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"In Maiden Meditation": Girls and Readership in Victorian England

by

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Abstract

“In Maiden Meditation”: Readership and the Victorian Girl

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My project argues that a private, autodidactic model of girls’ readership is challenged within mid-Victorian culture, as formal education for girls became more accepted and itself underwent reform. While discourses of public and private spheres dominated Victorian ideology related to women and girls, the schoolroom became an imagined space where larger concerns about the social and political role of women were played out as understandings of the role of reading shifted. I examine the ways that readership and education interacted in the period as the purpose of reading was culturally determined and redetermined. My dissertation uses literary criticism and cultural history to investigate different models of education: fictional and real, formal and informal. Fictional portrayals of girls’ reading and their education provides a way to chart changes in the public understanding of what girlhood meant in the Victorian period. While I examine models of readership provided for girls by various authorities, I also use women's and girls' life-writing to shape my understanding of how girls perceived their own reading. My work intervenes in the field of readership studies primarily, complicating current understandings of how girls shaped and were shaped by their literature.
Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Till lately I have never read Spenser, and therefore was not personally acquainted with his beauties. Neither do I mean to say that now I have read his "Faerie Queene;" but, having accidentally met with an extract from his "Hymn of Heavenly Love," a long poem, I went to papa's study and read the whole poem, which is most exquisitely beautiful, and is perhaps equal to anything Milton ever wrote. It is very simple, but highly poetical, and a pious feeling runs throughout.

Emily Shore, The Journal of Emily Shore

In the 1832 writings of Emily Shore, above, we can see, in miniature, an entire model of one form of early Victorian readership. Shore, aged twelve, begins with one of the extracts that were so common during girls' education of the period, the sort parodied in Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey. Yet, unsatisfied, she seeks a greater depth of understanding; therefore, she moves to a private space of paternally-sanctioned readership, “papa's library,” in order to read the entire poem. Within the poem, Shore finds a “pious” feeling, thus extracting socially acceptable meaning from her readership. Throughout, Shore functions as a model of a particular autodidactic mode of learning for girls, one that encouraged unfettered access to knowledge within a safe, private space. “Turn [your girl] loose into the library every wet day and let her alone,” insisted John Ruskin in 1864, praising an individualistic autodidacticism. “She will find what is good for her; you cannot.”

My dissertation works through some of the reigning polarities of the nineteenth century and examines how girls during the period are influenced by the understanding of these polarities. I examine, of course, the doctrine of separate spheres, but I also interrogate the

educational philosophies that underpin concepts of formal and informal education. At the juncture between these models of instruction is reading; for Victorian girls reading was both escape and prison, education and delight, a means of accessing knowledge as well as a way of finding imaginative meaning in one's own life. Yet for all my interest in polarities, my investment in a subversion/containment spectrum, whereby every text either reinforces or challenges gender inequities is minimal. Although I try to draw on historical and biographical detail where appropriate (as in the case of Ruskin, whose work is one of the primary focuses of my first chapter), my inquiry pushes beyond a work's stated purpose to examine also the ways it models, questions, and undermines its own terms. Further, ideas of containment and subversion are dangerous for the way they reduce complicated debates to a single gradient between progressive and reactionary. During the Victorian era, progressive and reactionary did not exist on a single plane, even within the struggle for women's rights. Famous educators of girls were anti-suffragists. To try and decide whether the conservative factor "outweighs" the liberal would be ridiculous.

I am therefore perfectly confident in arguing, as I do in the course of my third chapter, that Charlotte Yonge promotes an ideal of public service that is liberating even though Yonge disapproved of schools for girls and women's suffrage and rights generally. Even if I were to assume that Yonge herself was unilaterally conservative, which seems improbable, her books have meaning beyond those with which she imbues them. Communities of readers take from literature what they want to find and make meaning in the process, and perhaps there is no reader more imaginative and intellectually flexible than the reader who has not yet reached adulthood. Girls (and boys) like a good story without much caring about the politics of the story-makers. Even as Victorian poets reached into the medieval era for images of strong women without questioning the laws of that period that made women into property, Victorian
schoolgirls took what they desired from their favorite novels without consulting the authors for direction on the shape of their own lives.

My purpose, then, is to construct a history of the reading girl in the Victorian era, interweaving literary representations with nonfictional cultural constructions and first-person testimony. By moving between these rich sources of cultural history, I hope to analyze the different modes of discourse on readership and education for girls while also being sensitive to the voices of historical women. Throughout, I will demonstrate that as formal education becomes more important over the course of the Victorian period, private readership continues to play an equally large role in forming a cultural and personal identity for girls, even as it seems to disappear from discourse.

Yet my strongest claims in this dissertation are not for feminism; those claims do not, I hope, need to be rehearsed in this case. Though I am not the new feminist who believes that all battles have been won, I hope that some have, and the idea that girls should be given access to formal education is by now beyond uncontroversial in mainstream society. But the kind of education given during the Victorian period, a liberal arts education in which readership forms the main part of serious study, is far from uncontroversial. “There are no jobs in the humanities,” modern students are instructed again and again, as they are told to learn quarks or brick-laying or something useful to their fellow man. This refrain is often heard within the academy, but even more persistently from without. When President Obama suggested that everyone should be able to go to college, he drew considerable fire from conservatives for suggesting that everyone ought to have an elite education. Plumbers do not need a college education, but neither did Victorian wives and mothers. In my arguments, then, the strongest parallels are not with modern girls or women, but with modern working classes.

For as tuition rates rise with unprecedented rapidity, making what was once a birthright
of the middle classes a difficult-to-afford luxury, the question is, and should be, asked over and over again. What is the value of a liberal arts education? For Victorians, looking at unpaid female labor, the answer was that it would help them to perform that labor better—to become better mothers. Indeed, as claims of social mobility, career preparation, and citizenship all falter as we try them out in the twenty-first century, we might do well to look at their model and note that we are educating parents. But to advance even so seemingly humble a claim, we must look again at what we are offering; is this Ruskin's treasury of kings, or merely a warehouse filled with outdated texts? We must decide whether the humanities and liberal arts constitute a good in themselves and if so, what that good is. Perhaps the good is not in the content of our instruction, but in the mode, and for the humanities in general and English in particular, reading is that mode. When undergraduates are instructed in the sciences, they are asked to study, but not to really read; how many biology instructors put Darwin as required reading? When they are instructed in the social sciences, students are taught to read data, but not books. Thus the great storehouses of human learning are closed to all but a select few acolytes in modern education. With pragmatism as a guiding principle, universities have cut off or slowly de-funded the kinds of programs that allow students to learn to read texts with deep and serious attention. This has repercussions well beyond the study of English literature; comparative literature founders because we have learned that most Americans need not learn foreign languages—the rest of the world will do that for them. Because of this, most students have no access to literature that does not exist in translation. I make this point not to plead for more foreign language requirements, but to point out how, in trying to fill the demands of pragmatism, universities are systematically denying students the tools they would need to access much of human learning.

If I have a cause to champion, then, it is not girls—they have better champions than I, or
at least so I ardently hope and believe. But who will champion the cause of slow, extravagant learning? Yet to form a society of readers as well as citizens and professionals and parents seems to me no mean thing. Throughout my dissertation, I give priority to reading over education, not because I think one is more essential than the other, but because reading is a powerful tool that can be accessed today as it was accessed by many girls in the nineteenth century: alone, with minimal guidance, and with great delight. It is a vital part of education, but it extends beyond education in every direction, flirting with each horizon. When I taught English composition at the community college level, one of the texts I used for my students was Malcolm X's account of his own education in prison. Barely literate, he began by copying out the dictionary and ended by nearly wearing out the prison library as he sought to understand the world around him. Though unfortunately none of my students have yet been inspired to either copy the dictionary or read great swathes of history, that image of Malcolm X reading in prison is more relevant to my work than any imagined cluster of teenagers leaning over *Twilight*. For he is the figure of education denied, postponed, and deferred—until he began to read. In the ultimate position of (literal) disenfranchisement, he was able to build the foundations of his education through the humility of the written word.

Reading, in itself, is not challenging. The ability to negotiate and make sense of twenty-six symbols is all that is required initially; any kindergartener can hopefully do the same. But the very ease of the act, along with the ubiquity of books, is what makes reading a revolutionary technology. The rankest beginner can read through a translation of Foucault and, with the help of dictionary, make sense of his words. In that moment, he or she gains access to a set of ideas that helped shape twentieth-century theoretical discourse. She may not understand them at first, but given some persistence and perhaps some rereading, she will gain access to Foucault's concepts as well. At the age of eleven, I was in very nearly this position; I
determined to read Dante's *Inferno* with some vague idea that learning about hell might be interesting or instructive. Barely used to poetry, which I had not been taught at all, I spent most of my time flipping to the back, following footnotes and trying to understand what on earth the verses were trying to convey. Did I “learn” Dante during that period? Probably not. But I did learn how to read a text thoroughly and with careful attention, which are skills more precious than we realized before the era of social media.3

My studies of the reading girl therefore offers the opportunity to scrutinize very timely questions in a historical context. While I hope that my dissertation also has claims to make on the Victorian era and readership studies, this project's main focus is the transformative experience of reading as related by Shore and countless other girls. I propose that reading not only enacted education, but also helped girls and their elders to question ideas of development, girlhood, and education through the pages of fiction. I look therefore not only at what and how girls read, but also how their society imagined their reading through literary portrayal. Jane Eyre in her windowseat is as crucial to my inquiries as Emily Shore in her papa's study; I attempt to privilege neither (though my training as a literary critic makes that all but impossible) but use both kinds of figures to deconstruct the girl reader in the Victorian period.

**Methodology**

As one intent on constructing a *history* of the reading girl, I am conscious that I am in critical conversation not merely through my subject matter, but by means of my very methodology. My dissertation will rely on sources not only literary, but also historical, both primary and secondary, to construct a history that reflects the lived experience of girls in the Victorian period. Valerie Sanders4 notes some of the problems inherent in working with

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3 In his *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction*, Alan Jacobs makes the case for focused, attentive reading as seriously threatened by modern “multi-tasking.” (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), though he indicates that the advent of the ereader returned his ability to read texts thoroughly.

primary texts such as women's autobiography—namely, how few of the valuable life records of Victorian women can be properly classified as such. I believe, however, that this is precisely what a literary history with a cultural studies focus, that uses fictional and non-fictional texts, formal autobiographies and ephemera, is able to correct. Regenia Gagnier\(^5\) argues that autobiography—the act of intentional self-representation—serves as a “classifying statement,” even while suggesting that women's autobiography was largely constructed from other autobiographical traditions. Yet Linda Peterson, while praising Gagnier's attention to the generic specificity of the autobiography, argues further that there is a separate and distinct tradition of women's autobiography ignored by previous writers on the subject.\(^6\) Such distinction, however, seems overfine, though it provides a salutary reminder of the complex discourse distinctions at play in the field, and I consider it is important to be attentive to these complexities of genre and tradition even while being inclusive in my approach. Marking another distinction, Miriam Elizabeth Burstein\(^7\) argues against the tendency of modern critics to consider women's history as an unwritten story, even within the nineteenth century. Burstein points out the popularity of women's history in the Victorian period as a subject for male and female writers alike. Such works add to the rich field of cultural history available, but also suggest a more complex relationship between women's history and mainstream Victorian culture that I intend to explore.

The relationships among my sources provide a complicated discursive field. I deal with a wide variety of genres, including novels, poetry, non-fiction essays, periodical sources, works of pedagogical theory, autobiographies, journals, letters, and historical data. My focus in


analyzing these texts is primarily literary, even while my work aims to make broader claims about Victorian culture. I intend to construct a literary history centered on the figure of the reading girl and her construction in Victorian fiction; for this reason, I have chosen for study texts that allow me to explore a rich figuration of reading or a meaningful shift from private readership towards emotional education and preparation for life in the public sphere.

In discussing the public sphere, I am not merely referring to traditional meanings of public life, but prefer to utilize the “fractal thinking”⁸ that allows for a more complex relationship between public and private, such that not only a public author or minister like the heroines of Red Pottage and The Beth Book would be included, but a girl preparing to enter university might also consider herself as leaving the private sphere of home and family. For similar reasons, I consider autodidacticism as a mode rather than a set classification. A figure such as Emily Shore, whom I discussed earlier, received lessons from her parents, but also reveals in her journal that she frequently operated in this autodidactic mode, reading and studying outside of parental supervision. While I am primarily focused in my dissertation on girls reading literature, I am cognizant of the fact that generic distinctions were not as formal during the period as they are today. Shore, who often read natural history as well as poetry and only occasionally fiction, therefore, does not necessarily fall outside the scope of my inquiry.

