent women in service work illustrates how gender informs emotional labor. Hochschild acknowledges that both men and women participate in emotion work, but it is more crucial for women because “women in general have far less independent access to money, power, authority, or status in society” (163). As subordinates in the social stratum, “it has been in the woman’s interest to be the better actor. . . . Yet these skills have long been mislabeled ‘natural,’ a part of woman’s ‘being’ rather than something of her own making” (167). It is as if Hochschild is speaking directly of Esther when she describes how women accommodate the feelings of others in their affective labors: [Women] actively adapt feeling to a need or purpose at hand, and they do it so that it seems to express a passive state of agreement, the chance occurrence of coinciding needs. Being becomes a way of doing. Acting is the needed art, and emotion work is the tool” (167). This behavior is most prominent in Esther’s interactions with her benefactor, John Jarndyce. Dependency necessitates her emotional labor, supporting Hochschild’s theory that, “lacking other resources, women make a resource out of feeling and offer it to men as a gift in return for the more material resources they lack” (163). Esther’s dependency on Jarndyce for material resources is implicit in the novel; however, her narration

explicitly depicts her use of feeling-resources in order to secure the less-material resources of love and belonging that she lacks.

### **The Foundations of Esther's Emotional Labor**

Esther's introduction to emotional labor occurs on her twelfth birthday, "the most melancholy day at home, in the whole year" (29). Reacting to an expression on her godmother's face which communicated, "'It would have been far better . . . that you had had no birthday; that you had never been born!'" (30), Esther pleads for information about the mother she has never met. Miss Barbary's contemptuous reply is the impetus for Esther's emotional performance throughout the novel:

'Your mother . . . is your disgrace, and you were hers. The time will come—and soon enough—when you will understand this better, and will feel it too, as no one save a woman can. . . . Submission, self-denial, diligent work, are the preparations for life begun with such a shadow on it.' (30)

Processing her godmother's pernicious directive, Esther mourns, "Imperfect as my understanding of my sorrow was, I knew that I had brought no joy, at any time, to anybody's heart, and that I was to no one upon earth what Dolly was to me" (31). Unwilling to give way to hopelessness, Esther resolves to reframe the narrative of her life and work tirelessly to earn love and affection as an act of reparation: "I would try, as hard as ever I could, to repair the fault I had been born with . . . and would strive as I grew up to be industrious, contented and kind-hearted, and to do some good to some one, and win some love to myself if I could" (31). Esther's declaration lays the groundwork for her entire narrative. Her efforts to compensate for the trauma inflicted by her godmother are reflected throughout her *Bleak House* narrative in the form of emotional labor.

Since the publication of *Bleak House*, Esther's characterization has generated significant controversy. Alex Zwerdling notes, "From the first, [Esther's] prominence in *Bleak House* has been treated as one of Dickens' disastrous mistakes" (429). Labeled as "unrealistic and unconvincing," and "a hopelessly inconsistent character," Esther is also "frequently accused of coyness, particularly in her insistence on disclaiming the compliments heaped upon her while faithfully recording them" (429). Zwerdling takes issue with these characterizations of Esther, claiming that she is "one of the triumphs of [Dickens's] art, a subtle psychological portrait clear in its outlines and convincing in its details" (429). Zwerdling's claim stems from his analysis of Esther through a clinical lens, arguing that "the major aim of her portion of the narrative is to study in detail the short- and long-range effect of a certain kind of adult violence on the mind of a child" (429). In this view, Zwerdling believes that the characterization of Esther is appropriate for one suffering the effects of childhood trauma.

Like Zwerdling, Heidi Pennington suggests that Esther's first-person narration is "key to understanding her in a more complex and productive way" (36). Reading Esther through the lens of fictional autobiography, Pennington notes that she "writes the apologia of her own life and self. She is both the subject and the object of her discourse," and her leading concern is "to represent and to legitimize her inward identity in relationship to a particular social role" (37). Esther's narrative enables her to disclose evidence of her emotional labor—an otherwise unseen endeavor. Narrating her affective work exposes her inner self in relation to her role as a dependent female worker. These revelations not only confirm Pennington's assumption that "feeling is the guiding principle of [Esther's] authorship" (51), but they also play a role in constructing a more nuanced identity rather than a static representation of Victorian ideology which some critics attribute to her characterization.



## Emotional Labor and Feeling Rules

In “When Fairy Godmothers are Men,” Melissa Smith argues that Esther’s narration in *Bleak House* “problematizes and undermines” Dickens’s project to fantasize the feminine ideal (Smith 195). As a narrator, Dickens grants Esther certain concessions with regards to the construction of her identity in order “to write her own happy ending,” and although Esther does not completely break free from Dickens’s scheme to “keep women . . . the indefatigable angels of the house,” she pushes against this delimitation by negotiating the role of a female storyteller, “entitled to an authoritative voice,” and Dickens’s control of her voice “to express certain desires, attitudes, and values . . .” (197, 198). Evidence of these negotiations are woven throughout *Bleak House* in Esther’s narrated performances of emotional labor. Even though her outward displays often conform to dominant Victorian ideology, her wrestle between what she *does* feel and what she *ought* to feel are represented in the text.

Hochschild uses the term “feeling rules” to define the “pinch between ‘what I do feel’ and ‘what I should feel’” (57). Feeling rules are used “to describe societal norms about the appropriate type and amount of feeling that should be experienced in a particular situation” (Wharton, “Sociology” 148-49). Since feeling is “a form of pre-action,” Hochschild argues that “a script or a moral stance toward it is one of culture’s most powerful tools for directing action” (56). In Victorian society, the widely-circulated “moral stance” towards middle-class women’s emotions was that they should be checked, subdued, regulated, selfless, sympathetic, and deferential. Christina Kotchemidova’s social history of cheerfulness claims that a society’s “formal emotion culture”—its script—is understood by its “folklore and epos, sermons and religious teachings, educational and scientific publications, court records, books of advice . . . etiquette books, ethics codes, or other cultural products offering models of personality and self-

presentation where emotional states are significant building blocks” (6). Textual materials such as these were abundant in Victorian England; Dickens even contributed to society’s emotion culture with the publication of his weekly magazine *Household Words*. Although these “prescriptive” literatures did not necessarily translate into practice, they were “indicative of the cultural expectations in regard to emotion experience” (6).

Esther’s attempts to navigate Victorian feeling rules—to adhere to the script—are represented by the recurring dialogue between her emotionally spontaneous and regulatory selves. Shortly after Esther’s arrival at Bleak House, while sitting with Jarndyce she begins to tremble. She explains to the reader: “I could not help it: I tried very hard: but being alone with that benevolent presence, and meeting his kind eyes, and feeling so happy, and so honoured there, and my heart so full—” (Dickens 117). After Jarndyce gently reproaches her “foolish” display, she tells the reader, “I said to myself, ‘Esther, my dear, you surprise me! This really is not what I expected of you!’ and it had such a good effect, that I folded my hands upon my basket and quite recovered myself” (117). Recognizing Esther’s regained control, Jarndyce “[expresses] his approval in his face” (117). Not only does Esther reprimand herself, but Jarndyce’s reaction also reinforces the social nature of feeling rules—his approving glance signifies her return to a more socially-acceptable emotional state. The dichotomy of Esther’s selves can be understood through Jill Matus’s explanation about two dominant views of emotion: the hydraulic and the cognitive. The hydraulic sees emotion as “opposed to reason, automatic rather than voluntary, universal, and natural,” whereas the cognitive view “emphasizes the appraising, evaluative aspect of emotional response” (14). In the text, whenever Esther has a spontaneous emotional response (hydraulic), her regulatory-self is quick to reproach her back into compliance with normative emotional behavior (cognitive).

Another notable example involving Esther's navigation of feeling rules occurs when she returns to Bleak House to resume her duties after convalescing at Chesney Wold:

I was perfectly restored to health and strength; and finding my housekeeping keys laid ready for me in my room, rang myself in as if I had been a new year, with a merry little peal. 'Once more, duty, duty, Esther,' said I; 'and *if you are not overjoyed to do it*, more than cheerfully and contentedly, through anything and everything, *you ought to be*. That's all I have to say to *you*, my dear!' (609; emphasis added)

Although Esther frequently narrates her domestic work with exaggerated eagerness, like any Victorian angel in the house, this instance reveals a more candid expression of the exacting nature of emotional labor and the struggle to negotiate feeling and self to fit social expectations—even if Esther is “not overjoyed to do it,” she “ought to be.”

### **Esther as Emotional Laborer**

When Esther leaves Greenleaf to begin her first paid position as a companion to Ada Clare, and unexpectedly, as the housekeeper of Bleak House, she has little independent income except for fifteen pounds, set aside over several years through a quarterly allowance (Dickens 97). She describes her precarity thus: “I had always thought that some accident might happen which would throw me, suddenly, without any relation or any property, on the world; and had always tried to keep some little money by me, that I might not be quite penniless” (97-98). Esther's money, though not a sign of any significant wealth, is representative of a scant, though prized level of security and autonomy.

Her first night at Bleak House, she is called away discreetly to assist in resolving the debt of Jarndyce's friend, Mr. Skimpole, who is on the verge of arrest unless it is paid. Without hesitation, Esther sacrifices her meager sum to help pay the debt. Catching wind of Skimpole's

inappropriate financial solicitation, Jarndyce is dumbfounded, “‘Oh, dear me, what’s this, what’s this! . . . rubbing his head and walking about with his good-humored vexation” (100). As an emotional laborer, Esther’s job is to suppress her own feelings of exploitation in order to pacify Jarndyce, who begins “alternately putting his hands into his pockets . . . and taking them out again, and vehemently rubbing them all over his head” (101). In response, Esther knowingly reminds Jarndyce of Skimpole’s alleged child-like nature in order to provide what she believes will be a satisfying explanation for his misconduct and render it harmless:

“I ventured to take this opportunity of hinting that Mr Skimpole, being in all such matters, quite a child—

‘Eh, my dear? said Mr Jarndyce, catching at the word.

‘—Being quite a child, sir,’ said I, ‘and so different from other people—‘

‘You are right!’ said Mr Jarndyce, brightening. ‘Your woman’s wit hits the mark. He is a child—an absolute child. I told you he was a child, you know, when I first mentioned him.’

“Certainly! Certainly! we said.

‘And he *is* a child. Now, isn’t he?’ asked Mr Jarndyce, brightening more and more.

He was indeed, we said. (101)

Esther’s emotional labor pays off. She remarks, “It was so delicious to see the clouds about his bright face clearing, and to see him so heartily pleased” (101). The economic violence Esther brings upon herself by paying the debt stems from her desire to shield Jarndyce from discomfort. Her management of his emotion is achieved at the expense of her prolonged and careful efforts toward future stability, yet we read nothing of her distress over such a loss. Moreover, Esther’s sacrifice further restricts her limited autonomy and increases dependency and a feeling of

indebtedness towards Jarndyce, which translates into an even greater obligation to emotionally labor on his behalf.

Another example of Esther privileging Jarndyce's emotions occurs while discussing Richard Carstone's occupational prospects in order to help him become a more suitable future husband to Ada. As an orphan and ward of the court of Chancery, Richard, like Ada, lives under Jarndyce's care at Bleak House. Esther suggests asking Richard himself what he is inclined to pursue. Jarndyce exclaims, "'Exactly so. . . . That's what I mean. You know, just accustom yourself to talk it over, with your tact and in your quiet way. . . . We are sure to come at the heart of the matter by your means, little woman'" (122) In this exchange, Jarndyce unsettles Esther and disrupts Victorian separate-spheres ideology in two ways: 1) by invoking "the heart of the matter," when it comes to Richard's professional choice—acknowledging that feeling plays a role outside of the domestic sphere and 2) designating a woman to lead out in such an endeavor. As narrator, Esther is privileged to let the reader see the hidden world of her emotional labor:

I was really frightened at the thought of the importance I was attaining, and the number of things that were being confided to me. I had not meant this at all; I had meant that he should speak to Richard. But of course I said nothing in reply, except that I would do my best. (122)

Esther feels misunderstood and frightened by the responsibility given to her, yet she says nothing to intimate her discomfort. This example highlights Arnold's observation that "the use of emotional labor can keep dependent women subservient" (316). Jarndyce assumes that as Esther's employer, he has the authority to dictate a course of action. As an emotional laborer, it is Esther's job to withhold her frustration and avoid drawing attention to the fact that issues

regarding a man's profession are outside of her domestic realm. As a result of this imbalance of power, Esther submits to Jarndyce's directive.

