

Throughout the novel, Nancy's older sister Barbara acts as a bastion of safety and an exemplar of proper femininity for her mildly rebellious younger sibling. Nancy is self-absorbed where her sister is completely selfless, and Nancy acknowledges Barbara's aesthetic as well as moral superiority at every turn. Inevitably, these descriptions of Barbara are always accompanied by a foreshadowing of the older sister's permanent separation from all that she loves through her premature death. As Nancy describes Barbara in the light of the setting sun, she maintains that Barbara remains beautiful and therefore good wherever she may be: "the silk of her hair, the flower petals of her cheeks, the blue compassion of her eyes. My pretty Barbara! Let them say what they like, I am sure that somewhere—somewhere—you are pretty now!" (52). From the beginning of the novel, Barbara is already marked as being too good for this earth and spiritually superior to her more fallible younger sister. By foreshadowing her death so early in the novel, Broughton positions Barbara as a living saint of Victorian womanhood and Nancy as the sister who lacks the selflessness live up to those standards. While Nancy's early comments on the subject do not indicate how Barbara will die, they do hint that Nancy herself is in some way responsible or at least negligent in the matter through the heavy sense of regret and mournfulness that characterizes these moments. Broughton implies that Nancy's differences from Barbara, namely her self-absorption and carelessness, will in some way harm her older sister. Importantly, Barbara's death also will prompt Nancy to become more like her elder sister.