More interesting to me than the content of a girl's reading, however, is the model of her reading. I am interested in an expressive model of reading that is interpolated either with study or with pleasure. While I am interested in the ways that girls' reading sparked disciplinary concerns in parents, educators, and reformers, a subversive/containment model is not relevant to my research, as it is the discourse of such concerns rather than the quantification of

“subversion” that is the field of my inquiry. I will demonstrate over the course of my dissertation that such disciplinary and social concerns over women's reading created spaces for social and cultural change.

While my work follows a developmental trajectory—that is, I see novels and social theorists offering a different perspective early in the Victorian era than late in the Victorian era—my dissertation will be attentive to the possibilities for fragmentation in the social message being promulgated. Factors such as class, geography, and even faith may offer instances of this fragmentation, and I hope to trace these instances while still retaining a focus on what I believe to be an important shift in the way that readership is coded as an educational and leisure practice.

My work is not situated within a particular theoretical framework, though my terms of discourse analysis undoubtedly owe something to a genealogy dating to Michel Foucault. However, my mode of inquiry is heavily focused on close reading, cultural studies, and historicism. While I hope that my readings of individual literary works will be responsible to the texts as a whole and therefore insightful as literary analysis, my primary focus in each reading is to contribute to a larger understanding of the Victorian construction of the reading girl. Similarly when working in a historical vein, such as in situating school reform, while my aim is to choose representative texts and persons to the extent possible, my larger goal is to create a meaningful narrative of cultural discourse as it interacts with readership and literature.

History

The Victorian era, from 1837-1901, is the focus of my investigation, though my chapters also draw minimally on early modern and eighteenth century culture and history to provide context. The Victorian period may be said, in general terms, to be a very good one for readers. Rising literacy rates meant that more people could read than ever before in England,
and the Industrial Revolution made the reproduction of printed text far more financially viable. The era bristled with periodicals, serials, tracts, books, annuals, and other printed texts. Lending libraries were popularized during the nineteenth century. This broad and unprecedented access to the printed word meant that even as more people read, there was more choice of reading. A girl in 1637 might have had access to a half a dozen volumes if she were very lucky; a girl in 1837 could easily access a hundred.

Yet I could very easily make the precise same claims for studying girlhood in 2013; girls today can access a million volumes through electronic media—why do I not study them and their reading? Certainly girls and their reading are scrutinized and restricted today as they were during the Victorian period. The crucial difference, however, between Victorian girls and modern girls, for purposes of this question anyway, is that Victorian girls were told far more frequently and explicitly how to be girls. While concerns about girlhood specifically have not been overturned or diminished, they are now couched differently. Girls are rarely told in plain terms that it is their duty to do something because they are a girl. Instead, gendered messages are rehearsed through extensive modeling that takes place in all forms of media. Girls do not learn to be ladylike by reading books about how to be young ladies—they learn instead from pop culture icons outside the family what kind of behaviors are appropriate, and it is through the dramas of these strangers that concerns about gender and appropriate behavior are rehearsed.9 During the Victorian era, however, that kind of discourse was made explicit, which is instructive for modern critics seeking to understand how questions of girlhood unfold over time.

The Victorian era operates, further, as a liminal space insofar as girls' education is concerned. One year before Victoria ascended the throne, in 1836, Caroline Norton left her

9 Media discourse surrounding the 2011 Vanity Fair photographs of Miley Cyrus highlighted the anxiety that parents feel about the potential sexuality of their daughters' role models.
abusive husband. In retaliation, he successfully sued to confiscate the earnings with which she sought to support herself, kidnapped her children and hid them away, and then, just to make a good show of things, sued then Prime Minister Lord Melbourne, Norton's close friend, for “criminal conversation.” Three years later, very limited notions of women's rights began to be enshrined in law with the Custody of Infants Act, which was championed by Norton, whose status as a sympathetic figure and able activism would later help the Married Women's Property Acts to be passed. Further, the Queen herself, while the most conservative of female monarchs, nonetheless played an important role in shaping public discourse about femininity. Finally, the Education Act of 1902, by providing unified funding for private secondary schools, expanded formal educational opportunities for girls immeasurably. Girls would never again be predominantly educated at home, and formal education became the standard. (Although the wealthy daughters of the upper classes were somewhat left behind by the movement of progress; until World War II, they were taught in much the same way they had been during the nineteenth century.) During Victoria's reign, however, it was still not an accepted good that girls should be educated in any kind of systematic manner, and questions that today are presumed to be resolved were still in play. Conceptions of public and private spheres informed the period's debates, both formal and informal, over the place of women and girls; those debates were vigorous and ongoing. I therefore locate in the Victorian era a particularly ripe field of inquiry for studying the role of readership in the lives of girls.

In the section that follows, I shall attempt to outline both the chronology that structures my work and the major figures who were at the center of public debate, by which I provide a context for understanding the political and social changes of the Victorian era as they particularly affected girls. While education is my major focus in this section, I also include those political developments which affected the fate of women generally and influenced
notions of gendered domesticity and the “sanctity of the family” such as changes in the age of consent for girls, divorce and married property laws, and infant custody acts. I argue that all these factors worked in a complicated harmony to define a new culture and identity of girlhood.

I began by discussing the extraordinary case of Caroline Norton and the subsequent Infant Custody Bill of 1839, which granted women limited custodial rights for children under seven in certain cases of abuse or desertion. While before and after this men retained all rights of legal guardianship, the Infant Custody Bill used the “tender years” doctrine to suggest that under the age of seven, children might, under certain circumstances, be best cared for by their mothers. In many ways, the Infant Custody Bill marks the first cracks in the edifice of coverture, the policy whereby the woman assumed the status herself of a legal minor under her husband's protection, and her property and person were wholly subsumed (legally) into his property and person. This edifice was to receive repeated shocks throughout the Victorian period as politicians negotiated both the legacy of Enlightenment ideals of human rights such as those put forward by John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor and the uncomfortable realities of a female monarch.10 It also marks the rise of particular discourses relating to women and family. While women had long been viewed as a civilizing influence overall, during the nineteenth century a new concentration of personal wealth in the middle classes meant a scramble to find new markers of gentility.

The family unit and doctrine of separate spheres answered well to this need for the middle class assert its newly powerful status. Members of the professional classes assumed a gendered division of work whereby women assumed the role of the (apparently) leisurely stewardess of the house while men were thereby freed to assume the paid labor of supporting the family while still maintaining the classification of gentleman. Historian Jane Martin sums

up the perceptions of femininity and its “special gifts” deftly:

Buttressed by social and religious beliefs, medical and scientific practice, women's 'special' traits were felt to include: benevolence, compassion, humility, modesty, morality, patience, sensitivity and tact. In particular, it was assumed that a combination of maternal capacity, physical frailty and sexual vulnerability placed women in need of care and protection and, to this extent, the feminine ideal became a metaphor for the social patterning of gender.11

The burden of responsibility for a family's gentility therefore fell, in many ways, upon women to maintain; as supremely moral and sensitive beings, they were the guardians of the domestic sphere, whose disassociation with paid labor was socially enforced. The more “useless” the wife could appear, the greater the family's association with gentility, since leisure assumed the financial capacity to pay servants to perform domestic labor. This seeming paradox whereby a woman's value was demonstrated by her complete disassociation from any form of labor or considerations of utility created the cult of domesticity with its nearly hysterical insistence on the moral guardianship of women.

While it is easy to identify these patterns of hegemony, it is also important to notice the places where hegemony breaks down, and identifying the Victorians as mindlessly restrictive would seem to negate the transformative nature of the era itself. Certainly that transformation was seen in few places more plainly than in the education girls, which during the late 1840s underwent the first stages of reform. In 1848 Queen's College was founded under the patronage of Queen Victoria to provide secondary education for girls; it was mainly intended to provide academic training to women who were obliged by circumstance to earn their living as governesses. It numbered among its earliest pupils Frances Mary Buss and Dorothea Beale, whose respective institutions jointly established the tone for girls' secondary education in the

decade that would follow. The following year, Bedford College was founded by Elizabeth Jesser Reid; it was the first higher education institution for women in the United Kingdom. Reid was a well-to-do Unitarian who formed part of a circle of well-connected middle class women in London who formed the nucleus for women's education reform during the mid-Victorian period. Martin argues that the radical Unitarian faith of many of these activists was no coincidence; as members of a faith other than that of the Church of England Establishment, both women and men who were Unitarians suffered significant disadvantages, particularly given that “religious tests for Oxbridge fellowships were not abolished until 1871.”

Bessie Rayner Parkes, whose 1854 *Remarks on the Education of Girls* was an important document in the mid-century reform movement, was also part of this circle. Parkes was also the editor of the *English Women's Journal*, which ran from 1858-64. Martin suggests that these women achieved many of their goals through working with broadly-based alliances: “In essence, it provided the catalyst for several decades of equal rights campaigning for access to secondary and higher education, as well as greater employment opportunities and participation by women in public life and government.”

The organization “spread across the country and proceeded to incorporate provincial networks of sympathetic women and men” such as the North of England Council for Promoting the Higher Education of Women and others.

I mentioned previously that the establishments of Frances Mary Buss and Dorothea Beale would create the two predominant models of girls' secondary education in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In 1850, the North London Collegiate was founded by Buss, who became the school's first headmistress; NLC was an independent day school that provided rigorous secondary education for girls—schools that followed the NLC model were variously called day schools or high schools. The NLC was used as a model by the Girls' Public Day

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12 Martin, p. 17.
13 Ibid.
School Trust, a powerful institution that created many secondary schools after its 1872 foundation, as well as various independent high schools (including the Manchester High School which I use as a case study in my fourth chapter). Dorothea Beale, on the other hand, was the second “lady principal” of Cheltenham Ladies' College, founded in 1854. Beale took her school in a very different direction from the NLC; where NLC was democratic in its admissions, Cheltenham prided itself on selective admissions and guarding against the entry of any undesirable tradesmen's daughters. It was to become the model for upper middle class and upper class boarding schools during the late Victorian period. Both were united, however, in their desire to promote secondary education for girls that was the equal of that provided to boys.

During this period, concerns about women were reaching a critical point; in 1856, Jane Welsh Carlyle wrote a “Petition for which the Signatories of Women [were] requested.”

Carlyle's petition addressed the problems related to married women's property on practical grounds. What was often dismissed as a theoretical question of women's earnings, she argued, was in fact daily becoming more common “since married women of education are entering on every side the fields of literature and art, in order to increase the family income by such exertions.” She notes that while the families of well-to-do women often made provisions for their daughters' financial futures after marriage in an attempt to circumvent the law, poor women had no access to the legal niceties that would allow them, as working women, similar provision. Signatories to Carlyle's letter read like Who's Who of the Victorian women's movement: Anna Blackwell; Isa Blagden; Elizabeth Barrett Browning; Sarianna Browning;

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15 Ibid.
Mrs. Cowden Clarke; Charlotte Cushman; Amelia B. Edwards; Eliza F. Fox; Mrs. Gaskell; Matilda M. Hays; Mary Howitt; Anna Mary Howitt; Mrs. Jameson; Harriet Martineau; Honble. Julia Maynard; Mary Mohl; Bessie Rayner Parkes; Mrs. Reid; Miss Sturch; Mrs. Carlyle; Miss Jewsbury; Mrs. Lovell; Mrs. Loudon; Miss Leigh Smith.  

1857 saw reform enacted through the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, which established civil divorce courts in England and provided a mechanism for legal separation and awarding maintenance to women, though the laws maintained their favor towards men who chose to abandon their wives over the reverse. The following decade was perhaps the most significant in terms of educational reform: between 1860 and 1869, Buss campaigned to open the Cambridge Senior Local examinations, a syndicated certification program for secondary education, to girls; the influential Schools Inquiry Commission was set up (1864); Emily Davies and her coalition successfully pressured the Commission to include girls' education (1867-8); and the 1869 Endowed Schools Act “empowered Commissioners to prise endowment from the old grammar schools” for the purpose of establishing girls' grammar schools.  

