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Separate Ways or Til Death Do Us Part?: Divorce in Victorian Literature

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Abstract

Divorce laws changed radically across the Victorian period (1837-1901), making divorce more accessible, particularly for men. Considering how those changes affected the portrayal of divorce in early, mid, and late Victorian novels, this study analyzes the literary representation of divorce in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), and George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways* (1885), contextualizing this analysis with literary criticism and legal history.

No matter how accessible divorce became during the nineteenth century and no matter a character's reason for wanting to end his/her marriage, divorce is not presented as a legitimate option for characters in any of these three novels. Even when divorce is legally possible and the character's desire for divorce is understandable, the only way that any of these marriages end is through the death of the character or his/her spouse. Reflecting persistent societal opinions against divorce despite legal reforms, these characters suffer because the influence of public opinion negates the growing availability of divorce. Furthermore, though both female and male characters describe marriage in terms of imprisonment, men and women in these stories seek divorce for different reasons: the men are married to immoral women and want to marry better women because the behavior of their spouses reflects negatively on them, and the women simply want be free from loveless marriages. This study considers not only how Victorians viewed marriage and divorce but also reveals Victorians' assumptions about appropriate behavior for men and women both within marriage and in broader society.

Key Terms: Victorian period, marriage, divorce, imprisonment, *Jane Eyre, Hard Times, Diana of the Crossways*

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Introduction

The topic of divorce in the Victorian period is often forgotten in literary studies, despite the many changes in divorce laws that took place across the nineteenth century; the scarcity of literary discussion of Victorian perceptions of divorce can be attributed to the fact that much of Victorian literature glosses over that long taboo topic. Until the twentieth century, divorce had typically been seen as an unthinkable and sinful act, and it was, therefore, expensive and only achieved though very complicated measures in the hopes of deterring people from going through with the process (Baird 403). This societal opinion of divorce contributed to an absence of positive presentations of divorce in the literature of the period, even as laws for divorce in nineteenth-century England were changed multiple times, gradually allowing people to get divorced more easily. The literature of this period does not offer greater opportunities for release from miserable marriages, and while men and women may desire divorces for different reasons, neither are allowed to actually achieve them.

In the three Victorian novels I consider, the motivations for divorce are different between men and women, with the men desiring both the release from the dishonor that immoral wives bring upon them and the freedom to remarry women who reflect more positively on them, and women seeking freedom from loveless marriages with no expectation of remarriage. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) features a wealthy man, Rochester, who desperately desires freedom from his immoral wife who has tainted his good name almost beyond repair. Rochester imagines that his life would have been drastically improved and that many problems would have been solved had he been able to get a divorce from this immoral wife; however, divorce is not an option for Rochester. It

is not even mentioned by name, and he is unable to marry the morally admirable woman he loves while his first wife lives. In Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), a poor man, Stephen Blackpool, also wishes for freedom from a morally reprehensible wife. Stephen also imagines that his life would have improved and many obstacles to his happiness been removed had he been able to get a divorce and remarry a better woman than his immoral wife. In another plotline from the novel, Louisa Gradgrind marries for practical reasons devoid of romance or love and eventually discovers that her husband is a fool and a fraud with whom she cannot bear to remain. Divorce is explicitly discussed in *Hard Times*; however, Stephen is told that he cannot divorce because he cannot afford it, and Louisa is never even presented with the option to get a divorce, no matter how badly she may wish to be free. George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways* (1885) presents a woman who desires to be free from a miserable and loveless marriage but is unable to take action. Her husband files for divorce and is denied it. So she is forced to live married but separated from her husband, unable to gain the independence she so desires.

Much of Victorian literature depicts unhappy marriage as an imprisoning institution that leaves its victims in misery, but without the option of divorce there is no escape from this prison, frequently leaving characters trapped and forced to either suffer through the miseries that accompany such bad marriages or to seek the ultimate divorce: death. Death is the only valid option offered these characters, indicating that no matter the legal reforms that span across the Victorian period, these novels that also span the century resist diverging completely from the norms of society to present divorce as a proper solution to miserable marriages. The laws may have changed, but the availability of divorce for these literary characters has not.

Nineteenth-Century Divorce Law and Reforms

When many people picture a nineteenth-century marriage, the first thing that comes to mind is the happy ending and giddy romance of a Jane Austen novel, and while these novels predate the Victorian period, this image often carries over into the common perception of Victorian marriage. Although it is true that many Victorian novels include happy marriages, there are just as many depictions of miserable marriages. Because of the frequent presence of unhappy marriages in Victorian literature, the rosy picture of nineteenth-century marriage is not a good generalization for this time period, despite the low occurrence of divorce. According to A. James Hammerton's research, marital discord and cruelty were quite common across the classes in this period, but because divorce was expensive and carried such a "stigma," individuals who got divorces were greatly in the minority (*Cruelty and Companionship* 3-4). Divorce had been taboo in British culture long before the Victorian period, but political and legal changes in the treatment of divorce across this time period threw many long-held beliefs and prejudices into question. Lisa A. Surridge explains that England had been, and still was, a patriarchal society that placed women in the persistently subordinate position, especially in marriage; however, this era saw a people questioning long-held notions of male authority in marriage, particularly as it related to the limits of matrimonial cruelty and abuse, along with women's rights (6).

The ideal for marriage in the nineteenth century was a patriarchal model that tended to focus on the companionship of husband and wife, but featured distinctly defined roles for each within the marriage that overwhelmingly denied a wife her own identity. These distinctly defined roles of men and women were generally seen in terms

of separate spheres, or the separation of men into the public sphere and women into the domestic sphere. While men could typically cross into the domestic sphere once they returned from the public sphere, women were typically not permitted to appear in the public sphere very often; so while men could exist in both spheres, the presence of women in the public sphere was often looked down upon. In addition to the expectation that men would be present in the public sphere, the male is also to be seen as the authority in the domestic sphere, the home; in contrast, the major role demanded of a woman required her to remain in the domestic sphere and comply with ideas of "female subordination" to her husband's authority (Hammerton, "Victorian Marriage" 280). Hammerton discusses the prevalence of prescriptive manuals published in this period that lay out lessons in the proper forms of Victorian marriage, indicating that the middle class woman was in need of assistance in discovering her proper place in a marriage. These manuals emphasize the "sacred origins of male authority and the need for women to submit to that authority willingly" (Hammerton, "Victorian Marriage" 280). According to the individuals who wrote these instructional materials, "Submission was to be a matter of consent and internalized compliance" on the wife's part, with no alternative response to a husband offered no matter his behavior or character (Hammerton, "Victorian Marriage" 280). This focus on submission to the husband's authority was often the reasoning cited for the practice of coverture in the denial of women's legal rights. Coverture, according to Danaya C. Wright, is a legal doctrine in which "a woman's legal existence is subsumed into that of her husband upon marriage"; under this doctrine, while a woman is married she cannot own property, has no control over her own wages, cannot enter into contracts, cannot make her own will, and cannot be sued (1). This doctrine

exemplifies the overarching Victorian marriage ideal, that a woman's identity becomes figuratively and legally consumed by that of her husband.

Before the mid-1800s, divorce in England was extremely expensive and difficult to achieve and was highly regulated by the Church of England. In an 1850 commission from Queen Victoria herself, a report was given about inquiries into the state of divorce laws in the nation. In this report, the Commissioners explain the laws of marriage in great detail before giving recommendations for changes to these laws. There are two kinds of divorce that could be processed through Ecclesiastical Courts at this time: partial, called *á mensâ et thoro,* and total, called *á vinculo matrimonii*. According to J.H. Baker, divorce *á vinculo matrimonii* served to nullify a marriage; these would have typically been seen in cases where there was a lack of consent or an inability for consent to the marriage; this form of divorce was the only one that led to the possibility of remarriage under certain circumstances (402). The royal commission describes divorce *á vinculo matrimonii* as those "which *annul* or those which *rescind* the marriage contract: the former being grounded on some antecedent incapacity which rendered it in reality void from the beginning: the latter being granted in consequence of some supervenient cause, which, having arisen subsequently to the marriage, justifies the parties in desiring to put an end to it" (Great Britain 2). The 1850 commission emphasizes the need for divorce law to ensure the firm proof of such specific and limited causes, stating that the justifications allowing divorce are purposely limited "to a few and extreme provocations," asserting that it was in society's best interest that marriages only be dissolved when it has been "clearly established by the strictest proof that the offence has been committed" (Great Britain 1).

The second type of divorce, divorce *á mensâ et thoro*, also called "divorce from board and bed," was instituted to relieve a spouse who had been wronged (J. Baker 404). This type was also called "judicial separation" and was more like the modern idea of separation than the modern idea of divorce, since neither party could remarry. J.H. Baker explains, "A divorce *á mensâ et thoro* could be decreed by the ecclesiastical courts for such misconduct as adultery, cruelty, sodomy, and heresy, or for fear of future injury; and an innocent wife could be awarded alimony for her support after separation" (404). The Parliamentary Commissioners in 1850 state, "Divorces *á mensâ et thoro* are little more in the eye of the law than simple separations; they only last until the parties think fit to be reconciled; and they are granted at the suit of the husband or wife, when the gross misconduct of either of them, such as cruelty, adultery, or the like, have rendered it impracticable for them to live together" (Great Britain 1). Even these extreme justifications of "gross misconduct" do not extend to an ability to be completely free from this spouse, only acknowledging that these circumstances would likely make it "impracticable" for these two people to live together anymore.

Over time, parliament grew more and more involved with the divorce process, working with the Church initially, then moving to claim greater authority over the divorce process in the eventual institution of a civil divorce court. Around the time of King Henry VIII, it became a practice to use acts of parliament to "interfere with the laws of marriage," extending the process to make divorce *á mensâ et thoro* the first step in more definitive separations that would also allow the separated parties to remarry (J. Baker 407). In this way, if an individual could establish that adultery did take place by bringing action for "criminal conversation" to court, and could attain a divorce *á mensâ*

et thoro, then a petition was sent to parliament. With this method, the person who successfully filed for divorce was allowed to marry again, making private divorce bills being passed in parliament more common (J. Baker 407). However, this highly involved process of divorce made divorce too expensive for common people, and it was argued that it should be obtained through a civil court rather than the church, since permission from the church was still required before the suit could even reach parliament. According to W. Blake Odgers in a lecture he delivered for the Council of Legal Education in November of 1900, if a man sought a divorce around 1800, he had to go through a complicated and expensive process: sue the man with whom the wife committed adultery, seek a divorce *a mensa et thoro* through the Ecclesiastical Court, then get an Act of Parliament passed to receive a decree of divorce (14). As Odgers says, "only a very wealthy man could obtain a divorce in England in 1800" (14). Arguments against this complex process formed the basis for the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which established this long awaited civil divorce court (J. Baker 408).

The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 gave many more people access to filing for divorce than had previously existed, especially women and the poor. As previously mentioned, before the passage of this Act, divorce only took place by going through the church in a long and involved process that included proving that adultery had taken place, getting a rare approval from the church, and paying to get an act of Parliament passed to complete the process, a process that was expensive and much easier for a husband to conduct than for a wife. This 1857 Act to amend the laws of divorce and matrimonial causes created a civil divorce court, in contrast to that previous process that went through the church and was difficult and expensive (Baird 406). In this system, anyone who could

prove that his or her spouse had committed adultery had the potential to file for divorce. Odgers discusses the fact that even after this civil divorce court was established, allowing for divorces to be more easily obtained, the law mandated different requirements for divorce depending on whether the husband or wife instigated it. While a husband could obtain a divorce with only proof of his wife's adultery, the wife had to prove her husband's adultery and also had to prove that her husband had been guilty of some other offense like cruelty or desertion. This was apparently not so in Scotland; Odgers says that in Scotland sufficient cause for divorce for a husband was also sufficient cause for a wife, remarking on how strange it was that there were still different laws between the two places (14-15). Ultimately, the 1857 Act did allow wives more access to divorce than they had previously, even though men had even greater access. Additionally, people who were not rich could now potentially get a divorce where they could never afford them in the past. The process was not free, but it was cheaper than the long and complicated process that existed before the 1857 Act was passed.

The Matrimonial Causes Act, which acknowledged that women might be mistreated in marriage and gave them the means to get divorced, was part of a larger women's rights movement in the nineteenth century. Due to people questioning the manner in which marriage was maintained and divorce was achieved and calling for reform, many changes in the distribution of power in marriage took place in the nineteenth century. After a long history of male domination, which more often than many realized led to domestic violence, Victorians began questioning the traditional relationship between husband and wife, especially whether or not the husband controlled his wife's body. Many of the most urgent and debated issues of the period revolved

around questions of manliness and the rights of women, particularly how these two concepts should properly relate (Surridge 6). The Divorce Act of 1857, the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, and the Infant Custody Acts of 1873 and 1886 are just a few of the pieces of legislation that were passed in the Victorian period, changing the status of women and the poor, not completely, but enough to grant more rights than had previously been available to them (Carens 175). The Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 granted women earnings and property gained apart from their husbands as their own separate property, in contrast to the old law which required women's property to immediately revert to their husbands' control (Perkin 304-306). The Infant Custody Acts of 1873 and 1886 took steps toward allowing women to retain custody of their children in the event of separation from their husbands, since children had almost always been seen as under sole custody of the father in the past, giving the mother few rights in regards to their children, especially in the event of separation (Perkin 27-28).

However, despite the growing accessibility of divorce, many people still chose to remain in marriages, unhappy or not. The numbers of divorces did increase, with a Lord Campbell noting in his January 1859 journal entry that only a year after the Matrimonial Causes Act took effect there were already over three hundred divorce suits pending (Baird 406). Nevertheless, as a whole, this increase was not as drastic as many opponents to the Act feared, particularly in the case of divorces initiated by women. According to Joan Perkin, most wives chose to accept marriage as it was, viewing it as their purpose in life. In spite of the attempts of more radical women to change the oppressed state of women in marriage, the majority of women did not share their vision, and remained in

the positions appointed for them by society (3). These legal changes constituted a drastic shift in the mindset of Victorian society, but such a long-standing mindset does not change quickly. Many married people held on tightly to their traditional ideals of the inseparability of the marriage covenant, even people who sometimes seemed to be critical of the state of marriages and the accessibility of divorces in this time period.

