GOOD NIGHT, SLEEP TIGHT: A CULTURAL STUDY OF THE BEDROOM AS A
MODE OF UNDERSTANDING SCENES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

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Emily Jean Severy, B.A.

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GOOD NIGHT, SLEEP TIGHT: A CULTURAL STUDY OF THE BEDROOM AS A MODE OF UNDERSTANDING SCENES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

Emily J. Severy, B.A.

Thesis Advisor: John C. Pfordresher, PhD.

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on scenes of sexual violence in three nineteenth-century novels: 
*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy, and *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. As all these scenes all take place in bedrooms, I study the evolution of the bedroom to further understand the significance of the violations suffered by the female characters in these novels. By the end of the nineteenth century, the bedroom had become a personalized, individuated space that reflected the identity of its inhabitant. By studying the nascence of the bedroom in the nineteenth century, I highlight how sexual assaults which occur in bedrooms not only represent a violation of the body, but a violation of the self.
This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Richard and Louise Severy, with love and gratitude.
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INTRODUCTION

The scenes on which I focus in this thesis are famous: Jane Eyre waking to goblin laughter at her door, Tess Durbeyfield sleeping soundly in The Chase, and Dracula attacking the sleep-walking Lucy Westenra. Scholars have addressed these scenes at length, supplying varied ideas as to what these scenes reveal about the characters themselves, Victorian notions of sexuality, colonialism, nativism, racism, sexism, etcetera. The majority of these scholarly approaches require great leaps in interpretation, understandings of allusions, and a willingness to find hidden meanings in the texts. But these readings overlook the simple fact that sleeping girls are attacked. In this thesis, I do not aim to understand racial undertones in *Jane Eyre* or investigate the new technologies of blood transfusions in *Dracula*; instead, I want to look closely at violations of women while they sleep at a moment in history when never before had the act of sleeping required so much privacy, nor had the bedroom been imbued with an inviolable sense of individuality and emotion. I will begin by glossing some of the major arguments surrounding *Jane Eyre*, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, and *Dracula*. This will hopefully demonstrate the need to back up, and (re)view the attacks of Jane, Tess, Mina, and Lucy as violations of the body, and, through a historical analysis of the new importance of the bedroom, as trespasses upon the self.

Gilbert and Gubar, in their classic book *The Madwoman in the Attic*, and subsequent essays such as Sandra Gilbert’s “*Jane Eyre* and the Secrets of Furious Lovemaking,” have standardized the perception of Jane’s “encounters” with Bertha as a mode of understanding Bertha as the “avatar of Jane” (Gilbert and Gubar 359).
Bertha’s incendiary attack on Rochester is really “the angry Bertha in Jane [who] had wanted to punish Rochester, to burn him in his bed” (368). Gilbert and Gubar view Bertha’s actions as “what Jane wants to do” (359): “Disliking the ‘vapoury veil’ of Jane Rochester, Jane Eyre secretly wants to tear the garments up. Bertha does it for her. Fearing the inexorable ‘bridal day,’ Jane would like to put it off. Bertha does that for her too” (359). This reading of Bertha and her violent nocturnal acts, have become so prevalent that, as James Buzard points out, Gilbert and Gubar have “accustomed us to regarding Bertha Mason as the vehicle for Jane’s own inexpressible fury over the false liberation Rochester promises her in ‘wedlock’” (200).

A few scholars have gleaned other meanings from Bertha’s nighttime attacks. Rather than viewing Bertha’s attack on Rochester as an enactment of Jane’s true desires, Susan Meyers views the novel in terms of colonialism, and how Bertha then functions as a colonialized “native,” rebelling against imperialist power. Whereas Gilbert and Gubar attempt to understand the descriptions of Bertha as reflecting a darker side of Jane, Meyers argues that Bertha’s darkness is actually “blackness” (49); Bertha is a racialized Creole from the West-Indies. When Meyers reads the scene in which Bertha tears the veil in Jane’s bedroom, Meyers emphasizes Jane’s description of Bertha in order to argue for Brontë’s racialization of Bertha. When Bertha sets Rochester’s bed on fire, she is, Meyers insists, “symbolically enacting precisely the sort of revolt feared by the colonists in Jamaica” (51).

Nicole Plyler Fisk has also examined Bertha’s entrance into Jane’s bedroom, seeing it as Bertha’s attempts to gain the female sympathy Bertha lacks in her prison at
Thornfield. Fisk takes a historical approach in order to understand madness in the nineteenth century, and by comparing *Jane Eyre* to Eliza Fenwick’s *Secresy*, Fisk asks why Jane does not feel more sympathy for Bertha, as Caroline Ashburn shows compassion for Sibella. Fisk argues that Bertha is not perhaps as mad as she is portrayed in the novel, and hopes to be rescued by Jane herself: “Bertha’s inscrutable laugh might express her hope that Jane’s arrival at Thornfield Hall marks the arrival of her own companion or even ‘saviour’” (226). Furthermore, Fisk places great emphasis on Bertha’s “seeking out” of Jane in the night: “Bertha, seeming to intuit this sympathy, expresses gaiety at the prospect of gaining Jane as an ally, and begins to ‘visit’ her, whenever she gets the opportunity” (226).

The scholarly debate surrounding *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* addresses the question of whether Tess is raped or seduced by Alec d’Urberville. Kristen Brady writes: “From the time of the book’s publication, the question of whether Tess was raped or seduced has divided critics, and the debate has still not been resolved with perfect clarity […] An aspect of the confusion, needless to say, lies not just in Hardy’s novel but in the inadequacy of the words themselves” (131). She goes on to discuss the connotations of violence and force that we associate with “rape,” and concedes that these are absent from the text. Nevertheless, Alec coerces her by appealing “to her guilt about her responsibilities of her family” (131), which is certainly a means of force. Brady explains, “if he did exert physical force on her in The Chase, that would have been just one form of assault on her person” (131).
While Brady acknowledges that Tess stayed with Alec for a few weeks after the assault, thus signifying some compliance on Tess’s part, other scholars, like William Davis, maintain that Tess is raped according to Victorian judicial laws. Davis points to the fact that Tess and Alec do not speak during the encounter, and finds great importance in Tess’s sleeping state. Davis investigates English law in the nineteenth century to find that a woman asleep is “incapable of assent, and although no violence is used, the prisoner [rapist] may be convicted of rape if he knew that she was asleep” (qtd. in Davis 224). Davis contends that “Victorian readers of the 1891 edition of Tess read a description of the assault scene containing specific details that would have further established the scene’s legal undertones” (224). For Davis, it is enough that Tess is asleep during the attack to call it rape.

Ellen Rooney challenges the binary of rape versus seduction altogether. By setting the two ideas in opposition, she explains that this “reinscribe[s] the very patriarchal dichotomies which we seek to escape” (92). Instead, Rooney argues “that what is ultimately at stake in any attempt to read the scene of sexual violence is the place and status of this subject” (89). Critics, and Hardy himself, have found it so hard to come to a consensus on “what happens” to Tess, because rape and seduction are so often put in opposition. Tess’s consent, for Rooney, is irrelevant; regardless of whether Tess ultimately says “yes” to Alec does not necessarily mean that she “succumbs” or is “seduced.” Instead, Rooney looks to Catharine MacKinnon’s definition of rape from a feminist point of view: “The law distinguishes rape from intercourse by the woman’s lack of consent coupled with the man’s (usually) knowing disregard of it. A feminist
distinction between rape and intercourse, to hazard a beginning approach, lies instead in
the *meaning* of the act from the women’s point of view” (qtd. in Rooney 87). Rooney
demonstrates, however, that the sexual encounter for Tess means something entirely
different than it means to Alec. It is this different meaning that constitutes the scene in
*The Chase* as rape.

Dracula’s attacks on Mina Murray and Lucy Westenra have prompted scholars
to examine the inherent sexuality of these scenes. Christopher Bentley writes that
“Dracula attacks Mina Harker and Lucy Westenra, suggesting that vampirism is a
perversion of normal sexuality” (27). The vampires, certainly in comparison to the
“somewhat sexless Mina (26), are “permitted to assert their sexuality in a much more
explicit manner than his ‘living’ characters” (26). Bentley supports this argument by
pointing to Lucy’s “heightening of sexuality” (27) once she becomes a vampire.

Phyllis Roth agrees that “only relations with vampires are sexualized in the
novel” (59), but she finds that “suddenly sexual women” in *Dracula* are persecuted,
which illustrates societal conceptions of female sexuality: “Perhaps nowhere is the
dichotomy of the sensual and sexless woman more dramatic than it is in *Dracula* and
nowhere is the suddenly sexual woman more violently and self-righteously persecuted
than in Stoker’s ‘thriller’” (58). Both Roth and Bentley see Dracula’s attacks as
symbolic of attacks on women’s sexuality, that sexualized women are demonized and
need to be eliminated. Virtuous women, like Mina, can overcome Dracula’s attacks,
but Lucy, who desires to marry not one but three men, must not be merely killed, but
destroyed by the men who once loved her.
Kathleen Spencer makes an interesting observation about the attacks in *Dracula*. She observes that it is when characters are left alone that they are attacked. Pointing first to Jonathan’s attack in Dracula’s castle, she writes, “[Jonathan] is far from home and isolated from other living human beings. For the Victorians, solitude greatly increased sexual danger: the solitude of privacy allowed one to indulge in masturbation, while the different solitude of anonymity left one free to indulge in the kinds of sexual experiences one would, as a member of a family, have been ashamed to admit desiring” (215). Mina likewise is vulnerable when left alone: “they leave her too much alone. Solitude is a danger to her as it was to Jonathan” (217).

Among these three works, I see a recurring event: a woman sleeps, her sleeping space is entered without her consent, and her body and/or sexuality is violated in some way. What this short review of literature has hopefully shown is that no one has taken into account the importance of the space in which these attacks take place. Scholars have commented upon what these scenes reveal about sexuality: scholars of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* have debated for over a century whether Tess was raped or seduced, and critics of *Dracula* examine the results of the attacks, as well as the societal implications of “suddenly sexual” women. But if we step back, we see young women, girls really, who are sleeping without fear. They bed down in spaces which they perceive to be safe. Those spaces are then trespassed upon in a way that jolts us as readers. We do not want to awaken to find a strange vampire-like woman rending our wedding veil, or to see a true vampire woman with seductive red lips.
This thesis is an examination into the history of sleeping spaces, in particular, a history of the bedroom. While much has been said on the separation of “public” and “private” spheres in the nineteenth century, this is instead an investigation into the history of personal privacy, and its physical manifestation in architecture. The bedroom as we know it today had its nascence in the nineteenth century. Prior to the nineteenth century, rooms had been designated for sleeping, but it was not until the Victorian Era that the bedroom took on an emotional significance. Bedrooms became progressively more private as brothers were separated from sisters, parents from children, and masters from servants. This was due to many reasons, including concerns about hygiene and fears about sexual contact, but also a growing sense of the individual, and the individual’s need to be alone and have privacy.

A history of the bedroom allows us to view these scenes of sexual violence in a different way. Instead of interpreting Bertha’s attacks on Jane and Rochester as projections of Jane’s hidden desires, or symbolic representations of slave revolts, we can instead see Jane lying terrified in her bed “of no thorns” (165), not knowing who might be entering her private space. Prior to her arrival at Thornfield, Jane always shared a bedroom, but sleeping alone renders her vulnerable to attacks. I agree that Jane must leave Thornfield and grow to become Rochester’s emotional, social, and financial equal before the story can come to a satisfactory end, but I want to examine the locus (the bedroom) from which she flees Thornfield in the context of her larger emotional journey. Bertha symbolically attacks Jane’s sexuality when Bertha rends the
veil, and, quite similar to Tess Durbeyfield’s own reclamation of virginity, Jane must travel and work independently before she can return to the hero of the novel.

Perhaps *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* seems a strange choice for a study of the bedroom; Tess is after all attacked outside, nowhere near the safety of a bedroom. But Tess does not have a private bedroom at any point in the novel, so we must instead look at Tess’s various sleeping spaces, and examine the emotional significance with which she imbues those spaces. The scene in The Chase, for all its obscurity, reveals Tess’s sense of security in her nest in the woods. Tess’s sleeping space is violated as much as Jane’s. Both girls feel entitled to safety; they slumber without fear of being touched or disturbed. A historical understanding of the importance of sleep is essential here, as William Davis begins to touch on in the essay I discussed above. I go further, taking into account historical understandings of the privacy of sleep, as well as Gaston Bachelard’s arguments about how the “home” is something we create ourselves. The violation of Tess’s sleeping space also allows me to consider class in terms of sleeping spaces, which will be discussed at length in Chapter Three.

I appreciate Kathleen Spencer’s acknowledgement of Victorian anxieties about sleeping alone. This is the sort of historical understanding that will illuminate these texts, including *Dracula*. Admittedly I view the sleeping Victorian body differently than Spencer; instead of viewing the sleeper as vulnerable, I actually see her as protected. As I will demonstrate in the following chapter, the nineteenth century saw the bedroom transform from a room of general use into one specifically designed and conceived of as a sanctuary for the individual. It may seem strange to think of an
unconscious prone person as protected; certainly, Lawrence Wright reveals the utter vulnerability of the bedroom:

[The bedroom] might have been designed specifically for doing the occupant to death unexpected. We know he will be there at the chosen hour, unconscious or sleepily off-guard; that shadows offer us a lurking-place; that no witness is likely to intrude, or to see us come and go.

Pillows and bedding are at hand to stifle our victim’s cries, or to soak up the blood, or to wipe our hands clean afterwards. (117)

It is true that a sleeping body does not exhibit any defenses. This is why an understanding of the cultural value placed on sleep, and the emotional significance of the bedroom, is so crucial to the reading of these texts. The girls are not violated at their most vulnerable moment; instead, Victorians highly valued private sleep, as shown by their emotional investments in their bedrooms. The Victorian bedroom was a site of inviolable privacy, a place that protected and represented their inner selves. Jane, Tess, Lucy and Mina are violated not only bodily, but their sleeping spaces, which reflect and protect their very identities, are attacked as well.
CHAPTER ONE

The Evolution of the Bedroom

“A house plan is human behavior in diagrammatic form.”

--Lawrence Wright

In the famous English epic poem Beowulf, the monster Grendel attacks Hrothgar’s great hall, Heorot, nearly every night. Hrothgar’s people no longer sleep in the hall out of fear for their lives, and everyone is shocked and rather impressed when Beowulf arrives, announcing that he will sleep in the hall and defeat the monster without even a sword for protection. Hrothgar leaves Heorot entirely in Beowulf’s control, whereupon Beowulf beds down in the rushes among the mead benches. His men sleep right beside him, until, of course, Grendel arrives, eats one of Beowulf’s men, and Beowulf victoriously rips off Grendel’s arm, an injury which ends up being fatal.

The early scenes of Beowulf show a glimpse into the medieval hall and communal life. When Hrothgar dreams of building Heorot, he foresees it as a place wherein “he would share out/among young and old all God had given him” (lines 71-2). The hall is a site of celebration, and it is the jubilation in the hall that enrages Grendel: “Then the great monster in the outer darkness/suffered fierce pain, for each new day/he heard happy laughter loud in the hall,/the thrum of the harp, melodious chant,/clear song of the scop” (86-90). The hall is also where everyone sleeps; Grendel’s first attacks are devastating because he has easy access to so many sleeping bodies crowded together in
the hall. The poet explains that people began to seek “rest elsewhere, at some slight distance” and “slept in the outbuildings” (139-40). Beowulf and his men all sleep together in the hall after their welcome feast: “Then he lay down, the pillow took the cheek/of the battle-brave noble, and round him many/valiant sea-fighters sank to hall-rest./None of them thought he would ever return/from that long hall floor to his native land” (588-93).

