DISCOURSE AND DETECTION:
GENDERED READINGS OF SCIENTIFIC AND LEGAL EVIDENCE
IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

DISSERTATION

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By
Robi R. Rhodes, B.A., M.A.

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Dissertation Committee:
Professor Clare Simmons, Adviser
Professor Marlene Longenecker
Professor Nancy Johnson
Professor David Horn

Approved by

Adviser
English Graduate Program
ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines the link between representations of gender professionalization in the Victorian novel and changing methodologies in the field of forensic science. Using Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1848), Wilkie Collins’s *The Law and the Lady* (1875), and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), I examine how female investigators go about locating new evidence and developing new ways of interpreting it to produce socially-productive information. In particular, the dissertation focuses on three key issues: First, women in the Victorian novel demonstrate the problems with existing professional methodologies not by rejecting them entirely, but rather by subtly modifying them and by demonstrating the inherent instability of interpretive methods understood as stable by male professionals. I argue that female investigators in the Victorian novel employ the traditional methods of investigation and argumentation that such fields as science, medicine, and law use, integrating them into more subjective approaches such as memory and intuition to generate new models of narrative construction for forensic investigation. Secondly, women are the objects of gender expectations within the novels and must find ways of operating within these expectations as they engage in the act of detection. Thirdly, the success of female investigators does not rest with their ability to produce useful information alone, but rather...
determined by the extent to which their new methods are accepted by and adopted by male professionals. The central claim that emerges from these issues is that women gain agency and authority within the novel not by rejecting male professional authority, but rather by working within existing gender expectations.
In loving memory of my Papa
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VITA

December 29, 1979………………………Born – Chickasha, Oklahoma

2002…………………………………………B.A. English, Oklahoma State University

2004…………………………………………M.A. English, The Ohio State University

2004-present………………………………Graduate Teaching Associate and Graduate Fellow, The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: English Literature
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INTRODUCTION

When I arrived on the Indiana University campus in October 2007, my original goal was to conduct research at The Kinsey Institute and to locate photographs and documents that would give me some impression of women’s roles within the family in Victorian England. I found several pieces of evidence that assisted me in understanding how women were represented in portrayals of family life. But idle curiosity quickly turned my attention elsewhere. Although it was not part of my original plan, I decided to walk across campus to the Lilly Library to examine the rare books collection. The current exhibit on timepieces and navigation instruments was fascinating, but the “Games and Puzzles Room” immediately drew my attention, as I did not expect that a space devoted to the display of texts would feature this kind of material culture. Whether it is because I have performed endless readings of Dracula recently or because my general interests gravitate to the macabre, one of the first games I noticed took the form of a small casket and was titled “Rest in Peace.” The attending display card informed me that this was a popular game in Victorian England in which players would solve a series of “clues” written on slips of paper that pertained to a murder investigation. The player who correctly solved the clues would have the honor of unlocking the casket to reveal the body or object that was missing from the investigation.
Finding this game delighted me, as I had hoped to demonstrate that the idea of clues and detection were a part of Victorian popular culture. While the vast amount of detective fiction circulating during the period is in itself evidence of this, “Rest in Peace” suggested that people were not content merely to read representations of cases, but had some interest in engaging in the practices of detection themselves. Considering that the Victorian concept of progress was intimately related to the increased production of new technologies and products for consumption, I found it particularly interesting that the game seemed to focus on abstract clues to guide the players. While the clues written on the slips of paper may have referred to physical evidence (weapons, etc.), the idea of “progress” in the game is premised on the cognitive associations that the players make between the clues and how they employ them in solving the case. In a culture consumed by its interest in material objects, why would Victorian players take such an interest in a game that emphasized clues?

The Proliferation of Details

If “clues” are understood as markers that help the observer to sort through information to distinguish what is important or relevant, then it is little wonder that the Victorians were fascinated with them. The Victorian period witnessed a boom in the amount of information available to the public in the form of new products, species, texts, and even diseases. The deluge of details that attended such vast amounts of information affected every level of society, from the practicing physician to the household wife. This is in part due to the fact that this new information was associated with “progress.” Just as the famous detective Sherlock Holmes solves his cases with better ease as he accumulates “data,” the Victorians associated this influx of new information with an expansion in their
field of vision. Natural scientists such as Charles Darwin understood the collection of new plant and animal specimens as a means of forming a more comprehensive understanding of the natural world: “Let it be borne in mind how infinitely complex and close-fitting are the mutual relations of all organic beings to each other and to their physical conditions of life” (The Origin of Species 101). Collecting a broad range of species helped Darwin to demonstrate these mutual relations and to imagine how the environment constructed the selection of species. One might imagine that increasing the number of specimens, and hence that data that one must consider, would actually prevent the articulation of a theory. Darwin, however, noticed similarities between species and these similarities, rather than the innumerable differences between them, became the focus of his investigations.¹

It is not surprising that the influx of information and hence the proliferation of details affected professional fields. What is more interesting, however, is that the person most subject to these details was the very person who was excluded from professional fields of analysis: the Victorian housewife. As the middle class had access to disposable income, and the availability of new products and technologies developed for the household burgeoned, middle class housewives were at pains to reevaluate how to manage their homes. It must be understood, though, that the unending march of daily “details” was already understood as a part of the Victorian wife’s responsibilities. In fact, it was the relegation of “details” to women that, at least in part, awarded them the distinction of being the “virtuous” counterpart within the institution of marriage: “Housework was ideal for women, as its unending, nonlinear nature gave it a more virtuous air than something that was focused and could be achieved and have a result”
(Flanders 16). The work of men was understood as linear in nature in that a man had to achieve specific goals with defined tasks involved in achieving that end. In short, he had to be ambitious. The wife, however, was expected to be subsumed in the world of details that attend domestic life. One moment she may be choosing the menu for dinner, the next she may be darning clothing for her children, the next perhaps writing correspondence to a relative or returning a visit to a neighbor. As her pursuits were so varied and repetitive, with no one activity having any particular causal connection with the next, her position was virtuous in that it eluded the vulgar ambition and linearity required of men in the world. Thus, there was nothing inherently threatening about the fact that women were focused on details, as this was necessary for the management of her home.²

The availability of new products and technologies developed for the household, however, dramatically multiplied the details that the Victorian wife had to sort through and choose from. Lori Loeb notes the proliferation in the number products for the home advertised to female audiences:

They found advertisements for the latest fashions, for companies that could furnish a house “of any magnitude” in less than a week, for cocoas, beef extracts, and lemonades. They read advertisements that promised to lessen household labor with sewing machines, manglers, and knife cleaners. They found illustrations for trusses, respirators, and artificial limbs; advertisements for myriad pills, tonics, and syrups. They were tempted by advertisements for lavender colognes, almond skin creams, and walnut hair dyes; by Swiss clocks, Brussels carpets, and Venetian blinds. (5-6)

This broad range of products invited the housewife to re-envision every aspect of her household. The new cooking products offered new and convenient methods for speeding up the process of meal preparation. If, for example, the wife selected the beef extracts
from Loeb’s list of products, then she or her servants were no longer at pains to produce and store beef stock. The new sewing machines and knife cleaners would speed up the process of making clothing and cleaning up after meals. The available furniture and carpets allowed her to alter the aesthetic appearance and appeal of her home, while the various perfumes and creams enabled her to enhance her own charms. How, then, was the poor Victorian wife supposed to sort through this deluge of products and decide which ones were useful, necessary, or advantageous? The answer to this question also explains how consumption of detail moves from being an expected part of the wife’s existence to a threat to domestic tranquility: the focus of the Victorian housewife shifted from the management of household details to the necessity of understanding how these details would be interpreted by their guests. The specific problems presented by this shift will become clearer with a comparison between the duties of the wife and those of her husband.

Male professionals, specifically coroners and investigative officers, were just as consumed with details as women were. However, their interpretation of details set them apart. Far from being occupied with the various and unrelated details that form a part of household management, male professionals were concerned with how details could be yoked together to form a concise and linear narrative of events. The inquests for the murder of Cecilia Aldridge at Finsbury, published in The Times of London in January 1870, demonstrate how observing physical details themselves became the key to solving cases within male professions. In the third of a series of inquests into the murder, Mr. George Yarrow performs a post mortem examination of Cecilia’s body, noting several
scratches and contusions, as well as the displacement of one eye. It is his assessment of
the injuries to the head, however, that proves most revealing:

The bones of the nose were fractured. From one of the wounds witness
removed several small pieces of green glass, such as that of an ordinary
wine bottle. He also discovered fragments of a resinous substance. On
the candlestick which was found in the kitchen at the hotel there was
found a small quantity of brain matter. This showed that the candlestick
had been used in striking the deceased on the head. . .The cause of death
was a fracture of the skull.

Observing the relationship between details becomes key in sorting through the case. The
objects become signifiers for the events that produced them. The brain matter on the
candlestick suggests that it had some contact with the victim’s body, and hence was quite
likely the murder weapon. The dislocation of part of the body onto an object suggests
their relationship. The reverse also proves true. The location of glass in the body
suggests the use of the glass bottle in inflicting the wounds. In short, the relationship
between details becomes a means of creating a narrative of events that admits no other
possible interpretation.

Victorian housewives sorted through the details presented to them in the form of
products in order to create a particular interpretation of their homes. The availability of
new products worked against prevailing Victorian ideal of the home as a sanctuary:
“Confronted with the pressures of evangelicalism, market capitalism, and rapid social
change, the home was practically deified. It became a sanctuary, a temple of virtue, ‘a
divine institution’” (Loeb 18). The introduction of new technologies and products into
the home presented a challenge to the desire for stasis in the home while the world
around it changed. As new products offered to change the face of the Victorian home,
the domestic space threatened to become a constantly changing signifier, a space that
invited multiple interpretations. Housewives were no longer only concerned with the
details of their daily lives; rather, they became concerned with how others would interpret
domestic space. Many women looked to economy manuals to help them decide what to
buy for their homes (Loeb 20); women were obliged to understand and replicate the
current tastes:

Taste was not something personal; instead it was something sanctioned by
society. Taste, as agreed upon by society, had moral value, and therefore
adherence to what was considered at any one time to be good taste was a
virtue, while ignoring the taste of the period was a sign of something
wrong indeed. (Flanders 18)

This presents something of a quandary in the world of male professionals, whose
narratives are understood as stable in that they rely on the relationship between
unchanging details in the form of physical evidence. The idea of “taste,” as the passage
suggests, varies with time and puts women in the position of constantly re-evaluating and
adjusting the details of the home in order to generate the appropriate response from
visitors. She must be careful that her Brussels rugs do not clash with her Venetian blinds
and that her lavender perfume does not offend the sensibility of her guests. In short,
male professionals strive to establish a relationship between details that will create a
stable narrative, whereas women strive to alter details to fit the prevailing understanding
of “taste” so that outsiders will think well of the family that inhabits the home.

**Dracula: A Case Study in the Problems of Observation and Classification**

It is precisely the fact that women are responsible for managing ever shifting
details and their unstable interpretation that makes them best able to demonstrate the
problems with how male-dominated professions interpret evidence. The Victorian novel
in particular becomes a forum in which women’s skill at managing details serves a
socially-productive purpose. Nowhere does this become clearer than in the detective novel. In Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, Mina Harker’s skills in interpreting details and creating a narrative from them depend on her modification of several traditional organizational principles for scientific inquiry. Her protectors, including Jonathan, Van Helsing, and Seward, have difficulty reaching beyond these practices and hence restrict the evidence that they locate and the means of interpreting it. Perhaps the most basic of these practices that the male characters constantly engage in is the seemingly simple act of classification. The process of categorizing and labeling new information is by nature a process of both placing limits and promoting universality. It places limits in that we identify the new object or concept only through a set of prescribed and sometimes rigid set of characteristics or principles. Categorization promotes universal ideas by encouraging a professional community, such as scientists or medical practitioners, to communicate about organisms, diseases, symptoms, and so on, based on accepted categories, making it unnecessary to articulate all of the particulars or details of a concept. The process thus has a number of practical and professional uses, but may also promote the exclusion of new and significant information about a concept or object because it does not fall within the list of recognized features for the concept. In short, the process that is meant to create an understanding of new, foreign, or unfamiliar concepts can inadvertently cause the systematic exclusion of evidence.

This tendency to leave out or ignore information is precisely the practice that Jonathan Harker engages in from his first journal entry in *Dracula*. Much of the information he elects to relay in his travel journal expresses an explicit desire to categorize the new sights, traditions, and customs he encounters on his journey to Castle
Dracula. For example, while he does eventually give detailed descriptions of the
different people he sees, his first impulse is not to describe his interactions with them, but
rather to give an account of the “four distinct nationalities” (28) in Transylvania. Before
giving his own account of the people, he first needs to establish the accepted and
predetermined categories to contextualize his own findings. He notes which part of the
country each of these nationalities—the Saxons, the Wallachs, the Magyars, and the
Szekelys—inhabits. This represents an attempt on Jonathan’s part to organize and
categorize information not only geographically, but in a broader sense visually. This is
confirmed by his disappointment when he can find no Ordnance Survey maps of the
country. The visual concept of a map, or at least the hint of geographic boundaries, gives
Jonathan a central concept and blueprint upon which to trace his own travels, the history
of the country, and any other details he chooses to record. Also significant in his
discussion of the nationalities is Jonathan’s observation that the Wallachs are “the
descendants of the Dacians” and that the Szekelys “claim to be descended from Attila and
the Huns” (28). He demonstrates a strong and persistent interest in determining from
whom the people of the country are descended and what their origins are. We see in this
e example a propensity that will place Jonathan in mental and physical danger a number of
times in the novel: desire to use individual “facts,” methodologies, and imagination to
produce a sense of comfort when he encounters unsettling new information. Jonathan
appears to understand history as something that is stable band based on dates, figures (he
notes that 13,000 people were killed at the battle of Bistritz), and physical space
(geography). He uses this understanding as a means of comforting himself when he notes
that the natives of Transylvania could easily be portrayed as “some old Oriental band of
brigands” (29). Jonathan notes in his journal that recording the descriptions of the people he meets in an orderly fashion temporarily relieves his feelings of disconcertedness and uncertainty in Count Dracula’s homeland.  

Categorizing causes Jonathan either to misinterpret or to entirely ignore information about Dracula. As Jonathan leaves the station, for example, the people whisper words in several languages that translate as “Satan,” “hell,” “witch,” and “vampire.” Although this is a case in which the ideas of several witnesses point in the same direction, Jonathan dismisses the information as a product of superstition and determines to ask for an explanation from the Count, whose rank and familiarity with the country would seem to make him an ideal authority. In order to find out the nature of his imprisonment and to plot an escape, Jonathan is forced to acknowledge the problem of categories. When a woman at the station gives him a crucifix, he initially dismisses it “as in some measure idolatrous” (31). This is hardly surprising considering Jonathan’s observation that “every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians” (28). It is thus easier to label the eccentricities of the locals as mere superstition, as doing otherwise would involve adopting a new basis for interpretation and compromising his job as a clerk.  

He later finds a source of comfort in the crucifix during his imprisonment at Castle Dracula, but cannot determine whether this comfort arises from some power in the object itself or from the memories that he assigns to it. But even acknowledging that the object may have some power in itself is a significant move for Jonathan, who up to this point has ignored the possibility of occult powers. Also, his other explanation for the crucifix’s power is that he may be assigning meaning to it through his memories. He is accepting the idea that understanding the crucifix is a
process of constructing meaning, not merely revealing it. This is important because Jonathan has given up attempting to identify the crucifix’s power based on a set of predetermined characteristics. He understands that its power emerges either from something that he cannot explain, or from his own act of narrative construction. Either way, he perceives its ability to defend him against the Count and uses it despite his inability to articulate the sources of its power. This is significant because Jonathan will have to rely on Mina’s speculations about where to find Dracula, which are based almost solely on Mina’s deductions and intuition, rather than on concrete facts. This early moment in the novel is an example of Jonathan’s ongoing struggle to trust in and accept alternative forms of evidence even if he cannot give an explanation for their validity through traditional forms of rational, scientific inquiry.  

David Glover notes that these moments in which “facts” are not available or not helpful “suggest that scientific objectivity is essentially a humanistic ideal [and] . . .seeks to bring nature under the full control of the human subject” (63). This ideal of objectivity becomes particularly complicated when paired with the act of categorizing because assigning a concept to a group depends on the ability of the observer to clearly note the features of the concept. Such a process becomes problematic for Jonathan because it seems as though the very nature of Transylvania conspires to confuse his senses. His sense of consistency and continuity are disrupted from the beginning as the trains are late and become increasingly so the farther east he travels. Even the land itself resists classification as “the growing twilight seemed to merge into one dark mistiness the gloom of the trees, oak, beech, and pine” (34). Three distinct trees that feature very different physical traits and that have different seasons of vitality merge in Jonathan’s
perceptions to produce a “peculiarly weird and solemn effect” (34). Anne McWhir notes that Jonathan must release the concept of objectivity because preserving categories, even what the characters perceive as the fundamental ones of “man” and “vampire,” relies on the “kind of power that seems quite inimical to order and peace and trains that run on time” (39). In order to preserve the categories that define them as different from Dracula, Jonathan and his companions must employ methods that challenge the authority of traditional classification.

That deriving meaning and taking action depend on nontraditional forms of interpretation is in part related to how Dracula himself consciously blurs categorical lines and uses Jonathan’s senses against him. For example, taking detailed notes about his meals and collecting recipes for Mina is one of the consistencies of Jonathan’s early journal entries. While he is Dracula’s guest, however, Jonathan’s usual patterns and labels fail him. The Count keeps him up all night talking of England so that “trapped in the terror of the castle, day and night [are] reversed” (Tropp 181). This disruption in Jonathan’s sleep patterns also confuses his previously consistent account of his meals. He stays up all night and eats between five and six o’clock in the morning, so he is unsure “whether to call it breakfast or dinner” (44). Such a small point of confusion would not have any great significance if it did not stand in contrast to Jonathan’s attempts up to this point to be clear, if not entirely prosaic in his descriptions. The Count also uses people’s perceptions against them when he wears Jonathan’s clothing so that he can send the false letters of Jonathan’s wellbeing to England and so “that any wickedness which he may do shall by the local people be attributed to [him]” (67). Hence perception becomes a means of manipulation rather than a way to derive valuable information.
A further complication to the act of classifying information within the novel is that often the most telling ideas are those that rely on observing what characteristics are absent.\(^{10}\) Jonathan first begins to suspect that the Count is a supernatural being when he can see Dracula over his shoulder, but sees no reflection in the mirror (50). If categorizing material depends on the ability to identify and articulate the prominent characteristics of new concepts or objects, then Jonathan must reach beyond this method because the features and habits of the Count that are expected but absent are often more revealing than those that are present.\(^{11}\) When Dracula destroys Jonathan’s mirror it is particularly significant in that he eliminates the only means Jonathan has for confirming his suspicions. Jonathan appears to think that the loss of the mirror is only a minor annoyance, making it more difficult to shave. The Count has, however, deprived Jonathan of a means of visibly placing himself and the Count in different categories. While he can and does come to the realization that Dracula is a supernatural being, the process of doing so presents a challenge to his mental stability. This is not surprising when one considers to what extent Jonathan has relied on visual observations up to this point. The mirror was also a means of self-identification, the loss of which forces Jonathan to depend on his written reflections. He becomes increasingly concerned with employing only “facts” and being prosaic to the end of establishing his credibility not only with future readers of his journal, but also with himself. This moment is particularly important later in the novel, as Jonathan desperately resists employing principles of exclusion. His training is such that he can only rely on positive evidence, which limits the scope of the investigation until Mina and Van Helsing help to corroborate his testimony.
Jonathan faces something of a dilemma since the world he is trapped in resists classification, and yet to employ interpretive methods that do not rely on this principle might be aligned with insanity. Dr. John Seward, a medical doctor and director of a mental institution, closely follows and records the sporadic behaviors of his patient Renfield. During a bout of “religious mania,” Renfield refuses to make a distinction between Seward and his attendant. Seward notes that recognizing categories is a part of any system, even religion: “The real God taketh heed lest a sparrow fall; but the God created from human vanity sees no difference between an eagle and a sparrow” (119).

The idea here is that there does exist a hierarchy of beings and that God is so aware of each part of this chain that he condescends to notice even when a sparrow, which is weaker and more numerous than the eagle, perishes. Renfield’s insanity prevents him from making such distinctions, so that all categories blur in light of his conviction that all beings are inferior to him. We also see this confusion of categories in the case of the crew of the Demeter, the ship that brings Dracula to England. Having performed an exhaustive search of the ship, the only things left unexamined are the boxes of earth. As these boxes have been labeled as “clay” (105), and do not appear to have any possible connection to the creature that is murdering his crew, the captain decides to ignore them. His first mate, whose erratic behavior and eventual suicide lead the captain to dismiss him as insane, is the only one who suspects that there may be a connection between the boxes and Dracula, a suspicion that he voices repeatedly and attempts to act on when he wants to toss the boxes overboard.12 Although the act of ignoring labels or categories in favor of other interpretive strategies carries a social stigma aligning it with madness, it is
often the only means of revealing new information and using it in productive ways within
the novel.

The act of classification is particularly helpful when one encounters new
information in that one may compare the new concept, object, organism, to an existing
type to establish to what extent the new information fits in with other samples. The
difficulty for several characters in the novel is that they have nothing in their previous
experiences or representations within existing forms of knowledge against which they
can compare what they have seen. This is particularly true for Jonathan, who does not
even have the benefit of other testimonies to confirm what he perceives while he is
imprisoned in Castle Dracula. Jonathan notes during his journey that the driver of the
carriage stops every time a blue flame appears in the darkness of the woods. He observes
a “strange optical effect” (38) at one point when the driver stands between him and the
flame, he can still see the flame. He finds this disturbing, but “as the effect was only
momentary,” he assumes that his “eyes deceived [him] straining through the darkness”
(38). As he has nothing with which to compare his observation of the translucent driver,
he dismisses it as a failed translation between the physical world and the organs of
perception. Having no previous experience to compare with the strange events he
encounters, he begins to settle for the repetition of his own perceptions as evidence. For
example, when he first sees the Count crawling down the castle walls like a lizard, he is
at first skeptical: “At first I could not believe my eyes. I thought it was some trick of the
moonlight, some weird effect of shadow; but I kept looking, and it could be no delusion”
(58). While he can provide no logical explanation for how the Count is able to crawl
down the walls, he does trust the consistency of his perceptions, which is an important
step in formulating his method of escape. It is at this point that Jonathan suspects that Dracula is merely “the semblance of man” (58). This is an important moment in Jonathan’s “education” as an investigator. Up to this point he has depended almost solely on the principles of scientific inquiry, which have led him to dismiss what he cannot explain or what does not seem probable. This is Jonathan’s first attempt to shift his methodological practices when traditional lines of inquiry fail. Accepting methodologies that constantly shift is significant for Jonathan, as he must later accept Mina’s diverse methods of investigation if he is to have any hope of locating Dracula.

This is not to say that deriving or categorizing information is necessarily easier when one does have perceptions or systems of knowledge to serve as a basis for comparison. When Jonathan first meets the Count, he notices a striking similarity to his previous perceptions: “The strength of the handshake was so much akin to that which I had noticed in the driver, whose face I had not seen, that for a moment I doubted if it were not the same person to whom I was speaking” (41). Rather than trusting his own perception of the similarity of handshakes, he asks the Count to identify himself. He also passes over his perceptions because he has not seen the face of the driver. As he has no visual proof to support his observation, he dismisses it. In this case, Jonathan has previous experiences (the strength of the grip) that he may compare to his current perceptions, but reaches for outside authority in the Count’s confirmation of his identity to determine the scope of his inquiries. Dr. Seward, who like Jonathan begins his task without the benefit of other testimony to assist him in drawing conclusions, attempts to diagnose Lucy Westenra based strictly on his own observations of her symptoms: “Even the lips were white, and the gums seemed to have shrunken back from the teeth, as we
sometimes see in a corpse after a prolonged illness” (143). Seward, like Jonathan, notices a similarity between his current observations and his previous experience. Seward has an advantage in that he sees the visual resemblance between Lucy’s pale lips and gums and the corpse. This does not seem to avail him of much, though, as he has neither inclination nor time (he must give Lucy a blood transfusion) to formulate the kinds of questions that would lead to a useful investigation of Lucy’s condition. He might, for example, ask whether these are symptoms that usually occur after prolonged illness; and if so, why is Lucy, who has not been ill above a week, demonstrating them? Why and how is Lucy exhibiting physical signs that usually only appear post mortem? Could these changing physical traits have any relationship to other marks on the body that have also changed, such as the “pin pricks” on her neck that have become ragged and white?

Seward and Jonathan both have unique abilities in noting details and being specific in their descriptions, but seem unable to follow up with questions when they notice similarities or patterns within their perceptions. Part of the difficulty may be that both men operate only within the limits of what is possible according to existing physical laws and social customs. Jonathan quite likely dismisses the idea that the driver and the Count are the same person because of the “extraordinary evidences of wealth which are round [him]” (43). It seems unlikely that a Count who owns gold-plated service and furniture with lavish upholstery would need or want to drive his carriage or wait at his own table. Since Lucy is Seward’s living patient, he makes the comparison to the corpse only as a means of describing the appearance that the symptoms produce. In both cases, their observations of similarities prove to be telling forms of interpretation as Jonathan
realizes that the Count has no servants and has been deceiving Jonathan, while Seward learns from Van Helsing that Lucy is becoming one of the undead.

In these particular cases, employing comparison between past experiences and current events may help Jonathan and Seward in formulating questions to assist them in their investigations, but they dismiss it when the consequences of the comparison are uncomfortable or are not governed by existing methods of inquiry. Even when Jonathan and Seward do use comparison, however, it becomes a means of explaining away disturbing observations rather than a way of revealing useful information. Jonathan, for example, closely watches the Count’s face while they are discussing the Count’s new estate in England. The Count assures Jonathan that Carfax Abbey is an appropriate home for him because he prefers darkness and being left alone with his own thoughts. Jonathan is not fully confident in this assertion: “Somehow his words and his look did not seem to accord, or else it was that his cast of face made his smile look malignant and saturnine” (48). The discord between the Count’s expression and his words presents Jonathan with the opportunity to question the Count’s character. That he does not avail himself of this opportunity is hardly surprising in light of the fact that Jonathan has already ignored the warnings of the villagers and his own instincts (the handshake). As in previous instances, he is too trusting of the Count’s authority; he would sooner interpret the moment as a product of the smile creating an odd effect when compared with the cast of the face than acknowledge the implications of the Count’s smile. To make things more complicated, the principles of physiognomy are not based merely on the relationship between the nervous system and facial musculature, but also on the connection between “emotions” as they are felt in the body and the cultural expectations governing their expression. If he
were to interpret the discord as a reason to suspect that the Count has ulterior motives for
going to England, he would have to realize his own danger. Jonathan uses comparison in
much the same way that he employs categories: as a means of creating a sense of comfort
or normality.

Jonathan is not alone in making mistakes occasioned by comparison, though
Seward makes errors based strictly on physical features. Jonathan, whose place in the
legal profession would require him to distinguish between those who are credible
witnesses and those who are not, attempts to read on Dracula’s face the sincerity of his
words but fails. Seward, on the other hand, is not responsible for generating connections
between abstract concepts (words) and physical traits; rather he must establish a
relationship, often a causal one, between various physiological and physiognomic
structures. His observations of Lucy’s symptoms indicate that making these connections
is no easier when concrete physical evidence (the body) is the object of interpretation:
“Her breathing grew stertorous, the mouth opened, and the pale gums, drawn back, made
the teeth look longer and sharper than ever” (173). It does not occur to Seward that the
pale gums and sharp teeth might be the product of the same “illness.” Instead, his
comparison of these two physical features leads him to believe that the paleness of the
gums must be producing the appearance of the sharp teeth. This is rather convenient in
that it allows Seward to observe these extraordinary symptoms without having to go
through the unpleasantness of make a diagnosis to account for them. By neglecting both
the idea that the gums are causing the teeth to sharpen and the possibility that they point
to the same disease, Seward effectively opts out of making any interpretation that
addresses the larger systemic problems of Lucy’s body. As Mina begins to collate the

different journals and to explore how they corroborate each other, Jonathan and Seward are no longer at liberty to exempt themselves from the narrative process. They will correct many of these early errors in judgment only by recording them, reflecting on them, and sharing them with their companions.

**Methodology and Terminology**

This central idea of “sharing” accounts for why novel is the focus of this dissertation. That is, the work that the female detective accomplishes relies heavily on Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept that the novel contains multiple voices that “invariably represent diverse and often conflicting attitudes, philosophies, and ideologies,” and thus the attempt to have one voice of authority in the novel “remains open and indeterminate to some extent” (Murfin and Ray 86). Narrative fiction, then, becomes a space for different discourses to interact and compete for authority. If, as Bakhtin suggests, none of these discourses are destined to produce a single authoritative speaker, then narrative is the most productive place for women to generate ideas and conclusions. The novel is a particularly useful space to compete for authority when the means of establishing authority is interpreting evidence. The novel provides a space that simultaneously encompasses the almost prosaic descriptions of evidence necessary in professional discourses and the visionary modes necessary to complicate these discourses. It is the novel’s ability both to articulate the reasoning behind current social and professional practices and to present viable alternatives to these practices that make it the ideal space for generating new methods of investigation.

As the terms “narrative” and “discourse” will be of the utmost importance in articulating how female detectives in these works of fiction develop new methods for
interpreting evidence, they warrant further discussion and explanation. The term discourse, as defined by Michel Foucault, is of particular interest because of its contribution to power relationships:

I would like to show that “discourses,” in the form in which they can be heard or read, are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible, colored chain of rules. . . . These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. (The Archaeology of Knowledge 427)

Discourse is not merely a study of the use of definitions or a description of circumstances; rather, it is concerned with the ordering of objects, and hence the production and formulation of knowledge. Those who are in the position of participating in the production of knowledge are also in the position of establishing power relationships between objects and people. This is of particular interest to professionals, who employ discourse in establishing authority. Professional discourses govern how professionals organize and construct their subject and how they order the objects of that discourse. Professional discourses, which include scientific, medical, and legal discourses, are important because they determine how characters within the novels draw conclusions about evidence. If, as Alison Brown suggests, discourse is “a system of rules regulating the flow of power” (31), then discourses are the very space where female investigators in the novel may compete for authority, both as speakers and interpreters. It is in complicating how male professionals talk about evidence that female investigators are able to form new methods for evaluating evidence.

The term “narrative” has a broader definition: “A story or telling of a story, or an account of a situation or events” (Murfin and Ray 232). A narrative may be fictional or
“true,” and does not necessarily have to be written in prose. Whereas “discourse” involves the ways in which male professionals talk about and evaluate evidence, the “narrative” is the larger account of events that emerges from this analysis. For example, the chemists in Wilkie Collins’s The Law and the Lady employ scientific discourse in testifying about the presence of arsenic in Sara Macallan’s body and the mechanisms for how it caused her death. The narrative, however, is the series of events that led to her death, including her marriage to Eustace, her jealousy over his love for Mrs. Beauly, and her instructions to Eustace to purchase arsenic for her. Within the context of detection, then, discourse serves as a means of evaluating evidence and narrative is the account that emerges from this analysis. The connection between the terms is significant because in complicating how discourses control the evaluation of evidence, female investigators also destabilize the narratives that account for the production of evidence. In challenging prevailing professional discourses, women in these novels develop new methods of interpretation that help them generate more comprehensive narratives than those of their male counterparts.

My dissertation examines the process of developing these new methods and the implications for gender expectations when they are put into practice. My goal is to explore the link between representations of gendered professionalization in the Victorian novel and changing methodologies in the field of forensic science. Using Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre (1848), Wilkie Collins’s The Law and the Lady (1875), and Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897), I examine how female investigators go about locating new evidence and developing new ways of interpreting it to produce socially-productive information. In particular, the dissertation focuses on three key issues: 1) Women in the
Victorian novel demonstrate the problems with existing professional methodologies not by rejecting them entirely, but rather by subtly modifying them and by demonstrating the inherent instability of interpretive methods understood as stable by male professionals. I argue that female investigators in the Victorian novel do employ the traditional methods of investigation and argumentation that such fields as science, medicine, and law use, but they integrate them into more subjective approaches such as memory and intuition to generate new models of narrative construction for forensic investigation. 2) Women are the objects of gender expectations within the novels and must find ways of operating within these expectations as they engage in the act of detection. 3) The success of the female investigator does not rest with her ability to produce useful information alone, but rather it is in part determined by the extent to which their new methods are accepted by and adopted by male professionals. The central claim that emerges from these issues is that women gain agency and authority within the novel not by rejecting male professional authority, but rather by working within existing gender expectations. This claim is significant in that it suggests how women were able to make their entrance into the professions. As the fictional female investigators demonstrate, violently rejecting ideas and methods is no way to convince one’s audience, particularly when that audience is composed of Victorian men and women. These women must learn to turn moments of oppression or restriction to their advantage.

The title character of Charlotte Bronte’s Jane Eyre is perhaps the most facile of the female investigators discussed in this dissertation at turning moments of oppression into moments of opportunity. My first chapter, “The ‘Visionary Hollow’: Discursive Practices as Investigative Tools in Jane Eyre,” examines how Jane successfully uses discursive
strategies to create spaces of opportunity that are otherwise denied her. If discourses are responsible for governing the flow of power and the ordering of objects, then it is appropriate that Jane chooses her discourses, as her primary concern is to gain authority as a speaker and to attain some level of material comfort. Why include Jane in a dissertation about detectives? If one can prove that Jane uses discourse to alter her existing circumstances, then readers are more likely to believe that discourse can be employed in producing larger social consequences. In short, if we cannot prove that discursive strategies can change the fate of even one girl, then how are we to believe that modifying discourses can help Valeria overturn a verdict against her husband or that Mina can stop Dracula’s planned invasion of England? Also, Jane employs discursive strategies in solving “mysteries” about herself, Rochester, Bertha, and other characters. Her project of self-definition becomes a form of detection that helps her interrogate the reasons for and the viability of her relationships with others. I argue that Jane Eyre experiences a progression both in how she participates in discursive practices and in how she responds to the ways in which others discourse about her. Jane’s discursive progress demonstrates four clear stages: 1) At Gateshead, Jane Eyre violently rejects the way in which Mrs. Reed, her aunt, and her cousins talk about her. At this point, Jane is only able to launch vicious counter-arguments that threaten those who produce her oppressive circumstances. 2) Jane moves to Lowood Institution, and, with the help of Miss Temple and Helen Burns, learns to discipline the way in which she discusses her previous suffering, and hence begins to gain credibility as a speaker. 3) Jane finds a new position at Thornfield and learns to temporarily accept the way in which others (particularly Rochester) talk about her as a means of imagining and bringing about improved
circumstances for herself. 4) After her discursive practices fail in responding to her cousin, St. John, Jane travels to Ferndean to be reunited with Rochester. Jane has become so comfortable with how others talk about her at this point that she may remain silent on many points and yet still achieve the end of having Rochester propose for a second time.

Valeria Woodville, like Jane Eyre, must find ways of working within gender expectations while introducing new methods. As noted in this introduction, details were understood to be a part of the housewife’s duties. My second chapter, “Detective and Aesthete: Feminizing the Detail and Destabilizing Narrative in Wilkie Collins’s The Law and the Lady,” opens with a discussion of the difference between “contingent” and “dispersed” details, as defined by feminist critic Naomi Schor. This is necessary because male professionals were expected to employ contingent details, which by nature seem to contribute to a larger narrative. Women were expected to be concerned with dispersed details, which do not appear to have any connection with a larger narrative, and which in fact may have no relation to each other. This terminology sets the stage for how Valeria Woodville will undermine existing professional juridical methods by pointing to the instability of their narratives, and hence of the details that form the narrative. The idea here is that if it is difficult to organize and classify details, than the narratives that rely on these details are also unstable. Recall that Jane Eyre alters the way in which people talk about her as a means of changing her circumstances. Here, Valeria seeks to alter how people discuss details of the legal investigation as a means of forming a new narrative of culpability, one that frees her husband from blame. In order to understand how and why Valeria forms the new methods that she does, it is important to understand the material
and emotional circumstances that attend their creation. Valeria must learn to depend on
association as a means of connecting the dispersed details of the evidence. This is
particularly significant because it simultaneously seems to assume that women are less
inclined to use logic or linear narratives, and yet produces information that even Mr.
Playmore and his gaggle of Scottish attorneys produced when Eustace was first accused.
By submitting to gender expectations and seeming to fulfill them, Valeria finds a means
of conducting her investigation.

My third chapter, “The Female Investigator and Modifying Evidentiary Practices
in Bram Stoker’s Dracula,” explores how Mina Harker manages to fulfill the expectations
of the Victorian wife and yet develop new methods that produce persuasive evidence.
Her methods are so convincing, in fact that her male “protectors” are required to adopt
them in their search for Dracula. The text seems to set up restrictions for those relating
the narrative, in that they are limited to their fields of expertise. Mina, however, eludes
these restrictions as she is not privy to the particulars of professional discourses.
Demonstrating that Mina exists outside of these discourses is significant because it allows
her to be subversive. She fulfills gender expectations in that she cannot participate in
professional discourses due to lack of training. She is then at liberty to modify them in
ways that would probably be uncomfortable for her companions. Jonathan Harker, John
Seward, and Abraham Van Helsing’s methods often involve syllogistic reasoning and
comparison, which leaves them inept and frustrated as they attempt to connect seemingly
disparate events, while Mina modifies discourses and resolves the problems that they
create. She promotes sharing information as the key to solving the case. This is
significant because Mina often has access to the feelings of witnesses because she is a
woman. Hence, gender issues are intimately tied to the success of her methods. Arthur, for example, feels that he can cry in front of Mina because she is a woman, and she learns more about her protectors than they know about each other. Just as Mina must depend on testimony from others and share her own testimony to trace Dracula’s movements, she must begin to trust parts of her own perception that seem unstable or overly complex. It is only in employing these alternative methods that she is able to speculate about Dracula’s location. Here again, Mina finds a way of fulfilling gender expectations while acting outside of them. By relying on unstable concepts like imagination, she is, one the one hand, fulfilling the stereotype that women do not think in linear terms and that they are constantly distracted. This is further corroborated by the fact that Jonathan and Seward condemn imagination at various points. Using these methods, though leads her anticipate Dracula’s plan of action. Mina may seem the ideal Victorian wife, but her methods also award her the status of detective.