The authors of each of the three novels that this study examines have some connection to unhappy marriage. In 1858, the year the Matrimonial Causes Act took effect, Charles Dickens was involved in a highly public separation from his wife, Catherine Hogarth Dickens, and published a statement explaining the entire situation in a newspaper, contrary to the typical Victorian practice of keeping separations quiet and private. According to Phyllis Rose, the case was clearly a matter of "incompatibility," meaning that the prerequisite causes to allow full divorce were not present (512). Still, Dickens wrote many novels that criticized how unattainable divorce was and often seemed in favor of people getting divorces when stuck in an unhappy marriage. George Meredith fell in love with a woman named Mary Ellen Peacock, whom Elizabeth J. Deis describes to have been "unconventional…intelligent, well-read, and progressive-minded"; she was a widow who was seven years his senior (15). Meredith married Mary Ellen, but she left him nine years later, sparking Meredith's response of "icy rage and haughty silence" that extended to a reluctance of allowing their children to visit their mother during an illness that resulted in Mary Ellen's death several years after the separation (Deis 15). Meredith remarried Marie Vuilliamy after Mary Ellen's death, a much more conventional and domestic woman, and apparently enjoyed a happy marriage with her. However, the traces of his first marriage and the problems he experienced with

it are present in much of his writing, with this disaster of a marriage described as "sufficiently disturbing to give a novelist material for life" (Deis 16). And while Charlotte Brontë was apparently happily married herself and may have had little connection to issues of miserable marriage or divorce in her own personal life, she has connections through her brother, Branwell Brontë. While working as a tutor employed by the Robinson family, Branwell was dismissed due to an alleged affair between himself and Mrs. Robinson, in which he supposedly wished her to leave her husband for him (FitzGerald 116). Tom Winnifrith suggests that this situation contributed to Charlotte's bold and negative depiction of adultery in *Jane Eyre*, having experienced the troubles for her brother caused by such actions (9).

Despite the resistance of a vast array of people, the questioning and legal changes that began in the nineteenth century constituted an unending shift in the view of divorce, a shift that led to a future filled with divorce as a commonplace occurrence. While divorce did not become openly accepted overnight, neither did it infiltrate literature immediately. Authors such as the three who are the focus of this piece are frequently seen as progressive thinkers who challenge societal conventions, even ones as hegemonic as marriage and divorce, but there is still a question of how far even these authors will take their characters into the world of divorce.

Mr. Rochester's Marital Misery in *Jane Eyre*

In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre,* marriage is presented as imprisonment for a man when he is permanently bound to an immoral wife; therefore, a man in this situation longs for the freedom that is believed to come when he is released from his miserable marriage and is at liberty to be joined to a morally upstanding woman instead. The behavior and morals of a wife are shown to reflect on her husband, revealing Victorian ideas that a husband and wife become one person, the wife's identity becoming engulfed by her husband's. If the wife's identity is this closely connected to that of her husband, then any negative image related to the wife's character will implicate immorality in the husband's character as well. The man in this story who is trapped in this particular brand of terrible marriage is Mr. Rochester, married to the insane and immoral Bertha Mason. In his situation, the immorality of the wife is shown to negatively affect him as her husband, damaging his good moral potential and tainting his good name simply by association with hers. As may be expected, Mr. Rochester longs for freedom from this damaging connection to Bertha, desiring to escape his first marriage in order to claim the morally superior Jane Eyre as a better wife. Unfortunately for him, however, ending this marriage through divorce seems to be out of the question, and no matter how many ways Mr. Rochester may attempt to reason his way out, the only way to end his awful marriage comes through the eventual death of Bertha.

Jane Eyre follows the story of the titular character as she goes to work as a governess for the young French ward of Mr. Rochester, master of Thornfield Hall. Mr. Rochester is a bold and authoritative, but not traditionally attractive, man who admits to having lived a wicked life before meeting Jane. They strike up an unlikely friendship,

with his gruff nature and her steadiness somehow constituting a mutually beneficial relationship. Jane, who has never felt loved or at home in any of the places she has lived throughout her life, comes to see Thornfield as a true home, falling in love with the old estate as she falls in love with Mr. Rochester. Mr. Rochester's erratic and often forward behavior towards Jane frequently perplexes her, but the two eventually declare their love for each other and quickly set a date for a wedding, with Mr. Rochester expressing the desire to make her his wife with the utmost haste. The reason for this urgency becomes quite clear on the day of the attempted wedding, when Mr. Rochester is forced to reveal that he has a wife already, hidden away on the mysterious third floor of Thornfield. This wife, Bertha Mason, is described as a morally reprehensible creature who had made Mr. Rochester's life a misery before she was officially declared insane shortly after their marriage. Having a wife still living, Mr. Rochester's marriage to Jane cannot take place, and Jane's moral scruples prevent her from seriously entertaining thoughts of working out alternative solutions that allow them to still be together. Jane flees Thornfield, and Mr. Rochester falls into a deep despair. In the year that Jane is gone, Bertha sets Thornfield ablaze and commits suicide by jumping from the roof, injuring and blinding Mr. Rochester in the process as he attempts to rescue her. When Jane finally returns to him, his wife's death has left Mr. Rochester a free man, so Mr. Rochester and Jane marry and set into motion the start of a very promising life together.

Before Jane knows anything about Mr. Rochester's marriage to Bertha, Mr. Rochester frequently discusses Thornfield and his situation in terms of bondage and imprisonment; viewing Thornfield as symbolic of his wife who is hidden within, this language clearly connects marriage to ideas of imprisonment. While explaining to Jane

the circumstances of his short relationship with a woman named Céline Varens, Mr. Rochester wrestles with his habitual hatred of Thornfield because of what is housed there, wanting to dare to like the place again now that he has found in Jane a renewed hope. For almost twenty years, Thornfield has visibly represented Mr. Rochester's state of imprisonment by his marriage to Bertha and by the passions that lead him to each ill-advised step he takes (i.e. entering into this marriage in the first place, fleeing to European dissipations, and attempting to trick Jane into bigamy) (Hagan 357). Jane watches Mr. Rochester's internal struggle play out on his face, with emotions like "Pain, shame, ire—impatience, disgust, detestation" flashing in conflict through his eyes, struggling against his overwhelming feeling of captivity linked with this place that has served as a geographic reminder of his imprisonment for so long (Brontë 163). He describes this moment of internal struggle as a meeting with his destiny, figured as a "hag like one of those who appeared to Macbeth," but rather than providing some prophecy of future glory as the witches gave Macbeth (misleading as it may have been), Mr. Rochester says that the hag he encounters taunts him, dares him to try and like Thornfield while knowing that the source of his long-standing misery is held within. This image of the hag is a threatening and frightening picture of a witch writing "lurid hieroglyphics" in the air along the front of the house, daring him to try and like his prison (aka, Thornfield) if he can, implying that it is an impossible task attempting to overcome his hatred of this place and of Bertha, the being that made what should be his home a "plague-house" (Brontë 163). This disturbing image of the hag's taunting of Mr. Rochester casts Thornfield as a prison, implying that what makes this place a prison is the marriage that

its captive resident represents and throwing doubt on the possibility of Thornfield ever being seen in another light.

But even in seemingly innocent and positive references to marriage, there is still no escape from images of imprisonment in connection to matrimony. Marriage is discussed in connection with imprisonment throughout the novel, such as in John Hagan's example of the symbolism seen in the game of charades played by Mr. Rochester and his guests in which the word "bridewell" is acted out through a staged wedding scene followed by Mr. Rochester featured as a prisoner in a cell (362). While entertaining a large group of guests at Thornfield, Mr. Rochester plays an elaborate game of charades with his friends; Mr. Rochester's group enacts the word "bridewell," the name of a prison, through two scenes that focus on the creation of union between man and wife. The first scene is meant to convey the word "bride," being a pantomime of an actual wedding in which Mr. Rochester is figured as the groom to bride Blanche Ingram. The second scene enacted by this group displays the word "well"; the scene is the Biblical story of a man named Eliezer approaching Rebecca on behalf of Isaac at a well, an encounter which led to Rebecca becoming Isaac's wife. The final scene played by the group is meant to represent the complete word meant by the charade. In this scene, Mr. Rochester appears alone, dirty and dejected, with chains rattling on his wrists; this simple image of a man in prison quickly reveals the word to the guessing audience. Using two scenes of approaching matrimony to describe a word for prison creates a strong connection between marriage and imprisonment. Casting Mr. Rochester as the groom in the wedding, as the man seeking the future bride in the scene at the well, and as the prisoner in the final scene explicitly links him to both marriage and imprisonment, most

clearly in the ultimate image of a filthy and fettered Mr. Rochester. One could almost see the scenes as images of his life, with the first scene being an apparently happy wedding, and the final scene being the man begrimed and imprisoned, exactly as Mr. Rochester's marriage state is depicted as having had a hopeful start that ended in chains. With this focus on his imprisonment, the implication is that he is the one to suffer in the imprisoning state of marriage. His own marriage is depicted as a trap for both parties, but Mr. Rochester in particular is presented as the one to suffer irrevocably and publicly because of his wife's heinous behavior.

The language of imprisonment used in reference to nearly every aspect of this marriage lends to a presentation of Bertha as the cause of the miseries associated with this union, placing the blame for Mr. Rochester's problems on her and her immoral behavior, removing his hopes of freedom in addition to damaging his morals and reputation. Mr. Rochester refers to his marriage as having "thrust" him on a "wrong tack" at the age of twenty-one, clearly indicating through the language used that the mental and social prison in which he has resided for so long, the dark moments of his past, and the sinful path that his life seems to have followed, can all be blamed on his marriage to Bertha (Brontë 154). In one conversation alone, he mentions at least a half-dozen times that circumstances, not his natural disposition, are to blame for the miserable state of his life, the specific circumstance being his marriage, stating that "…remorse is the poison of life" (Brontë 155). When Jane suggests the possibility of repentance as a cure to his life of error, Mr. Rochester claims it to be useless, "hampered, burdened, cursed" as he is in this marriage, asserting that, "happiness is irrevocably denied" him (Brontë 155). The firmness of this belief that there is no avenue to happiness open to him implies that he

sees no way out of his marriage to Bertha; he has been imprisoned in this situation for years, with no hope of escape and no hint of true freedom, living with a constant reminder of the shame and disgrace that this marriage inevitably brings upon him.

The language of marriage as imprisonment is often tied to descriptions of Bertha's immorality and the problems that her behavior and character cause for Mr. Rochester, but we cannot forget that marriage for Bertha is literally a prison. She is locked away in an apparently small attic room and is guarded night and day by a woman named Grace Poole who ensures that Bertha is never allowed to leave the confines of this attic room, aside from her occasional undesired escapes. Unsurprisingly, Mr. Rochester is disgusted to be married to an individual with whom he shares no commonality of opinion, can spend no peaceful moment with, and expresses behaviors that are generally considered reprehensible by the society to which he belongs; however, Bertha's misery in this marriage is based on a literal imprisonment at the hands of her husband. Nancy Jane Tyson calls Rochester's marriage to Bertha the novel's "central instance of the mutual prison that is wedlock. Both parties are caged, one literally, one figuratively" (100). Tyson investigates the representation of nineteenth-century marriage in *Jane Eyre,* specifically concerning what happens to the individual within marriage, particularly the female individual. Tyson argues that the novel displays the way that Victorian marriage "demeans and dehumanizes women," leaving them open to potentially abusive situations (95). Seen in this light, Bertha can be seen as symbolic of the situation of women in Victorian marriage, repressed beneath their husbands' wills (Tyson 95). Once married, a woman is no longer her own person, but instead belongs to her husband, and is expected to represent him well, which often means repressing passionate natures. However, in

spite of her physical imprisonment, Bertha deviates from the traditional idea of a woman's identity being subsumed by her husband's, becoming the identifier in this marriage instead of Rochester, and subsequently causing complications for her husband because of her damaging identification.

The central conflict of the story revolves around the mysteries and complications stemming from Mr. Rochester's miserable marriage to Bertha. While the full account of his marriage is not revealed until later in the story, the effects of the marriage infuse every piece of Mr. Rochester's life, especially his interactions with Jane. To attempt to understand Mr. Rochester's behavior throughout the novel, it is essential to gain some insight as to why exactly his marriage to Bertha has been so destructive to his character, so apparently poisonous to his purity of mind. This tale is devoid of any positive reference to the marriage between Mr. Rochester and Bertha, and to understand why Mr. Rochester always sees his marriage in this negative light, a view which leads to his later attempts to find avenues around or out of this marriage, one must discover why exactly an infamously immoral wife is so problematic for a man, especially one of Mr. Rochester's position in society.

Mr. Rochester's marriage to Bertha did not begin under the most promising circumstances, the union formed under conditions more similar to a dishonest business deal than to a marriage of love. Mr. Rochester's father, described as "an avaricious, grasping man," was loath to divide his fortune evenly between his two sons but still could not bear the thought of having a son who ended up poor; as a result, he sought to find this younger son, the Mr. Rochester we know in this story, a wealthy wife (Brontë 354). With these motivations, the young Mr. Rochester was sent to the West Indies and was

introduced to the beautiful daughter of a wealthy planter and merchant, a young woman named Bertha Mason. Rochester recounts how she was shown to him in the best light, always dressed beautifully, flirting and flattering, and most importantly, never alone. They were married before Rochester had time to think, and certainly before he had the chance to discover the strain of mental illness and immorality that apparently runs in her family. The presentation of Bertha to Mr. Rochester can be equated to the way a sleazy used car salesman presents a customer with the most beautiful sports car imaginable, sleek and shiny and impressive; only after the foolish customer has bought the car and brought it home does he discover the problems hidden beneath the hood. Similarly, Bertha was advertised to Rochester as a beautiful and accomplished young woman, and what he got instead was a lunatic who brought shame upon him in every way imaginable. The hatred Mr. Rochester expresses toward Bertha can be partly seen as the disappointed hopes of a man who enters into a marriage with one whom he thinks is an honorable woman but who in reality is an immoral monster.