A medieval hall like Heorot was the center of life in the Middle Ages. Hrothgar’s people all sleep in the hall, as does Beowulf. There is even an Old English word, sele-reste, which translates literally to “hall-rest,” as mentioned in the quote above. The fact that a term existed to describe communal sleep proves the pervasiveness of the practice. People slept on the floor, as Beowulf demonstrates. Bill Bryson explains this further in his book At Home: A History of Private Life: “After an evening meal, the inhabitants of the medieval hall had no bedrooms in which to retire. We ‘make a bed’ today because in the Middle Ages that is essentially what you did—you rolled out a cloth sleeping pallet or heaped a pile of straw, found a cloak or blanket and fashioned whatever comfort you could” (54).

Rooms apart from the great hall began to be built in Saxon halls; at one end of the hall there would be a two-story block of rooms that would serve as receiving rooms or private rooms for more important guests. The invention of the fireplace allowed for an even greater division of space, a point which Bryson elaborates: “The development

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1 See Lawrence Wright, Warm and Snug: A History of the Bed, page 21. He explains the difference between Norman halls and Anglo-Saxon halls, noting especially the partitioned spaces either above or at the end of the hall, which were the first indication towards a need for more privacy.
of the fireplace became one of the great breakthroughs in domestic history: they allowed people to lay boards across the beams and create a whole new world upstairs. The upward expansion of houses changed everything. Rooms began to proliferate as wealthy householders discovered the satisfactions of having space to themselves” (59).

The extra space and privacy was not universally appreciated, as Lawrence Wright points out in *Warm and Snug: A History of the Bed*: “Henry VIII denounced the disuse of the hall and the decay of communal living, but private apartments multiplied, and the old halls[…]were being subdivided by the insertion of floors and partitions” (63). The partitions and extra floors indicated one aspect of the move away from communal living; the ejection of servants from the hall was another. By the seventeenth century, servants, once considered a part of the family,2 were relegated to separate wings of the house. Mark Girouard, author of *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History*, attributes the removal of the servants from the front part of the house to “a growing feeling for privacy and a growing fastidiousness” (143). Servants who once slept in the same room and even in the same bed as their masters by the late-seventeenth century were sleeping in small closets off their master’s bedroom; this way they were close at hand should a master need something, but out of the master’s private bedroom.

Backstairs also contributed to the decreasing visibility of servants. A system of backstairs would connect servants’ rooms to other parts of the house, reducing the

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2 See Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*. “In the Middle Ages (and indeed up till the early eighteenth century) when someone talked about his family he meant everyone living under his roof, including his servants; by the nineteenth century he meant his wife and children. The early type can be epitomized by the great hall, in which the whole household ate together with its guests” (10).
occasions when a servant and a master might meet. Girouard relates one man’s reaction to the invention of the backstairs in the late seventeenth century: “Roger North thought this the biggest improvement in planning that had taken place during his lifetime. The gentry walking up the stairs no longer met their last night’s feces coming down them” (138). Figure 1.1 shows the system of backstairs and servants rooms at Coleshill House in Berkshire, built by Sir Roger Pratt in 1660.

![Figure 1.1](image_url)


Though servants no longer routinely slept with their masters, bedrooms remained far from private. Beds were often the most expensive item a family could own, but as Rafaella Sarti explains in *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture, 1500-1800*, “it would be incorrect to deduce from the number of beds that beds were
exclusively part of private activities. In France, in particular, a bed was a luxury item that had to be put on display” (122). Bill Bryson argues that it is possible that a person did not have an assigned bedroom to retire to each night: “Sleeping arrangements appear to have remained relaxed for a long time. The plot of one of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* hinges on the miller’s daughter getting into the wrong bed in her own home, something she could hardly do if she slept in the same place every night” (54).

Bedrooms, at least through the seventeenth century, were little more than rooms with a bed, regardless of the room’s intended purpose. The presence of the bed, as Sarti mentions above, could have been simply a means of displaying a family’s wealth. Instead of being a private site meant solely for slumber, bedrooms were often bed-sitting rooms. For instance, Charles II’s bedroom was a place where he supped and received visitors. These visitors were not universally admitted, but were permitted entry according to rank: “Princes of the blood were allowed into it of right and at any time. Principal officers of state and privy counselors had access, but had to ask permission first” (Girouard 130).

Because beds were symbols of wealth, bedrooms, especially the state bedroom, were most often on the ground floor of the house where visitors would have the opportunity to view them. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, bedrooms, including the state bedrooms, were moved upstairs. Part of the reason for this was because “the concept of state was going out of fashion” (Girouard 230), but also because bedrooms began to be thought of as more private spaces, and its occupants did not want their private space on display for visitors. Up until the nineteenth century,
visitors were often given a suite of rooms, or apartments, for their personal use. These apartments consisted of at least one bedroom, a dressing room, a closet or two, and perhaps a sitting room. The apartment system began to fade by the beginning of the nineteenth century as people were expected to spend the majority of their day in the downstairs communal rooms of the house.³ Visitors were given merely a bedroom with a closet, and perhaps a morning sitting room if the occupant was a lady.

As bedrooms moved upstairs, the ground floor communal rooms took on a new importance. The front part of the house, still known as the hall, maintained its importance as the entrance, the first part of the house a visitor would see. The eighteenth century saw the rise of saloons, parlors, drawing rooms, and dining rooms. Grand staircases began to be popular. The hall and the saloon, in the eighteenth century, were the grandest rooms of the house, and were the site of elegant gatherings, such as at Chatsworth: “The hall was a room for great dinners, the saloon for grand ones. Both rise through two storeys” (Girouard 158). These grand rooms were often linked, as the figure of the first floor of Norfolk House shows below. The only way to reach one room was to pass through another.

³ The decaying of the apartment system was predominantly an English phenomenon. Mark Girouard notes the ire of German Prince Puckler-Muskau, who “complained of the social pressure which forced guests to leave their own rooms and spend the whole day in the communal life of the public rooms downstairs” (11). Girouard explains further that “guests were now expected to spend the day downstairs in communal rooms, except when they were changing for meals. The one exception was that in some houses women guests could pass part of the morning in their bedrooms writing letters” (288).
Figure 1.2


The inconvenience of having to pass through one room to enter another was solved in the late seventeenth century with the invention of the corridor. Corridors, like backstairs, ensured greater privacy, for “a room entered only from a corridor, and not from other rooms, would[…]circumvent the danger that the people or purpose of one room might mix unexpectedly with those of another” (Marcus 94). Tom Crook correctly argues that the corridor was essential to the development of the privacy of the bedroom: “Bedrooms ceased to be interconnecting, as they had often been before. Instead, they were provided with only one door, not two or three, and thus positioned as spaces of seclusion, rather than as points of passage” (22).

A system of corridors, backstairs, and upstairs bedrooms both contributed to and reflected an increasing desire for privacy. However, this privacy was not so much for the individual as it was for the family. Upper-class families retained use of the apartment system for themselves while requiring their guests to make use of only one or
two rooms. Husbands and wives, in England at least,\(^4\) usually shared a bedroom, though they often had separate dressing rooms. The wife might have a private sitting room or drawing room, while the husband would most assuredly have a study. In fact, the study was perhaps the first most truly private space in a house\(^5\) because of its very nature as a room in which a man kept important documents and required silence and privacy in which to read, write, and, as the room’s name implies, study. By the nineteenth century, the parents’ room would have been close to the children’s rooms, with the governess’s room and the nursery\(^6\) also nearby, as Figure 1.3 (Thoresby Hall in Nottinhamshire) depicts.

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\(^4\) As Rafaella Sarti notes, “Even husband and wife often had separate bedrooms, although often adjacent or connected by secret passages. In the eighteenth century, high-ranking married couples in England used to sleep together, while in France the lord and lady had separate beds and bedrooms” (122).

\(^5\) Sarti emphasizes the importance of the study as the first private place: “The study was the personal space where one could withdraw to read and write undisturbed, and also keep books, letters, important documents and other objects of value. According to some historians, this space, which was mainly but not exclusively enjoyed by men, was the first expression of a new need for privacy and personal comfort which was to develop in the coming centuries” (131). It is important to note, as Inga Bryden does, that the study was a masculine space: “the first historical, truly ‘private’ space [w]as the (man’s) study; an intellectual space and a space of writing (and reading)” (9).

\(^6\) The nursery was a nineteenth century invention: “J.C. Loudoun, in The Suburban Garden and Villa Companion, published in 1838, had to explain to his readers that specialized rooms for children were called nurseries” (Flanders 64).
By the nineteenth century, rooms were no longer multi-purpose, but rather designed and considered to have one specific function. A parlor was no longer transformed into a place to eat dinner by bringing in tables, but instead, the dining room was developed. Breakfast rooms, morning rooms, and billiard rooms were intended to be used for specific purposes. Room specialization was meant to increase “efficiency”: “Efficiency involved analyzing the different functions performed by different servants, giving each function its own area and often its own room, and grouping the related functions into territories” (Girouard 276). To achieve this sort of efficiency, the Victorians took room-specialization to an extreme, particularly in the servants’ quarters,
as kitchens, pantries, and storage spaces held only one type of item. Bryson describes the extent of room specialization in the Victorian Era: “A large country house was likely to have a gun room, lamp room, still room, pastry room, butler’s pantry, fish store, bake house, coal store, game larder, brewery, knife room, brush room, shoe room, and at least a dozen more” (92). Figure 1.4 below shows the servants’ floor at Lynford Hall in Norfolk. Note the separation of even different types of alcoholic beverages, such as beer and wine.

![Figure 1.4](image)


Room specialization contributed to “a distinction within the home between the more private rooms and the rooms more open to the outside world” (Sarti 138). Not
only did room specialization assign a specific purpose to a room, but it also “dictated into which parts of the house one might venture—which corridors and staircases one might use, which doors one might open—depending on whether one was a guest or a close relative, governess or tutor, child or adult, aristocrat or commoner, male or female, upper house servant or lower house servant” (Bryson 93).

The specialization of the more private rooms, in particular the bedroom, included the assigning of a specific bedroom to a single individual. The Victorians were not only concerned with separating different objects from one another, hence the need for separate knife closets and lamp closets, but they also were greatly concerned with segregating sleeping bodies. I have already mentioned the ejection of servants from the main parts of the house, including the bedroom; before the installation of adjoining servants’ closets, servants slept in the same room as their masters, and it was not uncommon for them to share the same bed.7 Beginning in the eighteenth century, children were moved out of the parental bed, and eventually out of the parents’ bedroom and given bedrooms of their own. By the nineteenth century, if the family could afford it, siblings of the opposite sex slept in separate bedrooms, and, if possible, older children had separate bedrooms from younger ones.8 Sleeping in separate beds and separate rooms was a priority for those who could afford it, and those who could

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7 Judith Flanders explains: “In the eighteenth century and before, servants and apprentices had slept in the same rooms as family members, who themselves were not separated in sleeping apartments by sex or age” (9).

8 Separating people by age as well as by sex was important because, as Mr. Hay Japp put it in 1880, “young persons are in some way robbed of vitality, and enfeebled, by sleeping with the aged” (qtd. in Wright 202).
not, were looked upon with disgust,\(^9\) as Roger Ekirch reveals in his book *At Day’s Close: Night in Times Past*: “By the eighteenth century, communal sleep inspired widespread disdain among the gentle classes, likely spawning the contemptuous term ‘bed-faggot.’ In no other sphere of preindustrial life did a mounting appreciation for personal privacy among the upper ranks of society manifest itself more plainly” (280). Ekirch acknowledges that many families could not afford separate sleeping arrangements, and so often an entire family would sleep in the same room (280). By the nineteenth century, the pressure to separate sleepers became so acute that many middle-class families built partitions between rooms. Judith Flanders elaborates on this: “The desire for additional rooms meant that most rooms became, of necessity, smaller, and houses became taller, but the extra privacy made these inconveniences worthwhile” (9). The importance of sequestered rooms is manifest in the building boom in mid-nineteenth-century London. Instead of erecting apartments as in New York and continental Europe, the British preferred the more private terraced house (Flanders 20). Tall and narrow, the design of the terraced house allowed for families even of modest means to have communal rooms on the ground floor, and separate bedrooms on the second and third stories. Figures 1.5, 1.6, and 1.7 show the floor plan for semi-detached houses in Ealing built for prosperous middle classes.

\(^{9}\) Tom Crook indicates that the Victorians perceived communal sleep as something morally disturbing: “never before had mingling dormant bodies threatened so much, nor assumed the power to repulse so deeply” (21).
Figures 1.5, 1.6, and 1.7 show the plans for terraced houses built for the lower middle classes.

Note that even in the houses designed for the lower middle classes, three upstairs bedrooms are provided, one for the parents, one for male children, and one for female children.

The move away from communal sleep arose in part because of concerns for hygiene (Perrot 481), or as Inga Bryden puts it, “privacy could then be defined as protection against other bodies’ dirt and odours” (12). Thomas Crook describes Victorian efforts to enforce separate sleeping arrangements: “The sleeping body was thus subject to a meticulous hygienic movement: it was spatialized, aerated and cleansed” (9). Lynne Hunt mentions that in country houses, bachelors and young ladies were often assigned bedrooms in entirely separate wings (89). Another issue with
multiple bodies inhabiting the same bed greatly disturbed Victorian sensibilities: sex.\textsuperscript{10} Sharon Marcus relates middle-class anxieties about working-class homes in which families, and even non-relatives, slept together in the same room and sometimes in the same bed:

By bringing family members and distinct families into close proximity, crowding also broke down social units and hierarchies and as a result, led to indiscriminate mixing. Middle-class urban observers focused particularly on the sexual promiscuity that they believed resulted from spatial proximity, obliquely referring to the widespread occurrence of incest, prostitution, and sodomy among poor people in lodgings. (105)

Allowing children to sleep with adults exposed them to sex, which stood in direct opposition to the Victorian conception of childhood. The Victorian home was becoming, as Judith Flanders says, “child-centered” (6) in part because of the reduction in child mortality, the decline of the practice of apprenticing children, and the Romantic movement’s idealization of childhood. The need to protect children from sex required that children be removed from the room and particularly the bed in which sex took place.\textsuperscript{11}

Although the ideal scenario in nineteenth-century England was for everyone\textsuperscript{12} to sleep alone, communal sleep often continued, and not just among the working classes.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} See Bryson pgs. 324-8 for more on Victorian restrictions on sex, even between married couples.
\textsuperscript{11} See Tom Crook p. 20 for more on Victorian fears of incest between parents and children and siblings.
\textsuperscript{12} Even, according to some nineteenth-century moralists, for married couples.
\textsuperscript{13} Concern for separate sleeping eventually extended even to servants: “At night, infinite care was taken to see that men and women slept in different parts of the house, without access one to the other. Within
Judith Flanders points out that although sleeping together was often regarded with anxiety or even disgust, middle-class Victorians, like Alfred Bennet and Edmund Gosse, slept with their parents. Roger Ekirch describes the comforts of a bedfellow: “Sleeping beside a familiar soul, whether a family member, a fellow servant, or a friend brought advantages beyond enjoying another’s warmth or saving the cost of an extra bed. It also provided a sense of security” (280). Sharing a bedroom was also perceived as ensuring that certain deviant acts of sexuality did not occur, such as wet dreaming and masturbation (Crook 28). Despite the advantages of sleeping together, and the fact that many families continued to do so, the preference of doctors, religious leaders, and the majority of families was for people to sleep by themselves.