Davies's 1866 *Higher Education of Women* provided a central rallying point for middle-class education activists; her rhetoric demanded a system of education that would produce women “of the best and highest type, not limited by exclusive regard to any specific functions hereafter to be discharged by them.” Here, as elsewhere, Davies made on behalf of women the case for liberal arts education. While acknowledging that many of her contemporaries viewed education for women as only valuable insofar as it advanced the goals of improving her performance as a wife and mother, Davies rejected such a circumscribed purpose: “A man will not be the better husband and father for neglecting his obligations as a citizen, or as a man of..."
business. Nor will a woman be the better wife or mother through ignorance or disregard of other responsibilities.”

In 1869, Davies, along with Barbara Bodichon and Lady Stanley of Alderley, founded an institution that answered to her demands for disinterested and equal (in quality, though not in recognition) post-secondary education for women: Hitchin College, which would upon its 1873 remove to Cambridge become Girton College was the first institution of higher education for women that was not intended as preparation for the “necessary evil” of women earning their living as teachers.

Women's rights activities of the 1860s bore fruit in 1870, which was marked by the passage of both the Forster Education Act and the 1870 Married Women's Property Act. The latter gave women the right to legal possession of their own earnings and any real property inherited from family members as well as a limited amount of other forms of property. The weakly vicious Linton Heathcliff, who in Emily Bronte's 1847 *Wuthering Heights* wrested away young Catherine's locket because her property was his, became immediately a figure of the past rather than a menacing reminder of the precarious and penniless legal status of Victorian women.

The Forster Education Act, on the other hand, affected girls by establishing mechanisms for elementary education for all students. The Act created (or provided the mechanism for creation of) local school boards that had the authority to make provisions for elementary education for students aged five through twelve. These local school boards were influential for women in a number of ways; while they provided some assurance of educational provision for girls under twelve, they also provided one of the first public offices for which women could run. Because the school boards were elected from among ratepayers rather than property holders, women were able to stand election for the local school boards.

19 Davies, p. 12.
20 Lady Stanley also served as a “lady visitor” on the college's staff and chaperoned girls to their lectures. Martin, p. 74.
Women were thought to be peculiarly fitted by nature for school board work; an editorial piece in the *Englishwoman's Review* in 1888 held forth on the claims of the position for women: “As Board School managers, and as members of the Boards, they are increasingly needed, and as no property qualification is necessary for a School Board member, there is not the same difficulty in finding suitable candidates that besets a Guardian election. We trust that women may feel this claim upon their motherhood, and bring to the State schools the thoughtfulness and tenderness which overflows from their home nurseries and schools.”

Honner Morton, however, noted in 1899 the potential for middle-class women to privilege for poor girls the domestic economy subjects: “There are a very large number of women on the School Boards now, and they ought to make their motto, 'Thorough grounding for the girls'. Unfortunately, it is the women members who so often press domestic economy lessons on babies, it being the thing of which they themselves have a little knowledge.”

In the 1870s, the progress of the previous decade was continued and further mechanisms were set up to ensure the expansion of educational opportunities for girls. In 1871 Newnham College was residentially founded in Cambridge; unlike Emily Davies's more rigorous Girton (which would not move to Cambridge until 1873), Newnham girls attended entirely separate lectures from the Cambridge men and sat different examinations, while Davies insisted that Girton girls face the same tripos that their male counterparts had to endure. Sadly, despite this laudable rigor, neither Newnham nor Girton would be awarded the status of full Cambridge degree-granting institutions until 1947 (Oxford having capitulated on the same issue in 1918). In 1872, the Girls Public Day School Company (also known, later, as the Girls

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22 The *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 October 1888 434-6, quoted in Martin, p. 24. To make clear the full oddity of the position of education for poor girls in the nineteenth century, school officials were only persuaded reluctantly that it was not particularly appropriate for the schools to take in washing and mending, which were then performed by pupils to help pay for their own education. The rate-payers' money, after all, was valuable, and the time of poor girls not particularly so.

23 Quoted in Martin, p. 87.
Public Day School Trust) was founded, and it was because of the Trust that thirty-eight non-denominational day schools were established over the last thirty years of the century. It may be well, in the wake of that number, to pause and question the impact of the reforms that we are discussing in terms of secondary education. Sally Mitchell estimates that even by the end of the period, fewer than a quarter of girls would receive secondary education of any kind. Why then the fuss over reforms that would not impact seventy-five percent of the population for which they were intended? I argue, however, that the existence of these schools and the work that they did in defining girls' education in the latter part of the nineteenth century opened up an extraordinarily fruitful space that permitted both girls and their elders to fix upon the “site” of secondary education a broad range of hopes and fears relating to girlhood more generally. With the advent of secondary schooling, the schoolgirl was born, and she soon became a type who was alternately admired, romanticized, and considered the representation of all the evils attending “overeducating” girls.

Girlhood was a concept under scrutiny during the 1870s, as was motherhood. In 1875, the age of consent was raised to a whopping thirteen years of age, though no further for fear of disaccommodating gentlemen whose acquaintance included particularly buxom fourteen-year-olds. This was a response to the Forster Education Act; if schooling was more or less compulsory until twelve years of age, it was considered proper for matrimony to follow that period rather than intervening in it (the previous age of consent had been twelve years). In 1873, women were legally given the opportunity to gain custody of children under sixteen years of age in cases of divorce. The courts began weighing custody decisions based more on the welfare of the children rather than the rights of the father. The progress of the women's rights movement, moreover, began to pick up the pace during the decade that followed, the

24 Purvis, p. 77.
bustling 1880s. 1882 saw the final changes to the Married Women's Property Act, which made women the legal possessors of any property, real or otherwise, which they inherited or otherwise gained before or during their marriages. But until the 1894 Local Government Act, women were still unable to stand for office in most local elections; of particular note is the fact that most were barred from standing for Poor Law Guardianships by property requirements. Social activism for Victorian women was often viewed as appropriately centering on poverty work; Jane Martin notes that “the idea that the home and the neighbourhood (including the church) were the anchors of a woman's existence helped to consolidate the role of middle-class women as social activists.”25

I have already rehearsed the changes to the British educational system by the 1902 Balfour Education Act. This Act dismantled the system of school boards and replaced them with a Local Education Authority. It made at least a modicum of secondary schooling mandatory for both boys and girls, and formed the system of education that would remain more or less unchanged for the majority of the twentieth century. The Victorian era, with its challenges and opportunities, was completed, though the work that was begun in the period was far from done.

Critical Overview

I will not pretend, or even rehearse the pretense, that I am studying a wholly new and uncharted field. Such an insistence would be ridiculous; Kate Flint and Jennifer Phegley have both written at length about the Victorian woman reader. Sally Mitchell and Kristina Moruzi have written about girlhood and the popular press. Judith Rowbotham has looked at girls and the ways that they are shaped by the fiction of the period. Historians have ably covered the field of girls' educational reform. What, then, is left for my project to offer in this field of

25 Martin, p. 23.
worthies? My strongest contributions are certainly to the field of readership studies. Further, through my eclectic approaches to my material, I work to shed light on numerous aspects of readership and schooling that have previously not been illuminated. Further, rather than seeing Victorian girls as entirely being acted on by their reading, I see reading as an active and transformative process.

It may be helpful here to further delineate the scope of my project. My work is focused specifically on middle-class girls reading. I am aware that this replicates the over-focus that literary criticism has historically leveled on the middle class. The reason for defining my critical focus on the middle class is two-fold. First, as I have noted, the daughters of the upper classes experienced very little change during the period in question. As Martin notes, “[T]he shift from a largely rural-based agrarian economy to one which was urban, industrial and based on wage labour was a long, slow and uneven process. Yet the changes involved were so momentous that their shadow fell across the lives of even those who were not directly affected.” Part of that “uneven” process meant that the daughters of the aristocracy continued to be privately educated at home until long after the end of the Victorian period. The experience of working class girls during most of the period was similarly static—while after 1870 they were more likely to receive some formal education, they had limited access to books and literature until the end of the period when the popular press exploded reading options for all classes. Martin has provided insightful analysis of the ways in which the curriculum for working class girls was developed in her work, *Women and the Politics of Schooling in Victorian and Edwardian England*.

What those working class girls read and what they thought about it has been ably covered by Sally Mitchell in her work *The New Girl.* Mitchell explores the emotional

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experiences of girls reading, in particular the cheap periodicals that were available to working class girls at the end of the Victorian era. Arguing that for many middle-class readers, however, spaces of escape and autonomy were located in the school as it was portrayed in fiction. I build on Mitchell's work to suggest that it was not only the fictional schools that had a powerful effect on girls' ability to imagine new identities for themselves as a collective, but also the real schools being established during the period. Purvis notes that one “distinctive feature of the NLC was the attempt to create a schoolgirl community with its own lifestyle, including activities such as organized games, a school magazine, various clubs and old girls reunions.”27 Mitchell locates in the idea of girlhood that was developed through imagined communities of the periodical, the idea of school as an autonomous space, and the emotional experiences of reading a new space for imagined possibilities.28

How the ideal of girlhood was socially constructed by Victorians is the main focus of Deborah Gorham's work *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*.29 Gorham's work on domesticity underpins my own understandings of the way that the domestic sphere operated in Victorian discourse:

> The cult of domesticity helped to relieve the tensions that existed between the moral values of Christianity, with its emphasis on love and charity, and the values of capitalism, which asserted that the world of commerce should be pervaded by a spirit of competition and a recognition that only the fittest should survive. By locating Christian values in the home, and capitalist values in the public world of commerce, the Victorians were able to achieve an efficient moral balance. (4)

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27 Purvis, p. 79.
28 My discussions of imagined communities are informed primarily by the work of Benedict Anderson in this field. (*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006.)
I further argue, as I have stated previously in this introduction, that the separation of spheres also worked to define notions of gentility that were based on a division of labor and leisure. Gorham observes that the “majestic childishness' of the ideal woman was a sign of the extent to which she was removed from the vicissitudes of the public sphere.”30 To this degree, the girl becomes an overdetermined location of ideal feminine values. Catherine Robson's *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* argues that in Victorian literature and culture, the ideal child was a female child. The girl therefore operates at the nexus of expectations both about childhood and about femininity, anxiously loaded with the ideological baggage of both.31

In *Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction*, Judith Rowbotham lays out some of the important principles that inform my own work. In particular, her observations regarding the purpose of girls' education are key:

> There was simply no possibility that anything comparable to the peak of male genius could result from a woman's brain. More, self-indulgence by women in this respect would sap their qualities of self-sacrifice and that was tantamount to being wilfully unwomanly . . . It was thus necessary to find alternative reasons for educating the feminine mind and for selecting the subjects that would form part of the curriculum.32

I look at those “alternative reasons” presented for the education of girls throughout my project and the subjects selected for girls' school curricula form a major part of my second chapter. Rowbotham underlines the ways in which fiction for girls was didactic and acted to reinforce

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30 Gorham, p. 6.
normative gender roles. My third chapter, which discusses the novel of education as a space of possibility and change, even in the case of conservative works, is nonetheless informed by the work done by Rowbotham.

If any single critic has prepared the way for my dissertation, however, it is Kate Flint. Her germinal work *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* is a brilliant deconstruction of the ways that social anxieties about gender are displaced onto the act of reading. Flint explains why the image of the female reader drew so much scrutiny: “the self-absorption of the readers depicted implies some of the reasons why the private activity of reading tended so persistently to come under scrutiny. It hints at the subject's vulnerability to textual influence, deaf and blind to all other stimuli in her immediate environments. It suggests the potential autonomy of her mind.”

That potential autonomy of the female reader is a crucial part of my inquiry, for the act of readership is far from a passive one. While the mind reads, it makes connections, extensions, forms its own desires and decisions about the texts. Flint draws on the reading experiences of women in all social classes to create a compelling history of the reading woman.

The ways in which the “dangers” of the reading woman were constructed is the focus of Jennifer Phegley's work. When I focus on negative reading prohibitions, I draw on her keen outline of the ways in which women's reading was negatively shaped by social anxieties:

> . . . critics amplified fears that what women read (especially of it happened to be sensational or scandalous) and how they read (particularly if it was quickly and uncritically) would infect them with (at best) romanticized expectations that would leave them dissatisfied about their own lives and (at worst) with immoral thoughts that could lead to immoral behavior.

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These fears, particularly of “sensational or scandalous” reading form the starting point for my analysis of reading romance in my second chapter. Phegley interrogates the ways that Victorian family magazines responded to these anxieties; her work, however, is primarily focused on the adult reader (unlike Flint, who takes into account a wide spectrum of ages).