One reason that Mr. Rochester's marriage to Bertha is so detestable to him is the fact that her immorality has reversed the conventional hierarchy of husbands and wives. Wives are meant to be known by their husbands, not the other way around; society even goes so far as to demand a wife to change her last name to be known by her husband's name rather than her own. In the article "Jane Eyre: The Prison-House of Victorian Marriage," Carol A. Senf argues that Bertha is representative of the nineteenth-century position of women, which in her words includes "a wide spectrum of social forces which kept women parasitic, inferior, and confined" (355). Senf focuses on limited education, limited employment options, and nineteenth-century notions of marriage, which include

ideas of female dependence on men and a general lack of autonomy (355). The societal expectation was for the wife to become completely dependent on her husband and to give in to his authority; Bertha's unquestionable lack of autonomy due to these typical conditions for women, in addition to her particular circumstances, should lead to dependence on Mr. Rochester, leaving her in the traditional position of a wife standing in the shadow of her husband. The resulting relinquishment of her own nature and name should lead to the wife being seen in connection with the husband's name and associated with the husband's reputation. But because of her apparently degenerate lifestyle at the time of their marriage in addition to her eventual diagnosis of insanity, Bertha is instead depicted as brazenly flouting her sin before the rest of society with Mr. Rochester disgustedly standing in the shadow of her immorality.

In the marriage between Bertha and Mr. Rochester, the language all points to the improper reversal of the traditional dynamic of a wife being known by the husband's reputation, emphasized by the sparse reference to Bertha as "Mrs. Rochester," a common labeling that would traditionally be utilized to identify Bertha as Mr. Rochester's wife. There are very few instances in which Bertha is referred to by name at all; instead she is called "fiend," "the maniac," "the mad-woman," or "that fearful hag," titles that all reflect her decidedly negative image (Brontë 349). Nevertheless, the majority of direct references to her, especially those surrounding the failed wedding that reveals Bertha's existence to the world, refuse to identify her as Mrs. Bertha Rochester, emphasizing her maiden name instead of her married one. At the failed wedding of Rochester and Jane, the solicitor's reading of the statement written by Richard Mason, Bertha's brother, explains that the reason Rochester cannot marry Jane is because he already has a wife;

yet, in this statement, her own brother states that Rochester is "married to my sister, Bertha Antoinetta Mason," neglecting to add "Rochester" to the end of her name and omitting any kind of clarification that this was her name before she married and became Mrs. Bertha Antoinetta Mason *Rochester* (Brontë 337). In this same scene, Rochester's response to this charge also emphasizes Bertha's maiden name: "I now inform you that she is my wife, whom I married fifteen years ago—Bertha Mason by name…Bertha Mason is mad…" (Brontë 339). Her own husband insists on calling her by the name she carried before her marriage to him, an unsettling habit in a time so concerned with the wife's identity being absorbed by that of her husband. This lack of casting off her own name to take on her husband's seems not only extremely strange for the Victorian period, but it also presents Bertha as a rebel to Victorian conventions. Although Mr. Rochester is loath to be closely associated with Bertha by the time Jane enters the picture, the retaining of the name Bertha Mason takes away part of the husband's traditional authority over the wife and denies him the power of identification.

In addition to this removal of power from the husband through keeping her own name, the novel makes it clear that Bertha failed to repress her passionate nature after the marriage began, stealing the spotlight from her husband in society through her depraved and infamous actions. Her immoral behavior is seen as making her almost notorious, and tainting Mr. Rochester with her infamy by association:

> …her vices sprung up fast and rank; they were so strong, only cruelty could check them; and I would not use cruelty. What a pigmy intellect she had, and what giant propensities! How fearful were the curses those propensities entailed on me! Bertha Mason, the true daughter of an

> infamous mother, dragged me through all the hideous and degrading agonies which must attend a man bound to a wife at once intemperate and unchaste. (Brontë 356)

In this passage, Mr. Rochester speaks of just how immoral his wife's behavior became within the first four years of their marriage. Having previously described Bertha as the daughter of a "mad-woman and a drunkard" who had "copied her parent in both points," Rochester here adds the term "unchaste," indicating that Bertha's immoral behavior includes not only drunkenness and insanity, but also promiscuous adultery (Brontë 339). Bertha is linked with unchecked and unrestrained passion, which Peter Grudin discusses in his article "Jane Eyre and the Other Mrs. Rochester: Excess and Restraint in *Jane Eyre*," showing the emphasis of restraint versus passion in the novel to be linked to the differences between Jane and Bertha. While Jane seems to generally be the figure of restraint in the novel, even when passion is boiling within, Grudin asserts that Bertha is "presented as a woman who has purposely abandoned herself to sexual excess and indiscriminate infidelity, who has leapt rather than fallen" (148). Bertha's madness is linked with "sexual impropriety," and while Jane may be tempted to fall into the same traps, it is only Bertha who is depicted as having already fallen (or leapt) to these temptations (Grudin 154).

Bertha's unrestrained passions lead to Mr. Rochester's good name being tainted by his wife, and it seems as if there is nothing to be done to change the situation; the language used to refer to the union that feeds this pollution reveals another layer of what makes this marriage so detestable to Mr. Rochester. Although Mr. Rochester laments his fate, he admits to finding no true escape from the degradation of her name being

associated with his own: “In the eyes of the world I was doubtless covered with grimy dishonor…I repudiated the contamination of her crimes, and wrenched myself from connection with her mental defects. Still, society associated my name with hers…” (Brontë 357). Being as closely connected to this woman as a marriage bond necessitates, Mr. Rochester is “covered with grimy dishonor,” implying that to those watching Bertha’s immoral behavior, Mr. Rochester is seen to be shrouded in the shame and disgrace of his wife’s appalling character. Her actions are seen as “contamination,” poisoning Mr. Rochester through their unbreakable connection. And no matter what distance he attempts to put between them, no matter how desperately he tries to renounce his wife and her immorality, the world will forever see them as linked. However, the way Mr. Rochester phrases this linkage is essential to understanding why this marriage is so utterly disgusting to him. He specifically states that “society associated my name with hers,” not *her* name with *his*, which would be the normal expectation. She has usurped the power of public renown that generally belongs to the husband, stripping him of his expected agency as a man, and in some ways emasculating him. No matter how much space he attempts to put between himself and his wife, even going so far as to continue calling her Bertha Mason when she should assumedly be called Bertha Rochester, Mr. Rochester’s name is unavoidably attached to her and is identified with her infamous reputation.

In comparison with this infamous woman, Jane is described as the complete opposite of Bertha in nearly every way, with Jane’s calmness and spotless morality shown in direct contrast to Bertha’s wildness and immorality, a divergence that Mr.

Rochester desperately desires. Mr. Rochester frequently speaks of Jane's abundant virtues, her own goodness as well as the positive influence she has on him:

> You are my sympathy—my better self—my good angel: I am bound to you with a strong attachment. I think you good, gifted, lovely; a fervent, a solemn passion is conceived in my heart; it leans to you, draws you to my centre and spring of life, wraps my existence about you—and, kindling in pure, powerful flame, fuses you and me in one. (Brontë 366)

Each characteristic that Mr. Rochester attributes to Jane denotes beauty and goodness, the starkest contrast imaginable to the demonic descriptions of Bertha. Jane is the epitome of feminine virtue, his "good angel," his renewed hope. Through Mr. Rochester's language, she is depicted as the best person he has ever met, speaking of her as his only chance of finding happiness and goodness again. Rochester persistently describes Jane in terms of contrast to Bertha, blatantly asking the attendees of his failed wedding to see the difference between the angelic Jane and the "demon" Bertha: "Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder—this face with that mask—this form with that bulk…" (Brontë 341). With both his physical descriptions and moral descriptions of these two women, Mr. Rochester clearly paints Jane as the desirable alternative to the woman he originally married, lending to his frantic hopes of finding some way to end his marriage to Bertha to claim Jane as his better wife.

Mr. Rochester's story is characterized by an overwhelming disgust at his marital situation and an insatiable desire to be freed from this miserable marriage; divorce is discounted as a valid method of escape, and despite attempts to reason his way out, the only acceptable alternative to end his marriage comes with the death of his wife. When

Mr. Rochester finally relates the history of his marriage to Jane after the sham of a wedding has been stopped, he speaks of Bertha's immorality, saying, "I could not rid myself of it by any legal proceedings; for the doctors now discovered that *my wife* was mad—her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity" (Brontë 356). This statement seems to imply that somehow Bertha's diagnosed insanity prevents him from getting out of the marriage legally. Divorce is never mentioned blatantly, but this belief of Rochester's comes nearly as close as this novel gets to actually discussing the idea of ending a marriage before one spouse dies. James Phillips discusses the process that Rochester would have been required to follow to get a legal divorce, that of the ecclesiastical court system which would have required a blameless Mr. Rochester and a cross-Atlantic suit against any of Bertha's lovers (206). The length and impracticality of this process lessens the likelihood of a successful legal divorce, which provides greater motivation for Rochester's desire to find his own causes to label his marriage void.

Because of this inability to escape marriage through legal means, Mr. Rochester seems to spend a large portion of his time after meeting Jane plotting a way to circumvent the binding nature of marriage, choosing to ignore the prescribed model of "til death do us part" and seeking a way to claim his happiness in Jane despite still being stuck in this marriage. In a cryptic conversation, he asks Jane if a person's desires to be a better person would justify "overleaping an obstacle of custom—a mere conventional impediment, which neither your conscience sanctifies nor your judgement approves?" (Brontë 253). The language of this question seems to indicate that the "impediment" keeping this individual from realizing this renewed desire to lead a good life is something unimportant and debatable, but he is speaking of his marriage. To a large portion of Victorian society,

the sanctity of marriage was not a debatable issue, yet Mr. Rochester here presents it as a matter of opinion. He indicates that his conscience does not sanctify the inflexible maintenance of this institution, nor does his judgement approve of it. He views his marriage as the one obstacle in his path to a purer life through Jane's influence; he seems to view this "end" as justifying the means and negating the importance of the "custom" or "convention" holding him in his marriage. According to Phillips, this novel "neither shies away from conventions nor submits to them uncritically: conventions…are there to be reinvented" (203). This mixture of supporting and questioning conventions displays the complexities of the topics and themes under examination in this story; while some see the conventions of marriage as inflexible, others like Mr. Rochester view them as ideas that are open to interpretation and modification.

The tension between ideas that Victorian society viewed as set in stone and ideas that Mr. Rochester presents as flexible characterizes this man's attempts to reason his way free of his oppressive marriage. While trying to convince Jane to stay with him after she has found out about Bertha, Mr. Rochester realizes that Jane sees him as a married man and, therefore, off limits, while he operates under the opinion that he is not actually married. In beginning his attempt to persuade Jane of this opinion, he says that Jane "knows nothing of the character of that woman, or of the circumstances attending my infernal union with her," as if that is sufficient reason for his marriage to be seen as invalid (Brontë 353). In Rochester's mind, Bertha's bad character and the deceit involved in his own marriage are sufficient justifications to view his marriage as void. To Mr. Rochester, the person and the situation of the marriage are so bad that they warrant and excuse his own actions, no matter how apparently immoral or illegal. However, Phillips

refutes Rochester's entire argument for why his marriage is invalid: "As a contract, marriage does not depend on the ever-renewed public consent of the parties: the consent of the moment of the wedding ceremony is what gives the union its legal status. That Rochester did not know the character and health of the person whom he was marrying does not invalidate his consent…" (203-204). Additionally, Jane does not accept his rationalization for presenting himself as an unmarried man; to Jane, he is married to Bertha Mason, no matter what he may say, ensuring that she cannot marry him and meaning any scenario in which she stays with him would turn her into his mistress. Unfortunately, no matter what Rochester tells himself or Jane, neither the situation surrounding the marriage nor Bertha's bad character (or even her insanity, for that matter) are sufficient legal justification for the dissolution of a marriage, and his attempts to work outside of the demands of the law are seen as reprehensible by his Victorian society.

Due to all of these elements that obstruct any avenue of escape from Mr. Rochester's marriage to Bertha, the only option for freedom remaining to either of them is for one of them to die. Bertha's death by jumping from the roof of Thornfield as it burns to the ground around her represents the beginning of freedom for them both; Rochester, who has suffered from the shame of being the husband of such a wife, is finally free of her and able to remarry if he so chooses. After Bertha's death is described as Jane returns to Mr. Rochester in the end of the novel, Bertha is not mentioned again; the freedom this death gives Mr. Rochester is so complete that he is able to reestablish his relationship with Jane, bring it to fulfillment through marriage, and never speak of his first miserable marriage again. The marriage has been dissolved through his becoming a widower, and the freedom supplied by this circumstance places him on a happier path

than he has apparently known in his life. But strangely, this death gives freedom to Bertha as well; having been literally imprisoned at Thornfield for so many years, physically trapped by her marriage, death may have been the only way Bertha saw for her own escape. Victorian conventions were no help to her, and her diagnosis of insanity ensured that she would see nothing but the inside of her room at Thornfield for the rest of her days, unless she acted to change her situation. Setting her prison on fire and jumping from its roof to her death, while seemingly the actions of a mad-woman, may also be seen as the most freeing action she expresses through this entire novel. Her death is the catalyst for true change in the lives of these characters, bestowing upon Mr. Rochester a chance for a new life and releasing Bertha from a fate of unavoidable imprisonment through her miserable Victorian marriage.