These readings may give the reader the impression that female professionals emerged easily in light of how their skills are represented in the novel. The conclusion, then, serves as a sort of caveat to the previous chapters. The idea here is to demonstrate that, while being subversive by generating alternative methods to those of male professions is to some extent acceptable in fiction, any attempt to directly introduce real women into the professions was met with staunch resistance. To demonstrate the level of this resistance, I begin the conclusion with an analysis of a letter from Queen Victoria to her prime minister, which gives various reasons for why women should not be permitted to enter into the profession of medicine. This letter implies that women have the ability to learn the particulars of medicine, but that in doing so they would compromise the
feeling of protection that men feel toward women. These contradictions are developed in my analysis of three women in the Sherlock Holmes series: Mary Morstan (The Sign of Four), Violet Hunter (“The Adventure of the Copper Beeches”), and Irene Adler (“A Scandal in Bohemia”). Whereas Queen Victoria attempts to exclude women from gaining knowledge, Doyle permits women to both observe and to employ knowledge. He does not, however, permit them to engage in deduction, which is the key form of interpretation in detection. As both Mary Morstan and Violet Hunter demonstrate, moments in Doyle’s fiction in which interpretations becomes possible are either interrupted or are dismissed in favor of the need to fulfill gender expectations.

The idea that women’s skills are not enough and that men’s impression of them must change for them to advance is part of the problem in Victorian culture, as evidenced by the career of Florence Nightingale. Despite the fact that Nightingale was perfectly capable of engaging in classification and interpretation, she gained public fame for her generosity of spirit, selflessness, and motherly affection. In spite of their unique and prodigious skills, women, both real and fictional, could not rely on their skills alone in bringing them professional acknowledgement and recognition. In short, Charlotte Bronte, Wilkie Collins, and Bram Stoker all generate a creative space in which women can generate socially-productive methods of interpretation, but the novels anticipate a much longer struggle toward creating the female professional.

1 Darwin did not, however, associate his theory itself with an articulation of “progress.” Evolution is not, then, making species more perfect through the mechanism of natural selection. Rather, the selection of species depends on the environment and its impact on each species’ circumstances.

2 In fact, the wife would perform many of the same activities each day, and it is this circularity that distinguishes her pursuits from those of her husband’s “linear” activities.
It must be noted, however, that observation was not always helpful to professionals. Practicing physicians in Victorian England frequently relied on the details of various symptoms to help them distinguish which disease a patient suffered from and to determine how to develop a treatment. This became particularly difficult, however, when the details of the symptoms were similar. For example, the diseases of typhoid fever and typhus demonstrated similar symptoms, which included “delirium and a rash” (Pool 249). The inability to distinguish between the illnesses inhibited the physician’s ability to diagnose and treat the illness. Whereas there was no known treatment for typhus—the symptoms either gradually resolved or killed the patient—typhoid fever was a bacterial infection caused by drinking or eating substances contaminated by human waste and was treatable with broad-spectrum antibiotics. If the doctor could not distinguish between them, the patient might not receive treatment. Since it was impossible to distinguish between then “without laboratory tests” (248), physicians were at pains to improve their technological capabilities, which did not happen until mid-century. The proliferation of disease, then, presented physicians with interpretive difficulties.

Such concerns become important for female investigators in the novel in terms of how they gain access to information. For example, Valeria Woodville of The Law and the Lady wears cosmetics and dresses her hair elaborately because she knows that Major Fitz-David has a weakness for ladies who show their features to best advantage. She is correct in this assumption, and the charmed Major allows Valeria to search his office. Fulfilling aesthetic expectations, then, becomes a means of opening a discourse between characters.

Carol Senf notes that Jonathan’s desire to find maps of the country demonstrates that fact that he enters Transylvania as a man “secure in the belief that the world is an orderly and rational place” (18).

Thomas Byers suggests that in fact the whole text of Dracula is merely a “complex system of psychological and political defenses” (150). Hence, Jonathan is far more interested in maintaining a sense of comfort and control than in drawing the disturbing conclusions that his observations warrant.

Jonathan’s experience with the prevailing system of social classification, one based on class, may be part of his problem. Dracula is a member of the nobility, so Jonathan may find it difficult to question his authority. Instead, he turns to objects for comfort, attempting to find a source of comfort, rather than taking action in light of his fears.

Carol Senf notes that professionals in Dracula are at liberty to speak “so long as they remain within their limited fields of expertise” (95). When Jonathan’s experiences seem to work against his expertise, however, he must find some means of understanding his experiences. Since he cannot generate alternative interpretations himself, he adopts those of people who have experience with Dracula.

Dracula steals not only Jonathan’s clothing, but also his discursive practices. Carol Senf observes that Dracula even admits to inviting Jonathan to Transylvania so that “he could learn the subtle nuances of English law and business” (99).

Valeria Woodville of The Law and the Lady also employs this method. She often interprets absence as an attempt to hide or conceal information. In this case, Jonathan understands absence as a reason for questioning his assumptions about Dracula’s ontological status.

Interpreting absence is a necessity for Jonathan, as Valdine Clemens notes that Dracula’s “near invisibility in itself has endowed him with greater power” (158).

Valdine Clemens notes that the Captain of the Demeter is punished because he does not acknowledge the power of the daemonic (159). If this were the case, the reader might excuse the Captain because it is easy to dismiss the power of a being when one has no evidence of the being itself. What is less excusable is his neglect of reason in eliminating the possible hiding places on his ship.
Lucy Hartley identifies the study of physiognomy as “a classificatory act which functions in a profoundly normative manner in so far as it takes a particular expression as the exemplification of a general kind and then uses this to describe the character of an individual” (2). In Dracula’s case, there is something of a schism between his expression and the articulation of his character. Jonathan, however, is not yet capable of articulating the nature of this difference or its larger significance.

The project in this chapter is somewhat different, however. Whereas Jane Eyre is attempting to construct and rescue the “self,” Valeria is attempting to save the “family.”
CHAPTER 1

THE “VISIONARY HOLLOW”:
DISCURSIVE PRACTICES AS INVESTIGATIVE TOOLS IN JANE EYRE

1.1 Liberation and Restriction

The term “detective” may seem something of a misnomer for Jane Eyre. She is, after all, an orphan with no connections or formal training in the legal profession, and little knowledge of the world beyond her cloistered existence at Lowood Institution. This is compounded by the fact that she often has no specific purpose or guiding principle for her investigations. In later chapters, I will discuss how Valeria Woodville, the heroine of Wilkie Collins’s The Law and the Lady, makes the exculpation of her husband the focus of her investigation and how Mina Harker attempts to understand her husband’s experiences as a means of preventing both his mental degeneration and Dracula’s invasion of London. Jane Eyre has no such objects in mind and often has no information to suggest that she has need of performing the tasks of these later female investigators. We do not find our heroine elbow-deep in court manuscripts or combing tirelessly over journals and newspaper articles. What we see in Jane, however, is a mind bent on rendering the world interpretable. As she has no connections and appears to have neither interest in, nor even access to, documents and evidence that are often associated with
legal investigations, she must create new methods of analysis and interpretation that enable her to evaluate her circumstances.

Jane does not, as a rule, accomplish this strictly by generating narratives from physical evidence. Rather, she creates an interpretive space by interrupting the discursive practices of other characters, and subsequently accepting or rejecting the consequences that she envisions when she is an object of a given discourse. Jane cannot often rely on witness testimony or physical evidence to direct her search, and so functions as a detective rhetorically by employing discursive practices. The way in which Jane negotiates within discursive practices and attempts to establish authority suggest that discourse is not just an exchange of words, but a product of rhetorical strategies and concerns. Jane does not have much success in solving mysteries outside of herself, such as the relationship between Rochester and Grace Poole, but she becomes a detective in the sense of finding and constructing the “self.” She accepts confinement by allowing others to talk about her; she then uses this as a means of articulating her desires and launching counter-narratives. The reader sees Jane’s attempt to find liberation in confinement from the outset, as Jane confirms that she would rather relinquish the possibility of a walk outdoors than be “humbled by the consciousness of [her] physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed” (63). She willingly accepts physical confinement at Gateshead so that she may avoid a more painful and humiliating rehearsal of her inferior traits, one that she already hears from Mrs. Reed and that the servants, Abbott and Bessie, constantly reiterate. The books that Jane reads for leisure provide her with the first means of working against how other characters discuss her.

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Critics have often noted that Jane’s selection of reading materials demonstrates her love of narrative, and that she uses this form of absorption primarily as a form of escape from the suffering she experiences at the hands of her aunt and cousins. But these interpretations do not account for the complexity of how Jane deploys what she has read in opposing her oppressors. John Reed finds Jane hiding in the window seat reading, which he immediately identifies as a crime:

“You have no business to take our books: you are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentleman’s children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama’s expense. Now, I’ll teach you to rummage my book-shelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years.” (67)

John immediately identifies Jane as a “dependant,” suggesting that she has no right to the material advantages that the Reeds have. Interestingly, John identifies books not in terms of the information that they may convey to Jane, but rather in terms of their status as objects of possession, much like the clothing and food that he mentions in the passage. As if to emphasize its status as an object at his disposal, he throws the book, striking Jane and knocking her head against the door. At this point Jane reaches the limit of her submissive behavior:

“Wicked and cruel boy!” I said. “You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors!” I had read Goldsmith’s History of Rome, and had formed my opinion of Nero, Caligula, &c. Also I had drawn parallels in silence, which I never thought thus to have declared aloud. (67)

Jane’s reading provides her with a means of articulating the nature of her oppressor. She ignores John’s insistence on her material dependence, focusing instead on how he
employs the power that he is given. The implication is that Jane’s status as a dependant provides no justification for John’s abusive behavior.

The specific text that Jane uses to challenge John Reed’s authority is significant in light of accepted reading practices for young women and children during the Victorian period. Kimberley Reynolds notes that the works chosen for girls and young women were designed to help the reader internalize the existing social order:

It could also be argued that reading fiction was perceived as a desirable activity for girls because it steered them into an open-ended channel in which they could wallow in fantasy and imaginary resolutions to social and sexual problems (resolutions which, because not genuine, needed constantly to be repeated) and generally gave them an activity and a language which impeded social success based on individuality, activity and self-confidence. (102)

Girls would typically gain access to these appropriate works of fiction through parents or educators. As Jane has no such figures to guide her reading practices, she has access to a whole host of texts that would be considered inappropriate. As the incident with John Reed demonstrates, reading becomes in itself a subversive act for Jane. She chooses works of history and adventure stories, rather than stories that reject individuality as a basis for success. The choice of Goldsmith is particularly significant here. The text of The Roman History (1769) portrays the shocking and arbitrary violence practiced by several of Rome’s emperors. The portrait of Caligula, in particular, illustrates the abuse of power in terms of his irrational political decisions (appointing his horse to the Senate), abuse of relatives (particularly his uncle, Claudius), coercion of women (forcing the wives of noblemen to engage in sexual activities with him and then reporting to their husbands on their level of sexual skill), and criminal actions (murdering his sister). These events, though extreme, would quite likely strike a cord with the young Jane. In
particular, the abuse of family members and unaccountable violence would be a basis for comparison between John and Caligula. Jane’s selection of literature that would be considered unacceptable and that does not support the existing social order (Caligula was assassinated for his actions) provides her with a means of actively speaking out against behavior that she understands as reprehensible and unjustifiable. This first act of speaking, however, does not end Jane’s oppression. John charges at Jane for her words and grabs her by the hair and shoulder. In that moment she really “saw in him a tyrant: a murderer” (68). This perception, along with the feeling of her blood trickling down her neck, sends her into a frenzy and she strikes John in return. Although Jane is defending herself from further abuse, she is put in the position of reciprocating the violence that she has just condemned. In order to challenge how others talk about her and to influence how others treat her, Jane must find a method that does not force her to replicate the very social problems that she wishes to avoid.

Throughout the novel, Jane experiences a progression as she is increasingly encouraged to become an object of the discursive practices of others and as she is taught to discipline and productively employ discursive strategies to realize the complexities of both her own position and those of other socially marginalized figures. The young Jane of Gateshead fiercely rejects the way in which Mrs. Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst talk about her character and behavior, but in doing so she performs the very sins of which they accuse her. At Lowood, Jane begins to discipline the story of her past suffering under the influence of Helen Burns and Miss Temple. She learns to talk about her experiences and feelings in a way that becomes credible to others, reversing the judgment that Mr. Brocklehurst imposes on her when he repeats Mrs. Reed’s story before the students.
Jane’s new discipline provides her with the skill to gain a position at Thornfield, but her discursive strategies must alter as Rochester makes her the object of his reflections. Jane gradually learns to engage in Rochester’s means of talking about her social position, experience, and future prospects, temporarily accepting the terms of his arguments as a means of exploring their validity. This strategy also assists her at Moor House, where she is able to reject St. John’s definition of “justice” as strictly a concept within legal discourses and create a new understanding of the term that allows her to split her fortune and gather to her the family that she has been denied. As Jane flees from St. John and returns to Thornfield, her discursive strategy takes yet another form. Rather than envisioning herself within the terms and conditions that others employ in talking about her, she allows both the innkeeper and Rochester to misinterpret her role in their discussions and conclusions about her.

One must be careful to note, however, that making herself the object of another’s discursive practices, even if only temporarily, places Jane in dangerous and even compromising positions. This is particularly true when Rochester is the narrator, as he subtly attempts to convince Jane to be first his wife, and later his mistress. Jane employs her role as the object of various discourses as a visionary mode, drawing from Rochester’s own arguments the very means of rejecting them and constructing a new vision for her life. Thus, it is not specifically the ability to interpret evidence that establishes Jane Eyre as a precursor for later female investigators. Rather, she demonstrates that the very discursive practices that seem to place a woman in disadvantageous positions may be turned to advantage in that they give her the means of becoming an active participant in the discourse. Allowing herself to become the object of
discourses invites Jane’s judgment and vision, allowing her to interrogate her own circumstances and to disrupt and alter the ways in which others talk about her.

1.2 Gateshead: Oppression and the Fledgling Speaker

While Jane begins to stand up to John Reed’s abuse and to question her status as “dependent” almost from the outset of the novel, her first attempt to convincingly speak about her position and produce consequences from this act does not occur until she is confined in the red room, a terrifying space for her, as it is the chamber in which her Uncle Reed died. Her fear, however, serves a purpose, as it defamiliarizes Jane’s surroundings and opens a space for her to articulate and respond to her suffering. As Jane surveys the room with its crimson curtains and stately furniture, her gaze settles on the mirror. One would imagine that a mirror would be the one medium through which Jane, who is constantly subjected to negative interpretations of her behavior, could see herself properly and accurately represented. What Jane experiences, however, is a form of alienation:

All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality; and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still had the effect of a real spirit: I thought it like one of the tiny phantoms, half fairy, half imp, Bessie’s evening stories represented as coming up out of lone, ferny dells in moors, and appearing before the eyes of belated travelers. (71-2)

The mirror not only changes the physical appearance of the red room, but also Jane’s perception of herself, to the point that she does not recognize her own image. This is significant because she employs Bessie’s tales as a means of articulating her position within the family. It is important that Jane sees the image in the mirror as “half fairy.” After her fainting incident, she begs Bessie to bring her Gulliver’s Travels, in which she
finds “a vein of interest deeper than what [she] found in fairy tales” (78). She says this because she believes all of the fairy tale creatures to have left England. In the red room, then, Jane is comparing her image to those in tales that she has no faith in as a representation of reality. Dependence on such surreal representations of her circumstances will become useful for Jane, as she later increasingly allows herself to be interpreted in ways that are contrary to all her impulses and feelings in order to employ them as interpretive tools. In this case, too, comparing her image to the imp in Bessie’s stories serves a purpose for both the young Jane and our adult narrator. Peter Grudin notes that “what the child intuits and understands via these metaphors the mature narrator interprets as social alienation” (152). This seems to be the case for the adult Jane, who claims that within the Reed family she is “a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities” (73). Our narrator, the adult Jane, attempts to make sense of her oppression by demonstrating that her exclusion is in part a result of her fundamental differences from the Reed family in terms of temperament, not merely the mean-spiritedness of her aunt and cousins.²

The child Jane, however, has a very different interpretation, and one not so generous as that of her adult counterpart: “Resolve, equally wrought up, instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression—as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die” (72). Running away is not an expedient option, as her aunt has locked her in the red room until she behaves submissively. She does manage to enact, in narrative form, a specimen of her second option: death. Jane suggests that she will let herself dwindle away and starve to death. She has already achieved one level of separation by comparing herself to an
imp in Bessie’s narrative, but as she turns from the mirror to boldly look again upon the red room, she finds a way to make this sense of alienation useful. As daylight begins to leave the red room, Jane questions her rebellious instincts:

All said I was wicked, and perhaps I might be so: what thought had I been but just conceiving of starving myself to death? That certainly was a crime: and was I fit to die? Or was the vault under the chancel of Gateshead church an inviting bourne? In such vault I had been told did Mr. Reed lie buried; and led by this thought to recall his idea, I dwelt on it with gathering dread. (73)

In thinking of herself as a person who would starve herself as an act of retribution, Jane lessens the distinction between how the Reeds talk about her and how she understands herself, acknowledging that her thoughts are wicked. Jane’s thoughts of starving herself lead her to envision the material circumstances associated with death, which in turn prompts her memory that her uncle is buried in the vault. While this thought frightens her, it also provides her with an imaginative space that allows her to envision thoughts of her retribution:

I began to recall what I had heard of dead men troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes, revisiting the earth to punish the perjured and avenge the oppressed; and I thought Mr. Reed’s spirit, harassed by the wrongs of his sister’s child might quit its abode—whether in the church vault or in the unknown world of the departed—and rise before me in this chamber. (74)

Mr. Reed’s spirit provides Jane with some comfort, not least because the thought of his invocation gives her a sense of agency against those who oppress her. Herman Rapaport’s psychoanalytic reading of the red room scene suggests that Jane fantasizes about the emergence of Mr. Reed’s spirit because “she is transferring unconscious wishes and fantasies onto an imaginary person who is able to realize Jane’s wishes in terms of the ‘real world’ of adults” (1094). Although Jane has just admonished herself as wicked
for thinking of starving herself, her unconscious desire remains that of retribution and rebellion. As her confinement demonstrates, she is incapable of articulating, much less acting upon this desire in a productive way. Mr. Reed’s spirit provides her with a means of carrying out her desires. This is tempered, however, by her intense fear that such a thing “would be terrible if realized” (74). Jane’s fear of enacting her retribution emerges from the idea that doing so would require her to apprehend her uncle’s ghostly manifestation. She has more reason than this, however, to be frightened. To invoke his spirit would also produce a form of death for her. She would be passing all of her rage to her creation (the spirit) to carry out her need for revenge. Thus, the spirit would simultaneously allow her agency by acting out her desires, but deny her the ability to carry them out herself.³ In this case, the potential to become a speaker who actively protests her circumstances dies with the production of the spirit. Jane’s fear of seeing the spirit prevents this as she sees a light on the wall, believes it to be a ghost, and falls unconscious. Although Jane’s attempt to articulate and act against her oppression in this case proves abortive, it represents her first endeavor to find a means of responding that is not violent.

Her next attempt proves more successful as she is asked by an outside party to engage in various discourses, allowing her to analyze the terms in which speakers talk about other modes of living and inviting her to imagine herself within the circumstances that these discourses articulate. After she recovers from her swoon in the red room, Jane awakens to a visit from the servants’ doctor, Mr. Lloyd. When he asks her why she is so miserable, Jane explains that her treatment at the hands of her aunt and cousins is responsible, but this has little effect on Mr. Lloyd, who constantly seeks to temper her
vindictiveness with statements and questions skewed toward producing a positive response: “You have a kind aunt and cousins. . . .Don’t you think Gateshead Hall a very beautiful house? . . .Pooh! you can’t be silly enough to wish to leave such a splendid place?” (82). Mr. Lloyd refuses to indulge Jane by sympathizing with her plight, but when she responds to his last question by asserting that she would like to leave Gateshead, he invites her to envision new circumstances. This is significant because he is asking Jane to participate in discourses of poverty and education as means of evaluating possible alternatives to her current circumstances, which allows her some means of escaping her oppression. He suggests that she may go to relatives, even if they are poor, and they may treat her kindly. Jane attempts to envision herself as a member of such a family:

I shook my head: I could not see how poor people had the means of being kind; and then to learn to speak like them, to adopt their manners, to be uneducated, to grow up like one of the poor women I saw sometimes nursing their children or washing their clothes at the cottage door of the village at Gateshead: no, I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste. (82)

While Jane’s thought process may seem a bit class bound as she assumes that belonging to poor relations can only lead to her degradation, it also reveals to her a number of features of oppression. She notes that she does not understand how poor people have the “means” to be kind. This suggests that material deprivation must affect the moral fortitude and generosity of those who experience it. In other words, one’s circumstances help to produce abstract concepts of morality. In the very act of rejecting the circumstances that she associates with “poverty,” Jane inadvertently articulates the various injustices that people of abject poverty experience. Up to this point, Jane has
claimed that she would sacrifice a great deal for liberty. The act of reflecting on the possible alternatives, however, demonstrates for her that oppression is in itself a complex concept, one that may manifest itself in a number of forms. It also suggests that the concept of “liberty” may merely be another form of oppression, an understanding that will prove absolutely necessary in her later interactions with Rochester. In this case, trading the emotional oppression and physical isolation that she experiences within the Reed family would, in her understanding of poverty, only provide her with an alternative form of oppression in the form of economic destitution and its consequences of social and cultural exclusion.

Mr. Lloyd next asks Jane if she would like to go to school. As she has no experience of school, Jane must sort through the various accounts that can give her a base from which to reflect on the consequences of being a student. The process of choosing which account to believe brings with it an analysis of the speaker who discourses about education. Although John Reed incessantly complains about his school, she notes that his “tastes were no rule for mine” (83) and rejects his account as a useful basis for interrogation. She seeks instead the accounts of a person whom she trusts: Bessie. It is here that she puts in motion the events that will produce her journey to Lowood:

She boasted of beautiful paintings of landscapes and flowers by them executed; of songs they could sing and pieces they could play, of purses they could net, of French books they could translate; till my spirit was moved to emulation as I listened. Besides, school would be a complete change: it implied a long journey, and entire separation from Gateshead, an entrance into a new life. (83)

This passage is particularly interesting because the formulation of liberty that Jane is suggesting provides her with an entirely new way of ending her oppression. Rather than
directly attacking her oppressors, as she thinks of doing in the red room and as she does in her story to Mr. Lloyd, she finds a means that is primarily internal of removing herself from her current circumstances. She is moved to “emulation” as she envisions the accomplishments that could be hers should she attend school. She forms of liberty that does not require confrontation, yet will allow her to exist outside of the Reeds’s sphere of influence. Thus, Jane’s increasing ability to describe the nature and benefits of education and her desire to become one of the accomplished ladies that Bessie describes provides Jane with a nonviolent and productive means of gaining liberty.

This vision is short-lived, though, because Jane is again made to feel both the stings of her aunt’s insults and her renewed indignation at her oppression. Mrs. Reed summons Mr. Brocklehurst, the headmaster of Lowood Institution, to Gateshead to evaluate Jane and reiterate her wish that Jane be admitted to the school. When Jane is introduced to Brocklehurst, he asks her a series of questions relating to life and divinity. The last of these questions is whether Jane reads the Bible, to which Jane responds affirmatively. She notes that she likes “Revelations and the book of Daniel, and Genesis and Samuel, and a little bit of Exodus, and some parts of Kings and Chronicles, and Job and Johah” (92), but not the Psalms, to which Brocklehurst replies that this “proves [she has] a wicked heart” (92). Before Jane can ask how she is gain the pure heart that Brocklehurst suggests that she adopt, Mrs. Reed recommends that he be vigilant against her “worst fault, a tendency to deceit” (92). In response to Mrs. Reed’s evaluation of Jane’s character, Brocklehurst gives Jane a pamphlet to help her reform her character:

Little girl, here is a book entitled the ‘Child’s Guide;’ read it with prayer, especially that part containing ‘an account of the awfully sudden death of Martha G----, a naughty child addicted to falsehood and deceit.’ (94)
While Brocklehurst’s recommendation that Jane pray is not particularly surprising, the focus of his moral regimen is interesting. He, like Mr. Lloyd, is asking her to reflect on her current actions and her future prospects. Mr. Lloyd’s invitation to Jane to discourse on the concepts of “poverty” and “education” helps Jane to understand the complexity of oppression and to find an alternative liberty that will not harm her oppressors. Mr. Brocklehurst’s recommendation, however, requires Jane to see herself as naughty Martha, who is deceitful and dies young. The idea is that Jane will see the consequences of her behavior and commit to reforming her character, lest she suffer the same fate as Martha. If Jane were to submit to the discourse of obedience that Brocklehurst promotes and acknowledge herself as another Martha, however, she would be giving credibility to Mrs. Reed’s evaluation of her and hence demonstrating that she deserved the treatment she received. Becoming an active subject within the discourse of obedience requires Jane to accept and submit to the way in which Mrs. Reed talks about her behavior. Jane has reached something of an impasse at this point. She cannot submit to Mrs. Reed’s and Brocklehurst’s evaluation of her character, and yet is equally incapable of convincing him that he should not construct her “into an artful, noxious child” (93). Whereas Mr. Lloyd invites Jane to employ discourse as a tool that is productive for her understanding, Mr. Brocklehurst positions her so that she experiences both emotional oppression when faced with acknowledging herself as deceitful, and rhetorical oppression when she has no means of either persuading or of being persuaded.

While Jane cannot summon the courage to attack Mr. Brocklehurst, who may hold the key to her future as a student, she quickly turns her anger toward Mrs. Reed, using the
way in which she talks about Jane as a means of gaining power over her. After Mr. Brocklehurst departs Gateshead, Mrs. Reed orders Jane to return to the nursery, but she finds herself unable to leave. Without knowing what force compels her, Jane launches a violent verbal counterattack:

I shall remember how you thrust me back—roughly and violently thrust me back into the red-room, and locked me up there—to my dying day; though I was in agony; though I cried out, while suffocating with distress, ‘Have mercy! Have mercy, Aunt Reed!’ And that punishment you made me suffer because your wicked boy struck me—knocked me down for nothing. I will tell anybody who asks me questions, this exact tale. People think you a good woman, but you are bad; hard-hearted. You are deceitful!

This outburst may seem shocking in light of Jane’s previous attempt to articulate a less confrontational means of achieving liberty by going to school. Her response, however, is a result of the fact that going to school requires her to be degraded by Mrs. Reed and Mr. Brocklehurst. In short, the very means by which she achieves her liberty become the mechanism for rejecting the non-confrontational image that she creates. Jane has in fact made attempts to make her aunt regret her actions and repent, but these only earn Jane a box on the ears. Jane’s strategy here is very different, as she threatens to use Mrs. Reed’s own discursive practices against her. Jane not only proposes to tell others about how the Reeds treat her, but also to demonstrate that Mrs. Reed lies to mask that she is “hard-hearted” or to justify her treatment of Jane. It is only when Mrs. Reed’s reputation is at stake that she shows fear. In short, the moment that Jane bursts out as the speaker who is at liberty to respond to how others talk about her is the moment that Mrs. Reed begins to fear Jane.
Melodie Monahan notes that “as Jane speaks the truth, she acquires rank” (593), and this certainly seems true for Jane, who feels triumphant over Mrs. Reed after this exchange: “It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unhoped-for liberty” (96). In engaging her oppressor and rendering her submissive with the threat of speaking out, Jane gains a sense of freedom, but this does not last long as she realizes the consequences, or rather the limitations that her violent approach entails: “I would fain exercise some better faculty than that of fierce speaking; fain find nourishment for some less fiendish feeling than that of somber indignation” (97). Jane soon realizes that in attacking Mrs. Reed, she has encouraged seeds of resentment to grow and burgeon into a form that lacks any ability to persuade others. She expresses an awareness of this when she encounters Bessie on a walk, shortly after the altercation with Mrs. Reed. While Bessie sees quite a changed child before her, one who is “venturesome and hardy” and who has “quite a new way of talking” (99), the change is not without its problems. Jane is certainly bolder and embraces Bessie in a manner “more frank and fearless than any [she] was habituated to indulge in” (98), but this newfound courage only reaches to a point. Jane decides not to tell Bessie about her conversation, feeling it better to “remain silent on that head” (99). Although Jane is not explicit about why she does not want to tell Bessie about the exchange, it is not difficult to deduce at least one of her reasons. Bessie has on previous occasions scolded Jane for acting out against the Reed family, and it is quite likely that recounting her argument with Mrs. Reed would produce the same outcome. Considering that Jane is just now forming a close relationship with Bessie, it is understandable that she does not reveal her secret. Her omission, however, demonstrates part of the problem, the same problem, in fact, that she
encounters with Mr. Brocklehurst. On the one hand, Jane cannot fully justify her transformation into a brave young lady without revealing the events that produced this change; on the other hand, she cannot maintain her current relationship with Bessie unless she omits the incident. By choosing omission, she loses the opportunity to convince others of the validity of her methods for opposing her oppression. The eventual solution to Jane’s repeated struggles to talk about herself and to convince others of her authority as a speaker is a regimen of disciplining her expression. Jane receives aid in her struggle for authority when Mrs. Reed finally has her sent to school at Lowood Institution.

1.3 Lowood Institution: Tempering Expression

Jane’s first ally who assists her in establishing authority is Helen Burns. This may seem odd in light of the fact that Helen is by nature submissive and does not create competing accounts, even when her instructors accuse her of actions that she either does not commit or that are beyond her control. For example, when Mrs. Scatcherd admonishes Helen for having dirty nails, Jane is puzzled by the fact that Helen does not explain that “she could neither clean her nails nor wash her face, as the water was frozen” (115). It is precisely this element of submissiveness, though, that will help Jane make her account more credible to those in positions of authority, particularly Miss Temple. When Jane is humiliated in front of the other children as Mr. Brocklehurst warns the school that she is deceitful, she believes that no one will ever trust her again. Helen seeks her out and comforts her, listening to her account of her past. Although she reprimands Jane for being “too impulsive, too vehement” (133) in her account, she does believe Jane and teaches her an important lesson that will prepare her for later exchanges. She
reminds Jane that “Mr. Brocklehurst is not a god; nor is he even a great and admired man” (133). This reinforces the idea that her actions, rather than the headmaster’s words, will determine how the teachers and students think of her. In claiming that Jane is too vehement, she also encourages her to temper her manner of expression, as honesty is far more persuasive than spite.

This lesson proves to Jane’s advantage when they have tea with Miss Temple later that evening. Before Jane can employ Helen’s advice, however, she must be assured that she has a willing and receptive audience, a point which is demonstrated through material circumstances. When they are invited to tea, Miss Temple sets out her humble set of dishes for the toast, and these instruments immediately appeal to Jane: “How pretty to my eyes, did the china cups and bright teapot look, placed on the little round table near the fire!” (136). Jane feels the atmosphere is welcoming and bright, which stands in stark contrast to her previous experiences at Gateshead. After her fainting spell in the red room, for examples, Bessie attempts to make her more comfortable by giving her access to all of her favorite objects, but with a very different result:

Bessie had been down into the kitchen, and she brought up with her a tart on a certain brightly painted china plate, whose bird of paradise, nestling in a wreath of convolvuli and rosebuds, had been wont to stir in me a most enthusiastic sense of admiration... This precious vessel was now placed on my knee, and I was cordially invited to eat the circlet of delicate pastry upon it. Vain favour! Coming, like most other favours long deferred and often wished for, too late! I could not eat the tart; and the plumage of the bird, the tints of the flowers, seemed strangely faded: I put both plate and tart away. (78)

Jane is presented with a favored object of aesthetic admiration, but it does not make her feel included or happy. Rather, it seems to create a space for a rehearsal of Jane’s suffering. She cannot focus on Bessie’s present kindness when she remembers that it is a
pleasure “long deferred.” Her attention turns to the means by which it has been deferred, rather than the pleasure that it could afford her. Her reflections even render the aesthetic qualities of the dish less appealing. Miss Temple’s china, while it may not be as fine or ornate as that at Gateshead, is offered in the spirit of generosity. Nancy Pell argues that Jane accepts self-discipline through Miss Temple because it is rooted in nourishing the body and mind (406). Offering Jane the use of the china from the outset helps Jane to understand Miss Temple as a receptive audience, and hence helps her to accept the discipline and restraint that she has to offer Jane.

Miss Temple further gains Jane’s trust by reinforcing what Helen has already noted: “We shall think you what you prove yourself to be, my child” (134). She offers Jane the opportunity to discuss her suffering, and Debra Teachman argues that it is this act that makes Miss Temple a good teacher for Jane. Miss Temple does, however, encourage Jane to discipline the manner in which she expresses her account by prompting her to say “whatever memory suggests as true; but add nothing and exaggerate nothing” (135). In a sense, Miss Temple is asking Jane to recount the events of her life at Gateshead without including her own interpretation of them. This may seem an unfair form of restraint considering the pain that Jane felt as a result of the events, but it is in a sense more effective, as it invites Jane’s audience to envision for themselves the suffering she feels. After Jane finishes her story, she feels as though this strategy is beneficial: “I infused into the narrative far less of gall and wormwood than ordinary. Thus restrained and simplified, it sounded more credible: I felt as I went on that Miss Temple fully believed me” (135). By tempering her harsh judgments of Mrs. Reed and her cousins, Jane gains credibility.
Jane does not, however, entirely exclude moments of feeling from her account. When she talks about the red room incident, she notes that this is the one moment when her “excitement was sure, in some degree, to break bounds” (135). But this moment has its use, as she happens to mention Mr. Lloyd in the process of recounting her red room experiences. Miss Temple knows Mr. Lloyd and says that she will write a letter asking him if Jane’s story is accurate. If he responds in the affirmative, Miss Temple promises to clear Jane’s name before the school’s instructors and students. Some critics, such as Carla Kaplan, find this problematic because requiring outside corroboration suggests that Jane’s account cannot stand on its own as evidence (11). This assessment, however, neglects the complex functions of Jane’s development as a discursive participant. Helen and Miss Temple do not discourage Jane from telling her story, but rather teach her to discipline her story into a form that can be accepted and corroborated by others. Mr. Lloyd’s subsequent confirmation of her story’s validity demonstrates the discursive vitality that is born of Jane’s newfound restraint. Mr. Lloyd did not accept Jane’s account of her suffering when she was impassioned and angry at Gateshead, but he is able to corroborate her calmer, more restrained account. Hence, in modifying the way in which she talks about her suffering, Jane gains some degree of authority as she can now have some agency in the ways in which her schoolmates and instructors talk about her. She does not need to hide her story, as she did when she withheld the account of her fight with Mrs. Reed from Bessie. Jane is given a clean slate within the school that is not premised on prevarication. Miss Temple also gives Jane an important lesson in social responsibility by requiring corroboration of her account. She is demonstrating to Jane that if one wants to produce larger social consequences (i.e. her exculpation before her
classmates), one must also expect some level of reliance on larger networks of discursive practice, authority, and testimony. But perhaps more importantly, Miss Temple illustrates that discursive strategies, when properly employed, can produce changes in one’s circumstances.

After Miss Temple clears Jane’s name within the school, Jane settles in to her life there, and is eventually the top student in the first class. Her education and tools of restraint that she learns from Helen and Miss Burns benefit her in unexpected ways. This is not to say that Jane is always calm and restrained. When Miss Temple leaves Lowood to get married, Jane begins to feel anxious for change again, feeling herself grow “tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon” (151). But even as she desires a change in her circumstances, Jane still employs the restraint that she has internalized:

I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it, and framed a humbler supplication; for change, for stimulus: that petition too, seemed swept off into vague space; ‘then,’ I cried, half desperate, ‘Grant me at least a new servitude!’ (151)

Jane generates three different formulations of her desire for change. The first, for liberty, and the second, for stimulus, seem far beyond her reach, as access to these almost immediately requires financial independence, which Jane lacks at this point. She then exercises the discipline that she has learned, and seeks what she might readily attain: a new dependency. This at least involves a change in her circumstances. Sharon Marcus notes that considering Jane’s socially disadvantageous position, “this approach offers her a way to expand her field of action” (210). Thus, Jane gains liberty by restraining the manner in which she reflects on the possibilities for her future life. As she moves to Thornfield, however, Jane must learn new discursive techniques, as restraining her
expression alone will not be adequate to face the challenges that her new master will present.

1.4 Thornfield: The Authority of the Speaker

Before Jane even meets the master of Thornfield, Edward Rochester, the battle for authority as a speaker has already begun. As with the case of the china in Miss Temple’s tearoom, the struggle begins in material terms. Rochester establishes his authority by restricting the books to which Jane has access:

Most of the books were locked up behind glass doors; but there was one book-case left open, containing everything that could be needed in the way of elementary works, and several volumes of light literature, poetry, biography, travel, a few romances &c. I suppose he had considered that these were all the governess would require for her private perusal. (171)

The books that Rochester selects for Adele’s education are unremarkable in that they simply appear to reflect the “elementary works” requisite for an education. When discussing the books left for her private use, it is important to note that Jane does not say that Rochester has provided books that are adequate for her interests. Indeed, the books say nothing about her at all, as she notes that they represent only what Rochester thinks of as necessary for her interest. Rochester’s restrictions also do not succeed in constructing or restraining her interests, as she claims that the books only content her “for the present” (171). Thus, Rochester’s attempt to restrict Jane’s access to the books only succeeds in revealing his assumptions, as Jane adeptly turns a moment that stresses her dependence to her advantage.

While Rochester establishes that he should have more influence and authority as a speaker than Jane because of his age and experience, she cuts short his first attempt to talk about her in terms of his previous experiences with women. Rochester demonstrates
his authority by talking about Adele in same terms as he does her mother, Celine Varens, when she asks for her gift from his travels:

“Yes—there is your ‘boîte’ at last: take it into a corner, you genuine daughter of Paris, and amuse yourself with disemboweling it,” said the deep and rather sarcastic voice of Mr. Rochester, proceeding from the depths of an immense easy-chair at the fire-side. “And mind,” he continued, “don’t bother me with any details of the anatomical process, or any notice of the condition of the entrails: let your operation be conducted in silence.” (200-01)

The passage demonstrates a number of narrative strategies that simultaneously work to Rochester’s advantage and reveal the problems of his methods. In referring to her as a “genuine daughter of Paris,” Rochester is comparing Adele to her mother, Celine Varens, who used Rochester for his fortune and then betrayed him by denigrating his character to another of her lovers. Rochester is implying that because Adele takes such pleasure in her gift and constantly demands it, she exhibits the same heartless material impulses her mother did. In describing the opening of the present as “disemboweling” and referring to its contents as “entrails,” he is suggesting that Adele inflicts pain, even torture, in the process of gaining her present, just as her mother did to have access to Rochester’s fortune. What Rochester does not realize, though, is that in providing her with the gift, he is in a sense constructing her interest in material goods. In addition, his imperative that she remain silent prevents Adele from countering his construction of her. She is left the helpless victim of Rochester’s discursive practices.