### **Overidentification and Emotional Labor**

Esther's struggle to "strike a balance between the requirements of the self and the demands of the work role" causes what Hochschild terms "overidentification," where the self and the work role essentially merge together (Wharton, "Consequences" 162). Joshua Gooch comments on the blurred line of self and work when he contrasts the difference between workers who produce materials and workers who provide services: "unlike workers engaged in material production, service workers undertake work that is neither material nor completely located in a single work-space but is rather a process that relies on the development of skills and instrumentalized relationships that make the relation of work and life effectively indeterminate" (139-40). Esther's interactions with Jarndyce satisfy her desire to win his love (self) while also meeting his unspoken need for affective care (work role); however, her constant engagement with emotional labor results in overidentification with the work inasmuch that she cannot separate her own desires from the requirements of the job. This principle is represented in an interaction between Esther and Jarndyce after she confides her shocking discovery that Lady Dedlock is her mother:

He spoke so tenderly and wisely to me, and he put so plainly before me all I had myself imperfectly thought and hoped in my better state of mind, . . . and when at last I lay down to sleep, my thought was how could I ever be busy enough, how could I ever be good enough, how in my little way could I ever hope to be forgetful enough of myself, devoted enough to him, and useful enough to others, to show him how I blessed and honoured him. (Dickens 686)

The muddling of Esther's personal emotion with the demands of emotional labor is, in large part, the product of her childhood trauma. Her craving for love drives her to contemplate a standard of performance in her affective work that is seemingly unattainable—how can she ever be “good enough,” “forgetful enough,” “devoted enough,” or “useful enough” to show her gratitude for his kindness (686)? Shortly after this scene, Esther proves that the lengths to which she is willing to emotionally labor to secure Jarndyce's affection extend far beyond a standard professional relationship—reinforcing the blurred line for emotional laborers between the job and the self.

The culmination of Esther's emotional labor in *Bleak House* occurs when she accepts Jarndyce's proposal of marriage even though she is in love with Allen Woodcourt. Although Jarndyce asserts that Esther owes him nothing—rather, he is *her* “debtor”—the power dynamics inherent in emotional labor dictate that it is *her* job to please *him*, not the other way around. As an emotional laborer, any generosity from an employer “demands a response from the dependent woman in the form of gratitude” (Arnold 319). Esther's gratitude is inordinately manifested by her willingness to become “Mistress of Bleak House”—significantly, her narration excludes the title of “wife”. Pondering his proposal, she reasons, “*I felt that I had but one thing to do. To devote my life to his happiness was to thank him poorly, and what had I wished for the other night but some new means of thanking him?*” (Dickens 692; emphasis added). Devotion is not enough for Esther; rather marriage—representative in Victorian society as a merging of her selfhood with his, to *disappear* in him—is the ultimate expression of gratitude toward Jarndyce.

Although Esther overidentifies with the demands of emotional labor, it is important to remember that her situation is unique compared with other dependent female workers. She does not yearn to *throw off* the shackles of emotional labor for independence, but rather to *bind herself to them* in order to secure affection. Without any assurance of love or security outside of Bleak

House, Esther follows the course of her “benignant history” (692) with Jarndyce, thereby winning *some* love, even if it is not *the* love she desires. Again, Hochschild’s feeling rules come into play through Esther’s self-talk:

By-and-by, I went to my old glass. My eyes were red and swollen, and I said, ‘O Esther, Esther, can that be you!’ I am afraid the face in the glass was going to cry again at this reproach, but I held up my finger at it, and it stopped. . . . ‘When you are mistress of Bleak House, you are to be as cheerful as a bird. In fact, you are always to be cheerful; so let us begin for once and for all. (692)

Notwithstanding the pain Esther feels of something “indefinitely lost to [her],” which she is unable to articulate as the love she hoped to share with Woodcourt, she agrees to marry Jarndyce.

In order to solidify her decision, Esther makes one final symbolic, sacrificial gesture. Remembering the flowers Woodcourt left for her which she had placed in a book in Ada’s chamber, she reasons, “It would be better not to keep them now. They had only been preserved in memory of something wholly past and gone, but it would be better not to keep them now” (Dickens 693). The repetition at the beginning and end of her thought shows her struggle to let go of the love she truly desires. Even though a future with Woodcourt is “wholly past and gone” in her mind, keeping the flowers would signify a withholding of her heart from Jarndyce and a constant, painful reminder of unfulfilled romantic love. Retrieving the book, Esther goes to Ada, bends to kiss her, and starts to cry:

It was weak in me, I know, and I could have no reason for crying; but I dropped a tear upon her dear face, and another, and another. Weaker than that, I took the withered flowers out, and put them for a moment to her lips. I thought about her love for Richard;



though, indeed, the flowers had nothing to do with that. Then I took them into my own room, and burned them at the candle, and they were dust in an instant. (693)

Esther has every reason to cry—her sense of loss is significant—but feeling rules dictate otherwise; however, her pain is too great for her reproach to have any effect. Ada's love for Richard represents Esther's vicarious enactment of a romantic love with Woodcourt, and placing the dried flowers to Ada's lips becomes a symbolic "kissing goodbye" to what might have been between them. Contrary to Esther's disclosure, the flowers have everything to do with Richard and Ada's love because their love is proxy for her love with Woodcourt. Heartbroken, but resolute, Esther places her romantic love on a figurative altar of emotional labor and burns the flowers to dust.

### **Emotional Labor Rewarded**

In a surprising narrative turn, Esther reveals that she does not marry Jarndyce after all; having won his fatherly love, he ultimately privileges her happiness over his own: "I had no doubt of your being contented and happy with me, being so dutiful and so devoted; but I saw with whom you would be happier" (964). Aware of Woodcourt's love for Esther and perceiving Esther's love of Woodcourt, Jarndyce releases her from their engagement, knowing that Esther, as a person of her word and a committed emotional laborer, would undoubtedly "sacrifice her love to a sense of duty and affection, and [would] sacrifice it so completely, so entirely, so religiously, *that you [would] never suspect it*, though you watched her night and day" (965 emphasis added). Uncharacteristic of one who employs an emotional laborer, Jarndyce acknowledges the invisibility of Esther's affective work, as well as the reality that the work performed comes at the cost of her own authentic desires. Jarndyce's admission, therefore, complicates assumptions about Dickens's staunch commitment to Victorian domestic ideology,

but moments later Dickens resumes his adherence to cultural expectations through Esther's completion of the Victorian marriage plot. Her emotional labor transfers seamlessly from Jarndyce to Woodcourt, evolving into unpaid emotion work, where it has *use value* as his wife, rather than *exchange value* as a paid employee.

Writing in the present, having been married to Woodcourt for “seven happy years,” Esther relates, “The people . . . like Me as I go about, and make so much of me that I am quite abashed. I owe it all to him, my love, my pride! They like me for his sake, as *I do everything I do in life for his sake*” (989, emphasis added). Ultimately, Esther secures a romantic love with Woodcourt that is supported by her emotion work and satisfies—in a manner more positive than penitent—the imperatives placed upon her by her childhood self.

Analyzing Esther's narration in *Bleak House* through principles of Arlie Hochschild's emotional labor expands the notion of nineteenth-century female sympathy and exposes the underbelly of dependent female service workers' affective performances. Esther's traumatic childhood and her resolve to repair her past by earning others' love intensifies the manner and purpose for which she emotionally labors throughout the text, becoming the ultimate driving force and principal focus of her narrative; however, Esther is not immune to Victorian society's expectations and norms, and she struggles to coordinate her own feelings in accordance with what is required of her as a woman and an emotional laborer. Overidentification with her work role entangles Esther in an engagement out of duty to Jarndyce at the expense of her own authentic romantic feelings for Allen Woodcourt, yet characteristic of Dickens—who often upholds or rescues benevolent characters—he finds a way to reward Esther with the love she ultimately desires. Although Esther cannot fully extricate herself as Angel in the House of both Bleak House residences—nor does she entirely want to—her narration pushes against idealized

representations of affective work and emotion management as inherent extensions of women's natural self.

## Chapter Two:

### Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*: Emotional Labor, Independence, and Loss

In “Approaching Charlotte Brontë in the 21st Century,” Deborah Wynne declares, “the time has come when *Jane Eyre*’s dominance in Charlotte Brontë studies needs to be challenged” and “more [scholarly] weight” given to her other works (7). Since that time, many critical conversations regarding *Villette*, and particularly its protagonist, Lucy Snowe, have emerged and enhanced the already-prolific body of criticism of Charlotte Brontë’s oeuvre. Lucy is a unique and complicated character, often described in unfavorable terms such as “detached, paranoid, reticent” (Pond 771), and “unlikeable” (Jagannathan 213), and her narrative as “aleatory, disjointed, and unreliable” (Gibson 204). Alternatively, Talia Schaffer claims that Lucy’s inconsistencies stem from the fact that she is a “female migrant caregiver, a situation that generates a crisis about identity, vulnerability, and language” (Schaffer, “Migration” 84), and “if Lucy is ‘bewildering, perverse, or obscure’ as a narrator, perhaps that is because we have not accounted for the persistent effect of emotional labor on the development of narrative, the way such work twists narrative reliability in the same way it falsifies the worker’s lived reality” (102).

In the course of her professional endeavors, Lucy engages in behaviors that do not align with her inner feelings. This is common in the world of emotional labor, but it presents certain difficulties in a first-person narration where readers tend to rely heavily on the transparency and credibility of the narrator. Schaffer invites readers to view caregiver narratives such as Lucy’s in a new light, through a “new mode of conceptualization” that, according to Lana L. Dalley and Jill Rappoport, “take[s] into account her carefully circumscribed socioeconomic position and the behavior it elicit[s]” (85). For Lucy, and other nineteenth-century fictional caregivers, Schaffer

suggests that “we need to read [them] as people whose inner truths and outer behavior have ceased to correlate” and to read their acts “not as markers of their personal honesty but as methods of coping” (86). In other words, “protocols” are needed “that see surface behaviors as cloaks for, not indicators of, inner feeling” (86). In this light, readers can take a more liberal view of Lucy’s inconsistencies in the novel, as well as those of other female emotional laborers in Victorian fiction. This chapter supports Schaffer’s theories about the discrepancy between the inward feeling and outward behavior of emotional laborers, but it pursues a more specific line of inquiry exploring the contradiction that even as Lucy’s falsely performed behaviors benefit her professional life, they impair her efforts to nurture potentially romantic relationships.

Readers of this project will note similarities between Dickens’s narrator and emotional laborer in *Bleak House*, Esther Summerson, and Lucy Snowe. Although they share certain commonalities, such as their single, dependent status, traumatic childhoods, and yearnings for affection, Lucy’s narrative differs with regards to the performances and outcomes of her affective labors. Lucy’s affective work is manifest as silence or suppression of authentic feeling stemming from a desire to avoid attention and preserve an unadulterated sense of self with the freedom to think and act according to her conscience. While she labors with the intent to secure future professional autonomy, that desire never negates her need for companionship.

Unfortunately, the blending of Lucy’s public and private spheres at the *pensionnat* proves problematic. Although Lucy’s unobtrusive, reticent behaviors in the workplace are efficacious in pursuing autonomy, in her private sphere, especially in associations with Graham Bretton and M. Paul, these tactics fail to engender the affectionate connections she hopes for. Lucy realizes that what her emotional labor ultimately offers in terms of independence and autonomy proves

insufficiently compensatory, for even as she realizes freedom in her professional sphere, she ultimately does so at the expense of intimacy she desperately craves in her personal life.

### **Lucy as a Dependent Woman**

Nineteenth-century society denied women the ability to respectably self-actualize unless their desires fit within conventional parameters. Although Brontë did not consider herself an overtly political writer—"I cannot write books handling the topics of the day" (*Letters* 208)—in a letter written to Elizabeth Gaskell in 1850, she directly addresses the inequity of the condition of women in Victorian society:

Men begin to regard the position of Women in another light than they used to do, and a few Men whose sympathies are fine and whose sense of justice is strong think and speak of it with a candour that commands my admiration. They say—however—and to a certain extent—truly—that the amelioration of our condition depends on ourselves. Certainly there are evils which our own efforts will best reach—but as certainly *there are other evils—deep rooted in the foundations of the Social system—which no efforts of ours can touch—of which we cannot complain—of which it is advisable not too often to think.*

(173, emphasis added)

Brontë recognizes women's responsibility to improve their condition as far as they are able, but she calls out the systemic evils that render women powerless to redress on an institutional level hindrances to their improvement. Nineteenth-century women were, therefore, forced to exist within bounds set by a patriarchal system, including in their professional pursuits.

Writing from personal experience, Brontë confesses, "the poor are born to labour, and the dependent to endure" (Gaskell 131). Most of Brontë's adult life, she endured the precarity and shame that many single, dependent women experienced in a society that viewed them as a

“problem to be solved” and an “evil and anomaly to be cured” (Greg, “Redundant” 440). In *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England*, Jennifer Phegley references an 1841 conduct book claiming that the state of singlehood is “‘not to be enjoyed, but endured’”; however, Phegley continues, “single women could potentially bring honor to the ‘generally . . . despicable’ term *old maid* by fruitfully employing themselves ‘amid scenes of sickness and affliction’ or in professions such as teaching or governessing” (152). Schaffer explains that “middle-class women, debarred from selling their bodies or labor, had little else to market except their capacity to care” (*Communities* 91). Like Brontë, who commercialized her affective life through governessing and teaching, Lucy is also forced to navigate the world of commodified care.