Insufferable Spouses in *Hard Times*

Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* follows two main plot lines, one following the story of Stephen Blackpool and the other the story of Louisa Gradgrind, two individuals who find themselves in unhappy marriages and seek some sort of escape from them. The events in this novel take place in Coketown, a small industrial town in Victorian England. Mr. Thomas Gradgrind is an influential member of society who seeks to spread his philosophy that facts are the only things that truly matter in life, and, therefore, emotion and imagination are irrelevant. Raising his children Tom and Louisa under this philosophy, the two grow up with no instruction in dealing with intangibles such as feelings or fancy or love. However, despite the strict forbiddance placed on any sort of imaginative thinking, Louisa spends the majority of her life battling with the feeling that there is more to life than the simple facts her father has always taught her. When she gets older, her father gives her hand in marriage to his best friend, Mr. Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, a self-proclaimed self-made man, who tends to be loudly boastful about accomplishments that are not actually true. Mr. Bounderby is a successful businessman and owner of the factory in town at which Stephen Blackpool is employed, an honorable man who is married to a drunken and thieving wife who appears at her pleasure, periodically disrupting his life. Seeking a solution to his miserable predicament, Blackpool seeks a path to divorce so he can remarry a virtuous woman named Rachael. Unable to find any way out of his marriage, getting on the bad side of the factory workers' union, and finally being accused of robbing the bank, Stephen leaves town; he later attempts to return in an attempt to clear his name, claiming to be innocent of the robbery, but he unfortunately falls into an old mining shaft and eventually dies. Louisa

and Bounderby maintain a seemingly peaceful marriage for about a year, until the charismatic James Harthouse comes to town and begins pursuing Louisa out of an apparent desire to ease his own boredom, viewing her as a challenge. Louisa grows confused about her inability to understand the emotions Harthouse seems to awaken in her, eventually reaching a breaking point and returning to her father's home. Louisa and Bounderby subsequently assume an informal separation, with Louisa permanently remaining with her father and Bounderby resuming the life of a bachelor until he suddenly dies a few years later.

Stephen

The story of Stephen Blackpool features an oddly similar marital situation to that of Mr. Rochester and Bertha, a man married to an infamous and immoral woman who has spent their entire marriage dragging his name through the mud. Stephen constantly describes his life as a "muddle," and nothing in his life appears to contribute to this turmoil more than his marriage. Despite being a member of a lower class than a man like Mr. Rochester, Stephen has apparently suffered tremendously as a result of his wife's terrible character, perpetually being presented in this story as the victim of the cruelties accompanying being held in bondage to an immoral wife, just as Mr. Rochester is shown to be. But aside from the personal and societal degradations associated with being the husband of such a woman, Stephen also suffers a bitter sense of regret, both for the disappointments of his expectations in this marriage not measuring up to reality, and for the idea of what might have been had he chosen differently.

As in *Jane Eyre*, Stephen's marriage is presented in terms of imprisonment, and any way out of that marriage is seen as freedom, even the briefest of reprieves. Stephen frequently reflects on the state of his life and how he reaches such a dark and low place: "He thought of the waste of the best part of his life, of the change it made in his character for the worse every day, of the dreadful nature of his existence, bound hand and foot, to a dead woman, and tormented by a demon in her shape" (Dickens 79-80). Stephen speaks of being "bound hand and foot" to this "dead woman," conjuring an image of a hostage held captive with the worst thing imaginable, the dead body of someone he used to know. This disturbing image speaks loudly of Stephen's conception of his wife—she is not only "dead" to him, but she is also a "demon" who parades around in the body of what used to be his wife—but it also displays his impression of this particular marriage as being the worst sort of prison imaginable. In this narrative he seeks a way "to be ridded o' this woman," but never finds the path to this escape (Dickens 73). His relief is shown to have been found in the times when his wife would disappear, when he had been left to enjoy the precious little time he can spend with his faithful friend Rachael and try to forget his troubles. Until this last time that his wife reappears, Stephen never seems to attempt anything further than this temporary relief, but Rachael's presence is shown to be representative of the freedom he desires, connecting her with thoughts "of the home he might at that moment have been seeking with pleasure and pride; of the different man he might have been that night; of the lightness then in his now heavy-laden breast" (Dickens 79). His idea of freedom is typically discussed in connection with Rachael, but always in terms of escape from his degenerate wife and the miserable marriage in which he is entangled.

Despite Stephen's assertion that his wife had been "a young lass—pretty enow—wi' good accounts of herseln" when the two first married, this woman is only described in the present in demonizing and dehumanizing language, much like the descriptions of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* (Dickens 71). John Baird asserts that Bertha may have even served as a model for this character, adding that the two are presented as drunkards because "drunkenness is both the symptom and the symbol of complete moral abandonment" (408). Amplifying the separation from the husband's name seen in the way Bertha is referred to by her maiden instead of her married name, this woman is never even given a name, being referred to as "it" or "creature" more often than anything else in many descriptions of her (Dickens 67-68). This practice serves to dehumanize her, in addition to restricting how closely she is identified with her more honorable husband. Based on Stephen's first reaction to seeing her, nearly tripping over her as he walks into his home one night after work, he is clearly disgusted by this woman, in both appearance and character:

> Such a woman! A disabled, drunken creature, barely able to preserve her sitting posture by steadying herself with one begrimed hand on the floor, while the other was so purposeless in trying to push away her tangled hair from her face, that it only blinded her the more with the dirt upon it. A creature so foul to look at, in her tatters, stains and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy, that it was a shameful thing even to see her. (Dickens 68)

All of the repulsive images raised by her description clearly describe a woman who is incapable of behaving as a good wife should, contrasting greatly with the brief

description of this woman at the start of her marriage to Stephen. In addition to the revulsion aroused by her physical appearance, the narrator asserts that her "moral infamy" is even more disgusting than her drunken and grimy exterior, so much so that simply looking at her would bring shame on the observer. According to Jill L. Matus, Dickens utilizes physical descriptions of a body during times of emotional change to "do the work of describing a state of mind" (15). Baird similarly asserts that "Her physical decay mirrors her moral state" (408). These ideas both support the progression apparent in this passage: her physical foulness is a shadow of her inner filth. And comparing this internal darkness with the people around her, such as her husband, only intensifies the foulness of her existence. Hajeong Park suggests that Stephen's middle class values displayed in his dress and manner of keeping house and apparent "aspirations for a higher class" emphasize the distinct contrast between he and his wife; while connected to such a base individual who in no way shares these values, Stephen has no hope of achieving those aspirations because his reputation is forever tainted by hers (108). Nearly every mention of his wife emphasizes Stephen's constant goodness and her degeneration to solely evil behavior. He speaks of being "not a unkind husband to her" and being "patient wi' her," asserting "I tried this, I tried that, I tried t'other," all to no avail (Dickens 71).

Still, aside from her obvious drunkenness, this unpleasant meeting does not clarify the source of this woman's complete moral infamy; the brief and curt conversation Stephen has with his wife clearly indicates that she comes and goes as she pleases and takes whatever she pleases. This thieving mentality and frequent desertion would make her an undesirable wife, certainly; nevertheless, the moral defects displayed in this brief scene reveal nothing that would warrant Stephen feeling such intense repulsion and

shame from simply looking at her. And these faults are definitely not adequate cause to seek divorce, which only a short time later Stephen declares a desire to do. The source of this deep-seated disgust is hinted at in the following chapter, when Stephen approaches his boss, Mr. Bounderby, for help in freeing himself from connection with this shameful creature.

Through Stephen's conversations about his wife with other characters, he seems to indicate that in addition to her drunkenness and thievery, like Bertha, her immorality may extend to adultery. When Stephen goes to Mr. Bounderby, he attempts to explain his wretched situation, beginning with his marriage nineteen years before to a young woman who had had "good accounts of herseln," but who "went bad—soon" (Dickens 71). Stephen starts at the beginning of his troubles, assumedly planning to work his way chronologically through the account of their marriage to the miserable state in which it currently stands, but Mr. Bounderby, never one to listen to anyone for long due to his inability to keep silent for any length of time, almost immediately interrupts with his own concise, second-hand version of the story: "'I have heard all this before,' said Mr. Bounderby. 'She took to drinking, left off working, sold the furniture, pawned the clothes, and played old Gooseberry'" (Dickens 71). Almost all of these behaviors are already acknowledged as contributory to this woman's terrible depiction in the first scene in which she appears (drunk, dissipated, thieving); however, the last statement—"played old Gooseberry"—adds a new level to her moral degradation. The phrase "played old Gooseberry," slang for "played the devil," implies some more heinous sin than simple drunkenness or thievery. Baird argues that this phrase implies that in addition to the detestable behaviors attributed to Stephen's wife thus far, she can also be titled an

adulteress (407). Stephen's explanation of his fruitless attempts to intervene and stop his wife from walking down this dark path serves to reinforce the idea that her detestable behaviors included adultery. Stephen says that his wife's exploits went, "From bad to worse, from worse to worsen. She left me. She disgraced herseln everyways, bitter and bad" (Dickens 72). An individual, particularly a Victorian woman, being described as disgraced in every way almost certainly indicates sexual disgrace.

While the actions of Stephen's wife toward her husband are hurtful and shameful, his intense reactions and nearly constant statements of regret imply a source greater than simply her disgraceful actions; the force of Stephen's reactions to his wife indicate a tremendous feeling of disappointment due to the realities of his marriage in contrast to his probable expectations upon entering this union. The fact of her adultery is a requirement for Stephen's appeal to Mr. Bounderby to be even remotely valid; to even consider any sort of divorce from a spouse, that spouse had to have been guilty of adultery, otherwise any attempt at divorce would be futile (Baird 407). But the level of hate that Stephen feels toward his wife seems to indicate a more deeply rooted source than simply her immoral behavior, such as regret for his own part in the misery of his marriage. None of Stephen's fleeting descriptions of the beginning of his marriage indicate that he expected his wife to be terrible from the start; on the contrary, his language seems to reveal having had at least the hope of a good marriage. Stephen seems to suggest that his wife's violent and sinful tendencies developed during their marriage, stating that "he had seen her come to this by inches" and that he cannot believe the disgusting creature on whom he looks is the same person (Dickens 85). However, just as Mr. Rochester's originally hopeful marriage to Bertha degenerated into misery because of Bertha's immoral tendencies, any

indication of an initial hope at the outset of Stephen's marriage is quickly followed by a bitter statement of his wife's fall into grievous wickedness. When looking at his wife as she sits in his room, "He thought…that no single trace was left in those debauched features, or in the mind that went along with them, of the woman he had married eighteen years before" (85). Stephen looks now and sees a ruined and terrible figure that barely even warrants the title human; yet, he remembers the woman he married, even if there is nothing left of that woman in this creature's face. This memory merely contributes to bitter feelings toward a wife who not only disappointed his hopes of having an at least contented marriage, but who completely destroyed these hopes by flying to the complete opposite end of the spectrum and delving into what seems to be the blackest of sinful lives. Stephen recognizes that his wife's behavior is widely divergent from his ideals, and he refuses to view her as a victim of circumstance or society, preferring instead to desert her entirely and seek a way to marry another more virtuous woman rather than fight the circumstances of his miserable marriage any longer (Park 109). Ascribing to the Victorian ideal of man and wife becoming one, with a wife's identity expected to be characterized by her husband's identity, just as Bertha's deplorable reputation reflected badly on Mr. Rochester, the behavior of Stephen's wife besmirches his good name, linking him with her generally drunken and repulsive appearance.

However, more than simply bringing shame to Stephen's name or having dashed all of Stephen's original hopes for a happy marriage, his wife's very existence now denies him the one spot of goodness in his life: Rachael. Adding insult to injury, the reader quickly learns that Rachael, Stephen's angelic equivalent to Mr. Rochester's virtuous Jane Eyre, a woman whose friendship has sustained Stephen through these

difficult years, had been a childhood friend of Stephen's wife and had been with them through the courtship, the marriage, and the aftermath (Dickens 82). Stephen seems to have known Rachael before he married, yet instead of wooing her, he chose a woman who would quickly become the bane of his existence. In Richard Fabrizio's words, "as a youth he chose the flesh—the 'pretty girl'—and as a man he regrets his choice" (240). Stephen spends a great deal of time in this novel yearning to be able to have Rachael for his wife, even though he declares that "No word of a new marriage had ever passed between them" (Dickens 79). Stephen has complete confidence in Rachael and sees her as the virtuous pillar of light that could restore what has been taken from him by his immoral wife, similar to the way Mr. Rochester views Jane as his path to the goodness his marriage to Bertha has denied him. Stephen's desire for Rachael and bitterness toward his wife are quite intense, particularly as he walks home from Bounderby's house after being told that divorce is not an option out of this situation for him.

The powerful language of Stephen's despair at the thought that he is forever denied the happy home that Rachael could have provided and that he so desires, displays better than anything the true reasons Stephen wishes to divorce his wife. Stephen thinks of how Rachael's life has been made as miserable has his own because of his choice in wife, how she has had to watch the women around her grow up and build families while she sticks to her lonely and "melancholy" path for Stephen's sake (Dickens 80). Stephen is dejected because the woman he thought he had married nearly twenty years ago turned out to be the wrong purchase, had been falsely advertised as wife material just as Bertha Mason had been deceitfully presented to Mr. Rochester at the time of their marriage, and the woman who was there the whole time and would have truly made a good and happy

home for him is now inaccessible. In his mind, Stephen compares the two women: "He set the picture of [Rachael] up, beside the infamous image of last night; and thought, Could it be, that the whole earthly course of one so gentle, good, and self-denying, was subjugate to such a wretch as that!" (Dickens 80). In comparing his wife to Rachael, it is almost as if Stephen is comparing Bertha to Jane; the situations and descriptions are so similar. And in both cases, the man is seen as the one to suffer the most from the infamy of the one and the denied access to the other. As Baird phrases it, "Circumstances and the law have combined to defraud Stephen of the happiness and tranquility which he deserves; he is their victim" (409). Stephen's pride is damaged by the way that his wife's behavior affects him, but nothing makes him despise his wife more than the knowledge of what her presence denies him, particularly coupled with the knowledge that he chose her, meaning that his misery is partly of his own making. Stephen's regret stems from anger at himself for choosing this woman, and it is aggravated by the law's apparent refusal to help him, so he channels that regret into disgust and hatred of his wife, as does Rochester.

Unlike Mr. Rochester, however, Stephen attempts to investigate legal avenues of escaping his terrible marital situation before trying to find his own way around moral ideals and human laws. Stephen's visit to Mr. Bounderby is not merely for the purpose of complaining about his terrible situation; Stephen seeks information from Mr. Bounderby about how he can "be ridded o' this woman" (Dickens 73). Stephen speaks of having seen in the papers that "great folk…are not bonded together for better for worst so fast, but that they can be set free fro' *their* misfortnet marriages, an' marry ower agen" (Dickens 73). He has heard of people finding ways out of marriages, either through

separation or complete divorce, and being allowed to remarry, and he wants to know how this can be accomplished. Stephen knows that there are laws to punish him for nearly every alternative solution to his problems, from fleeing his wife to trying to marry another while already married, and he wants Bounderby to "show [him] the law to help [him]!" (Dickens 73-74).