As children were given their own bedrooms and people began sleeping alone, the bedroom began “assuming a new significance in terms of the fate of the individual” (Crook 21). Roger Ekirch observes that “members of the middle and upper classes, by retiring to their bedchambers, enjoyed the greatest opportunity for personal reflection” (203) but also acknowledges that “farther down the social ladder, inadequate time and space inevitably made solitude harder” (203). Part of the reason that the private bedroom became imbued with emotional significance stems from the new importance of the individual in general. The rise of Evangelicalism in the eighteenth century contributed to the importance of the individual by placing great importance on acts of

the male and female sleeping quarters it was normal for the servants to sleep one, or at most two, to a room. Servants’ dormitories had survived into the early Victorian period, but were regarded with suspicion and soon got rid of” (Girouard 276).

14 Alfred Bennett “slept on a small bed beside his parents’ bed,” and Edmund Gosse “slept in his father’s room until he was eleven” following the death of his mother when he was seven (Flanders 38).
introspection such as private prayer, personal faith, Bible study, and the keeping of private journals and diaries (L. Hunt 53). The rise of democracy also emphasized the importance of the self:

More and more people rebelled against communal and family discipline and declared that they needed more time and space of their own. Individuals wanted to sleep alone, to be allowed to read books and newspapers in peace and quiet, to dress as they pleased, to come and go as they wished, to eat or drink whatever they liked, and to see and love whomever they chose. In other words, they believed in their right to pursue happiness as they saw fit. Democracy bestowed legitimacy on that right. (Perrot 454)

The bedroom fostered this investment in the self by providing a quiet, sequestered site away from the public sphere not simply of the world outside of the house, but separate from the rest of the home. As Tom Crook puts it, “the home represented one private threshold, the bedroom another” (23). Discussions about privacy in the nineteenth century tend to focus on the public world of business and politics as opposed to the privacy of the domestic sphere, but I want to emphasize here that my references to privacy concern the private self seeking to be alone even from the rest of the family. The Victorian home was designed to be as private as possible.15

15 See Marcus: “Architects promoted the domestic ideal of privacy through their designs for middle-class houses and their commentary on what constituted a house. Throughout the nineteenth century, architectural discourse defined the house as an impenetrable, self-contained structure with distinct and specialized rooms. Doors and windows, necessary breaches in the house’s impenetrable walls, were given treatments that reflected the English architectural view that, in one historian’s paraphrase, ‘opening
including the growing preference to have homes outside of the city in order to be further from the “filth” of the city and to create a greater separation from the place where the husband worked and where he lived. The home, and domesticity, have been extensively explored by scholars, and while it is an important study, it neglects to consider the even more private sanctuary of the bedroom and the role the bedroom played in the growth of the individual.

The Victorian bedroom fostered the individual’s sense of self, and even began to reflect the self, as Lynne Hunt argues: “A girl’s bedroom, now the temple of her private life, was appropriately bedecked with symbols. Identified with its occupant, the private bedroom gave proof of individual independence” (481). The practice of hanging symbols on one’s bedroom walls continues today: teenagers hang posters on their walls, parents place their wedding and baby photos on bedside tables. The bedroom also became, and remains today, “the place where the self was groomed: where it was dressed and prepared for public presentation and social intercourse” (Crook 23). The private activities of the bedroom—grooming, praying, letter writing, diary keeping, thinking—served, as Tom Crook argues, “to consolidate the notion that the bedroom was the pre-eminent place where the secrets of the individual were located: where they were nurtured, cherished, and intensified” (23).

in the walls are not in the least desirable and can only be considered necessary evils.’ Each room within the house was designed to secure occupants from observation and intrusion. Whenever possible, main rooms faced the back, not the front entrance” (94). Other adjustments were made to the house to ensure privacy, as Judith Flanders notes: “The English house became ever more inward turning[…] Thick curtains replaced the airy eighteenth-century windows, as much to block out passers-by who might look in as to prevent the damage from sun and pollution” (8). See also Sharon Marcus, page 97.

16 Tom Crook goes on: “Mirrors, hairbrushes, nail files, toothbrushes: all of these miniature technologies of the self were eagerly utilized by the nineteenth-century middle classes, and in time the working classes” (23).
In order for the bedroom to function as a sanctuary for the individual, the bedroom could not be trespassed. Roger-Henri Guerrand describes the bedroom’s new inaccessibility to anyone but the room’s occupant: “Once it had been permissible to receive guests in a room with a bed in it, but that time was past. A taboo was placed on the bedroom, as if it were a sacred place and to enter it without reason, entailed some terrible risk” (369).

The emotional significance of the bedroom is epitomized in L. Hunt’s 1877 article “Bed” from *The Sanitary Inspector: A Monthly Visitor and Adviser*:

> Home is Home,’ says the good proverb, ‘however homely.’ Equally certain are we that bed is bed, however bedly. Bed is the home of the home; the innermost part of the content. It is sweet within sweet; a nut in the nut; within the snuggest nest, a snugger nest; my retreat from the publicity of my privacy; my room within my room, walled (if I please) with curtains; a box, a separation, a snug corner, such as children love when they play ‘house’; the place where I draw a direct line between me and my cares; where I enter upon a new existence, free, yet well invested; reposing but full of power. (qtd. in Crook 24)

At no other point in history had the bedroom embodied so much importance for the individual. By the end of the Victorian Era, a bedroom was a retreat from everything, including the more public parts of the house. It was a place for psychological and emotional regeneration. It was a psychic haven, the safest place for the self to grow and be nourished. Hunt exalts in the bedroom as a place “to draw a line
between me and my cares,” where he “enters upon a new existence.” The bedroom is not meant to be trespassed; architecture has even been modified to ensure this privacy: corridors prohibit the use of a bedroom as a place of passage, walls and partitions have been built to separate the bedroom from the rest of the house, and bedrooms have been elevated to the second and third stories of houses to protect the sacred bedroom from contact with the public world of the street below.

It may be obvious to note, but the act with which we most associate the bedroom, and the reason for its existence, is sleep. Victorians insisted that each room in a house serve a separate purpose, and the purpose of the bedroom is for sleep. Sleep is thus considered to be a private act, one that needs protecting. While other private activities take place in the bedroom, the act of sleeping takes precedence. The sleeping figures of Jane Eyre, Tess Durbeyfield, Mina Murray and Lucy Westenra must now be seen in a new light. Their violations become all the more poignant. Their beds and bedrooms reflect their identities and are supposed to protect not only their bodies, but their selves. While women have been sexually violated throughout history, we must consider the fact that these girls are attacked while they sleep in their bedrooms, a place which never before had held such emotional and psychological significance.
CHAPTER TWO

Jane Eyre: Blue Chintz Curtains at Thornfield Hall

“My couch had no thorns in it that night; my solitary room no fears.”

—Charlotte Brontë

As Charlotte Brontë was writing Jane Eyre in 1847, objections to communal sleep were becoming vociferous. Many people, especially among the working classes, still shared beds, while among the upper classes, bedrooms were beginning to be thought of as a place of solace for the self. A study of where Jane sleeps throughout the novel reveals a preference for solitary sleep, while maintaining a nostalgia for the comfort of a bed-fellow. Jane at once desires independence, including solitary sleep, but when her sleeping spaces are threatened, she always finds comfort by sleeping with another person. Jane Eyre fits nicely into this study of violence in bedrooms because it was written at a time when people were still grappling with the move towards solitary sleep; the novel shows that dangers lurk when one sleeps alone. Yet Jane loves her solitary bedroom at Thornfield, happy at last to have a space in which she can allow her selfhood to flourish and grow. Bertha’s intrusions into Jane’s bedroom shatter Jane’s sense of self, and Jane must undertake an odyssey of sorts in order to regain and rebuild her identity.

Like many British upper middle-class children in 1850, Jane sleeps in a crib in the nursery with her nurse Bessie nearby. Jane calls her crib “my own bed” (76), and can hear Bessie speaking with Sarah as they sleep together in the housemaid’s
apartment “which was near” (77). Although Jane does not have her own special bedroom as do her cousins Eliza and Georgiana, she still finds solace in her little crib, especially after the red-room episode. The red-room is the first place where Jane feels terror in a bedroom; she fears it is haunted with the ghost of her deceased Uncle John. Her fears are augmented by the taunts of Miss Abbot: “Say your prayers, Miss Eyre, when you are by yourself; for if you don’t repent, something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney and fetch you away” (70). The room terrifies Jane because of its isolation: “The room was chill, because it seldom had a fire; it was silent, because remote from the nursery and the kitchens; solemn, because it was known to be so seldom entered” (71). After the episode in the red-room, Jane is comforted to be back in her individual sleeping space, the little crib in the nursery. Her experience in the red-room exposes her to the dangers of an isolated bedroom, although she does not have to face those dangers again for many years to come.

At Lowood, Jane never experiences the dangers of solitary slumber, but her communal sleeping arrangements are nearly crowded enough to offend Victorian sensibilities: “To-night I was to be Miss Miller’s bed-fellow; she helped me to undress: when I laid down I glanced at the long rows of beds, each of which was quickly filled with two occupants” (104). This sharing of beds in dormitories was facing its decline by the time that Jane Eyre was written: “Initially, the practice of sharing a bed was common, even in the most expensive schools, but during the second half of the century […] dormant bodies were progressively individuated” (Crook 29). While sharing beds in dormitories in 1850 may have been looked upon with distaste, it is possible that
Brontë envisioned the setting of *Jane Eyre* to be decades before, and may even be recalling the dormitories of her own youth. Whether dormitory-style living was in vogue or not, Jane does not mind; Jane even sleeps with her friend Helen Burns as Helen lies dying: “I clasped my arms closer around Helen: she seemed dearer to me than ever; I felt as if I could not let her go; I lay with my face hidden on her neck. […] She kissed me, and I her; and we both soon slumbered” (147). Jane discovers later that Miss Temple had found the two girls together: “I learned that Miss Temple, on returning to her own room at dawn, had found me laid in the little crib; my face against Helen Burns’s shoulder, my arms around her neck. I was asleep and Helen was—dead” (148). Helen’s death is arguably the most formative experience of Jane’s childhood; Helen is the first person to show Jane true friendship, and influences Jane in countless ways, not least of all reinforcing Jane’s attitudes towards the comfort and companionship of communal sleep.

Even as a teacher at Lowood, Jane shares a room with another woman. Jane begins to find the presence of another individual stifling: “I was not free to resume the interrupted chain of my reflections till bedtime: even then a teacher who occupied the same room with me kept me from the subject to which I longed to recur, by a prolonged effusion of small talk” (151). Communal sleep has never before bothered Jane; rather, she claims she had never regarded it “in any other light than as a nuisance” (151). Yet after the departure of Miss Temple, Jane begins to change. She desires more than the monotonous days at Lowood: “I was tired of the routine of eight years in one afternoon. I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer” (151). Life at
Lowood suffocates Jane; there is no room there for her to think beyond its plain walls, or to dream of a life beyond school books. She eventually tempers her desire for liberty and asks only for “a new servitude” (151), anything to get her away from the boredom of her present life. Even her shared bedroom hampers her from attaining a new life, for she cannot reflect or recuperate with the cloying presence of another person. Jane’s desire for a new life and identity can be seen in her annoyance with her roommate, for she cannot grow without a site to be alone and reflect.

Jane at last gains her liberty from Lowood and moves to Thornfield. As many scholars, such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, have acknowledged, Jane’s identity begins to truly flourish at Thornfield. She learns to have courage, independence, and ultimately, how to a love other than friendship. Significantly, it is at Thornfield where Jane has her first solitary bedroom. And she delights in it: “I was glad when finally ushered into my chamber, to find it of small dimensions and furnished in ordinary modern style” (165). She reflects, “I was now at last in safe haven” (165). Her first night spent in her new bedroom is a happy one: “My couch had no thorns in it that night; my solitary room no fears” (165). Jane seems a bit surprised that she sleeps “soon and soundly” (165) in her room, and the fact that her “solitary room [has] no fears” implies that perhaps she worried she might have been afraid of spending her first night alone.

Jane immediately compares her bedroom at Thornfield to the one she left behind at Lowood: “The chamber looked such a bright little place to me as the sun shone in between the gay blue chintz window curtains, showing papered walls and a carpeted
floor, so unlike the bare planks and stained plaster at Lowood, that my spirits rose at the view” (165). The lightness and gaiety of the room at once influence Jane’s happiness. Her room is soft and feminine, starkly different from the barren militaristic room she slept in at Lowood. Blue chintz curtains and papered walls signify that the room is meant for a lady, encouraging and shaping Jane’s growth into womanhood. Jane describes the effect the room has on her sensibilities: “Externals have a great effect on the young: I thought that a fairer era of life was beginning for me,—one that was to have its flowers and pleasures, as well as its thorns and toils. My faculties, roused by the change of scene, the new field offered to hope, seemed all astir. I cannot precisely define what they expected, but it was something pleasant” (165). Jane does not come to the conclusion that her life is now filled with hope upon being hired as a governess, or when she sees Thornfield, or even when she walks through the halls of the house; rather, she feels hope, anticipation, and excitement after spending a night in a solitary room, her room, one furnished for a young lady. The room symbolizes a new identity for Jane, one separate from the dreary, lonely, stifled girl at Lowood.17

Jane’s room is especially appropriate for her because of its size, simplicity, and gentle, feminine prettiness. Other rooms in the house do not have these qualities that so perfectly suit Jane. Rather, they are “especially grand,” “dark and low,” with “imperfect light,” holding “bedsteads of a hundred years old” (173). Jane explicitly states her distaste for these rooms: “I by no means coveted a night’s repose on one of

17 While he does not discuss Jane’s bedroom in particular, Michael Klotz investigates the connection between the decoration of various rooms at Thornfield and the identities of Jane and Rochester. See his article “Rearranging Furniture in Jane Eyre and Villette.” ESC 31.1 (2005): 10-26.
those wide and heavy beds: shut in, some of them, with doors of oak; shaded, others, with wrought old English hangings crusted with thick work, portray ing effigies of strange flowers, and stranger birds, and strangest human beings—all of which would have looked strange, indeed, by the pallid gleam of moonlight” (173). The furniture in the other rooms at Thornfield do not reflect the feminine beauty of Jane’s character at all. She is young, and so needs the youthful “ordinary modern style” (165). She is not “venerable,” “antiquated,” “heavy,” “shut-in,” “crusted,” or “thick” (173); the other chambers are thus meant for a very different sort of person. The chambers seem apt in fact for Rochester, who is dark and “shut-in,” and a member of an old antiquated family. Brontë must have understood the growing contemporary sentiment that a connection existed between an individual and his or her own bedroom; thus Jane’s bedroom is light and youthful, feminine and hopeful, utterly perfect for a young girl newly freed from a life of gray monotony, about to embark on an exciting journey into womanhood.