Trauma in Lucy’s family forces her to become a dependent woman, and by extension, an emotional laborer. Lucy offers vague details of the tragedy, revealing little more than that as a child, she experienced “a long time, of cold, of danger, [and] of contention” (*Villette* 39). In her youth, Lucy’s only happiness is in the company of her godmother, Mrs. Bretton, and her son, Graham, with whom she stays twice a year, until “impediments, raised by others, had . . . come in the way of [their] intercourse, and cut it off” (*Villette* 39-40). With the obscure loss of her family and the severed connection with the Brettons, Lucy says, “there remained no possibility of dependence on others; *to myself alone could I look*. I know not that I was of a self-reliant or active nature; but *self-reliance and exertion were forced upon me by circumstances*” (40, emphasis added). Feeling the oppressive weight of her circumstances, Lucy says,

All at once my position rose on me like a ghost. Anomalous; desolate, almost blank of hope it stood. What was I doing here alone . . .? What should I do on the morrow? What prospects had I in life? What friends had I on earth? Whence did I come? Whither should I go? What should I do? (51-52)

The precarity and loneliness of Lucy's situation is significant, and in order to survive economically, she engages in professional roles that necessitate emotional labor.

### Lucy as a “Rising Character”

As a dependent woman, Lucy's initial plan is simply to make a living. On the boat to Labassecour, in response to Ginevra's question of where she is going, Lucy responds, “Where Fate may lead me. My business is to earn a living where I can find it” (61). After Lucy is hired as an English teacher at Madame Beck's *pensionnat*, her attitude shifts and becomes more forward-thinking: “My time was now well and profitably filled up. . . . I felt I was getting on . . . polishing my faculties and whetting them to a keen edge with constant use. Experience of a certain kind lay before me, on no narrow scale” (91). Later in the novel, after Paulina admits that she pities Lucy's position, her father responds, “When I had time to consider Lucy's manner and aspect . . . I saw she was one who had to guard and not be guarded; to act and not be served: and this lot has, I imagine, helped her to an experience for which, if she live long enough to realize its full benefit, she may yet bless Providence” (322). His remark hints that her efforts as a dependent woman have taught her to be self-sufficient and proactive, and in the course of time, may lead to greater achievements beyond merely working to provide a “roof of shelter” and being “spared the pain” of burdening others (321). Lastly, when Lucy is fully established as a teacher and confident in her post, she admits,

I paced up and down, thinking . . . how I should make some advance in life, take another step towards an independent position; for this train of reflection . . . had never by me been wholly abandoned. . . . Courage, Lucy Snowe! With self-denial and economy now, and steady exertion by-and-by, an object in life need not fail you. Venture not to complain that such an object is too selfish, too limited, and lacks interest; be content to labour for



independence until you have proved, by winning that prize, your right to look higher.

(408)

Taken as a whole, these experiences highlight the trajectory of Lucy's professional goals. In her own words, Lucy is "a rising character" (347), and in the course of the novel, her plan for professional and financial autonomy expands as she develops skills that make independence an actual possibility rather than a mere fantasy.

### **Lucy's Need for Affection and Connection**

In addition to Lucy's desire for economic independence, she also yearns for affection and connection in both professional and personal capacities, as evidenced by her relationships with Miss Marchmont, Georgette, Graham Bretton, and later, M. Paul. Unsure at first whether she can handle the care required by Miss Marchmont when she is offered a position as her nurse and companion, Lucy softens to the idea after her ministrations during a sudden "paroxysm" creates a "sort of intimacy" between them (41). As Lucy labors, she develops a "growing sense of attachment" and "respect" for Miss Marchmont (41, 42). She welcomes the pseudo-family they create, as it makes her job feel more like an authentic relationship and less like a duty: "Even when she scolded me . . . it was in such a way as did not humiliate, and left no sting; *it was rather like an irascible mother rating her daughter, than a harsh mistress lecturing a dependent*" (42, emphasis added). Pondering her situation, Lucy discloses the extent of her self-sacrifice in Miss Marchmont's service:

Two hot, close rooms thus became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all. Her service was my duty—her pain, my suffering—her relief, my hope—her anger, my punishment—her regard, my reward. I forgot that there were fields, woods,

rivers, seas, an everchanging sky outside the steam-dimmed lattice of this sick-chamber; I was almost content to forget it. (42)

Lucy's affective care circumscribes her "world" and "all within [her]" to a sick-chamber. The concerns of her mistress become *her* concerns to the extent that she is "almost content" to forget the ebb and flow of life outside the confines of Miss Marchmont's stale rooms. What Lucy gains in exchange for her labor is worth her sacrifice. She relates,

[Miss Marchmont] gave me the originality of her character to study: the steadiness of her virtues . . . the power of her passions, to admire, the truth of her feelings to trust. . . . For these thing I would have crawled on with her for twenty years . . . [b]ut another decree was written. It seemed I must be stimulated into action. . . . My little morsel of human affection, which I prized as if it were a solid pearl, must melt in my fingers and slip thence like a dissolving hailstone. (42)

Lucy would rather submit "to a whole life of privation and small pains" in Miss Marchmont's service than experience "occasional great agonies" (42). This response is a byproduct of her past and helps to explain her contentment with such an unconventional form of affection to the point that she is willing to sacrifice nearly all of herself to retain it. Unfortunately, Miss Marchmont passes away, forcing Lucy to give up the stable security and reciprocated affection she felt in her employ.

Lucy also cherishes an affectionate exchange with Georgette, Madame Beck's youngest daughter, for whom she was a governess. Waiting for Dr. John to arrive in order to check on the sick child, Lucy relates:

I affected Georgette; she was a sensitive and a loving child: to hold her in my lap, or carry her in my arms was to me a treat. To-night she would have me lay my head on the

pillow of her crib; she even put her little arms round my neck. Her clasp and the nestling action with which she pressed her cheek to mine, made me almost cry with a tender pain. Feeling of no kind abounded in that house; this pure little drop from a pure little source was too sweet: it penetrated deep, and subdued the heart, and sent a gush to the eyes.

(135-36)

Although Lucy claims to affect Georgette, it is Georgette who truly affects Lucy. Starved for personal connection and affection at the *pensionnat*, Lucy relishes Georgette's affection; however, Georgette, like Miss Marchmont before her, is taken from Lucy: "As soon as Georgette was well, madame sent her away into the country. I was sorry; I loved the child, and her loss made me poorer than before" (141). There is a trend in the novel that whomever Lucy feels affection towards, inevitably slips out of her life. Such is the case with Miss Marchmont and Georgette in Lucy's professional experience as well as with Graham Bretton and M. Paul in her personal life.

The episode of Lucy's breakdown during the long vacation illustrates her vital need for companionship. During the eight-week break when teachers and students leave the *pensionnat*, Lucy is left alone except for a servant and a "poor, deformed and imbecile pupil" named Marie Broc (176). Lucy recounts that in the succeeding weeks:

My heart almost died within me; miserable longings strained its chords. . . . My nervous system could hardly support what it had for many days and nights to undergo in that huge, empty house. How I used to pray to Heaven for consolation and support! . . . [A] want of companionship maintained in my soul the cravings of a most deadly famine.

(177, 178)

In her desperation to leave the confines of the *pensionnat*, which was “crushing as a slab of a tomb,” Lucy follows the sound of bells into a church where she confesses to a priest that she is “perishing for a word of advice or an accent of comfort” (182). After her confessional, she admits, “the mere relief of communication in an ear which was human and sentient . . . had done me good. I was already solaced” (182). Cold, powerless, and caught in a storm on her way home, she passes out on the stone steps of a “great building” (185). Rescued by Graham Bretton, he takes her to the home he shares with his mother, Lucy’s godmother. While convalescing, Lucy confides in Graham about her experience and the agony of her isolation,

I cannot put the case into words, but, my days and nights were grown intolerable; a cruel sense of desolation pained my mind. . . . I wanted companionship, I wanted friendship, I wanted counsel. I could find none of these in closet, or chamber, so I went and sought them in church and confessional. . . . I have done nothing wrong . . . all I poured out was a dreary, desperate complaint. (211)

Human connection, companionship, and friendship are essential to Lucy’s wellbeing, and while she does not fully realize these connections at the *pensionnat*, her role as a teacher serves to minimize her loneliness; however, due to the school break, “the prop of employment” is withdrawn, and Lucy’s spirits “[go] down fast” to the degree that she is unable to cope with reality (177).

The subsequent rekindling of her relationship with the Brettons allows Lucy to regain her emotional health, and improve her outlook on life: “a new creed became mine—a belief in happiness” (286). Graham writes letters to Lucy to keep up her spirits, but she professes, “I did not live on letters only: I was visited, I was looked after; once a week I was taken out to La Terrasse; always I was made much of” (287), but just as these tokens of affection lift Lucy out of

her emotional slumps, their absence plummets her into depression again, proving how essential such kindnesses are for her emotional well-being. Because of Graham's serendipitous reintroduction to Paulina Home, he fails to maintain his correspondence with Lucy:

Following that eventful evening at the theatre, came for me seven weeks as bare as seven sheets of blank paper: no word was written on one of them; not a visit, not a token. . . . I admitted . . . the conviction that these blanks were inevitable. . . a part of my life's lot. . . . I underwent in those seven weeks bitter fears and pains, strange inward trials, miserable defections of hope, intolerable encroachments of despair. (301-02)

Confirming the trend noted above, Lucy feels that her abandonment by Graham, and others with whom she forms connections, is an "inevitable" aspect of her existence, and that Reason, "who would not let [her] look up, or smile, or hope . . . harshly den[ies] [her] right to ask better things" (259). The "better things" she refers to are aspects of life—like affection—that reside beyond the base existence of merely "being born only to work for a piece of bread, to await the pains of death, and steadily through all life to despond" (259).

### **Emotional Labor, Suppression, and Madame Beck**

After having tasted affection in Miss Marchmont's service, Lucy experiences the harsh reality of commodified care through her experiences with Madame Beck, her employer at the *pensionnat*. Lucy's version of affective labor is to remain silent or suppress her authentic feelings, presenting a façade of unassuming self-control. Lucy feels obligated to perform inauthentically because of Madame Beck's emotional detachment—she is driven more by self-interest than concern for her employees:

I saw plainly that aid in no shape was to be expected from Madame: her righteous plan was to maintain an unbroken popularity with the pupils, at any and every cost of justice

or comfort to the teachers. . . . In intercourse with her pupils, Madame only took to herself what was pleasant, amiable, and commendatory; rigidly requiring of her lieutenants sufficiency for every annoying crisis, where to act with adequate promptitude was to be unpopular. Thus, I must look only to myself. (92)

When Lucy first arrives at the *pensionnat*, she observes in Madame Beck that “never a gleam of sympathy, or a shade of compassion, crossed her countenance . . . she was not one to be led an inch by her feelings” (73). Spending more time with her, Lucy observes, “I have seen her feelings appealed to, and I have smiled in half-pity, half-scorn at the appellants. None ever gained her ear through that channel, or swayed her purpose by that means. On the contrary, to attempt to touch her heart was the surest way to rouse her antipathy, and to make of her a secret foe” (73, 82). These examples illustrate Madame Beck’s emotional unavailability not only to Lucy, but to anyone who works at the *pensionnat*. As a result, Lucy realizes that she must suppress her authentic self as well as her need for connection, affection, and belonging lest they are met with scorn and ridicule. She is compelled to shoulder the burden of isolation alone, knowing that there is no one to look to for help and few who can understand her.

Additionally, Madame Beck’s constant surveillance contributes to Lucy’s need to suppress her true self. Jagannathan argues, “In *Villette*, we have a protagonist-narrator whose strong impulse is to elude scrutiny and regulation, as she shields herself from Mme Beck who opens [her] drawers, reads her letters, and studies her face to elicit information” (222). Susie Gharib attributes Lucy’s behavior to her economic precarity: “Lucy keeps silent and endures intrusion upon her privacy in order to safeguard her employment at all expenses” (101). This need for secrecy and evasion also transfers over to *Villette*’s readership. Schaffer claims that, “initially, [Lucy] equates her readers with the employers from whom she must hide her deepest

feelings, so she evades and baffles us. . . . She is trying to protect this information from us because she assumes we want to monetize her emotions” (86). Her argument stems from Hochschild’s notion of emotional labor in which aspects of one’s affective life are consigned to commercial uses, “thus creating a crisis of authenticity” (85). Schaffer continues,

Emotional labor ‘requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others.’ Because such labor commodifies ‘a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality,’ the worker can become ‘estranged or alienated from’ her core self. (85)

Lucy feels estranged from her authentic self and suppresses her feelings out of necessity as an emotional laborer under Madame Beck’s unsympathetic, surveilling eye, but her emotional labor is advantageous in her professional life because it enables her to retain her position and move forward towards her goal of economic independence and the hope of an autonomous future.