Rather than feeling compassion for this poor man and attempting to help him in any way possible, Mr. Bounderby displays shock and contempt for Stephen's desire to get out of his marriage and tells him in no uncertain terms that there is no possibility of him being able to get a divorce. After almost a page and a half of dialogue between Stephen and Mr. Bounderby, Bounderby finally admits to Stephen that there is a law that gives provisions such as those Stephen seeks. However, Bounderby bluntly and unfeelingly asserts, "But it's not for you at all" (Dickens 74). Bounderby summarily explains a simplified version of the complicated process that is required to achieve the divorce that Stephen desires, involving bringing suits to the Doctors' Commons and the court of Common Law and the House of Lords. Bounderby informs Stephen that this process costs "a mint of money," and that there is no way that he, a poor laborer, could do it (Dickens 74). Published and set before the enactment of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, divorces would have been extremely difficult for anyone in this tale to achieve; however, for someone as poor as Stephen, divorce would in reality have been almost impossible to afford. So while divorce may have technically been legally possible for Stephen, insurmountable financial barriers stand between him and freedom through divorce.

Other characters in *Hard Times* openly condemn Stephen's desire to divorce his wife, suggesting that despite the wife's character or behavior, divorce was not a socially and morally acceptable option, even if Stephen could have afforded it. Instead of offering Stephen the sympathy and help he desires, characters display a general societal rejection of the prospect of divorce, with the strongest reactions being seen from Mr. Bounderby and the woman who runs his household, Mrs. Sparsit. When she understands that Stephen has come to Mr. Bounderby for the purpose of inquiring into how he can get a divorce, Mrs. Sparsit is said to seem as if she has "received a moral shock" and begins muttering about the "immorality of the people" and the "impiety of the people" (Dickens 73-74). Mr. Bounderby also reprimands Stephen for his response to not being allowed a divorce, reminding him that he took his wife "for better for worse" and saying that if she "turned out worse...she might have turned out better" (Dickens 75). Mr. Bounderby, not known for his compassion, does not give Stephen any semblance of understanding for his situation or acceptance of his desire to divorce. Mrs. Sparsit and Mr. Bounderby are unlikeable, unyielding, and proud characters; therefore, Dickens may be using their opinions to assert a critique of the societal view of divorce as immoral or improper. Nevertheless, due to the fact that these opinions of shock and distaste are the main reactions depicted in connection with the possibility of divorce, the novel seems to indicate that these opinions are overwhelmingly the common view of divorce by the society of this time.

Dickens paints Stephen as one of the most sympathetic and pitiable characters in the novel; the reader, therefore, understands rather than condemns his desire for a divorce. According to Baird, Stephen's impeccable virtue, miserable situation, and

poverty that keeps divorce out of reach all combine to give Dickens a way to discuss this issue without raising too much controversy. Baird argues that Dickens' presentation of divorce as inaccessible is done in order to "do justice to the facts without offending his audience"; Dickens "separates divorce from the realm of the possible" by making the sole petition for divorce come from a poverty-stricken laborer who is extremely sympathetic (407). Through Bounderby's assertion that Stephen is too poor to be able to afford a legal divorce, Dickens is able to raise questions of divorce as an option or not an option without forcing Victorian audiences to deal with the real possibility of a character getting divorced (Baird 407). Despite some characters' negative reactions to Stephen's wish to divorce, Dickens evokes sympathy for this poor man's situation, forcing the audience to possibly rethink any staunch opinions against divorce.

Nevertheless, despite the sympathy for Stephen that his situation induces in the reader, the only escape from a miserable marriage is the same in *Hard Times* as in *Jane Eyre*: one spouse must die for freedom to be restored to one or both members of the union. Legal methods are sought in this story, with divorce being explicitly discussed in Stephen's conversation with Mr. Bounderby; however, divorce is still taken off the table, and death is shown to be the only alternative. Stephen reaches this realization fairly quickly once legal escape through divorce has been unequivocally denied him. Because Stephen knows that his society views marriage as indissoluble, and especially once the unattainability of divorce for him has been confirmed through his conversation with Mr. Bounderby, it becomes clear that Stephen understands that the only way for his marriage to end is for him or his wife to die. Stephen feels as if he has been "cheated in his youth, cheated in his marriage, that he had grown old too soon, that he anticipated marriage to

cure what he suffered in youth," but because his marriage has turned his life into such a "muddle," death becomes the only means of escape (Fabrizio 240). After Bounderby tells him the expensive and complicated process of legally ending his marriage, proving to Stephen that this is not a viable option, Stephen exclaims, "...the sooner I am dead, the better" (Dickens 74). And although he may not speak the thought at this particular moment, the same idea could hold true for his wife.

Rather than allowing the narrative to straightforwardly move toward the obvious death of one spouse or the other, this novel plays with the idea of death being the only escape from marriage. The narrative seems to vacillate between Stephen as the one to die versus his wife being the one, particularly in the scene of the near accidental suicide of Stephen's wife in which Stephen almost sits back to watch his marriage end in the only beneficial way for him that it really could. At one point in the novel, Stephen's wife almost accidentally commits suicide by reaching for a bottle of poison that she mistakes for a bottle of alcohol. Stephen—in a state between dreaming and waking—is semi-aware of what his wife is doing, but he does not stop her. Instead, Rachael, who is also watching over Stephen's wife, intervenes to prevent her from drinking the bottle of poison. So, Stephen comes very close to watching his wife die in right front of him, an act that would have served to free him from her contaminating presence.

In this episode with the poison bottle, Stephen comes extremely close to ridding himself of his wife in a completely different manner than the one he sought from Mr. Bounderby; rather than getting a divorce, Stephen almost allows his wife to kill herself by drinking poison that she seems to mistake for alcohol. After Rachael stops Stephen's wife from drinking the poison, Stephen thanks her for being his "Angel" and for saving

his soul, asserting that if she had not been there, "'How can *I* say what I might he' done to myseln, or her, or both!'" (Dickens 87). Park calls Rachael in this instance "an active supporter of morality and goodness" who "readily nurtures and rescues Mrs. Blackpool from certain death by poison" (115). By extension, she seems to have also saved Stephen's life and conscience. If Rachael had not been there to stop the wife, Stephen may well have simply sat by and watched her kill herself and have finally been a single man; or perhaps he would have come to his senses and stopped her; or maybe he would have killed himself along with her. But no matter what may or may not have happened, Stephen makes it quite clear that the only way he could see forward in that dark moment had been for either he or his wife (or both of them) to drink the poison and die. Fabrizio connects the ideas of death and marriage in Stephen's story, arguing that thoughts of both tend to dominate Stephen's thoughts: death taking the two forms of Stephen's contemplation of his own suicide and imagining of his wife's murder, and marriage taking the forms of Stephen's desire for divorce from his wife and wish to marry Rachael (241). Granted, this scene of near poisoning leans to the melodramatic, but the emotions and terror expressed by Stephen in these moments show that he sees the death of either he or his wife as the only solution to this problem, now that legal avenues of divorce have been denied him in his hopes of marrying better.

While the poison scene does not result in the termination of Stephen's marriage, the marriage does end in a death; it ends with Stephen being pulled out of the Old Hell Shaft, an old abandoned mine shaft, and heartbreakingly dying right after he is reunited with Rachael for a moment once he is brought back to the surface. Rather than experiencing the liberation and remarriage that Mr. Rochester enjoys after the death of

his spouse, Stephen is given the freedom with which Bertha is faced—freedom through death. Despite having the unquestioned moral high ground over his wife and a great many other characters in this tale, Stephen is given no release from his problems on Earth. Perhaps reinforcing the tragedy of his inability to escape his situation through divorcing his wife simply because of financial deficiencies, Stephen's situation can literally only be alleviated through his own death, while his immoral wife lives on, being dutifully cared for by the saintly Rachael. No matter the sadness his death invokes, there is no alternative presented through which his "muddle" of a life could be brought to freedom.

Louisa

Louisa Gradgrind's marriage is depicted as terrible for quite different reasons from Stephen's marriage; rather than a marriage of two morally unequal individuals, as seen in the marriages of both Mr. Rochester and Stephen Blackpool, Louisa's marriage is depicted as a completely loveless marriage. From the very beginning of *Hard Times*, Louisa is clearly shown to be a highly intelligent woman, partly due to her father's rigorous fact-based education, with she and her brother having studied a wide variety of subjects for their entire lives, with their father doing everything in his power to shape their abilities to reason and to ensure that their minds exclude any form of imagination or emotion. Mr. Gradgrind himself describes theirs as "minds that have been practically formed by rule and line, from the cradle upwards" (Dickens 23). This up-bringing and education has made Louisa a very intellectual person, but it has also starved her of many aspects of humanity that are necessary to good and realistic reasoning, such as emotion or

empathy. In some ways, Louisa's entire existence has been a type of prison keeping her ideas contained and restricted to the facts to which her father subscribes, so any marriage that maintains the same ideals as her father will only be extending that prison. However, despite all her father's best efforts, assisted by Mr. Bounderby wherever possible, a remnant of imagination has survived in Louisa, ensuring that the seeds of emotion are still in existence; this rebellious remnant is sufficient to place an insuperable divide between Louisa and her husband.

The reader's first introduction to Louisa and her rebellious spirit in the face of her father's prison occurs after her father discovers her and her brother Tom at a circus, immediately following a scene that displays Mr. Gradgrind's educational philosophy at work. Mr. Gradgrind is furious that his own children would behave in such a way as this, one that is completely opposed to the ideals he had been instilling in other children just moments before this scene. As he is reprimanding his children for this lapse in judgement, telling them that places like this circus have nothing to do with fact and reason, the description of Louisa is very telling about the effects that her education has had on her and the rebellion that brews within:

> There was an air of jaded sullenness in them both, and particularly in the girl: yet struggling through the dissatisfaction of her face, there was a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow, which brightened its expression. Not with the brightness natural to cheerful youth, but with uncertain, eager, doubtful flashes, which had something painful in them, analogous to the changes on a blind face groping its way. (Dickens 17)

Louisa is described as somehow having still held on to an imagination, one that is "starved" but "keeping life in itself somehow." This remnant of natural imagination and the accompanying emotions seen in Louisa show that she has not bought into her father's ideals, that she knows that there is more to the world than what can be reduced to simple facts and figures. And even though everything in her life thus far has conspired to destroy that idea, her imagination is still holding on, if only like "a blind face groping its way." This attitude that silently and subtly rebels against her father's education does not indicate that she will ever be a woman who will grow to accept a life that is restricted to fact alone. This initial description of Louisa already implies that any attempt to force her to maintain the Gradgrind ideals will not end well; in fact, this small rebellion indicates that she is already seeking a way out of the prison to which her father has restricted her.

The descriptions of this young woman as seeking something more to the world than what her father's belief system has presented her does not bode well for a marriage to a man who upholds and agrees with the Gradgrind philosophy. Nevertheless, enter Mr. Bounderby, a man described, like Mr. Gradgrind, as being "perfectly devoid of sentiment" (Dickens 19). Mr. Bounderby is described in terms of loudness and coarseness, exuding a commanding presence and giving an impression of constant boastfulness. Vaunted as a rich and successful businessman, Mr. Bounderby proudly proclaims "his old ignorance and his old poverty," attempting at every turn to make people believe his status as "self-made man" (Dickens 19). Introduced as being as nearly "Mr. Gradgrind's bosom friend" as possible for two men totally devoid of sentiment, Mr. Bounderby does not immediately strike one as a compatible match for someone holding on to a dying imagination as tightly as Louisa appears to be.

Following the conventional prescription for a man's successful life, Mr. Bounderby seeks a wife, and who more perfect than someone like Louisa whom he can watch and assist as her father grooms her to be a rational-minded woman who does not value imagination or emotion. Despite her clear aversion to Mr. Bounderby, Louisa agrees to his eventual proposal made through her father; Louisa is bored and knows nothing of emotion, having been raised to see emotion as unimportant, so she agrees to the marriage with the full knowledge that it is in no way based on love or affection, but is a marriage of convenience and advantage. When explicitly asked by his daughter if she is expected by either Mr. Bounderby or Mr. Gradgrind to love her future husband, Mr. Gradgrind fumbles through an answer that eventually conveys the message that she is not expected to love Mr. Bounderby, but rather that this marriage is seen as simply a reasonable and practical step for Louisa to take. Additionally, Louisa's understanding of her own incapacity for love, as well as for other emotions generally viewed as essential in romantic or marital relationships, presents her as ill-equipped to enter into a successful marriage.

As in the story of the process that led to Bertha becoming Mr. Rochester's wife, the process leading to Louisa's marriage to Bounderby invokes the image of marriage as a business transaction that subjugates the woman, particularly because the contract seems to be made between Mr. Bounderby and Mr. Gradgrind rather than Bounderby and Louisa, presenting Louisa as little more than a commodity that Mr. Bounderby is purchasing from Mr. Gradgrind. For years Mr. Bounderby has been watching Louisa grow up under the Gradgrind education system; this constant observation can be seen in terms of a buyer inspecting a potential purchase over an extended period of time to

ensure that the product is worth the price. Fabrizio argues that after watching Louisa for so many years, Bounderby proposes because Louisa's lack of typical femininity leads him to expect that he will "find in her all the feminine charms with none of the difficulties" (230). Bounderby desires the emotional fulfillment that a wife could provide but none of the complications of a wife who is herself emotional. When her own father accompanies his declaration that a proposal has been made to his daughter with his compliments of her being "not impulsive," "not romantic," and "accustomed to view everything from the strong dispassionate ground of reason and calculation," Bounderby can be confident of having found such a unique apparently emotionless woman (Dickens 93). When Mr. Gradgrind begins his conversation with Louisa about Mr. Bounderby's proposal, after praising her dispassionate nature, he tells her that she is "the subject of a proposal of marriage that has been made to [him]," not a proposal that has been made to her; the entire process of the marriage proposal seems to have taken place without Louisa (Dickens 93).