Jane, however, is not so helpless and quickly prevents Rochester’s attempt to construct her feminine caprice. When Rochester asks Jane if she, like Adele, expects a gift, Jane notes that Adele has more a claim to them than she because Adele is his charge and because there is precedent as Rochester has “always been in the habit of giving her
playthings” (191). Rochester seeks to counter Jane’s explanation by arguing that the improvements he has seen in Adele warrant such a gift: “She has no talents, yet in a short time she has made much improvement” (191). Before Rochester can then yoke his claim into a reason that Jane should have a present, Jane claims that his comment itself is a gift: “Sir, you have now given me my ‘cadeau,’ I am obliged to you: it is the meed teachers most covet; --praise of their pupils’ progress” (191). Jane’s response is significant in that it prevents Rochester from accusing her of the same caprice that Celine Varens demonstrates. Her gift is abstract, a compliment, which prevents Rochester from talking about her as someone who seeks only material advantages. In addition, it roots Rochester’s gift firmly within the realm of her profession. He is not, then, at liberty to discourse about her character or actions. Jane’s triumph is clear, as Rochester responds by sitting back in his chair and taking his tea “in silence” (191).

Not content to give Jane the authority to articulate her position and feelings, however, Rochester resorts to subterfuge to guide how Jane responds to her circumstances. While the Ingrams and other guests are visiting at Thornfield, Rochester disguises himself as a wandering gypsy and being admitted to the house, invites each of the young ladies to have their fortunes read. Jane is the last to meet with the gypsy, and is at first oblivious to Rochester’s disguise. Rochester begins the charade not by giving Jane her own fortune, but by attempting to gather information. The gypsy asks if Jane has not detected the air of gratitude that Rochester has for Blanche Ingram, his intended bride, and Jane replies that she has detected nothing of the sort. The gypsy responds quickly to this remark: “Detecting! You have analyzed, then. And what did you detect, if not gratitude?” (280). Jane has inadvertently revealed to Rochester that she has been
thinking about his potential marriage to Blanche and the feelings that he entertains for her. She stops the gypsy from making further enquiries, however, by noting that she “came here to inquire, not to confess” (280). Rochester knows his audience well, even choosing a discursive practice that Jane supports by observing that “destiny is not written [on the palm] . . . it is in the face: on the forehead, about the eyes, in the eyes themselves, in the lines of the mouth” (278). Jane’s previous attempts to read Rochester in terms of his physiognomy and to discuss his character based on its principles suggest that she places faith in this interpretive strategy, and hence she submits herself as an object of the gypsy’s gaze. After noting the relationship between Jane’s character and the various features of the face, the gypsy notes that there is “no enemy to a fortunate issue but in the brow” (281), which dictates that “judgment shall still have the last word in every argument” (282). The gypsy then dismisses Jane, who at that moment notices the ring that reveals Rochester’s identity. Jane is shocked and cannot account for Rochester’s deception: “I believe you have been trying to draw me out—or in: you have been talking nonsense to make me talk nonsense. It is scarcely fair, sir” (283). Sally Shuttleworth notes that in submitting herself to the gypsy’s gaze, Jane gives Rochester the power to control the articulation of the psyche (171). Rochester’s choice of the discourse of physiognomy certainly gives him authority in the situation, as it is one of which Jane approves. If having “control” is the goal here, however, then it fails, as the scene only serves to heighten Jane’s suspicions and to make her more wary of Rochester as a speaker.

As with her experiences at Gateshead and Lowood, however, Jane’s engagement with discursive practices must evolve if she is ever to change her circumstances. In the
proposal scene in the garden at Thornfield, Jane employs the strategy that will help her both to express her love for Rochester and subsequently to separate herself from him when she finds that he is married: submitting herself as an object of discourse. She moves away from distrusting Rochester and instead employs the manner in which he discusses her character and fate to her advantage. This assists her in evaluating and responding to her thoughts and feelings. Rochester follows Jane into the garden and torments her with musings about his impending marriage to Blanche Ingram. He tells Jane that he will find her a new position when he is married, as Jane requested. He asks if Jane will miss Thornfield, which prompts Jane to explain why she will miss her home:

I love it, because I have lived in it a full and delightful life,--momentarily at least. I have not been trampled on. I have not been petrified. I have not been buried with inferior minds, and excluded from every glimpse of communion with what I reverence; with what I delight in,--with an original, a vigorous, an expanded mind. (337)

Carla Kaplan notes that Jane’s frequent use of “I” in this passage represents her struggle to create an ontological expression of self (9). While this may be true, it is complicated by Jane’s frequent use of the passive voice. In evaluating her life at Thornfield, Jane claims that she loves it because she has not “been trampled on,” “been petrified,” “been buried” or “[been] excluded.” The relationship between the “I” and the passive voice indicates one of Jane’s most complex discursive attempts to date: to be both subject and object. In using “I” to assert her feelings, she becomes the subject actively constructing her fate; in using the passive voice, she acknowledges that the reasons for asserting her feelings are based on her experiences as the object of Rochester’s treatment. The desire to become both subject and object is the key to what follows in her exchange with Rochester. She must become the object of his discourse as a means of evaluating how he
speaks of and thinks about her. She must become the subject who participates in his description of her as a means of rejecting the manner in which he speaks about her.

Rochester goes to extreme lengths in prompting Jane to confess her feelings for him. He first tells her that he has found a new situation for her in Ireland. Jane here employs her strategy, identifying the coldness and complacency with which Rochester describes her new life:

The thought of Mrs. O’Gall and Bitternut Lodge struck cold to my heart; and colder the thought of all the brine and foam, destined, as it seemed, to rush between me and the master, at whose side I now walked; and coldest the remembrance of the wider ocean—wealth, caste, custom intervened between me and what I naturally and inevitably loved. (336)

Jane’s submission to Rochester’s discussion of her future in Ireland assists her in articulating the physical and emotional consequences of her separation from Rochester, which she finds intolerable. In addition, it demonstrates the more complex social boundaries that prevent her from having any claim as Rochester’s equal. Her submission to his description, however, helps her to formulate an alternative form of equality, one that will allow her to reject Rochester’s formulation and to articulate her feelings:

Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton?—a machine without feelings? and can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water, dashed from my cup? Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless?—You think wrong! . . . it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God’s feet, equal,—as we are! (338)

As previously noted, becoming subject and object is significant in employing discourse as an evaluative tool. This becomes clear in the passage as the relationship between form and function is complex. Jane begins to reject the possibility of her installment at Bitternut Lodge by asking what appear to be a series of rhetorical questions. Jane,
however, does not know the answer to these questions. She does not know that Rochester loves her and is manipulating her to confess her feelings. The questions in effect produce Jane as subject and object, allowing her to both assert her feelings and to convince Rochester to articulate his. She asserts her feelings in the questions by systematically rejecting the qualities that would cause Rochester to dismiss them. She expresses her feelings in the very act of encouraging Rochester to acknowledge that her feelings exist. She also prompts Rochester to re-evaluate the terms of her existence by demonstrating how her separation from him affects her. In short, she is submitting herself as the object of his scrutiny even as she articulates her love. While this may seem a liberating moment for Jane in which becoming subject and object helps her to achieve the desired end (Rochester’s proposal), she must yet be vigilant in observing and countering Rochester’s attempts at control in their discursive exchanges. Ruth Yeazell notes that despite the fact that love and independence seem to come together in the garden, Jane must remain alert, lest her “apparent freedom become a new form of imprisonment” (139). Nor is it long before Rochester seeks to compromise the very independence that the garden scene would seem to offer.

Rochester’s bid for authority as a speaker begins as early as the morning after his proposal to Jane. After greeting her with a kiss, he refers to her as “Mrs. Rochester,” which produces a blush. He then becomes more explicit in his possession, calling her “Fairfax Rochester’s girl-bride” (343). Jane’s response has interesting implications:

It can never be, sir; it does not sound likely. Human beings never enjoy complete happiness in this world. I was not born for a different destiny to the rest of my species: to imagine such a lot befalling me, is a fairy tale—a day-dream” (343)
While Jane’s answer may seem to enact the expected discourse in which the blushing bride-to-be expresses shock that her life is replicating the ideals of a fairy tale, Jane’s response has more problematic implications. In comparing the relation she feels when she thinks of being Rochester’s wife to a fairy tale, Jane immediately draws a parallel with the half fairy that she sees in the mirror at Gateshead. The mirror and the name “Mrs. Rochester” serve the same purpose here. Jane is able to articulate and respond to her alienation within the family by looking in the mirror. As she looks into the name “Mrs. Rochester” and tries to see herself embodied in this term, she sees only impossibilities. She is hesitant to accept the way Rochester discusses her (although she may not be aware of the reason for her reluctance at present). Although Rochester claims that he “can and will realize” (343) Jane’s fairy tale, his attempts to do so ultimately fail.

Rochester is not content merely to mark Jane linguistically by giving her his name. He must claim her by decorating her in the family jewels: “I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings” (344). Rochester’s language has hints of slavery in its descriptions, as he places the chain-like bracelets on Jane and renders her fairy-like fingers mundane with the weight of the family’s rings. And although Jane would prefer not to have the jewels, they are merely a prop for Rochester to commit a far more alarming form of tyranny:

“I will make the world acknowledge you a beauty, too,” he went on, while I really became uneasy at the strain he had adopted; because I felt he was either deluding himself, or trying to delude me. “I will attire my Jane in satin and lace, and she shall have roses in her hair; and I will cover the head I love best with a priceless veil.” (344)

The worst threat is not being draped in jewels, but rather being made the constant object of his humiliating discursive practices. Becoming his plaything so that he may convince
others of the validity of his claims about her beauty makes Jane uncomfortable. Her response is not predicated only on her fear of economic inequality, but rather on the fear of losing discursive equality. In the garden scene, Jane submits herself as an object of Rochester’s discourse on her life as a governess and establishes a formulation of spiritual equality in doing so. In this case, though, Jane is not comfortable in submitting to Rochester’s interpretation of her appearance and notes that she should become “an ape in a harlequin’s jacket” (344) should she submit. In short, accepting the manner in which Rochester’s talks about her beauty and his plans for domination as a speaker in making others acknowledge this beauty would mean sacrificing the very means of bringing them together: a mutually beneficial discursive exchange. In this case, Jane would be strictly the object and could not use his conclusions about her as a tool for self-evaluation because they would be premised on delusions.\textsuperscript{14}

Jane attempts to avoid a sense of complete dependence on Rochester by writing to her uncle in the West Indies to inform him of her coming marriage. The result, however, is not what she anticipated. An attorney appears on her wedding day and stops the proceedings, noting that Rochester is already married to Bertha Mason. Rochester confesses to his attempt at bigamy and takes the entire wedding party to the attic of Thornfield to show them his “wife,” who is plagued by madness and who has already made an attempt on Rochester’s life. Far from sacrificing his authority as a speaker, Rochester attempts to employ Jane’s belief in truthful accounts against her:

“I am a fool!” cried Mr. Rochester, suddenly. “I keep telling her I am not married, and do not explain to her why. I forget she knows nothing of the circumstances attending my infernal union with her. Oh, I am certain Jane will agree with me in opinion, when she knows all that I know!” (395)
Rochester has already manipulated Jane into revealing her feelings by creating a false account of his intended marriage to Blanche Ingram. He has every reason to think, then, that she will be persuaded by the true story of his marriage. Interestingly, this passage has certain characteristics in common with legal proceedings. He notes that Jane can only be convinced of his “opinion” when she hears “the circumstances attending” his marriage to Bertha. Even more interesting is that he is using language similar to legal discourses to convince Jane to adopt an extralegal definition of “marriage.” He is using a socially accepted manner of expression to convince her to act outside of socially accepted definitions. This seems to demonstrate the full scope of Rochester’s manipulative impulses. It is not, however, entirely different from how Jane has used language. She submits herself as an object Rochester’s discourse on her life in Ireland as a means of arguing against him. In short, she uses a means of communicating with which her audience is comfortable (one of Rochester’s own creation), and uses it to posit her own claims, which is precisely what Rochester does here. He may, though not consciously, be using Jane’s own narrative strategy against her. The outcome, though, is not what he hopes for.

Rochester recounts the circumstances of his marriage to Bertha, which are primarily orchestrated by his greedy father and brother. He portrays himself as a victim of their avaricious ambitions and of his wife’s ignoble and lascivious proclivities. He does manage to provoke Jane’s sympathy, but Jane again submits herself as an object of his discourse on madness and his assumptions about his mistresses to produce her separation from him in the same way that she once did to ensure their union. Jane listens
patiently to his account, but when he makes disparaging remarks about Bertha because she is mad, she stops him:

“Sir,” I interrupted him, “you are inexorable for that unfortunate lady: you speak of her with hate—with vindictive antipathy. It is cruel—she cannot help being mad. “Jane, my little darling, (so I will call you, for so you are), you don’t know what you are talking about; you misjudge me again: it is not because she is mad I hate her. If you were mad, do you think I should hate you” “I do indeed, sir.”

Jane is moved to identify with the marginalized figure of Bertha by Rochester’s professions of hatred for the lady. She remains unconvinced by Rochester’s assertions that madness is not the source of his disgust. Jane rejects how Rochester participates in the discourse of madness. He portrays Bertha’s condition as a result of heredity and her own problematic behaviors. Jane shifts the terms by which Bertha’s current condition is evaluated by noting that it is not her fault that she is mad. She feels sympathy for Bertha and refuses to dismiss her as Rochester’s “wife” based on how he discusses the source of and consequences of madness. Thus, by identifying with a marginalized figure and interrupting his discursive practices, Jane is able to work against Rochester’s argument for an alternative form of marriage.

Rochester, however, is not so quick to give up the argument, shifting its terms to focus on the topic of equality. He notes that he regrets his affairs in Europe because he allowed himself to consort with inferiors: “and to live familiarly with inferiors is degrading. I now hate the recollection of the time I passed with Celine, Giacinta, and Clara” (403). His point in referring to his previous mistresses is to assure Jane that as she is his equal, she should not fear that he will ever harbor the same feelings of hatred and disgust for her that he now demonstrates for them. Jane again experiences herself as an
object of Rochester’s discourse to set up an internal monologue against Rochester’s attempts at persuasion:

I felt the truth of these words; and I drew from them the certain inference, that if I were so far to forget myself and all the teaching that had ever been instilled into me, as—under any pretext—with any justification—through any temptation—to become the successor of these poor girls, he would one day regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their memory. I did not give utterance to this conviction: it was enough to feel it. I impressed it on my heart, that it might remain there to serve me as aid in the time of trial. (403)

This assessment involves an interesting acknowledgement on her part: circumstances intimately affect and shape the individuals who share them. More specifically, Rochester can only resist thinking of Jane as his mistress for a short time when she is living with him as his mistress. She doubts whatever claims that he makes that he can live outside of social definitions of equality and marriage. In living with Rochester, she would be made his inferior, and it would only be a matter of time before he realizes this. Jane does not employ moral arguments in her resistance to Rochester’s plans; rather, she argues that to live with him under any title than his wife will bring about her fear of becoming nothing to him. Here again, Jane submits herself to the same discursive strategies that Rochester employs in talking of his mistresses, and in doing so establishes not her differences from them (as Rochester would wish), but rather how circumstances would render her position similar to theirs. It is significant that she does not voice her concerns. When she noted that she believed Rochester would treat her in the same manner as Bertha if she were mad, he vehemently argues against this idea. By keeping her concerns to herself, Jane denies Rochester the ability to argue with her, effectively putting an end to his arguments in favor of bigamy.
1.5 Moments at Moor House: Discourse and the Deus ex Machina

Jane subsequently leaves Thornfield and, after three days of cruel deprivation and rejection, arrives at Moor House, which fortuitously is also the home of three people later revealed as her cousins. St. John, Mary, and Diana Rivers kindly take Jane into their home, and here Jane encounters a foe entirely different from any she has encountered previously. The trend in the conversations that St. John and Jane engage in seems to be reading the other person as much as possible without being read. Jane operates under the name “Jane Elliot” to prevent St. John from discovering her relationship with Rochester. Their battles for authority, however, go well beyond merely interpreting each other while avoiding interpretations of themselves. Jane and St. John compete for speaking authority by attempting to have the other person adopt a new way of talking about themselves. For example, Jane has authority to the extent that she can convince St. John to talk about himself in the terms that she has in mind. More specifically, Jane has authority as a speaker when she can convince St. John to discuss his potential to become Rosamund Oliver’s husband and a minister in England, rather his intentions to become an ascetic missionary in India. And for some time it appears that Jane is winning the battle.

In her first attempt to convince St. John to accept her discursive practices, Jane brings her artistic abilities to her aid. In her hours of leisure, Jane has painted a portrait of Rosamund Oliver, a wealthy heiress of an established family, and St. John’s love interest. She hopes to use the painting to stimulate St. John’s feelings of love and to persuade him to take Rosamund as his wife. Although he plans to become a missionary in India and thus rejects the notion of marrying Rosamund, St. John sees her portrait and agrees to let himself indulge in the fantasy of being with her for a quarter of an hour:
Now I see myself stretched on an ottoman in the drawing-room at Vale Hall, at my bride Rosamund Oliver’s feet: she is talking to me with her sweet voice—gazing down on me with those eyes your skillful hand has copied so well—smiling at me with these coral lips. She is mine—I am hers—this present life and passing world suffice to me. (470)

Jane seems to be victorious in that she persuades St. John to articulate the material and emotion consequences of his union with Rosamund as she does. He imagines the material advantages of being installed at Rosamund’s family home and the specific aesthetic pleasures that her company would afford. In effect, St. John submits himself as an object of another’s discourse in the same way that Jane does when she envisions the life that she would have in Ireland if forced to leave Rochester. Unfortunately for Jane, the consequences are also the same when St. John’s quarter of an hour has elapsed:

“Now,” said he, “that little space was given to delirium and delusion. I rested my temples on the breast of temptation, and put my neck voluntarily under her yoke of flowers; I tasted her cup. The pillow was burning: this is an asp in the garland: the wine has a bitter taste: her promises are hollow—her offers false: I see and know this.” (470)

Just as Jane becomes an object of Rochester’s discourse as a means of rejecting the conditions he describes as a possibility, St. John uses Jane’s manner of talking about him as a “husband” as a means of rejecting its realization. This becomes all the more obvious in the language that he employs, positing the fantasy as “temptation” and referring to the deceptive and dangerous “asp.” St. John uses Jane’s discursive stragety to reaffirm his intention to be a missionary and to congratulate himself for resisting temptation. Jane’s victory is only temporary and ultimately assists in producing the reverse of her intentions.

Jane soon submits to being an object of St. John’s discursive practices, but rather than employing them to push other people away, she uses them to bring her family together and forge a new form of justice. St. John informs Jane that she is worth twenty
thousand pounds and also mentions that the uncle in Madeira who left her the fortune is
his uncle as well. Jane realizes that St. John, Mary and Diana are her cousins and this
becomes her focus, rather than the fortune. St. John admonishes her for neglecting
“essential points to pursue trifles” (483). He encourages Jane to focus on how her fortune
could benefit her, rather than the insignificant trifle of finding out that her benefactors are
also her family. In short, he encourages her to understand “justice” strictly within its
legal context. Jane takes St. John’s advice and discusses herself as the wealthy heiress
whose possessions are her own according to law, but not with the effect that St. John
expects:

> It would please and benefit me to have five thousand pounds; it would
torment and oppress me to have twenty thousand: which moreover, could
never be mine in justice, though it might in law. I abandon to you, then,
what is absolutely superfluous to me. . .you see the justice of the case?
(484-85)

Rather than keeping the twenty thousand pounds for herself, Jane proposes to divide it
with St. John, Mary, and Diana. Although Rochester could not convince Jane to adopt an
extralegal definition of “marriage,” Jane modifies legal discourse and generates a new
definition of “justice” here because she feels that her cousins have just as much a right to
the fortune as she has.¹⁹ She believes this in part because her uncle in Madeira made his
fortune with the help of St. John’s father. But more importantly, she feels that it is
beneficial to everyone; it allows Mary and Diana to live at Moor House rather than being
governesses; it provides funds for St. John’s missionary goals in India; and it allows Jane
to have a family with whom she shares mutual affection and respect for the first time. As
it is mutually beneficial to all parties and can only unite her family, Jane privileges her
new definition of justice above other formulations, and she eventually persuades even St.
John to admit “a certain justice” (485) to her idea. Jane then takes the necessary legal steps and by Christmas, she and her cousins are each possessed of five thousand pounds. At this point, both Jane and St. John have submitted to each other’s discursive practice to achieve their own purposes. Jane’s fate as an heiress and St. John’s fantasy of being Rosamund’s husband, however, represent their lives as two different entities. It is when St. John attempts to convince Jane as his wife, bringing their fates together, that the battle for authority and the usefulness of being an object of discourse become the focus of their relationship.

When St. John wishes Jane to come to India with him and be his wife, he employs a number of strategies to convince her that it is the most appropriate course of action for her. He encourages her not to fear the journey, as he himself was at first afraid, but soon learned to have faith in his “summons from Heaven” (501). He also encourages her not to fear her physical inferiority, for though God has chosen “a feeble instrument to perform a great task, He will from the boundless stores of His providence, supply the inadequacy of the means to the end” (501). After Jane notes that she feels no spiritual quickening when he speaks, St. John notes that Jane is perfectly fitted for the position because of the generosity she showed in sharing her fortune and because she is “docile, diligent, disinterested, faithful, constant, and courageous” (502). As Jane considers the proposal, she again inserts herself into St. John’s discursive practices to consider what her life with St. John would entail:

Can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love (which I doubt not he would scrupulously observe) and know that the spirit was quite absent? Can I bear the consciousness that every endearment he bestows is a sacrifice made on principle? No: such a martyrdom would be
monstrous. I will never undergo it. As his sister, I might accompany him—not as his wife: I will tell him so. (504)

Just as when she attempted to articulate the consequences of her life in Ireland without Rochester, Jane attempts to see herself as St. John’s wife. She examines at first the physical consequences of such a union, the acceptance of the ring and the consummation of the marriage. She then examines the schism between these physical acts and the feelings that St. John would have in performing them. The vision that emerges from this comparison is one that Jane cannot carry out. She immediately understands the differences between how she and St. John understand and discourse about “marriage.” She proposes instead to go to India as St. John’s sister.

St. John attempts to convince her that this is not feasible because a sister can be taken from him at any time, whereas a wife is pledged to stay at his side. He assures her that he does not want to marry her because he loves her, but rather to fulfill God’s wishes for his work. This merely gives Jane all the more reason to reject him: “Oh! I will give my heart to God. . .you do not want it.” (505) St. John then adeptly turns the conversation back to its spiritual rewards, noting that “the advancement of that Maker’s spiritual kingdom on earth will be your chief delight and endeavor” (506). Jane refuses to accept this argument absolutely and again examines the manner in which St. John discusses marriage to evaluate the circumstances that she would endure as St. John’s wife. More specifically, she interrogates the consequences of his desire to have a “sole helpmeet I can influence efficiently in this life” (505):

But as his wife—at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked—forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital—this would be unendurable. (507)
Jane’s use of fire is only partly metaphorical here. She has, as demonstrated at Lowood, learned and internalized restraint and discipline. These lessons, however, did not encourage her to immolate her sense of selfhood. Rather, they taught her to discipline the desires of the self to social circumstances and to set achievable goals. In this case, the restraint that she would practice as St. John’s wife would slowly consume and alter her nature. She agrees with St. John’s thought that she would become accustomed to being his wife, but she finds the consequences unsupportable. In noting that her vitals would slowly be consumed, Jane also seems to represent a decline in her health as a result of the emotional consequences of being St. John’s wife. Even her cousin Diana notes that Jane is “much too pretty, as well as too good, to be grilled alive in Calcutta” (515). It would seem, then, that Jane has successfully used St. John’s discourse on marriage to formulate a means of escaping its realization.

St. John, however, is not so easily deterred. He cleverly shifts from a discourse of marriage to one of religious duty, portraying himself as the faithful and devoted pilgrim who struggles to emulate the patience and diligence of Christ:

My Master was long-suffering: so will I be, I cannot give you up to perdition as a vessel of wrath: repent—resolve; while there is yet time. Remember, we are bid to work while it is day—warned that ‘the night cometh when no man shall work.’ (518)

Rather than positing himself as Jane’s husband, he portrays himself as the servant of God seeking to protect his flock. By implying that Jane’s reward in heaven or her punishment as a “vessel of wrath” in perdition is found after death, he places Jane in an impossible position. Jane has been accustomed to submitting herself as an object of discourse to envision the physical and emotional consequences of her potential actions (i.e. her
separation from Rochester in Ireland and her acceptance of the bridal ring and consummation of her marriage to St. John). In noting that the circumstances that Jane would encounter await her after death, St. John effectively denies Jane the ability to envision the material circumstances that emerge from his discourse on religious duty. The consequences are far too abstract and removed from her immediate circumstances for her to rationally evaluate their desirability.

As a result, Jane is very nearly convinced that marriage to St. John would be possible. In her plight, she looks elsewhere for an answer:

I entreated of Heaven. I was excited more than I had ever been; and whether what followed was the effect of excitement, the reader shall judge. . .Suddenly it stood still to an inexpressible feeling that thrilled it through, and passed at once to my head and extremities. The feeling was not like an electric shock; but it was quite as sharp, as strange, as startling: it acted on my senses as if their utmost activity hitherto had been but torpor; from which they were not summoned, and forced to wake. They rose expectant: the eye and ear waited, while the flesh quivered on my bones. (519)

She then hears Rochester’s disembodied voice calling out to her in agony and despair.

This may seem the deus ex machina come to extricate poor Jane from the persuasions of St. John, and it certainly has this effect. The particular terms on which this moment is predicated, however, are far more significant than the source of the feeling, which is ambiguous at best. Peter Grudin notes that “she is no match for St. John” because “the months spent in around Moor-House have helped to purge her of her romantic individualism and willfulness” (156). It does not seem true that Jane has lost her individualism and willfulness. If this were the case, it does not seem as though the feeling of shock and the voice would have such an impact on her. She is drawn to Rochester’s voice precisely because she has not lost her individualism. Grudin does
seem correct, however, in noting that Jane is no match for St. John. He has already suppressed her strategy of productively submitting herself to discursive practices, and hence she is left defenseless. It is significant that the feeling she experiences prior to the voice reaffirms her physical senses. It forces her out of the spell that St. John has cast and causes her flesh to quiver as she waits in anticipation. As Jane has been accustomed to evaluating the physical circumstances emerging from various discursive practices, this feeling confirms and reinforces her previous means of evaluation, recalling her again to physical awareness. Jane is the victim of St. John’s religious discourse, and hence needs a summons outside of discourse, Rochester’s disembodied voice, to release her. She subsequently leaves Moor House and returns to Thornfield, where she believes Rochester waits for her, and where her interpretive strategies are useful in altering her circumstances.

1.6 Return to Thornfield and Ferndean: Silence as Strategy

Upon her return, Jane finds not a grand home and her faithful master, but rather a ruin of a mansion gutted by fire and devoid of inhabitants. In looking at the ruins and attempting to deduce what happened, Jane demonstrates a rare moment of evaluating physical evidence:

I gathered evidence that the calamity was not of late occurrence. Winter snows, I thought, had drifted through that void arch, winter rains beaten in at those hollow casements; for, amidst the drenched piles of rubbish, spring had cherished vegetation: grass and weed grew here and there between the stones and fallen rafters. And, oh! where, meantime was the hapless owner of this wreck? In what land? Under what auspices? (525) Jane is able to deduce some amount of useful information from the physical evidence of the wreck. She deduces that the fire must not have occurred recently from the fact that
vegetation is growing amongst the stones and rubbish of the ruined estate. What is more interesting about this moment, however, is that it points to what Jane does not know, what the evidence is inadequate to tell her. As her final three questions of the passage demonstrate, she cannot determine if Rochester is alive or dead, much less where he now resides or the conditions of his existence. She also has no means of discovering the cause of the fire. Jane must rely on the testimony of outside sources to derive this information.

As her circumstances have changed and St. John has employed her discursive strategies against her, Jane’s methods evolve and form a new basis for evaluation: silence.

Considering that Jane has used how others discourse about her to formulate and express new forms of equality and justice, silence may seem an altogether shocking approach to finding Rochester and ensuring her happiness. This new strategy does not, however, represent an abandonment of her previous practices. Rather, it demonstrates Jane’s increasing comfort with directing how others talk about her. Jane subsequently returns to the town inn to question the keeper about the events of Thornfield. She successfully encourages him to relate the events and time of year of the fire. The host begins to digress, though, by noting that “a queer thing happened a year since” (527). Jane has assiduously hidden her identity from the innkeeper, perhaps because she suspects it will influence what information he will relate to her. When he begins to talk about the “queer thing,” Jane fears that she will hear her own story: “I endeavored to recall him to the main fact” (527). She remains silent on the fact of her identity and curbs the innkeeper’s desire to discuss the governess not because it will wound her pride, but rather because she wants to find out Rochester’s fate as soon as possible. When the innkeeper insists on recounting how the governess “bewitched” (527) Rochester, Jane
interrupts him and admits that she has a “particular reason for wishing to hear all about
the fire” (527). Here again, she remains silent on the point of why it is that she wants to
her about the fire. She diverts the innkeeper’s story by asking him if Mrs. Rochester had
a hand in the fire. This question finally moves the innkeeper’s attention away from the
governess to the cause of the fire, its effects on Rochester, and how it leads to his retreat
to Ferndean.

As in previous instances, Jane employs the innkeeper’s testimony to challenge the
way in which he talks about her. The innkeeper, for example, notes that Mr. Rochester
was bold and spirited before “that midge of a governess crossed him” and wishes that she
had “sunk in the sea before she came to Thornfield Hall” (528). His portrayal of Jane is
not at all flattering and suggests that she is responsible for depriving Rochester of his
vitality. By remaining silent on the point of her identity and encouraging the innkeeper to
remain silent on the story of the governess, Jane derives the information that will allow
her to disprove the brief portrait that the innkeeper gives of her (the governess). Lisa
Sternlieb notes that later Jane’s written account will redeem her and work against the
townspeople’s description of her as “the one bewitches, distracts, and emasculates the
spirited, keen, bold gentleman” (467). What is more interesting, however, is that Jane
employs the innkeeper’s very testimony as the means of counteracting their perceptions
of her. In locating Rochester with the help of the innkeeper’s account, Jane is given the
opportunity to act the part of rehumanizing Rochester and rejecting the oral accounts of
her.

Jane procures a means of transportation to Ferndean from the innkeeper and
travels to Ferndean, where the strategy of silence avails her in bringing about her
marriage to Rochester. She employs the strategy of silence in her second interview with Rochester, which takes place in the garden at Ferndean. She intentionally allows Rochester to misconstrue her relationship with St. John by responding to his questions in the most positive and approving terms. Rochester asks if his brain is soft, to which Jane replies that it is “not impressible, but vigorous” (543). He asks if St. John is educated, and Jane notes that he is “an accomplished and profound scholar” (543). When his more innocent questions do not produce a response that is critical of St. John, Rochester seeks to impose his own interpretations onto Jane’s: “His manners, I think you said, are not to your taste?—priggish and parsonic? . . . His appearance,—I forget what description you gave of his appearance—a sort of raw curate, half strangled with his white neck-cloth, and stilted up on his thick-soled high-lows, eh?” (543). Rochester is encouraging Jane to give a negative account of St. John, in part so that he may still have hope that Jane will marry him. Jane’s silence is of the utmost importance here.  

She does not yet inform Rochester that she declined St. John’s offer of marriage. She allows Rochester to believe, based largely on her favorable account of St. John, that she wishes to marry him.

Jane’s assertion that St. John’s manners are “polished, calm, and gentlemanlike” and that his appearance presents a “Grecian profile” (543) produces an interesting effect on Rochester. He begins to compare himself to St. John, increasing his fear that Jane would rather be with her cousin than with her old master:

The picture you have just drawn is suggestive of a rather too overwhelming contrast. Your words have delineated very prettily a graceful Apollo. . . Your eyes dwell on a Vulcan,—a real blacksmith, brown, broad-shouldered; and blind and lame into the bargain. (544)
Rochester’s own physical deficiencies stand in stark contrast to the portrait that Jane has produced of St. John. Jane has effectively dismissed Rochester’s attempt to produce a negative account of St. John. He succumbs to the idea that St. John is his superior on many points. Through a series of questions he discovers that St. John asked Jane to marry him. Based on Jane’s account of St. John’s appearance and character, Rochester assumes that Jane has agreed to marry her cousin. Jane does not at first contradict his assumption, allowing Rochester to arrive at conclusions based on his discourse with her. Her silence on this point produces a reversal of Rochester’s garden proposal at Thornfield:

“Oh, till this moment, I thought my little Jane was all mine! I had a belief she loved me even when she left me: that was an atom of sweet in much bitter. Long as we have parted, hot tears as I have wept over our separation, I never thought that while I was mourning her, she was loving another! But it is useless grieving. Jane, leave me: go and marry Rivers. (545)

Without saying a word to confirm his idea that she will marry St. John, Jane has forced Rochester to rewrite his role. He is no longer the hopeful suitor, but the victim doomed to rehearse the “hot tears” that he shed at their initial separation. Just as Jane allowed herself to be discussed in terms of her future situation as an Irish governess in the garden scene at Thornfield, Rochester sees himself as a victim whose feelings are passed over in favor of another man. There are two significant points of difference, however, that demonstrate the effectiveness of Jane’s strategy. When Rochester proposes to Jane, he heightens her feelings by repeatedly asserting that he will marry Blanche Ingram. He employs a discourse of courtship with which Jane is unfamiliar so that Jane will reveal her feelings. Jane, however, remains entirely silent about her response to St. John’s
proposal. She has no need to establish this, as her silence encourages Rochester to produce an interpretation that confirms his continuing affection for her. Many critics, in fact, argue that Jane’s silence is too effective, ultimately placing her bid for interpretive control above her love for Rochester. This evaluation is unjust, however, as Jane ultimately gives Rochester the authority to determine their future: “Shake me off, then, sir—push me away; for I’ll not leave you of my own accord” (546). Jane accomplishes two goals with this statement: she gives Rochester reason to hope that she still loves him and allows him to decide if he will avail himself of the affection that it implies.

Rochester duly proffers his hand in marriage, and in a manner far more humble than his first proposal. Jane accepts the proposal and writes her story after she has been married to Rochester for ten years. Jane’s evolving discursive strategies, which transform her from the tortured child who vehemently rejects how others discuss her into the speaker who is comfortable in remaining silent to “charm the snake” (543), ultimately allow her to re-envision her circumstances and to bring about the end that she believes will produce her happiness.

1.7 Chapter Conclusion

Jane Eyre’s particular specimen of “detection,” then, is one of observing and constructing “self.” This would not seem to align her with the popular vision of the detective, who relentlessly hunts for clues and employs various professional discourses in evaluating them, which then results in a clear and comprehensive narrative of culpability. But it is precisely Jane’s engagement with discursive practices that connects her with later female investigators. The mechanism that allows female detectives to acknowledge a broad range of evidence and to develop new methods for interpreting it is the disruption
of dominant discourses. In particular, Jane sets up two conclusions that will prove invaluable for female detectives: 1) Submitting oneself as an object of discourse provides useful information; and 2) Interrupting or modifying discourses has the potential to generate productive social and personal consequences.

For example, Jane submits herself as an object of Rochester’s discourses, and in doing so finds a means of articulating her social position and rejecting its consequences. Valeria Woodville of The Law and the Lady similarly becomes an object of discussion for Miserrimus Dexter and Major Fitz-David. In allowing herself to be perceived as the submissive wife and proper lady, Valeria gains access to useful information. Miserrimus Dexter slowly reveals the story of Sara Macallan’s death as Valeria submits to his interpretation of women as unstable, and Major Fitz-David allows her to search his office for clues regarding her husband’s past as she submits to his degrading comparisons to other women. In allowing male characters to talk about her, and in fact about women in general, as though they should not be concerned with the past, Valeria succeeds in unearthing it.

Jane demonstrates the second of these principles when she uses legal discourse to describe herself as an heiress, and subsequently rejects it as a means of forming a new formulation of “justice.” Mina Harker employs a similar strategy in Dracula. Whereas her male protectors are inclined to dismiss what cannot be explained, Mina implicitly accepts her husband’s account of the events he experienced in Transylvania. She disrupts traditional scientific and medical discourses by acknowledging that one may indeed see things that cannot be rationally or conveniently explained. In challenging how
professionals discuss and determine the ontological status of objects, Mina is better able
to determine and thwart Dracula’s plans.

What Jane Eyre ultimately establishes, then, is that to disrupt discourse is ultimately to disrupt authority, opening a space for new speakers and new investigative methods, whether the object of investigation is the “self,” or a more socially-threatening opponent.

1 Janet Freeman notes, for example, that Jane’s later verbal attack on Mrs. Reed represents a significant transformation from a child “who remains silent, isolated behind the curtain with escape literature in her lap” (686). Carla Kaplan argues that Jane turns to books “to compensate and console her for being shut out of the family conversation” (8). These evaluations are problematic because the texts that Jane has read provide her with the means of protesting John Reed’s abusive behavior. She is not merely escaping from her suffering (this tactic does not work), but rather gathering a means of articulating it.

2 Jane is able to describe her relationship with her family through the use of the retrospective narrative. In fact, all detective stories are retrospective, following the investigator as s/he reconstructs the narrative of events. In Jane’s case, however, the reader sees her attempt to analyze events in the moment they occur and in the adult Jane’s narrative of her life. Hence, the reader has two levels of interpretation. In the first, Jane attempts to make sense of the events she witnesses. In the second, Jane reflects on the effectiveness of these methods. Hence, we not only see Jane acting as a detective, but also as a reader who evaluates her own methods. This is very similar to Mina Harker’s desire to write her journal so that she can write and listen at the same time. The retrospective narrative is thus intimately connected to Jane’s later desire to be both subject and object.