Jane, with the wisdom of a woman beyond her years, predicts that even her new life will have its “thorns and toils” (165). Before the arrival of Mr. Rochester, Thornfield is nearly as dull and monotonous as Lowood. Rochester, of course, changes everything. His presence physically and emotionally fulfills Jane: “So happy, so gratified did I become with this new interest added to life, that I ceased to pine after kindred: my thin crescent-destiny seemed to enlarge; the blanks of existence were filled

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18 See Gilbert and Gubar’s classic Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination for more on Jane’s frustration and loneliness at Thornfield. They look particularly at the scenes in which Jane climbs to the roof and looks out over the landscape; these scenes reveal Jane’s desire for a fuller life beyond her passive obedience at Thornfield.
up; my bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and strength” (219). It is not long before this budding love is threatened; and it is not by Blanche Ingram, but rather, by the first Mrs. Rochester. Having been allowed to grow in the safety of her solitary bedroom, Jane is once more made to fear solitary slumber: “I started awake on hearing a vague murmur, peculiar and lugubrious, which sounded, I thought just above me. I wished I had kept my candle burning: the night was drearily dark; my spirits were depressed. I rose and sat up in bed, listening” (220). Bertha, of course, has just passed by Jane’s room. Jane is terrified, and unable to sleep again. Her fears augment in the darkness of her room: “It seemed that my chamber-door was touched; as if fingers had swept the panels in groping a way along the dark gallery outside” (220-1). In the silent darkness, Jane’s senses are heightened, and the rather innocuous sweeping of fingertips along her door makes her “chilled with fear” (221).

Jane tries to calm herself by imagining that “it might be [Rochester’s dog] Pilot” (221), but, then, the laughter that has perplexed Jane for months sounds right outside her door: “This was a demoniac laugh—low, suppressed, and deep—uttered, as it seemed, at the very key-hole of my chamber-door. The head of my bed was near the door, and I thought at first, the goblin-laugher stood at my bedside,—or rather, crouched by my pillow” (221). Jane rises and fastens the bolt to her door, and finally, with not a little bravery, calls, “Who is there?” (221). Jane, hearing the laughter die away, finally unlocks the bolt and finds a single candle sitting in the corridor. The sheer terror of this scene cannot be ignored; Jane’s safety is truly threatened. Her courageous locking of the bolt and crying out are what divert Bertha away from Jane’s room. Bertha’s first
impulse was to harm Jane: leaving the candle outside of Jane’s room proves this. It is a symbolic way of telling Jane that the fire in Rochester’s room was intended for her. Jane’s locked bedroom door, accompanied with Jane’s cry indicate to Bertha that Jane is awake, and not an unconscious victim, as is Rochester.

Bertha’s attack on Rochester is one imbued with sexual undertones. The bed is of course the site of sexual intercourse: setting it on fire (traditionally the symbol of passion) indicates a desire to utterly decimate and consume that site. Bertha not only wants to incinerate the site of sexual intercourse, but also the man with whom she once shared her sexuality. By burning the site of sex and the man who once claimed her sexuality, Bertha hopes to purify her sexual past. It is a last sort of “consumption” of Rochester (who claims that Bertha’s sexual appetites were excessive, “intemperate and unchaste” [397]). Because Bertha, in her madness, can no longer indulge her sexual appetites with Rochester, she consumes his bed and his body in engulfing flames.¹⁹

Bertha turns her violent attentions towards Jane two nights before Jane is supposed to marry Rochester. Jane describes waking from a haunting dream to find a figure standing at the door of her closet. The figure tries on Jane’s wedding veil: “Presently she took my veil from its place; she held it up, gazed at it long, and then she threw it over her own head, and turned to the mirror” (371). The figure, which we know to be Bertha, then destroys the veil viciously: “It removed my veil from its gaunt head, rent it in two parts, and flinging both on the floor, trampled on them” (371). Like

¹⁹ I understand that my reading of Bertha is not as sympathetic as those done by other scholars such as Gilbert and Gubar and Valerie Beattie. While these sympathetic readings certainly have merit, and indeed have almost become the norm, they do, however, neglect the material violence which Bertha enacts upon Rochester, Mason, and Jane.
Bertha’s attack on Rochester, I see this attack to be sexually motivated; indeed, I believe it is an attack on Jane’s very sexuality. Like a leering voyeur, Bertha gazes at the veil, the symbol of Jane’s virginity. In trying on the veil, Bertha samples Jane’s virginity without her consent: a virtual rape, if you will. Bertha finally rends the veil in two parts, tearing the traditional symbol of a bride’s virginity. The image of rending a bride’s veil seems to me connected to the tearing of a bride’s hymen on her wedding night. Rochester, listening to Jane’s recounting of her harrowing experience, immediately asks what happened “afterwards” (371). He understands this “rending of the veil” to be the completion of an act, just like the tearing of a virgin’s hymen. Jane continues her story: “Just at my bedside, the figure stopped: the fiery eye glared upon me—she thrust up her candle close to my face, and extinguished it under my eyes. I was aware her lurid visage flamed over mine, and I lost consciousness: for the second time in my life—only the second time—I became insensible from terror” (371). Bertha, the perversion of a bridegroom, approaches the figurative wedding bed after “rending the veil,” then “thrusts” the phallic symbol of the candle at Jane, gazes with a “lurid visage,” whereupon Jane faints in utter terror—not unlike other Victorian brides were said to do on their wedding nights. The intrusion of a virgin’s bedroom just nights before her wedding, the rending of the veil, the lurid visage above the bedside, the thrusting of the candle—these actions connote sexual violence.

Jane’s account of her attack explicitly recalls her childhood episode in the red-room, the only other occasion on which she loses consciousness. By articulating this connection, Brontë signals to her reader to remember the violence of John Reed’s cruel,
blood-drawing attack on Jane. Because she loses consciousness when Bertha attacks her, Jane cannot fully explain the details of the physicality of the assault. The connection with the red-room suggests that Jane suffers from an equally physical and violent attack at the hands of Bertha as she did as a child, and that both aggressors draw Jane’s blood. This lends evidence to the sexual nature of Bertha’s assault on Jane, as the blood symbolically represents a virgin’s blood on her wedding night.

Rochester’s reaction to Jane’s story reveals that he understands just how dangerous Bertha is: “I felt Mr. Rochester start and shudder; he hastily flung his arms around me: ‘Thank God!’ he exclaimed, ‘that if anything malignant did come near you last night, it was only the veil that was harmed.—Oh, to think what might have happened!’” (372). Rochester does not believe that anything besides the veil was harmed; he does not interpret the rending of the veil in any symbolic way. He does not even seem, or perhaps refuses, to suspect that Bertha may have been attempting to send a very direct message. Rochester of course knows that Jane’s story is true, and he understands that the attack could have been much worse. Rochester’s fear of “what might have happened,” however, begs the question: what might have befallen Jane? In truth, we do not know. Not even Jane knows, for she loses consciousness. Is it possible that Bertha harms Jane in some way that Jane is not aware of, or that Brontë felt too modest to express? Jane loses consciousness just as Bertha is leering and thrusting at Jane; a more direct attack on Jane’s sexuality could have occurred, but we have no way of knowing. Rochester clearly thinks that something more could have happened; perhaps Brontë’s description of the “rendering of veil” is supposed to challenge the reader
to consider the possibility that Bertha violates Jane in a more physical way. Regardless of the extent to which Bertha attacks Jane physically, Bertha nevertheless violates Jane’s private bedroom, the place that reflects Jane’s selfhood.20

Jane, under Rochester’s insistence, is able to temporarily ignore the traumatic episode, although she does not spend another night alone in her bedroom. At Rochester’s urging, Jane finds comfort with a bed-fellow: “There is room enough in Adèle’s little bed for you. You must share it with her to-night, Jane: it is no wonder that the incident you have related should make you nervous, and I would rather you did not sleep alone: promise me to go to the nursery” (373). After Jane’s episode in the red-room (the first time that Jane loses consciousness), she finds comfort from listening to Bessie sleeping nearby; now as a young woman, Jane relaxes only once in the nursery with Adèle and Sophie.

Seeking safety through communal sleep temporarily deters Jane from contemplating the violation further. The morning of her wedding, Jane begins to understand the enormity of the violation as she senses a break with her old identity: “I saw a robed and veiled figure, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a stranger” (374). Jane’s bedroom, the extension of her selfhood, has been violated as much as her body. She begins to see the change her identity has undergone as she

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20 While Jane’s bedroom reflects and fosters her identity, so too does Bertha’s. Bertha’s “bedroom,” if we can call it that, reflects her madness and dismal life: “He lifted the hangings from the wall, uncovering the second door: this, too, he opened. In a room without a window, there burnt a fire, guarded by a high and strong fender, and a lamp suspended from the ceiling by a chain. Grace Poole bent over the fire, apparently cooking something in a saucepan. In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards” (380). Bertha’s room is hidden, windowless, gloomy, and dark. The furnishings of her room are “guarded,” “suspended,” and “chain[ed].” The “deep shade” of the bedroom hides its occupant, providing a place where she can “grovel” and “growl” (380). Bertha’s room is a hidden prison, as perfect for her as Jane’s airy, feminine bedroom is for Jane.
cannot recognize herself in the mirror, although she does not understand why she feels differently. Of course, Rochester’s revelation pushes Jane’s now delicate identity to the brink, and she no longer knows herself: “I was in my own room as usual,—just myself, without obvious change: nothing had smitten me, or scathed me, or maimed me. And yet, where was the Jane Eyre of yesterday?—where was her life?—where were her prospects?” (383). Standing in her room which once held so much hope and so much comfort, Jane feels lost. Her identity has been intruded, violently and “spitefully” (372). Jane senses too that nothing has “smitten” her, but this recalls her loss of consciousness, and suggests that perhaps something did indeed “smite” her on that fateful night in her bedroom.

Rochester’s revelation proves that he has been dishonest with her, that he meant to turn her into a bigamist, and that he is not the man she supposed him to be: “Mr. Rochester was not to me what he had been; for he was not what I had thought him” (384). While Rochester’s revelation is shocking and has terrible implications for Jane, it should not prompt Jane to feel that she has lost her own identity as she does. Jane senses that there is no “obvious change” on her body, but she understands that something terrible has happened to her old identity of Jane Eyre. Her room, the place meant at once to foster and reflect her identity, no longer refreshes and protects her. It too has been violated and irrevocably changed. The solitary bedroom does, however, offer one last favor, as Jane at last is able to understand the magnitude of Bertha’s violation and Rochester’s betrayal: “It came: in full, heavy swing the torrent poured over me. The whole consciousness of my life lorn, my love lost, my hope quenched,
my faith death-struck, swayed full and mighty above me in one sullen mass. That bitter hour cannot be described” (384). Jane regains the (self)consciousness she lost when Bertha violated the sanctity of her bedroom, and the recognition of all that has vanished from her life pours down on her in one magnificent solitary moment of reflection. Having lost her innocence, an integral part of her identity of “the Jane Eyre of yesterday” (383), Jane mourns this deprivation; then, she gathers her courage, and flees Thornfield.

Jane’s departure from Thornfield further signifies the destruction of her identity as a result of her violation. Her bedroom, having served its last function as the site for Jane to fully comprehend the impact of her violation, is no longer a “safe haven.” Jane resolves to leave Thornfield so that she may regain her lost identity. She sees her past self as a “visionary bride who had melted in air” (411). As she leaves Thornfield, and the bedroom which fostered her private thoughts, Jane does not even allow herself, or perhaps lacks the ability, to think: “No reflection was to be allowed now: not one glance was to be cast back; not even one forward. Not one thought was to be given either to the past, or to the future” (412). Only a year earlier, Jane had been full of thoughts for the future; her selfhood has been shattered as she leaves Thornfield, and she cannot bear to reflect on it.

Jane’s experiences once she leaves Thornfield help her to reform her lost identity. Her first nights away from Thornfield are spent in the coach, but when she runs out of money, Jane is forced to sleep outside. She chooses Nature to be her new bedroom: “Nature seemed to me benign and good: I thought she loved me, outcast as I
was […] To-night, at least, I would be her guest—as I was her child: my mother would
lodge me without money and without price […] I folded my shawl double, and spread it
over me for a coverlet; a low, mossy swell was my pillow” (415). Seeking the
accustomed comfort she experienced warm in her own bedroom at Thornfield, Jane is
forced to accept Nature as a bedroom for, unlike people, Nature is willing to accept her.
Needing the solace of a maternal bed-fellow, Jane calls Nature “mother.” This night
spent outside stands as the first step in Jane’s journey towards rebuilding a life for
herself: she learns to depend on herself, and to find comfort even when alone.

Jane’s attempt to find maternal comfort in Nature is only a temporary solution.
Nature cannot sustain Jane, and she suffers from the cold and wet. Though Nature is
often depicted in early nineteenth-century poetry and literature as an idyllic, peaceful
haven, Jane’s experience contradicts this belief. Her expectation that Nature will
provide for her anticipates Tess Durbeyfield’s own belief in Nature’s protective power,
but for both girls, Nature is not a refuge, but is a changing and cold place.

At Moor-House, the home of the Rivers family, Jane at last finds a welcoming
shelter. Her temporary bedroom is not private since the inmates of the house come and
go frequently as they diligently nurse Jane back to health: “Hannah was my most
frequent visitor. Her coming disturbed me […] Diana and Mary appeared in the
chamber once or twice a day” (432). Despite the shelter provided at Moor-House, Jane
does not feel the same emotional attachment to her chamber as she does at Thornfield.
She uses indirect pronouns: “that bed,” “the apartment,” “the chamber” (432, my
emphasis). At Thornfield, it is “my couch,” “my solitary bedroom” (165). Jane does
not regain the same sense of selfhood until she resides in her little cottage at the school house: “My home, then—when I last I find a home,—is a cottage: a little room with white-washed walls, and a sanded floor [...] Above, a chamber of the same dimensions as the kitchen, with a deal bedstead, and a chest of drawers; small, yet too large to be filled with my scanty wardrobe” (454). Jane does not refer to this cottage as “the cottage” or “the house” but “my home.” She is emotionally invested in this building, it is a place of privacy and renewal, a site filled once more with anticipation of the future.

Jane’s sojourn among the Rivers family teaches her lessons in self-reliance, hard work, and tenacity. Jane’s happiness in her modest cottage allows her to rebuild her independent spirit. She also regains the inner strength she lost while submitting to the will of Rochester, as she sees for herself when she is able to refuse St. John Rivers’s proposal. She also regains her courage, which was stripped from her when Bertha terrorized her into unconsciousness. Bertha also deprived Jane of her innocence, and while Jane does not regain that innocence, she learns to accept this loss, and ultimately returns to Rochester as a woman, rather than as a girl. Jane is even able to return to Rochester as a financial equal, having inherited her uncle’s fortune.

In Jane’s final chapter, she extols the equality in her marriage. She goes so far as to say, “To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking” (554). By the end of the novel, Jane finds that she can be “as free as in solitude” with Rochester. Jane, even before leaving Lowood, has desired solitude for reflection and personal growth; the bedroom has usually served as the site
for her solitude. Yet Jane also needs companionship, whether it is the comforting voices of Bessie, or the warm body of Adèle, or, finally, the marital bed she shares with Rochester. Interestingly, Jane never describes that bed, or the bedroom she shares with Rochester. Perhaps because of her concern for the sensibilities of her reader, Jane chooses not to describe a space that holds so many sexual connotations. Her omission may also signal her desire to keep her new bedroom strictly private, even from her reader, considering the violent way in which the privacy of her bedroom was invaded once before. Despite an intense desire to keep her new bedroom private, in her final words to the reader, Jane proves that she has fully recovered from Bertha’s assault and Rochester’s betrayal, and finds a way to reconcile her need for independence and comfortable companionship. Jane’s attacker has died, and Jane has grown and healed from the scars left by the violation of her selfhood.