Historian Christina de Bellaigue is another figure whose observations frame my own inquiry. De Bellaigue complicates the traditional view that early female education for the middle classes was always entirely frivolous and lacking. She argues that the dominant criticisms of “accomplishments” reflected “the dominance of a narrow conception of what constituted 'solid' education.” She suggests that modern languages were often called accomplishments and thus devalued. “While never clearly spelling out which subjects the commissioners considered to be 'accomplishments', the [Schools Inquiry Commission] report seems to equate them with those 'branches of instruction more particular to female schools', implying that what was not studied in boys' schools was by definition an 'accomplishment.'”

She argues that this was based on a “conception of Classics as the basis of all serious education. It also derived from the way they were taught through conversation rather than grammar and translation, the favoured methods of teaching Classics. This explains why Dorothea Beale, when seeking to affirm the intellectual rigour of the female curriculum, favoured German. Having regular declensions, it could be taught along the same lines as Latin.” The complicated role that the classics played in girls' education is one that I explore in my second chapter as I argue that the forms of the classics helped shape what was and was not considered appropriate reading for girls.

Chapter Outline

36 De Bellaigue 173.
37 Ibid.
Throughout my project, I operate on a rough chronology. While individual chapters are organized thematically, their overall progress is moulded by the shape of the century. I interrogate diverse modes of reading in order to illuminate the experience of reading during the Victorian era. This permits me to trace the shift from informal to formal education during the Victorian period while also looking at the changing mores that permitted this shift and the ways that girlhood was constructed in literature and culture.

My first chapter lays forth what I consider to be the main debate in girls' education: formal versus informal schooling. I use John Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* and *Ethics of the Dust* to exemplify a particular mode of private, autodidactic education that was prevalent during the Victorian era, particularly for the middle classes. Overwhelmingly, middle-class girls were educated primarily in the home, usually by parents, governesses, or visiting tutors. Ruskin is a particularly rich figure for inquiry; he was strongly invested in the cause of girls' education, and yet in *Sesame and Lilies* particularly, he championed older forms of education for girls, using organic metaphors to insist that girls be allowed to “grow” according to their wont. In contrast to Ruskin, on the opposing side of the debate, I use the novels of George Eliot to demonstrate the drawbacks of this style of education. *The Mill on the Floss*, with its tragic denouement and vivid depiction of the ways that reading impacted the life of its heroine, provides the focus for my inquiry. I argue that Eliot's novels present the need for formal education as related to personal development. Certainly *Middlemarch*'s Dorothea, who is so hungry for teaching that she enters into a supremely unwise marriage because she believes that a husband might remedy the deficiencies of a father and provide adequate instruction, is almost an emblem for the dangers of the old style of instruction for girls. I attempt to provide an intellectual history for these competing discourses of education, drawing links between humanist thought, scholasticism, and the nineteenth-century debates over formal education.
My second chapter examines the interplay of reading and education within the particularly charged genre of romance. I attempt to define the elusive parameters of nineteenth-century romance through literary history in order to ascertain the implications of concerns over inappropriate reading for girls. This is the chapter in which I primarily discuss negative models of reading—moments in which authorities tell girls that certain forms of reading are objectionable rather than putting forward a positive model. I look at eighteenth century depictions of the dangers of girls reading in order to locate the stakes of these concerns.

My third chapter is focused on literary representations of girls reading in a form of literature that I call the “novel of education.” The books chosen for my primary texts span from the early to late Victorian period; I analyze *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte, *The Daisy Chain* (1864) by Charlotte Mary Yonge, and *The Beth Book* (1897) by Sarah Grand. The first section of the chapter examines reading and scenes of education in *Jane Eyre* to interrogate the generic parameters of the novel of education; *Jane Eyre* is a prime example of the *bildungsroman*, but it is also an enduring story of romance. I trace both these threads in the novel, determining that while the education plot of the novel is more or less subsumed by the romance plot, this hybrid document has a great deal to say about the place of education and reading in girls' lives. In my second section, I examine *The Daisy Chain*, which is perhaps the perfect type of the novel of education: focused primarily on reading, learning, spiritual development, and familial relations over romance, the novel airs mid-Victorian concerns about the purpose of educating women. Finally, *The Beth Book* provides an entirely different perspective; written as a self-consciously New Woman novel, the text makes explicit the intellectual deprivation suffered by the middle class girl in Victorian England and the material effects of that ignorance. I argue that the novel of education, particularly as represented by these texts, is valuable for the ways that it opens up possibilities for women's personal
development that were often foreclosed by early marriage.

My fourth chapter is primarily based on archival material and focuses on positive models of reading. Drawing on educational history and periodicals, and concluding with a thought experiment, I attempt to delineate the ways in which girls were meant to read. I use the Manchester High School for girls as a case study of formal education and its impact on readership (rather than the other way around, a line of inquiry pursued in my second chapter). This chapter investigates the school's leadership, attitudes towards reading, and library offerings in order to convey the kinds of reading that were supported and encouraged. I then investigate *Atalanta* and the *Girl's Own Paper*, focusing on *Atalanta*, to see how periodical literature shaped girls' reading not only through its content but through reaching out to communities of eager and ambitious readers. Finally, I create the reading biography of an imagined ideal girl of the 1880s, using fiction to bring to life the principles that are demonstrated through argument earlier in the chapter.
Chapter One: Ruskin, Eliot, and the War for Girls' Minds

Humanist education principles, which transformed the early modern world, emphasized reading a canon of selected authors in order to develop a mastery of rhetoric. It should be obvious that their influence may continue to be seen in the high schools and universities of today, where English curricula strive, some more and some less directly, to achieve these very goals. Yet from this long-lasting mark on educational institutions, it should not be inferred that the fundamentals of the humanist education project have remained unquestioned since the sixteenth century. Rather, it must be understood that these humanist ideals were transformed and shaped by the educational theorists who each attempted, consciously or not, to adapt this dominant model of pedagogy to suit the concerns and needs of the next generation. In this chapter, then, I shall trace a kind of genealogy of pedagogical theory from the humanist movement of the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, where, I argue, the tropes and methodologies of humanist education came under scrutiny in the debates over girls' education.

Two figures stand out as typifying the conflicting perspectives on girls' education in the early Victorian period: John Ruskin and George Eliot. While Ruskin embraced a philosophy of private study for girls that was profoundly neo-humanist in both its rhetoric and its ideals, Eliot's novels painted a dire portrait of the need for formal education for girls which would correspond to their changing roles in the Victorian era. It should be understood, then, from this contrast, that the argument I am examining was not on whether girls ought to be educated: no one could have called Ruskin an admirer of ignorance. Rather, it was on the mode of education and its product, whether that education ought to be private and heavily based on reading, or whether rigorous, systematic education in a more “public” setting was in order. In denoting formal education for girls in the Victorian era as “public,” I am utilizing Susan Gal's “fractal thinking” about the public/private sphere, which permits for a more complex understanding of
these distinctions, such that a girl leaving her home to enter a school run by strangers might, in some sense, be said to be entering the public sphere.\(^{38}\)

The kind of formal education that Eliot was suggesting for girls deserves some attention because it is, arguably, one of the many innovations of the Victorian period. Dinah Birch argues that “[i]t was the Victorians who first conceived of education as a formal process...with prescribed courses of study, and outcomes measurable by examination.”\(^{39}\) This shift to some extent mirrors the historical processes of the Industrial Revolution; the metonymic ties may be seen easily, most famously in Dickens's industrial fiction, but also in the ways that both are based on clock time and measurable results. The schoolroom then becomes the mirror of the (industrial) workplace, with similar dangers for middle-class girls, most notably the erosion of the public/private sphere boundaries. Thus while formal education was, in some sense, a natural extension of public sphere opportunities available to young men, its implementation for young women was a far more controversial operation.

On one hand, then, we have Ruskin in *Sesame and Lilies*, working to preserve separate spheres and deploying neo-humanist arguments and rhetoric in order to prescribe private education for girls that would be heavily reliant on readership and autodidacticism. On the other hand, George Eliot's novels, most particularly and tragically *The Mill on the Floss*, depict the intellectual wastefulness of leaving girls untaught. In depicting these two intellectuals as a staging ground for wider Victorian debates, I mean to suggest not a polarity in ideology but rather a paradigmatic incompatibility that is at the heart of conflicts over girls' education. In this chapter, I will investigate the metaphors that enabled these discourses and work to define the female reader as autodidact in order to demonstrate the complex interactions between readership and formal education during the Victorian era.


Ruskin's Neo-humanism

Early modern humanists saw themselves as liberating Europe from a culture of intellectual barbarism; this is an evaluation that has not withstood scrutiny, given contemporary reevaluations of the scholastic tradition, and yet it sets the ground for understanding the humanist education project. Despite being widely understood as canon makers, as Rebecca Bushnell points out, the humanists instead considered themselves as canon breakers.40

Bushnell points out key features of humanist pedagogy: “an insistence on play, pleasure, and kindness, a respect for the child's nature, and an admiration of variety and range in reading struggling against a will to control, a love of purity, and a belief in hierarchy and exclusivity.”41 The respect for the child's nature is a defining feature of humanism that would influence pedagogy for centuries, most particularly in the Romantic era.

The metaphors used by humanist educators with regard to a child's nature were, notably, often horticultural. Bushnell outlines the complexities of these metaphors:

When a teacher was compared with a gardener it could mean many things ranging from violent mastery to tender regard; similarly, a student was imagined in different ways when compared with a seed, a plant, or soil. On the one hand, such comparisons suggested that the teacher/gardener could plan and cultivate the pupil's mental garden for greater profit. On the other hand, such analogies also conveyed resistance on the child's part, for they granted the child a specific property or nature that the teacher/gardener could not alter.42

It is in this latter conception of the child's nature, which assigns to the child particular

41 Bushnell, p. 18.
42 Bushnell, p. 76.
properties that must be accommodated rather than eradicated or altered by education that I find
the seeds of the humanist legacy in pedagogy as it carried over into Victorian discourses. An
example of the use of such a metaphor may be found in the well-known educational treatise by
humanist Roger Ascham, who rose to prominence in part on the basis of his tutelage of
Elizabeth I:

[T]he yong spring hath shot vp so faire, as now there be in Cambrige
again, many goodly plantes (as did well appeare at the Queennes
Maiesties late being there) which are like to grow to mightie great timber,
to the honor of learning, and great good of their-contrie, if they may stand
their tyme, as the best plantes there were wont to do: and if som old
dotterell tres, with standing ouer nie them, and dropping vpon them, do
not either hinder, or crooke their growing.43

In this passage, Ascham perceives the “goodly plantes” as pursuing their own course of growth
that ought not to be “hindered” by their elders. While it should be noted that this is only one
example of the ways in which horticultural metaphors were used in humanist education
discourse, it is a striking one that points to a shift away from direct authority and towards
permitting young minds to develop according to their own nature.

This question of nature held a particular valence for the education of women during the
Renaissance period. Bushnell notes that often “…attention to 'nature' and 'property' ultimately
worked to the disadvantage of girls, who were seen by nature to follow a different life cycle.”44

Thus nature, while apparently a liberating factor in the humanist educational model,

43 Roger Ascham, The Scholemaster Or plaine and perfite way of teachyng children, to vnderstand, write, and
speake, the Latin tong, but specially purposed for the privaye brynging vp of youth in Ientlemen and Noble
mens houses, and commodious also for all such, as have forgot the Latin tonge, and would, by themselves,
without a Scholemaster, in short tyme, and with small paines, recouer a sufficient habilitie, to vnderstand,
44 Bushnell, p. 111.
demonstrates also the possibility of proving restrictive. This follows anthropological models whereby culture is seen as “transcending” nature and suggests that “culture...recognizes that woman is an active participant in its special processes, but sees her as being, at the same time, more rooted in, or having a more direct connection with, nature.” While this proposition may seem at odds with the humanist respect for nature and the role it must play in the education of the pupil, I suggest that it instead represents a kind of subordination by incorporation whereby nature is drawn into the cultural processes of education and thereby made less feminized and threatening. In the case of women, however, such ties to nature may have been seen by many as too strong to overcome through this model, and therefore women were best left to follow their “natural” life patterns of marriage and maternity.

In the eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theories on education were no less influential than their humanist forebears, and “nature” was a persistent concern for him as well. Rousseau wrote, in a statement that emblematizes his thinking on nature and society, “Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the author of things and everything degenerates in the hands of man.” Yet Rousseau was far from being hostile towards education, a position he expressed using another of our familiar horticultural metaphors:

There is more: in the condition things are in, a man abandoned to himself from his birth would be the most disfigured of all...Nature there would be like a shrub that chance had caused to be born in the middle of a path and that the passersby soon cause to perish by dint of bumping into it from all sides and bending it in every direction.