3 If Jane’s role as a detective is to reveal and construct the “self” and to change her relationships with others, then the spirit would prevent her from carrying out this role. The spirit would be created strictly to act in accordance with subconscious desires. The idea of detection, however, involves how the rational, conscious faculties interact with these desires. For example, Valeria Woodville’s act of sorting through cognitive associations demonstrates this relationship. The adult Jane’s analysis of her childhood feelings, then, is an example of detection.

4 Based on her evaluation of Jane’s reading of Bewick, Monahan might also be inclined to cite this as moment in which Jane “displaces received narratives for her own facts” (590). While it is certainly true that Jane develops her own impressions of her circumstances, she does this only by rejecting the narratives of others. For example, she rejects John Reed’s interpretation of her role as a “dependant.” In this case, Jane gains a sense of liberty, but it is only achieved through confrontation and by rejecting the interpretations that Mr. Brocklehurst and Mrs. Reed create about her. As the novel progresses, Jane develops an increasing facility for embodying the discursive strategies of others to her advantage, rather than violently rejecting them, as she does here.

5 Janet Freeman notes that later in the novel Rochester “specializes in partial truths.” As we see in this moment, Jane too employs omission in order to preserve her relationships. Jane, however, will learn new ways of disciplining her manner of expression while avoiding missions. Rochester’s life lacks the structure that Jane’s does, and it is not until Jane threatens to leave Thornfield that he will learn the necessity of being equally communicative.
The act of refining one’s expression has an intimate connection with how one understands the events under consideration. Similarly, the very means of constructing a narrative of detection requires a particular understanding of the events that form it.

This will be very important for Jane later, as outside testimony from her uncle and an attorney prevent her from marrying Rochester. This network of authority is also significant for detection because the intersections in testimony and the knowledge of experts are helpful in deriving information that may otherwise not be readily accessible.

Parama Roy argues that the tools that Jane has learned have limited usefulness, as they are “inadequate against the greater horrors of Lowood; only a typhus epidemic, and several deaths, can ameliorate those (716-17). While Roy is correct that Jane cannot protect her classmates from disease or directly improve their conditions, it is still the authority of the speaker that in a sense produces change. The deaths lead to an investigation, but it is the subsequent account of the conditions at Lowood that ultimately create change, which includes a new administrative board and better living conditions for the students.

Many critics have argued that Jane’s language training at Lowood, along with her discursive strategies, work to her advantage. Mark Hennelly Jr., for example, argues that learning the first two tenses of the French verb “être” indicates that “she has likewise learned to adapt her past temperamental self to the present restraining influences of Miss Temple and Helen Burns” (703). If this argument holds true, then her restraint works to her advantage later in that it makes her marketable, giving her the skills to change her dependency. Janet Freeman notes that Jane’s language training represents an attempt “to know the world more fully” (692). Here again, this proves useful in Jane’s quest for new employment, as speaking French helps her to build a relationship with Adele. For while we do not see Jane employ her French in its native country, the language does help her know the world more fully in the sense that it provides her with a means of understanding her pupil. Thus, it also represents preparation for the domestic sphere that she will enter at Thornfield. Sharon Marcus, however, makes an even more compelling claim for Jane’s language skills, noting that “she begins to construct her subjectivity on the basis of an alien grammar and a system of representation without referents or material grounds” (210). Jane uses her language skills not only to draw connections between herself and others, but also to construct her own subjectivity. This is particularly important for Jane, for just as she abstracts herself into a foreign grammar, she will eventually learn to submit herself to how others discourse about her as a means of evaluating her circumstances.

There is also a striking connection between Rochester’s limitations on the reading materials and John Reed’s attempt to forbid Jane from reading the family’s books. Both men are making assumptions about Jane’s status as a dependent. John Reed, however, is restricting Jane’s access to books based on the idea that she has no money, nor any way to make a living. Rochester, while still restricting Jane’s access to books, makes assumptions based on her profession. Jane will later use his focus on her profession as a governess to avoid the assumptions he makes about gender.

Just as a detective must employ outside evidence in constructing a narrative of events, Jane must use how others talk about her in order to construct the “self.” Jane is a detective at the most basic epistemological level, employing rhetorical strategies to construct her subjectivity.

The focus on the imaginative faculties has inspired a number of critical responses to this moment. Peter Bellis concludes that Jane’s imagination in such moments “is primarily visual in both its process and its products” (642). This seems particularly true for Jane, who envisions the vast ocean between herself and Rochester and uses this to articulate the material concerns that would keep her from being Rochester’s partner. This emerges later in the garden scene when Jane claims that if she had wealth, she would make it as difficult for Rochester to leave her as it is for her to leave him. Thus, Jane uses a visual medium to anticipate and articulate material consequences. Paul Pickrel evaluates Jane’s imaginative faculties by positing them against Rochester’s, noting that while Rochester’s mode is visual, which allows him to
distance himself from people, Jane’s mode is “visionary, opening up for her a truth behind appearance” (172-73). This does not seem a fair evaluation. While it is true that Rochester distances himself from people, Jane envisions the space that will come between herself and Rochester if she goes to Ireland. Thus, Jane’s visionary mode is premised on the visual. Jennifer Gribble argues that “we are driven to the symbolization and articulation of experience when we must understand it to keep ourselves oriented society and nature” (280). In Jane’s case, she articulates her experiences by submitting herself as an object of discourse, which allows her to articulate simultaneously her affirmations of selfhood and her reliance on others.

13 This moment of self-assertion has produced a greater plethora of critical responses than any other moment in the text. Critics disagree about the kind of agency that Jane has in this moment and how it is effectively deployed. Sharon Marcus, who acknowledges several moments of Jane’s authority in the text, notes that Jane is the “apparent author of her fate only when she alienates herself into writing, into advertisements, and into an abstract professional body” (209). In this case, however, Jane has submitted to Rochester’s description of her future life in Ireland and formed a means of rejecting it. Shuttleworth, however, demonstrates that such moments can be subversive in noting that Jane linguistically “attempts to transgress social boundaries whilst remaining within an accepted social framework” (152). Just as Jane must limit her ambitions to broaden her field of vision as she seeks to leave Lowood, here too she wishes to produce change without offending the sensibility of others. Other critics are loath to credit Jane with any agency or choice in the garden scene. Sandra Gilbert, for example, describes Jane as a Cinderella who is “condemned to a life of humiliating servitude from which she can only hope to escape through the intervention of an imperious man” (358). This evaluation does not seem fair, and not only because Jane’s dependence is not the same as servitude. Jane uses Rochester’s discourse about her to interrogate her own feelings and to set the terms by which Rochester will evaluate her. It is true that she must be cautious because in fulfilling her own desires, she also fulfills Rochester’s. Kaplan seems to strike a balance between these interpretations of the garden scene. She claims that exploring Jane’s efforts to find a conversation in which no one instrumentalizes the other means mapping “sites of failure overwritten by utopian desire” (6). The idea is that characters must use each other as instruments in some form, whether it is for comfort, advancement, etc. Thus, Rochester uses Jane by manipulating her into telling her feelings. Jane, however, uses Rochester by embodying his own discursive strategies and subsequently setting the terms of equality on which their union will ideally exist.

14 Peter Pickrel points out that when Rochester initially refers to himself as a rubber ball as he describes himself to Jane, he is inadvertently revealing that he is afraid of being used by others (165). Pickrel’s argument seems apt, as it would explain why Rochester makes first Adele, and now Jane, the objects of his unwavering discursive tyranny. Micael Clarke claims that the refusal to take Rochester’s gifts “establish[es] power as a key issue between them” (705). Philip Rule argues that the struggle between them is not merely economic, but rather represents “the struggle for a reconciliation of opposites that are equal” (166). Hence, the struggle is not for the authority to speak alone. Discursive exchange is one means by which Jane and Rochester express the desire for other forms of control and in part constructs how and if these other forms are to be attained. For example, Jane notes that if she were to apply the same strategy to Rochester that he applies to her in calling her beautiful, she would be undermining the very basis for her love. Thus, the struggle for authority in this case represents Jane’s desire for equality and demonstrates how one may find (or in this case drive away) the means of achieving equality.

15 Little does Rochester realize that the complexity of “marriage” destines this method to fail. The legal definition of marriage is intimately linked to other discursive formulations of the term, as the minister’s invocation of vows indicates: “For be you well assured that so many as are coupled together otherwise that God’s Word doth allow, are not joined together by God, neither is their matrimony lawful” (376). The legal definition of marriage is conflated with the religious/spiritual definition. Rochester attempts to convince Jane to develop a definition outside of legal discourses, but in doing so also asks her to abandon other definitions as well. Jane is unable to do this, as we see when Jane determines that “preconceived opinions, foregone determinations, are all I have at this hour to stand by: there I plant my foot” (408).
Melodie Monahan confirms this assessment, claiming that it is “[Jane’s] attachment to Rochester, entailing as it does the enhancement of female power, prevents Jane’s victimization in the narrative Rochester would himself authorize” (598). Jane’s submission as an object of discourse has up to this point given her power and helped her articulate the terms of her equality with Rochester. In this case, Jane prevents her victimization by using the way in which he talks about his history, his wife, and his mistresses to reject Rochester’s problematic formulation of equality.

As later chapters note, the act of comparison is important to detection because it allows for both establishing connections between evidence and establishing differences. Similarly, Jane compares her position and prospects to those of Bertha and Celine. Her conviction of the potential similarity in their relationship with Rochester gives her the tools to make her fate different from these women.

In a contemporary review of Jane Eyre, Elizabeth Rigby notes that the author is skilled in describing the subtle beauty of landscapes, but when “he talks of art itself, it is obvious that he is a complete ignoramus” (594). There is something of a misunderstanding here. Rigby is accusing the author of being inept at discoursing about the production and features of art. What Rigby neglects to see, however, is that discussing the features of art is merely a means for St. John to elude the topic of Jane’s painting. If he focuses on the technical features of the portrait, then he does not have to discuss his feelings for the person (Rosamond) it represents. How St. John attempts to employ the discourse of artistic production is far more significant than how successfully the author carries off the particulars of its features.

In effect, Jane alters St. John’s idea of “justice” to reflect that concept of “equity,” or equal division of property. This concept also belongs to legal structures, but Jane must work within the legal system to make her economic circumstances reflect this concept.

Philip Rule notes that Jane’s intentions in returning to Rochester bring to mind Rochester’s relationships with women. Whereas Bertha is the “Delilah” who robs Rochester of his strength, Jane is “one who humanizes—who saves him” (168).

Jane’s actions here are similar to later female detectives in several ways. First, Jane has to decide to what extent she wishes to share information with Rochester. This is very similar to Mina Harker’s resistance to giving Van Helsing Jonathan’s narrative. Access to and control of information is key issues in thinking about detection. Jane is no longer seeking information for herself, but is actively attempting to construct the “self” as a wife by employing silence.

Lisa Sternlieb, for example, interprets Jane’s silence as the ultimate attempt at interpretive control because Rochester’s perception of the world, and even their marriage “is derived from what she deigns to tell him” (479). Carla Kaplan would agree with this conclusion, noting that when Jane does not tell Rochester the entirety of what happens after she leaves Thornfield, she is finding a “way of resisting his power” (25). Other observers claim that Jane is actually a victim despite her seeming authority in the garden scene at Ferndean. Jean Wyatt argues that Jane is disempowered by her marriage because she is “merged with Rochester” and is trapped because “she cannot move away to pursue any autonomous activity whatever” (211). Wyatt’s description is strikingly similar to Sir William Blackstone’s statements in Commentaries on the Laws of England, in which he notes that a married woman has no legal identity because she is subsumed by her husband. Wyatt’s argument, which clearly focuses on gender issues, is problematic because the conditions of Jane’s marriage are not merely dependent on her role as a woman, but also as a caregiver of a man with a disability. Gender issues, while significant here, are not all that is at stake. Sharon Marcus addresses the implications of both gender and disability by arguing that Jane becomes a part of, but is not subsumed by Rochester: “By using writing to abstract her body into a mechanized body part, Jane accedes to sovereignty through service and becomes the scribe of both her own and her husband’s stories” (213). Thus, Jane can be wife and writer, one who is the object of social expectations and the subject who actively constructs her own story.
CHAPTER 2

DETECTIVE AND AESTHETE: FEMINIZING THE DETAIL AND DESTABILIZING NARRATIVE IN WILKIE COLLINS’S THE LAW AND THE LADY

2.1 Contingent and Dispersed Details

The role of details and how they contribute to or distract from a larger narrative is one of the most fundamental issues of representation. In Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine, Naomi Schor notes that details are historically gendered as feminine because they privilege matter over form, needing the male artist to shape and contain them. She explains that while Sir Joshua Reynolds, the preeminent authority on aesthetics in the late eighteenth century, never explicitly links details to the feminine, “he implicitly reinscribes the sexual stereotypes of Western philosophy which has, since its origins, mapped gender onto the form-matter paradigm, forging a durable link between maleness and form (eidos), femaleness and formless matter” (16). Schor claims that the detail is thus linked with the material, and often the natural world. The connection with materiality, or as Schor phrases it, “material contingency” (15) is precisely why Reynolds claims that details are not compatible with the Ideal. In Reynolds’ mind, the Ideal exists beyond the perverse particularities of nature. The very basis for arriving at the Ideal
necessarily involves comparing objects and extracting from them an abstract form more perfect than the originals. The material contingency of details that Reynolds views as distracting from the Ideal contributes to forms of social control for the Victorians.

Rather than seeing details as distracting from the Ideal, the Victorians use details as a means of arriving at a different abstract form: the linear narrative. The linear narrative, or a narrative written so that the events have a determined place and progress from a beginning to an ending, becomes central to maintaining social control because it provides a form for systematically choosing information and drawing conclusions about it. While on the surface this may seem to be merely a means of articulating complex logical relationships and understanding causal relationships, the uses of the linear narrative are intimately tied to political anxieties in Victorian England. The linear narrative becomes essential to marginalizing groups and exercising social restraint in a society “increasingly preoccupied with systematically bringing under control the potentially anarchic forces unleashed by democratic reform, urban growth, national expansion, and imperial engagement” (Thomas 4). The linear narrative, then, becomes a means of hierarchically ordering information in order to draw conclusions about class, gender, and nationality. In order to draw these conclusions, however, one must first decide which details are significant in forming the narrative. Rather than viewing all details as equally distracting, the Victorians make the distinction in practice between what Schor calls contingent and dispersed detail.

Contingent details are those that are hierarchically privileged in the formation of the narrative and the dispersed details are those that distract from or disrupt this narrative. This is not to say, however, that if a dispersed detail turns out to contribute to the
narrative it can become a contingent detail. Contingent details must appear immediately and inherently to connect to the act of narrative production. In a detective narrative, this is usually accomplished by reading marks on the body and the evidence of crime as signifiers for the acts that produced them. For example, if investigators find blood on a candlestick at the scene of a murder, they may suspect that this is the murder weapon. Their reason for believing this is that the blood is present on the object because it had some contact with the victim’s body. The blood on the candelabra, then, is read as a signifier for how the blood was transferred to the object. Dispersed details, while they may have relevance, cannot be read merely as a direct signifier for what produced them. Dispersed details at the same murder scene might include various letters that the victim has written to and received from relatives. Unless the correspondence assists in establishing the potential identity of the murderer or a motive for the murder, then they are generally dismissed as irrelevant to the case at hand.

The distinction between contingent details and dispersed details is intimately tied to context. Nowhere does this become clearer than in detection and detective fiction. In the context of detection, the role of the linear narrative is to establish culpability. The contingent detail, in this case, would be objects that appear to relate directly to the crime being investigated. In a murder investigation, for example, contingent details would include the body, weapons, and other objects at the scene connected to the crime. The term “contingent” has a double meaning when it is used in context. It indicates that any one detail cannot stand on its own; rather, its meaning is intimately connected to other details, and together, these form the linear narrative. The term also refers to Schor’s explanation of how, in neo-classical aesthetics, details distract from the Ideal because of
material contingency. Although the linear narrative, like the Ideal, is an abstract form, it derives its very authority and apparent logic from the very details that Reynolds condemns. Since the material world can be perceived by most people in some capacity, the material contingency of contingent details lends the linear narrative a sense of credibility. Dispersed details, on the other hand, do not fit the hierarchical method for deriving meaning from other terms because they depend solely on themselves, being in some instances regarded as self-referential in the sense that they do not seem to belong to the larger picture. In a murder investigation, the dispersed details include objects that do not contribute to the narrative of culpability. This would be virtually anything not directly connected with the body or the circumstances that resulted in the murder. In short, contingent details and dispersed details are distinguished not so much by individual features within themselves, but rather by how they contribute to or distract from the production of linear narrative.

As it does not contribute to the patriarchal imperative to organize information and employ it in a manner that facilitates exclusionary practices, the dispersed detail is consequently coded as feminine. The “logic” of this move is the belief that the female body is characterized by inherent instability of the nervous and uterine systems (also referred to as the reproductive system in some discourses), thus making women’s understanding of detail dispersed because they cannot focus their attention long enough to produce a concise linear narrative. While nineteenth-century portrayals of female detectives would seem to have the potential to challenge this conclusion, these same depictions often serve to reinscribe the differences between the contingent and dispersed detail. In Andrew Forrester’s 1864 case study The Female Detective and W. Stephens
Hayward’s *The Experiences of a Lady Detective*, Mrs. Gladden and Mrs. Paschal succeed in solving mysteries that the police force is unable to. However, they do so using contingent details in the same manner that better-known male detectives, such as Sherlock Holmes, use. Mrs. Paschal, for instance, sends a piece of lint from a victim’s coat to a chemist for analysis (Klein 21). She chooses the details that connect directly to the body and the most obvious objects of the investigation. The problem with such portrayals is that “the fiction acknowledges no positive correlation between her gender and her profession” (Klein 23). Mrs. Gladden and Mrs. Paschal must become “honorary men” (Klein 29) and use contingent details to produce information. The restriction of employing contingent details in detection, even when the detective is a woman, emerges both from the imperative that representatives of male-dominated professions have sole authority in interpreting details and from an anxiety about the consequences of using dispersed details.

In *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science*, Ronald Thomas notes the traditional form for interpreting details of criminal investigations in nineteenth-century detective fiction:

> Invariably, the mangled corpse the literary detective scrutinizes reveals a code that his trained eye is uniquely capable of reading; or, alternatively, the body of the suspect betrays its own guilt in some visible signs that are legible only to the eyes of the detective. The conventions of the form generally require the detective to explain what seems to be an uncanny act of second sight as the simple application of a technique, or even a technology, to the variables of the present occasion. (Thomas 3)

Thomas’ evaluation of forms of detection reveals at least two important functions of details. The first of these is that is that details’ function as signifiers that the detective must translate to reveal the narrative of culpability. The second is that in order to reveal
this narrative, the details must be interpreted in terms of a systematic, pre-existing method in which all evidence connects to reveal a central narrative. That these details must depend on each other and collectively contribute to the act of discovery indicates that the business of the literary detective is what Naomi Schor terms the “contingent detail” (15). Both in Victorian literature and in life, the ability and the authority to translate the contingent detail is vested in male professionals, in particular, the private detective, the police officer, the coroner, and the physician. Medical discourses of the mid to late nineteenth century, particularly those of John Millingen and Thomas Laycock, hypothesize that while women have a predisposition for noticing detail, they are under the influence of biological processes that prevent concentration on one subject, hence marginalizing their perceptions to the realm of the “dispersed detail” (Schor 15). Physicians went so far as to suggest that this tendency to apprehend dispersed details has the potential to be both personally and socially destructive.

It is in making a socially productive link between gender difference and perceptions of detail in detection that Wilkie Collins succeeds where others fail. Published in 1874, within a quarter of a century after physicians such as Henry Maudsley and John Millingen articulate the basic medical principles for the condemnation of “feminine” detail, Collins’ novel The Law and the Lady explores the potential of the dispersed detail, or detail that does not directly seem to contribute to a linear narrative of culpability, in finding information relevant to changing a court verdict. The Law and the Lady portrays the quest of Valeria Woodville to prove the innocence of her husband. The novel opens with the marriage of Valeria and Eustace and follows their honeymoon at Ramsgate Sands. While at Ramsgate Sands, Valeria finds a picture of Eustace’s mother,
whom Eustace claims does not support their marriage because she favors another woman to be Eustace’s wife. Valeria soon discovers that the last name of Eustace and his mother is not “Woodville” but “Macallan.” Determined to discover what her husband is hiding from her, Valeria manages to postpone their honeymoon sailing voyage long enough to go to London. She rejoin...
relevant information and that they may subvert dominant systems of classification and
detection. In acknowledging the usefulness of dispersed details, Valeria destabilizes the
court’s narrative of Sara Macallan’s death and the professional discourses employed in
evaluating its circumstances. In sorting through the evidence that these dispersed details
present, she employs methods such as elimination and association, which are frequently
eschewed by male characters in the novel. Thus, Collins’ novel offers an argument for
female public agency, while simultaneously undermining the authority of the institutions
that could give women this agency.

2.2 Classifying and Quantifying the Unknown

One of the principle impediments to constructing a narrative based on contingent
details is the prevailing system of classification. As a whole, male characters within the
novel are not dismissive of details; rather, they isolate them as a means of deriving
information about each piece of evidence. Major Fitz-David’s habits of collecting
objects and minutia from different periods of his life provide the clearest example of this
process. As Valeria explores Fitz-David’s office in an attempt to uncover her husband’s
secret, she starts to get a picture, or rather snapshots, of the Major’s life. She examines
the cabinets in his study and receives a very different impression from each drawer she
opens. She finds toys from the Major’s childhood, carpenter tools, gifts from lady
friends, account books, relics of travel (74-75), and evidence of the Major’s military life
(84). She also notes an extensive collection of fossils (74), cameos, (81), and hair (82),
all with accompanying labels and inscriptions that identify their characteristics and/or the
circumstances attending their acquisition. Each object has been meticulously identified,
classified, and stored with like objects in different drawers. In the case of the toys, the
Major clearly divides his collection based on periods of life. It is more often the case, however, that the objects are organized based on spheres of life, including his finances, career, home, and social life. Valeria notes that the fossils appear to be from a former period of the Major’s life, “when he had speculated, not very successfully, in mines” (74) and that the cameos and hair (gifts from past female associations) are merely portraits representing “fair idols, no doubt, of the Major’s facile adoration” (80). The Major’s tendency to categorize and assemble objects with those that are used for similar purposes indicates a resistance to forming a larger narrative that analyzes his experiences. ² As a result, the Major places himself in awkward situations.

The Major’s collections reveal an assiduous attempt to separate his affairs with women from his economic affairs. He notes that he would do, and has done, virtually anything for a woman: “I can refuse nothing to a pretty woman. Dear and admirable lady, don’t abuse your influence! don’t make an old soldier false to his word of honour!” (67). Despite this acknowledgement and exhortation, he will not draw connections between the objects in his collection or the events that they represent. This refusal causes him to make an imprudent match. Later in the novel, he marries Miss Houghty, a young woman whom he adopted as a project to turn her into an opera singer. Far from feeling any deep-seated love for her much older husband, she confesses to Valeria that marrying the Major is a much easier way to care for her extensive family than to become a singer. The Major’s resistance to creating narratives between the areas of his life (the objects in his collections) prevents him from understanding Miss Houghty’s motives, or even learning from his past errors.
This is not to say, however, that the Major does not draw comparisons. Rather than describing Valeria in terms of her own traits and mannerisms, he can only identify her by choosing particulars of her character and comparing them to other women. When Valeria expresses her understanding that the Major cannot reveal Eustace’s secret because he has vowed to be silent, he aligns her emotions with those of Lady Clarinda, who “has the gift of sympathy, and sees exactly how [he] is situated” (66). In spite of her expressed sympathy for the Major’s position, Valeria is determined to develop a way for the Major to help her find the information, even if he cannot tell her. This prompts the Major to compare her to Madame Mirliflore, who is “a person of prodigious tenacity of purpose” (67). Even after the Major has given Valeria permission to search his office for information, he cannot resist watching her proceedings from a secret door in one of his study walls. After she notices him, he feels ashamed of his behavior and notes that Valeria has “the same carriage of the head” (79) as a lady friend he is going to visit.

These moments of comparison are to some degree an attempt to distract Valeria or to avoid reprimand. His use of comparison, far from aiding Valeria in her search, serves to turn her attention from the object at hand. When he compares her emotions to those of Lady Clarinda, for example, he is merely preventing Valeria from insisting that he go back on his vow to Eustace. When he compares her tenacity to Madame Mirliflore’s personality, he is attempting to divert, or at least defer Valeria’s insistence on developing a means for her to find information. These moments demonstrate that the Major is quite capable of making connections between details. His attempts, however, reveal nothing about the subject at hand. These descriptions of Valeria, while they may endear her to the Major, ultimately reveal nothing either about her individuality or the subject that she
so relentlessly pursues (Eustace’s secret), making his efforts at comparison as fruitless as his efforts at classification.

It is tempting as readers to dismiss the Major’s efforts at description as buffoonish, as he is often characterized as fickle and manipulative throughout Collins’s novel. His attempts to control details in forming narratives, or in not forming them, as the case may be, are representative of investigative principles in the male-dominated professions of medicine, law, and science. That men from these professions are interested in employing details, in particular those that may pertain to Sara Macallan’s death, becomes clear in the testimony for Eustace’s trial. Christina Ormsay, the nurse charged with caring for the first Mrs. Macallan during her frequent periods of illness and lethargy, notes that upon the doctor’s advice she “made notes, at the time, of dates and hours, and such like” (126). The doctor’s recommendation that Ormsay take notes indicates that recording the details of a patient’s experiences is an integral part of exploring the patient’s symptoms. Making note of the time and dose of administered medicines, the changes in a patient’s behavior and appearance, and how the patient responds to various stimuli (visitors, physical stimulation, etc.) is a way for physicians to gather information that might help them form a diagnosis, and by extension, a treatment.

The value of details also becomes clear in examining representations of the legal profession in the novel. When Valeria travels to Scotland to visit Mr. Playmore, one of the attorneys in Eustace’s case, he seems deeply interested in the details of Valeria’s conversation with Miserrimus Dexter: “It was not, however, until I had described my extraordinary interview with Miserrimus Dexter, and my hardly less remarkable conversation with Lady Clarinda, that I produced the greatest effect on the lawyer’s
mind. I saw him change colour for the first time” (257). Dexter’s actions seem suspicious to Mr. Playmore, and he encourages Valeria to take a witness with her to record the details of her next conversation. Valeria is puzzled by this request, believing that the lawyer, like her Uncle Starkweather and her friend Benjamin, is merely attempting to protect her from harm. Mr. Playmore excuses himself by noting that as a lawyer his “business is to make a fuss about trifles” (271). In fact, it is the details of Valeria’s testimony, Dexter’s facial expressions, his eagerness to blame Mrs. Macallan’s death on Mrs. Beauly, and his marked preference for Mrs. Macallan, that lead him to believe that the court may have overlooked a suspect. Hence, details become key in locating new information and opening ways of taking action.

The use of these details, however, is often restricted to the professionals and remain entirely unspoken within public contexts. Female characters often blind themselves to how male professionals employ details by not acknowledging that men are concerned with minutia. For example, Christina Ormsay testifies that she is confused by the fact that the doctors only watch Mrs. Macallan as she suffers from the symptoms of a mysterious illness. She believes that “keeping watch [is] the nurse’s business” (131), while the doctors are supposed to help the patient. In short, she considers it the nurses’s business to gather the details of the patient’s condition, and the doctor’s job to interpret them. Ormsay is troubled when the doctors cannot see the larger picture and make sense of the seemingly random symptoms she has observed. In a similar moment, a private investigator hired by Mr. Playmore encourages a former lady-in-waiting at Gleninch (Eustace’s estate) to tell him the details surrounding Mrs. Macallan’s death, only to find that “she is half ashamed to speak of trifles,” because she “thinks men above such
matters” (349). The maid believes so strongly that men should not be concerned with
details that she initially will not speak on the matter, placing the entire investigation in
jeopardy. Even Valeria, who appears of all the characters most sensitive to details and
their interpretations, often denies that professional men concern themselves with details.
As she reads the manuscript of Eustace’s trial, Valeria notes that “the evidence was
simply irresistible” when two chemists “produced in Court the arsenic which they had
found in the body” (134). Interestingly, though, Valeria does not relate any of the details
of this moment, which stands in contrast to her analysis of the investigation up to this
point. The absence of details may result from the fact that an object, a bottle of arsenic
taken directly from the scene, is produced, making it unnecessary to relate the process of
its distillation, or even its implications for the case at hand.3 Hence, the reason that
women often do not associate details with formal investigations is because professionals
are expected to produce an outcome in the form of a diagnosis, verdict, or physical
evidence. In short, the outcome becomes a way of concealing the means of its
production.

The focus on the outcome in professional fields is not inherent, but rather emerges
from the efforts of professionals to restrict how details are gathered and interpreted. For
example, at a crime scene such as Mrs. Macallan’s bedroom, context becomes a means of
containing the seemingly endless suggestions that the evidence allows. More
specifically, context assists professionals in locating contingent details. Several objects
must be removed from Mrs. Macallan’s room for further analysis. The arsenic bottles
and labels are taken away to the chemist’s office and the dressing-case containing several
documents is taken to the Fiscal’s office. The idea here is that these objects will be
examined in detail individually and that the information gathered will suggest how the narrative of Mrs. Macallan’s death should be reconstructed. Each of these items has some sort of signifier that connects it with the original crime scene, such as a smell (the arsenic bottles), labels (the envelop containing the arsenic), or handwriting (the poems and documents). Thus, context ensures that these objects have some relationship to the victim, so that the investigators need only reveal what these connections are. Any evidence that is dispersed, or not directly related to the scene, threatens to disrupt this contained system of interpretation and hence is dismissed as irrelevant. For example, at Eustace’s trial, Miserrimus Dexter produces a bottle, which he claims that he discovered in Mrs. Macallan’s dressing-case and which he claims held reconstituted arsenic. The bottle has no residual liquid, no smell, and no label to identify it. The chemist who sold a supply of arsenic to Eustace claims that while it looks exactly like the bottle in which he placed the arsenic, it is “equally like hundreds of other bottles in his shop” (167). The bottle has no sensory signifier that sets it apart from other objects and suggests its direct connection with the crime scene, and is consequently dismissed. Details, then, must be carefully monitored within male-dominated professional practices. That these objects suggest their connection through their analysis, rather than having a narrative imposed upon them by the investigator, suggests that the processes of interpretation must be restrained and the potential of the detail to be unstable must virtually disappear.⁴

2.3 Liberating the Detail/Destabilizing the Narrative

Valeria’s methods of investigation immediately pose a threat to any self-contained system of signifiers. The detail becomes the basic unit of knowledge as Valeria applies it to various narratives, testing its validity within each system. Throughout the novel,
Valeria uses the details she uncovers first to prove that Miss Beauly is the murderer, then to prove that Miserrimus Dexter killed Sara Macallan because he could not marry her, and finally to support the idea that Eustace’s unfortunate first wife committed suicide because she could not inspire her husband’s love. She does not assume that the narrative is inherent in pieces of evidence themselves, but rather she seems to have an implicit understanding that details may find a place within multiple narratives and hence are by nature unstable. Naomi Schor describes the danger of the unstable, uncontained detail within aesthetic principles: “Its tendency to subvert an internal hierarchic ordering of the work of art which clearly subordinates the periphery to the center, the accessory to the principle, the foreground to the background” (20). Schor claims that the detail can resist principles of ordering and cast light on that which is hidden or conveniently marginalized. This is also true with forensic investigation, where focusing on the dispersed details threatens to undermine the production of a linear narrative in which all causal relationships are clearly signified by the relationship between contingent details. Benjamin expresses his fear of this when Valeria insists on pursuing her case. When they go to dinner during Valeria’s stay in London, he mocks her for considering all evidence as important to her search: “Here is a loin of mutton, my dear—an ordinary loin mutton. Is there anything suspicious in that?” (49) While this statement seems merely to claim that it is absurd that everything should fall under suspicion, it reveals a far more significant fear: Valeria’s inclusion of all evidence and her insistence on examining the evidence in detail threaten to break down any mode of distinction, and hence challenge the methods of male-dominated professional practices, complicating traditional notions of evidence, contingent detail, linear narrative, and even of culpability.
Benjamin’s fear becomes all the more apparent when Valeria insists that she visit Dexter, and Benjamin complains about the state of modern times: “We were all monkeys before we were men, and molecules before we were monkeys? And what does it matter? And what does anything matter to anybody?” (Collins 300). Benjamin’s tirade indicates a fear that all things may be deconstructed to the point that distinctions among them become irrelevant. When this becomes the case, the idea that anything “matters” is revealed as constructed.\(^5\) If all creatures, human and animal are composed of molecules, then the differences between them are not as absolute or as rigid as it is comfortable to suppose. It is also significant that Benjamin employs the comparison between men and monkeys here, as it implies that Valeria’s methods are devolving from existing methods of investigation. Valeria’s consideration of all evidence and her insistence on examining it in increasingly closer detail threaten to defer meaning indefinitely, denying the idea that details are contingent, or that they naturally reveal their connections to each other.

Benjamin’s fear that Valeria’s methods of examination will deconstruct hierarchies is due not merely to her examination of details. Even her method of gathering information implies a sense of instability to the point that some characters refuse to answer her questions. When Valeria is preparing to leave on her honeymoon, her landlady informs her that Woodville, the name under which Eustace married Valeria, is not his true name. Valeria pays a visit to Eustace’s mother, Mrs. Macallan, to discover the truth. She asks Mrs. Macallan if she had a first husband and if his name was Woodville, but she declines to answer the question because it “should only lead to other questions; and [she] should be obliged to decline replying to them” (42). Mrs. Macallan’s refusal to answer the question implies that questioning has a snowball effect.\(^6\)
One question simply produces another and so on. The nature of questioning is such that it simultaneously narrows and expands at the same time. It would bring Valeria closer to Eustace’s secret, but the questions themselves would multiply. Major Fitz-David expresses a very similar fear when Valeria attempts to persuade him to reveal Eustace’s secret: “My sweet friend, stop there! I know where your questions will lead me, and what the result will be if once I begin to answer them” (67). The Major too fears the inherent tendency of questions to multiply. The questions produce more and more specific information as they multiply, exploring subjects in closer and closer detail until they threaten to fall into minutia. This relates to Benjamin’s fear that Valeria’s way of looking at the world will deconstruct it to the point that it is unrecognizable. If the very nature of methods used to extract information tends toward details, then it compromises the structure of hierarchies of information and interpretation.

Although Mrs. Macallan and Major Fitz-David refuse to answer Valeria’s questions, their very attempts to define other characters reveal the instability of narrative and flexibility of interpretation. This becomes clear as they both attempt to describe Miserrimus Dexter’s madness in a way that will dissuade Valeria from involving him further in her investigations. After introducing Valeria to Dexter at his London estate, Mrs. Macallan tries to characterize Dexter’s behavior in a way that will frighten Valeria: “A mixture of the strangest and the most opposite qualities; at one time, perfectly clear and reasonable, as you said just now; at another, breaking out into rhapsodies of the most outrageous kind, like a man in a state of delirium” (187). Interestingly, Mrs. Macallan’s definition of insanity is not based on a set of stable characteristics; rather, her definition implies that the inability to maintain either rational or irrational thoughts and behaviors is
the soul of madness. Inconsistency, not irrational behavior, then, is what makes Dexter dangerous and untrustworthy. Mrs. Macallan’s definition does not seem too far off the mark when one considers Dexter’s testimony at Eustace’s trial. He tells the jury that it is irrational for them to believe that Eustace poisoned his wife because Eustace could only afford the upkeep on his Gleninch estate because of his wife’s income (165). In this case, Dexter seems quite capable of analyzing the pragmatic concerns of economics. Mrs. Macallan tells Valeria that when Dexter is offered a substantial amount of money for his own dilapidating and neglected property, Dexter claims that his house is “a standing monument of the picturesque and beautiful, amid the mean, dishonest, and groveling constructions of a mean, dishonest, and groveling age” (190). Though he has claimed that economic concerns are of utmost importance in considering human interactions, he ignores such considerations so that he may teach the purchasers a lesson. This is certainly a specimen of Dexter’s inconsistency, and according to Mrs. Macallan’s definition, insanity. Her description, however, is not the only interpretation of Dexter’s behavior.

Major Fitz-David’s characterization of Dexter does not rely on features that are inherent to his condition, or even on traits that dictate his behavior: “He is a mixture of the tiger and the monkey. At one moment, he would frighten you; and at the next, he would set you screaming with laughter” (179). The Major defines Dexter’s madness by the effect that he produces in people. This suggests a certain flexibility in definitions because it implies that they arise from relationships between people and concepts, rather than from examining the subject in isolation. Valeria’s description of Dexter further corroborates the flexibility of definitions: “I can only describe him as being an unusually
handsome man. A painter would have reveled in him as a model for St. John. And a young girl, ignorant of what the Oriental rug hid from view, would have said to herself the instant she looked at him, ‘Here is the hero of my dreams!’” (200). Valeria admits that she is no physiognomist, but she manages to interpret Dexter’s appearance from the perspective of a grown woman, a painter, and a young girl. The fact that the details of his appearance lend themselves to such a broad range of interpretations suggests that definitions are unstable. The very act of defining becomes one of negotiation between the object in view, and the cognitive faculties of the viewer.\(^8\)

Valeria’s investigations not only complicate individual definitions and acts of classification, but also demonstrate the inherent instability of entire narrative structures. This allows her to function within professional discourses in a way that those who depend on the stability of contingent details and evidence cannot. Eustace, for example, is resigned to the “Not Proven” verdict because the best attorneys in Scotland could not entirely dismiss his guilt in the mind of the jury. He is therefore understandably skeptical when Valeria plans to overturn the verdict with only her devotion and her limited resources to assist her: “No motive of yours, Valeria, no love and hope of yours, can alter the inexorable facts. My first wife died poisoned; and the verdict of the Jury has not absolutely acquitted me of the guilt of causing her death” (99). Eustace focuses on the obstacles that Valeria will face, and in doing so emphasizes the rigidity of the legal system and its verdicts. Legal proceedings are in fact more flexible in function than in form. That is, it is entirely possible to change the “inexorable facts” (the verdict and the evidence upon which it is based) provided that Valeria works within the existing discourse. Miserrimus Dexter provides a clear example of this in his testimony for the
defense. When Valeria reads the court manuscript, she immediately notices Dexter’s elegant manner of expression and cogent arguments. Eustace’s mother, however, soon informs her that the manuscript does not report his words verbatim, as “the shorthand writers and reporters put his evidence into presentable language, before they printed it” (186). This moment does demonstrate the inflexibility of the legal profession in terms of form, but not in terms of function. Although the recorders altered Dexter’s testimony to fit the form of traditional court proceedings, the manuscript also indicates that Dexter’s evidence has a visible impact on the jury, and seemingly in Eustace’s favor. So while the legal profession may be inflexible in terms of the forms it accepts as evidence, it is not wholly inflexible in allowing non-traditional evidence, even the ramblings of Dexter, to affect its final decision. Valeria seems to understand this, and hence nourishes the hope that she can vindicate Eustace.