### **Modified Emotional Labor, Aggression, and Teaching**

The advantageous and adaptive nature of Lucy’s emotional labor in her professional sphere is evident when she becomes an English teacher at the *pensionnat*. While still a governess, Madame Beck asks Lucy to stand in for a teacher who is ill. Inwardly, Lucy wants to refuse, claiming to be “inadventurous” and “unstirred by impulses of practical ambition,” but an even stronger desire to decline stems from her wish to avoid “heavy anxiety” and “intimate trial” (85). The need to avoid intense feeling arises out of Lucy’s lived experience that feeling is more often a source of pain rather than pleasure. Governessing, for Lucy, requires minimal emotional exertion, but the thought of teaching sixty unruly students is threatening.

Face to face with her employer, Lucy’s moment of indecision is significant for her as an emotional laborer. Madame Beck challenges her grit much like a man would challenge another

man in the public sphere: “Looking up at madame, I saw in her countenance a something that made me think twice ere I decided. At that instant, she did not wear a woman’s aspect, but rather a man’s. Power of a particular kind strongly limned itself in all her traits, and that power was not *my* kind of power” (86). Madame asks, “‘Will you . . . go backward or forward?’ indicating with her hand . . . the great double portals of the classes” (87). Drawing “strength and determination” from Madame Beck’s “antipathy,” Lucy moves forward. Madame Beck counters,

“[C]an you face the classes, or are you over-excited?”

She sneered slightly in saying this—nervous excitability was not much to madame’s taste.

“I am no more excited than this stone,” I said, tapping the flag with my toe: “or than you,” I added, returning her look. (87)

Madame Beck respects quiet aggression and strength, not weakness, frailty, or over-excitment. Lucy knows this and responds in kind, thus proving her mettle, although inwardly she feels “diffidence” and “pusillanimity” (86). As a result of her stern composure, she passes Madame Beck’s first test.

Rising to the rank of a teacher from a governess is a pivotal step towards Lucy’s goal of achieving independence as a headmistress of her own school; therefore, it is important that Lucy proves capable as a teacher at the *pensionnat*. Lucy performs emotional labor in order to command the respect of the unruly class. “Emotional labor” in this sense is different from previous discussions of female affective work. Whereas women tend to affectively labor through submission and deference, Lucy’s labor aligns more with Hochschild’s description of masculine emotional labor. Hochschild uses examples of female flight attendants and male bill collectors to illustrate the distinction. A female flight attendant emotionally labors to create a comfortable



environment for passengers, “to *enhance* the customer’s status” and “heighten his or her importance,” whereas male bill collectors emotionally labor by displaying anger, intimidation, or aggression in order to “*deflate* the customer’s status”—“a bill collector is given permission to puff himself up, to take the upper hand and exercise a certain license in dealing with others” (Hochschild 139, 144). These examples show that women tend to approach affective care from beneath and men from above, but Lucy, indifferent to these gendered expectations, implements the more masculine form of emotional labor in her classroom.

Madame Beck warns Lucy that her pupils “‘always throw over timid teachers,’” and that Lucy is not to expect help from her or anyone else because it “would at once set [her] down as incompetent for [her] office” (88). Lucy is aware that the entire class knows she is Madame Beck’s governess. Mounting the estrade to begin the lesson, she “beheld opposite to [her] a row of eyes and brows that threatened stormy weather—eyes full of an insolent light, and brows hard and unblushing as marble” (88). Her pupils “knew they had succeeded in expelling obnoxious teachers before now,” and “looking at ‘Miss Snowe’ they promised themselves an easy victory” (88-89). Lacking fluency in the French language, and acknowledging that “this growing revolt of sixty against one, soon became oppressive enough” (89), Lucy resorts to intimidation and aggression to “get command over this wild herd and bring them into training” (89). Lucy selects two students who hold the greatest influence in the class. Walking up to the “handsomest, and most vicious,” she takes her exercise book, “remount[s] the estrade, deliberately read[s] the composition, which [she] found very stupid, and as deliberately, and in the face of the whole school, tear[s] the blotted page in two” (89). Lucy is off to a good start, for this “avail[s] to draw attention and check noise” (89). Next, she targets a girl who is standing “for the purpose of conducting her clamour with freer energies”; “[a]dvancing up the room, looking as cool and

careless as [she] possibly could,” Lucy instantly turns and pushes the girl into a closet, shuts the door, and places the key in her pocket (90). This final act has the desired effect:

[The class] was stilled for a moment; then a smile—not a laugh—passed from desk to desk: then—when I had . . . returned to the estrade, courteously requested silence, and commenced a dictation as if nothing at all had happened—the pens travelled peacefully over the pages, and the remainder of the lesson passed in order and industry. (90)

Ever the surveillant, as Lucy exits the classroom “hot and a little exhausted,” Madame Beck says, “C’est bien . . . Ça ira;” (“That’s good . . . That will do”), because “[s]he had been listening and peeping through a spy-hole the whole time” (90). Lucy proudly acknowledges, “From that day I ceased to be a nursery-governess, and became English teacher” (90). Her successful emotional labor brings order to the classroom and secures her position as the new English instructor at the *pensionnat*, yet in spite of Lucy’s advancement professionally, as a dependent worker, Madame Beck still exploits her labor: “[She] raised my salary; but she got thrice the work out of me she had extracted from Mr. Wilson, at half the expense” (90), emphasizing that emotional labor always exhibits an imbalance of power between worker and employer.

### **Lucy’s Misguided Emotion Work**

Lucy’s professional and personal life exist within the walls of the *pensionnat*, where “students and teachers jostle in inappropriately intimate proximity” (“Migration” 98). As such, she has little privacy or freedom to live authentically, as she is “forced to maintain her performative cover morning, noon, and night” (97). Lucy protests that the *pensionnat* “was a strange house, where no corner was sacred from intrusion, where not a tear could be shed, nor a thought pondered, but a spy was at hand to note and to divine” (*Villette* 261). The blending of

public and private spheres becomes problematic for Lucy because she struggles to prevent her performances of emotional labor from spilling over into her personal relationships, especially with potential love interests Graham Bretton and M. Paul. The mask of inauthenticity that benefits Lucy in the workplace fails to produce the romantic attachments she seeks in her personal life.

For much of the novel, Lucy engages in a one-sided relationship with Graham Bretton. Lucy describes it as “half marble and half life; only on one hand truth, and on the other perhaps a jest” (409). Because of her silence and suppressed emotion, Graham considers Lucy passive and “as inoffensive as a shadow” (356). Prior to his discovery that she is the Lucy Snowe of his youth, she performs as a silent observer in his presence, similar to her unobtrusive behavior around Madame Beck. At one point, when Lucy is in a room with Graham, she notes that he grants her “just that degree of notice and consequence a person of [her] exterior habitually expects: that is to say, about what is given to unobtrusive articles of furniture, chairs of ordinary joiner’s work, and carpets of no striking pattern” (110). Lucy is practically nonexistent to Graham beyond occupying space in a room, but she is free to “puzzle over” and “wonder” about him as he sits “like a man who thinks himself alone” (110). When he does catch her gaze and questions her reason for doing so, Lucy admits,

I might have cleared myself on the spot, but would not. I did not speak. . . . Suffering him, then, to think what he chose, and accuse me of what he would, I resumed some work I had dropped . . . . [I]n quarters where we can never be rightly known, we take pleasure . . . in being consummately ignored. (111)

By refusing to speak and allowing Graham to “accuse” her of motivations which are not necessarily true, Lucy’s response is more fitting for a prying employer, like Madame Beck,

rather than a potential companion. Subsequently, Lucy perpetuates Graham's opinion of her as a timid and hapless woman, and she makes no gains in cultivating the affectionate relationship she desires.

After Lucy's identity is revealed to Graham while convalescing at La Terrasse, rather than capitalizing and building on their former acquaintance, Lucy performs emotion work as a sounding board and middleman in his romantic pursuit of Ginevra Fanshawe. Lucy prepares for Graham to broach the subject of Ginevra because he recently confided in her at Madame's fête that *he* is Ginevra's "Isidore," the mystery suitor who "loves [her] to distraction" (96). Lucy's first few days at La Terrasse, Graham never sits near or approaches her until he finds the courage to ask about Ginevra (214). In Graham's eyes, Lucy is his connection to Ginevra and nothing more, and Lucy labors affectively to pacify him in his infatuated pursuit rather than drawing him to herself. Lucy remarks,

I thought of Miss Fanshawe and expected her name to leap from his lips. I kept my ear and mind in perpetual readiness for the tender theme; my patience was ordered to be permanently under arms, and my sympathy desired to keep its cornucopia replenished and ready for outpouring. (214)

Lucy is almost satirically calling on all of her feminine sensibilities—attentiveness, patience, and sympathy—to be ready when Graham instigates a conversation about Ginevra because she knows Ginevra's true deplorable character. Approaching the topic "delicately" and "anonymously," Graham asks,

"Your friend is spending her vacation in travelling, I hear?" "Friend, forsooth!" thought I to myself: but *it would not do to contradict; he must have his own way; I must own the soft impeachment*; friend let it be. (214, emphasis added)

Graham attributes greater fondness to Lucy than she actually feels for Ginevra, but as an emotion worker, Lucy refuses to contradict him and tolerates his misstatement. Continuing the conversation, Lucy is unable to answer all of his questions, admitting that she is not as intimately connected with Ginevra as he thinks. Graham, mistakenly assuming that Lucy is “stung with a kind of jealous pain similar to his own,” (215) tries to pacify her. Lucy, however, does not require appeasement; she cares little for Ginevra:

“You are very kind,” I said briefly. A disclaimer of the sentiments attributed to me burned on my lips, but I extinguished the flame. *I submitted to be looked upon as the humiliated, cast-off, and now pining confidante of the distinguished Miss Fanshawe: but, reader, it was a hard submission.* (215, emphasis added)

Lucy admits her struggle to yield to Graham’s misperceptions of her character and the nature of her relationship with Ginevra, but she does so out of affection for him, notwithstanding her contempt for Ginevra.

Lucy’s dream of a future with Graham was doomed from the start. In a letter to her publisher, Brontë admits that “Lucy must not marry Dr. John; he is far too youthful, handsome, bright-spirited and sweet-tempered; he is a ‘curled darling’ of Nature and of Fortune; he must draw a prize in Life’s Lottery; his wife must be young, rich and pretty” (*Letters* 209). Lucy is none of these things, and gradually, she recognizes that her hope of a relationship with Graham is a fantasy. Transferring his affections to Paulina Home, Graham asks for Lucy’s help again, but this time, she declines, fully aware that her emotion work has failed:

“I wish I could tell her all I recall: or rather, I wish some one, *you* for instance, would go behind and whisper it all in her ear, and I could have the delight . . . of watching her

look under the intelligence. Could you manage that, think you, Lucy, and make me ever grateful?"

"Could I manage to make you ever grateful?" said I. "No, *I could not*." And I felt my fingers work and my hands interlock: I felt, too, an inward courage, warm and resistant. In this matter I was not disposed to gratify Dr. John: not at all. With now welcome force, I realized his entire misapprehension of my character and nature. He wanted always to give me a rôle not mine. Nature and I opposed him. He did not at all guess what I felt: he did not read my eyes, or face, or gestures; though, I doubt not, all spoke. Leaning towards me coaxingly, he said, softly, "*Do* content me, Lucy."

And I would have contented, or at least, I would clearly have enlightened him, and taught him well never again to expect of me that part of officious soubrette in a love drama. (357)

Lucy never plays an intimate role in Graham Bretton's ultimate "love drama," for he marries Paulina Home. Mournfully, Lucy recognizes that "while Graham could devote to others the most grave and earnest, the manliest interest, he had no more than light raillery for [her], the friend of *lang syne*" (354). Lucy's only option, then, is to bury her love for Graham, sealing it with the epitaph: "'Good-night, Dr. John; You are good, you are beautiful; *but you are not mine*" (410, emphasis added).

Lucy's other love interest is M. Paul, who from her first night at the *pensionnat* claims to have seen through her and read her countenance (74). Due to oppressive surveillance at the school, where it is impossible to find "security or secrecy" (332), Lucy turns inward, hiding her true self behind a mask of inauthenticity. As a result, her ability to cultivate a friendship with M.

Paul is hindered. Only when Lucy drops her mask, embracing reality and her own authentic feelings, is she able to progress in her relationship with M. Paul.