Here Rousseau suggests that the role of the educator is intended to be one of protection from society's influence, enhancing rather than directing the work of nature. Yet when discussing the education of girls, Rousseau took a far different note, relying instead on concepts of utility rather than natural development. While admitting that “good sense belongs equally to the two sexes,” he firmly cautioned that “it does not follow that anything ought to be demanded from them whose utility they cannot see.”48 Adherence to custom and “constraint” was rather to be the program for girls, who “ought to be constrained very early” since “[a]ll their lives, they will be enslaved to the most continual and most severe of constraints—that of the proprieties.”49

On the subject of girls reading, Rousseau was concerned as an educator to be certain that this mode of utility was paramount. “After all,” he demanded, “where is the necessity for a girl to know how to read and write so early? Will she so soon have a household to govern? There are very few girls who do not abuse this fatal science more than they make good use of it.”50 Rousseau expresses what is one of the dominant fears about girls reading here, one that the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century made vital as I make clear in my second chapter. Instead, the girl's reading and writing is to be directed towards the management of the household (in a move that implicitly does the cultural work of constructing and reinforcing a bourgeois domestic ideal), and Rousseau even proposes that arithmetic is a far more suitable study than reading. Here, oddly, “nature” is of little concern as it relates to girls, whose role is instead to become useful, and whose education is intended to mirror rather than change that destiny. This philosophy was only reinforced by the Edgeworths, reigning educators of the late eighteenth century, whose *Practical Education* (1798) “preserve[d] an unquestioning acceptance of women's confinement to domestic life, and an expectation that female education

48 Rousseau, p. 544.
49 Rousseau, p. 545.
50 Rousseau, p. 544.
should be adapted to the requirements of that realm.”

In Ruskin's seminal “Of Queens' Gardens,” we see a similar philosophy at play—that is, woman educated for her role as helpmeet—but a far different and, arguably, more humanist application of that theory. Ruskin argues, “All such knowledge should be given to her as may enable her to understand, and even to aid, the work of men: and yet it should be given, not as knowledge,--not, as if it were, or could be, for her an object to know; but only to feel, and to judge.”

Ruskin's syntax here bears some unraveling. When he speaks of “an object to know” and claims that such cannot be for a woman, he does not suggest that it is not possible for a woman to gain knowledge, but instead that a woman's purpose cannot be to know, though she may gain knowledge in the pursuit of other goals. Instead of Rousseau's bourgeois household utility, we here see the awakening of a sense of broader social purpose for women. Ruskin's woman is not merely expected to keep track of the amount of butter the housekeeper has used—she is expected to “exercise herself in imagining what would be the effects upon her mind and conduct, if she were daily brought into the presence of the suffering which is not the less real because shut from her sight.”

While still envisioned as domestically sheltered, Ruskin's woman has a larger social consciousness that allows her some sense of direction in her life.

The Ruskin who speaks somewhat dismissively of learning for women may be hard to reconcile with the Ruskin who spent much of his patrimony supporting the girls' school Winnington Hall.

Yet Ruskin wrote “Of Queens' Gardens” primarily to address a single girl

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53 Ruskin, p. 81.
—Rose La Touche, who had been privately educated. As Dinah Birch notes, “Self-examination and the lack of serious work is the real enemy of girls’ growth in 'Of Queens' Gardens', as Ruskin believed it had been Rose's enemy.” Yet while Ruskin may have been, indeed was, an enthusiastic supporter of girls' and women's education, as a public intellectual, the frameworks and mindsets he promotes within his public lecture “Of Queens' Gardens” are influential and cannot be disregarded as merely addressed to a single figure. While one must reconcile the two, seemingly distinct Ruskins that emerge from his work and from his life, neither can be dismissed as irrelevant.

In questions of reading and education, Ruskin displays an interesting and, I am convinced, thoroughly Victorian, duality in his approaches to girls and boys. For, after outlining his approach to the literary education of girls, which I shall explore in more detail further on, he uses two distinct metaphors in describing two kinds of education:

“[T]here is just this difference between the making of a girl's character and a boy's—you may chisel a boy into shape, as you would a rock, or hammer him into it, if he be of a better kind, as you would a piece of bronze. But you cannot hammer a girl into anything. She grows as a flower does,—she will wither without sun; she will decay in her sheath, as a narcissus will, if you do not give her air enough; she may fall, and defile her head in dust, if you leave her without help at some moments of her life; but you cannot fetter her; she must take her own fair form and way, if she take any.”

Here, while the concept of innate or natural properties is invoked for both girls and boys (“her own fair form and way” and “if he be of a better kind”), but there the similarity ends. Boys are

56 Ruskin, p. 83.
industrial products, to be chiseled or hammered to a pattern, whereas girls are entirely organic, to be cultivated by a system that is dictated only by their own developmental needs. Arguably, this system invests the girl with far more power than the boy—she becomes the director of her own curriculum in some sense, dictating how her education will progress. Yet this is the same nature that, as argued previously, has been used to subordinate women throughout much of human history. While Ruskin is graceful enough to use discrete metaphors that avoid direct comparison, the associations between the strong, powerful stone and bronze and the frail, delicate flower are hard to avoid.

Ruskin's conception of a girl's literary study follows from this organic metaphor in a neo-humanist strain, suggesting that with certain restrictions, all reading should be permissible to the developing girl:

> The chance and scattered evil that may here and there haunt, or hide itself in, a powerful book, never does any harm to a noble girl; but the emptiness of an author oppresses her, and his amiable folly degrades her. And if she can have access to a good library of old and classical books, there need be no choosing at all. Keep the modern magazine and novel out of your girl's way: turn her loose into the old library every wet day, and let her alone.\(^57\)

Here we see that Ruskin's educational directives are a blend of the romantically permissive and the clearly humanist. Though there is something wonderfully liberating about Ruskin's “let her alone,” it is, as I shall explore further in this chapter, a pitfall for anyone desiring the kind of rigorous education that requires guidance and supervision. While he comes forth in favor of not choosing a girl's reading and of allowing her to direct her own studies without interference,
other signs suggest the carefully chosen canon of the humanists—the “good library of old and
classical books,” that is to frame the girl's selection even as she seemingly pursues her own
inclination. Sharon Aronofsky Weltman sees this in particular as a moment in which Ruskin
breaks down gender barriers: “The solitary acts of exploring a library and reading books are the
defining rituals for a scholar; Ruskin's insistence that girls perform them fully is his most
stringent blow at gender differences within student identity, despite the syrupy and gendered
justification he offers to support it.”58 Yet the specifically solitary, domestically sheltered
nature of library reading is, in this case, part of a home education that is very different from
that offered to boys of the period. The potentially liberating act of exploring the library
becomes another moment in which the public/private boundaries are reinforced for girls, with
the physical boundaries of the home counteracting the intellectual liberation of uncensored
reading.

It is this library that I use, to some extent as a guiding concept in questions of self-
directed readership for girls: the domestic library that provides the chief material for an
education that may be otherwise neglected. This library is a definitely masculine space, though
sometimes, as seen in Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, which I examine in my second
chapter, contaminated with feminine influences and selections. The “good library” of Ruskin's
description contains no modern novels, which are excessively feminized through associations
with both authorship and readership. If the girl is set forth into this safely prescribed space, she
need fear no danger, because all the pernicious influences of her own gender have already been
eradicated. This operates in contrast to the popular circulating libraries of the nineteenth
century whose function was to provide as many popular choices as possible; while the

“popular” choice was often a serious work of non-fiction, there was nonetheless not the

58 Sharon Aronofsky Weltman, *Performing the Victorian: John Ruskin and Identity in Theater, Science, and
opportunity for canon-making that exists within the private library. Indeed, Ruskin specifically proscribes for girls the circulating library, calling its choices “wet with the last and lightest spray of the fountain of folly.”

“A temple of the hearth”: The Private and Public Products of Victorian Education

It may seem that a text like “Of Queens' Gardens,” whatever Ruskin's works may have done to contradict it, sets up an intraversable boundary between the male and female spheres, and certainly many who followed Ruskin treated the delineation of separate spheres as such. Ruskin speaks of the “temple of the hearth,” saying that “wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her....home is yet wherever she is; and for a noble woman it stretches far round her, better than ceiled with cedar, or painted with vermilion, shedding its quiet light far, for those who else were homeless.” It is important to note both the breadth and the inescapibility of Ruskin's vision. While home is far from claustrophobic, it is also a complete spatial prison. Home then relies more on the nature of the woman in question than on any conception of appropriate setting or space, which may give us a sense of either movement or paralysis depending on how we conceive of these public/private divisions. I intend in this section to suggest a framework that relies on more than a simple conception of the physical home, accounting instead for the more partial movements between public and private spheres, encompassing a variety of activities.

Susan Gal's work on the semiotics of public vs. private makes clear the ways in which the boundaries that are often taken for granted in discourse are in fact merely ideological constructions. “Despite the assumption of 'separate spheres,’” she argues, “most social practices, relations, and transactions are not limited to the principles associated with one or

59 Ruskin, p. 82.
60 Ruskin, p. 78.
another sphere.” As words, she defines public and private as “indexical signs that are always relative: dependent for part of their referential meaning on the interactional context in which they are used.” Dependent for meaning, also, on each other, which is a key component of outlining how we understand these spheres as differentiated (always) and yet necessarily operating side by side. Gal uses the term “fractal” to describe the ways in which public and private operate as constantly reiterated and therefore redefined by social interactions. She therefore argues that “spaces that are undoubtedly public (in one context) can be turned into private ones by indexical gestures (the sweeping and caretaking [of a store's proprietor]) which are recalibrations that bring them into new contrast sets.”

The distinctions made between public and private are particularly relevant to Ruskin criticism. Kate Millett, who for years was the most important feminist voice on “Of Queens' Gardens,” regards the lecture as primarily reflective of “the official Victorian attitude” and “Victorian chivalry,” qualities she contrasts with the “realism” of John Stuart Mill's *Subjection of Women*. Millett sees Ruskin's promulgation of separate spheres as primarily a strategy to “subvert the new heresy” of women's rights. She claims, “Having through mere assertion 'proven' that the sexes are complementary opposites, Ruskin then proceeds to map out their worlds, reserving the entire scope of human endeavor for the one, and a little hothouse for the other.” Millett thus ignores Ruskin's strictures on bringing up girls “as if they were meant for sideboard ornaments” (84) to receive a concept that Ruskin treats seriously, home-building, with unveiled contempt. While she is not outright wrong in her reading of Ruskin's reification of separate spheres, Millett ignores the larger subtleties of Ruskin's argument, most importantly

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61 Gal, 78.
62 Gal, 80.
63 Gal, 82.
65 Millett, p. 91.
66 Millett, p. 93.
his awareness of the social ills of his age and his desire that women should help to alleviate them. In reading the Ruskin of the “official Victorian attitude” and school prizes (“Of Queens' Gardens” was notably popular as a prize to Victorian schoolgirls), Millett ignores Ruskin the radical, who is seeking precisely to turn women's minds outwards rather than in. She fails, in fact, to note the fractal nature of the distinctions that Ruskin sets up, and the gestures he uses to make public into private (and perhaps vice versa).

For it is not merely the spatiality of Ruskin's conception of home that must be understood clearly, but the activities that he conceived of women as engaged in. Deborah Epstein Nord, in her edited volume of *Sesame and Lilies*, outlines the different ways that Ruskin has been used by scholars in the past and contextualizes them. She argues that “Ruskin burdened women with the duty of home-building, but this duty was understood, as well, as license to enter the arena of public life, not just as ladies bountiful or philanthropists but as teachers, nurses, artists, reformers, tenement managers, and slum workers.” Here we have an interesting conceptual contradiction that lies at the level of language if nowhere else: home-building leads women into “the arena of public life.” This then potentially requires a fragmentation of our understanding of home, whereby the domestic home is, certainly, still private, but the larger home envisioned by Ruskin extends into spaces and roles that could be conceptualized as public.