Valeria’s ability to see the constructed nature of narrative also permits her to analyze information that others might dismiss as irrelevant. When she pays her second visit to Dexter, she encourages him to relate all the events that happened the night of the first Mrs. Macallan’s death. In the process of telling her the story, Dexter employs both dramatic narrative and first person narration (238 and 240). His purpose in doing this is to impress Valeria with his mastery of narrative styles, but in doing so he reveals something far more telling. While the dramatic narrative lends Dexter’s observations an element of disinterest and the first person reveals more of his motives for watching the events, such as spying on Miss Beauly, the significance of the events seems unaltered by his narrative impulses. This suggests that the “truth” does not rest with one narrative form, despite the attempt of professionals to use discourses in controlling details and
convincingly conveying information. This becomes all the more important for Valeria, who must convince Dexter to reveal information that he does not initially tell her. He attempts to mask his actions in the form of an Italian gothic tale featuring a gentlewoman and her handmaid. Dexter initially spins his tale to deceive Valeria, convincing her that Miss Beauly forced her maid to deliver the poison to Sara Macallan. Based on testimony by Lady Clarinda about Miss Beauly’s whereabouts (a masked ball) the night of the supposed murder, Valeria already knows that she is innocent. As the plot of Dexter’s tale unfolds, it becomes clear that the two characters represent a conflict within him concerning whether to reveal a letter he has found. While characters like Benjamin may be inclined to dismiss this tale as a symptom of Dexter’s madness, Valeria interprets it as a fictionalized recollection of an actual event. She waits patiently as Dexter “circles” the truth, and eventually his narrative reveals that he destroyed the letter. Valeria’s willingness to hear the tale through, no matter how irrational it seems, is fortunate for the investigation, as the letter turns out to be Sara Macallan’s suicide letter, the only piece of evidence that can fully exculpate Eustace.

2.4 The Obstacles of Gender Expectations

Valeria’s ability to analyze narratives and to employ details in their construction would seem to make her the ideal investigator to reveal information that the Court might have missed. Her desire to free her husband from blame, however, meets with resistance because the role of investigator conflicts with gender expectations. For example, in order to conduct her investigations, Valeria must have access to her own funds left to her by a family member, but cannot bring herself to accept the money that Eustace leaves for her when he flees to the continent. She wants to rely only on her own resources, so that her
actions will be a demonstration of affection for her husband. When she attempts to explain this to the attorneys charged with keeping Eustace’s affairs in order, their response is less than sympathetic: “They argued and remonstrated with me. The partner with the ill-tempered eyebrows wanted to know what my reasons were. The partner with the sour smile reminded his colleague satirically that I was a lady, and had therefore no reasons to give” (110). The attorney suggests that women are not at pains to give reasons for their decisions, or perhaps more accurately, their whims. The implication is that women do not develop criteria for making their decisions and that their decisions cannot be rational. But what is most interesting in this case is that no matter what “choice” Valeria makes, she must fulfill the gender expectations of nineteenth-century patriarchal values.\textsuperscript{10} If Valeria accepts the money, then she is not financially independent, relying on Eustace to provide for her. If she rejects the money, then she is dismissed as unreasonable and stubborn at the expense of reason, which the attorney considers to be typical of women. The ideological system is constructed so that Valeria cannot escape condemnation.

The reason that this system may exist rests with idea that emotion, whether positive or negative, restorative or denigrating, can be posited as pathological for women. Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble argue that the Victorian sensation novel often expands the role of the heroine, “showing vulnerability, rage, violence, lust and vengeance as part of the range of female emotions” (117). This certainly seems the case in \textit{The Law and Lady}, as Valeria feels love and duty for her husband and unborn child, anger and impatience toward Miserrimus Dexter, curiosity with Mr. Playmore, and jealousy for Eustace’s first wife and Miss Beauly. That Valeria experiences a broad
range of emotions is without question; how effective her emotions are in producing change when they encounter other systems of interpretation is less certain. For example, when Eustace and Valeria express their love in a kiss shortly after their wedding, Valeria returns refreshed from the momentary escape: “I came back to realities, fortified and composed, rewarded for all that I had gone through, ready to go through it all over again for another kiss. Only give a woman love, and there is nothing she will not venture, suffer, and do” (19). Love is not strictly an escape for Valeria, but also a means of support to face harsh realities. Indeed, it is only her love for Eustace and her conviction that her love is returned that give her the courage to act contrary to her family’s wishes in marrying Eustace and to work industriously to ensure that his name is cleared of the stigma of “Not Proven.” Not all characters are convinced that affection is an emotion that helps women focus their attention, however.

Miserrimus Dexter notes that women are restricted by their own nature from rising to compete with men within any profession: “As a rule, women are incapable of absolutely concentrating their attention on any one occupation, for any given time. Their minds will run on something else—say typically, for the sake of illustration, their sweetheart, or their new bonnet” (229). Dexter’s examples suggest that any emotion, whether it is deep-seated affection for a person, or a passing fancy for a hat, cannot help but distract women. Dexter further supports his conclusions with an example from a woman working at a local post office. He claims that he had an important document to send and that he gave the parcel to the female postal worker to record the address. The niece of a fellow worker came into the building and the woman was immediately distracted by the child. When Dexter receives the parcel back, he notices that a key line
is missing, thanks to the distraction. There is, of course, a degree of irony in Dexter’s assertions. He claims that women are easily distracted, and yet he so often digresses from the subject of Sara Macallan’s death to discuss his own talents and preferences that Valeria must forcibly remind him of the topic at hand. In spite of the lack of self-awareness of Dexter’s statement, the fact remains that he has access to information that Valeria needs and his perceptions of women invariably influence the extent to which and the method by which he will share this information with Valeria. Dexter chooses not to treat Valeria as an equal, but rather as a pupil. He considers it his obligation to educate Valeria’s palate in delicacies such as fine wines and truffles. At other times he treats her as a lover because of her resemblance to Eustace’s first wife, forcibly pulling her close and kissing her hands. In both roles, Dexter is the dominant male who has the luxury of sharing his knowledge or of asserting his will. Valeria must submit to these roles if she wishes to reveal the secret of Dexter’s involvement and the extent of his observations at Gleninch.

Female characters are not only in the position of having their emotions misinterpreted or dismissed, but also of risking any actions they take or advice they give being dismissed. During Eustace’s trial, the prosecution produces three letters from his wife’s female friends, each with a recommendation for how she should respond to Eustace’s coldness and disinterest. Sara Macallan’s first friend stresses that women love differently from men because it “does not last, as it does with us” (149). This friend recommends that Sara show forbearance for Eustace’s behavior because he is only enacting a fundamental difference between the sexes. Valeria notes that the description of the men at the trial seemed to show a support of this advice. The second friend
suggests that Sara run away from Eustace, as it is better to be alone than “to be treated with polite neglect and contempt” (150). This correspondent does not suggest a reason for Eustace’s conduct, nor does she recommend that Sara attempt to generate explanations. The soul of the letter is action, not clarification. The third friend concludes that Eustace’s coldness is prompted by the love of another woman, and suggests that Sara “make it the business of [her] life to find out who the creature is” (150). The goal of this approach is to make Eustace’s life as miserable as he has made Sara’s. The choices based on these letters, then, are resignation, ignorance, or retribution. If Sara acts as the first friend suggests, she will submit to the differences between men and women and attempt to find happiness within this construction. The men in the court support this idea because it promotes the resignation of the wife not only to living within the socially-constructed differences between the sexes, but to actually finding pleasure in it. If Sara acts as the second friend recommends, she will be both alone and ignorant of the reasons for Eustace’s coldness. The third friend’s advice promotes blind retribution, making her entire life invested in creating a man’s misery. The advice of the second and third friends could be explained as evidence of the fickle and unreasonable nature of women. Hence, no matter what course of action Sara chooses, she must submit to constructions of patriarchal authority.

To make things worse for Valeria, female characters within the novel not only have their responses interpreted within patriarchal systems so that they in effect have no “choices,” but also are forced to operate within male-dominated systems of representation. In effect, they are trapped both in terms of their actions and the cognitive processes through which they make these choices. Miss Hughty tells Valeria that she
and Major Fitz-David had an altercation because she was jealous of his attentions to Lady Clarinda: “There was a woman’s face painted on the china; and he told me it was the living image of her face. It was no more like her than I am. I was in such a rage that I took up with the book I was reading at the time, and shied it at the painted face” (87). Although Miss Houghty does not believe that the face painted on the vase bears any resemblance to the woman who gives the Major flowers, she must accept his terms of representation in order to enact any kind of retribution. She breaks the vase because she knows that destroying it will upset him and that the Major has made a connection between it and Lady Clarinda. Thus, in order to produce any impact on the Major, she must submit to his system of representation.11

Valeria experiences an even more degrading position than Miss Houghty when she decides to carry on a dialogue with Miserrimus Dexter. She finds that Dexter habitually calls on his servants, particularly his lumbering, inarticulate cousin Ariel, using a whistle. Valeria must listen for Dexter’s whistle to summon her before she can see him. As reprehensible as she finds this system, she recognizes that “there [is] no help for it but to submit like a dog” (213). Just as Dexter later insists on assuming the role of teacher and lover with Valeria, even the simple act of admitting a guest to his home requires that he assume a role of dominance. But Ariel demonstrates that a feeling of embarrassment is not the only fate one must suffer for communicating with Dexter. Valeria abstains from visiting Dexter after he attempts to embrace and kiss her, prompting him to send her a letter that subtly demands her forgiveness. Ariel delivers the letter and Valeria agrees to send her forgiveness to Dexter. This, however, is not enough for Ariel, who will later end her life when her master dies. She first makes Valeria repeat her forgiveness “as the
Master said it” (283). Valeria accordingly reads the letter, repeating Dexter’s own words. Ariel will not allow her to communicate an acceptance of apology in her own words. In this case, a woman is responsible for forcing another woman to participate in a system of representation created by a man. But the situation becomes worse still when Ariel demands that Valeria repeat Dexter’s words back to her so that she may repeat them by heart to Dexter. Though resistant, Valeria “slowly fasten[s] the message, word by word, on her mind” (284). Valeria not only has to submit to Dexter’s representation, but also must propagate it by teaching it to another woman. The idea of fastening the words “on” Ariel’s mind is important because it suggests that the act prevents Ariel from having to think or recall information on her own. In this case, as in others, women’s participation in systems of representation created by male characters stands to leave them in ignorance. Valeria, however, finds means of operating not only within these systems of representation, but also of working within expected gender roles while still finding new information.

2.5 Rewriting Roles and Methods:

Gender Expectations, Comparison, and Elimination

Far from attempting to abandon her domestic roles, Valeria begins her investigations with every intention of investigating Eustace’s trial to save her marriage. Even her first act of searching begins with what appears a domestic act. While they are staying at an inn before leaving for their honeymoon, Valeria wakes feeling capricious. Her ultimate solution is to tidy Eustace’s dressing-case: “I busily cleaned and dusted the bottles with my handkerchief as I took them out” (26). The act of cleaning Eustace’s grooming solution bottles seems at first a domestic response, ensuring the tidiness of the
living space, even away from home. Valeria’s innocent act of dusting quickly becomes subversive, however, as she notices a string running along the blue velvet lining. She finds a secret compartment with various correspondences and a picture of Eustace’s mother. She is shocked to find that Mrs. Macallan has a very pleasant face, denoting “a person possessing unusual attractions—a person whom it would be a pleasure and a privilege to know” (27). Valeria cannot understand this because Mrs. Macallan refused to attend the wedding, and hence she expected her mother-in-law to appear an austere and intimidating figure. The discovery of this first inconsistency leads Valeria to question Eustace’s relationship with his mother, which then reveals that he changed his name. This in turn leads her to question why Eustace changed his name. A simple act of tidying her husband’s dressing case soon leads to a line of questioning that will both reveal Eustace’s secret and form Valeria’s resolution to clear him of blame.

Lillian Nayder suggests that Valeria’s success in her investigations may transgress gender roles, but that her methods and motives reaffirm concepts of femininity (68). But this does not seem particularly true for Valeria, whose motives subtly shift as her investigations become more detailed. As in the case of the dressing-case, Valeria begins with motives that seem in keeping with dominant ideals for gender relationships. Seeing the picture of Eustace’s mother and hearing her husband attempt to tell lies on the beach to mask his mother’s response to Valeria convince her that it is her duty as a wife to find out the secret (38). After discovering that Eustace was accused of poisoning his first wife and stamped with the stigma of a “Not Proven” verdict, Valeria believes more firmly than ever that is her duty as Eustace’s wife to reverse the verdict (99). Valeria’s motives for reversing the verdict change after she discovers she is pregnant. She then
notes that she must continue the investigation so that she may ensure that her child will have a good opinion of its father. Valeria later finds out that a letter may hold the key to saving Eustace, and she literally throws a blank check at Mr. Playmore so that he will send an investigator to America to interview a former housekeeper. She does this not merely out of a noble desire to save her husband, but also so that she can insist “positively on being fed with more information” (330). Here, Valeria desires to know more than any desire to save Eustace. She is so persistent that she convinces Mr. Playmore that she owes it not only to her husband, but also to the abstract concept of Justice “to bring the truth to light” (331-32). Even Mr. Playmore must in the end concede that Valeria’s investigation has legal and social implications that extend far beyond the domestic sphere.

Valeria finds ways of justifying her investigation by employing familiar domestic roles. She also begins to modify existing methodologies to find not only new information but also new approaches to revealing information. As noted earlier, male figures, particularly Major Fitz-David, often use principles of comparison to render objects more familiar. Although he does not know Valeria, the Major finds her increasingly attractive as he compares her to women he does know. Comparison serves the rhetorical end of making the Major more comfortable, and even dominating with a woman he has never met and with whose character he is not familiar. Valeria uses comparison more frequently to find objects that are out of the ordinary than to find similarities. She identifies an object as significant based on how and whether it varies from the norm. She does not seek a sense of familiarity, and therefore her findings are often disturbing.

When she first visits the Major’s home, his attendant Oliver goes into his office to
announce her arrival. She notices a slight line along the wall and sees that “the door was not of the ordinary kind” (57). She listens through this strange and secret door to the conversation between the two men and from it learns that the Major has a weakness for attractive and charming women. This conveys to Valeria what her approach must be in convincing the Major to help her find out Eustaces’s secret.

Valeria’s use of comparison continues to provide her with new information as she and Mr. Playmore revisit Gleninch to look for any physical evidence that may have been overlooked. While touring the grounds Valeria’s attention is drawn to the “great size” and “curious situation” (270) of the dust-heap at Gleninch. The dust-heap is unremarkable to Mr. Playmore, who explains why the placement of refuse may seem odd to Valeria: “‘In tidy England, I suppose you would have all that carted away, out of sight,’ said the lawyer. ‘We don’t mind in Scotland, as long as the dust-heap is far enough away not to be smelt at the house. Besides, some of it, sifted, comes in usefully as manure for the garden.’” (270). Since Mr. Playmore is familiar with the placement of the dust-heap, he pays it very little attention. He only notes that usually the scraps would have been used in the garden, but are undisturbed because the estate is abandoned. Both of these observations prove significant. The dust-heap, though it is separate from the house, is attached to the crime scene through its contents. The refuse that composes the heap comes directly from the residents of the estate and may be used, however fragmented it is, to draw connections between events in the house. Sara’s suicide letter, which Dexter destroyed to protect her reputation, is later found in the dust-heap. Hence, Valeria’s mental comparison between what she observes and her previous experiences proves productive. As she is not familiar with the customs of Scottish households, she
must construct a narrative that relates the evidence hidden in the dust-heap to the house at Gleninch. In addition, her unspoken prompting of Mr. Playmore to give her more information reveals that the dust-heap would normally be recycled in the garden. When they begin their search for the letter, the fact that the refuse has remained undisturbed gives them hope that they may recover the document.

When Valeria is faced with multiple possibilities for interpreting evidence or is simply in the position of having to interpret too many pieces of evidence, she employs the methods of elimination and interpreting absence, rather than selecting evidence based on positive qualities. For example, when she appeals to Major Fitz-David to tell her Eustace’s secret, he explains that he cannot tell because he has vowed to be silent on the matter. Valeria interprets this refusal to give information as an indication that the secret is something grave that could cast doubt on her husband’s character. She interprets the absence of information as a warning. Valeria pushes further still, however, in asking the Major if there is a way that she may find the secret without making him break his promise to Eustace. The Major notes that there is evidence of the secret in his office. This inquiry eliminates other areas of the Major’s house as places for investigation, not to mention eliminating the other sources that Valeria would have to employ if she had received no information from the Major. Valeria then asks if the evidence in the office is “something, for instance, which [her] eyes might see, and [her] hands might touch, if [she] can only find it” (70). On the surface this question does not appear to eliminate much evidence, but it does suggest that the answer does not rest with the testimony of a person, but rather with an object. Valeria also implicitly concludes from the Major’s comments that she may interpret the object herself, since the idea is that she will know
the secret without the Major’s help. This leads Valeria to the correct conclusion that the object is a book or document. Catching the spirit of Valeria’s little “game,” the Major even tells Valeria that he may safely assure her that his “letters will not assist the discovery” (75) of the information she seeks. Valeria’s methods, then, not only assist her in her own deductions, but also provide other characters with a means of offering her information that they might otherwise feel obligated to conceal.

Absence and elimination are also the primary methods that direct Valeria in her physical investigations. Valeria almost always begins her examinations with cabinets and drawers because of a “vague distrust of the locked doors, a vague doubt of what they might be hiding” (80). Valeria assumes that people who need to hide secrets will conceal physical evidence out of sight. She is correct in this assumption in the case of Major Fitz-David. In the bottom drawer of one of the cabinets, Valeria is disappointed to find broken pottery shards hidden away. Rather than dismissing the vase as relevant evidence, she employs her own absence of knowledge as the basis for an investigative strategy in itself. Valeria uses her lack of familiarity with a subject as a means of multiplying questions about the evidence that she finds. If she does not know the information, she uses her ignorance to open a way to find it. For example, when she first discovers the broken vase in the Major’s office, she reveals her lack of knowledge about the identifying features of her find: “I was too ignorant of the subject to be able to estimate the value of the vase, or the antiquity of the vase—or even to know whether it was of British or of foreign manufacture” (Collins 77). Lillian Nayder interprets this lack of knowledge as a detriment, noting that “rather than demonstrating her expertise and her breadth of knowledge, in the familiar manner of Sherlock Holmes, Valeria lists her
subjects of ignorance when describing her find” (67). Nayder portrays the traditional evaluation of detail and evidence as demonstrating a great body of knowledge, denying the subversive potential of Valeria’s assessment. Expertise and superior knowledge are the very things that serve to limit male detectives in their investigations. Since Valeria knows nothing about her vase, however, she must give a detailed description of its features and develop questions about its significance: “By what accident had it become broken? And why had Major Fitz-David’s face changed when he found that I had discovered the remains of his shattered work of Art in the cabinet drawer?” (Collins 77).

Rather than identifying the characteristics of the vase and dismissing it as irrelevant, Valeria generates questions about her evidence, both of which prove relevant to her discovery of Eustace’s trial.

These questions prompt her to rely not only on her own associations, but on those of others. Valeria does not at first believe that the shards have any relevance to her search, but she notices that the Major looks at her “with a sudden suspicion and surprise” (75) when he sees her looking at the broken vase. This in turn leads her to believe that the road to discovery lies “directly or indirectly—through the broken vase” (78). This instinct proves to be correct, though the path is far more “indirect” than perhaps she would imagine. In talking with Fitz-David’s current “songbird,” Valeria discovers that the vase was broken when he and his ward had an argument over Lady Clarinda and the girl threw a book at the vase, shattering it in her anger. The book that she uses just happens to be a manuscript of Eustace’s trial for the murder of his first wife. The vase was also a gift from Eustace and his wife to Major Fitz-David. There is not a causal relationship between the vase and the clue that Valeria seeks (the manuscript). That is,
there is no physical trait within the shards that could possibly indicate to Valeria their connection to the book. As a result, Valeria cannot rely on syllogistic or linear reasoning to guide her. She must reveal the *associational* relationship between the objects by consulting a third party. Hence, Valeria’s reliance on personal and cognitive associations assists her in finding information that she would find inaccessible had she relied on contingent details.

The use of absence and elimination extends not only to searching for evidence, but also in attempts to characterize other people. Valeria often arrives at conclusions about people by first defining what they are not. Valeria’s manner of investigation illustrates that details can be productive by refusing to define what objects and evidence are; she prefers instead to characterize them by what they are not. The most explicit example of this is when she meets Mr. Playmore, the attorney who will assist her in her investigation: “In all other respects I found Mr. Playmore only negatively remarkable. He is neither old nor young, neither handsome nor ugly; he was personally not in the least like the popular idea of a lawyer” (Collins 256). In choosing to identify Mr. Playmore by what he is not, Valeria often rejects opposites (young/old, handsome/ugly) and hence resists the familiar dichotomous classification of details within scientific discourses. In addition, defining objects and people by what they are not forces Valeria to consider more information and possibilities about her evidence than if she defined them strictly by what they are or appear to be. The very name of the attorney “Playmore,” which seems to promote the fluidity of meaning and play of language, may be seen as a response to the rigid and exclusionary practices of defining objects of significance in detection, science, law, and other public, male-dominated forums. This is particularly important for Valeria,
whose case depends on modifying existing methods to find evidence that still works within professional discourses. The significance of employing elimination in Valeria’s investigations becomes clear in Dexter’s lyrical portrayal of their search for truth. He sings that together they will range “the mazes of the past” (205). This unassuming line embodies all the complexity of Valeria’s search for Eustace’s secret and her subsequent attempt to reverse the verdict. There is no string of evidence that leads one through a maze. The only way to solve the riddle is to make wrong turns and to remember which wrong turns one has made. Valeria does not often make the correct choices or draw the right conclusions on her first attempt, but she is a heroine uniquely capable of putting wrong turns to good use.

2.6 Visual Evidence and Aesthetics

It is fortunate for Valeria that she has this skill, as Miserrimus Dexter consistently attempts to mislead her, and others deny her information. Valeria must employ what little information she has to construct a narrative that will reveal what others seek desperately to conceal. In doing this, she relies not only on the written evidence she is given, but also on visual representations that allow her to produce multiple interpretations. Indeed, it is Valeria’s ability to interpret the aesthetic features of faces, portraits, art, and even her own body, that assist her in forming a convincing and coherent narrative of Sara MacAllan’s death, or rather, her husband’s innocence. More specifically, Valeria understands visual evidence to be intimately connected to narrative construction in that its forms are isolated images that require conscious cognitive processes and evaluation to establish their various connections. She demonstrates this process almost immediately in the novel, as she reflects on her courtship with Eustace
Woodville: “My mind wandered backward once more, and showed me another picture in the golden gallery of the past” (18). Valeria’s choice of the word “gallery” is particularly significant here. It suggests that her memories, like the portraits in an art gallery, are a series of isolated moments that she considers individually and that the act of forming a narrative requires the careful selection and interpretation of these moments.

She illustrates this in considering the moments that lead up to her marriage, including the day she met Eustace at the stream, the proposal, and the night she met him in the alley to express her Uncle Starkweather’s reservations about their marriage. She spends virtually no time in this series of memories describing her daily interactions with Eustace. Each of these moments produces intense feelings of anxiety for Valeria, and even their recollection makes her uncomfortable. Each of these also reflects a conspicuous lack of some sort of propriety in light of these feelings. When she encounters Eustace while he is fishing at the stream near her aunt and uncle’s house, they immediately forget the social niceties: “This I know for certain, we forgot our breeding as lady and gentleman; we looked at each other in barbarous silence” (17). Their immediate connection supersedes the introductions that would ordinarily take place, which proves ominous as the neglect of other social forms places Valeria in awkward circumstances. For example, when Valeria tells Eustace of her uncle’s concerns, he decides that he should spare Valeria and not marry her. She cannot understand this response and grows desperate: “Oh, Eustace, I am only a woman—don’t madden me! I can’t live without you. I must and will be your wife” (23). Valeria in other respects proves to be a rational heroine, but in this case ignores her uncle’s concerns and even Eustace’s reservations. The memories that Valeria chooses to describe from her
“gallery” do not, taken as a whole, create a narrative that fosters confidence in their union. Valeria’s selection of them suggests her own anxiety about her marriage. Just as her memories demonstrate a lack of attention to social conventions and personal restraint, her wedding is conspicuously devoid of the expected social trappings: “No cheering; no sunshine; no flowers strewn in our path; no grand breakfast; no genial speeches; no bridesmaids; no father’s or mother’s blessing” (15). Although Valeria was more than willing to overlook the obvious obstacles placed in the way of her marriage, she grows concerned afterward that such deficiencies indicate that her marriage begins with poor omens. Hence, Valeria’s choice of moments from her “gallery” appears to reveal her larger anxieties about the circumstances of her marriage.

That Valeria’s interpretive strategies rely on the connection of isolated evidence is also implied by the setting and her attempts to interpret it. After reading Eustace’s trial, Valeria is determined to communicate with her husband’s friends with the hope of revealing evidence that the court overlooked. Her mother-in-law insists that if she is determined to visit Miserrimus Dexter, she must not go unattended. Mrs. Macallan agrees to take Valeria to Dexter’s estate, and Valeria has ample time to question her decision as the landscape becomes increasingly dismal. She notices by turn the “dingy brick labyrinth of streets,” the patches of waste ground that seem “neither town nor country,” and the scattered houses and shops that seem like “lost country villages wandering on their way to London” (188-89). These descriptions emphasize a feeling of being lost and confused. The streets, like Dexter’s reference to the past as a “maze,” suggest that one could become easily confused by their intricacies and lose sight of one’s goal. The grounds seem to elude classification, as they do not exhibit the characteristics
of either town or country. These descriptions reflect not only the decaying state of
Dexter’s mind and the consequent chaos and instability of his thought processes, but also
provide a useful metaphor for examining Valeria’s investigative methods. She must
either avoid the chaos that comes with making a wrong turn in the labyrinth, or use such
mistakes or errors in judgment to her advantage. Just as the grounds elude convenient
classification, Valeria must develop methods for sorting through evidence that does not
inherently support a larger narrative, or that could be used to support multiple
interpretations.

This becomes clearer when Valeria arrives at Dexter’s estate. She doubts that
there could be human activity in such a dismal place, where a few vagrant ducks appear
to be the only inhabitants. The physical details of the scene are all that demonstrate to
her the possibility of human activity: “The footman led the way towards the paling,
through the boards and bricks, the oyster-shells and the broken crockery, that strewed the
ground” (189). The boards and bricks are evidence that builders have been on the sight,
and the oyster shells and broken crockery are the remnants of their meals. These small,
almost negligible pieces of evidence become a means for Valeria to establish that the
estate is not completely devoid of human life. Also, the descriptions of the gravel path as
“half-made” and the foundations of a few neighboring houses as “half-completed” again
point to Valeria’s interpretive strategies in forming narratives. Valeria is not often privy
to complete narratives. Even Eustace’s trial, which is meant to be an accurate rendering
of court proceedings, has been altered to conceal the wild ranting of Miserrimus Dexter.
She is forced to employ the same methods that she applies to her memories; namely, she
must select particular, and often “half-completed” pieces of evidence, and create a
narrative from them. Her process, then, reveals that narratives, particularly those constructed from physical and visual evidence, are constructed and hence unstable.

Valeria is at pains to embrace the instability of visual evidence and narrative from the inception of her investigation. She approaches her task by embracing personal, cultural, and cognitive associations, rather than established facts, as the basis for her examination. We first see Valeria’s ability to sort through forms of visual evidence when she receives Major Fitz-David’s permission to search for evidence relevant to her husband’s secret. She does not know where to start with her examination, as the Major gives her no hint about where to find the relevant object, or even what the object is that she seeks. In making a cursory glance at the room, she notices two sets of drawers “supporting two fine bronze reproductions (reduced in size) of the Venus Milo and the Venus Callipyge” (74). On the surface this decision seems arbitrary, but Valeria’s choice to begin her investigation may depend on more deeply rooted aesthetic and personal associations:

Her hair is black; dressed, in these later days (as it was dressed years ago to please her father), in broad ripples drawn back from the forehead, and gathered into a simple knot behind (like the hair of the Venus de Medici), so as to show the neck beneath. (14)

Valeria’s early description of her appearance suggests both her familiarity with the Venus statues aesthetically and her own efforts to emulate their specific qualities to please her father. While the Venus of Milo and the Venus of Callipyge are far more erotic pieces than the Venus de Medici, the fact that Valeria begins by exploring cabinets supporting these objects with which she is familiar points to a subtle cognitive connection.14 This would by no means be a place from which to begin any formal investigation, but she
must depend on such random associations as she has nothing concrete to direct her examination of the study.

This also becomes symbolically clear as Valeria searches the study and consciously attempts to find and eliminate possible sources of information. After searching two of the cupboards under the Major’s bookshelves and finding nothing of relevance, Valeria almost despairs of hope and hesitates to open the third cupboard. After a brief consideration, she decides it better to conduct a complete investigation and open the cupboard:

On the upper shelf there appeared, in solitary grandeur, one object only—a gorgeously-bound book. It was of a larger size than usual, judging of it by comparison with the dimensions of modern volumes. The binding was of blue velvet, with clasps of silver worked in beautiful arabesque patterns, and with a lock of the same precious metal to protect the book from prying eyes. When I took it up, I found that the lock was not closed. (82)

The symbolic nature of the arabesque in other nineteenth-century works proves particularly significant here, as it frequently appears in literature as a symbol of insanity, derangement, nonlinear reasoning, and chaos. Gustave Flaubert, for instance, writes in Madame Bovary that Charles’s and Emma’s initials on the wedding pastries are written in arabesques, indicating the destructive nature of their relationship and Emma’s restlessness and eventual descent into madness. Edgar Allan Poe employs the arabesque in Ligeia (the curtains) to illustrate his narrator’s instability as he attempts to construct his current wife as his first love. The narrator’s walls in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s The Yellow Wallpaper are covered in arabesques, indicating both the narrator’s increasingly unstable condition and her frantic attempts to escape from patriarchal authority. Oscar Wilde too uses this symbol later in the century in The Picture of Dorian Gray. The title
character holds up a lamp studded with silver arabesques to view the body of his friend Basil, whom he as murdered, representing Dorian’s increasingly degenerate thoughts and violent behavior. To some extent Wilkie Collins also employs this symbol to represent a character’s state of mind, or more precisely, the fluid cognitive associations involved in revealing evidence and constructing a narrative from it. The arabesque itself resists linear, teleological, and hierarchical classification in that the figure has neither beginning nor ending. Hence, no point on the arabesque may be privileged above any other. It is in the blue book covered in arabesques that Valeria discovers the picture of Eustace and his first wife, her first clue to revealing her husband’s secret. The arabesque becomes symbolic of Valeria’s refusal to choose only evidence that seems most relevant and her resistance to employing linear reasoning in ordering and interpreting this evidence.

Valeria’s reliance on cognitive associations and nonlinear reasoning ultimately assist her in shifting her suspicions from Mrs. Beauly to Miserrimus Dexter. After sending Ariel, Dexter’s cousin, from Benjamin’s house with the promise that she will see him again, Valeria cannot take her mind from the apparent affection that Dexter feels for Sara Macallan. This leads her to imagine the horrible death scene as Sara dies from arsenic poisoning:

The horrible picture took a strange hold on my mind. I rose, and walked up and down, and tried to turn my thoughts some other way. It was not to be done: the scene was too familiar to be easily dismissed. I had myself walked in the corridor which Dexter had crossed, on his way to take his last leave of her. The corridor? I stopped. My thoughts suddenly took a new direction, uninfluenced by any effort of my will. What other association, besides the associations with Dexter, did I connect with the corridor? (284-85)
Valeria refers to the trial to find her answer. She searches the nurse’s testimony and remembers that two men were posted in front of Sara Macallan’s death chamber, which in turn leads her to question how Dexter gained access to the room. Her process for arriving at this conclusion does not strictly involve connecting pieces of evidence through their implicit relationship to each other. There is no obvious connection, for example, between Dexter’s affection and the death scene, and still less between Valeria’s experience of walking down the corridor at Gleninch and the nurse’s testimony. Rather, Valeria’s visual memory of the corridor leads her to make a cognitive association with evidence that she has read before. Mr. Playmore decides to trust Valeria’s cognitive associations and consequently locates Sara Macallan’s suicide note, proving Eustace’s innocence and generating a light “which the whole machinery of Law was unable to throw on the poisoning case at Gleninch” (260).

2.7 Chapter Conclusion

The deconstruction of professional discourses challenges the authority of the linear, concise, systematic narrative of culpability, and in turn questions the ability to base culpability (which is in itself constructed) on such socially constructed methodologies. To conclude this, however, one must demonstrate that Valeria herself does not ultimately draw conclusions from her finds. This certainly seems to be the case in that Mr. Playmore, the agent he sends to America, and the chemist who reconstructs Sara Macallan’s letter are the ones who ultimately determine that Sara committed suicide. Even when Valeria does have incriminating information, she does not know how to interpret it. For instance, she discovers compromising information about Miserrimus Dexter, but must depend on Mr. Playmore to translate it (Collins 260). Lillian Nayder
concludes that Valeria’s “inability to make important discoveries become a sign of her
gentility” (69). While Valeria’s investigation is undoubtedly tied to class issues and
traditional roles for women, to conclude that her aversion to definite conclusions is a
mark of her gentility denies the subversive potential of Valeria’s search.

The role of the contingent detail and linear narrative is ultimately to reveal the
truth in a way that the dispersed detail and unstable narrative cannot. The rise of realism
contributes in many ways to this perception. In Honore de Balzac’s *Pere Goriot* and
George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, for example, the contingent detail becomes a way of
revealing the “truth” of human nature and of predicting its patterns. The rise of
naturalism also contributes to the privileging of the contingent detail in narrative
construction. The differences between species and races might seem consistent with
dispersed detail in that the genetic variations that produce the resulting differences in
phenotype (observable, expressed genetic traits) are difficult to predict. However, the
visible, manifest distinctions between species are catalogued and classified in
dichotomous forms so that they may then be used in the narrative of difference upon
which Victorian authority stands. It is hardly surprising, then, that the contingent detail is
appropriated by those institutions whose duty it is to come to conclusions about the ever
present “Other” and practice the language of exclusion, particularly law, medicine, and
detection (surveillance, policing, etc.). Wilkie Collins presents a challenge to the
dependence on contingent detail in *The Law and the Lady* by demonstrating that
excluding evidence that does not appear relevant at first may result in false narratives and
ultimately false conclusions. Thus, he seems to illustrate that the contingent detail alone
is not enough to produce a legitimate narrative. In doing so, he promotes agency for
women, whose business/nature it is to perceive the dispersed detail, in public forums.

While the acceptance of the dispersed detail does not seem to gain much support in nineteenth-century England, the concept later gains recognition as modernism’s need for forms that deviate from traditional models and postmodernism’s endorsement of the fragmented self call for the literary community to rethink what constitutes the concept of “truth.”

1 Miserrimus Dexter suffers from a disability produced by genetic deformity. He does not have the use of his legs, which are missing from knee to ankle. He is referred to as “half-man” because he relies on a wheelchair for mobility and assiduously hides the physical signs of his disability under Oriental coverlets.

2 Peter Thoms’s analysis of The Moonstone suggests that the tendency to either resist narrative formation or to form narratives that are not based on reasonable deductions is common in Collins’s novels. He notes that Rosanna Spearman, a homely maid in the Verinder household ignores what she sees in the mirror to pursue Franklin Blake. Although the “interpretive ordering of reality” (162) is normal, it can place characters in danger. Major Fitz-David is fortunate that he only stands to make an imprudent marriage, as Collins’s female characters often suffer for their illusions. Rosanna Spearman, for example, commits suicide when she realizes that her love cannot be returned.

3 The idea that an object masks the processes of its production receives further support from its presence in other fields. Economic theorists, for example, suggest that the products purchased by consumers simultaneously conceal and reveal the processes of their production. The object may mask the labor that contributes to its production, just as physical evidence may mask the methodology and implications of its extraction.

4 In his Ways of Seeing, John Berger notes that details in art reveal the constructed nature of narrative in that reproduction of artworks allowed for the isolation of particular details of paintings. The fact that these details, such as a woman’s face taken from a larger painting, may suggest a completely different story from that of the original painting suggests that the detail is unstable and does not lend itself to any particular interpretation. This idea is particularly dangerous when it is applied to evidence because the objects do not reveal their connections to other evidence, but rather are merely pieces that are made to fit within a larger construction.

5 Lillian Nayder notes that Benjamin associates Valeria’s ideas with a new generation of women who do not mind being without husbands (66). Just as Benjamin fears that looking too closely at objects will confirm their isolation rather than their inherent connections, so too does he fear that operating independently in her investigation will persuade Valeria that she does not need male agents. Hence, Benjamin’s fears are not just for traditional methods of interpreting evidence; rather, he understands Valeria’s investigative methods to have broad social implications that could challenge the very idea of hierarchy.

6 This concept of questioning persisted in novels after The Law and the Lady. In Robert Louis Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, for example, Mr. Enfield notes that questions multiply until someone is hurt: “You start a question, and it’s like starting a stone. You sit quietly on the top of a hill; and away the stone goes, starting others; and presently some bland old bird (the last you would have thought of)
is knocked on the head in his own back garden and the family have to change their name” (9). While questions do have the potential to reveal information, their manner of doing so seems out of control, or haphazard at times.