*Jane Eyre* demonstrates a moment in history when the bedroom was beginning to have emotional significance for the inhabitant. Brontë goes to great lengths to emphasize the perfection of Jane’s bedroom, and the solace Jane initially finds there. The greatest points of horror in the story are the attacks in the bedrooms on the sleeping bodies of Rochester and Jane. The attack on Jane in particular shows that it is not merely Jane’s privacy that is invaded, but so are items of personal value, even sexual value. Jane’s sexuality is threatened by Bertha’s violence at Jane’s bedside, and, most importantly, the symbol of Jane’s identity, the bedroom, is violated; afterwards Jane cannot sleep alone, identify her face in a mirror, and even questions how her girl-self of yesterday has disappeared. A girl’s bedroom is “the temple of her private life” (481),
Michelle Perrot tells us; the violation of that temple at first destroys, but then spurs Jane Eyre to recover her lost selfhood, and ultimately to find a way to reconcile her desire for solitude and her love of companionship.
CHAPTER THREE

*Tess of the d’Urbervilles: Constructing a Bedroom from the “Slightest Shelter”*

“She was sleeping soundly, and upon her eyelashes there lingered tears.”

--Thomas Hardy

As I mentioned in the introduction, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* may not seem to be a logical choice for a study of the bedroom because her famous rape occurs out of doors. The very lack of the bedroom, however, encourages questions about the different sleeping arrangements among the classes; in particular, it allows us to consider more clearly how, by the last decade of the nineteenth century, people imbued their sleeping spaces with personal emotional significance. A close reading of the scene in The Chase will reveal how Tess creates a temporary bedroom in the woods; once this space is invaded, Tess’s identity becomes fractured, and like Jane Eyre, Tess must undertake an emotional journey to regain her sense of selfhood. During the crucial moments of Tess’s journey, she is asleep\(^\text{21}\), beginning with the death of her family’s horse Prince, and ending when the police find her sleeping at Stonehenge.

The episode in which Tess and Abraham drive the beehives to Casterbridge demonstrates how Tess and Abraham, who do not have private personal bedrooms, create a sense of safety and privacy in their mobile, outdoor sleeping space. At a time when “every living thing was intended to be in shelter and at rest” (20), Abraham and

\(^{21}\) Penny Boumelha also discusses Tess’s sleep at crucial moments in the text: “Tess is asleep, or in reverie, at almost every crucial turn of the plot: at Prince’s death, at the time of her seduction by Alec, when the sleep-walking Angel buries his image of her, at his return to find her at the Herons, and when the police take her at Stonehenge” (87).
Tess rouse themselves and head into the night. At first, the brother and sister are afraid, and seek to allay their fears: “To cheer themselves as well as they could, they made an artificial morning with the lantern, some bread and butter, and their own conversation, the real morning being far from come” (20). Having achieved a minor comfort with the lantern and conversation, Abraham eventually becomes too tired to remain awake. Tess creates a “sort of nest in front of the hives, in such a manner that he could not fall” (21) so that the boy can sleep. The creation of a “nest” suggests another nest in which Tess will sleep in The Chase on that fateful night. By making a nest in the wagon, Tess demonstrates that she believes a nest is a safe place, one that ensures that the sleeper will “not fall.” Her belief in the safety of the nest becomes important when considering the scene in The Chase, for it is important to understand that Tess deems her sleeping space to be inviolable, as inviolable and private as a bedroom.

With Abraham asleep, Tess takes advantage of the privacy to reflect, an activity typically partaken in within the safety and seclusion of the bedroom: “With no longer a companion to distract her, Tess fell more deeply into reverie than ever” (21). As with Jane Eyre, who cannot think clearly while her roommate babbles, Tess, distracted by Abraham, cannot parse out her own thoughts regarding her parents’ hopes that she will seek out their wealthy “relatives.” The solitude she experiences once Abraham goes into his own “bedroom” allows her to consider fully her parents’ plans: “Then examining the mesh of events in her own life, she seemed to see the vanity of her father’s pride; the gentlemanly suitor awaiting herself in her mother’s fancy; to see him as a grimacing personage, laughing at her poverty, and her shrouded knightly ancestry.
Everything grew more and more extravagant, and she no longer knew how the time passed” (22). As Tess sits and daydreams, she becomes so comfortable within her solitude that she falls asleep. She successfully creates a “bedroom” of her own on the wagon. This illusion is broken of course when her wagon collides with another, and Prince is stabbed through the heart.

Feeling responsible for the loss of Prince, Tess resolves to “claim kin” with the rich d’Urberville family and work for them by tending their fowl. This brings her into daily contact with Alec d’Urberville, whose presence causes Tess extreme discomfort: “But—but—I don’t quite like Mr d’Urberville being there!” (34). Unlike the safety Tess experienced while driving with her brother, Tess becomes so afraid of riding in the dogcart with Alec that she demands that he allow her to get down. Alec’s advances, coupled with his recklessness, immediately put Tess on her guard. Once Tess arrives at the d’Urberville home, she finds it difficult to be at ease. Even though Tess has been promised “a comfortable room would be provided for her” (32), she finds her solitude constantly assaulted.

Embarrassed of whistling in front of “genteel company” (44), Tess feels obligated to find solitude in which to practice her whistling for Mrs. d’Urberville’s bullfinches. Having found a private retreat in the walled garden, Tess commences “fruitlessly blowing and blowing” (44), when suddenly, she beholds “a form springing from the coping into the plot” (44). It is Alec d’Urberville. He admits that he has been spying on Tess: “I have been watching you from over the wall—sitting like Im-patience on a monument, and pouting up that pretty red mouth to whistling shape, and whooing
and whooing, and privately swearing” (45). Alec understands that Tess desired privacy, as indicated by his teasing phrase “privately swearing,” but, by his cavalier attitude, he shows that his trespass upon her solitude does not cause him anxiety. It is clear that Tess is embarrassed by his intrusion, and finds that her whistling improves when she is alone and “unrestrained by the young man’s presence” (46).

Tess admits that she begins to lose her “shyness” of Alec, but attributes her “familiarity” with him to his continual presence when she is “alone” (46). It becomes clear that Tess is rarely actually alone, for Alec secretly spies on her:

Once while Tess was at the window where the cages were ranged, giving her lesson as usual, she thought she heard a rustling behind the bed. The old lady was not present, and turning round the girl had an impression that the toes of a pair of boots were visible below the fringe of the curtains. Thereupon her whistling became so disjointed that the listener, if such there were, must have discovered her suspicion of his presence. She searched the curtains every morning after that, but never found anybody among them. Alec d’Urberville had evidently thought better of his freak to terrify her by an ambush of that kind. (46)

The word “once” seems ironic, as if it is meant to suggest that this surveillance of Tess was a regular act, not a singular one. Alec’s lurking presence in the bedroom seems particularly ominous, considering the sexual potential of the seclusion of the room and the presence of the bed. He clearly had planned an “ambush” of some kind, and the sexual nature of the bedroom does not suggest that the ambush was meant to be an
innocent prank. Not only does this episode show invasions of Tess’s privacy, which she resents, but it also supports the argument that Alec’s eventual attack on Tess in The Chase is a rape. While he “thinks better” of his “ambush” on Tess in his mother’s bedroom, this scene reveals his inclinations for spying, invading Tess’s privacy, and a desire to “ambush” the solitary girl.

Though Alec thinks better of his ambush in the bedroom, he eventually attacks her later in the famous scene in The Chase. Tess becomes easier prey when she begins visiting the market in the nearby town of Chaseborough. Her fateful encounter occurs when she attends “a private little jig at the house of a hay-trusser and peat-dealer” (47). Tess makes the journey alone, yet once she arrives, she finds that Alec, too, has traveled into the town. Tess evasively tells him that she is “simply waiting for company homeward,” then quickly slips “down the back lane” (48). Tess is not successful in her flight; Alec follows her: “A loud laugh from behind Tess’s back in the shade of the garden united with the titter from within the room. She looked round, and saw the red coal of a cigar: Alec d’Urberville was standing there alone. He beckoned to her, and she reluctantly retreated towards him” (49-50). Tess feels threatened by Alec’s sudden presence; the “red coal” of his cigar feels nefarious, and she only goes to him with “reluctance.” His unexpected arrival also seems to jar Tess, for she hears him before she sees him. She declines his offer to see her home, feeling “her original mistrust of him” (50).

Tess, having found security in the companionship of the other working people, becomes vulnerable once more when they eject her from their circle due to a
misunderstanding between Tess and another woman. Tess goes off alone: “She no longer minded the loneliness of the way and the lateness of the hour; her one object was to get away from the whole crew as soon as possible” (52). Once she separates from the group, Alec appears, indicating that he was likely following Tess, despite his earlier supposed departure from the country dance. Sensing her vulnerability, he encourages Tess to ride with him. Tess obliges him, though not without trepidation: “She felt almost ready to faint, so vivid was her sense of the crisis. At almost any other moment of her life she would have refused such proffered aid and company, as she had refused them several times before; and now the loneliness would not of itself have forced her to do otherwise” (53).

Tess’s ride with Alec fills her with fear: she is “dubious,” and feels her seat to be “precarious” (53). In her nocturnal ride with her brother, Tess finds ways to cheer herself, but she is unable to find that same sense of security with Alec. Alec immediately takes advantage of her “precarious” situation and bodily proximity by asking her uncomfortable questions, such as whether she feels “obliged” to him, and why she does not like to kiss him (53). The conversation immediately alters the power dynamic between the two riders, so that Tess must defend her repeated dismissals of Alec’s advances. The uncomfortable conversation distracts Tess so that she does not notice when they pass the lane leading back to the d’Urberville home.

Tess does fall asleep on the ride with Alec, but her sleep is not one of ease and reverie as it was during her ride on the wagon. This sleep is entirely due to exhaustion:
She was inexpressibly weary. She had risen at five o’clock every morning of that week, had been on foot the whole of each day, and on this evening had, in addition, walked the three miles to Chaseborough, waited three hours for her neighbours without eating or drinking, her impatience to start home preventing either; she had then walked a mile of the way home, and had undergone the excitement of the quarrel, till, with the slow progress of their steed, it was now nearly one o’clock. Only once, however, was she overcome by actual drowsiness. In that moment of oblivion her head sank gently against him. (54)

The narrator’s long explanation of Tess’s exhaustion emphasizes that her sleep is not a result of feeling comfortable or safe. In that “moment of oblivion” which happens “only once,” Alec attempts to put his arm around Tess which “immediately put[s] her on the defensive” (54). Unlike Tess’s comfortable slumber on the wagon, her sleep while riding with Alec is accidental, and quickly disturbed.

After a quick confrontation with Tess and mollifying her by describing the gifts he has sent to her family, Alec convinces Tess to wait for him while he finds out their exact location in The Chase. Before he leaves, he makes a nest for Tess, which is strikingly similar to the nest Tess creates for Abraham in the wagon: “[He] made a sort of couch or nest for her in the deep mass of dead leaves […] He pulled off a light overcoat that he had worn, and put it round her tenderly” (56). Tess, now warmer and more comfortable than before, begins to rest, especially once she hears “his movements
I contend that Tess’s little nest in The Chase becomes a sort of bedroom because of the comfort, repose, and safety she finds in her bed of leaves and her walls of mist. Gaston Bachelard, in his landmark book *The Poetics of Space*, argues that a home, or any space for that matter, is an imaginary space created by a person: “[…]All really inhabited space bears the notion of home[…] The imagination functions in this direction whenever the human being has found the slightest shelter: we shall see the imagination build ‘walls’ of palpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection—or, just the contrary, tremble behind thick walls, mistrust the staunchest ramparts” (5). As Tess lies in the woods, she “builds walls,” not from shadows, but from the “webs of vapour” which “form[…] veils between the trees” (56). The darkness also protects her: “Tess became invisible” (56). Once invisible and safe, Tess also falls “into reverie,” an activity which Bachelard claims can only take place in the safety of a home: “The house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (6). Tess has created a sort of home for herself, or rather, a bedroom, for, as we have seen, by the late nineteenth century, sleeping was an activity only allowed to take place in the bedroom. When Tess creates this home, she really creates only part of a home, the innermost part: the bedroom. Here, she is able to feel safe, to relax, to fall into reverie, and at last to sleep.

Besides applying Bachelard’s argument of how people create a home or other safe place, I assert that Tess’s bedroom is appropriately placed outside because of her
association with nature. The narrator often remarks on how country women, Tess in particular, seem to be a part of nature:

But those of the other sex were the most interesting of this company of binders, by reason of the charm which is acquired by woman when she becomes part and parcel of outdoor nature, and is not merely an object set down therein as at ordinary times. A field-man is a personality afield; a woman is a portion of the field; she has somehow lost her own margin, imbibed a sense of her surrounding, and assimilated herself with it. (68-9)

This description, while encompassing all of the women in the field, is directed at Tess. The narrator proceeds to mention one or two girls, but then goes on to describe Tess at length, indicating that it is she who “becomes part and parcel of outdoor nature,” who has “imbibed a sense of her surrounding, and assimilated herself with it.” Just as late-Victorian girls assimilate into the surroundings of their bedroom, allowing their identity to become a part of the walls of their private rooms, Tess assimilates her identity into nature.

Tess’s outdoor “bedroom,” the nest in The Chase, reflects her identity of nature and innocence. Her other bedrooms throughout the text fail to provide her the same sense of security. Her bedroom at her family’s home in Marlott cannot reflect her identity, for it serves as a communal bedroom: “Mrs Durbeyfield came into the large bedroom where Tess and all her little brothers and sisters slept” (19). Communal sleep was still common among the working-classes, though it inspired disgust among the
middle-classes, particularly when brothers and sisters slept in the same space. That Abraham, at nine-years-old, still shared a room with his sixteen-year-old sister would undoubtedly have been cause for alarm. The narrator repeats the fact that all the children occupy the same room several more times throughout the text, as if to emphasize the poverty and vulgarity of the Durbeyfield family.

Regardless of the propriety of communal sleep amongst brothers and sisters, Tess does not feel a great connection to her bedroom. The bedroom, shared, effectively becomes no one’s. Only when suffering from the humiliation of a having a child out of wedlock does Tess strive to find comfort in her communal bedroom: “The bedroom which she shared with some of the children formed her retreat more continually than ever. Here, under her few square yards of thatch, she watched winds, and snows, and rains, gorgeous sunsets, and successive moons at their full” (66). While Tess is able to find solitude in the room at times, she finds greater comfort in reflection when walking alone out of doors:

The only exercise that Tess took at this time was after dark; and it was then, when out in the woods, that she seemed least solitary. […] She had no fear of the shadows; her sole idea seemed to be to shun mankind—or rather that cold accretion called the world, which, so terrible in the mass, is so unformidable, even pitiable, in its units. […] Her flexuous and stealthy figure became an integral part of the scene. At times her whimsical fancy would intensify natural processes around her till they seemed a part of her own story. (66-7)
Out of doors, Tess is able to feel solitary but not isolated. She can reflect on the world and feel apart from it, as if she is in a refuge away from the “terrible world.” Tess is able to feel this sense of secure solitude in nature because, as Hardy states, she is an “integral part of the scene.”