Schaffer claims, “Lucy’s hunger for real feeling perhaps accounts for her attraction to the most natural, spontaneous person she knows, M. Paul. She is entranced by his utterly transparent emotional life, including his ebullitions of anger, his childish jealousies, his sudden rapprochements” (97). In spite of Lucy’s attraction to M. Paul and his unfettered emotion, she struggles to outwardly convey her feelings because her emotional labor requires constant restraint and little, if any, reprieve. In order to draw Lucy out and uncover her inner passion, M. Paul continually goads her with accusations about her hidden persona: “‘You are one of those being who must be *kept down*. I know you! I know you! Other people in this house see you pass, and think that a colourless shadow has gone by. As for me, I scrutinized your face once, and it sufficed” (175). As Lucy’s interest in M. Paul grows, however, she sabotages her efforts to form a personal connection with him by suppressing her feelings and enacting false equanimity.

Every year, M. Paul is honored with small tokens of affection by teachers and students at the *pensionnat*. M. Paul is particular about these gifts:

No value was offered to him: he distinctly gave it to be understood, that he would accept neither plate nor jewellery. Yet he liked a slight tribute; the cost, the money-value, did not touch him: a diamond ring, a gold snuff-box, presented with pomp, would have pleased him less than a flower, or a drawing, offered simply and with sincere feelings.

Such was his nature. (379-80)

The preference of M. Paul for simple, thoughtful gifts highlights his respect for what is genuine and sincere rather than superficial. On the morning of M. Paul’s fête, Lucy wakes “an hour before daybreak” in order to finish the watchguard she plans to give him. All of her efforts to

embellish the piece are done “to suit the particular taste whose gratification was in view,” and finding that in order to finish the ornament, she needs a gold clasp, Lucy removes the clasp of her “sole necklace” and attaches it to the watchguard (377). Lastly, Lucy places the gift in a small, beautifully ornamented box on which she engraves his initials with the point of her scissors. Clearly, Lucy goes to tremendous lengths to prepare this token for M. Paul because she considers him her only friend at the *pensionnat*. As pupils and teachers present their bouquets of flowers, M. Paul notices that Lucy has not given him a gift. Shamed by Mademoiselle St. Pierre for being a “foreigner” and not knowing their customs, in addition to M. Paul’s entreaty three times, “in really tragic tones,” “‘Est-ce là tout?’” (“Is that all?”; 384), Lucy withholds the watchguard. She explains,

I might yet have made all right, by stepping forwards and slipping into his hand the ruddy little shell-box I, at that moment held tight in my own. *It was what I had fully purposed to do*; but, first, the comic side of Monsieur’s behavior had tempted me to delay, and now, Mademoiselle St. Pierre’s affected interference provoked contumacity. . . . [I] felt too perverse to defend [myself] from any imputation the Parisienne might choose to insinuate: and besides, M. Paul was so tragic, and took my defection so seriously, he deserved to be vexed. *I kept, then, both my box and my countenance, and sat insensate as any stone.* (384-85, emphasis added)

M. Paul is deeply wounded by what he believes to be Lucy’s oversight because he, too, desires a relationship with her. He asks, “[W]hy can we not be friends? . . . I awoke in a bright mood, and came into classe happy; you spoiled my day. . . . It was my fete-day; everybody wished me happiness but you. . . . Was this unintentional?” (390). Listening to M. Paul’s grief for being seemingly forgotten, Lucy takes the little box from her desk and places it in his hand, explaining,



“It lay ready in my lap this morning . . . and if Monsieur had been rather more patient, and Mademoiselle St. Pierre less interfering—perhaps I should say, too, if I had been calmer and wiser—I should have given it then” (391). M. Paul is noticeably touched and delighted by the watchguard and asks: “This object is *all* mine?” to which Lucy affirms, “That object is yours entirely” (392).

Lucy’s interaction with M. Paul is significant because when she purposely withholds the watchguard in class, she performs behind the inauthentic mask of her emotional labor—keeping her countenance “insensate as any stone,”—when she truly feels frustrated and annoyed. This deception hurts M. Paul to his core because he detests dishonesty, deceit, and concealment (381). His philosophy is, “Prove yourself true ere I cherish you” (396). But the moment Lucy speaks plainly and reveals her authentic feelings, M. Paul is pacified, tender, and forgiving. Thus, Lucy’s suppressed emotion pushes M. Paul away, but her earnestness draws him to her.

### **Independence Gained, Love Lost**

As Lucy and M. Paul’s relationship develops, she more confidently and consistently displays true feelings, not only to him, but also to Madame Beck and others at the *pensionnat*. She finds strength to be authentic through M. Paul’s affection: “His friendship was not a doubtful, wavering benefit—a cold, distant hope—a sentiment so brittle as not to bear the weight of a finger; I at once felt . . . its support like that of some rock” (460). Lucy claims, “I loved him well” (538), but unfortunately, at the peak of their new love, M. Paul must leave for three years to work in the West Indies at the behest of Madame Walravens and Madame Beck. Prior to his departure, he presents Lucy with a small, rented building he has prepared as a school in her name. He explains,

“you shall live here and have a school; you shall employ yourself while I am away; you shall think of me sometimes; you shall mind your health and happiness for my sake, and *when I come back*—“

*There he left a blank.* (546, emphasis added)

Having provided Lucy with her greatest wish—an independent and autonomous position—M. Paul hesitates, hinting at an uncertain yet promising future. Readers assume this “blank” signifies M. Paul’s hope for matrimony; however, it is an intentional move on Brontë’s part for a more ominous reason.

For three years, Lucy works to build up her school with tremendous success. She says, “M. Emanuel was away three years. Reader, they were the three happiest years of my life. Do you scout the paradox?” (552). Lucy’s happiness is not based on M. Paul’s absence, but rather, because in those three years she feels loved and cared for: “A generous provider supplied bounteous fuel. . . . By every vessel he wrote; he wrote as he gave and as he loved, in full-handed, full-hearted plentitude” (553). While M. Paul is away, she enjoys both success in her profession and security in his affection, but invariably, this contentment is short-lived. By connecting Lucy’s “commercial success to her romantic prospects,” Ashley Nadeau asserts, “Brontë appears to suggest that these two ends can coexist, that they might even be cooperative. However, the novel’s evasive conclusion implies that, while this may be true, the marriage of work and love is still outside the narrative bounds for the female protagonists of mid-century fiction” (132).

Originally, Brontë wanted to end the novel with M. Paul’s death at sea on his return to Villette three years later; however, her publisher and her father advised her against such a melancholy ending. In order to appease them, she ends the story cryptically, implying his death

but leaving it open for speculation: “Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror . . . . Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life” (555). To Brontë, M. Paul’s death is necessary as part of Lucy’s lot in life, “the fiat of fate”—like Miss Marchmont, Georgette, Graham, and now M. Paul, whomever Lucy grows to care for slips out of her life almost as quickly as they enter, and by the end of the novel, she is, once again, alone.

Lucy Snowe’s characterization and narration in *Villette* are full of inconsistencies that pose challenges for critical analyses of the text; however, if scholars view Lucy’s narration through the lens of emotional labor, these irregularities can be understood as part and parcel of the female caregiver experience. Lucy, like other nineteenth-century emotional laborers, performs outwardly in ways that are disconnected from her inward, authentic self. She chooses silence or suppression of emotion in order to advance in her professional career as well as to avoid undue attention from Madame Beck’s oppressive surveillance at the *pensionnat*. As a dependent female worker, her silence and suppressed emotion also serve as coping mechanisms to alleviate the mental and emotional strain of her work. Although Lucy labors towards professional autonomy and independence, she craves affection and connection. Unfortunately, because the *pensionnat* encompasses both Lucy’s personal and professional spheres, she struggles to separate the two, incorporating tactics of emotional labor in her private life. Silence and suppressed emotion propel Lucy forward professionally, but they hinder her pursuit of potentially romantic relationships. In the end, Lucy qualifies for and obtains the independence she seeks, but tragically, at the expense of love; as Nadeau concludes, “Her unconventional desire for both romantic and professional fulfillment is ultimately unmet” (132). Lucy laments that after having

won the “prize” of independence, it is not enough: “is there nothing more for me in life—no true home—nothing to be dearer to me than myself? . . . I suppose, Lucy Snowe, the orb of your life is not to be so rounded; for you the crescent-phase must suffice” (408-09). In the totality of Lucy’s existence, she accepts independence as an incomplete substitute for a wholeness of life that is tragically out of reach, signifying that what emotional labor ultimately offers her in terms of autonomy and freedom are inadequate in meeting her personal need for affection and companionship. Clearly, “there is no happy ending to Lucy’s story” (Jagannathan 220), for hers is a story of unrequited love, over and over again.

### Chapter Three:

#### Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*: Emotional Labor, Performance, and the Domestic Ideal

Elizabeth Gaskell's contemporary readership considered *Wives and Daughters* one of her "greatest achievements" (Morris viii). Commenting on the text in 1866, Henry James writes that the novel "added to the number of those works of fiction . . . which will outlast the duration of their novelty and continue for years to come to be read and relished for a higher order of merits" (Easson 463); however, James, like others at the time, considered Gaskell "a properly feminine writer" whose stories were driven by affections and feelings rather than intellect. Critical studies of her work waned until the 1950s, when renewed scholarly interest in her earlier social-problem novels reinstated her reputation "as a writer tackling urgent political issues," but her domestic works were largely ignored and undervalued (ix). Pam Morris acknowledges that "[a] reassessment of [Gaskell's] work as a whole has had to await the current concern of women readers and critics to revise and reinterpret neglected or disparaged writing by women" (ix). Even so, Morris asserts that feminist critics prefer the "challenging intellectual ambition of George Eliot or the passionate language of protest found in the fiction of the Brontës" over Gaskell's works because they are "made uneasy by her apparent affirmation of women's conventional roles as wives, daughters and mothers" (ix). At first glance, this perspective is reasonable; following Gaskell's brief use of the pseudonym Cotton Mather Mills, she was published simply as Mrs. Gaskell, a conspicuous signifier of domesticity. Content in her roles as wife and mother, Gaskell is not the ideal model of modern feminist ideology, but examining her works more closely reveals ambivalence about the idealistic domestic expectations for nineteenth-century women.

On the surface, Morris admits that *Wives and Daughters* appears “staunchly behind the dominant domestic narrative of Victorian society. The text seems neither to doubt nor question the rightness and inevitableness of the progression of daughters into wives” (xiv); However, recent scholarship in the sociological process of emotional labor and Emma Brandin’s study of domestic performance enables us to see beneath the text’s seemingly implicit conformity to Victorian ideology. These areas of study, applied to Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters*, complicate the assumption of women’s innate desire and ability to care.

In a 2020 article in the *Journal of Psychosocial Research*, Tiwari et al. define emotional labor as,

the process of managing expressions and feelings to fulfill the emotional requirements of a job. Emotional labor is a state that exists when there is a discrepancy between the emotional behavior that an individual displays and the genuinely felt emotions that would be inappropriate to display. This act of faking, suppressing or displaying emotions to create an impression as part of the job was first defined by Hochschild as emotional labor. (524)

In this chapter, I will examine the performances of female characters in Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters* as they engage in the “act of faking, suppressing or displaying emotions” in order to fulfill the emotional expectations of domestic ideology. As noted in Chapter One, the process of emotional labor occurs not only on the job, per se, but also in private contexts as *emotion work*; rather than being sold for a wage, its value stems from its usefulness in managing personal relationships. Like Dickens’s *Bleak House* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*, Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters* portrays acts of emotion management by women in both public and private spheres.

In “Domestic Performance and Comedy,” Emma Brandin incorporates theories of women’s humor in her analysis of Gaskell’s use of comedy to “subvert existing social structures” (33). Feminine humor’s “key characteristic is its non-intrusiveness, that is, its ability to question and criticize from *inside* domesticity, without deliberate intention to attack or uproot the existing social order. Its methods are more delicate and circumspect than that—not aiming to overthrow, but to nudge towards balance and equality” (44). While Brandin asserts that comedy in *Wives and Daughters* “stands in opposition to domesticity,” I argue that representations of emotional labor, like humor, act subversively in the text to expose “the artificiality of the domestic ideal” and subtly undermine “the essentialist idea of natural gender difference and predetermination” (Brandin 30-31). Even as the novel conveys women’s struggles to enact socially-acceptable emotions in the management of themselves and others, these representations do not seek to overthrow the social order entirely, but to “question and criticize” unrealistic emotional expectations placed on women and advocate for more truthful depictions of the labor behind sympathy and care. Gaskell’s depictions of female emotional labor in *Wives and Daughters* perform a similar function to comedy within the sphere of domesticity, but while feminine humor’s subtly subversive tactic is “perceived as trivial, silly, and unworthy of serious attention” (Barreca 19), emotional labor’s disruption of domestic ideology is the unmasked effort behind female affective work. This form of disruption extends beyond comedic response to social imbalances by revealing the destructive potential of domestic ideology in personal relationships and individual lives.