7 Mrs. Macallan’s definition stands in contrast to medical assessments of Dexter’s behavior, which suggest that as his irrationality increases, so does his madness. In “Debating Aestheticsim from a Feminist Perspective,” Margaret Stetz argues that female writers occupied the “split subject positions of aesthete and New Woman” (35), causing women to reject scientific determinism. Mrs. Macallan’s definition of madness does not make Dexter’s irrational behavior alone the index for the state of his mind. Thus, she rejects the biological determinism that the physician later espouses.

8 John Berger notes that vision is by nature more reciprocal than the word. Language, especially dialogue, exists as a means of determining how and why one sees the world and to determine how others perceive it. By extension, then, the very act of defining an object relies on the cognitive abilities of the viewer.

9 Peter Thoms notes that using narrative techniques to conceal or reveal facts is common in Collins’s works. He demonstrates that in The Moonstone, Drusilla Clack cloaks her experiences in fictional or cultural narratives that the reader may find it difficult to “dismantle the moral and allegorical frameworks in which she packages her events” (162). Clack is so determined to protect her vision of a hero that she will use narrative to enact it. In Dexter’s case, he is so intent on protecting the secret of Mrs. Macallan’s death that he cloaks it in layers of fiction. Thoms suggests that such attempts reveal the constructed and fictive nature of narrative.

10 If, as Lillian Nayder suggests, Valeria assesses gender expectations by “defining the members of one sex against those of the other” (62), she would find this ideologically enclosed system quite a shock. If she defines one sex by what the other is not, then confronting a system in which opposing decisions can produce similar responses (scorn) would be very troubling. Jill Matus suggests the women in fiction face condemnation when they blur the boundaries between gender categories. Matus argues that in The Woman in White, Marian Halcombe exhibits both masculine and feminine traits, and hence experiences rejection from respectable men. The only one who favors her is the villain, Count Fosco. Valeria does not have the slightest trace of masculinity in her appearance, but simultaneously embodies the masculine feelings of professional zeal and the feminine feelings of protectiveness and sentimentality for Eustace and their unborn child.

11 Alison Case suggests that Wilkie Collins and Bram Stoker claimed narrative control as a means of preserving masculinity when lived experiences were becoming less and less gendered (149). This certainly appears correct for The Law and the Lady, as male characters find multiple ways of controlling narratives and systems of representation so that information is tightly regulated, if not wholly inaccessible to women.

12 Reynolds and Humble argue that in The Woman in White, Marian can be both Laura’s confidante and Walter’s sidekick because she has both feminine form and masculine physiognomy. Valeria does not have this luxury, so she must rewrite activities associated with women to carry out what are regarded by many as masculine pursuits.

13 Peter Thoms notes that Collins’s novels often feature characters who inherit evidence as they do property. Rachel Verinder, for example, must sort through the mystery of the moonstone even though she had nothing to do with its acquisition. Although Valeria does not directly inherit Eustace’s secret, her child will inherit the shame of the “Not Proven” verdict if she does not complete her investigation. Eustace ultimately leaves it to his son to deliver the letter that confirms his innocence. So in this sense, Valeria’s child is the bearer of evidence, but without the burden of having to interpret it.

14 There is an even more complex association with the Venus of Milo, which is an armless representation of the goddess. Miserrimus Dexter, as already noted, is legless. While this association does not necessarily
affect Valeria’s investigation directly, is may form part of the complex cognitive associations that she must sort through and employ in her methods.
CHAPTER 3

THE FEMALE INVESTIGATOR AND MODIFYING EVIDENTIARY PRACTICES

IN BRAM STOKER’S DRACULA

3.1 Framing the Professional

How these papers have been placed in sequence will be made manifest in the reading of them. All needless matters have been eliminated, so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of later-day belief may stand forth as simple fact. There is throughout no statement of past things wherein memory may err, for all the records chosen are exactly contemporary, given from the standpoints and within the range of knowledge of those who made them.

This prefatory paragraph to Bram Stoker’s gothic novel Dracula would seem on many levels to set boundaries for the reader, limiting the scope of the events and perhaps even interpretations of the evidence that form the novel’s story. That the reasons for the order of the papers are “made manifest in the reading of them” constructs the text as an insulated and self-referential unit, reaching to no other authority to explain or justify its organization. Also, any source of excess that may result from additional details or variance in memory has been eliminated so that the narrative stands as “simple fact.” The narrator even places restrictions on his characters, noting that the information within the narrative is strictly “within [their] range of knowledge.” To all appearances, then, this paragraph places restrictions on how the reader may interpret the text, both because
he is allowed to employ no other sources and because he is limited to the perspective of the characters. Interestingly, though, these very restrictions accomplish the rhetorical work of positioning Dracula as a detective story in which the process of constructing a narrative of culpability involves a number of complex interpretive strategies for evaluating evidence.¹

The narrator’s claim that the order of the documents is made clear in their contents puts the reader in the position of identifying what the ordering principle is and whether it is effective. For example, had the organizing principle been who was testifying rather than when, so that Jonathan Harker’s testimony were together as a unit rather than interspersed with other testimonies and documents, the narrative would be in many ways indecipherable. Also, the internal logic of the narrative allows Stoker to create what a contemporary review of the novel in The Athenaeum terms “a sense of possibility in impossibility” (59). The events of the novel frequently exist outside of what many readers would consider probable, or even possible. If the text is meant to be understood in isolation, then readers must limit their search for material by which to interpret the events to the text itself, which also means that they may have to accept alternative forms of evidence.

The statement of the prefatory paragraph also limits the various testimonies to the “range of knowledge” of those who gave them. This is particularly important since those who give testimony represent several different professions, disciplinary fields, and social strata: Jonathan Harker begins as a clerk and becomes head of a legal firm upon his benefactor’s death; Arthur Holmwood, son of an English aristocrat, becomes Lord Godalming upon his father’s death; John Seward is a doctor of medicine and head of a
psychiatric hospital; Quincey Morris is an American adventurer; and Abraham Van Helsing has multiple degrees in such fields as science, medicine, and law. With the exception of Van Helsing, the men whose testimony forms a significant part of the novel are limited in how they are at liberty to interpret evidence because of their training in a professional discourse or position within the social structure. Training in a scientific field, for example, would dramatically impact interpretation in that it influences what the individual considers legitimate evidence and how he makes connections between different forms of evidence, such as physical details, witness testimony, formal documents, and historical knowledge.

The character who to some extent escapes the limited scope of professional training, and thus has the ability to connect the differing, and sometimes conflicting interpretive strategies of the novel is Mina Harker, whose knowledge of shorthand and train schedules make her a valuable resource while not restricting her to any particular methodology. Mina’s role in the beginning seems to be strictly that of a recorder and helpmate to her husband and to the men who seek to destroy Dracula. But as the prefatory paragraph suggests, even the act of recording can be complex. The narrator notes that “all needless matters have been eliminated,” which suggests that for the narrative to be convincing as a series of facts, some editing has taken place. As her increasingly active role in the novel as an investigator will demonstrate, Mina finds new and productive ways both of locating and interpreting evidence that often serves to reveal probabilities and promote action when the “facts” are not clear or cannot be known. Key to this ability is Mina’s understanding that the narrative that will ultimately assist her male companions in locating and destroying Dracula is generated through a complex
series of negotiations, intersections, and exclusions of evidence. She employs a number of professional discourses and methodologies, finds new ways of encouraging witness testimony, and promotes information sharing between her protectors as a means of consciously creating a comprehensive narrative.

3.2 Syllogistic Reasoning and Correlating Evidence

Mina’s male companions find it difficult to interpret information about Dracula in part because accepting their observations means to admit that what once seemed impossible is now a part of their lived experiences. The method that Jonathan and Seward employ in negotiating between their fantastic observations and the laws of the known world is largely based on syllogistic argumentation. That is, they attempt to map out upon what premises certain conclusions are based and whether these premises are possible based on their observations. This becomes their means of connecting seemingly unrelated observations. Although Jonathan’s realization that the Count is not a mere man is the product of a long process of reflection, drawing connections between the events that have led him to suspect this results from syllogistic reasoning. When he can confirm that the Count prepares the dinner table, this precipitates a line of argumentation and questioning that ultimately helps Jonathan understand his foe:

For if he does himself all these menial offices, surely it is proof that there is no one else to do them. This gave me a fright because if there is no one else in the castle, it must have been the Count himself who was the driver of the coach and that brought me here. This is a terrible thought; for if so, what does it mean that he could control the wolves, as he did, by only holding his hand in silence? (51-52)

His process of reasoning here is that if there were servants in the house, then they would perform the task of setting the dinner table. Since the Count carries out this “menial
office,” Jonathan concludes that there is no one but the Count in the castle. Based on this, he then concludes that the Count was also the driver. Many of his observations, such as mysterious blue flames, missing mirror reflections, and seeing the Count crawl down the sheer castle walls have served to foster doubt and fear in Jonathan’s mind; but it is only when there are clear, logical links between these observations and assumptions that he can begin to ask helpful questions. After he establishes that there are no servants, he asks why the people at Bistritz were so concerned for him, why they gave him talismans to protect him, and how the Count is able to control the animals and the weather. Rather interestingly, Jonathan must use a system of reason and logic to corroborate his suspicions of the Count’s supernatural nature.

While Dr. Seward is a skilled practitioner of syllogistic reasoning, this becomes a problem for him when he attempts to make connections between events or markers that correlate but do not have a clear connection, or at least not the connection that he expects: “The qualitative analysis gives a quite normal condition, and shows, I should infer, in itself a vigorous state of health” (128). Seward assumes that if something is in fact wrong with Lucy, there will be distinguishable markers in her blood. More specifically, Seward assumes that if the exterior of the body is demonstrating symptoms, then the system that controls or produces the symptoms will have some variance in its usual features as well. Since Lucy’s pallor is alternating between pale and flushed, Seward logically concludes that the answer will become clear in examining the cardiovascular system. When he can find no evidence of a malady seated in the body, he concludes that “it must be something mental” (129).
While the body is marked in such a way that Seward could read the cause of Lucy’s illness (the bite marks), these fall so much out of Seward’s formal training that for quite a long time, this marker means nothing to him:

It at once occurred to me that this wound, or whatever it was, might be the means of that manifest loss of blood; but I abandoned the idea as soon as formed, for such a thing could not be. The whole bed would have been drenched in scarlet with the blood which the must have lost to leave such a pallor as she had before the transfusion. (140)

Seward is faced with a dilemma both because his premises do not support his conclusion and because his observations would not allow him to admit his premise as existing within the realm of possibility. His instinctive conclusion is that the wound is the source of Lucy’s blood loss. In order for this to be true, though, Seward relies on two premises: 1) The source of the blood loss must produce observable blood loss; and 2) The neck wound produces manifest blood loss. The first of these premises seems probable and receives corroboration from Seward’s previous medical experience. The second premise is problematic because Seward’s observations suggest that the blood loss is not “manifest,” though Lucy’s pallor clearly suggests that it has gone somewhere. Hence the premise that the neck wound produces blood loss is invalid and the conclusion that emerges from this premise must also be called into question. Seward’s strict reliance on syllogistic argumentation proves detrimental in this case. It not only keeps him from realizing the source of Lucy’s symptoms, but also reveals a problem with his methodology. Seward dismisses the idea that the neck wound is the source of Lucy’s symptoms because any wound that would produce the blood loss that Lucy’s pallor suggests would have to produce readily observable consequences (blood on the sheets). In this case, Seward is willing to use Lucy’s clearly anemic body to dismiss a claim, but will not use this same
evidence in thinking about the source of Lucy’s illness. He insists that the blood loss be visible to prove that the wound is the source, but will not use the same claim (the blood loss is evidenced by Lucy’s anemia) to prove that the wound could be the source of Lucy’s blood loss. Seward uses deductive reasoning in that he admits information that supports a conclusion that he has labeled as possible. In short, Seward does not see a premise as valid in itself despite whatever circumstances surround it, but rather regards it as true only if it contributes to a conclusion that in some measure obeys the laws of or corroborates existing medical knowledge and scientific methodologies.

Van Helsing, whose interdisciplinary background that includes medicine, law, and metaphysics sets him apart from Jonathan and Seward, encourages Seward not to be dismissive of even the smallest kernel of information. His recommendation for his former pupil is to record all the details of Lucy’s case: “I counsel you, put down in record even your doubts and surmises. Hereafter it may be of interest to you to see how true you guess. We learn from failure, not from success!” (130). Rather than finding a few details or symptoms and tracing them to a logical conclusion, Van Helsing proposes that Seward draw his conclusions through the process of elimination. This suggests that meaning is not something that is traced from positive evidence, but rather something that arises only in eliminating or rejecting other meanings. Van Helsing critiques Seward’s tendency to dismiss premises by suggesting that scientists often either ignore evidence because it does not corroborate existing assumptions, or must take action despite the fact that the premises for an argument are not clear: “You do not let your eyes see nor your ears hear, and that which is outside your daily life is not of account to you. . .Ah, it is the fault of our science that it wants to explain all; and if it explain not, then it says there is
nothing to explain” (Stoker 200). Just as Seward must ignore details that do not fit with his theories because he habitually employs deductive reasoning, science must claim that “there is nothing to explain” when an existing theory fails to account for the disparity of details and events. Such, Van Helsing claims, will be their downfall, for “the doubting of wise men would be [Dracula’s] greatest strength” (342). Rather than allowing himself to acknowledge what he has seen and to employ investigation and action outside of his formal epistemological practices, the scientist will ignore the evidence, suggesting that because he cannot quantify the information, it must not be relevant, or even real.

Van Helsing points out that imposing such limitations on accepting evidence not only restricts the ability to interpret one’s observations, but is also contrary to the historical practice of scientific inquiry. He points out both the problem of Seward’s willingness to accept Charcot’s theory of hypnotism and the subsequent difficulty of rejecting corporeal transference, materialism, and mind reading:

Then you are satisfied as to it? Yes? And of course then you understand how it act, and can follow the mind of the great Charcot—alas that he is no more!—into the very soul of the patient that he influence. No? Then tell me—for I am student of the brain—how you accept the hypnotism and reject the thought-reading. Let me tell you, my friend, that there are things done today in electrical science which would have been deemed unholy by the very men who discovered electricity—who would themselves not so long before have been burned as wizards. There are always mysteries in life. (201)

Van Helsing begins here by reprimanding his former pupil for accepting Charcot’s theory when he cannot articulate and explain the specific principles upon which hypnotism is premised. The point of this, though, is not merely to humble Seward’s occasionally complacent responses and self-indulgent inferences, but rather to demonstrate that scientific and medical practices do not require practitioners to identify the premises that
support a theory in order to put them into practice. Based on this acceptance of hypnosis
without premises, Van Helsing suggests that there is no reason for Seward to be so
dismissive of other theories, no matter how unreasonable they first seem. His use of the
word “soul” in describing Charcot’s examination of his patients is also significant
because it implies that the subject of Charcot’s study remains yet a mystery in that it
exists outside of scientific objects of inquiry. Had he used “mind” here instead, this
would suggest that the changes that hypnosis produces and the method of its operations
may be clearly studied because the mind, or more specifically the brain, is a physiological
structure that has predictable features, responses, and behaviors. “Soul” implies that
while we may observe the influence that hypnosis has over the patient’s faculties, it
would be difficult, if not impossible, to identify the mechanisms that permit this
influence. Van Helsing thus demonstrates that scientific inquiry often depends on
trusting and employing theories that are not thoroughly explained and on examining
subjects that do not seem relevant.

Van Helsing suggests that this exploration of and dependence on the unknown is
in keeping with the spirit of scientific investigation. He notes that his contemporaries
perform electrical experiments that would offend the men who discovered electricity, and
that the acts and conclusions of these men were condemned in their time. The idea that
scientists face social stigmatization and must work against widely-accepted assumptions
and values is probably not surprising to Seward, who is himself at pains to overcome
sentimental interpretations of his interactions with Lucy in order to help her. But Van
Helsing is not merely suggesting that Seward look beyond social interpretations of
science; rather, he is proposing that an integral part of scientific exploration is responding
to, and sometimes rejecting the work of other scientists. Scientists do not reject the unknown when it does not support previous conclusions or does not seem to fit within current methodologies. The scientist is either faced with finding a way of explaining the new phenomenon with current practices, or, as Van Helsing suggests, with reevaluating whether existing practices are productive and appropriate.

Van Helsing tells Jack Seward that the first step in this process of reevaluation is not developing new hypotheses, but rather being open to new possibilities, which he demonstrates by asking him an extensive series of seemingly unrelated rhetorical questions: “Do you know the altogether of comparative anatomy, and can say wherefore the qualities of brutes are in some men, and not in others? . . . Can you tell me why the tortoise lives more long than generations of men; why the elephant goes on and on till he have seen dynasties?” (201). Van Helsing does not pause during his questioning to allow Seward time to formulate a response principally because his goal is not to find answers. This rhetorical strategy soon frustrates Dr. Seward and he insists that Van Helsing stop:

He so crowded on my mind his list of nature’s eccentricities and possible impossibilities that my imagination was getting fired. I had a dim idea that he was teaching me some lesson, as long ago he used to do in his study at Amsterdam; but he used then to tell me the thing, so that I could have the object of thought in mind all the time. (202)

Seward is troubled because this form of demonstration is not part of his formal training. The professor does not seem to have a thesis, and therefore his questions do not seem to move toward a logical or even definable end. Because there is no central idea, and the supporting “evidence” consists of questions, not facts, Seward is unable to see Van Helsing’s point. The professor has, then, proved his point on more than one level. The main idea, of course, is that science cannot answer all questions, namely the questions
that Van Helsing poses; however, perhaps the more significant point to note here is that Jack Seward is not capable at this moment of employing any framework for investigation other than the structure provided for him in the male-dominated epistemological practice of medicine. He notes that the questions stimulate his imagination, suggesting that he is considering possibilities outside of his own experience and training. He fears these ideas because they make him feel “like a novice blundering through a bog in a mist” (202). As in Jonathan’s case, Seward is troubled by the lack of agency and absence of control over thought and argument that imagination presents. It is important to note, however, that by this point in the novel Van Helsing already begins to see the importance of moving beyond facts in that he uses a line of questioning without the traditional use of a thesis, or conclusion, and premises to support it. What separates Van Helsing from the highly perceptive Mina, however, is that Van Helsing is skilled in critiquing existing methodologies but lacks the ability to generate new interpretive models to replace traditional male-dominated epistemological practices. While Mina’s primary function in the novel seems to be merely a helpmate, her contributions to the investigation serve to fundamentally redefine methodological practices within the novel. Mina works to establish a narrative that accounts for both the cognitive processes employed in evaluating evidence and the desire to disinterestedly connect outside events, objects, and testimony.

3.3 Sharing Knowledge and Intersecting Testimony

The band on the pier is playing a harsh waltz in good time, and further along the quay there is a Salvation Army meeting in a back street. Neither of the bands hears the other, but up here I hear and see them both.
This stray thought that Mina records in her journal represents her first investigative role in the novel as the person responsible for placing seemingly unrelated testimonies and disparate details in communication with each other. This does not prove an easy task, however, as the men attempting to locate Dracula, and even Mina herself, face a number of methodological, social, and psychological dilemmas in deciding to share information. They struggle with misguided impulses to protect each other, a desire to maintain control over information, and the need to fulfill social roles. Rather surprisingly, the parties who most frequently inhibit the sharing of information are precisely the people one would expect to demonstrate disinterestedness: the scientists. One would anticipate that a scientist would gather together the relevant information and employ it in generating a systematic explanation for the events and data under examination. As a medical practitioner whose principal duty is to protect his patients, though, Seward must take into consideration other goals than revealing the “facts” of Lucy’s illness. He finds himself in the position of looking after not only Lucy’s interests, but also those of the ones who love her most. For example, Seward refrains from telling his friend Arthur that Lucy’s malady demonstrates all of the symptoms of hysteria. William Hughes notes that Seward would be familiar with “the role of sexual passion over that of physical dysfunction in the development of hysteria” (153) and hysteria’s previous associations with “female salaciousness” (153). In this case, Seward demonstrates a familiarity not only with mental maladies, but also with the social consequences that popular interpretations of them can produce. The implication that Lucy may have uncontrollable sexual impulses or perverse sexual proclivities would hurt Arthur and potentially end the hopes for his union with Lucy.⁶ This instance of withholding information, however, is one of the few
that does not directly result in someone getting hurt. Keeping his suspicions from Arthur does not harm Lucy because Arthur is not instrumental in either contributing to the testimony that will locate Dracula or in interpreting this testimony to form a cogent narrative. Part of the reason that there are minimal negative results in this case is that Seward considers multiple contexts for and consequences of sharing or withholding information. Far more frequent and disastrous, however, are moments in which medical practitioners and scientists deny their patients information that prevents them from taking appropriate action. In short, withholding knowledge and testimony becomes dangerous when it deprives characters of agency, particularly their ability to protect themselves.

Perhaps the most obvious examples of this mistake are keeping the nature of Lucy’s condition from Mrs. Westenra and denying Lucy information about the degree of danger that she is in. Van Helsing and Seward agree not to inform Mrs. Westenra of how sick her daughter is or of the mysterious source of the illness so that she will not have a heart attack from the shock and fear of losing Lucy. The two doctors place garlic flowers in Lucy’s room to temporarily stave off Dracula’s attacks. Not aware of the medicinal purpose of the flowers, Mrs. Westenra removes them, fearing that “the heavy odour would be too much for the dear child in her weak state” (Stoker 148). The consequences of withholding their intentions from Mrs. Westenra are that Lucy is once more attacked in the night, drained of much of her blood, and abandoned in her most vulnerable state. Van Helsing and Seward also contribute to Lucy’s demise by not discussing her condition with her. Talking with Lucy about the experiences she records in her diary, notably her descriptions of experiencing memory lapses, a “vague fear” (126), and “long spells of oblivion, and the rising back to life as a diver coming up through a great press of
water” (150), might have given Lucy’s protectors some clue concerning the extent to which Dracula can affect his victims’ mental and physiological state. This in turn might have helped them to understand Mina’s later hypnotic episodes and to use these moments to their advantage. In addition, sharing with Lucy their suspicions about her supernatural attacker might at least have helped her interpret her own experiences and perhaps even have given her a means of defending herself. Lucy is doubly a victim; Dracula deprives her of the memory of her attacks, while her protectors rob her of the lens that would help her interpret what little she does remember.

This is one of the most significant points of difference between Lucy and Mina. Mina, like her friend, is physically attacked and emotionally traumatized. Also, she is repeatedly excluded from information by those seeking to protect her. Though part of reason that Mina is excluded is because Dracula can gain information about their plans through her, Van Helsing also cites medical reasons for why Mina should not be involved:

> Even if she be not harmed, her heart may fail her in so much and so many horrors; and hereafter she may suffer—both in waking, from her nerves, and in sleep, from her dreams. And besides, she is young woman and not so long married; there may be other things to think of some time, if not now. (240)

Van Helsing is concerned that trauma can have effects well beyond the initial moment in which it is experienced. Hence, having contact with Dracula not only produces initial shock and terror, but also becomes a degenerative and debilitating mental malady. This concern is certainly not without foundation. After seeing Dracula in London, Jonathan falls into a stupor to escape his fear. Van Helsing later mentions Dracula’s attack on Mina and discusses its implications, making Mina, whose strong constitution has been
unquestioned up to this point, faint with terror. Van Helsing’s concern for “other things,” which one may infer alludes to pregnancy, however, seems unfounded and actually places Mina in grave danger. Van Helsing’s concern is not strictly medical, but also involves the fulfillment the social expectations. The mere fact that he mentions the short time that Mina has been married suggests that there is a strong connection between marriage and motherhood. Van Helsing expects that when Mina has been married longer she will of course have children. But whether one understands Van Helsing’s concerns as strictly medical or as intimately informed by social expectations, they ultimately leave Mina vulnerable to attack. Van Helsing, Seward, Jonathan, and Arthur decide to make a late-night raid on Carfax Abbey to destroy Dracula’s place of respite. They neglect, however, to leave a guard for Mina, leaving her helpless. Ironically, Van Helsing’s attempt to construct Mina as the virtuous wife and mother threatens to create in her the very sense of yearning, forwardness, and salaciousness that are at odds with Victorian ideals of modesty and propriety. His concerns for Mina’s future pregnancies are also unfounded, as Mina will bear the burden of her attack quite well, managing not only to locate Dracula, but also to give birth to a son who carries the names of all of her protectors.

Clearly attempts to withhold information either for medical or social reasons prove problematic within the novel. But it is difficult to judge Van Helsing and Seward harshly for their actions, as their reasons for remaining silent are deeply rooted in their methodology as scientists. When first discussing Lucy’s case with Van Helsing, Seward is not sure if it is wise to tell Arthur his concerns. Van Helsing discourages him from doing so, but not because it will spare Arthur the pain and fears associated with knowing
the gravity of Lucy’s condition; rather, he notes that divulging information could have negative effects on Seward’s analytical processes:

All men are mad in some way or the other; and inasmuch as you deal discreetly with your madmen, so deal with God’s madmen, too—the rest of the world. You tell not your madmen what you do nor why you do it; you tell them not what you think. So you shall keep knowledge in its place, where it may rest—where it may gather its kind around it and breed. (135)

Van Helsing draws a parallel between Seward’s patients and men of the world, such as Arthur. The patients are the subjects of Seward’s investigation and telling them his thoughts about their various maladies could have a number of undesirable consequences. The most problematic would be that the patient, now aware of the symptoms that Seward observes, begins to demonstrate new behaviors. Hence, the sharing of knowledge is tantamount to compromising disinterestedness as an observer because it can construct or change the very behaviors that one observes. Van Helsing’s recommendation that Seward keep the knowledge within him to “gather its kind around it and breed” suggests that Seward’s own thoughts, observations, and previous experiences will assist him in corroborating the knowledge that he protects. The ideal result is that when Seward revisits this partially-formed knowledge later, he will find “that he be no half-thought at all; that be a whole thought, though so young that he is not yet strong to use his little wings” (335). The process of proving the validity of ideas from Van Helsing’s perspective has at its root the concepts of silence and individual reflection. While this approach may safeguard the observer from influencing his subjects, it also denies him the input of other observers. The benefits of sharing information are that a scientist has the observations of his peers to either corroborate or refute his conclusion. Also, other
observers may introduce new criteria that alter the means by which the scientist evaluates knowledge. Because she has no training in formal scientific methodologies and hence does not rely on silence in her analytical processes, Mina is the character most capable of developing interpretive strategies that look at the intersection of various testimonies and forms of knowledge.

But Mina, too, must overcome, or in some cases rewrite, social expectations that prevent the sharing of information. Mina, like Van Helsing, wants to protect her role as wife at all costs. When Jonathan returns from Transylvania and marries Mina, he gives her his journal with the account of his harrowing journey. He tells her that she may read it if she wishes but not to let him know. As a demonstration of love, Mina wraps it in white paper and blue ribbon, sealing it with her wedding band so that “it would be an outward and visible sign for us all our lives that we trusted each other” (123). Fulfilling her role as the loving and faithful wife requires Mina to construct her own ignorance. At this point she cannot share the information, or even access it herself because Mina defines herself by what she denies herself. The development that precipitates her later role in collating evidence is not a conscious act of self-realization or an active rejection of accepted roles for Victorian women. Rather, she rewrites her role as wife as someone who must act on her husband’s behalf when he cannot act on his own. She feels it her duty to understand why her husband responded to the “stranger” as he did so that she can best determine how to help him. This, of course, justifies not only her opening of Jonathan’s journal, but also her involvement in examining any information that could corroborate his narrative, which as it turns out, includes journals, newspaper articles, and letters. Mina thus becomes the detective by deepening her role as wife.
This is certainly not to suggest that Mina’s attempts to access testimony always function seamlessly in the complex network of social relationships and gender negotiations. For example, when Van Helsing comes to visit her after Lucy’s death to discuss the details of Jonathan’s experiences in Transylvania, Mina initially provides him with the shorthand version of the journal. He cannot read the text, and Mina, noting “the taste of the original apple that remains still in our mouths” (193), feels guilty about deriving pleasure from his confusion. She relents and hands him a full typed copy of the journal. Mina’s actions may seem a bit childish and counterproductive, but they represent the larger conflict of control over information. As she cannot diagnose or treat her husband’s frail condition, her only source of influence or control is access to a narrative that may give her a clue to the origins of Jonathan’s condition. The reference to Eve could merely be an indication of Mina’s sense of guilt for committing what she believes is a sin. The allusion, though, has added relevance because it deals with the issues of power over information and the act of persuasion. Eve is anxious to convince Adam to partake of the apple, if only so that she may not be alone in her condition. Her source of power lies in her ability to persuade her partner to replicate her actions. This is particularly important in thinking about Mina’s circumstances because she initially seems to deny that sharing information and influencing how people interpret it are her forms of authority. Her resistance to providing Van Helsing with Jonathan’s narrative suggests that she considers access to information to be a method of control. One of Mina’s most significant developments is understanding that determining how information is collated and interpreted to form a narrative is far more valuable than the ability to deny others knowledge. Mina’s unvoiced fear, quite understandably, is that she will not be valued for
these skills or permitted to employ them. And while Mina’s later telepathic connection with Dracula does necessitate her exclusion, her ability to both share information and to convince others to share their testimony provides her with the information to deduce Dracula’s location.

Mina’s first act of sharing is to offer Van Helsing Jonathan’s narrative. Her first attempt at persuading others to share testimony involves Jack Seward’s phonographic journal. Seward’s intention when he meets Mina is to “get her interested in something” (226) so that he may read Jonathan’s narrative. Not one to be distracted, Mina asks about Lucy’s death because she suspects that “the diary of a doctor who attended Lucy might have something to add to the sum of our knowledge” (227). She asks to type Seward’s phonographic recordings so that she and Van Helsing may have access to his reflections on the circumstances of Lucy’s death. He is resistant to this request both because he does not want to terrify Mina and because he does not want his private feelings to be made public. Mina understands Seward’s hesitation and offers to let him read both Jonathan’s and her own journal, reminding him that she has “not faltered in giving every thought of [her] own heart in this cause” (228). Mina’s openness and trust in Seward, though she hardly knows him, inspires him to return the favor. While other characters make the mistake of keeping each other in the dark to protect people from their feelings or weaknesses and to uphold social distinctions between public and private matters, Mina finds ways of accomplishing these ends without concealing information. She makes Seward’s reflections available to her protectors while protecting his personal anguish, translating his testimony into type so that “none other need now hear [his] heart beat, as [she] did” (229). Mina respects Seward’s feelings for Lucy and his pain at losing her, but
through the sharing of her own anxieties about Jonathan and her hints at how important
his testimony may be to their understanding of Dracula, Mina persuades Seward to share
the whole of his narrative.

Mina’s willingness to share information produces a number of positive
consequences. One of the most significant impacts of sharing testimonies is that the
similarities of the narratives serve to corroborate each other, contributing to a more
convincing, cogent narrative. Mina notes that she would not have believed Seward’s
testimony of the “wild, and mysterious, and strange” (230) circumstances surrounding
Lucy’s illness and death had she not already read the equally disturbing events that form
Jonathan’s narrative. Both Jonathan’s and Lucy’s journals keep Mina from doubting her
own experiences and observations when she is attacked. When Dracula enters her room,
she notices two red eyes peering at her through the fog and quickly relates them to the
eyes that Lucy told her of “in her momentary mental wandering” (262) and to Jonathan’s
description of “those awful women growing into reality through the whirling mist in the
moonlight” (262). The fact that others have seen what she sees prompts her to
understand her observations as legitimate evidence, rather than dismissing them as
products of her imagination. Whereas Lucy had no context against which to compare her
experiences, Mina has the testimony of her protectors. Lucy frequently has vague
feelings of terror, but cannot consciously articulate what images and events produce these
feelings. The only time that she can relate any details is when she is in a languid, trance-
like state. Mina’s familiarity with testimony relating to Dracula may assist her in
consciously recalling the details of her attack because she knows what to look for ahead
of time. While this does not help her to resist Dracula’s attack, it does provide her with
more information that she can employ in drawing conclusions about him later. The inclusion of multiple testimonies thus becomes intimately linked even to the most basic acts of observation, encouraging the characters to accept as true what they would otherwise be tempted to dismiss.

3.4 The Interviewer and Access to Witness Testimony and Documents

While Mina’s talents for collating information are impressive, these would be of little use were it not for her unique ability to interview witnesses and interpret their testimony. She employs her aptitude for reading character and her social position as a woman to gather testimony both from those who have witnessed Dracula’s activities and those who are the victims of his designs. In addition, Mina’s strategies for gathering and interpreting testimony do not require that the details of the narrative be directly relevant to what she is investigating. More specifically, she does not demand that she understand every part of a person’s argument and does not insist that testimony be restricted to facts. While visiting Whitby with Lucy, Mina frequently walks to the cliffs and talks with Mr. Swales, nicknamed “Oracle,” an elderly seaman. Her early philosophical discussion with Mr. Swales about the nature and purpose of gravestones is an example of Mina’s methods of interviewing. Her initial goal in approaching Mr. Swales is to hear old seafaring stories so that she may better understand the local superstitions and history of Whitby. When Mr. Swales condemns such stories as idle and inappropriate, though, Mina does not end her conversation with him. She understands that there may be something to learn from testimony other than details that are directly connected with the goal she has in mind. Accordingly, she gives Swales the opportunity to choose the topic of their discussion. But rather than telling any local tales
or anecdotes, he makes light of the disparity between the comments recorded on headstones and the actual character of those the stones are meant to memorialize. The fact that Mina continues to talk to him after this in itself sets her apart from her protectors, who often only continue an interview if it fulfills a specific need for information.

Jonathan, for example, faces a number of problems by limiting the goals of his early interviews with Dracula, the most significant being that he limits the information that he can gain from the exchange. After he realizes that he is a prisoner in Castle Dracula, he decides to ask about Transylvanian history so that he may better understand the Count and presumably form a plan of escape. Dracula is more than happy to relate the history of the Szekelys. Interestingly, though, Jonathan does not use any of the information that he learns from the conversation to help him escape. As he can learn nothing about Dracula’s plans for him from the discussion, he depends on the dates from the letters that his captor plans to send to England to tell him how long he has to live. He does observe that throughout the interview Dracula describes the battles “as if he had been present at them all” (52). Jonathan has already acknowledged that his host seems to have supernatural powers, but he cannot accept that Dracula is centuries old. In all fairness to Jonathan, it is easier to find an explanation for how Dracula controls the animals than to rationalize how he could be hundreds of years old. Had he paid as much attention to his conversation with Dracula as he did to the letters, then he might have gathered information regarding obstacles to his escape. For example, Dracula tells Jonathan that the Szekelys, with his family as their leaders, returned to the war in Turkey and “came again, and again, and again, though [they] had come alone from the bloody
field where [their] troops were being slaughtered” (54). They also fought against the Hungarians for independence because their “spirit would not brook that [they] were not free” (54). While this description provides Jonathan with no direct information about his circumstances, it does suggest that Dracula’s family is persistent and skilled at commanding the interests of others. Had Jonathan recognized this, he might have realized that attempting to bribe the Szgany, who are clearly loyal to Dracula, is not only futile, but also places him in danger. The man he attempts to bribe informs Dracula of the exchange, which tells Dracula that Jonathan is aware that he is a prisoner. This tells Dracula that he needs to be all the more vigilant about keeping Jonathan in the castle. In placing strict limits on the questions he asks and on what kind of information he will derive from the interview, Jonathan misses valuable hints about Dracula’s character and inadvertently provides his “host” with the means to continue his imprisonment.

Van Helsing and Seward also tend to neglect information about character and consequently fail to anticipate the consequences of their interviews and conversations. Whereas Jonathan’s actions place only himself in danger, however, Van Helsing and Seward threaten the mental health of those who are placed in their care. When Mina’s protectors are attempting to decide when to descend on Dracula’s Piccadilly manor, Jonathan is anxious to leave immediately because Mina has been attacked. Van Helsing says that this is not necessary because Dracula has feasted heavily. This is particularly insensitive considering that the blood Dracula consumed was Mina’s. The reminder of the attack sends Mina into a fit of moaning that threatens to cause her collapse. Van Helsing fails to consider how his statements will affect Mina because “he had simply lost sight of her and her part in the affair in his intellectual effort” (295). More specifically,
Van Helsing focuses so closely on the larger issue of how to infiltrate the Piccadilly estate that he neglects the details of the attack that necessitate Dracula’s destruction.

Seward neglects the interests of his patients by ignoring the effects of his questioning. After Seward proposes to Lucy and is rejected, he is restless and cannot eat or sleep. He concludes that work is the only way to recover and begins observing and questioning his patients. In retrospect even he is shocked by how he questions Renfield:

I questioned him more fully than I had ever done, with a view to making myself master of his hallucination. In my manner of doing there was, I now see, something of cruelty. I seemed to wish to keep him to the point of madness—a thing which I avoid with the patients as I would the mouth of hell. (82)

Just as Van Helsing forgets Mina’s role in favor of the larger picture, Seward does not consider Renfield’s state of mind as the interrogation wears on. He ignores how the questions affect Renfield because he focuses on grasping the principles of the illness that influences his patient’s mind. His manner of questioning, however, produces a number of methodological problems. Considering that he cannot even fulfill his basic needs (eating, sleeping, etc.) because his hopes for marriage to Lucy have been dashed, it is not surprising the Seward feels out of control. It is important, then, that he claims that he wants to be “master” of Renfield’s disease. Under normal circumstances this would just mean that he wants to gather the facts of Renfield’s case to best determine a treatment. In this case, though, Seward is looking to master his own emotions through his work, which is clearly affecting how he treats Renfield. In addition, he notes that he seems to be keeping Renfield near madness. Just as Jonathan accidentally provides Dracula with information, Seward’s interview brings about the very thing that a presumably disinterested scientist would want to avoid at all costs: changing the nature of the system.
under observation through the very act of inquiry. Seward certainly witnesses a specimen of Renfield’s madness; but as his own actions help to produce it, one must question its validity.