To return to the scene in The Chase. Tess carefully creates a “bedroom” in the woods, building “walls” out of vapor, and conceiving of them as inviolable boundaries. Her identity is imbued into her surroundings, as she “becomes a part and parcel of outdoor nature.” I view Alec’s attack on Tess as a rape for many reasons, but primarily because of how I read Tess’s sleeping space. She only becomes comfortable after he leaves; when she accidentally falls asleep in his company, it is a mistake, and a dangerous one, for Alec takes advantage of her unconscious state and tries to caress her. Tess has previously made a “sort of nest” for her brother, believing it to be something safe, something to ensure “that he could not fall” (21). Tess likewise believes that her nest will prevent her from “falling.” Because Tess only falls comfortably asleep when Alec leaves, and because she believes that “nests” prevent falls, and because she is associated with nature, her sleeping space in The Chase seems to become to her an inviolable refuge, a reflection of her identity: her bedroom. It is a different sort of bedroom than the lovely feminine chamber of Jane Eyre in Thornfield, but this simply demonstrates that people of different classes have different sorts of bedrooms;

22 Like Ellen Rooney, I do not believe that rape and seduction are mutually exclusive, a supposition on which most debates regarding this scene are based. Whether or not Alec d’Urberville uses physical violence when he has sex with Tess does not prove one way or another if Tess is raped. Tess may be flattered by Alec’s attention, but the power dynamic between them is hopelessly skewed. He repeatedly manipulates her by demanding “gratitude,” and he forces her into the impossible situation of being isolated in a foreign part of the woods. Tess, even if she submits without violence, is nevertheless forced. She does not come to him willingly, nor with her heart.
regardless of how the bedroom appears, the emotional significance of the personal bedroom does not change.

When Alec returns, he finds Tess peacefully sleeping. As he has done so many times before, he intrudes her privacy, and spies on the unsuspecting girl. Alec has demonstrated throughout the first section of the novel that he does not mind, and in fact, rather enjoys violating Tess’s privacy. Alec, finding the sleeping girl, gazes at her ominously, and slowly bends down to her: “He knelt, and bent lower, till her breath warmed his face, and in a moment his cheek was in contact with hers. She was sleeping soundly, and upon her eyelashes there lingered tears” (57). This contact with Tess, who is “sleeping soundly,” is still a violation; she does not wish him near her, as she proved when she pushed him away as he put his arm around her when they rode together on his horse. Alec completes his long-awaited “ambush” upon Tess, now having found a secluded spot in which to fulfill his desires. Tess’s outdoor bedroom does not protect her as she hopes with her “simple faith” (57). Alec at last has sex with Tess, and whether the act is violent or not, it is still an invasion, and Tess suffers greatly from it.

Immediately following the episode in The Chase, it is clear that Tess’s identity has shattered. She is “Maiden No More” (58), as the title of the succeeding phase explains. As she walks home to Marlott, the author explains that she has suffered a great internal change: “It was terribly beautiful to Tess to-day, for since her eyes last fell upon it she had learnt that the serpent hisses where the sweet birds sings, and her views of life had been totally changed for her by the lesson. Verily another girl than the simple one she had been at home was she who, bowed by thought, stood still here, and
turned to look behind her” (59). The narrator understands the change as a loss of innocence, that the girl who was on the precipice of adulthood, has now become a woman. Yet the change seems greater than that: Tess sees herself as “another girl” altogether. The narrator continues to remark upon Tess’s altered identity: “It is Tess Durbeyfield, otherwise d’Urberville, somewhat changed—the same, but not the same; at the present stage of her existence living as a stranger and an alien here, though it was no strange land that she was in” (69). This remark clearly recalls Jane Eyre’s own question about the “Jane Eyre of yesterday.” Alec’s attack on Tess has done more than rob Tess of her innocence—it has caused her to become a stranger to herself, and to her home. Alec invaded a space that represented Tess’s identity, thus shattering Tess’s sense of self.

Tess does not immediately attempt to rebuild her life; she instead merely exists. She does not even love her baby until it becomes clear that the baby will die. After the death of the baby, Tess at last begins to try to regain her lost self. Interestingly, the first step in the self-reclamation takes place in another bedroom, the bedroom Tess shares with her brothers and sisters. Finally able to see her child as more than an “intrusive creature” (75) and another punishment for her perceived sin, Tess attempts to save it through baptism. Without a priest to perform a proper baptism, Tess takes up the task herself. As she prepares to baptize the baby, Tess exhibits more strength and animation than at any time previous: “The children gazed up at her with more and more reverence, and no longer had a will for questioning. She did not look like Sissy to them now, but as a being large, towering and awful, a divine personage with whom they had nothing in
common” (75). Tess’s courage and personal power was stripped from her during her rape, but this scene indicates that Tess begins to grow, almost literally, and she regains power and strength. The change is not temporary: “The calmness which had possessed Tess since the christening remained with her in the infant’s loss” (75).

The episode in her communal bedroom allows Tess to start to heal, yet she senses that she will never fully regain her identity until she leaves Marlott: “It became evident to her that she could never be really comfortable again in a place which had seen the collapse of her family’s attempt to ‘claim kin’—and through her, even closer union—with the rich d’Urbervilles […] To escape the past and all that appertained thereto was to annihilate it; and to do that she would have to get away” (78). Tess leaves Marlott after two “silent reconstructive years” (79), hoping to find a way to regain her fractured sense of self.

During her recuperative journey, Tess meets and falls in love with Angel Clare, only to have her tenuously rebuilt self shattered once more in another bedroom scene. After their wedding, Angel brings Tess to a house that once belonged to Tess’s d’Urberville ancestors. This house recalls vestiges of Tess’s identity as well, which jars them both when they see the ancestral portraits on the landing: “The unpleasantness of the matter was that, in addition to their effect upon Tess, her fine features were unquestionably traceable in these exaggerated forms” (170). The d’Urberville part of her identity is precisely the one that Tess wishes to forget, so the abrupt confrontation with this house, and all that it represents, “frightens” her (170). Tess and Angel begin to enjoy a companionable evening, washing their hands together and eating their tea off
of the same plate. Just as the two prepare to consummate their marriage, however, Tess reveals her past, and Angel rejects her. Ironically, the bedroom, which previously failed to shelter Tess in The Chase, does not permit their sexual union, even though on this occasion the intercourse would be licit and consensual. Within the house that represents her d’Urberville connection, Tess essentially explains that her connection is closer to the d’Urberville family than Angel previously believed. Angel rejects Tess, believing her identity to be imbued into the walls of the house.

Tess seeks to escape the identity which Angel attached to her in the ancient d’Urberville home. Once he leaves her, she tries to make a life for herself while still idealizing Angel. She at first tries to return to Marlott, but finds it unwelcoming: “Tess retreated upstairs, and beheld casually that the beds had been shifted, and new arrangements made. Her old bed had been adapted for two younger children. There was no place for her now” (202). The old bedroom which once allowed Tess to begin rebuilding her shattered self now provides no refuge. Tess endures backbreaking labor at a farm far from home as a sort of self-imposed penance. When Tess’s father dies, she is compelled to once again return to the childhood home, where she confronts Alec, and, in a moment of privacy in the house at Marlott, comes to realize that the episode in The Chase was never her fault, and that Angel is wrong for deserting her. Tess finds the ability to reconstruct her strong, indignant girlhood self while sitting alone in the house where she was born: “Her husband, Angel Clare himself, had, like others, dealt out hard measure to her—surely he had! Never in her life—she could swear it from the bottom of her soul—had she ever intended to do wrong; yet these hard judgments had
come” (281). Tess, in her white dress at the country dance in the meadow years before, had felt the strength to be angry with Angel for deserting her. Her dignity begins to be restored after her months of hard labor; she needs the privacy and safety of her temporarily empty childhood home to at last rebuild the shards of her broken identity, and be angry with her idol, and forgive her blameless self.

While Tess begins to regain her sense of self at her home at Marlott, she nevertheless submits to live with Alec d’Urberville in order to help her destitute family. Yet when Angel returns, Tess boldly chooses to be with him, and breaks forever her link with Alec. In a striking reversal of bedroom violence, Tess stabs Alec in his bedroom at the Herons. It seems only fitting that Tess comes to Alec in his bedchamber and penetrates him, permanently ending a life he once enjoyed; Alec did the very same to Tess when she was a girl.

Free of her connection to Alec, Tess spends several days with Angel at last enjoying the conjugal bliss so long denied her. Tess desires to sleep “under the trees” (306) in her true bedroom, but Angel insists that they return to a deserted mansion. Because of the deserted house’s “absolute seclusion” (307) and its total anonymity, Tess and Angel suspend their concerns about Tess’s crime, their future, and their past. The house in which Angel and Tess stay has no connection to either of them—it allows them to forget the reality of their situations: “By tacit consent they hardly once spoke of any incident of the past subsequent to their wedding-day. The gloomy intervening time seemed to sink into chaos, over which the present and prior times closed as if it never had been” (307-8). The anonymous house provides a temporary place of solace; but the
refuge is a fleeting illusion, it is not real, and they cannot remain there; their identities, particularly Tess’s, are found in other places.

The night after Tess and Angel are compelled to leave the deserted mansion, they sleep at Stonehenge. Tess feels fully comfortable: “I very much like to be here,” she murmured. ‘It is so solemn and lonely—after my great happiness—with nothing but the sky above my face’” (311). Tess enjoys her bed at Stonehenge for she has returned to her bedroom in nature which most closely reflects her identity. When the police come for her, Angel implores them, “Let her finish her sleep!” (312). At last, Tess is allowed to sleep unmolested in her bedroom. Her bedroom shelters her, and the men do not trespass upon it. Her identity does not have to be violated once more. When she wakes, Tess is not disturbed by the arrival of the policemen: “‘It is as it should be,’ she murmured. ‘Angel—I am almost glad—yes, glad! This happiness could not have lasted—it was too much—I have had enough’ […] She stood up, shook herself, and went forward, neither of the men having moved. ‘I am ready,’ she said quietly” (312-13). Tess has finally recovered from the invasion of her body and her identity. Sleeping outside in her “bedroom” once more, she demonstrates that she has healed, that her bedroom now successfully shelters her reclaimed identity, and that it provides her with a refuge from the world.

Though Tess does not have a personal bedroom in the way that Jane Eyre does, Tess has a personal sleeping space which she imbues with emotional significance. When that space is violently invaded, Tess’s identity is fractured, and she no longer knows herself. Through a series of important episodes in other bedrooms, Tess
gradually recovers from her attack. The bedroom at her childhood home in Marlott allows a site for her re-growth, namely when Tess christens her baby, and later when she comes to see herself as blameless, and Angel as having done wrong. She suffers a temporary setback when Angel rejects her sexual offering in their honeymoon bedroom, having discovered that his playful choice of the d’Urberville home truly does reflect Tess’s identity in a way that causes them both intense sorrow. Tess recovers her sexual control over Alec when she stabs him in his own bed, thus violently severing any power he had over her and permanently prohibiting him from ever threatening her identity again. Though she stays temporarily in an anonymous home, Tess understands that the house is only an illusion of reality. After a night spent in her true bedroom in nature where she sleeps without intrusion, she gains the strength to return to the world a full woman.

The Victorian bedroom symbolized a refuge from even the public world of the rest of the home, though the home was the first defense from the threat of public society. A respite in the bedroom was intended to prepare one for re-entry into the public sphere; Tess’s refreshing, recuperative night on the altar at Stonehenge, in the bedroom she has constructed for herself, allows her to go resignedly and relieved, with the policemen.
CHAPTER FOUR

*Dracula: The Dangers of Sleeping Unwisely*

“Let me advise you, my dear young friend—nay, let me warn you with all seriousness, that should you leave these rooms you will not by any chance go to sleep in any other part of the castle. It is old, and has many memories, and there are bad dreams for those who sleep unwisely. Be warned! Should sleep now or ever overcome you, or be like to do so, then haste to your own chamber or to these rooms, for your rest will then be safe.”

--*Bram Stoker*

In Dracula’s warning to Jonathan Harker in the lines above, he cautions Jonathan to find safety within the walls of Jonathan’s apartment, which includes a dining room and bedroom. While Jonathan is free to roam the castle during the day, he must return to the safety of the bedroom to sleep. Dracula has forbidden the other vampires in the castle to attack Jonathan in the rooms designated for Jonathan alone, insisting, with undertones of homoeroticism, that “this man [Jonathan] belongs to me” (62). Jonathan finds temporary safety within the walls of his own bedroom in Dracula’s castle, though when he fails to heed Dracula’s warning, he faces a strange and startling violation.

In Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, three characters are attacked as they sleep: Jonathan Harker, Lucy Westenra, and Mina Harker *née* Murray. Their attacks are followed by the most dramatic identity changes seen thus far in these three novels: they begin to transform into the Undead. The rampant violence, recurrent attacks, and the victims’ seeming inability to fend off the vampires render this novel horrifying, and also provide an intriguing capstone to this study of violence in bedrooms. The plot of this novel
arguably revolves around Dracula’s nightly attacks on Lucy and Mina, so the sheer volume of material for study makes this novel highly appropriate. It also demonstrates the conflict between the two schools of thought that Groucho Marx termed “monobedders” and “polybedders” in his 1930 book *Beds* (Wright 200), that is, those who advocated for communal sleep versus those who abhorred such a thought and preferred separate beds, or even separate rooms for dormant bodies. In *Dracula*, Lucy and Mina often seek safety through communal sleep, even allowing men to sit by their bedsides. The privacy of the bedroom is intruded upon, but often in order to keep its occupant safe. Yet the bedroom seems to be the place where the individual is in the most danger, and sleep itself becomes a harrowing experience.

The attack upon Jonathan Harker acts as a sort of preface for the attacks that Lucy and Mina suffer later in the novel. His experience reveals the eroticism of the attacks, the victim’s helplessness, and the vulnerability of an unconscious sleeping person. On the first night that Jonathan spends in Count Dracula’s castle he begins to sense the danger within the castle: “I entered my bedroom….I am all in a sea of wonders. I doubt; I fear; I think strange things which I dare not confess to my own soul. God keep me, if only for the sake of those dear to me!” (43). Upon entering his bedroom, Jonathan begins to reflect on the eeriness and bleakness of the castle. The longer he remains in the castle, the more suspicious he becomes. His curiosity concerns Dracula, who warns Jonathan to check his wanderings, particularly at night: “‘Let me warn you with all seriousness, that should you leave these rooms you will not by any chance go to sleep in any other part of the castle. […] There are bad dreams for those
who sleep unwisely. Be warned! Should sleep now or ever overcome you, or be like to do so, then haste to your own chamber or to these rooms, for your rest will then be safe” (57). Dracula knows that, within his castle at least, sleep places a person in extreme danger, particularly when one leaves the safety of his or her own individual bedroom. Later in the novel the bedroom does not provide the same impenetrability, but Jonathan’s experience reveals that even Dracula considers the bedroom as a space meant to protect its occupant. Dracula has his own reasons for desiring to keep Jonathan “safe” in the bedroom, but it is significant that he specifies the bedroom as Jonathan’s space in which he can be particularly secure.