*Wives and Daughters* follows Molly Gibson, a dutiful and guileless young woman, navigating her role in a society governed by overarching ideals of Victorian femininity and domesticity. In Brandin’s view, female characters in the novel “are socially determined to live

according to the domestic ideal,” but their response to that expectation varies (31). As a novice emotional laborer, Molly observes female characters negotiating the demands of affective responsibility within the dominant discourses of domesticity through acts of submission or exploitation. Two women in particular influence Molly’s relationship with emotion work: Mrs. Hamley, a short-lived substitute for her deceased mother, and Clare/Mrs. Kirkpatrick/Mrs. Gibson, Molly’s stepmother and former paid employee of the Cumnor family. These characters are foils of Molly, and in broader terms, demonstrate ways in which gender, class, and familial circumstances condition engagement with emotional labor. Ultimately, the text reveals that emotion management as an outgrowth of genuine feeling yields strong relational bonds notwithstanding mental, emotional, and physical costs, whereas superficial emotion work, void of authentic feeling, results in detached, unsatisfying private relationships even as it simultaneously reaps social benefits. Furthermore, the fact that private relationships suffer even as social status improves through superficial care reveals a deficiency in the prevailing domestic ideology itself.

Critics agree that domestic ideology and the notion of a domestic ideal flourished in the nineteenth century. The domestic ideal was “formulated and imposed on [women] from a patriarchal standpoint outside domesticity . . . but it [was] upheld and perpetuated as a norm by women’s acquiescence and continued re-enactment of it” (45). Kay Boardman describes the ideology of domesticity and the domestic ideal thus:

The domestic ideal centered around the concept of separate spheres which inserted women into the domestic space and men into the public. Under these terms the only acceptable work for women was domestic, it was to take place in the home and it was woman’s job to oversee the regulation of the household, both morally and economically. .



. . Whilst men accumulated money to support the home and family, women regulated household consumption . . . and the ideal domestic woman used all her time to make the home run smoothly. (150)

Brandin elaborates on this point, acknowledging that “Domesticity and femininity were the dominant influences on middle-class women’s lives at the time of Gaskell’s novels. By establishing norms of femininity and domestic perfection, which all women were expected to aspire to, these discourses aimed to homogenise women” (45). Domestic discourses significantly affected women by “[constituting] the parameters within which [they] could work out their own sense of identity” (Mills 55) and promoted purportedly inherent qualities of “true womanhood,” such as sympathy, selflessness, deference, and humility.

Brandin astutely observes that the nature of any ideal lacks exceptions for “individuality or subjectivity” and is “virtually unattainable”; as a result, “*the only way for an individual to adapt to that ideal is to perform it* as one might perform a role on a stage—by memorising and rehearsing the script that society provides of the socially acceptable and culturally desirable” (31, emphasis added). This script is similar to Hochschild’s feeling rules in Chapter One, in which society determines the “appropriate type and amount of feeling that should be experienced in a particular situation” (Wharton, “Sociology” 148-49).

The domestic ideal rejected women’s unique identities and emotions while also designating them as society’s emotion managers by virtue of their seemingly innate sensibility to care; therefore, women often had to *perform*—by faking, suppressing, or displaying emotions—in order to conceal the physical and emotional effort required to meet the affective needs in their individual spheres. The invisibility of emotion work kept the illusion of the domestic ideal intact and allowed stereotypes, like the angel in the house, to perpetuate. What Gaskell does in *Wives*

*and Daughters*, however, is expose the struggle inherent in emotional labor and, in certain cases, the less-altruistic motivations behind these efforts which, in turn, unmask the artificiality of the domestic ideal—rather than natural, effortless, disinterested and accessible, it is performative, laborious, susceptible to manipulation, and elusive.

### **Molly as the Domestic Novice**

Molly Gibson is seventeen years old when her widowed father announces that he will marry again. She and her father have lived alone, with servants, for nearly fourteen years, and his disclosure is shocking. Unbeknown to him, Mr. Gibson's bride-to-be, Mrs. Kirkpatrick, is a woman with whom Molly had a traumatic interaction five years prior, as a young girl. Conditioned to live "according to the domestic ideal," Molly suppresses her feelings about his engagement. Repeatedly, her silence is narrated in their exchange with phrases such as: "She did not answer," "her silence was unnatural," "No remark from her," and "Still she was silent" (Gaskell 111-12). Molly's silence is a deliberate choice "lest the passion of anger, dislike, indignation . . . should find vent in cries and screams, or worse, in raging words that could never be forgotten" (111). Seeking a quiet place to grieve the news, Molly is discovered by Roger Hamley, son of Squire and Mrs. Hamley, who advises her that "One has always to try to think more of others than of oneself" (117). These words influence Molly's emotional labor throughout the novel.

Molly attempts to put his counsel into practice, but an experience with her future stepmother tempers her unconditional acceptance of it. Prior to her father's marriage, she accompanies Mrs. Kirkpatrick to the Towers, the estate where Mrs. Kirkpatrick was previously employed as a governess to the Cumnor children and later as a companion to Lady Cumnor. On her way to the Towers, Molly repeats to herself, "I will think of others. I won't think of myself"

(125). During their visit, Mrs. Kirkpatrick speaks to Molly as a self-imposed intermediary between Molly and her father, and in response, “Molly’s colour flashed into her face. She did not want an assurance of her own father’s love from this strange woman. She could not help being angry; all she could do was to keep silent” (126). Then again, holding Molly’s hand and “stroking it from time to time,” Mrs. Kirkpatrick says,

“You don’t know how he speaks of you; ‘his little treasure,’ as he calls you. I’m almost jealous sometimes.”

Molly took her hand away, and her heart began to harden; these speeches were so discordant to her. But she set her teeth together, and ‘*tried to be good*’” (126, emphasis added).

Much as she tries, Molly struggles to hide her resentment—she controls her words, but her emotional response is difficult to mask.

Later, Molly is offended by Lady Cumnor, who questions her father’s discretion:

“I should not have thought your father could have afforded to keep a governess. But of course he must know his own affairs best.”

“Certainly, my lady,” replied Molly, a little touchy as to any reflections on her father’s wisdom.”

“You say ‘certainly!’ as if it was a matter of course that every one should know their own affairs best. . . . You’ll know better before you come to my age.” (132)

Reprimanded by Lady Cumnor for her voiced assurance of her father’s competence, Molly labors again to suppress a response:

[She] did not speak but it was by *strong effort* that she kept silence. Mrs. Kirkpatrick fondled her hand more perseveringly than ever, hoping thus to express a sufficient

amount of sympathy to prevent her from saying anything injudicious. But the caress had become wearisome to Molly, and only irritated her nerves. She took her hand out of Mrs Kirkpatrick's, with a slight manifestation of impatience. (132, emphasis added)

In addition to her frustration with Lady Cumnor, Molly is annoyed by Mrs. Kirkpatrick's attempt to calm her, but because she is so fresh "in her new-born desire of thinking of others," she is unable to fully conceal her irritation (131).

Shortly after these exchanges, their engagement at the Towers concludes; however, spending the day with Mrs. Kirkpatrick and Lady Cumnor is so emotionally taxing to Molly that when out of their presence, she can no longer suppress her feelings: "[She] had held up all the day bravely; *she had not shown anger, or repugnance, or annoyance, or regret*; but when once more by herself in the Hamley carriage, she burst into a passion of tears. . . . Then *she tried in vain to smooth her face into smiles, and do away with the other signs of her grief*" (134, emphasis added). Molly is constantly checking herself in order to display, or perform, appropriate behavior according to Roger's advice and domestic ideology—"imposed on women from a patriarchal standpoint"—but struggles with the process. Returning to Hamley Hall, where she resides as a guest, Roger notices her distress, and she frankly admits,

"I did try to remember what you said, and to think more of others, but it is so difficult sometimes. . . ."

"It is difficult, . . . but by-and-by you will be so much happier for it."

"No, I shan't!" said Molly, shaking her head. It will be very dull when I shall have killed myself, as it were, and live only in trying to do, and to be, as other people like. I don't see any end to it. I might as well never have lived. And as for the happiness you speak of, I shall never be happy again." (135)

Growing up without a mother and trained by her father to be simple and truthful, Molly is slow to unequivocally accept and adopt domestic ideology and the notion of a domestic ideal. Her candor and inexperience enable her to see through the artificiality of these expectations for women, and she struggles to reconcile her unique identity with society's push to conform: "Thinking more of others' happiness than of her own was very fine; but did it not mean giving up her very individuality, quenching all the warm love, the true desires, that made her herself? Yet in this deadness lay her only comfort; or so it seemed" (134). The domestic ideal, as Brandin notes, "does not allow for individuality or subjectivity," and Molly feels that social survival necessitates a type of death to her individuality—a condition which plays out in the character of Mrs. Hamley.

### **Mrs. Hamley as the Domestic Ideal**

Although Mrs. Hamley's presence in the novel is brief, no character more closely portrays an embodied representation of and submission to the domestic ideal in *Wives and Daughters*, and yet there is also no character who more clearly illustrates the costs of performing emotional labor in order to, as Boardman says, "make the home run smoothly." Mrs. Hamley's emotional labor has use value and is enacted to manage the relationships in her family, especially her relationship with her husband. After Mrs. Hamley's death, Squire Hamley suffers grievously and admits to becoming a "domestic tyrant" (247) without her influence:

Quiet and passive as Mrs Hamley had always been in appearance, *she was the ruling spirit of the house* as long as she lived. The directions to the servants, down to the most minute particulars, came from her sitting-room, or from the sofa on which she lay. Her children always knew where to find her; and *to find her, was to find love and sympathy*. Her husband, who was often restless and angry from one cause or another, always came

to her to be *smoothed down and put right*. He was conscious of *her pleasant influence* over him, and *became at peace with himself when in her presence* . . . but the keystone of the family arch was gone, and the stones of which it was composed began to fall apart. (246-47, emphasis added)

This passage illustrates Mrs. Hamley's seemingly perfect alignment with the domestic ideal—she is a “ruling spirit”, ethereal like an angel, anxiously engaged in all matters of the home, from the most “minute particulars” to her ever-present emotional availability to her children and the smoothing down and putting right of her restless and angry husband. She is so enmeshed in her role as emotional manager that her own life disappears in the care of others. While Mrs. Hamley lived, all things in the private sphere revolved around her. She was the “keystone” of the home, the central piece that held the domestic structure together, and in her absence, it crumbled.

On its own, the passage above reflects ideal domesticity; however, Gaskell presents a more complete picture of the Hamleys' apparent domestic bliss by illustrating the personal costs of Mrs. Hamley's emotional labor, which unsettles the notion of intrinsic feminine care:

. . . they were very happy, though possibly Mrs Hamley would not have sunk into the condition of a chronic invalid, if her husband had cared a little more for her various tastes, or allowed her the companionship of those who did. After his marriage he was wont to say he had got all that was worth having out of that crowd of houses they called London. It was a compliment to his wife . . . but, for all that, she used sometimes to wish that he would recognize the fact that there might still be something worth hearing and seeing in the great city. But he never went there again, and though he did not prohibit her going, yet he showed so little sympathy with her when she came back . . . that *she ceased caring to go*. . . . She *gave up* her visits to London; she *gave up* her sociable pleasure in

the company of her fellows in education and position. . . . He loved his wife all the more dearly for *her sacrifices for him*; but, *deprived of all her strong interests*, she sank into ill-health; nothing definite; only she never was well. (42-43, emphasis added)

The level of Mrs. Hamley's sacrifice is tremendous—her health, personal interests, like-minded companionship—essentially, several significant components of her individual identity are cast aside, and she suffers for it, body and mind. Although their marriage is “very happy,” it is qualified by the adverb “though,” which hints toward a lesser degree of happiness because of the imbalance of care between Mrs. Hamley and her husband. According to Hochschild, “In the gender system . . . social conditions make [emotional labor] more prevalent . . . for those at the bottom”; in other words, affective labor is more commonly enacted in the lives of women than of men (162).

As a married woman in the nineteenth century, Mrs. Hamley is dependent on her husband. One of the ways in which she “repays” her debt to him is to perform “extra emotion work—*especially emotion work that affirms, enhances, and celebrates the well-being and status of others*” (165). Hochschild uses the term “shadow labor” to describe emotion work that enhances others because it is “an unseen effort” (167). The product of shadow labor is “niceness,” which varies in types of display and degrees of performance; in Mrs. Hamley's case, she labors within the highest degree—“the moral and spiritual sense” of being nice—by embracing the needs of another person as more important than her own (168). This deference is common to those who participate in emotion work, however, Hochschild claims that “women are expected to do more of it” (168).