While this storyline does not feature much explicit mention of marriage viewed as imprisonment, the way in which Louisa's calm and dispassionate exterior contrasts starkly with her husband's loud and (falsely) boastful personality pushes her to deeper and deeper isolation, a reaction of distaste to her husband's behaviors that nevertheless places her in a type of mental prison within her own home. While her voice is generally, if not always, absent from any talk about her distaste for her husband, her feelings are noted by others. James Harthouse's first impression of Louisa is experienced in the presence of Bounderby, meaning that much of what he notices about her involves her response to her husband. Harthouse observes Louisa closely and sees her to be:

> …so constrained, and yet so careless; so reserved, and yet so watchful; so cold and proud, and yet so sensitively ashamed of her husband's braggart humility—from which she shrunk as if every example of it were a cut or a blow…Utterly indifferent, perfectly self-reliant, never at a loss, and yet never at her ease, with her figure in company with them there, and her mind apparently quite alone… (Dickens 121)

To an outside observer who is examining her closely, as Harthouse does, Louisa appears to be decidedly separate from everything around her, with the description of her as "constrained" implying a restriction in her situation that is strongly reminiscent of imprisonment. She is closed off and aloof, completely individual and alone even when surrounded by people. Most importantly, though, she is "ashamed" of her husband, but unlike the shame that Mr. Rochester and Stephen feel in response to the immoral behavior and lack of chastity in their wives, Louisa does not seem to worry about issues of morality like these. The isolation and shame that she expresses are at least partially attributed by Harthouse to her constant desire to shrink from her husband and the embarrassment that his every word and action incites. Untempered by any semblance of affection between them, Bounderby's blusteringly boastful behavior incites a disdain in Louisa that is noted by Harthouse. In the same scene, Harthouse observes the lack of influence the mistress of the house appears to have on the appearance of the room itself; he sees no feminine decoration or evidence of a woman asserting her influence in the home, and he describes the room to be "unsoftened and unrelieved by the least trace of any womanly occupation" (Dickens 121). In every aspect of this marriage, Louisa appears to be isolated and restricted. The dynamics of the relationship appear to be

completely one sided, with Bounderby being the active and talkative presence and Louisa being the silent and unresponsive counterpart attempting to contain her abhorrence at her husband's every word and movement. Louisa apparently leaves no imprint on the house or its inhabitants, being completely shut out (either by her husband or by her own choice) from the domestic workings of the Bounderby home.

After their marriage, many of Bounderby's actions seem to contribute to the negative depiction of this union, most especially his presentation of Louisa as his possession, displayed in the way Mr. Bounderby persistently presents Louisa in the most beneficial language for building up his own reputation, using her name only in terms that serve his purposes and restricting her identity to whatever he deems it to be. From the wedding onwards, Mr. Bounderby almost never calls Louisa by her first name: she is "Tom Gradgrind's daughter," never Louisa. Almost as if he is asserting some new social status that a marriage to "Tom Gradgrind's daughter" gives him, Mr. Bounderby seems obsessed with making sure that everyone knows who he has married. In the speech given by Mr. Bounderby at their wedding, despite his assertions that he is not the one to be giving a speech, Mr. Bounderby manages to simultaneously express a sense of prestige gained by this union as well as a sense of already deserving this higher status on his own merit:

> If you want a speech this morning, my friend and father-in-law, Tom Gradgrind, is a Member of Parliament, and you know where to get it…I feel a little independent when I look around this table today, and reflect how little I thought of marrying Tom Gradgrind's daughter when I was a ragged street boy…Now I have mentioned, and you have mentioned, that I

> am this day married to Tom Gradgrind's daughter. I am very glad to be so. It has long been my wish to be so. I have watched her bringing-up, and I believe she is worthy of me. At the same time—not to deceive you—I believe I am worthy of her. (Dickens 104).

In this one short speech, Mr. Bounderby manages to exert multiple angles related to the idea of a raise in status gained by this marriage. He first asserts that his new father-in-law is not only his friend, is not only a better speech-maker than himself, but is also a Member of Parliament. His new father-in-law's position in society and in government, particularly set in contrast to Bounderby's assertions of his own base origins, indicates that Bounderby places great value on Gradgrind's respectable status. His statement that he never thought he would have been able to marry as well as he has places greater emphasis on his view of this as an advantageous marriage. His repetition of the phrase "Tom Gradgrind's daughter" in reference to his new wife indicates that he wants to ensure that all know exactly who he has married; he has not simply married a woman named Louisa, but he has married "Tom Gradgrind's daughter." After watching her for years, he says, he has reached the belief that she is worthy of him, implying that she is worth him staking a claim on her and her good name.

Just as in the cases of the other marriages discussed so far, the way a wife's name is presented by her husband reveals much about his perception of her; Bertha never being called Mrs. Rochester by her husband distances her from that title, just as Stephen's wife's complete lack of name distances her from humanity. From the time of their marriage on, the name "Louisa" seems to disappear from Mr. Bounderby's vocabulary; he refers to her as "Tom Gradgrind's daughter" or "Loo Bounderby," but never Louisa.

Richard Fabrizio refers to this type of language as the "rhetoric of no-naming," a use of nicknames to assert a particular identity or attitude while avoiding anxieties or problems caused by more direct language (224). Calling Louisa by the name of "Louisa Bounderby" seems to be somehow unappealing or problematic to Mr. Bounderby, perhaps because it does not display the prestige her family name apparently brings to this marriage as blatantly as Bounderby would like; however, by utilizing this method of "no-naming," Bounderby is able to present Louisa with a new identity that clearly displays her heritage, while simultaneously expressing his seemingly boastful attitude toward that identity. The more he calls her "Tom Gradgrind's daughter," the more he seems to be asserting the status gained by this marriage; the more he calls her "Loo Bounderby," the more he seems to be renaming her and making her his possession.

Losing her own last name through marriage is not enough in Louisa's case; Mr. Bounderby chooses to give his wife a completely new identity that shows her value to him and is dictated by him and him alone. Taking the Victorian ideal to the extreme, Bounderby does not simply want the typical situation of a wife's identity being absorbed into her husband's, but rather seeks to create an entirely new identity for her. Furthermore, Mr. Bounderby's refusal to call Louisa by her real name minimalizes her as an individual. Louisa is no longer Louisa; she is not defined by her own accomplishments or her own intelligence. She is not even simply defined by her status as wife, in which she would typically be called Louisa Bounderby, having taken her husband's last name and identity. She is still defined by her status as daughter, by her father's social status, and by the advantages that her husband can gain through these titles. In addition to subverting the typical expectations for a wife to be called by her husband's last name

following a marriage, this apparent refusal to allow Louisa to be released from her father's name keeps her tethered to her father, a situation that does not bode well for a marriage that would generally be dependent on the wife being separated from her family home to be joined to her husband and her new home. Anne Humpherys asserts that this persistence of Bounderby (as well as Mrs. Sparsit) to keep calling her by her father's name foreshadows the eventual end of the marriage and Louisa's permanent return to her father's house (184).

In the case of this marriage, there is no explicit discussion from either spouse of the marriage being miserable or of their wanting to escape it; instead, circumstances push the couple farther apart than they may have been already, leading to their eventual separation. Harthouse quickly finds himself in an established confidence with Louisa "from which her husband was excluded. He had established a confidence with her, that absolutely turned upon her indifference towards her husband, and the absence, now and at all times, of any congeniality between them" (Dickens 168). Louisa's marriage is without doubt devoid of any form of affection or regard, so in the face of a man who is concertedly attempting to gain her regard and love, naturally Louisa would gravitate toward Harthouse and farther away from Bounderby. A series of related events serve to continue this pressure to grow closer to Harthouse. Mrs. Sparsit coming to stay at the Bounderby house after the bank robbery, for one, is a huge part of this process. Mrs. Sparsit is already bitter towards Bounderby and jealous of Louisa, bearing disappointed hopes from wishing to marry Bounderby prior to his marriage to Louisa. Because of these wounded feelings, Mrs. Sparsit makes an apparently concerted effort to drive a wedge between Louisa and Bounderby (as if one did not already exist). Simple things such as

Louisa not caring about "the wife's place" at table and allowing Mrs. Sparsit to take it incite discord between the couple. Bounderby is not happy at Louisa's indifference to the position that designates her his wife at the table, and Mrs. Sparsit's apparent eagerness to step into that position marks for Bounderby a decided turn away from Louisa and toward Sparsit. Similarly, this situation serves to push Louisa even farther from Bounderby and closer to Harthouse, resulting in a clear movement of both Louisa and Bounderby away from each other and into more intimate relationships with others.

However, despite the confidences and the later instance verging on infidelity, in which it seems Louisa almost elopes with Mr. Harthouse, Louisa's desire is not centered around the hope of a new and better marriage to replace the one she already has, unlike Mr. Rochester and Stephen who want to be free of their terrible marriages for the primary purpose of remarrying better spouses. Even in the climax of Mr. Harthouse's efforts to lure Louisa into declaring her love for him and betraying her husband, the moment in which he ensures that no one is at home and goes to her alone to persuade her to run away with him, her demeanor towards him is not as he would have wished: "There never was a slave at once so devoted and ill-used by his mistress. To look for your sunny welcome that has warmed me to life, and to be received in your frozen manner, is heart-rending" (Dickens 196-197). This declaration of Harthouse that his lover has received him more coldly than he would wish is stated clearly, as is his declaration of love; however, Louisa's responses to Harthouse's declarations are less distinct. The only clear dialogue attributed to her in this passage is a persistent "No!" or "Not here" in response to a request from Harthouse that they meet; she seems insistent that she should be left alone and that they should not be together at her husband's home. Unlike Jane and

Rachael, who are both presented as pillars of perfect morals, Harthouse is not a virtuous better alternative to Bounderby; rather, Harthouse is almost as selfish and loveless as Bounderby, albeit in different ways, and Louisa may in fact sense that. This close brush with infidelity emphasizes to Louisa her complete inexperience with matters of the heart, catapulting her out of Bounderby's house and back to her father, beginning her permanent return to her father's house.

The separation that ensues between Mr. Bounderby and Louisa over the next several years is devoid of any mention of divorce, which could not have really been achieved because no adultery actually took place, with the suspicion of adultery being in existence but remaining unaddressed in the story. Despite Mr. Bounderby's initial ultimatum demanding that Louisa return to him by the next day after he learns that she has left him, Louisa does not appear at the Bounderby house the next day as he demands, nor does she do so in any day following. Mr. Bounderby is described in terms of sullen acceptance, never expressing any desire to separate from her, but accepting Louisa's choice, sending her belongings to the Gradgrind house, and then having "resumed a bachelor life" (Dickens 227). The ensuing years feature the two living in complete separation. Mr. Bounderby does not carry his suspicions of Louisa's adultery to a court, either accepting that he does not have sufficient evidence for a divorce or not strongly motivated enough to go through the trouble and expense of actually attempting the process. In this novel, divorce is only discussed by those who clearly seek a remarriage, like Stephen Blackpool. For characters like Bounderby and Louisa, who express no desire to remarry anyone else, they behave as if the only option available to them is to live separate lives and never mention their marriage, even though the marriage is legally still

in effect. A separation appears to have less societal condemnation attached, with Bounderby appearing to have no problem telling others that he and Louisa did not work. In addition, the shame accompanying Stephen's marriage stemmed from his wife's actions and his desire for divorce, not from the act of their separation.

As in *Jane Eyre* the only escape from these miserable marriages is for one spouse to die. In the case of Louisa's marriage, Bounderby dies five years after their separation. But confirming her lack of desire for remarriage, she is described to stay with Sissy and live in the shadow of her domestic happiness. At no point does Louisa clearly articulate what she wants after being freed from her marriage to Bounderby; however, one idea is distinctly absent from her words, and later from her actions: she does not mention the desire to get out of her marriage to Bounderby in order to marry Harthouse. No talk of actually wanting to run away with Harthouse ever passes her lips, and at no point does she seem to desire a new marriage. But what, then, does she desire? Because her voice all but disappears from the novel after she leaves Bounderby, her real wishes can only be assumed. Nevertheless, Louisa seems to accept the knowledge that she is not meant to be the conventional woman and wife that her society expects her to be within a marriage, her story suggesting that when a woman is unhappy in her marriage or unable to perform the prescribed wifely roles, it is better for her to just remain single. In Stephen's case, however, the story plays out differently. The other marriages discussed at this point have featured middle or upper class people wishing to be rid of undesirable spouses; while they are not allowed divorce, the more sympathetic spouse is freed from the marriage by the death of the other spouse. But in Stephen's case, Stephen is the one to die rather than his immoral wife. Stephen's working class marriage ends in tragedy rather than

resolution towards a happier ending. Maybe because of his status as a lower class individual, Stephen's story not only denies him freedom through divorce, but it also denies him any form of freedom in life through the death of his terrible wife.

Divorce Denied in *Diana of the Crossways*

In George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways*, Victorian marriage is again depicted as imprisonment, and escape from these marriages is seen as the hope of freedom, a dynamic that has been present in both *Jane Eyre* and *Hard Times.* Just like Louisa in *Hard Times*, Diana in *Diana of the Crossways* knowingly enters a loveless marriage and experiences abject misery in that self-imposed prison, no matter how rational her reason for entering said marriage; like Louisa, Diana longs for the freedom that escape from this marriage offers. The less-than-happy couple featured in *Diana of the Crossways*, modeled on the real-life marriage of Caroline Norton, displays what happens when divorce is desired and attempted but is denied, leaving the pair in an uncomfortable and irreconcilable situation to which Victorian society still refuses to offer resolution.[1] As in the cases of each of the other couples discussed previously, the only legitimate method of terminating a miserable marriage offered by society in this period requires the death of a spouse.