Out of his growing suspicion and disgust for the Count, Jonathan rejects Dracula’s warning to sleep only within his chambers, and wanders the castle one night after he watches Dracula climb out of the castle in “his lizard fashion” (58). Jonathan finds his way into a new wing of the house, and relaxes in the “soft quietude” of this space. Jonathan remembers Dracula’s warning, but takes “a pleasure in disobeying it” (60), and falls asleep. This lapse proves almost fatal, as Jonathan is attacked by three vampire women. As with the attacks on Mina and Lucy later in the novel, Jonathan goes into a sort of trance, and cannot be sure whether he sleeps: “I suppose I must have fallen asleep; I hope so, but I fear, for all that followed was startlingly real” (61). The extraordinary experience so greatly frightens Jonathan that he tries to convince himself that he dreams. As the attack begins, the three vampire women inspire both lust and repulsion within Jonathan: “There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked,
burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips” (61). As in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, the victim of the attack feels a degree of attraction for his or her assailant. In *Dracula*, there is little dispute about Jonathan’s agency in the attack: though he does “desire” the women, this is a part of, as Mina later terms it, the vampires’ “horrible curse” (287).

The sexual desire that the vampire women arouse in Jonathan demonstrates the erotic nature of these attacks. Jonathan is made to be the helpless rape victim as the vampire women keep him in a trance of “delightful anticipation” (61) and slowly bend over his prostrate body:

The fair girl went on her knees, and bent over me, fairly gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal […] Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed about to fasten on my throat. Then she paused, and I could hear the churning sound of her tongue as it licked her teeth and lips, and could feel the hot breath on my neck […] I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with beating heart. (62)
The gender role dynamics in this scene are reversed: Jonathan lies prone, as unaware of his fate as a proper Victorian virgin, submissive and “waiting”; meanwhile, the dominant, active woman mounts him and prepares to penetrate him and draw blood.

Dracula interrupts the attack before the women can complete their oral “rape” of Jonathan, but he nevertheless suffers an identity shift. Luckily for Jonathan, he does not transform into a vampire as Mina and Lucy do. Instead, upon his return to England, Jonathan is a bed-ridden invalid, starkly different from the enthusiastic young man who ventured into Transylvania for his first assignment as a newly-licensed solicitor. Mina describes his wasted condition: “I found my dear one, oh, so thin and pale and weak-looking. All the resolution has gone out of his dear eyes, and that quiet dignity which I told you was in his face has vanished. He is only a wreck of himself” (122). Mina slowly nurses him back to health, but it is not until his suspicions of what he suffered in Transylvania are confirmed by Dr. Van Helsing that he begins to recover emotionally from his attack: “She showed me in the doctor’s letter that all I wrote down was true. It seems to have made a new man of me. It was the doubt as to the reality of the whole thing that knocked me over. I felt impotent, and in the dark, and distrustful. But, now that I know, I am not afraid, even of the Count […] Doctor, you don’t know what it is to doubt everything, even yourself” (197-8).

The fantastical horror of Jonathan’s attack causes him to doubt his own sense of self. He grounds his sense of self in his gender as a man, but his doubts about what happened to him cripple him. Instead of sharing a conjugal bedroom with his new wife, she sits by his bedside in a hospital room, nursing him back to health. His sense of self
and his belief in his manhood are at last restored only after Dr. Van Helsing assures him that his experience was real.

Jonathan’s sufferings foreshadow the attacks that Mina and Lucy endure in subsequent chapters. His comparatively minor identity shift signals that Mina and Lucy’s identities will likewise undergo a transformation, though their transformations are much more grave. Interestingly, Jonathan attributes his loss of selfhood to a crippling sense of self-doubt, an ignorance of what truly happened to him. Yet Jonathan does not choose to enlighten Mina later in the novel about his attempts to hunt out Dracula, and she suffers for that ignorance. Jonathan and his companions decide that Mina is better left not knowing their plans regarding Dracula, but, as other scholars have pointed out, it is her ignorance, and her exclusion, which leave her vulnerable to Dracula’s most gruesome attack.

The novel shifts to focus on Lucy and Mina, and the significance of Jonathan’s early experiences is not fully understood until Dr. Van Helsing enters the scene, confirms Jonathan’s fears and diagnoses Lucy’s “illness.” Prior to this diagnosis, Lucy’s problems are a mystery for quite some time. Like Jonathan, Lucy is attacked when she does not sleep in her proper sleeping space. Lucy sleepwalks, which causes her roommate Mina great anxiety: “Then, too, Lucy, although she is so well, has lately taken to her old habit of walking in her sleep. Her mother has spoken to me about it, and we have decided that I am to lock the door of our room every night” (93). That Mina feels compelled to confine Lucy within their shared bedroom indicates societal

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23 See Thomas B. Myers, “Good Men and Monsters: The Defenses of Dracula,” for more on the men’s decision to exclude Mina from their plans.
concerns about a sleeper remaining in one’s appropriate bed. Mina and Lucy already infringe upon certain social mores about sharing a bedroom, but, as Lucy explains, their communal sleep only strengthens the bond of their friendship: “Mina, we have told all our secrets to each other since we were children; we have slept together and eaten together, and laughed and cried together” (77). Communal sleep also helps to protect Lucy, who, by sleepwalking, flirting with an American, and expressing her hope that a woman should be allowed to marry three men at once, appears inclined to take risks and push the boundaries of proper Victorian female behavior.

The descriptions of the attacks in the bedroom in Dracula deviate from those in Jane Eyre and Tess of the d’Urbervilles in that the reader is not provided with a detailed description of the bedroom itself. Mina explains that she comes to stay with Lucy and her mother at “the house at the Crescent in which they have rooms” (83) in Whitby. The room does not truly belong to either Lucy or Mina, although arguably Lucy sustains a greater emotional connection to the room since she lived there before Mina comes to join her. Mina makes it explicit that the girls have separate beds, and that the room has a fireplace, at least one window with a window-seat, and a door leading into a corridor onto which other bedrooms open. But Mina does not describe the types of curtains, rugs, or washstands as Jane does. This lack of detail does not necessarily signify an emotional disconnect with the bedroom, but perhaps is a result of having multiple narrators of the novel, rather than the observant Jane Eyre and the omniscient narrator of Tess of the d’Urbervilles.
Despite Mina’s precautions to keep Lucy safely confined while she sleepwalks, Lucy manages to escape the locked bedroom, leave the house, and find her way into the ancient churchyard at Whitby. Sleeping in a space other than her designated bedroom allows Dracula to find and attack her. Mina catches a glimpse of the figure bent over Lucy’s prostrate body, but when she finally reaches Lucy, Mina’s only worry is for what others will think of Lucy’s sleepwalking adventure: “I was filled with anxiety about Lucy, not only for her health, lest she should suffer from the exposure, but for her reputation in case the story should get wind” (112). Being abroad at night has injured Lucy, although not in the way that Mina thinks. Lucy is attacked outside, like Tess Durbeyfield, though Lucy does not have Tess’s affinity for the natural world. Lucy is not attacked in a bedroom of any kind, but the penetration of her sleeping body initiates a disturbing change in the once-happy girl, and instigates a series of increasingly traumatic attacks in Lucy’s bedroom.

Mina increases the security of their room, but Lucy no longer passively accepts the enclosure: “I shall lock the door and secure the key the same as before, though I do not expect any trouble to-night. My expectations were wrong, for twice during the night I was wakened by Lucy trying to get out. She seemed, even in her sleep, to be a little impatient at finding the door shut, and went back to bed under a sort of protest” (113). The first indication that Lucy has begun to change is her “sort of protest” against being confined within the bedroom. At this point in the novel, the sleeper is only vulnerable when he or she leaves the safety of the bedroom. Lucy’s unconscious desire
to leave and seek Dracula once more is dangerous, but Mina temporarily keeps her safe
by locking the bedroom door and impeding Lucy’s exit.

When Dracula is unable to lure Lucy from her bedroom, he resorts to attacking
the bedroom itself through its various apertures. He attempts to break into the bedroom
through the window while he is in the form of a bat, though once more Mina is able to
keep the bedroom secure: “Again I awoke in the night, and found Lucy sitting up in
bed, still asleep, pointing to the window. I got up quietly, and pulling aside the blind,
looked out […] Between me and the moonlight flitted a great bat, coming quite close,
but was, I suppose frightened at seeing me, and flitted away across the harbor towards
the Abbey” (113). Dracula, in the form of the bat, is temporarily frightened off by the
presence of another person within his victim’s bedroom.

Yet Mina cannot always remain within the bedroom to help keep Lucy safe. As
Mina returns home one early evening, she looks up to find Lucy at the open window
with the bat perched beside her on the windowsill: “There distinctly was Lucy with her
head lying up against the side of the window-sill and her eyes shut. She was fast asleep,
and by her, seated on the window-sill, was something that looked like a good-sized
bird” (114). Having once found his way in through an open window, Dracula continues
to attempt to break into the bedroom, and though he is thwarted by the window-glass,
he tries “scratching or flapping at the window” (127) in the form of a bat.

The continued attacks take their toll on Lucy, and she begins to waste away.
Mina anxiously watches as “all the time the roses in [Lucy’s] cheeks are fading, and she
gets weaker and more languid day by day” (115). It is not long before the heroes of the
novel, Dr. Seward and Dr. Van Helsing, are called in to help the languishing girl. Dr. Seward’s reaction demonstrates the extent of the physical change in Lucy: “Van Helsing and I were shown up to Lucy’s room. If I was shocked when I saw her yesterday, I was horrified when I saw her to-day. She was ghastly, chalkily pale; the red seemed to have gone even from her lips and gums, and the bones of her face stood out prominently; her breathing was painful to hear” (136). The dramatic change in Lucy prompts the men to begin sitting up with her through the night, working in shifts so that someone is constantly awake by her bedside. Knowing that Dr. Seward will attend her throughout the night gives Lucy great comfort: “And to-night I shall not fear to sleep, since he is close at hand and within call” (142).

There appears to be no sense that propriety is violated by having an unmarried woman attended by a revolving set of likewise unmarried men as she sleeps, which is interesting for earlier in the novel, Mina disparages the notion of men watching their fiancées sleep: “Some of the ‘New Women’ writers will some day start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the New Woman won’t condescend in future to accept; she will do the proposing herself” (109). Many scholars have compared the putative virtue of Lucy and Mina, and have argued that, for late-Victorian audiences at least, Mina, with her submissive devotion to her husband, modest daubing of her feet with mud when venturing abroad at night, and other “godly” attributes, would have been considered the more virtuous woman. Taking into consideration Mina’s criticisms of the “New Woman” and her attitude regarding men watching women sleep, the episodes in which
Lucy sleeps under the watchful eyes of Dr. Seward, Quincey Morris, and Dr. Van Helsing perhaps are meant to reinforce Lucy’s inferior morality. If allowing men to watch a woman sleep somehow affects Victorian readers’ opinions of a woman’s character, this suggests that by the late nineteenth century, sleep was considered to be a private act regardless of whether it took place in a bedroom. Mina believes that men should not watch women sleep unless they are married, so Dracula’s attack on the sleeping Lucy, even though it is outside of her bedroom, indicates that he violates her privacy as well. Dr. Seward and Dr. Van Helsing also intrude upon Lucy’s privacy, but they do so with her permission and out of concern for her health and safety.

Lucy benefits greatly from her guardians’ vigilance, and she begins to regain strength. She even begins to exhibit the same improvement experienced by Jonathan upon his return to England: “Four days and nights of peace. I am getting so strong again that I hardly know myself. It is as if I had passed through some long nightmare, and had just awakened to see the beautiful sunshine and feel the fresh air of the morning around me. I have a dim half-remembrance of long, anxious times of waiting and fearing” (150). Lucy’s injured identity begins to heal, and she begins to recognize her true, happy self once more. Without Dracula to intrude upon her private rest, Lucy slowly recuperates. Yet when she is finally given the privacy to recuperate completely, the solitude proves fatal. Dracula breaks into her room through the window in the form

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24 While having a doctor remain by a patient’s bedside would not necessarily have offended Victorian sensibilities, it is important to consider that Dr. Seward and Quincey Morris both love Lucy, and have proposed to her. Later, Dr. Van Helsing uses his status as a doctor to defend his violation of propriety as he enters Mina’s room, but this is likewise problematic because he loves Mina.
of a “gaunt, gray wolf” (157). Lucy, like Jane Eyre, faints, and cannot later recall the events of her attack.

The final attack on Lucy transforms her into a vampire. Significantly, this final attack, which is undoubtedly the most dramatic, occurs in her bedroom. The violence of the attack is highlighted by Dracula’s presence as a wolf, a creature much more terrifying and powerful than a bat. Lucy’s transformation into a vampire is a more literal embodiment of the kind of identity changes experienced by Tess Durbeyfield and Jane Eyre, and unfortunately for Lucy, it is permanent. Lucy has no chance of regaining herself, but instead becomes a child-attacking monster. Dr. Seward explains the extent of the change in Lucy: “My own heart grew cold as ice, and I could hear the gasp of Arthur, as we recognized the features of Lucy Westenra. Lucy Westenra, but yet how changed. The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness” (218).

Christopher Bentley and other scholars have interpreted Lucy’s vampiric “voluptuousness” as symbolic of Victorian fears about the overly-sexed woman. Lucy, who has “succumbed” to Dracula multiple times, and had the blood of three different men transfused into her body, now becomes sexually ravenous and aggressive like the vampire women encountered by Jonathan in the early chapters of the novel. Lucy becomes “dangerously” sexual after the intrusions of multiple men, including the monstrous Dracula, into her bedroom. Her identity as a chaste virgin is not only shattered, but re-formed into the utter opposite: a child-murdering, raging female rapist.
Because Lucy’s transformation is so complete, she cannot regain any vestige of her previous self.

Significantly, Lucy has a new “sleeping space” that fosters her transformed identity: her leaden coffin. Dr. Van Helsing explicitly states that the vampire’s tomb is a home: “As he spoke he made a comprehensive sweep of his arm to designate what to a vampire was ‘home’” (209). The transformed Lucy is compelled to leave her bedroom in the house in the Crescent neighborhood, but she adapts her new sleeping space of the coffin to reflect her identity as a vampire. Having comprehended that Lucy has transformed into one of the Undead, Dr. Van Helsing knows that he will find her in her coffin-bedroom. To stop this “nightmare of Lucy” (221), Dr. Seward, Dr. Van Helsing, Arthur Holmwood, and Quincey Morris must “kill her in her sleep” (209). Lucy is transformed into a sexualized beast because of the attacks she suffers while asleep, and it is once again in her sleep that she is changed from a vampire to a human, though the effort requires killing her. That these transformations occur as she sleeps clearly reinforces the notion of the vulnerability of the sleeping body, particularly one that is left without the comfort of a companion.