One of these troubled spaces, for Ruskin and Victorian society alike, was the school and the school for girls in particular. Christina de Bellaigue argues that “[t]he first part of the nineteenth century...had seen the elaboration of a conception of education that emphasized the distance between school and home,” and she sketches out the ways that this distinction was

both played out and masked in the education of girls.\textsuperscript{68} The contrast between the \textit{purpose} of a girl's education (to prepare her for the home) and the \textit{setting} of her education (outside of the home) necessarily created some difficulty in reconciliation. As a kind of compromise, small, often family-run schools for girls flourished throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries before gradually becoming obsolete as Victorian reforms in teacher training and education changed the standards of education for girls and women alike. Such schools were often primarily engaged in secondary education, and were intended to provide not only academic but also social benefits to their pupils. Yet, despite these purported advantages, there was often concern over the concept of removing girls from the home environment at all. Elizabeth Gargano notes how "[w]hile the institutional classroom cultivates the child's mind, domestic pedagogy supposedly nurtures the child's heart."\textsuperscript{69} Clearly few parents would desire an un-nurtured heart in a child of either sex, least of all a girl. Yet even as the domestic sphere expanded in the Victorian era, the education of girls outside the home continued to be a \textit{desideratum} for social status and the dreaded "accomplishments" that were often held to be the only value of such schools.

Yet the movement of girls outside the home for purposes of education mirrored the movement of labor outside the family and into the industrial workplace, creating an institutional society. For the fact of the school as institution was perhaps the chief unspeakable in the education of girls. Schools relied upon the very quality of smallness to help maintain the fiction of the home that alloyed the idea that female children were being institutionally educated. In the school that educational theorist and novelist Elizabeth Sewell started with her sisters, "their pupils referred to the trio as 'Aunts Elizabeth, Ellen and Emma.'" Adolescent


insubordination was hardly a problem in a community where ties of personal affection bound the inhabitants in mutual obligation.”70 Gwen Raverat, in the late Victorian era, “had to endure, when the school day was over, 'the distasteful duty of kissing five or six mistresses good night', as they stood in a row after Prayers. Such a ritual was seen as a mark of the family atmosphere of the small private boarding school.”71 Manufacturing these "ties of personal affection" and a “family atmosphere,” however, and forging affective relationships, was a difficult business in a situation where a community is created through contingency and economic transactions. As the "Aunts Elizabeth, Ellen and Emma" above suggest, such a relationship was best formed through the establishment of a family dynamic, and small schools of the period seem to have been more or less successful based on their ability to achieve this dynamic. This family fiction had the dual virtue of presumably securing an acceptably genteel and nurturing environment for girls and of erasing the commerciality of the education profession in order to maintain said gentility.

Because the education of girls had previously been conducted almost exclusively within the home environment, the slightly modified home itself became one of the chief models for female education in the first part of the nineteenth century. These schools were often based on intrafamilial partnerships between sisters or other female relations, women who were lucky enough to have a home that might admit other occupants and considered themselves sufficiently genteel and learned to provide some kind of worthy education to their pupils. In truth, the small, family-based boarding school is only a step away from the working-class dame school in the scope of its ambitions. Elizabeth Gargano notes how, "For Victorian readers . . . the regimented classroom necessarily evoked the oppositional image of a jeopardized domestic

instruction, just as any common object conjures up its own shadow.\textsuperscript{72} While Gargano's work on the spaces of the school is only rarely differentiated by gender, this consideration is one that particularly predominates in the case of girls, whose education away from home remained less common than that of boys. Further, this message about Victorian readers could equally be applied to Victorian parents, who were similarly preoccupied with these shadows of domestic instruction.

The girls' school then compromises its aims by modeling the space of the school on the family environment and casting it as a domestic instruction with only a slightly broader scope. Reading one of the common types of advertisements for small girls' schools, Gargano demonstrates its replications of the domestic sphere: "Here, the quasi-domestic space that Currie and others attempted to institutionalize has not yet shrunk to the restricted and peripheral teacher's room. Instead, the teacher offers the whole of her house as the site of familial instruction."\textsuperscript{73} What is notable here is not merely the image of a whole house used for instruction, but rather the contingent nature of the space. This is not a school that has been designed by an architect in order to provide children with a reassuring, home-like environment; it is a home that has been modified, probably only slightly, in order to provide an institutional environment. The constraints of limited means thereby make a virtue of necessity in the way that characterizes so many of the common features of small girls' schools in the nineteenth century.

For limited space was typically matched by limited staff that might extend only to members of the family and various visiting masters who could provide additional tuition. Constraints of space and staffing offered the apparent virtue, however, of offering individual supervision and understanding for each girl. Sewell argues that in the second, more suitable

\textsuperscript{72} Gargano, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{73} Gargano, p. 64.
school that she attended, each girl was "in some degree known and understood." Sewell, who went on to found a school that replicated this same pseudo-domestic, intimate ideology, here identifies the chief argument in favor of small, family-run schools, wherein lack of tuition might be compensated for by being "known and understood." This was all the more important owing to the important function of moral education that such schools promulgated. Dinah Birch notes that among Victorian teachers, "Some saw the teaching vocation as primarily religious. They were training children for eternity. Others were more down-to-earth, wanting to prepare girls to cope better with this world—though some element of religious training was expected by parents, and was rarely absent." This religious training was not only or chiefly confined to any sort of academic transmission of biblical texts or correct information about precepts of the Church of England, but commonly encompassed providing moral supervision and guidance. With such particular aims, having a dozen pupils rather than a gross offers a distinct advantage in the possibilities of individual moral direction.

These moral aims were particularly central to the ideologies of pedagogy for girls. Birch argues that "[b]ecause women were thought to represent sympathy rather than rivalry, the cultivation of private virtue rather than public achievement was judged to be what mattered most in their schooling. The artificiality of these patterns was not easy to spot for those who were caught up in them." While in the space of the twenty-first century, the "artificiality" described here may indeed be apparent, within the Victorian era, there is an organic unity to the idea of cultivating domestic young women whose morals and values might be relied upon, rather than educated young women whose achievements could never, according to the

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76 Birch, p. 76.
conception of separate spheres, be *more* important than accomplishments within the home, and might easily be less important. The cultivation of said sympathy and private virtue was perhaps the best preparation for the domestic lives prepared for these girls by normative ideology.

Yet behind this fiction lay a pedagogy as well as a subjective reality. Educators like Sewell felt that a domestic, family-style environment was the only preparation for a successfully domestic life: "The school is the type of the life they are hereafter to lead. Girls are to dwell in quiet homes, amongst a few friends; to exercise a noiseless influence, to be submissive and retiring. There is no connexion between the bustling mill-wheel life of a large school and that for which they are supposed to be preparing."77 The school must then offer something like these "quiet homes" that are intended to be the destiny of middle-class girls. They would be taught within a kind of home how to later manage in homes of their own. An orderly, domestic environment was therefore the model for the school, which might even in turn provide a model for the home, as educational reformer Emily Davies argued that "there are certain principles, if I may so call them, underlying and governing the organisation of a college—that the same principles, with obvious limitations, ought to underlie and govern the organisation of a household of young people."78 A school, at its best, would provide an environment with the virtues of the domestic and the orderliness of the institution, offering, as Gal would point out, fractal movements between the public and private.

Elizabeth Sewell's narrative of her schooldays offers a unique window into the world of the girls' school because it presents two schools: one that nearly led to a sort of emotional and religious breakdown on Sewell's part, and the other that fostered a more ideally nurturing and

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domestic kind of environment. When first sent to school, Sewell attended the academy of Miss Crooke, whose grimly institutional nature is made apparent both by the exceeding formality of disciplinary practices, but also metonymically through descriptions of dreary rooms that housed multiple girls and provided none of the comforts of home. Sewell insists that "[p]eople now would scarcely believe what Miss Crooke's house was like, especially the wretchedness of the large bedroom which we four sisters and another little girl inhabited; the uncarpeted floor, the two blocked-off windows, with a third which we were forbidden ever to look out of." The space itself is unwelcoming, with its hard floors and forbidden windows that prevent any fond attachment from being formed with the physical room. Even between the children, a distance was enforced: "Miss Crooke, who, in some ways, was very wise, avoided anything like undesirable intimacy by obliging us all to use special forms of civility amongst each other. "Miss" was the one appellation, we never adopted Christian names—yet we played together when the opportunity was given." (19) Sewell relates this piece of formality within the context of the heterogeneity of class represented at the school, but it also demonstrates, though with Sewell's approval, a particular attempt to close off intimate and affective relations between pupils.

Sewell describes at length the emotional uncertainties that the rigid discipline enforced at Miss Crooke's caused to her. Sensitive by nature, she became constantly overcome with religious and moral scruples that seem to have been almost paralyzing. She explains how "I had worked myself into a very fidgety self-worrying state of mind . . . Miss Crooke herself must have been frightened at the mental condition to which her over-strictness had brought me, and she would have had still greater cause for alarm if she had known all that passed in my

mind" (24). Sewell came to believe, among other things, that she was obligated to kill her mother because she had considered making such a vow—the reasons for which are tantalizingly obscure. Her solution, in the school's environment of constant supervision, was to confess: "I begged that I might be allowed to tell every day the things I had done wrong, because I felt so wicked. Miss Crooke at first treated me as a converted penitent, but by degrees she must have become alarmed. My confessions verged on the ludicrous" (27).

Sewell's position was particularly distressing owing to her apparently unsatisfactory relationship with her mother. In addition to that unexplained "vow," Sewell admits that she was never "accustomed to unreserve with [her] mother" (25). Eventually, Sewell's mother interposed, which apparently relieved many of her conscientious scruples, yet this interposition was engineered by Miss Crooke rather than by Sewell herself. Unpleasant and emotionally unhealthy as Miss Crooke's environment was to Sewell, her response was still to confess to the academic authority figure rather than to the domestic one.

Owing chiefly to this incident, Sewell's parents removed her to another, one that proved more suitable, despite Sewell's perplexity in understanding the reasons for the choice:

It is strange to me now to see how this question of a new school was arranged. No one knew personally Miss Aldridge and her sister Caroline, to whose care we were entrusted. They had the reputation of being nice people (as the expression is), and a lady who made inquiries about them for my mother, liked them; and then my mother went to see them herself, and thought everything about the house neat and comfortable and home-like; but there might have been much that was unsatisfactory underneath the outward experience. (31-2)

The wording here is particularly odd, given that Sewell, having attended the school, must know whether or not there was "much that was unsatisfactory." Such a hint suggests that there must
have been, yet Sewell records little in the way of specific deficiencies at this second school.

As Miss Crooke’s school was characterized by rigid discipline and unsuitable kinds of spiritual guidance, the establishment of the Aldridge sisters seems largely to be characterized by the above description of "home-like." The school was particularly small, and seems to have been strongly organized around the model of the home: "There were twelve pupils, and we were treated very much as we might have been at home. No teachers lived in the house, and we were watched over individually, and in some degree known and understood" (32). The individual supervision of the girls is a key component in this model of education that replicates the home environment in order to train girls to be suitable wives and mothers in homes of their own. At the same time, however, the school itself offers a different environment from the "real" home, with the fractal intersection of public and private creating new attachments and fostering a development that is perhaps not necessarily intended. Sewell, cryptic once more, remarks on the mixed nature of her education at the Aldridges:

Certainly those two years and a half of school life were, in my case, years of most rapid growth for good and evil. Emulation and companionship, and a constant collision of wits, brought out all I knew, and gave me a longing to know more; but at the same time they taught me things which I have since felt it would be the greatest boon that could be conferred upon me to forget. (35)

"Companionship" and the contact with personalities at school is here focused on as the center of Sewell’s experience at this school. It is suggested that less formal distancing occurred here than under the auspices of Miss Crooke, which Sewell argues leads to mixed results. She presents herself as having gained one of the chief aims of education—"a longing to know more"—but also as a subject who has been tainted by the intimate companionship of the school. The emotional education of the school is therefore one that she sees as having been
damaging to her adolescent self. Yet at the same time, she still here seems to reaffirm, with the "collision of wits" that "brought out all I knew," the importance of intimate connections, intellectual and otherwise, within the school.

Ruskin and the Humanism of the Domestic

Teasing out some of Ruskin's ideas about the school—or the school for girls in particular—may allow us to begin reconciling the dual Ruskins to see how formal education may be understood within the model of the very private, home-based description put forth in “Of Queens' Gardens” and the cultural standards of the period. The most pertinent text in Ruskin's canon towards this task is his *The Ethics of Dust: Ten Lectures to Little Housewives on the Elements of Crystallization*. This book was based on his time helping at Winnington Hall, and is framed by the lectures given by an anonymous “Old Lecturer” to a group of girls. It is written in dialogue, and its style is highly playful and imaginative. Ruskin conceived of it as providing “introductions, for young people” or “suggesting new occupations or interests to its younger readers.”