Mina’s interview strategies are largely free from the methodological problems of her protectors because she is mindful not to disregard the details of an interview or character traits of the person she is interviewing. She is very conscious of her audience and understands how her questions affect people. She manages to direct discussions to reveal the information she desires without limiting the nature of the information itself. Her conversations with Mr. Swales at Whitby again provide an example of this. Mr. Swales claims that the tombstones at Whitby do not accurately describe the people they are meant to signify. Based on her past experience with Swales’s cantankerous side, Mina knows that expressing doubt or skepticism will draw further arguments from him:

I could see from the old fellow’s self-satisfied air and the way in which he looked round for the approval of his cronies that he was “showing off,” so I put in a word to keep him going:—“Oh, Mr. Swales, you can’t be serious. Surely these tombstones are not all wrong?” (87)

Observing that Swales seeks the approval of his peers, Mina knows that he will have to defend his point if she expresses doubt, which results in using specific examples. Swales rises to the occasion, citing the cases of Edward Spencelagh, Andrew Woodhouse, John Paxton, John Rawlings, and most memorably George Canon, to demonstrate that the tombstones are empty signifiers. Mina’s ability to understand the tone and mood of the conversation allow her to extract specific examples from Swales. Although she gains nothing significant from Swales’s gravestone tirade, the act of listening promotes a sense of trust so that he eventually reveals that his fear of death is the cause of his remarks:
“We don’t want to feel scart of it; an’ that’s why I’ve took to makin’ light of it, so that I’d cheer up my own heart a bit” (95). Mina does not realize it at the time, but Swales’s nickname “Oracle” is particularly appropriate. His sense that there is “something in that wind and in the hoast beyont that sounds, and looks, and tastes, and smells like death” (95) proves correct as Dracula’s ship arrives that night and Swales is dead by the following day. Hence, Mina’s conversations with Swales tell her valuable information about his character and make her privy to future events. She lacks the interpretive strategies to decipher it at the time, but the mere fact that her questions can reveal it is in itself impressive.

Mina admits early in the novel that she is an avid newspaper reader, even cutting out clips that are particularly interesting or out of the ordinary. Following the arrival of the Demeter with her dead captain, an interviewer from *The Pall Mall Gazette* reports on the strange case of a wolf that escaped from Whitby’s local zoological gardens. He conducts an interview with the keeper of the gardens to find out how and why the wolf escaped and to speculate about the consequences of the escape. The keeper refuses, however, to entertain any requests until after his supper:

“Now, sir, you can go on and arsk me what your want. You’ll excuse me refoosin’ to talk of perfeshunal subjects afore meals. I gives the wolves and the jackals and the hyenas in all our section their tea afore I begins to arsk them questions.”

“How do you mean, ask them questions?” I queried, wishful to get him into a talkative humour. (151).

Both the keeper’s analogy of the act of interviewing and the newspaper reporter’s manner of conducting the interview are important here. The keeper compares the interviewer asking him questions to hitting the wolves with a pole or scratching their ears. Just as he
would not dare to scratch the wolves’ ears before giving them “their sherry and kawffee” (151), the interview should not presume to ask him questions until he has had his dinner. This implies that the interviewing process is not merely the interviewer disinterestedly asking questions, but rather involves an intimate and delicate relationship between interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer must consider the needs and character traits of the person he is questioning. In this case, the Gazette interviewer encourages the keeper to discuss how he “questions” the wolves. This does not have any direct relevance to the escape of the wolf, but helps to establish a rapport with the keeper so that he is willing to answer questions. The journalist’s questions are also significant because they further explicate the difference between Mina’s interviewing methods and those of her protectors. Like the newspaper interviewer, Mina uses her perceptions of Swales’s character to encourage him to talk. Seward and Van Helsing, on the other hand, frequently neglect the needs of those with whom they are communicating and restrict the kind of information they can discover because of their rigid commitment to the larger picture or goal.

Part of the difference in methodologies could be related to the professional practices that the different parties are emulating. Seward and Van Helsing are employing scientific methods, which stress the disinterestedness of the researcher in revealing the facts of a case. The focus of this method of interviewing is distancing oneself as much as possible from the person being interviewed. Thus, engaging in trivial conversation, which consists of anything outside of what the researcher hopes to gain from the interview, is counterproductive. It is not necessary, or even advisable, to consider the character of the person interviewed or to use this to one’s advantage. This explains why
Van Helsing and Seward frequently neglect the niceties in their pursuit of information and in their attempt to make arguments. By contrast, Mina, who reads newspapers frequently, may be employing the methods she reads in these interviews. These less disinterested interviewers must often coax people into giving information that is very personal, and often compromising. The newspaper interviewer must convince the zoo keeper to tell him how the wolf escaped, which immediately questions the keeper’s abilities because he is meant to care for and control the animals. Similarly, Mina convinces Swales to be open with her about his fear of death and his weaknesses, although this was not the intention of her conversations with him. What becomes clear is that the most productive model for gaining information both acknowledges a personal connection between interviewer and interviewee and resists placing restrictions on the information that results from the conversation.

The fact that Mina does not insist that all of the information in an interview support or reveal the specific answers she is seeking becomes useful in a number of other ways. In some instances Mina does not have a larger context for interpreting the answers from an interview, even participating in conversations in which she literally cannot understand the person she is interviewing. In order to derive useful information from these moments, she cannot force the information to fit preconceived ideas, but rather must allow a larger point to emerge from the details of the conversation. One example of this is in her early conversations with Swales in Whitby, in which she quickly encounters a dialect barrier in conversing with the local seaman. Although she does not understand every part of Swales’s narrative, Mina encourages him to continue his argument: “I nodded, for I thought it better to assent, though I did not understand his dialect. I knew it
had something to do with the church” (87). Rather than forcing Swales to explain himself at each point, Mina trusts that the central point will emerge despite the dialect barrier. She must also employ her imaginative faculties to a point because she can only understand pieces of Swales’s narrative and is left to connect them on her own without context. This scene is particularly interesting when compared to the exchange between Van Helsing and Seward, in which Van Helsing asks his former pupil a series of unrelated rhetorical questions. Whereas Seward needs a thesis before considering the unrelated questions that his mentor asks, Mina waits to draw a conclusion from the details she gathers from the testimony. Seward, then, uses deductive reasoning, while Mina employs inductive reasoning. The significance of this point of difference is the amount and variety of information it permits the characters to interpret. If one uses deductive reasoning, as Seward does, one must either ignore information that is not consistent with a thesis, or abandon the central claim because it fails to account for the disparity of the details. If the observer uses inductive reasoning, however, he considers all of the evidence, however illogical or unrelated it appears. Mina’s method of collecting and interpreting evidence from testimony and argument allows her to consider more and different kinds of evidence than Seward’s method permits, demonstrating once again Van Helsing’s criticism of the epistemological limits of scientific knowledge and the necessity of generating new models of interpretation.

Even when she does not have the opportunity to interview people directly or when they resist giving her information, she is able to read voice inflection and even moments of silence to derive information. After Mina and Van Helsing have met and he has read Jonathan’s journal, Van Helsing wants Seward to meet with Mina and for them to learn
from each other what little they know of the connections between Jonathan’s experiences and the circumstances of Lucy’s death. Mina wants to know how Lucy died and is shocked when Seward vehemently denies her request and looks horrified that she would ask. Mina is puzzled by this response: “‘Why not?’ I asked, for some grave, terrible feeling was coming over me. Again he paused, and I could see that he was trying to invent an excuse” (227). This brief moment of silence is enough to tell Mina that Seward is attempting to hide the nature of Lucy’s death, which suggests that not only was the death related to Dracula, but that it was also “terrible” (228). Based on this conclusion, Mina is able to convince Seward to share his phonographic journal and allow her to record it, which proves invaluable to understanding the narrative of Dracula’s activities. She also interprets voice inflection to determine what kind of an exchange is occurring between individuals. Having gone to bed one evening in Seward’s house while her protectors are out tracking Dracula, she hears the sound of Renfield’s voice in the cell below her room: “The poor man was more loud than ever, and though I could not distinguish a word he said, I could in some way recognize in his tones some passionate entreaty on his part” (261). Although she is not present to read his face, which Jonathan and her protectors would insist on, she can read the inflection of his voice with enough skill to understand the intent and earnestness of Renfield’s words. Later, this information helps Mina and her protectors come to the conclusion that Dracula used Renfield to enter the asylum. Here, Mina can interpret nonverbal testimony, giving her an additional basis from which to decide how she might extract testimony and evidence.

Mina’s ability to interpret nonverbal responses is largely related to her openness in accepting information that does not seem to support a larger narrative or issue at hand.
She also applies this receptiveness in her process of saving newspaper articles in that she selects stories because they are interesting or out of the ordinary, not because they fit into a specific subject she is examining. This is not to say that other characters do not depend on newspaper articles for information. Van Helsing, for example, depends on public documents to corroborate evidence and trace major shifts. Van Helsing depends on the newspapers’s tales of the bloofer lady to inform him that Lucy has adopted the rituals of the undead. Mina’s use of these documents, though, is more complex and intuitive than Van Helsing’s. Her first use of a public document is taken from the Dailygraph on August 8th and describes the unusually tempestuous weather in Whitby and the arrival of a strange ship at harbor. Mina has absolutely no reason to suspect the importance of this article; as with Lucy’s sleepwalking, she includes the article because it is strange and not a part of her anticipated daily routine. Her observations and notes about such abnormalities often prove to be the most significant part of the investigation. This article, for example, gives the party an exact date for Dracula’s arrival in England, providing a starting point for tracing his subsequent actions. As Mina does not typically employ deductive reasoning, she does not insist that the article have some purpose or support a thesis before cutting it out of the paper. Had she insisted on this it is quite likely that the investigation would not have had the necessary date. Since she uses inductive reasoning, however, she notes every detail that seems out of place and later makes it part of a larger narrative or thesis. The acceptance of evidence that seems at first unrelated gives her access to information that her protectors do not have.

In point of fact, Mina can access information from her protectors that they will not even allow each other to see or hear. While Mina’s ability to read moods and to ask
appropriate questions assist her in gaining information, her access to some testimony relies heavily on her ability to employ her domestic role as a woman:

I suppose there is something in woman’s nature that makes a man free to break down before her and express his feelings on the tender or emotional side without feeling it derogatory to his manhood; for when Lord Godalming found himself alone with me he sat down on the sofa and gave way utterly and openly. (235)

Mina has access to Arthur’s feelings because she fulfills the role of the comforting mother, attempting to assuage his despair after Lucy’s death. She also has a deeper understanding of what motivates men’s actions because she sees more than the collected, calm personae that they present in public. Mina also helps stimulate testimony that may otherwise have been neglected. When Dr. Seward asks Renfield a question, the patient derides it as asinine, whereas when Mina asks the same question, he gives a more complete answer. As the question is the same, one must conclude that it is not a difference in framework that gives Mina the advantage. Seward’s speculations elucidate the nature of Mina’s influence as a woman: “I wonder if it was Mrs. Harker’s presence which had touched some chord in his memory. If this new phase was spontaneous, or in any way due to her unconscious influence, she must have some rare gift or power” (249). What is interesting here is the possibility that Mina has had some effect on Renfield’s memory that Seward cannot produce. As a professional woman, Mina, as already demonstrated, depends on information and details that do not necessarily create a concise, cohesive narrative, which is why her protectors initially reject this strategy. As this is the case, Renfield may feel inclined to talk to Mina because she too depends on what might be considered unstable evidence. Unstable evidence, including unrelated details and testimony, moments of recollection and memory, and the use of the imaginative faculties
to explain what cannot be observed, becomes key in determining Dracula’s activities in England and in tracking him as he retreats back to Transylvania.

3.5 Details, Memory, and the Imagination in Narrative Construction and as Investigative Tools

Narrative is by nature unstable in that it does not depend on unchanging “facts” that can be readily quantified by a large body of practitioners with little or no deviation. For Jonathan, Seward, and Van Helsing, who represent both the legal and scientific professions, however, facts are the primary units employed in generating a narrative. Within the context of their investigations, a “fact” is either an occurrence that can be corroborated by several individuals or a law that proves functional and replicable, such as a mathematical equation or scientific principle. The goal of narrative in these male-dominated professions, then, is connecting external evidence in a cohesive theory, understanding, or explanation. The focus of constructing narratives for these professionals is on producing a story that can stand on its own as a form of evidence and that needs no outside corroboration other than the details that form it. For this method to work, each detail and piece of evidence used to form the narrative must be demonstrated as true in its own right so that the conclusion of the narrative seems self-evident. Hence, the subtly complex cognitive processes and rhetorical negotiations involved in creating the narrative are usually not an object of investigation. One of the many problems with using narrative construction in this way is that it tends to dismiss individual observations if they do not appear to contribute to the larger, and often expected, explanation. This places strict limits both on the forms of evidence that may be used in the act of narrative construction and on the interpretation of this evidence. In fact, the most productive
instances of narrative construction within the novel frequently rely on understanding it as an internalized, cognitive process, rather than as a disinterested method for connecting external evidence. Mina’s understanding of narrative as a process that is valuable *because* of its instability aides her in forming a story that simultaneously traces Dracula’s past activities in London and correctly anticipates his plans to return to Transylvania. Ultimately, Mina’s five companions must adopt her practice of considering evidence outside of male-dominated epistemological frameworks in order to find and destroy Dracula.

Despite the methodological differences between Mina’s narratives and those of her protectors, they both depend heavily on details, or specific moments and examples. Jonathan strongly resists composing narratives, in part because he is uncertain about the role that details play in their construction:

> I began to fear as I wrote in this book that I was getting too diffuse; but now I am glad that I went into detail from the first, for there is something so strange about this place and all in it that I cannot help but feel uneasy. . .Let me be prosaic so far as facts can be; it will help me to bear up, and imagination must not run riot with me. If it does I am lost. Let me say at once how I stand—or seem to. (49-50)

Jonathan inadvertently makes creating a narrative to explain his experiences impossible because he employs two competing definitions of the role of details. He first expresses a fear that he has been too “diffuse.” This suggests that details may be a form of excess within the narrative in that they contain unnecessary information that distracts him from drawing concise conclusions. Details would seem, then, to be a threat to his reason and sanity. Jonathan promptly admits, though, that he is glad he included these details because Castle Dracula disturbs him in a way he cannot yet define. While details have
the potential to distract, clearly he believes that they are key to reflecting on his experiences and discovering the source of his uneasiness. Since details do not seem to have an inherently stable function within the narrative, Jonathan is desperate to have some form of control over the methods he uses to interpret details. He wishes to be prosaic, implying that he will only explore the details of his experiences that he can understand as “facts.” Thus, he seeks to impose an outside framework on the construction of his narrative. This is because he fears that his imagination will “run riot” if he does not limit himself to established facts. Imagination is problematic for Jonathan because it represents a lack of control. Facts place limits on details because they only acknowledge what can be corroborated by others or through universal functions. Privileging facts allows Jonathan either to explain away or to ignore entirely many of the events that he has experienced since arriving in Transylvania. Imagination requires no outside corroboration, depending entirely on the observer’s response to an outside stimulus. The imaginative faculties cause the mind to speculate about the source of an observation despite the fact that this source cannot be confirmed. The effect of imagination, then, is often to multiply the possible interpretations of details, complicating the process of developing a single answer or conclusion. Jonathan avoids it primarily because it involves sacrificing agency. If he allows imagination to govern his interpretations, he would be at pains to acknowledge that Dracula is a supernatural being as soon as he notices the similarity between the carriage driver and his host. He would then realize the power that Dracula has over him and the almost insurmountable obstacles that stand in the way of his escape. As long as he can be selective about the details he
elects to interpret, however, he maintains the illusion that he is in control of both his host’s decisions and the length of his stay at Castle Dracula.

But even Jonathan, who firmly believes that his sanity depends on restricting his interpretations of details, cannot ignore the strange events surrounding his host’s activities. He finally realizes that to create a narrative that explains these occurrences, he must acknowledge even the most unlikely of his observations. In his analysis of how Dracula points to the limits of nineteenth-century positivism, David Glover notes that scientific investigation in the novel is problematic because of its “consignment of speculation divorced from observation to the domain of unreality or illusion” (64). The positivistic framework of scientific inquiry relegates speculation to a position of excess because it has no quantifiable means of demonstrating the explanations it generates. Although Jonathan fears speculating about the details he observes, he eventually comes to the realization that he must use this strategy to draw any conclusions about what he has seen. He finally acknowledges details that he had previously ignored, particularly the blue flames outside the castle, the similarity between the driver and his host, Dracula’s control of the wolves, the concerns of the villagers on his way to the castle, and Dracula’s lizard-like ability to crawl down the castle walls. What he sees about the nature of his narrative, however, is no source of comfort to him: “This diary seems horribly like the beginning of the “Arabian Nights,” for everything has to break off at cock-crow—or like the ghost of Hamlet’s father” (54). On the surface, this is merely a statement of how disorienting Jonathan’s circumstances are because he has adopted his host’s schedule of sleeping during the day and attending to his client’s needs and questions at night. It also indicates, though, how unstable the functions of details are and why this is so disturbing.
to Jonathan. Rather than making his experiences and observations at Castle Dracula seem more plausible, the details of his narrative, in this case the fact that the cock-crow seems to control the length of his interviews with Dracula, seem merely to replicate the structure of fictional narratives. Jonathan finds this disconcerting and resists drawing conclusions from a narrative that so often features events that appear absurd or implausible. Although he does later admit that “perhaps at the end the little things may teach us most” (289), he nonetheless resists interpreting the details of his stay in Transylvania. Ultimately, Jonathan opts out of the narrative process altogether, relying almost wholly on the extensive historical and professional experiences of Van Helsing and his wife’s superior interpretive skills.

Mina’s understanding of how details work within the narrative process is far less focused on connecting outside events and objects than it is on exploring how the mind goes about creating narratives. In other words, Mina’s perception of the process rests on none of the claims to disinterestedness that Jonathan often insists on. In fact, her first reflection on the cognitive process involved in forming a narrative focuses not on rational discourse, but rather on the subconscious connections of her friend Lucy’s dreams:

She will be dreaming of this to-night, I am sure. The whole agglomeration of things—the ship steered into port by a dead man; his attitude, tied to the wheel with a crucifix and beads; the touching funeral; the dog, now furious and now in terror—will all afford material for her dreams. (108)

Although Mina will later become skilled in connecting details that appear unrelated, she has no reason at this point to suspect that the strange events she has just described are connected or that they will be the key to Lucy’s bizarre sleepwalking moments. Her concern, though, is that whether or not these details are logically connected, Lucy’s mind
may connect this “agglomeration” of events in a way that will torment her and potentially damage her already compromised health. Mina is not intentionally commenting on the process of narrative creation, but her observation is important because it suggests that the cognitive functions involved in generating a narrative and the impact that this process has on the one carrying out these functions is just as significant, if not more so, than connecting outside information. Since her understanding of the narrative relies on the unstable connections that the mind creates, Mina is far less troubled by the unstable nature of details. As a result, she acknowledges more details as evidence and employs more complex interpretive strategies than the strict lines of scientific inquiry would permit.

The idea that Mina understands narrative creation as a cognitive process is corroborated by her awareness of how she employs her journal. She does not view writing in her journal as a one-way process in which she merely records her thoughts, but rather as a means of “whispering to one’s self and listening at the same time” (93). Her goal is not to disinterestedly examine the events that she records, but rather to somehow be observer and subject at the same time. She seeks simultaneously to experience and to know. At the heart of Mina’s narrative process, in this case writing her journal, is an examination of how the mind negotiates between observation and experience, rendering the narrative process itself an intimate, internalized cognitive process.

In contrast, her companions resist this strategy primarily because it does not require a stable system of inquiry. Instability is a feature that Jonathan fears because he sees it as a direct threat to his mental health. He is not only disturbed by the constantly-changing role of details, but also by the need to employ memory in recalling these details:
Let me begin with facts—bare, meager facts, verified by books and figures, and of which there can be no doubt. I must not confuse them with experiences which will have to rest on my own observation or my memory of them. (49-50)

Jonathan understands facts to be the lowest common denominators because they have been stripped of the uncertainty with which his observations are invested. He does not want to depend on his own interpretations and observations, but rather on the collective knowledge of professionals and peers. Just as Jonathan comes to understand and fear details because they do not lend themselves to one specific interpretive framework, he also avoids relying on memory because it is not simply a process in which the mind recalls information exactly as it is perceived. Rather, the information undergoes a complex series of revisions that may be altered or influenced by the needs of the observer. For example, Jonathan did not pay too much attention to the similarity between the driver and Dracula when he first observed it. After he notices Dracula performing the menial tasks of the castle, however, these observations are invested with new meaning and the mind chooses which details to emphasize based on this lens. In Jonathan’s case, he is determined to understand the supernatural status of his host, so he recalls the details that corroborate this status. Although memory seems in this case to enable Jonathan to demonstrate his suspicions about Dracula, the fact that memories are subject to constant change makes him hesitant to employ them.

In Jonathan’s case, memory results in a lack of agency and control, difficulties he feels he cannot afford if he is to escape Castle Dracula and thwart his plans to invade England:

They are attempting to use written or recorded language to gain a modicum of control over the anxiety-provoking experiences that Dracula
has produced. For the writers/recorders are acting upon a faith in the ability of their words to produce truth or knowledge, which in turn should yield the power to prevent an individual or the group from being overwhelmed by Dracula and what he represents. (Tannenbaum 4)

As Leslie Tannenbaum articulates, the characters depend on language to give them power over their foe. The instability of memory does not lend itself to the production of a concise, linear narrative, as one piece of information does not have to have any logical connection to another. Memory hence becomes associated with excess and lack of control, and the logical extension of these problems within male-dominated epistemological practices: doubt. This becomes particularly clear after Jonathan escapes, as doubt and uncertainty make him impotent until Van Helsing corroborates his story with the collective knowledge of science and ancient lore.

Mina’s early claims about the function of memory in her professional duties suggest that she begins with a reverse problem of that of her husband. She is told that if she practices consistently she can “remember all that goes on that one hears said during a day” (76). This would suggest that Mina regards memory as a stable tool that merely assists journalists in regurgitating what they hear for an article. Her later description of journalism, however, demonstrates her belief that producing is narrative is not merely an act of recording or unveiling an existing story, but rather the attempt to engage the mental faculties by generating a new form of expression that reaches beyond the “facts” that are part of its construction:

I used to think I would like the practice interviewing; Jonathan’s friend on the Exeter News told him that memory was everything in such work—that you must be able to put down exactly almost every word spoken, even if you had to refine some of it afterwards. (191-92)
It is the clause “even if you had to refine some of it afterwards” that is significant here, as it suggests that the narrative that memory produces is ultimately subject to change and editing. The possibility that signifiers may not be stable is quite likely what is most disturbing to Jonathan and Mina’s other male companions. Knowledge, while it depends on recollection, is a method of understanding that does not alter over time. While interpretations may change, the essential “facts” that form a basic body of knowledge are relatively stable, and follow a distinct set of syllogistic, linear principles when the facts do change. In short, Jonathan privileges the epistemological practices of law and science because they rely on a body of relatively stable signifiers and are predictable in their framework for any changes to these signifiers. The rejection of memory occurs in part because there is no essential kernel of information to interpret and from which to draw a conclusion. Memory constantly multiplies, shifts, and restructures “facts” so that conclusions are often indefinite, or even deferred, hence preventing action.

As already stated, Jonathan is resistant to employing virtually any concept that cannot be corroborated by outside sources or stable systems of information. While details and memory certainly fall outside of the pale of his preferred methods of interpretation, imagination is almost the antithesis of every principle of legitimate investigation in Jonathan’s mind. There are a number of functions that imagination may carry out that account for Jonathan’s concern. Jonathan is desperate to rely on “bare, meager facts” (49). The primary effect of imagination is to invest details with significance beyond their immediate presence. This may be accomplished by replicating a detail over and over to produce a sense of the infinite. Imagination may work to produce explanations that have no direct proof. Imagination may thus simultaneously
affect both the act of perception and the analysis of these perceptions. The fact that imagination destabilizes both perception and methodology makes it particularly threatening for Jonathan in evaluating his circumstances.

This is not to say that Jonathan does not ever employ imagination. In fact he seeks it repeatedly as a source of comfort while he is imprisoned in Castle Dracula. After he realizes that he is a prisoner, he decides to ignore Dracula’s warning and venture into another part of the castle: “I determined not to return to-night to the gloom-haunted rooms, but to sleep here, where of old ladies had sat and sung and lived sweet lives whilst their gentle breasts were sad for their menfolk away in the midst of remorseless wars” (60). Jonathan refuses to employ imagination to interpret his strange experiences and to help him form a plan of action. He has no difficulty, however, in using it to envision himself in a passive position as a means of comfort. He envisions himself amongst women who have no other obligation or care than to wait. This vision gives Jonathan a sense of peace that he cannot find in his own room, where he is constantly reminded that he must be active in order to escape. Jonathan places himself in direct physical danger because in making himself feel comfortable in this new part of the castle, he becomes the object of the brides’ attack. The problem, then, is not the unstable nature of imagination, but rather the way in which Jonathan uses it.

The way in which Mina employs imagination, however, helps her to consider evidence and connections that Jonathan and her protectors do not initially notice. While waiting for her first meeting with Van Helsing, Mina makes a connection that the other characters will not make until later:
He attended poor dear Lucy in her last illness, he can tell me all about her. That is the reason of his coming; it is concerning Lucy and her sleep-walking, and not about Jonathan. Then I shall never know the real truth now! How silly I am. That awful journal gets hold of my imagination and tinges everything with something of its own colour. Of course it is about Lucy. (190-191)

Mina has absolutely no logical reason for believing that Van Helsing knows anything about Jonathan, and yet she imagines it nonetheless. She is also making an implicit connection between Lucy and Jonathan in defining Van Helsing as one who could have knowledge of both. Mina allows the journal to fire her imagination and to make connections that will not be made explicit until Van Helsing corroborates Jonathan’s narrative. Though she dismisses her almost prophetic connection between Lucy and Jonathan, this illogical and impulsive thought ultimately reveals for Mina “the real truth.”

Other characters are often skeptical of Mina’s access to information, dismissing it because it does not fit in with the traditional process of identifying evidence in male-dominated institutions. On their journey to Transylvania, Seward is skeptical about Mina’s continued assistance in tracing Dracula: “It seems to me that her imagination is beginning to work. Whilst she has been in the trance hitherto she has confined herself to the simplest of facts. If this goes on it may ultimately mislead us” (339). Seward says this because Mina notes the sounds of men talking in foreign languages, fierce-falling water, and the howling of wolves. He quite likely assumes that Mina’s imagination is graphing aspects of Jonathan’s journal onto her perceptions. While this would explain the howling wolves as they formed a number of horrific experiences during Jonathan’s stay, it does not fully explain the other information she channels. The talking in foreign voices could be the debate between captain and crew in deciding whether or not to throw
Dracula’s box overboard; the fierce-falling water could identify the place where Arthur and Jonathan later have an accident in the steamer; and the howling of wolves could be the entrance into Transylvania. In other words, Mina’s imagination may not be misleading her protectors, as Seward suspects, but rather enabling her to project, here again almost prophetically, how the Count’s journey will progress. This seems all the more likely because Seward later notes the sound of the rapids as they negotiate the dangers of the river and Seward, Van Helsing, and Mina all hear “the distant howling of wolves” (363) as they enter Transylvania. Seward’s dismissal of this information, however, prevents them from taking immediate action. Whereas Jonathan and Seward implicitly claim that imagination delays action in that it prevents concise conclusions, in this case ignoring testimony based on imagination stalls their efforts.

3.6 Incorporating Exclusion and Alternative Evidence into Traditional Investigative Methods

While Mina certainly never rejects syllogistic reasoning or the benefits of professional discourses, she incorporates new ways of sorting through information that assist her finding Dracula when the “facts” are at best obscure and at worst entirely unknown. In these cases, she employs the method of exclusion to determine which possible interpretation is the most likely. Not surprisingly, her male protectors are resistant to employing this method of investigation. For example, while imprisoned in Castle Dracula, Jonathan awakes in his own room. He notices that his clothes are uncharacteristically folded and his watch is unwound, which leads him to believe that Dracula carried him from the brides’ chamber to his room, but he will not accept this fully because he “could not arrive at an unquestionable result” (63). In order to act on
information, Jonathan insists that there be only one possible explanation. Narrowing down the possibilities allows for too much uncertainty. Jonathan’s fear of uncertainty may be a result of his professional pursuits in the legal field. Within the context of the court, the guilt of the accused must be certain for the jury or judge to establish a conviction and assign a sentence. In Jonathan’s mind, then, maintaining a sense of agency relies on being absolutely certain that information can either stand on its own or be corroborated by outside sources.

This is not to say that Jonathan, Van Helsing, and Seward never employ exclusion in attempting to find information. They restrict the use of this method, however, to instances in which they can visually exclude possible interpretations. When the men descend on Dracula’s Piccadilly estate looking for information about their foe, they employ exclusion to locate evidence: “After a cursory glance at the rest of the rooms, from basement to attic, we came to the conclusion that the dining-room contained any effects which might belong to the Count” (299). While it is clear that the process is a hurried one, the men clearly, look at each room, eliminating it as a possibility for the evidence they seek. They assume that the dining room has the documents merely because it is the last one left. As Jonathan’s case suggests, however, the men are willing to use exclusion only when there is visible evidence available to warrant the exclusion.

In The Birth of the Clinic, Michel Foucault suggests that this dependence on visible evidence is key to scientific inquiry in the nineteenth century: “Rational discourse is based less on the geometry of light than on the insistent, impenetrable density of the object, for prior to all knowledge, the source, the domain, and the boundaries of experience can be found in its dark presence” (xiv). Using exclusion when there is visual
evidence has nothing to do with a belief that the eye is a trustworthy organ of perception. Rather, the fact that the gaze cannot penetrate the weight and opaqueness of objects is what makes them a legitimate basis for evidence. While the men may be reluctant to employ exclusion in analyzing abstract forms of information, the solidity and absolute presence of objects permit them to do so with visual perceptions. One may point out that Jonathan too had visible evidence that Dracula had carried him to his room. The difference, though, is that the men also have visible evidence in the form of titles, deeds, and writing instruments to show them that their conclusion is correct. Jonathan has no such visible assurance and is therefore more resistant to using exclusion.

Mina does not depend on strictly visual evidence in employing exclusion. While she does use sources of visual information, such as maps, she relies on little more than her powers of deduction to draw conclusions from her own testimony. When Mina and her companions realize that Dracula has left England to flee back to Transylvania, she does not attempt to determine which route the Count must have taken, but rather which route is probable based on her knowledge of travel methods, geography, the Count’s character, and his resources. In reviewing her own testimony while hypnotized and the maps, Mina arrives at a conclusion only by eliminating possibilities:

(b) How is he to be taken?—Here a process of exclusions may help us. By road, by rail, by water?
1. By Road—There are endless difficulties, especially in leaving a city. . .
2. By Rail—There is no one in charge of the box. . .
3. By Water—Here is the safest way, in one respect, but with most danger in another. (344-345)

Through the process of excluding other possibilities, Mina arrives at the most likely method of travel. Similarly, she uses her own testimony from her hypnosis to eliminate
the possible routes the Count could have taken. Though her guardians have been apt to depend on those who arrange the trips for information, Mina does not look for positive evidence that Dracula is traveling by water; she appears to implicitly understand “that our words may be merely our futile attempts to exercise power over the essentially uncontrollable and unknowable aspects of life” (Tannenbaum 11). She seems to understand that there is no inherent or positive meaning in any of the evidence that she encounters and that she must depend on exclusions to arrive at meaning. The men’s reliance on visual evidence becomes problematic when Mina undergoes hypnosis because much of the information she provides is filtered through her other senses. This is perhaps the most striking example of Mina influencing the epistemological practices of her guardians because it forces them to accept new forms of evidence. While Mina is in trance, the men are left to draw conclusions for themselves:

“Where are you now?” the answer came dreamily, but with intention; it were as though she were interpreting something. I have heard her use the same tone when reading her shorthand notes.
“I do not know. It is all strange to me!”
“What do you see?”
“I can see nothing; it is all dark.”
“What do you hear?” I could detect the strain in the Professor’s patient voice.
“The lapping of water. It is gurgling by, and little waves leap. I can hear them outside.”
“Then you are on a ship?” We all looked at each other, trying to glean something each from the other. We were afraid to think. The answer came quick:--
“Oh, yes!” (309-310)

The significance of this passage relates to Van Helsing’s idea that “in this enlightened age, men believe not even what they see” (317). Men will not even accept their own experience if it is outside of traditional patterns of understanding and reason. Mina’s
hypnosis forces her guardians to incorporate and trust what these traditional patterns would not even consider to be evidence. Since men cannot, as Van Helsing notes, accept even what they see, they are particularly loath to take experience at second hand, and yet this is exactly what the men must do to make any sense of Mina’s statements. In addition, the privileging of sight is important. One of Van Helsing’s primary concerns about scientific methodologies is that men do not believe what they see and he becomes slightly perturbed when Mina cannot describe what she sees while hypnotized. Mina’s condition forces her protectors to privilege sensory information that they might otherwise regard as misleading. They must trust sound, not sight, if they are to gain any information from Mina’s trance. These challenges to traditional understanding are perhaps more than some characters can tolerate. Jonathan’s claim that Mina is interpreting the information is perhaps an unconscious means of avoiding responsibility. Mina is experiencing Dracula’s conditions, and hence filtering them through her own perceptions; however, she does not draw conclusions about them, provide context for them, or give any other indication that she is “interpreting” her sensations. Jonathan’s claim allows him to say that Mina’s faulty interpretation is to blame if the party’s conclusions and actions later prove to be wrong.

The process of accepting new forms of evidence is not one that happens easily for Mina’s companions. Rather than accepting alternative evidence that could be valuable in the form of Mina’s testimony under hypnosis, they are more inclined to devalue the information and despair of hope because it is too difficult to interpret. In her discussion of the ideological complexities presented by women under the influence of chloroform,
Mary Poovey notes how the silenced female body becomes a battle ground for interpretation and political power:

> The point is that the silenced female body can be made the vehicle for any medical man’s assumptions and practice because its very silence opens a space in which meanings can proliferate. Thus, consultants anxious to establish their territory as “moral feeling” can argue that woman is innately modest and yet dangerously susceptible to the advances of unscrupulous men and to smoldering, internal fires. (152)

Mina is not literally silenced as women under chloroform are; however, she is silenced in that she is merely filtering another’s experiences and because she does not remember what she says after she emerges from her altered state. Poovey’s idea that the female body becomes a space for interpretations is relevant here and would seem to put Mina in danger insomuch as she has no immediate control over what judgments her guardians make. This does not prove to be a difficulty as Mina must once again rescue them from their own limited framework for interpretation. Arthur, Quincy, and Seward express no conclusions about Mina’s statements; Jonathan attempts to opt out of taking responsibility for interpretation, and even the astute Professor is only able to conclude that Dracula is currently on a ship. The silenced body does not prove a danger for Mina because the process of revelation becomes self-referential. She examines the typed copy of her own testimony under hypnosis and is able to determine the Count’s plan of action.

### 3.7 Chapter Conclusion

Mina’s method actually encourages her protectors to consider methods they have not employed before her investigations. For instance, the group has no reason to divide prior to this point. They now take a note from Mina and cover all possibilities, however
unlikely. Rather than just pursuing the Count by water, the group divides so that all options may be considered potential routes for the Count’s movements. Hence, Jonathan and Arthur take a steamer by water, Quincy and Seward take horses by land, and Mina and Van Helsing take the train and a carriage directly to the castle. Despite the fact that splitting up the group would seem to complicate or problematize their plans, Mina’s process of elimination permits them not only to account for and cover all routes, but also to converge at the exact moment necessary to destroy the Count. Although her guardians do begin to consider evidence that they had not considered before, they are not to the point of being able to generate a framework for selecting this alternative evidence yet. While they are incapable of drawing conclusions about Mina’s testimony, they have made the significant leap to trusting methods and evidence that do not fit within the epistemological framework of male-dominated institutions.

The fact that Mina has access to evidence and interpretations that men do not and convinces her male companions to internalize them has significant implications for women’s roles in late Victorian England. It is important to note that the evidence the party collects does not have a place in an official courtroom. This would seem to undermine the idea that women have a place in the existing court system because they have access to socially-relevant information and interpretations. However, that women ought to have a more active role in legal discourses is not the only available interpretation of Mina’s skills. That women, either because of the inherently unstable condition of their bodies or because of their freedom from the bias that attends male-dominated epistemological practices, have access to information unavailable to the court may not suggest that women belong within the existing system, but rather that the system itself
Because Dracula’s case does not rest on “facts” as the legal system understands the term, the court would not be able to process the information, even though it is of great social relevance. The implication, then, is that existing institutions must change their framework for understanding problems to include new forms of evidence and new methods for identifying relevant evidence. The logical extension of this alteration would be that women would have more influence within the new system because they have access to this alternative evidence. Although this is probably not the interpretation that Bram Stoker would support, it is clearly one of the implications of demonstrating the limits of epistemological practices.

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1 Glen Cavaliero notes that “the variety of personal testimony defictionalizes the material” (46). The very construction of Stoker’s novel, then, helps it to stand on its own because it relies on a specific form of evidence that the audience will accept. Also, the variety, or number of perspectives, from which the testimony is taken assists in this effect.

2 Carol Senf goes so far as to claim that Van Helsing is different from the other characters, who are “two-dimensional characters whose only distinguishing characteristics are their names and their professions” (95). While this seems true for the men, whose discursive practices are often composed of their disciplinary interests, this does not seem true for Mina. The heroine succeeds in ways that even Van Helsing cannot. While he is adept at realizing the significance of events in retrospect, Van Helsing is unable to develop for himself the methodologies he will later learn from Mina.

3 Martin Tropp interprets Mina’s role as one that is active and yet subtle as she “takes charge, nonetheless, while appearing not to, deferring only enough to keep all the men comfortable” (164). Despite the fact that Mina’s male protectors clearly depend on her to organize and deduce information, Mina handles her position with care, rarely stepping out of the bounds of her social position overtly.

4 William Hughes claims that this is a symptom of the novel, as “the ambivalent relationship between cause and symptom in Dracula is, for the characters, an invitation to misdiagnose” (141). This puts the reader in the position of constantly rediagnosing. The unclear connection between cause and symptom problematizes the traditional medical discourses that make the interpretation of the body their focus.