Near the end of Mrs. Hamley's life, and at the behest of Molly's father (Mrs. Hamley's doctor), Molly stays with the Hamleys for a period of time. She quickly falls into the role of a

family member and emotional-laborer-in-training, “Her days at Hamley were well filled up with the small duties that would have belonged to a daughter of the house had there been one,” and she was “so willing and so wise; ready both to talk and to listen at the right times” (Gaskell 81, 79). Her first dinner with the couple, Molly makes two observations about the dynamics of the Hamleys’ relationship. These observations represent a microcosm of what life has become for Mrs. Hamley: first, “this dinner appeared to [Molly] a wearisome business, prolonged because the squire liked it, for *Mrs Hamley seemed tired out*,” and second, “The squire had hitherto been too busy to talk, except about the immediate concerns of the table, and one or two of the greatest breaks to the usual monotony of his days; a monotony in which he delighted, but which sometimes became *oppressive to his wife*” (Gaskell 67, emphasis added). These passages highlight the daily discomforts that Mrs. Hamley endures in deference to her husband, yet years of emotional labor combined with Squire Hamley’s lack of reciprocated emotional care make Mrs. Hamley apathetic not only to her own needs, but to life generally, and she wastes away until her only option in the novel is to disappear from it altogether through death. This is the fate Molly fears if she fully adopts the domestic ideal.

Mrs. Hamley’s character in *Wives and Daughters* represents the cost, to the extreme, of emotional labor gone too far, and that realization is not lost on Molly. Brandin notes a generational difference in the manner in which female characters in the novel navigate the discourses of the domestic ideal. Unlike Molly, who is “still in formation,” the “older generation,” like Mrs. Hamley and others, “take their roles and their social relevance for granted, and devote themselves to the *fulfilment* of them rather than a *renegotiation* of them” (Brandin 37, emphasis added); however, Molly soon learns that her stepmother, Mrs. Gibson, masterfully renegotiates the terms of her particular roles in the novel and uses them to her advantage.



### **Clare/Mrs. Kirkpatrick/Mrs. Gibson as the Domestic Manipulator**

Selfish and self-preserving by nature, Molly's stepmother is in many ways the antithesis of Mrs. Hamley. She superficially performs emotional labor in her roles as governess, companion, wife, and stepmother. "[A]s with any performer, her name changes with every new role she takes on" (Brandin 37). As a governess, she is Clare; after she marries, is widowed, and becomes an ad hoc companion to Lady Cumnor and schoolmistress in Ashcombe, she is Mrs. Kirkpatrick; and finally, as wife of Mr. Gibson, a country doctor, and stepmother to Molly, she is Mrs. Gibson.

Throughout the novel, Mrs. Gibson's ultimate purpose is social advancement, and her success in this endeavor lies in her ability to exploit sympathy and domesticity in her roles as a paid affective worker and as a wife. She manipulates the Cumnors to maintain her connection to the high-born family and their material and social extravagances. In her marriage to Mr. Gibson, she manipulates family members using the rhetoric and outward expressions of domesticity to cultivate social precedence. Both roles, as worker and wife, are influenced by Victorian discourses of domesticity and femininity, which dictate seemingly effortless sympathy, selflessness, and propriety in order to perform them well; however, Gaskell illustrates the artificial nature of Mrs. Gibson's domestic performances. Further, Gaskell shows that in matters of the home—a place where authentic relationships are believed to be most satisfying—Mrs. Gibson's superficial care lacks the depth to forge meaningful connections even as it succeeds in socially elevating the family.

Hochschild claims that "we all do a certain amount of acting," but we act in two ways—either through surface acting or deep acting (35). Mrs. Gibson's emotion management embodies surface acting, which involves changing how she outwardly appears—"The body, not the soul, is

the main tool of the trade” (35, 37). Rather than spontaneous emotion, her performances are consciously enacted, or performed, to shape the look of a feeling that is not authentically felt; in other words, Mrs. Gibson’s surface-acted feelings are, in Hochschild’s words, “put on,” rather than “part of [her]” (36). The artificial nature of surface acting, or false feeling, causes an additional disconnect in an already problematic relationship between an employer and a paid affective laborer. Both surface acting and commodified sympathy threaten the possibility of an “altruistic emotional interaction,” because “the potential for genuine sympathy is often already corrupt” (Hoffer 194). Mrs. Gibson’s character embodies corrupted sympathy because her performative care is motivated by financial precarity and status-seeking. This process is most evident in Mrs. Gibson’s interactions with the Cumnors.

Mrs. Gibson/Clare’s affective labor begins in the novel as a dependent female worker for the Cumnor family, the “great landowners” of Hollingford. They represent the apex of power and social status in the town, and as such, “They expected to be submitted to, and obeyed”; however, the Cumnors also “did a good deal for the town, and were generally condescending, and often thoughtful and kind” (Gaskell 7). Clare is aware of the Cumnors’ social clout and works to benefit from it by association and by making herself outwardly agreeable to them:

She was a greater, more positive favourite with Lady Cumnor than with any of the rest of the family, though they all liked her up to a certain point, and found it agreeably useful to have any one in the house who was so well acquainted with their ways and habits; so ready to talk, . . . so willing to listen, and to listen with tolerable intelligence . . . . She always made exactly the remarks which are expected from an agreeable listener. (96)

This passage reveals Clare's efforts to become an indispensable asset to the Cumnors by meeting their social and emotional needs—understanding their ways, ready to talk, willing to listen, and knowing just what to say and in what manner to say it.

Every year the Cumnor's hold a party at the Towers for the families of girls who attend a charitable school set up by the Cumnor women. When Molly is twelve years old, she is invited by family friends, the "Miss Brownings," to attend the party. Overheated while touring the Cumnor greenhouses, Molly escapes outdoors and falls asleep beneath a cedar tree. When she awakens, two Cumnor women enlist Clare to care for Molly. Carrying a tray of food, Clare says, "Look how kind Lady Cuxhaven is. . . . She chose out this little lunch herself; and now you must try and eat it, and you'll be quite right when you've had some food, darling" (17). Molly is too weak to eat, and out of earshot of the Cumnors and "with a shade of asperity in her tone," Clare says: "'You see, I don't know what to do with you here if you don't eat enough to enable you to walk home. And I've been out for these three hours trapesing about the grounds till I'm as tired as can be, and missed my lunch and all'" (17). Suddenly, "as if a new idea had struck her," she tells Molly to "lie back . . . and try to eat the bunch of grapes, and I'll wait for you, and just be eating a mouthful meanwhile" (17). Clare "[eats] up the chicken and jelly, and [drinks] the glass of wine," quickly, "as if she was afraid of some one coming to surprise her in the act" (17). Clare then takes Molly to nap in her own room and forgets to wake her when the Miss Brownings leave the Towers. Blaming Molly for "over-sleeping [herself]," scolding her for worrying about having to stay overnight at the Towers, and overwhelmed by the duties of the day, Clare complains, "I really have been as busy as can be with those tiresome—those good ladies, I mean, from Hollingford—and one can't think of everything at a time" (20). In these instances, Clare reveals her emotional labor to Molly, but conceals it from the Cumnors because of power

dynamics—Molly is a middle-class child and the Cumnors are her upper-crust employers with tremendous social sway. Clare's feigned concern for Molly stems from a desire to maintain positive relations with the Cumnors.

The Cumnors develop a fondness for Clare because of her use value; because they are also "generally thoughtful and kind," they feel some responsibility for her welfare. After her first husband dies, they promote her social advancement by securing her a position as a schoolmistress, subsidizing her housing there, and later, by casually suggesting Claire's suitability as a wife to the widowed Mr. Gibson. Abigail Arnold acknowledges the ways in which "charity creates inequality" for dependent women because it "demands a response . . . in the form of gratitude . . . further preventing [the dependent woman] from displaying potentially negative emotions" (319). The Cumnor's "charity" towards Mrs. Kirkpatrick keeps her subservient, preventing her from advocating for herself or speaking contrary to their opinions. While mending her underclothes, Mrs. Kirkpatrick recalls two experiences when she was humiliated by Lady Cumnor but endures them out of obligation:

. . . [M]any a little circumstance of former subjection to the will of others rose up before her during these quiet hours, as an endurance or a suffering never to occur again . . . . She recollected how, one time . . . after she was engaged to Mr Gibson, when she had taken above an hour to arrange her hair in some new mode, . . . Lady Cumnor had sent her back again to her room, just as if she had been a little child, to do her hair over again. . . . Another time she had been sent to change her gown for one in her opinion far less becoming, but which suited Lady Cumnor's taste better. These were little things; but they were late samples of what in different shapes she had had to endure for many years. (140-41)

Even though Mrs. Kirkpatrick is to be married again and out from under the ruling thumb of the Cumnors, she refrains from defending herself or defying Lady Cumnor because, on the whole, she is treated relatively well, but more importantly, because she likes the elevated status that accompanies her intimate association with the family.

One example of Mrs. Kirkpatrick's surface acting as an emotional laborer occurs when she brings Molly to the Cumnor's estate to meet Lady Cumnor prior to becoming Molly's stepmother. Excitedly, Lady Cumnor suggests that Molly go back with Clare to her school in Ashcombe in order for them to become better acquainted and for Molly to associate with other young women her age. Mrs. Kirkpatrick immediately shudders at the thought: "[she] had no fancy for being encumbered with a step-daughter before her time" (130). Listing all the "pleasant things" she would have to give up if Molly joins her, the narrator uncovers the unseen world of Mrs. Kirkpatrick's emotional labor:

One—two things Clare was instinctively resolved upon: to be married at Michaelmas, and not to have Molly at Ashcombe. *But she smiled as sweetly as if the plan proposed was the most charming project in the world*, while all the time her poor brains were beating about in every bush for the reasons or excuses of which she should make use at some future time (130, emphasis added).

Fortunately for Mrs. Kirkpatrick, Molly speaks against the idea, wishing to spend more time with her father before the wedding. Although grateful and relieved by Molly's "outspoken opposition to Lady Cumnor's plan," Mrs. Kirkpatrick was "exceedingly unwilling to back up Molly by any words of her own until Lady Cumnor had spoken and given the cue" (131). Again, Mrs. Kirkpatrick defers to Lady Cumnor and refuses to advocate for herself in order to remain in the countess' favor. She notes, in a similar experience, that if she opposes Lady Cumnor, ". . . she

might fall into such disgrace . . . that she might never be asked to stay at the Towers again; and the life there, monotonous in its smoothness of luxury . . . was exactly to her taste” (99).

Bridget Anderson notes, “It is important to recognize that there is always a power relationship between domestic workers and their employers” (30). The imbalance of power between Clare and the Cumnors is a subordinating force in her life; however, notwithstanding the Cumnor’s condescension, Clare maintains the comforts, connections, and relative social prominence she seeks through her emotional labor at the Towers.

Clare marries Mr. Gibson because she believes that it will grant her greater autonomy and because she is “tired of the struggle of earning her own livelihood” (125). After Mr. Gibson’s proposal, she asks him to call her by her given name, Hyacinth, rather than Clare because it “reminds [her] of being a governess”; Mr. Gibson remarks, “surely no one can have been more valued, more beloved” than she in their family, to which Clare acknowledges, “They have been very good. *But still one has always had to remember one’s position*” (107, emphasis added). Clare believes that marriage is her escape from subordination and that it will elevate her to a superior role in her own domestic sphere. Prior to her engagement, Clare ponders the disparity between her poverty and the Cumnor’s wealth:

[M]oney is like the air they breathe. . . . Ah! It would be different if they had to earn every penny as I have! They would have to calculate, like me, how to get the most pleasure out of it. I wonder if I am to go on all my life toiling and moiling for money? It’s not natural. Marriage is the natural thing; then the husband has all that kind of dirty work to do, and his wife sits in the drawing room like a lady. (98)

Clare resolves that marriage is the solution to her financial woes, but this passage also reveals that her perception of life is deeply rooted in the dominant discourses of domesticity—viewing

marriage as the only natural aspiration for women and the ideology of separate spheres which prescribes men to the “dirty work” of the public domain while women sit in seemingly relative ease at home. Clare is preoccupied by the *appearance* of domestic success put forward by these discourses, and above all, that is what she strives to achieve in her marriage through performances of superficial emotional labor.

In order for Mrs. Gibson to have her way at home, she uses a skewed rhetoric of domesticity similar to the process of what we call gaslighting today, which uses psychological means and an imbalance of power to manipulate someone into self-doubt. Mrs. Gibson’s power over Molly stems from her role as her stepmother and an awareness that Molly “generally [submits], sooner than have any struggle for her own will” (455); Likewise, her power over Mr. Gibson stems from her role as the domestic authority in the home, which she wields mostly at will unless her inclinations exceed what he deems ethically responsible, like matters affecting his profession or the reputation of his family.