In this text, we can better see how Ruskin's ideal of creative, loosely-directed education plays out in the “real” space of a girls' school and to what degree the public and private are intertwined in that instruction. While it must still be understood as a creative and fictionalized piece, *Ethics of Dust* performs a great deal of very useful work in demonstrating Ruskin's ideals about education.

It is notable that this text never received the popular acclaim given to “Of Queens' Gardens.” Ruskin claims in his preface to the second edition of *Ethics of Dust* that he has “seldom been more disappointed by the result of my best pains given to any of my books, than by the earnest request of my publisher, after the opinion of the public had been taken on the

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'Ethics of Dust,' that I would 'write no more in dialogue!'" This reaction may be due in part to what Ruskin acknowledges to be the “disconnected method” of the text, but I believe that the primary objection to these dialogues may have been towards the hybridity that Ruskin deploys in order to not only demonstrate, but also in part enact his pedagogical theories. Ruskin claims in his original preface that “[n]o science can be learned in play; but it is often possible, in play, to bring good fruit out of past labour, or show sufficient reasons for the labour of the future.” This quality of play within the text serves to reinforce an idea of the school that is profoundly humanist and operating in a particularly anti-industrialist mode.

For if the object of industrialism is the application of labor, method, and machinery to a raw product in order to manufacture a finished product, then there is little space for play or performativity. Ruskin appears in this light as the antithesis to the “industrial” schoolmaster satirized and critiqued most famously by Charles Dickens in his 1854 *Hard Times*. Instead, Ruskin in his lectures primarily ignores the industrial aspects of education such as examination and standards in order to bring in the “homely” activities of making-believe, story-telling, and the cunning insertion of morals within the lessons that are ostensibly based, however loosely, on scientific subjects. In this way, Ruskin uses imaginative play as well as an intimate approach to the teacher/student relationship to transform the public space of a school into the private space of the home. It may be argued that in this way, Ruskin feminizes himself, making the Lecturer one feature of a very domestic landscape that belies the seeming formality of the title. While the “little housewives” perform in part the work of home-making within the text, Ruskin extends their labor by making himself one more aspect of their play—an authority, yes, but an authority who can be teased and called upon to perform in the ludic environment.

Ruskin uses play to introduce his topics, but the establishment of a home-like

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81 *Ethics of Dust*, vii.
82 *Ethics of Dust*, xvi.
atmosphere is equally important. The first lecture, “The Valley of Diamonds,” is characterized as “[a] very idle talk, by the dining-room fire, after raisin-and-almond time.”

This lecture is not conducted in the space of a classroom, though certain of the later lectures are, but rather in a domestic space that might have proved familiar to those of Ruskin's readers who had never entered a schoolroom. Nor does the lecture begin with any peremptory issues to silence, but rather with the Old Lecturer bidding one of the children to speak: “Come here, Isabel, and tell me what the make-believe was, this afternoon.”

Nor does Isabel respond until she has “arrang[ed] herself very primly on the footstool,” followed shortly thereafter by Florrie “putting her head round from behind L.'s sofa-cushion” and, a moment later “giv[ing] L. a kiss.”

The Lecturer appears here in the guise of the benevolent and beloved bourgeois patriarch, relaxing within the family circle and showering the girls with attention. The “little housewives,” too, play their part in constructing the environment. Florrie, when later reproached for playing with the kitten during a lecture, objects that she is “only nursing her. She'll be asleep in my lap, directly.” And Dora, who is described in the Dramatis Personae as one “who has the keys and is housekeeper,” despite being aged seventeen, begins another lecture with “Now, the curtains are drawn, and the fire's bright, and here's your armchair—and you're to tell us all about what you promised.”

Nor is the focus on the domestic space confined merely to the setting of the pieces or the asides between serious dialogue. Ruskin's lecture on “Home Virtues” instructs the girls that their principle duties lie in dancing, dressing, and cooking—he expands their definitions, to be sure, to mean “intense happiness,” “dressmaking,” and, yes, cooking. And it is within the

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83 Ethics of Dust, p. 3.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ethics of Dust, p. 92.
87 Ethics of Dust, p. 129.
space of this lecture that, like a good humanist, he speaks out against the monastic system,
arguing that “Half the monastic system rose out of that, acting on the occult pride and ambition
of good people (as the other half of it came of their follies and misfortunes).”

Here Ruskin is not merely anti-monastic but, perforce, anti-scholastic. In a move that was foreshadowed in
“Of Queens' Gardens” and its strictures against girls reading theology, Ruskin insists that the
monastic system reflected the “noblest men and women shut[ting] themselves up, precisely
where they could be of least use.” The monastic system can then be interpreted as the kind of
“home” against which Ruskin is particularly vehement: that is, one which excludes rather than
includes. He dismisses the learning of the monks as “nonsense” and exclaims over “what little
progress they made in the sciences to which they devoted themselves as a duty.”

This connection, between scholasticism and the monastic system, allows us to see the
true flowering of Ruskin's humanism—that is, as it applies not merely to his pedagogy, but also
to the politics and social awareness that are its cornerstone. Ruskin is not simply a humanist
educator and a social reformer, but a humanist educator precisely because of his keen interest in
the problems of poverty and industrialism. The (often anti-Catholic) rejection of monasticism
and the accompanying academic model of scholasticism was precisely the defining gesture of
humanism, which drew knowledge to a scale that was more immediately apparent in its
relevance, just as Ruskin desires education to be relevant. Ruskin's broad conception of home
and home-making duties for women are a natural extension of this humanist philosophy, and
his refusal to draw clear boundaries between private and public spheres is a move that helps to
define his humanist principles for women. The more complex relationship at play, however, is
that between scholasticism and *industrialism* as they relate to pedagogical and readership

88 Ethics of Dust, p. 144.
89 Ethics of Dust, p. 145.
90 Ethics of Dust, p. 146.
models. To question this relationship more properly, it is necessary to turn from sage writing to fiction—and to the novels of George Eliot.

Scholasticism and Industrialism in *The Mill on the Floss*

To move among public lectures, non-fictional creative texts, and novels may seem to be working with a dangerous combination of epistemological levels. What I argue, however, is that “Of Queens' Gardens,” *Ethics of Dust,* and *The Mill on the Floss* are all written not only within a personal and intrapersonal context, as I have explored and will continue to explore, but also with a sharp eye toward public debates on social issues. As I have argued, the movement of girls outside the home for schooling was, because of its very prevalence, a vexed topic during the period, and in *The Mill on the Floss,* Eliot offers a different picture to Ruskin's rosy view of domestic instruction, suggesting instead the real tragedy, intellectual and otherwise, that may await the eager young mind left unguided. The novel instead makes a strong argument for the need for real teachers for girls and puts forth a parallel between the education of Victorian girls and boys.

To use *The Mill on the Floss* as a text is, inevitably, to invite the shade of Mary Anne Evans into discussion. In his study on Eliot's intellectual life, Avrom Fleishman dismisses much of Eliot's early education and reading, focusing on the Christian worldview it reflected and from which she would later distance herself. He argues, “To sum up the impression the young George Eliot makes in her epistolary comments on her reading in religious and secular literature, we may conclude that she responds very much as would a typical Anglican churchgoer of the middling classes in early Victorian England.”91 In taking this tack, however, Fleishman ignores the opportunity to explore precisely what the literary education (religious or secular) of this “typical Anglican churchgoer” might be and how its methodology rather than its

content might bear on the subject's later life and intellectual attitudes. While the bearing of Eliot's early interest in Evangelicism on her literary works cannot be denied, a critical opportunity has been missed that almost mirrors Maggie Tulliver's own missed opportunity as the readership of the girl becomes inextricably intertwined with matters of faith.

Another biographer, however, relates Eliot's early reading and education with interest, and despite the idiosyncrasies that may be ascribed to Leslie Stephen's biography of Eliot, the wealth of specifics he provides are invaluable. He describes the type of schools to which Eliot was sent, both of which were in the vein of the domestic public school that I have discussed previously in their small number of boarders and physical setting. Her early literary readership seems to have consisted principally of that curious kind of juxtaposition of fiction and non-fiction so common to the period, and an early experience with *Waverley* is held to be noteworthy. Stephens notes of her early education, and I here consider his authority as an intellectual of the nineteenth-century to give credence to his opinion, “She was not, indeed, competent to take a first-class in a University examination, or to enter any career for which such honours qualified the nobler sex,” yet notes that “[h]er intellectual curiosity was roused, though not yet fixed upon any definite object.”92 This lack of a definite object, which I believe Eliot in her later writings combines with the notion of the lack of a true teacher, is one that I shall explore in more depth through the medium of *The Mill on the Floss* in later sections.

From her formal education, Eliot moved into an intense period of reading and letter-writing that offers a window not only into her intellectual development, but also into her self-awareness of her own educational deficiencies. Rosemarie Bodenheimer chronicles what she cites as Eliot's “epistolary period of life,” that directly after leaving school, and reads Eliot's letters in order to portray Eliot as a developing intellectual and writer. Eliot writes, in 1839,

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how her mind “presents...such an assemblage of disjointed specimens of history, ancient and modern, scraps of poetry picked up from Shakespeare, Cowper, Wordsworth and Milton, newspaper topics, morsels of Addison and Bacon, Latin verbs, geometry entomology and chemistry, all arrested and petrified and smothered by the fast thickening every day of actual events, relative anxieties, and household cares and vexations.”

Notable in this quotation is the type of words she uses: “disjointed,” “scraps,” and “morsels” in particular. Reflected here is the frustration of a vigorous mind submitted to a non-systematic education and then left bereft of further approved intellectual ambition. Similar, in Mill on the Floss, is the description of “smattering, extraneous information, such as is given to girls.” In short, we may see that while Eliot was not starved for ideas and learning in the way that Maggie Tulliver is, her circumstances left her poised to make trenchant critique on the state of women's education.

In looking at scenes of reading in Mill on the Floss, we can see that Maggie's work as a reader is primarily imaginative and creative. As a child, reading Defoe's History of the Devil, she takes the pictures and constructs tales to go with them, compensating for her lack of linguistic competency with a visual and narrative acuity. “I like the pictures,” she says, “and I make stories to the pictures out of my own head, you know” (19). Her later experience with Tom's Latin grammar operates similarly. Instead of trying to understand the language in a systematic fashion, she “presently made up her mind to skip the rules in the Syntax—the examples became so absorbing. The mysterious sentences, snatched from an unknown context . . . gave boundless scope to her imagination, and were all the more fascinating because they were in a peculiar tongue of their own, which she could learn to interpret” (147). Here Maggie seeks meaning rather than system and is attracted to the “boundless scope” offered by

the “mysterious sentences.” She functions once more as an intensely creative and interpretive reader rather than a receptive one, demonstrating the qualities that both distinguish and doom her.

It is after leaving school, however, that Maggie's intellect brings her to real unhappiness, and while she attempts to use books to alleviate her suffering, there are many problems attendant on this path. She wishes, briefly, for novels and poems to act as drugs: “Sometimes Maggie thought she could have been contented if she could have had all Scott's novels and all Byron's poems!—then, perhaps, she might have found happiness enough to dull her sensibility to her actual daily life” (286). Yet she reflects that she can create “dream-worlds” from her own fertile imagination and that these literary opiates will not satisfy what she wants, which is to better understand the world around her. In short, Maggie wants a real education that will help her through her daily life in some meaningful way—an education that has not been provided by the “hard dry questions on Christian Doctrine” (286). She believes that education, or the lack thereof, is somehow the key to her problems of discontent: “If she had been taught 'real learning and wisdom, such as great men knew;' she thought she should have held the secrets of life; if she had only books, that she might learn for herself what wise men knew!” (286). Her first desire here is to have been taught—for directed learning that would enable her to understand better what she wishes to learn. Her second desire is for books that would allow her to seize a kind of intellectual power for herself, reflecting the sense of mastery that Maggie seems to have felt consistently over literature from childhood.