Yet Dracula’s power cannot be thwarted even by the presence of a husband in the conjugal bed, as demonstrated by his attacks on Mina. His initial attacks take place when Mina is alone; a crucial difference between this attack and the assaults on Jonathan and Lucy is that Mina does not make the mistake of sleeping in a space other than her bedroom. Mina’s attack most closely resembles those of Jane Eyre and Tess Durbeyfield because Mina has an expectation of privacy and security, for she is within
the walls of her bedroom. Dracula is not typically able to attack a victim in his or her bedroom unless he is “invited,” but the lunatic Renfield, who lives in the house where Mina is staying, allows Dracula to enter the house in the form of mist. Like Jonathan and Lucy, Mina believes that her attack was a dream:

Suddenly the horror burst upon me that it was thus that Jonathan had seen those awful women growing into reality through the whirling mist in the moonlight, and in my dream I must have fainted, for all became black darkness. The last conscious effort which imagination made was to show me a livid white face bending over me out of the mist. I must be careful of such dreams, for they would unseat one’s reason if there were too much of them. (262)

This melding of dreams and reality seems to be a common coping mechanism of sorts for the sleeping victims, who seem unwilling at first to accept that their attacks actually occur.

After the first attack, Mina begins to deteriorate just as Lucy had. Renfield describes her wasted appearance: “When Mrs. Harker came in to see me this afternoon she wasn’t the same; it was like tea after the teapot had been watered” (281). Mina, though not quite a “nightmare” of herself, is certainly a “watered-down” version of the vigorous and active woman she was just days earlier. The discovery that Mina was likely attacked by Dracula inspires Dr. Seward and Dr. Van Helsing to invade the sanctity of her bedroom as they once did with Lucy. Dr. Seward recalls that “it is

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25 This attack also greatly resembles Bertha Mason’s attack on Jane Eyre. Jane believes that she sees a “vampyre” looming over her in the dark, and then loses consciousness.
unusual to break into a lady’s room,” and worries that the intrusion will “frighten her terribly” (282). Dr. Van Helsing brushes these concerns aside: “This is life and death. All chambers are alike to the doctor; and even were they not they are all as one to me tonight” (282). It is intriguing that although Mina shares the bedroom with her husband, the doctors consider the room to be hers, and worry only about her fright at their intrusion. Although both men are doctors, only Dr. Seward feels the violation of propriety at entering this lady’s bedroom. Dr. Van Helsing’s assurance that “all chambers are alike to the doctor” rings false in this context, for he does not view Mina as a mere patient: he loves her as a man loves a woman. His intrusion into the bedroom seems invasive, particularly because both men know that Jonathan is in the room with Mina.

Whether Dr. Van Helsing is sincere in his true reasons for breaking into the marital bedchamber, the resulting scene before the two doctors justifies their unauthorized entrance into the bedroom:

On the bed beside the window lay Jonathan Harker, his face flushed and breathing heavily as though in a stupor. Kneeling on the near edge of the bed facing outwards was the white-clad figure of his wife. By her side stood a tall, thin man, clad in black […] With his left hand he held both Mrs. Harker’s hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man’s bare breast which was shown by his
torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten’s nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink.

(283)

Instead of finding Mina and Jonathan in a conjugal embrace, the doctors find Jonathan lying ineffectual and impotent on the bed while his wife is in the arms of another man. Mina, “white-clad” and virginal, has her arms forcibly outstretched, Christ-like, while performing what Christopher Bentley terms “a symbolic act of enforced fellatio” (29). Jonathan’s impotence suggests that his marriage with Mina, which Phyllis Roth describes as “spiritualized beyond credibility” (59), has never been consummated. This “rape” of Mina is thus her first true sexual experience, which accounts for her “white-clad” body “smeared with blood.” Mina’s innocence, epitomized in the image of the kitten, is destroyed by the violence and force of Dracula.

The realization of what has happened to her causes Mina unspeakable grief. Dr. Seward describes the depth of her despair: “Her eyes were mad with terror. Then she put before her face her poor crushed hands, which bore on their whiteness the red mark of the Count’s terrible grip, and from behind them came a low desolate wail which made the terrible scream seem only the quick expression of an endless grief” (283).

The repetition of the image of the “red mark” on Mina’s white skin reiterates the destruction of her virginity. Mina’s scream of “endless grief” emphasizes her agony. She views herself as “unclean,” a phrase she exclaims when relating the attack, and again later when Dr. Van Helsing presses the Host to her forehead. Although the doctors and Jonathan assure her that she is still “clean,” it is not long before they must
acknowledge that she is undergoing the same changes as Lucy did before her: “Madam Mina, our poor, dear Madam Mina is changing […] I can see the characteristics of the vampire coming in her face. It is now but very, very slight; but it is to be seen if we have eyes to notice without to prejudge. Her teeth are sharper, and at times her eyes are more hard. But these are not all, there is to her the silence now often; as so it was with Miss Lucy” (319). The men are unwilling to allow Mina to suffer the same fate as Lucy, and endeavor to kill Dracula.

In order to restore her identity as lovely, virginal, human Mina, the men take her with them on a journey into Transylvania. Mina actively fights the vampire’s curse, aiding the men by “seeing” into Dracula’s thoughts, and protecting them by refusing to allow them to share any information regarding their plot against Dracula lest he likewise “see” into her thoughts. Mina learns to resist the vampire women who come to lure her away from the men. Her struggle to restore her identity is aided by the novel’s heroes who eventually kill Dracula. Dracula’s death releases Mina from his curse, and symbolically restores her purity: “The snow is not more stainless than her forehead! The curse has passed away” (368). Her white forehead, now free of the red mark where the Host burnt into her skin, reflects her re-purified identity.

The three attacks on sleeping people in Dracula demonstrate several cultural attitudes about privacy, sleep, and bedrooms. The attacks on Jonathan and Lucy seem to emphasize the importance of people sleeping in their designated sleeping spaces. This extreme regimenting of sleeping spaces indicates the level of attention late-Victorians gave to sleep. Tom Crook outlines the Victorian’s obsession with separating
sleepers: “The spatial ordering of sleep was a key means through which this self-consciously civilizing society confronted some of its manifold discontents. By the end of the period, sleeping space was very much what it is today: a space at once privatized, medicalized, and psychologized” (16). Yet Dracula challenges the separation of sleepers as well. Mina and Lucy share a room, and as I have discussed, unmarried men are permitted to watch these women as they sleep.

The novel addresses the contemporary debate about people sleeping in designated private spaces while also acknowledging the safety of communal sleep. Perhaps because this debate remains unresolved in the novel, the connection between an individual and his or her bedroom is not as explicit as in Jane Eyre and Tess of the d’Urbervilles. The bedrooms are not described with the same level of detail as in the previous two novels, although this is likely due to the difference in genre: Jane Eyre and Tess of the d’Urbervilles are romantic novels, while Dracula is a sensational “collection of documents.” Dracula lacks a single narrator, so the realistic attention to surroundings is superseded by the mystery and thrills of the story. The attacks on the sleeping victims nevertheless follow the pattern of the violations in Jane Eyre and Tess of the d’Urbervilles: an intrusion on the privacy of the person’s sleeping space, followed by a sexual attack, after which the victim suffers an identity transformation, and must leave the safety of the home to regain her identity. Dracula dramatizes the identity transformations of the victims who change physically as well as emotionally, which allows for a deeper consideration of the changes suffered by Jane and Tess.
CONCLUSION

Sweet Dreams

The image of the violation of a sleeping woman appears with a surprising regularity in art and literature throughout the nineteenth century and before. In 1781, Henry Fuseli painted his masterpiece, *The Nightmare*, which depicted the disturbing dreams of a sleeping woman, including a haunting horse’s head looming in the darkness and an incubus sitting on her chest. The myth of the incubus (a male demon who has intercourse with female sleepers) stretches back to the Middle Ages, so the notion of sexual attack during sleep is nothing new.

Attacks on sleepers in their bedrooms can be found in literature within fifty years of the writing of *Jane Eyre*, including Ambrosio’s rape of Antonia in M.G. Lewis’s novel *The Monk* (1796), the monster’s fateful murder of Elizabeth Frankenstein on her wedding night in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), and Porphyro’s “hoodwinking” of Madeline in John Keats’s 1819 poem *The Eve of St. Agnes*. With the arguable exception of Madeline, the attacks cost these women their lives; there are no redemptive journeys to regain selfhood in these stories. That these women’s lives abruptly end after their sexual attacks suggest that a woman’s identity irrevocably changed after her initial sexual encounter with a man. As a virgin, a girl had the opportunity to marry and pursue the admittedly limited opportunities of a Victorian woman, but once that virginity was lost, a woman’s identity became defined by that sexual encounter. Even for a victim of a sexual

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assault, this identity was often that of the “fallen woman,” a woman who could never reclaim the same purity and potential as an unsullied virgin.

Yet what the novels of this study reveal is that, by the time Brontë was writing *Jane Eyre*, a woman who had experienced a sexual encounter, even one that was forced upon her, could now be redeemed. Her identity no longer became irreparably bound up in her lost virginity, but she could heal and recreate a life that once seemed irretrievable. The place which most effectively fostered this re-growth was her personal, sanctified, private, protected bedroom. The bedroom acted at once to both protect and reflect the many facets of a girl’s identity, including her intelligence, strength, resolve, tenacity, and beauty of spirit.

What can be misunderstood or overlooked in *Jane Eyre*, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, and *Dracula* is the profound impact the intrusions into the bedrooms have upon the girls. Understanding the cultural importance of the bedroom allows us to intently examine the attacks on the girls in these texts and to interpret them as erotic violations, if not rapes. The mid-nineteenth-century cultural value of a personal bedroom to a girl who had always been denied a room of her own would have been great, and the violation of that space would have been devastating.

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane clearly values the room as a sanctuary, and it holds emotional significance for her. The trespass of the room would impact Jane certainly, but the violation of her own body and privacy affects her even more. Yet in their haste to understand Bertha’s character, many scholars fail to realize the impact that the invasion of Jane’s room and her body has upon Jane herself. Beginning with a study of the space
in which this attack takes place helps to point to the sexual nature of the attack, and its subsequent effect on Jane’s psyche.

Bertha’s attacks on Jane have become misconstrued, and are now either ignored, as in the 2011 movie version of *Jane Eyre*, or only considered to further understand Bertha’s mental illness. Jane’s distress is recognized, but it is often attributed to Rochester’s revelation of his previous marriage. Even when Jane proves the reality of her attack by producing the torn wedding veil, Rochester attempts to disregard her concerns and removes her from the solitary bedroom until he can marry her. Jane senses that something has changed within her as she looks in the mirror dressed in her wedding gown, but that feeling is ignored not only by Rochester, but by critics as well. Scholars have neglected to consider the magnitude of Jane’s fear during the attack, as well as the chronology of Bertha’s attack on Jane and Jane’s subsequent sentiment that she is no longer herself. The popular interpretation of Bertha as Jane’s avatar goes beyond the text in a way that I find irresponsible. This reading disregards the terror, pain, and aftermath of the attack on Jane. We would never overlook such an attack on a girl today. Feminist studies have changed the way in which we think about the victims of rape and sexual assault, even when the perpetrator of the attack is a woman.

In the introduction to their book *Rape and Representation*, which addresses scenes of rape in society and literature including *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver take issue with society’s simultaneous acceptance as natural, or dismissal as inconsequential, of sexual violence against women. They argue that rape has become “so pervasive and so invisible a theme” in literature that it can often become
“unreadable” (3). They write: “Over and over in the texts explored here, rape exists as an absence or gap that is both product and source of textual anxiety, contradiction, or censorship” (3). The account of the sexual assault that Jane suffers is a gap in the text perhaps because of Brontë’s adherence to propriety, and her inability to explicitly detail such an assault. Though Brontë may have had qualms about describing a woman sexually assaulting another woman, modern scholars should not have the same concerns about exploring the implications of a woman entering another woman’s bedroom, tearing her wedding veil, and thrusting a candle into her face.

While the sexual nature of the attack is overlooked in Jane Eyre, the coercion and malice of Alec’s attack on Tess is likewise ignored or dismissed. As Higgins and Silver explain, women are today still called upon to prove their innocence in rape trials by describing their “resistance” to an assault, while “men’s intentions and sexual history are usually not part of the record” (2). A detailed exploration into Alec’s behavior prior to the episode in The Chase reveals his predatory tactics as he stalks and spies upon Tess. An understanding of the late-nineteenth-century conception of the impenetrable bedroom coupled with Bachelard’s argument that we “construct” our sense of “home” even from the “slightest shelter” (Bachelard 5) highlights Tess’s belief in her own safety and desire for privacy. Though Tess may not use violence against Alec, she demonstrates her resistance to his advances by building a bedroom in nature. His motives are tinged with wickedness and deceit when he purposefully gets lost in The Chase, and manipulates Tess’s sense of obligation to him by explaining all that he has done for her family.
A significant pattern among these three novels appears when examining the attack scenes: a woman’s bedroom is entered, she is attacked, she loses consciousness, and after the attack she feels as though her identity has changed. Recognizing this pattern helps to identify that a sexual attack has taken place in assaults which are only vaguely described or alluded to. Except for the attack on Jonathan Harker, the attacks in Dracula are not explicitly sexual, but by observing the pattern that occurs after the attacks on Lucy and Mina, it is clear that the girls are sexually assaulted as are Jane Eyre and Tess Durbeyfield.

While the pattern is observed in each of these three works, certain novels emphasize one aspect of the pattern. The transformations of the victims in Dracula, for instance, externalize the subtler internal identity changes experienced by Tess and Jane after their attacks. Jane’s and Tess’s personal connections to their bedrooms make explicit what is implied in Lucy’s and Mina’s attitudes toward their bedrooms, which they use for diary and letter-writing, inherently personal and private activities. The bedrooms of Jane, Lucy, and Mina, all members of the middle and upper-classes, point towards how a person of the working class, Tess Durbeyfield, might find the same sense of solitude and protection in a bedroom that she is obligated to make, having no other private space of her own. Taken all together, the patterns of assault in these novels help to reveal what may not at first be apparent in the other novels.

Scholarship on privacy in the Victorian Era often revolves around the separation of work and domestic life, the public and private spheres, and the burgeoning conception
of the “home.” Yet what I have attempted to do in this thesis is to explore the privacy of the individual, rather than the privacy of the family. The growth of the suburbs, the elimination of family apartments over doctors’ offices and shop fronts and the removal of the wife from the workspace have been cited as contributing to the privacy of the home and family in the nineteenth century. But the separation of sleepers into distinct bedrooms has only just begun to be considered in a similar physical manifestation of a cultural investment in personal privacy, even for children and adolescents. Within the privacy of a bedroom, a person could indulge in activities of selfhood, such as diary-keeping, reflection, grooming, dressing, and prayer. While today we take this personal space for granted, in the nineteenth century, it was something new, especially for governesses of Jane Eyre’s class, and a working-class girl like Tess Durbeyfield.

While for this study the incipient notion of the nineteenth century of the personal private bedroom has been used to uncover the often ignored traumatic impact of sexual assaults in Jane Eyre, Tess of the d’Urbervilles, and Dracula, understanding the new emotional significance of the bedroom during that time period can illuminate other crucial bedroom scenes in nineteenth century literature, such as Amelia Sedley’s strange shrine to her dead husband in her bedroom in William Thackeray’s Vanity Fair (1848), Bella Wilfer’s abandonment of her rich, lovely bedroom as she rejects the ills of wealth in Charles Dickens’s Our Mutual Friend (1865), and Lily Bart’s fateful gloom in her lonely apartment in the commercial areas of New York in Edith Wharton’s House of Mirth (1905). The study of the space of the individual, especially the bedroom, can
illuminate the most personal and private aspects of a character, for it is in the safety of our bedrooms that we are most natural, most unguarded.
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