Prior to Mrs. Hamley’s death, Squire Hamley goes to the Gibson home to fetch Molly because his ailing wife begs to see her. Mrs. Gibson, however, denies his request because Molly is expected to go visiting with her in her husband’s absence. Mrs. Gibson says, “[a]n engagement is an engagement with me; and I consider that [Molly] is not only engaged to Mrs Cockerell, but to me” (187). Frustrated and upset, Squire Hamley leaves the Gibsons and Molly is “on the point of crying at the thought of her friend lying ill and lonely, and looking for her arrival” (188). “Annoyed [by] Molly’s tearful face,” Mrs. Gibson asks, “What can I do to please you, Molly? I, who delight in nothing more than peace in a family, to see you sitting there with despair upon your face?” (188). Mrs. Gibson claims to be the victim and the martyr in this exchange; however, it is *she* who prioritizes a social engagement over the needs of the real victim, Mrs. Hamley, and

*she* who chastens Molly for her sympathetic concern. Clearly, Mrs. Gibson's domestic priorities are misaligned—while social calls and caring for the sick fit mutually under the umbrella of domestic ideology, she has more to gain socially by visiting Mrs. Cockerell than by Molly caring for Mrs. Hamley. Unwilling to place another's need over her own, Mrs. Gibson lacks the heart of domesticity and makes Molly out to be the villain.

The same year that *Wives and Daughters* was published in book form, Margaret Oliphant published *Miss Marjoribanks*. In an analysis of that text, Emily Dotson uses Oliphant's characterization of Lucilla Marjoribanks to suggest that "caring for others may not require deep emotional connections"; this suggestion is made in contrast to "idealized models of private selfless sacrifice in the home" (151). Mrs. Gibson is characterized similarly—her superficial efforts to care fail to engender emotional connections with her family, but that was never her intent; rather, her labors are self-serving under the guise of genuine concern. Referring again to Oliphant's Lucilla, Dotson claims, "[Her] obsession with domestic trivialities is indicative of a lack of interiority or psychological depth" (160). Like Lucilla, Mrs. Gibson is consumed by domestic trivialities, but her obsession stems from the need to outwardly embody the domestic ideal rather than internalize it. Just as she surface-acts as an emotional laborer, manipulating her outward appearance to convey a false feeling, Mrs. Gibson's enactment of domesticity is a superficial performance because she is incapable of valuing authentic representation.

As one who *does* authentically feel, Molly recognizes her stepmother's emotional disconnect. Waking one morning to "a dull sense of something being wrong" (Gaskell 410), Molly's thoughts reflexively turn to the unfortunate circumstances of her father's marriage:

[S]he could not help perceiving that her father was not satisfied with the wife he had chosen. For a long time Molly had been surprised at his apparent contentment. . . .



Something, however, had changed him now . . . he had become nervously sensitive to his wife's failings. . . . [Molly] did not look well either; she was gradually falling into low health . . . the vivifying stimulant of hope . . . was gone out of her life. It seemed as if there was not, and never could be in this world, any help for the dumb discordancy between her father and his wife. Day after day, month after month, year after year, would Molly have to sympathize with her father, and pity her stepmother, feeling acutely for both, and *certainly more than Mrs Gibson felt for herself*. . . . It was all hopeless, and the only attempt at a remedy was to think about it as little as possible. (410-11, emphasis added)

The tragedy for the Gibsons is that they all are privy to Mrs. Gibson's shallow character except for herself, and both Molly and Mr. Gibson are brought to the hopeless conclusion that avoiding significant thought of her deficiency is the only solution for a semblance of familial harmony, however inadequate. Although Elizabeth Gaskell unexpectedly died before she could complete the final chapter of the novel, her editor reveals what would have happened "[h]ad the writer lived" (648): Molly eventually marries Roger Hamley and leaves Hollingford, and her father takes a partner in his profession, "so as to get a chance of running up to London to stay with [her] for a few days now and then, and 'to get a little rest from Mrs Gibson'" (649). These concluding details lead readers to the melancholy conclusion that Molly and her father's relationship with Mrs. Gibson is one of endurance rather than enjoyment.

Although the Gibson family suffers from Mrs. Gibson's inability to feel deeply and authentically, according to Elizabeth Langland, Mrs. Gibson *does* achieve something notable in the domestic realm. In "Nobody's Angels," Langland claims that Mrs. Gibson is "a signal achievement on Gaskell's part" because of her successful execution of practices within domestic

ideology; however, she also notes that “Gaskell’s exposure of domestic ideology depends on making Mrs. Gibson perfectly awful as a person and completely successful in her roles” (301, 300). Langland notes several outward expressions of domesticity in which Mrs. Gibson thrives, whether it is her “masterful negotiation of the rules of etiquette and fashion” that help secure “socially prestigious marriages for her daughters,” or that “she establishes order and elegance in Dr. Gibson’s long-neglected household” through her regulation of the “servants and proper display of status,” or her “overturning [of] long-established pleasures and customs in her husband’s life . . . when it interferes with her manipulation of the discursive practices that will win the family social standing” (301). Langland helps us recognize that for all of Mrs. Gibson’s personal and emotional flaws, she realizes some success even as her character exposes the artificiality of domestic ideology and the domestic ideal—that it is a painstaking and often calculated endeavor rather than a natural and inherent quality of womanhood.

Although Mrs. Gibson achieves social advancement by performances of domestic ideology and artificial emotional labor, a sense of loss tragically overshadows her superficial gains, signifying that although she can “play” at the domestic game, the game itself is flawed. Consumed by egotism and an insatiable need to manipulate, her life lacks authentic meaning and purpose and the depth of her personal relationships remains skin-deep. Appearances mean more to Mrs. Gibson than the people who surround her, just as the appearance of the domestic ideal in Victorian society meant more than the individuality and personal identities of the women who enacted it.

Reading Gaskell’s *Wives and Daughters* through the lenses of emotional labor and domestic performance complicate assumptions that Gaskell’s work conforms wholeheartedly to Victorian domestic ideology. The characterizations of her female characters illustrate Gaskell’s

ambivalence towards the nineteenth-century premise that women's desire and ability to care was innate and effortless. Like Emma Brandin's analysis of the subversive qualities of humor to "expose the artificiality of the domestic ideal," representations in *Wives and Daughters* of female emotional labor, viewed as performance, also work to discreetly unsettle the feminine ideal. Molly, a newcomer on the performative stage, is presented with differing although more experienced models in Mrs. Hamley and Mrs. Gibson, whose negotiations of the discourses of domesticity stand in stark contrast with each other. In the end, neither model is wholly satisfying to Molly—on the one hand, complete submission to the domestic ideal leads to the death of one's individuality but also to familial devotion, whereas the exploitation of the domestic ideal out of self-serving motivations destroys familial relationships but is capable of advancing social status. In search of a more satisfying future than the models she observes, Molly must blaze her own domestic trail, but Gaskell succeeds in exposing the performative efforts of women as they work towards, rather than naturally embody, the elusive domestic ideal.

## Conclusion

Hochschild's processes of emotional labor and emotion work are useful lenses through which to explore women's affective behavior and the influence of domestic ideology in Victorian literature. The novels in this thesis examine ways in which women utilize emotional labor to navigate the demands placed upon them in their various roles as companions, housekeepers, governesses, teachers, daughters, wives, mothers, and stepmothers. Victorian society promoted the belief that women were inherently sympathetic, loving, and sacrificial, and manifestations of this assumption are found in literatures of the time; however, the lens of emotional labor draws our critical gaze beneath the surface, inviting close-readings of these texts in order to discover what female characters truly felt and how they altered those feelings in order to exhibit socially appropriate emotional displays.

There are two overarching commonalities in these novels: first, for married and single female characters, there is little reprieve from the demands of emotional labor—interactions at home and in the workplace require them to continually manage their own and others' emotions; the overlap of work and home is especially problematic for employed women such as Esther, Lucy, and Clare/Mrs. Gibson. Second, these novels reveal that women in every stage of life—young, middle-aged, and elderly—engage in emotional labor; therefore, it can be argued that emotional labor was an unavoidable and sustained practice in Victorian middle-class women's lives.

These texts also reflect an imbalance of power between female emotional laborers and those who require or demand their help. This relationship is manifested in different forms such as employer/employee, husband/wife, or stepmother/stepdaughter, but in each case, the emotional laborer has less overt power, and her physical well-being depends on her ability to skillfully

perform according to expectations. Emotional labor was often burdensome and minimized women's autonomy; therefore, emotional laborers sought ways to reclaim a measure of control within or outside of their affective responsibilities. Esther uses her narratorial power to disclose her inner feelings when it suits, subtly pushing against unrealistic expectations of the domestic ideal; Lucy is outwardly unassuming in order to safeguard her authentic inner self; Molly moves to London to avoid close contact with Mrs. Gibson; although an invalid, Mrs. Hamley is "the ruling spirit of the house as long as she lived" (Gaskell, *Wives* 246-47); speaking of Mrs. Gibson in hindsight, Lady Harriet admits: "I used to think I managed her, till one day an uncomfortable suspicion arose that all the time she had been managing me" (160). Power is rare for an emotional laborer, and because these women were never fully free from the demands of their work, they sought ways to meaningfully exist within the controlled spaces of their lives.

Middle-class women in Victorian England bore unique and oppressive emotional responsibilities. Domestic ideology profoundly affected women's lives and created unrealistic expectations about how they should feel and behave; therefore, they engaged in *performances* of domesticity in order to *appear like* rather than *embody* the domestic ideal. These performances were acts of emotional labor (or emotion work) because they necessitated internal efforts to "induce or suppress feeling" in order to conform to or satisfy social and ideological standards (Hochschild 7).

For single, middle-class, dependent women, respectable employment carried unspoken emotional requirements; therefore, it was requisite for them to perform affective labor in order to maintain economic stability. The commodification of affective labor was problematic because it could be corrupted from its intended purpose as an altruistic form of care. While Esther uses it to "do some good to some one," Lucy employs it to secure and keep a teaching position, and Mrs.

Gibson manipulates it for social advancement. The individual natures of these women and the precarity of their situations condition how they use emotional labor and invite us to be cautious when making moral judgments regarding the discrepancy between their inner feelings and outward expressions—self-preservation is a powerful force in their lives.

The novels in this project follow a trajectory of decline in emotional labor's ability to foster fulfilling personal relationships. In *Bleak House*, Esther realizes and maintains a marriage of love as a result of emotional labor. Lucy's commodified affective work in *Villette* produces professional success but hinders romantic aspirations because it alienates rather than binds her to the men for whom she cares. In *Wives and Daughters*, Mrs. Gibson's debased and superficial emotional labor is not intended to cultivate deep relational bonds; rather it sacrifices felicity in marriage and family life because her foremost priority is social advancement.

This trajectory not only reflects Victorian society's growing skepticism of the veracity of domestic ideology and the assumption that women were innately sympathetic and altruistic, but it also illustrates their gradual awareness of a broader and more nuanced understanding of the affective roles women were expected to play. Davidoff and Hall explain, "The women of the early nineteenth-century provincial middle class" caught hold of "the dream of domestic felicity,"

but when it became a full reality they found their sphere isolated, trivialized and often unable to give the support it had promised. It was in the experience of their daughters and granddaughters later in the century that the inequalities, the lack of power and resources for control over their own lives, came to be exposed and expressed. (454)

The novels in this thesis expose the "inequalities" and "the lack of power and resources" for women to exercise "control over their own lives."

Although domestic ideologues succeeded in creating a type of homogenous, ideal woman in the Victorian cultural imagination, the reality was that women were unique individuals who defied homogenization. Emotional labor was the work behind the *appearance* of the ideal. While the term *emotional labor* did not exist in the Victorian era, women's management of emotion to produce "the proper state of mind in others" was evident in novels of the mid-nineteenth century (7). To emotionally labor as Esther, Lucy, Molly, Mrs. Hamley, and Mrs. Gibson was to feel "as no one save a woman can" because the burden of emotion management was imposed almost exclusively on women in the period; however, this trend is not limited to the nineteenth century (Dickens 31). Female emotional labor continues to play a role in contemporary society.

In the late-twentieth century, Hochschild argued that women still resided at the bottom of the "gender system" and emotionally labored more than men because in general they "[had] far less independent access to money, power, authority, or status in society" (162, 163). But in the twenty-first century, middle-class women's ability to cultivate and maintain an independent lifestyle is increasingly becoming a norm. In terms of emotion work performed in private contexts, women today have more agency to engage authentically out of personal desire because they are less dependent on men for economic stability. In terms of emotional labor in the workplace, however, women predominantly inhabit expanding service sectors of established economies; therefore, their affective labors are necessary in larger proportion than in the mid-nineteenth century, and work-life balance remains a pressing concern.

Over the last forty years, Hochschild and other sociologists have formulated a discourse validating the unseen work of affective care that exists in the personal and professional lives of women. Moreover, their research can effectively influence other academic disciplines. Employing Hochschild's process of emotional labor as a lens for examining mid-nineteenth

century literature is a productive endeavor that challenges gendered norms of the period and gives rise to more comprehensive and nuanced views of women's affective work in Victorian novels.



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