5 Anne McGillivray interprets this as a moment in which “the scientific method is deconstructed even as it is employed” (229). This seems accurate in that Van Helsing is not suggesting that Seward abandon the scientific method; rather, he is encouraging him to understand all that he observes as potentially relevant or useful. Carol Senf corroborates in noting that “science may even be the enemy here because it encourages modern people NOT to believe in things they can not see or quantify” (23). Science can only be helpful, then, if it adjusts to help people change their criteria for believing in the existence of phenomena that are not easily perceived.
Carol Senf argues that such moments demonstrate the conflict between “the narrators’ rigorous moral arguments and their all-too-pragmatic methods” (96). The implication, as Seward’s awkward position suggests, is that these concerns are not as separate as those in favor of disinterestedness would prefer.

Carol Senf observes that although Lucy emulates her friend Mina in keeping a journal, she is a representation of traditional roles and hence cannot understand what is happening to her (20). William Hughes concludes that Lucy is unable to diagnose herself because “her analysis is again restricted by her tendency to comprehend symptoms through the frame of physiological medicine” (151). This argument seems dangerous because it suggests that Lucy is familiar with a discourse from which hers is almost wholly excluded. Lucy is unable to defend herself in part because her caretakers will not reveal to her their suspicions. She is not invited to discourse on her own body, which is part of the problem.

Valdine Clemens argues that the reason Mina is attacked is largely “because she has been denied active participation in the men’s ‘moving world’” (172-73). The very fears that the men have for Mina come true because she is not made aware of her danger. She is, at this point, in a similar position to Lucy. Mina, however, will find ways of participating. Whereas Lucy’s moments of sleepwalking and trance place her in danger, Mina’s hypnotism will reveal the remedy for her dangerous circumstances.

Martin Tropp notes that in giving Mina the journal, Jonathan “recognizes the balance of power in their relationship” (160). In this case, then, Mina’s ignorance is not constructed by a male authority. She has so internalized the expectations of the dutiful wife, however, that she wishes to demonstrate her trust by wrapping up the diary and denying herself knowledge. She only breaks the seal when she believes not doing so would harm her husband.

Tropp concludes that this moment also contrasts her “demure behavior with a sharp reminder of the superior skills associated with her from her introduction” (159). While Mina seems accommodating, she too has skills that will prove significant. Her behavior is within the expectations of the wife, but she subtly demonstrates that her behavior is not a signifier for her abilities.

Tropp notes that Mina knows more about “the strengths of the vampire and the weaknesses of her would-be protectors” (158). Mina’s status as a woman and the expectation that one’s emotions may be fully expressed to a woman give her access to the feelings of her protectors.

This is also true for Valeria Woodville in The Law and the Lady. She listens to the ramblings of Miserrimus Dexter, whose attempts to deceive her in his testimony actually reveal that Sara Macallan committed suicide. Jane Eyre also listens to testimony that is not relevant to her search or that she already knows. For example, she listens to the innkeeper’s story about the governess at Thornfield, even though Jane already has personal knowledge of the events he relates.

This is not an easy task for Mina. The mariners are far more attracted to the “passive and demure Lucy rather than to the businesslike and inquisitive Mina” (Hughes 143). As this is the case, Mina must employ her superior conversation skills to persuade Mr. Swales and his companions to tell their stories of Whitby.

Interestingly, Mina resists the very method that Mr. Swale here employs. He dismisses the stories of others as ridiculous and not worthy of discussion. He will later pay the price for his condemnation as he becomes one of Dracula’s victims. Richard Wasson notes that even “the peasantry of England is rationalist and skeptical” (21) in the novel. Mina must resist what is strictly rational if she is to combat an enemy whose ontological status is in question.

Valdine Clemens goes so far as to suggest that Seward is not even interested in Renfield’s responses. He is only concerned with “maintaining his own position of social, moral, and especially rational superiority to Renfield; as far as he is concerned, there is nothing Renfield can tell him that he does not already know” (161). In his attempt to maintain his superiority, Seward overlooks a number of clues that connect Renfield
to Dracula’s activities. This connection will only be discovered after Mina and Jonathan have reviewed the journals.

16 The “bloofer lady” is the term given to the woman (Lucy) who attacks the town children. The children are the ones who give her this name when they tell their stories to investigators. The bloofer lady obtains her meal by “luring children away and draining their blood” (143). As it is the children who are abducted who give her this name, it is evident that the bloofer lady does not always kill her victims. Judith Weissman suggests that this because Lucy’s condition makes her not into a murderer, but rather a “child molester” (75).

17 Valeria Woodville complicates the role of details in much the same way that the imaginative faculties do. Like the imaginative faculties, Valeria complicates the function of details through her experiences of cognitive association. While her experience of walking through the corridor at Gleninch has no direct connection with the nurse’s testimony, the word “corridor” reminds Valeria of Dexter’s statement and leads her to question how he entered Sara Macallan’s chamber after her death.

18 Mina Harker’s methods are not always “new” in the sense that they have not been used historically. Inductive reasoning, for example, was employed long before she uses this strategy in the novel. The methods are “new” in that they were not in widespread practice and were not accepted by nineteenth-century professionals.

19 Judith Weissman is skeptical of this moment, noting that after Mina is bitten, she “learns to resign the active role she had taken in pursuing Dracula and becomes passive, helping only by being hypnotized and giving messages in a trance” (73). Christopher Craft appears to agree with this evaluation, noting that the plot of the novel is “an extended battle between two evidently masculine forces, one identifiably good and the other identifiably evil, for the allegiance of a woman” (176). Mina is, for part of the novel, excluded from the plans of her male protectors. Her use of exclusion in locating Dracula, however, is by no means “passive.” She remains an active investigator, but one who must shift her methodological practices to produce a useful outcome.

20 Judith Weissman notes that the end of the novel and “their fight to destroy Dracula and to restore Mina to her purity is really a fight for control over women” (77). This interpretation seems problematic in light of Mina’s role in finding Dracula. It is also monolithic in the sense that it assumes that the only thing at stake is the purity of women. The novel, after all, suggests that Dracula plans to make all of England his own. Also, Mina is not “pure” at the end of the novel, particularly from a psychological perspective. The men may have removed the mark from her forehead, but they cannot erase the mark that Mina’s experiences leave on her memory. Even the naming of her child appears a therapeutic attempt at comforting herself at the loss of Quincey and the trauma they all experienced.
The skill that female detectives demonstrate in evaluating evidence would seem to suggest that women could potentially function within the practices of professional fields, and perhaps even enhance them. Despite the appeal that this suggestion has in fiction, it met with staunch resistance and criticism when attempts were made to make it a reality. In fact, the same monarch who funded the publication of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* and who frequently supported scientific and medical developments was appalled when the idea of women entering the professions was introduced. In a letter written in May 1870 to her prime minister, William Ewart Gladstone, Queen Victoria strongly protests women’s potential entrance into the professions:

> The circumstances respecting the Bill to give women the position as men with respect to Parliamentary franchise gives her an opportunity to observe that she had for some time past wished to call Mr. Gladstone’s attention to the mad & utterly demoralizing movement of the present day to place women in the same position as to professions—as men;--& amongst others, in the Medical Line. . .But to tear away all the barriers which surround a woman, & to propose that they should study with men—things which could not be named before them—certainly not in a mixed audience—would be to introduce a total disregard of what must be considered as belonging to the rules & principles of morality. (The Longman Anthology of British Literature 1544)

Interestingly, Queen Victoria does not argue that women cannot enter the professions because they would not understand the discourse and methods of medicine, but rather she argues that they *should not* mention certain subjects. She articulates several concerns for
women, the first of which is that the “barriers” surrounding women will be removed. The suggestion here is that these barriers protect women, and hence they may be understood as the home and the husband or father. Women would be taken outside of the domestic space, and hence would lose these levels of protection. In addition, she seems to demonstrate a concern for how men will begin to think about women if they study with them. Women will hear things named that Victoria claims should not be discussed in mixed audiences. If men witness women studying the vulgar particulars of anatomy and physiology, will they be as inclined to protect women as they would be otherwise? Victoria seems to think that the answer is “no.” The implication, then, is that women are capable of learning the particular body of knowledge associated with medicine, but that the consequences that this process would have for gender relationships is not acceptable.

One would like to believe that the detective novel provides a space for demonstrating that Victoria’s concerns are not necessary. Not all detective writers, however, support the interpretive practices of women as Bronte, Collins, and Stoker do. The works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle demonstrate that while women may be perfectly capable of performing the subtle interpretations involved in detection, they are often excluded from the text as a result of social practices and assumptions. If observation, knowledge, and deduction are in fact the essence of detection (6), as Sherlock Holmes suggests in The Sign of Four, then women are only permitted to engage in detection only in a very limited sense. They are permitted to engage in observation and to employ knowledge, but are frequently excluded from participating in deduction. Mary Morstan of The Sign of Four and Violet Hunter of “The Adventure of The Copper Beeches” are
perhaps the most compelling example of such exclusion, as their keen observations and instincts are important in revealing information about their respective cases.

Mary Morstan and Violet Hunter:

Exclusion from Interpretation and Gender Expectations

Mary Morstan arrives at Baker Street with a promising and yet suspicious case. She has for several years been receiving fine pearls, one arriving on the same date every year. She has now received a strange summons that promises her justice and further information. Mary is a governess for Mrs. Cecil Forrester and has served in the house since her father’s disappearance. She suspects that the summons and the gifts may have some link to her father, but can make no convincing speculations concerning how they are related. Watson and Holmes hear her story and agree to accompany her in the summons to the theatre that night. First, of course, Holmes insists on asking her additional questions, and Mary immediately demonstrates the awareness that one expects from a female detective. Holmes asks her about her father’s luggage when he disappeared and about the pearls and Mary is prepared with an explanation:

Remained at the hotel. There was nothing in it to suggest a clue—some clothes, some books, and a considerable number of curiosities from the Andaman Islands. He had been one of the officers in charge of the convict-guard there. . . .No word of writing was enclosed. Since then every year upon the same date there has always appeared a similar box, containing a similar pearl, without any clue as to the sender. They have been pronounced by an expert to be of a rare variety and of considerable value. (14 and 15)

Aside from the strange appearance of the pearls every year, there seems nothing extraordinary in Mary’s narrative. The kinds of information that she includes, however, demonstrate a facility with detection. She twice employs the word “clue.” In the first
instance, she notes that there is no “clue” within her father’s possessions. It seems that she understands the word to mean a piece of evidence that will lead to her father’s discovery. Rather than assuming that her examination of the luggage leads to no satisfactory result, however, she goes on to list the contents of the suitcase. This description serves multiple functions. In listing the contents of the luggage, she lays the evidence before Holmes in the event that she has missed something that might constitute evidence. Also, in listing the contents, Mary lends credibility to her argument that there is nothing of significance to be found there, which narrows the evidence that Holmes will need to consider in his case. Mary also shares what little knowledge she has concerning her father, noting that he was a guard on the Andaman Islands. While this may merely be an attempt to explain why her father kept “curiosities” from this region in his suitcase, it still represents an important use of knowledge and an attempt to further explicate the circumstances attending her father’s disappearance. Mary’s knowledge of the case, however, is largely personal. That is, she knows only knows about information pertaining to her father and the gifts that she receives every year. When she does not have personal knowledge about a subject, Mary seeks out those who do. For example, Mary notes that she has taken the pearls to be evaluated by an expert. Although she knows nothing about who sent the pearls, Mary seems to understand that an evaluation of the object itself may be useful. When she is not in possession of that knowledge herself, she seeks out experts who do. Mary clearly demonstrates a unique ability to make observations in describing the contents of the suitcase. She also demonstrates an appreciation for the importance of knowledge as she offers information about her father.
and seeks out the expertise of the jeweler. Mary is further encouraged to participate in the act of detection as Holmes asks her to compare her observations about the evidence.

When Holmes and Watson meet her that evening to accompany her to the theatre, Mary brings along a “curious paper” (20) found in her father’s study. Although she knows that it may not be “of the slightest importance” (20), she thinks that Holmes should see it anyway. The document displays the map of a building and the “sign of the four,” with the names Jonathan Small, Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan, and Dost Akbar written at the bottom. This seems of little significance to Holmes, but he asks that Mary “preserve it carefully...for it may prove of use to us” (21). Mary’s presentation of the paper is significant in that it illustrates her correct intuition again. Perhaps more importantly, though, is what it demonstrates about Mary’s powers of comparison. She brings the document because it is odd when compared to his other documents and because “no one could understand” it (20). The fact that it is so different from the other papers and that no one in the house can interpret it raises her suspicions.² This moment is also important because Holmes does not hoard the evidence, as he is sometimes apt to do. He instead exhibits some level of faith in Mary as he entrusts the document to her care. Mary has become the keeper of evidence, a role rarely awarded even to Holmes’s model clients.

Mary, Watson, and Holmes are conveyed from the theatre to the home of Thaddeus Sholto, where Mary learns that her father suffered a heart attack and that Thaddeus’s father covered up the death for fear that he would be accused of murder. She also learns that Major Sholto left his sons a valuable treasure, which Thaddeus’s twin brother, Bartholemew, has recently located. Thaddeus reveals that his father was
supposed to share the treasure with Mary’s father, but did not do so. Thaddeus wants to make amends by taking Mary to Pondicherry Lodge, the Sholto’s family estate, to receive her part of the treasure. Mary agrees to go, and it is at this location that Mary again demonstrates her powers of observation and comparison. She is shocked to find that the yard is in complete disrepair and notes a similar instance that she has observed:

“I have seen something of the sort on the side of a hill near Ballarat, where the prospectors had been at work.”

“And from the same cause,” said Holmes. “These are the traces of the treasure-seekers. You must remember that they were six years looking for it. No wonder that the grounds look like a gravel-pit” (37)

Mary compares the scene before her to one that is part of her previous experience. In comparing the scene to Ballarat, Mary correctly identifies the sources of the lawn’s current condition. Holmes reminds her that Thaddeus and Bartholomew spent years digging for the treasure, which accounts for the state of the lawn. This would seem to give Holmes credit for a better memory, and hence a better basis for detection than Mary. He too, though, is merely engaging in a form a comparison. Mary compares the physical evidence to what she has seen before, whereas Holmes compares the evidence to Thaddeus’s testimony. What is perhaps more significant, however, is that Holmes does not allow Mary to draw conclusions for herself in this case. Rather than allowing Mary to use her comparison of the prospectors to help her conclude that the Sholto brothers had been searching for treasure, Holmes interrupts her thought process and provides her with the answer. Hence, Mary is permitted to make observations and to compare them by employing her knowledge of prospecting. The moment that she has the opportunity to interpret, however, Holmes quickly interrupts the moment.
After leaving Pondicherry Lodge, Mary disappears from the text altogether as Watson and Holmes reveal the details of Bartholomew Sholto’s murder, discover the meaning of the “sign of the four,” and arrest Jonathan Small, one of the group’s members. It is not until the treasure chest is recovered and Watson delivers it to Mrs. Cecil Forrester’s home that Mary makes another significant appearance. Her conversation with Watson, however, again asserts her potential to be a detective. Watson presents Mary with the chest, which he imagines would stimulate her interest. When Mary gives him credit for its return, Watson declines the accolades and suggests the struggle that they had in recovering it:

“No, no,” I answered, “not to me but to my friend Sherlock Holmes. With all the will in the world, I could never have followed up a clue which has taxed even his analytical genius. As it was, we very nearly lost it at the last moment.”

“Pray sit down and tell me all about it, Dr. Watson,” she said. (92).

Watson imagines that Mary will be excited by the return of the chest and the wealth that will elevate her social standing. Of far more interest for Mary, however, is the narrative of their methods and the chase after Jonathan Small. She is not content with the object itself, but rather wishes to hear the account of the circumstances attending it. In short, Mary is seeking “truth.” Mary is only brought to consider the chest when she remembers what her friends faced in gaining it: “‘What a pretty box!’ she said, stooping over it. ‘This is Indian work, I suppose’” (93). Watson confirms her suspicion, noting that the box is Benares metalwork. Even when prompted to examine the box, Mary does not consider the treasure, but rather examines the salient features of the chest and its style of craftsmanship. Here again, she is more interested in observation and process than in the reward that Watson believes awaits her within. While her interest in “truth” rather than
the reward would seem to mark Mary as a detective, this moment also points to the limitations that she faces. She can make observations about the craftsmanship of the box, but she is not privy to the information that would allow her to draw conclusions about the case. She must depend on Watson’s narrative to reveal the subtleties of the case. In short, Mary is restricted to observation, while the process of deduction is reserved for Holmes.

It is perhaps fortunate for Mary that she privileges evidence and narrative, as the box proves to be empty. Jonathan Small emptied its contents into the Thames so that Mary and Major Sholto’s sons could not have it. Watson now feels at liberty to express his feelings for Mary, and she accepts his proposal of marriage. While Watson is elated, Holmes is a bit disappointed by the turn of events:

I think she is one of the most charming young ladies I ever met and might have been most useful in such work as we have been doing. She had a decided genius that way; witness the way in which she preserved that Agra plan from all the other papers of her father. But love is an emotional thing, and whatever is emotional is opposed to that cold reason which I place above all things. (117)

Holmes must acknowledge Mary’s skills and her intuition in saving the document from her father. He even suggests that she may have helped them in future cases, pointing to her potential as a detective. In noting that love is emotional and therefore opposed to reason, Holmes neglects an important point, especially for female detectives: Mary never demonstrated the cold reason that Holmes does, and yet she has proved to be of service to them because of her ability to understand what constitutes “evidence.” In all fairness, though, Holmes does not say that Mary is not fit to be a detective merely because she is a woman; rather, he notes that marriage itself is the source of the problem: “I should never
marry myself, lest I bias my judgment” (117). The idea is that the very institution that women are expected to enter into makes them unfit to be detectives. Mary Morstan demonstrates many of the methods that female detectives in other novels employ, including a reliance on experts, a broad definition of “evidence,” and comparison as a basis for deriving information. That fact remains, though, that Mary is restricted from deduction, which also denies her the opportunity to interpret evidence and develop a narrative of culpability on her own. Hence, Mary is condemned by the detective because she is engaging in an act (marriage) that will compromise her detective skills. What Holmes does not realize, though, is that he never allowed Mary to engage in detection according to his own definition to begin with.

Violet Hunter of “The Adventure of the Copper Beeches” demonstrates that same appreciation for knowledge and the same ability to make observations that Mary Morstan does. Violet arrives at Baker Street with a case that at first seems unremarkable to Holmes. Violet has received an offer for a position as governess, a position that offers to pay more than double that of the usual salary for a governess. Her potential employer, Jephro Rucastle, even offers her an advance if she is willing to accept the position immediately. While she is in desperate need of funds, Violet can see beyond her immediate concerns: “As I was already in debt to my tradesmen, the advance was a great convenience, and yet there was something unnatural about the whole transaction which made me wish to know a little more before I quite committed myself” (161). Violet’s knowledge and her skill at comparison prove useful here. She knows from personal experience that the salary that Mr. Rucastle offers is much higher than the usual salary. The comparison between what she expects to receive for a salary and what she is offered
raises her suspicions about the position and her potential employers. She asks Rucastle to
describe her duties, which include the care of a young boy and engaging in other
“whims” that he and his wife might ask of her: “If you were asked to wear any dress
which we might give you, you would not object to our little whim. Heh? . . . Or to cut
your hair quite short before you come to us?” (162). Violet’s response is particularly
significant here. Rather than comparing these “whims” to the duties traditionally
expected of a governess, she indulges in a moment of vanity: “As you may observe, Mr.
Holmes, my hair is somewhat luxuriant, and of a rather peculiar tint of chestnut. It has
been considered artistic. I could not dream of sacrificing it in this offhand fashion”
(162). Violet is presented with a moment that should further raise her suspicions about
the nature of the position. Her primary concern, however, is the consequences that it
would have for her personal appearance. She has difficulty maintaining consistency in
her methods when so personal a matter is at stake. Violet here commits a transgression
that is far worse than those that Holmes commits against women. She consciously
ignores evidence, using gender expectations regarding her appearance to avoid the job.

Violet’s pressing financial circumstances, however, ultimately oblige her to
accept the position, and she moves to a house just outside of Winchester to begin her
duties. After a few short weeks, however, she sends word to Holmes that she has made
several strange observations about her employers that she would like to discuss with him.
It is Violet’s ability to observe and the measures she will take to become that observer
that seem to redeem her as a female investigator. Violet begins her account to Holmes
with a description of one of the “whims” that the Rucastles ask her to engage in. Every
few days, Violet is ordered to wear an electric blue dress and sit with her back to the
window in the sitting room while Mr. Rucastle tells her stories and anecdotes until she is in tears from laughter. Violet notes that they always turn her away from the window, and becomes curious to know what is going on behind her: “My hand-mirror had been broken, so a happy thought, and I concealed a piece of the glass in my handkerchief. On the next occasion, in the midst of my laughter, I put my handkerchief up to my eyes, and was able with a little management to see all there was behind me” (171). Violet manages to see a man in a gray suit at some distance from the house observing her through the window. This moment would seem to establish Violet as a female investigator in that she will go to great lengths to find an opportunity for observation. She is subversive in this moment, using the performance that her employer’s demand of her as a means of discovering more information. She draws the handkerchief to her eyes as though she is crying from laughter, when in fact she is attempting to discover why Mr. Rucastle is making her laugh. While Violet, like Mary Morstan, is not invited to interpret her strange experiences, she does get a step closer to this when she expresses her fears about Holmes’s response to her account: “You may find it rather disconnected, I fear, and there may prove to be little relation between the different incidents of which I speak” (172). Violet cannot interpret the events herself, but she does demonstrate two very important traits that are essential to detection. First, she expresses sensitivity to the disjunctive nature of her narrative. Although she cannot interpret the connections between the events herself, she appears to understand the confusion that her narrative may cause when Holmes attempts to interpret it. Second, she notes that there may be no connection between the events, and yet she feels compelled to relate them all, even if they are not
Violet Hunter clearly engages in observation and employs knowledge within the story. She also demonstrates some awareness of the difficulties of interpretation. However close she may come to Holmes’s formulation of detection, however, her efforts and ultimately, her fate in the story, are promptly employed to reinforce gender expectations. In the course of her account to Holmes, Violet notes that she quickly learned the layout of the house, and that one wing appears to be uninhabited. When she sees Mr. Rucastle emerge from a room in that wing, she asks him about its use. He claims that his hobby is photography, but he looks at Violet with suspicion and annoyance for her observation. Violet then experiences a desperate need to see what is in the locked room:

Well, Mr. Holmes, from the moment that I understood that there was something about that suite of rooms which I was not to know, I was all on fire to go over them. It was not mere curiosity, though I have my share of that. It was more a feeling of duty—a feeling that some good might come from my penetrating to this place. They talk of women’s instinct; perhaps it was woman’s instinct which gave me that feeling. (174)

Violet is in a very awkward position in this case. She claims that she feels a sense of duty to discover what lies behind the door and that “woman’s instinct” tells her that something important is at stake. Violet is describing her motives in a way that is expected of her as a woman. If she is prying into affairs that are none of her concern and that are beyond the boundaries of her duties, then she is merely doing so because she thinks that something good will come of it. Hence, Violet writes herself within accepted gender expectations as a means of justifying her search. One must not judge Violet too relevant. Violet does not interpret the events, but she does seem to understand the subtleties and problems of creating a narrative.
harshly for this, however, as the alternative interpretation serves her not better. If Violet concedes that she wants to find out what is in the locked room merely out of curiosity, then she becomes the archetypical woman who suffers from idle curiosity, one whose intense desire to know is stronger than any concern she may have for her employers and their need to preserve privacy. In either case, Violet’s motives must be interpreted as fulfilling existing gender expectations in some form. Although Violet’s instincts prove correct and the reader discovers that the Rucastles are hiding their daughter away from her suitor (the man in the gray suit) so that they may have her inheritance, the process of discovering this is, of course, left to Holmes. What is perhaps most disturbing, however, is Watson’s account of Violet’s fate. After she leaves the Rucastle’s home, Violet goes on to become the headmistress of a private school at Walsall. This is a source of disappointment to Watson: “As to Miss Violet Hunter, my friend Holmes, rather to my disappointment, manifested no further interest in her when once she had ceased to be the centre of one of his problems” (181). Violet Hunter exits the Holmes stories, then, because Holmes does not consider her as a potential wife. This is particularly interesting when one recalls why Mary Morstan does not become a detective in the stories. Mary exits the text because Holmes believes that her duties as a wife will unfit her for the work that detectives must complete. Violet is written out because she is not the object of romantic interest. Thus, whether they fulfill the expectation of marriage or not, women are quickly disposed of in the stories. How then, are women to have a lasting role as detectives or as members of the professions significant to detection? Interestingly, the skills of women alone are not enough to ensure them a position within the professions.
Irene Adler of “A Scandal in Bohemia” suggests one the most important elements that is necessary for women to enter the professions. Irene is an actress and adventuress who had a romantic relationship with the King of Bohemia. The King is now getting married to another woman and needs to retrieve a photograph from Irene that pictures them together. The King fears blackmail and seeks out the services of Sherlock Holmes in resolving the delicate matter. Holmes takes the case and assumes a disguise, gaining admission to the estate that Irene is currently renting. He then raises the alarm of “fire,” with the assumption that “when a woman thinks that her house is not fire, her instinct is at once to rush to the thing which she values most” (36-7). Holmes bases his methods on gender assumptions, and Irene at first performs beautifully, rushing to a removable panel in one of the downstairs walls. Holmes assumes that they may return the next day and retrieve the photograph from inside the wall. This, however, is where he underestimates Irene, a point that he discovers when he reads her letter, conveniently placed in the space where the photograph should have been, the next day:

You really did it very well. You took me in completely. Until after the alarm of the fire, I had not a suspicion. But then, when I found how I had betrayed myself, I began to think. I had been warned against you months ago. I had been told that if the King employed an agent it would certainly be you. . .Well, I followed you to your door, and so made sure that I was really an object of interest to the celebrated Mr. Sherlock Holmes. (39)

Irene’s letter reveals an intimate knowledge of the process of detection. She understands that the goal of detection is in part to coax people into giving information. When she recalls that she has revealed the location of the photograph, she begins to suspect that she in under investigation. Irene, like Mary Morstan and Violet Hunter, employs what little
knowledge she has in her given circumstances. In particular, Irene has knowledge of Holmes from other sources, and so suspects his involvement. Irene is different from the other women of the Holmes stories, however, in that she makes conscious efforts to interpret information and to take action based on it. Despite Holmes’s disguise, Irene deduces that he is the famous investigator because he succeeds in getting her to reveal information about the photograph. Irene goes one step further and dresses like a young man, following Holmes back to his home in Baker Street, even passing by and greeting him in the street. Thus, Irene is not only able to interpret Holmes’s motives, but she is also able to replicate his skills at deduction and disguise. Irene, however, leaves the text just like Mary Morstan and Violet Hunter, despite her superior interpretive abilities. In addition, Irene exits the text in part because she is leaving with her new husband, an attorney. In spite of her departure from the story, Irene has a last impact on Holmes, one that demonstrates a significant point. Watson notes that change in his friend’s behavior: “He used to make merry over the cleverness of women, but I have not heard him do it of late” (41). Irene departs from the text, but the fact that she has outwitted Holmes makes him reevaluate his assumptions about the cleverness of women. The change in Holmes’s perspective demonstrates two significant points: 1) The success of women in the text relies on the extent to which male professionals understand and are affected by their methods. 2) Significant changes in gender assumptions are facilitated by public examples of individual women who are successful to varying degrees within the professions (just as Holmes reevaluates his understanding of women based on one woman).
Florence Nightingale: Icon of the Female Professional

Of all the women who become professionals in the Victorian period, Florence Nightingale was the representative whose professional image was circulated most extensively and hence the woman who had the most potential to change public opinions about women. Nightingale was very well educated, as her father instructed her in philosophy, the sciences, the classics, and languages. She wanted a career with its attendant structure and purpose, but her family, particularly her mother, strongly opposed this goal because it was not in keeping with her family’s economic status. She did, however, receive professional training as a nurse and led a group of nurses to a hospital during the Crimean War, where her superior administrative skills facilitated the diagnosis and treatment of patients. Nightingale was a professional woman uniquely capable of engaging in arguments and producing convincing interpretations. In particular, she was skilled in classifying and organizing information, in exploring the complexities of cause and effect, and in employing strategies to persuade her audience. As the focus of this dissertation is gender, the analysis here will examine Nightingale’s work Cassandra. While Cassandra was not published during her lifetime, Nightingale composed it before she received her professional training. It is important to show that Nightingale was capable of complex interpretation before her training because it suggests that Nightingale’s interpretive skills did not emerge merely as a result of her professional training.

Nightingale first demonstrates her skills at classification, which become essential in analyzing the reasons behind women’s circumstances:
The progressive world is necessarily divided into two classes—those who take the best of what there is and enjoy it—those who wish for something better and try to create it. Without these two classes, the world would be badly off. They are the very conditions of progress, both the one and the other. Were there none who were discontented with what they have, the world would never reach anything better. And, through the other class, which is constantly taking the best of what the first is creating for them, a balance is secured, and that which is conquered is held fast. (1500).

On a basic level, Nightingale’s analysis demonstrates that women have the capacity to classify information. The passage, however, demonstrates the complexity of classification. Her description of the two classes of people—those who complain and are not content with their circumstances and those who make the most of what is given them—also expresses an awareness of the purpose of classification. Nightingale does not employ classification merely to articulate the differences between people; rather, she demonstrates that these classes of people derive meaning from the existence of the each other and that each is necessary for progress. Those who are discontented ensure that society continues its attempt to produce new circumstances. Those who are contented take what the first class produces and hence create a balance. What is significant here, then, is that Nightingale employs classification in a way that articulates the complex relationship between groups of people. The focus of relationship between groups of people that seem opposites allows Nightingale to open a space for discussing gender. If the relationship between opposites is based on complex principles and fulfills particular social needs, then the topic of gender and relationship between the sexes warrants further consideration.

Nightingale demonstrates that she is an individual capable of producing impressive deductions about opposites. In particular, she is skilled in divining both the
causes and consequences of the phenomena that she observes about the relationship between men and women, which becomes clear in her analysis of the novel. Nightingale notes that a good novel exhibits two features. The first is that it places the character together “in circumstances which naturally call out the high feelings and thoughts of the character, which afford food for sympathy between them on these points” (1499). The second feature is that the heroine has no family ties to inhibit her union with the hero. Nightingale goes on to articulate the problems of novel reading:

Now, in as far as these are good and not spurious interests, let us see what we have to correspond with them in real life. Can high sympathies be fed upon the opera, the exhibitions, the gossip of the House of Commons, and the political caricature? If together, man and woman approach any of the high questions of social, political, or religious life, they are said to be going “too far.” (1500)

Novels encourage women to nourish high sympathies, which are not represented and cannot be nourished amongst the more prosaic and mundane discourses that are a part of men’s lives. Nightingale demonstrates that she can deduce both the causes of and the impact of the fact that women are encouraged to develop high sensibilities, rather than their other faculties. The cause of their feelings emerges from the sympathies that they cultivate in reading novels, which typically involve men and women in lonely or desolate circumstances. The problem with these feelings is that women have difficulty finding the means of applying their newfound sympathy in life. This drives the wedge further between the sexes. Nightingale notes that even should a woman try to find application for her feelings with the help of her husband by discussing and exploring important topics, she would merely be condemned for her efforts. Nightingale demonstrates that
she is adept at articulating the causes of women’s conditions and the impact that they produce. She is convinced, however, that she is not the only one who wants this ability:

Women long for an education to teach them to teach, to teach them the laws of the human mind and how to apply them—and knowing how imperfect, in the present state of the world, such an education must be, they long for experience, not patch-word experience, but experience followed up and systematized, to enable them to know what they are about and where they are “casting their bread” and whether it is “bread” or a stone. (1505)

Women do not want merely to learn; they do not want to merely understand the reasons behind things, but also to be able to draw conclusions about them and to pass that knowledge on to others. The reference to the bread and the stone is particularly interesting. The idea here is that women want to understand what it is and how it is that they are making an argument. They must understand whether they hold bread or a stone before they can understand its implications when they cast it. In short, Nightingale is arguing that women desperately need and desire the skills that will allow them to interpret. Rather unfortunately, Nightingale’s attempts seem to backfire to some extent.

Her ability to classify information, understand complex relationships, and interpret information would seem to make her as qualified to serve in the medical profession as men in the profession. It was, after all, her organizational skills that made her famous. The particular terms of her fame, however, did not focus on her methods of interpreting or organizing information. Rather, she was constructed as “the Lady of the Lamp,” a nurse whose womanly kindness and motherly affections saved countless lives. In point of fact, Nightingale was not, according to her family and co-workers, overtly sentimental. Her organizational skills, however, may have appeared too masculine for Victorian readers, who sought to render her image more palatable and acceptable according to
gender expectations. Although Nightingale was able to institute significant health care reforms with the help of this image, the fact remains that women were forced to operate within expected gender roles if they wanted to produce social changes. While portrayals of female investigators in the novels of Bronte, Collins, and Stoker offer a sense of optimism that women should occupy more socially active roles, the attempt to promote these roles within the professions demonstrates that the road to female professionalization was neither easy nor immediate. Women, as Florence Nightingale demonstrates, could not advance without submitting to how the public constructed them. In short, in order to interpret, women must reciprocate by allowing themselves to be interpreted.

This method is somewhat different from that which other female detectives, such as Valeria, use. Mary visits an expert when she has no knowledge herself. Valeria depends heavily on the generosity and testimony of Major Fitz-David, who gives her permission to search his office. When Valeria finds a broken vase, she uses her lack of knowledge about the object to generate a series of questions that will assist her in her investigations. Mary is often faced with dead ends when she interprets objects. For example, she finds out more about the pearls by taking them to the jeweler, but can deduce little from this information. Similarly, she can tell that the Agra treasure chest is of Indian make, but she must rely on Watson to tell her the details of the case. Doyle, then, does not often write women engaging in the act of deduction.

This moment is similar to experiences that Valeria has at Ramsgate Sands. Mary brings the document because it is odd when compared to the others. Valeria pulls the string in her husbands' grooming case because it seems out of place. Similarly, her suspicions are raised when the image of her mother-in-law in the picture she finds is entirely different from what she suspected. In short, understanding how things differ from the norm by comparing evidence is a significant aspect of detection that Mary engages in.

Mina Harker employs a similar method when she is attacked by Dracula. She is able to recognize Dracula because of Jonathan’s and Lucy’s journals and letters, which seem to corroborate each other and her present observations. Hence, the more the evidence intersects, the more convincing it becomes. The fact that Holmes uses a source outside of his own experiences is in part what makes his interpretation more credible than Mary’s, even though they are employing related methods (comparison).

The reader has seen this before in the progress of Valeria Woodville in The Law and the Lady. Valeria begins her investigation because she feels that she has an obligation to her husband. As the story progresses, Valeria increasingly seeks “truth,” rather than to fulfill her domestic duty. Even when her husband returns before the birth of their child, Valeria sends a scout to America and ultimately has investigators sorting through the trash to find the pieces of Sarah Macallan’s suicide letter. She seeks the truth even after she has established her domestic comfort.

This is similar to Valeria’s progression. Valeria begins her investigation with a sense of duty for her husband. By the time the case is nearing it conclusion, she is throwing blank checks at Mr. Playmore, the attorney, begging for more information. Mary, too, is most interested in finding out information, rather
than focusing on the money. The difference is that whereas the reader sees Valeria’s evolution of motives, he does not see enough of Mary Morstan to have evidence that warrants such conclusions.

6 This evaluation of marriage seems not only harsh on Holmes’s part, but also completely unsubstantiated within fiction. For women in particular, love can serve as an impetus for their investigations. Valeria Woodville, for example, conducts her investigations in part because she wishes to release her husband from the verdict of “Not Proven” in the case of his first wife’s death. Mina Harker only reads Jonathan’s journal and commences her investigation because she fears that Jonathan may die from a nervous condition if she does not. The reader sees a similar impulse in the Holmes story “The Adventure of the Copper Beeches,” in which the governess Violet Hunter feels her womanly instincts tell her that if she finds what is behind the locked door of her employer’s home, she has “a feeling that some good might come from my penetrating to this place” (174). Womanly instincts, especially those prompted by love and fellow feeling, are often turned to advantage.

7 Both Valeria Woodville and Mina Harker demonstrate this quality. Valeria depends on the services of the attorney Mr. Playmore. She consults him in how to approach her witnesses in collecting testimony, engages him to send a representative to track a witness to America, and ultimately puts the case in his hands after they recover the letter. Mina Harker relies on Abraham Van Helsing, whose experience in medicine, law, and the metaphysical serve her in collating and interpreting evidence. It should be no great shock that Mary Morstan disappears in the novel and it certainly does not eliminate her as a detective. Mr. Playmore, Van Helsing, and Sherlock Holmes are responsible in bringing about the conclusion of their respective cases, but it is the female detectives who give them the necessary information and/or methods by which to do this.

8 This is not to say that looking in mirrors or demonstrating a concern about one’s appearance has to be a difficulty. When Valeria looks into the mirror directly after her wedding, she uses the moment to construct an image of both herself and her husband, Eustace. Hence, appearance can provide an opportunity for self-articulation and growth. In this moment, however, Violet is neglecting relevant evidence because of her concern for keeping her hair.

9 Valeria makes use of a similar moment. When Miserrimus Dexter attempts to deceive her by discussing the night of Sara Macallan’s suicide in terms of an Italian romance, Valeria helps him circle in toward the truth. Violet uses the act of laughing to mask her attempt at discovery. Valeria uses a moment in which she is being deceived to her advantage.

10 This is very similar to Mina Harker’s witness practices. Mina allows witnesses like Mr. Swales and Renfield to discuss anything they like, as even things that seem unrelated can serve a purpose. Although Violet is the one testifying, she does seem to understand that even disjunctive events may be important.

11 Mina Harker makes a very similar Biblical reference. When she gives Van Helsing the manuscript of Jonathan’s journal in shorthand, which she knows he cannot read, she notes that she tastes a bit of the apple in her mouth. Violet’s circumstances are similar in that curiosity aligns her with Eve, who is so intent on knowing that she will sacrifice the lives of those around her to have knowledge.

12 Bronwyn Rivers suggests that the nurse was “a transient, moving out into the public world, unlike the housekeeper who resided in one household and became a known part of it. The nurse crossed and recrossed the physical boundaries which reinforced class and gender structures” (147). The fact that she is at liberty to cross boundaries may explain why the nurse has the potential to change public opinion on a broad scale.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