Diana of the Crossways tells the story of a young woman named Diana Merion Warwick who enters a loveless marriage to gain security but soon finds herself at the center of scandal and gossip as her husband sues for divorce. Diana originally enters this marriage to Mr. Warwick because she grows weary of being forced to fend off the

[1] Gisela Argyle describes Caroline Norton's scandalous situation that serves as the basis for the story of *Diana of the Crossways*. In 1836, Norton's husband sued Lord Melbourne, the prime minister at the time, for "criminal conversation," or adultery with Caroline. The suit failed, but Caroline's reputation was ruined; in addition, the state of married women in the period led to her being denied access to her children and losing to her husband any earnings she gained from her writing career (Argyle 981-982). These injustices done to her strictly on the basis of being a woman propelled her to become a vocal advocate for women's rights. Timothy Carens explains Caroline Norton's influence on the work of Victorian feminists, beginning work to better distribute power within marriage that eventually led to a series of Acts that slowly increased individual rights of women, such as the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 and the Infant Custody Acts of 1873 and 1886 (Carens 175).

unwanted advances of men, accepting the hand of a man she knows she does not love in order to gain the protection that a marriage could provide. Throughout her story, Diana is shown to be an intelligent and well-spoken woman, interested in matters of politics and society; an uncommonly outspoken Victorian woman, Diana engages in friendships with politicians with whom she can converse freely about these topics that so interest her, and her only female friend is an older woman named Lady Emma Dunstane. Because of Diana's close friendship with a high government official named Lord Dannisburgh, Diana's husband grows suspicious that she has committed adultery and files a process for divorce against her, believing that he has sufficient evidence to do so. His suit fails, leaving the couple married but separated; however, Diana is actually disappointed that the divorce does not succeed and has no inclination to make amends with Mr. Warwick. Attempting to sustain herself through writing, Diana lives mostly independently and develops other relationships with politically minded men that often verge on scandal. Mr. Warwick eventually dies, leaving Diana finally free from her marriage, but she does not enjoy this independence for long and remarries soon after the death of her first husband. This remarriage has better prospects than the first marriage; she marries Thomas Redworth, who has been in love with her throughout the story and has saved her multiple times from poor decisions that would have led to further scandal. Diana's story is one in which societal expectations clash with personal desires, leaving Diana in frequently unfortunate circumstances that deny her wishes for freedom; nevertheless, the ending of her story features a fairly conventional resolution through the enactment of a more satisfactory marriage than her previous one.

Like Louisa Gradgrind, Diana Warwick is not a typical Victorian woman; instead, she is a character who seems to redefine the image of a woman in nineteenth-century England. Diana, while immensely beautiful, is also outspoken, intelligent, witty, and intimidating to men, traditionally masculine traits which make her stand out from the typical woman of this period.[2] From the first mention of Diana Merion Warwick, this woman is depicted as standing out in almost every manner imaginable, with Meredith's "diarists" from whom the narrator gathers the information on which the story is based apparently being amazed at the "unusual combination" of wit and beauty found in her (Meredith 1). Her exceptional beauty is noted almost incessantly, and in combination with her cleverness, wit, and charm, Diana is clearly seen to be no ordinary woman.[3] Each characteristic that Diana displays presents her as a singular individual, standing out from the feminine masses of the Victorian period. Every aspect of her character and element of her outspoken individuality present her to be a woman who values autonomy, a value that may not fit into the wider culture but one to which she initially clings and always desires.[4] The brief portion of the novel in which Diana remains single presents the image of a woman who seems unlikely to settle for the common cultural ideals of

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[2] In an article discussing the necessity of the first chapter of *Diana of the Crossways*, a chapter which in actuality serves as a preface to the rest of the story, Gayla McGlamery presents George Meredith as a progressive thinker who was one of the earliest Victorian authors to support feminism (476). McGlamery argues that Meredith depicts Diana as a woman who "behaves unconventionally" for an early- to mid-nineteenth century woman, and when one of his "diarists" comments on the "unusual combination" of wit and beauty found in her, Meredith's narrator appears to take offense at "the implication that beauty and wit are rarely found together in women" (477). Going out of his way from the very first pages of the novel to present this woman as disconnected from the stereotypical feminine ideal, Meredith sets up an understanding that Diana does not, and an anticipation that she will never, fit in with the status quo.

[3] Furthering this idea of her divergence from the norm, Elizabeth J. Deis states that Diana is "an orphan, a foreigner, and strangest of all, a witty, intelligent, self-reliant young woman" who "does not fit any of the proper social roles" and is "at odds with the social system" (19).

[4] Placed against the backdrop of a Victorian construction of women that Brendan Fleming describes as "irrational, emotional, [and] incapable of self-discipline," dependent on and subservient to masculine control, Diana's fierce independence and memorable discourse in society is a significant divergence from the norm (41).

matrimony of the Victorian period; she seems far too independent and intelligent to agree to a system that is frequently depicted as an appropriation of women's individuality as her identity is consumed by her husband's. In fact, while still in her days of singleness, Diana vocally speaks against the very institution of marriage, declaring that marriage would be an unnecessary burden in her own life, and she spends a large majority of this novel either silently or vocally desiring her own individual freedom, a desire that frequently clashes with the norms of her culture as represented by situations and other characters in the novel.

The pervasive description of marriage in this novel represents it in terms of bondage, with Diana persisting in referring to marriage in these terms at all stages of her own marriage, before, after, and during. Early in Diana's story, her good friend Lady Dunstane's fears that Diana has fallen in love with Thomas Redworth are put to rest by Diana's declared desire for freedom: "May I be heart-free for another ten years!" (Meredith 20). Letters exchanged between Diana and Lady Dunstane in reference to this notion of Diana marrying profess the express opinion that a husband to Diana would be a "foreign animal" and a mistake at this point in her life (22). The idea of a husband brings to Diana's mind images of captivity and oppression: "…a husband…is a discordant note. He contracts the ethereal world, deadens radiancy. He is gross fact, a leash, a muzzle, harness, a hood; whatever is detestable to the free limbs and senses" (22). Each of these analogies used in reference to a husband are images that connote restraint or subjection, implying that this is the way in which Diana views marriage, as a constricting hindrance. Nothing about marriage seems appealing to her at this point in her life. She sees it only through the lens of restriction and declares that a convent would be more welcome. She

thinks about freedom, she talks about freedom, and throughout the narrative, she behaves in ways that display her deep desire for freedom.

However, despite her bold statements against marriage while single and her plethora of mold-breaking characteristics, Diana cannot completely cut herself off from the predominant Victorian ideologies about men, women, and marriage that confine women to the prison of marriage. After seeing Diana as a strong and mostly independent woman in the beginning of the story, establishing her as an individual, and hearing her enjoyment for participating in activities outside of the feminine norm (such as debating politics), Diana's quick fall into the conventional setup of marriage, not once, but twice, makes one wonder if it is even possible to ever truly break free of societal expectations or to break out of the prison that marriage is described to be. Timothy Carens's discussion of the metaphoric links between Diana and Ireland in the nineteenth century explores the contrast between Meredith's seemingly progressive support of female (as well as colonial Irish) independence and his subordination of women (and Ireland) to "patriarchal government"; despite the hopeful beginning that presents this female character as self-sufficient, this counter-cultural attitude cannot be sustained for long and must be brought back under patriarchal supervision (171).

From the beginning of Diana's marriage to Mr. Warwick, the changes that this marriage affect in Diana reveals their marriage to be imprisoning in the sense that Diana not only loses her freedom but also must appear subservient to her new husband. Lady Emma Dunstane's close scrutiny of both Mr. Warwick and Diana during her first encounter with the newly married couple reveals the alterations marriage has made in Diana's behavior from the strong independence she had once embraced. In this scene,

Diana is described as having "played second to him; subserviently, fondly; she quite submerged herself, content to be dull if he might shine" (Meredith 29). Strongly reminiscent of Victorian ideals of marriage, this description of Diana presents her as the perfect Victorian wife, allowing her personality to be covered by her husband's; for a woman who had been so independent and had shone so brightly in her own merit, this description of Diana seems to display a completely different woman. When Diana marries Mr. Warwick, it seems that she almost instantly becomes the quiet, doting wife, singing the praises of her husband while she gets used to standing in his shadow. As Robert S. Baker says, Diana's mind "undergoes a gradual change" that takes a sad turn, as she "submits to the promptings of a latent desire to repress her natural impulses," a repression that her society would view as proper within a marriage; her natural vivacity is dampened, but this apparent lining up with the values of her society is "accompanied by an elaborate pattern of prison imagery" that strongly identifies this shift with confinement and a loss of freedom (67). For someone who has been so accustomed to being praised and admired by all around her, Diana quickly dons the "mask, in the natural manner of women trying to make the best of their choice; and she [Lady Dunstane] excused her poor Tony [Diana] for the artful presentation of him at her own cost" (Meredith 29). Immediately after her marriage, she assumes the role of making her husband look good in society, presenting the image of a submissive and content wife in an attempt to make anyone watching believe that this marriage is good, even at great cost to her own happiness. Marriage subdues Diana, making her strong agency seen in the beginning of the story disappear as she is placed under her husband's authority, dimming her participation in society as that freedom is taken away.

As the story moves into the stage of their marriage in which Diana and Mr. Warwick are undergoing the process of seeking divorce, Diana simultaneously reveals how dark and intense a prison she sees her marriage to be and how desperately she wishes to be free from it. Diana's interior monologue after her friends attempt to convince her to fight against her husband's suit is filled with a burgeoning understanding of the hypocrisy of the world around her, a world that presents double standards for men and women, a world that expects certain behavior, even when performing those behaviors means putting on an act. Diana's growing insight into her society prompts a series of statements lamenting and rejecting her society's presentation of proper behavior that confines women to unavoidable imprisonment in marriage. While reflecting on her own miserable marriage, Diana's mind "dashed in revolt at the laws of the world when she thought of the forces, natural and social, urging young women to marry and be bound to the end" (Meredith 47). With the way her marriage turns out, Diana can only see marriage in terms of bondage, almost angrily expressing her disdain for the "laws of the world" that perpetually push young women into this bondage and deny them freedom. Diana's outlook on the world in this moment is bitter at the situation in which women are propelled by the societal expectation to marry and are held captive by the further expectation that they remain in the domestic sphere. The battle which Diana is fighting in this story is revealed through this chapter to be bigger than that of a simple jealous and suspicious husband not trusting his wife; this is a matter of the social state of women in Victorian England and their fight to be in command of their own lives. According to Gisela Argyle, George Meredith thought that "the condition of women in a society was symptomatic of its level of civilization" (975). This idea places the condition of women

to be of utmost importance, an idea that can be seen in Diana's persistent rebellion against the state of women in her society and overwhelming desire to gain freedom that is denied her.

Because of her prevailing view of marriage in terms of bondage, Diana desperately desires the opportunity to regain the freedom that her marriage stole from her. When her friends attempt to advise Diana to stay and make a stand against Mr. Warwick, Diana replies, "'He has commenced. Let him carry it out'…Her desperation could have added the cry—And give me freedom! That was the secret in her heart. She had struck on the hope for the detested yoke to be broken at any cost" (Meredith 45). Referring to her marriage as "the detested yoke," Diana's language paints the picture of two animals tethered together, with one constantly pulling against the other and never able to break free. Aloud, Diana declares to have no intention of meeting her husband's charges, claiming to want nothing but her friends' faith in her. Within, her entire being is screaming for release; she wants nothing more desperately than to regain her freedom from this awful marriage. In the first chapter of the entire novel that is presented in Diana's mind, Diana wrestles with the conflict between her friends' imploring her to stay and fight and her burning desire to leave the country and let the process run its course, allowing her to reclaim her freedom. Her thoughts are filled with this insatiable desire; the word "freedom" is repeated over and over. She thinks about the joy of having it, she cries it aloud, and she reflects on the risks of not achieving it if she does as her friends ask. She reflects on her "bitter marriage, joyless in all its chapters…imprisonment"; she declares that she would excuse her husband of all his wrongs, even "down to his last madness, if only the bonds were broken" (Meredith 46). Diana "yearns for a freedom 'the

world' will not grant to women in her lifetime," and despite her occasionally foolish or ill-advised actions, she wants nothing more than the ability to chase and claim that freedom (McGlamery 480).

Not all marriages in *Diana of the Crossways* are miserable, particularly Diana's happy remarriage at the conclusion of the story; therefore, the novel indicates that Diana's marriage to Mr. Warwick is so terrible because it is loveless from the outset. Diana only marries him because she thinks he will protect her. Following a powerful reminder that female independence does not mean security from the unwanted advances of men, even those like Sir Lukin Dunstane who are already married themselves, Diana forms a plan to welcome the first opportunity for marriage to cross her path, if for nothing other than the hope of protection from further unwanted encounters with men. As Elizabeth J. Deis says, "…Diana carries out her plan as quickly as possible, allowing the most readily available, least sexually threatening bachelor she knows, Augustus Warwick, to woo and wed her" (19). Her experiences with men like Sir Lukin have created an aversion to sexuality in her mind, pushing her to seek the "least sexually threatening" man she can find; after all, "What she has seen thus far of manly passion understandably holds no attraction" (McGlamery 480). So she seeks the most dispassionate man she can find and agrees to marry him, setting the stage for an almost utilitarian marriage with its sole purpose for her to gain security; similar to the sterile and emotionless marriage of Louisa Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby, such a beginning that is necessarily devoid of love or any semblance of affection does not bode well for a happy marriage on either side.

Every aspect of the early stages of Diana's engagement and subsequent marriage to Mr. Warwick indicates that this was begun as a loveless marriage, and the more details the narrative reveals about this relationship, the more certain the reader becomes of the inevitability of the miserable marriage that is to come. When Lady Emma Dunstane learns that Diana is suddenly engaged, the tone and substance of the letter bearing the news in conjunction with Emma's uncertain and almost mournful reaction do not set up a very hopeful outlook for this coming marriage. The future spouse had briefly been mentioned by Diana before the encounter with Sir Lukin as the spoiled nephew of the tenants of the Crossways, Diana's family home, an unflattering description of a "gentlemanly official…a barrister who did not practise: in nothing the man for Diana" (Meredith 21). In a brief letter to Emma that seems to focus more on the hope of living at the Crossways again than any expression of joy at the engagement, Diana's choice in spouse gives Emma understandable cause for alarm and grief:

> Not a word of the lover about to be decorated with the title of husband. No confession of love, nor a single supplicating word to her friend, in excuse for the abrupt decision to so grave a step. Her previous description of, him, as a 'gentlemanly official' in his appearance, conjured him up most distastefully. True, she might have made a more lamentable choice; a silly lordling, or a hero of scandals; but if a gentlemanly official was of stabler mould, he failed to harmonize quite so well with the idea of a creature like Tony [Diana]. (Meredith 26)

Emma reads nothing of love in Diana's choice, nothing that would explain her quick change of heart about marriage in general. While conceding that Diana could have made

a worse choice, that Warwick may be decent and stable, Emma fears that the image created from her previous descriptions of the man who will soon be her husband do not match up with an intelligent and passionate beauty like Diana. Emma knows immediately from Diana's brief and hastily written letter that this will be a loveless marriage, that Diana has apparently allowed a wish "to be settled" at the Crossways to overcome her previous scorn of such marriages of convenience that are devoid of love (Meredith 27). Diana does not explain her reasons for such a rapid reversal of ideals, nor does Emma understand what could push Diana to action that bears such "a sound of desperation," but Diana's coming nuptials are clearly not expected to be the start of a long and joyous marriage (Meredith 27). Unknown to Emma, though, is Diana's reason for this choice, a reason that does not necessarily carry the expectation of a long and happy marriage. Diana accepts Warwick because of what McGlamery calls his "emptiness and bland gentlemanly appearance" (480). To Diana, Warwick does not present the threat that other men have posed to her, and in this time following her encounter with Sir Lukin, the reader senses that, almost any man would have worked to provide Diana the shelter and protection from "predatory men" that she seeks, with no thought of love or desire entering her mind (McGlamery 480). She enters this marriage in the hopes of escaping the problems of being single, but she does not seem to consider the consequences of giving up her highly prized freedom and independence.

After seeing Diana and Mr. Warwick together, Emma has no shortage of incompatibilities apparent between Diana and Mr. Warwick, the most condemning of which is his coldness and dispassionate nature. Despite the seemingly favorable initial descriptions of him, Emma's first impression on meeting Warwick is not especially

favorable, noting, in addition to his ordinariness and fairly narrow view of the world, a certain coldness about him: “The lips opened to smile, the teeth were faultless; an effect was produced, if a cold one—the colder for the unparticipating northern eyes; eyes of that half cloud and blue, which make a kind of hueless grey, and are chiefly striking in an authoritative stage” (Meredith 29). Contributing to Emma’s less than satisfied impression of Mr. Warwick, already seeing him as a man of unremarkable character, his cold smile not reaching his cold eyes gives an impression of authority, but indicates that he lacks compassion, likely confirming the idea that this marriage is without any semblance of love. Emma’s final verdict on this first impression is telling: “Her first and her final impression likened him to a house locked up and empty: a London house conventionally furnished and decorated by the upholsterer, and empty of inhabitants…both human and spiritual were wanting. The mind contemplating him became reflectively stagnant” (Meredith 29). Emma’s analogy here shows the man to be completely dissimilar to Diana, being “empty” and conventional when Diana has always been full of life and completely *un*conventional, “idle” when “Diana had ambition” and “despised and dreaded idleness in men” (Meredith 29). Even worse, Emma indicates that his emptiness impacts those around him, asserting that the “mind contemplating him became reflectively stagnant,” meaning that his stagnant mind and idleness are replicated in the individual who even thinks about him too much, an idea that does not signify hope for Diana in this relationship.

With such an unpromising start to their marriage and Diana’s persistent view of marriage in terms of imprisonment, either Diana or Mr. Warwick were inevitably going to seek a way out; yet as in the cases of Rochester and Bertha, Stephen and his wife, and

Louisa and Bounderby, alternative methods are attempted, with this story featuring an actual attempt at divorce, but the only real escape still comes with the death of one member of the couple. Between the previously mentioned discrepancies in their characters and the problems the two face in the early stages of their marriage, separation and scandal soon follows. Disagreements between the couple in addition to the persistent lack of love between them takes a toll on the marriage, especially for Diana, who suffers more from this marriage that quickly becomes a misery than does her husband, because for a woman, marriage closes doors, while for a man it opens them. Brilliantly articulating both the position of women in Victorian society and her own personal situation, Diana writes: "We women are the verbs passive of the alliance; we have to learn, and if we take to activity, with the best intentions, we conjugate a frightful disturbance. We are to run on lines, like the steam-trains, or we come to no station, dash to fragments. I have the misfortune to know I was born an active. I take my chance" (Meredith 31). This passage illustrates Diana's understanding of the perils of going against the expectations of society, of refusing to "run on lines" and do as the status quo instructs. By saying that she knows she was "born an active," Diana expresses the knowledge that being the type of woman and wife that her society expects her to be is not in her nature; like Louisa, Diana is not the kind of woman that a man like her husband would want, the kind of woman who would consistently lose her identity in his. Even knowing the consequences of refusing to run on the line set out for her, she will "take [her] chance" and risk her actions creating a "frightful disturbance" in society. This "disturbance" will turn out being her relationship with Lord Dannisburgh and the ensuing

divorce scandal, a situation that will threaten to ruin her reputation, even as it offers her the possibility of regaining her freedom.

Diana's reaction to flee the country when her husband begins the process of seeking a divorce implies that as horrible as a marriage may be, a divorce process can be just as horrible. Once the gossip about Lord Dannisburgh and Diana becomes overwhelmingly widespread, Mr. Warwick "serve[s] her with a process," meaning that he begins a suit for divorce, even though Diana says that he has "no cause without suborning witnesses" (Meredith 34). Diana initially plans to run away, not from the shame of misconduct or the fear of Mr. Warwick's suit being victorious, but because she declares that she "cannot face the world," with all its suspicion and constant watchfulness (34). According to McGlamery, "Diana's tempting beauty only offers [the world] evidence that the evil rumors about her are true. Diana's beauty, cleverness, and unconventionality merely exacerbate the world's willingness to believe the worst of her" (477). The public does not need the truth and would likely not believe the truth even if it were declared; her difference from society places her in a pre-existing and perpetual place of suspicion, with any divergence from societal norms pushing her closer and closer to the spotlight of scandal, the world around her waiting with bated breath for that fateful step of guilt. Staying in England and fighting for her good name, Diana believes that she would have to be constantly playing the part of an actress, ensuring that she did not present an image of guilt to the world; leaving for her sounds better than staying to become a "mewing and courtseying simulacrum of a woman" (Meredith 35). Her marriage already took her freedom; she believes this process will take away her very being.

Although this novel features a rare actual attempt at divorce, the attempt is not successful. In *Hard Times,* Stephen cannot afford a divorce; in *Diana of the Crossways,* their divorce suit is rejected, leaving the spouses opposed and without a resolution to their conflict. Despite Diana's secret desire for her husband's case to succeed, Mr. Warwick does not seem to have sufficient evidence for the court to rule in his favor; he could not prove his charge because no adultery had actually taken place, so the case fails and is finally over. For Diana's friends, this is great news: her reputation can potentially be restored. For Diana, this means that she has no choice but to stay married to Mr. Warwick; she will not go back to him, even when presented with several opportunities and petitions by various characters. But she is still not free. Once this case is over, there is no other mention of divorce as a possibility. Diana and Mr. Warwick are separated, and Diana seeks to live as independently as possible for a woman in her position. She begins writing to sustain herself and spends time visiting various places with friends. Rumors occasionally fly about potential reconciliation with Mr. Warwick, but Diana will hear nothing of such a thing; she has no desire whatsoever to be reconciled to him, and even begins to grow close to another man named Percy Dacier, although the relationship never leads to full adultery and is never consummated. Despite her best efforts, Diana's life for several years following the failed divorce suit is a roller coaster of happiness followed by scandal followed by misery. She verges on crossing the line a time or two, but is restrained by circumstances and good friends; however, had Diana crossed that line her husband might have had actual cause and evidence to present for a divorce suit.

Circumstances ultimately free Diana from her marriage, but not through a legal divorce as was initially hoped; rather, she is given her freedom through Mr. Warwick's

eventual death. He had been mortally sick for a long time, but he dies in an accident in the street instead, strangely reminiscent of Mr. Bounderby's death from a fit in the street. Reflecting what we've seen in *Jane Eyre* and *Hard Times*, the only way to escape a terrible marriage is for your spouse to die. Diana finally gains the liberation she has been desperately desiring for so long through the death of her own spouse. After speaking so longingly of freedom throughout her story, she is finally able to speak of her situation as "free and safe" in the period after her husband's death (Meredith 184). Diana is briefly returned to that state of blissful freedom that she enjoyed in her single days before men tainted and restrained that freedom, spending her time as she pleases "untroubled by the presence of a man," as Diana puts it (177).

However, this sense of freedom is not allowed to last very long; in the same time period, Diana speaks of the plans of friends like Emma and Redworth to "rob her of dear liberty" (183) and "threatening her freedom" (184) by their conventional hopes of seeing her remarried to Redworth. In Redworth's mind he acknowledges the return of her freedom, just with different hopes attached to this freedom: "…now Diana Warwick stood free…He could not choose but to think of her. She was free" (172). To Redworth, a free Diana is one who is once again available for marriage to him. Emma's statements sound as though she is convinced that now Diana has her freedom again, she will keep it, saying, "Now that her jewel is restored to her, she is not the person to throw it away, be sure" (166), and warning Redworth that "Any menace to her precious liberty makes her prickly" (191). After desiring the return of this "jewel" of freedom for so long, Emma's conviction that Diana will hold on to this treasure for dear life seems natural, yet her apparent understanding of Diana's deep desire to maintain this long awaited freedom

does not protect Diana from efforts to again take this freedom from her. Eventually, Diana gives in to Emma's pressuring and Redworth's steadfast love, still calling marriage "slavery," but acquiescing to the desires of others to see her in a happier marriage (196). Reluctant but resigned, Diana marries Redworth with an attitude almost like obligation, but as ambiguous as the ending of the story seems to be regarding her true happiness, Diana and Redworth are described as exemplifying a "perfect mating" (Meredith 202). This view of Diana's second marriage, at least in Emma's eyes, presents the pair as well matched and indicates a strong hope of a happier remarriage for Diana.

In the end of the story, Diana has survived all of the hardships and scandals in which she has been entangled. She has walked through fire multiple times and come out on the other side in one piece. Her husband has died, giving her the freedom for which she has so long desired and been denied. The denial of divorce by the Court keeps her in a form of bondage for a long time, and she speaks of marriage in those terms (imprisonment, bondage, chains, etc.). But despite this actualization of what had seemed to encapsulate all of her hopes and dreams, Diana does not hold on to her new-found freedom very tightly. She marries again, and as in the case of Mr. Rochester's second marriage, the second chance at matrimony depicts a hopeful union formed under promising circumstances. Redworth, the man she remarries, seems to potentially be a better match than her first husband, especially since Redworth has been presented as being in love with her from the beginning of the story and has been her saving grace on multiple occasions. However, the fact that Diana is not allowed to maintain her freedom and singleness for very long seems to imply that women cannot be allowed that form of freedom for any extended period of time. The end of a marriage is not necessarily

presented as a good thing, even though it is presented as what she wants more than anything. Her words look on it as good and desirable, whether the marriage was to end through divorce or otherwise, but the action of the story indicates that divorce is still not an acceptable solution, especially for a woman. When her marriage is finally ended by her husband's death, she is not allowed to be on her own for long, even though this is the entire reason she wanted to get out of her marriage in the first place. She must be remarried, maybe because that is seen as what women do, their purpose in life, perhaps. Whatever the reason for the necessity of marriage, Diana's storyline reflects a societal distrust of independent women; women are not allowed to stand on their own, no matter how intelligent and capable these women may be.

Conclusion

No matter the circumstances that lead a character to desire divorce, no matter the character's gender, no matter the character's social or economic status, divorce is either not given as an option or is never actually granted and carried to completion in these instances of Victorian literature. While some mention of divorce laws are mentioned in these books occasionally, the majority of the characters and narratives seem to focus on dealing with the bad marriage in some way, or dealing with a separation that is still binding. In these novels, the only acceptable way to escape marriage—a method that allows for remarriage and carries no stigma or shame—is the death of a spouse. In all cases except one, the story ends with the "bad spouse" dead and the "good spouse" free to do as desired. In some cases, the death at the end of the tale allows the "good spouse" to pursue whatever hope the marriage had stolen from them, whether that involves remarriage, as in the case of Mr. Rochester, or simple freedom, as in the case of Louisa Gradgrind. In other cases, the death brings release, but not the desired end that the "good spouse" would have wished. In Stephen Blackpool's case, the release from his marriage that he sought comes in his own death, rather than that of his wife; he receives not only freedom from this immoral wife, but also freedom from the hardships of his life. He may not be allowed to marry Rachael as he would have wished, but he is freed from the degradations associated with his marriage. Diana similarly does not end her story with the achievement of every hope she had cherished in the story. Diana desires freedom above all else; she spends almost the entirety of the novel seeking freedom that her marriage took away from her. And she seems to initially gain that freedom back in the death of her husband, but this short-lived freedom is cut off by her swift remarriage to Thomas

Redworth, a most likely better husband for her than Mr. Warwick, but she has fallen back into the bondage of marriage and given up her freedom once again.

Each of these individuals seeks divorce for different reasons, with the men wanting freedom from their immoral wives and the ability to marry the morally upstanding women who enter their lives, and the women simply seeking freedom from their indifferent and detestable husbands. These characters are generally presented as some of the most sympathetic characters in their tales, even in the midst of their scandalous desires for divorce. But this sympathy is not enough to convince the surrounding society to remove their judgmental eyes and allow a world in which men and women can be released from terrible situations and miserable marriages in some way less drastic than death. But, as McGlamery says of the world in which George Meredith's Diana lives, "Meredith cannot change the world Diana inhabits, nor can he imagine a circumstance in which she might educate, defend, and provide for herself independently, given the world as it was in the 1840s, or even the 1880s when he was writing" (486). These authors are not writing fantasy novels; their stories are based, at least partly, in reality, which confines their narratives to a world in which divorce is simply not accepted. Their situations may create sympathy and their reasons may even seem justified, but making a solution other than "'til death do us part" an option would require a greater shift in the fabric of nineteenth-century British society than could have ever been possible in such a short time-span.

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