Eliot reinforces the difference between male and female education by having Maggie turn from her own schoolbooks to those of her brother Tom. For a time, Maggie works hard over the Latin and geometry schoolbooks, trying to repair the gaps in her education and earnestly believing that if she knows what men know, then some kind of contentment will be
her reward. Yet she finds heavy difficulties as she attempts to follow this path unaided: “The discouragement deepened as the days went on, and the eager heart gained faster and faster on the patient mind” (287). She begins to fantasize of leaving home, but in a reversal of the traditional fantasy of fleeing to a lover, Maggie imagines fleeing to a teacher: “[S]he would go to some great man—Walter Scott, perhaps—and tell him how wretched and how clever she was, and he would surely do something for her” (287). Here Ruskin's ideal of the self-directed education, the girl “following her own fair way,” is shown to be a recipe for discontentment and despair rather than fulfillment. What Maggie needs more than anything is systematic education that can only be imparted by a teacher.

Before Maggie finds her teacher-lover, she finds the *Imitation of Christ* and, in a move that Ruskin would have found both dangerous and familiar, sets out to improve herself through a path of faith. Within the pages of Thomas a Kempis, she believes that she has found “insight, and strength, and conquest, to be won by means entirely within her own soul, where a supreme Teacher was waiting to be heard” (290). The idea of a victory to be won by “her own soul” is one that holds a tremendous appeal to Maggie's intellectual vanity, while that “supreme Teacher” is the one that Maggie has been seeking for so long in vain. The shift from intellectual to spiritual pursuits is one that enables Maggie to follow a self-directed path, and one that is also socially approved, for it seems to make Maggie into a “good girl” rather than a willful one. Yet without a mentor or director, or a real change in those circumstances that have occasioned her unhappiness, there is no more hope for Maggie in faith than in literature or learning.

Eliot explicitly demonstrates this solitary path to be a harmful one and, I argue, in doing so reinforces a kind of scholastic tradition that relies on disputation and interaction between minds as a better ideal. Indeed, the teacher who finally emerges for Maggie, Philip Wakeham,
fits into the pattern of teacher-lover whose most famous example is arguably also one of the most famous of scholastics: Peter Abelard. Patricia Menon briefly explores the relationship between Philip and Maggie in her study on mentor-lovers in fiction, but finds the mixture here unsatisfactory in the face of Maggie's “final, and authorially approved, sacrifice of her love for Stephen.”

What Maggie seems to desire from Philip is not a teacher-lover, but rather a teacher-brother, a role that Tom has so notably failed to take for her. Similarly, in Middlemarch, Dorothea Brooke imagines that “[t]he really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it.”

For it is in Middlemarch and its Edward Casaubon that we find the model of the teacher-lover in Eliot's work, a man who “consented to listen and teach for an hour together, like a schoolmaster of little boys, or rather like a lover, to whom a mistress's elementary ignorance and difficulties have a touching fitness.” Yet Casaubon fails Dorothea both as a teacher and as a lover, with his shallow bent of both affection and knowledge proving completely inadequate to fill her needs. Menon argues that “Dorothea's aspirations to marry a mentor are not in themselves to be ridiculed [by the narrative voice], but rather her notion that Casaubon is equal to that role.” The attraction he holds for her, however, is not surprising. To Dorothea, he is “something beyond the shallows of ladies-school literature...a living Bossuet...a modern Augustine.” Dorothea, like Maggie, craves education and knowledge, and wants a marriage that will “deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path.”

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97 Middlemarch, p. 42.
98 Menon, p. 158.
99 Middlemarch, p. 12.
100 Middlemarch, p. 17.
The word girlish is often used of Dorothea, though the narrator's tone does not seem critical, and it suggests Dorothea as a figure whose development is far from complete. This “grandest path” that Dorothea seeks is part of the “program for the novel of the future, the novel of vocation,” which critic Alan Mintz identifies in *Middlemarch*. Interestingly, however, the novel does not *directly* treat what is often seen as a chief part of one's vocational development: specifically, education.

Of Dorothea's early education, we know relatively little. The reader is told that the two girls were educated “first in an English family and afterwards in a Swiss family,” suggesting that the domestic rather than regimented or professional style of education was chosen in their case. There is the previous mention of the “shallows of ladies-school literature” and we know that Mr. Brooke uses political economy as “that never-explained science which was thrust as an extinguisher over all her lights” rather than offering her any instruction in the subject. It is because, perhaps, of this ignorance, this near-cloistering effect that Dorothea's education has had upon her, that she is so susceptible to Casaubon's intellectual accomplishments in a way that Celia, more worldly by nature, is not: “For to Dorothea, after that toy-box history of the world adopted to young ladies which had made the chief part of her education, Mr. Casaubon's talk of his great book was full of new vistas.” Eliot seems here to suggest that while a broader and deeper education would not have materially changed Dorothea's temperament, it might have made her a better judge of Casaubon's intellectual attainments and therefore his suitability both as a mentor and as a mate. Indeed, Patricia Beer argues that “Nowhere in the nineteenth-century novel do we get a more chilling picture of the education provided for young women,” although I would argue that this distinction rests rather

102 *Middlemarch*, p. 8.
103 *Middlemarch*, p. 10.
104 *Middlemarch*, p. 58.
with *The Mill on the Floss*.\(^{105}\)

That Eliot intended *Middlemarch* to be an indictment on the state of female education is plain from the ending of the first edition of the work:

Among the many remarks passed on her mistakes, it was never said in the neighborhood of Middlemarch that such mistakes could not have happened if the society into which she was born had not smiled on propositions of marriage from a sickly man to a girl less than half his own age—on modes of education which make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance—on rules of conduct which are in flat contradiction with its own loudly asserted beliefs.\(^{106}\)

This “motley ignorance” is reflected in the novel not only in Dorothea's case but also in that of the accomplished and unhappy Rosamond, who is no more capable of selecting a partner and managing a successful marriage than Dorothea, despite being of a seemingly more worldly mind. These characters must be contrasted with someone like Mary Garth who, despite being equally poor in formal education, manages to educate herself through literature and finds consolation and guidance in the works that she reads.

I argue that there is a bond between the lack that results from unsatisfactory family or family-style bonds of mentoring and teaching and the need for formal education as seen in the new Victorian school system. The scholastic and the industrial merge as the factory-like school, with its emphasis on process, system, and outcome, also provides the dialectic and rigorous education harkening back to the older scholastic tradition. In contrast to the humanist emphasis on “nature,” the scholastic-industrial school instead focuses process and outcome—

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the passing of examinations and entrance into the university. While for Eliot, that outcome may have been the finding of a vocation rather than a formal recognition of intellectual abilities such as a university degree awarded, she highlights the frustration that is the result of intellectual drive without direction. Where other authors, like Charlotte Mary Yonge whom I discuss in my third chapter, found a shape for women's lives in pragmatic acceptance of home duties, Eliot presents this path as littered entirely with disaster.

Thus while Ruskin envisions the whole world as a kind of “home” sanctified by the presence of women and their much-needed social work to ease the problems of an industrial society, Eliot has perhaps a simpler idea of the movement of women between public and private spheres. For Eliot, women must make the transition into the public sphere of education and vocation in order to find fulfillment and an outlet for their creative and intellectual faculties. In this way, she dismantles the divide between public and private, making both spaces potentially available to women and offering free passage between the two. Readership and education, reflectively, become public acts rather than private, cloistered ones as envisioned by Ruskin as the ties of the domestic break down altogether, forcing girls into new and challenging arenas.
"Something Worse than Itself": Romance and the Education of Girls in the Nineteenth Century

The nearly wholesale creation of systematic education for young women in the nineteenth century was a bold project, and yet despite the movement towards education reform and the opening of the public sphere to women, it relied primarily on conceptions of education, not as fitting girls for future professional endeavors, but rather offering a more appropriate foundation for a future life as wife and mother. As such, treatments of literature by nineteenth-century educators are an expansion of the restricted reading historically allowed to women. This expansion makes available classical and poetic texts, but still excludes popular and feminized works of fiction. I argue that the hierarchy and aspects of social control implicit in educational projects of the nineteenth century caused the romance, as a genre, to inhabit an uneasy didactic space. As such, the romance was largely embraced only when it crossed paths with the traditionally masculine disciplines of poetry and classical languages that were central in the education of boys during the period in contrast to the prose romance, which was explicitly proscribed. The feminization of the prose vernacular text reflected concerns about somatic effects of literature on the unruly female body, a tendency of excluding as unworthy of study that which had been notably produced by female authors, and the centrality of moral education during the nineteenth century. These projects of education maintain traditionally male sites of literary excellence as canonical and continue the exclusion and silencing of female voices within distinct genres within the romance. This chapter focuses primarily on negative models of reading, while I reserve positive reading models for discussion in my fourth chapter.

Girls and romances are, according to the strictures of the nineteenth century, nearly inseparable, and yet must at all costs be kept apart. Educational theorist Fénelon offers typical strictures in 1861:
Idle and badly taught girls have ever-wandering imaginations. In the absence of solid food their curiosity turns eagerly to foolish ands dangerous objects. Those that have talent often set themselves up for learned women, and read every book that can feed their vanity. They delight in romances, in comedies, and in tales of marvelous adventures in which unhallowed love is concerned.  

Some distinction, however, must be made, for *romance* to the reader of the nineteenth century seems to have meant largely a volume of prose fiction that defied literary realism and drew inspiration from tales of chivalry and songs of troubadours. Pierre Daniel Huet's definition of romance from 1715 seems to be one that survives through much of the nineteenth century: "The name of Romance was formerly extended not only to Prose but Verse...But the custom of this Age prevails to the contrary; so that we esteem nothing to be properly Romance but Fictions of Love Adventures, disposed into an Elegant Style in Prose, for the Delight and Instruction of the Reader." He further notes that "Romances...have Love for their Principal Subject, and don't concern themselves in War or Politicks, but by Accident. I speak of Regular Romances, for those in Old French, Spanish, and Italian, have generally more of the Soldier than Gallant." Here Huet offers a definition that seems to functionally describe most of the nineteenth-century speech acts that use the word "romance." There is therefore a differentiation between the romance in general, with its history tracing back through antiquity and the eighteenth and nineteenth-century romance, which was definitively a prose work that

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109 Pierre Daniel Huet. *The History of Romances: An Enquiry in to Their Original; Instructions for Composing them; an Account of the most Eminent Authors; With Characters, and Curious Observations upon the Best Performances of that Kind*. Trans. Stephen Lewis. London: 1715, p. 3.
110 Huet, p. 8.
centered around (heterosexual) love.

At the same time, the nineteenth century presents itself very definitely as a liminal space, at least insofar as the history of the romance, and to circumscribe the nineteenth-century conception of romance into a solely eighteenth-century definition would be doing it just as much mischief as leaving it unexamined. Jan Cohn suggests that we must understand the nineteenth-century romance not only by reaching backwards, but also by reaching forward into the twentieth-century uses of the term. She argues, "The parallels to our own time are striking, and the Victorian romances prefigure today's Harlequins, for both address the same dilemmas about power and powerlessness. But there are major differences as well, particularly in the fantasy solutions of the older romances."111 These dilemmas of power are, unsurprisingly, gendered, and Cohn suggests that "the writers of Victorian romances were able to dramatize… vividly the aggressive subtext of women's revenge and their appropriation of power."112 Cohn reads the Victorian romance as a particular genre of mass-market fiction that strongly resembles its modern-day cousin in being produced largely for women and therefore participating in a peculiarly gendered discourse of economics and power relations.

I argue that these definitions are not incompatible, but instead, when synthesized, offer the most accurate possible delineation of the Victorian conception of the romance and, arguably, of the larger nineteenth century, given the close ties between works of gothic fiction and other widely-read works whose audience was presumed to be female. Catherine Hamilton, for example, in her 1892 compendium of Women Writers: Their Works and Ways uses the term romance to describe the works of Walter Scott and, most frequently, Anne Radcliffe.113 The

112Ibid.
term romance seems, then, to have had nearly so broad a power of signification as the word does in modern discourse. There are, certainly, consistent features: as noted previously, romance chiefly signified a prose fiction. Further, it is a prose fiction not aligned with the serious realistic novel that reached its apotheosis during the Victorian period. Elements of romantic love seem to form its primary (but by no means only) discourse, and it is a popular form whose readership is primarily gendered as female.

At the same time, such a conception of romance covers only a strain of romance within the larger signification of the word in modern critical discourse. A larger conception of romance as a genre must concede that the romance has a long literary pedigree stretching back to the earliest roots of antiquity and that, according to present terminology, any attempt to conflate romance and trash is unlikely to be helpful in discerning the particular fate of the larger genre of romance in readership or education. Yet insisting on holding romance as something entirely distinct from those often sensational works of fiction that caused nineteenth-century educators to despair is equally unhelpful. Barbara Fuchs notes the fluidity of categories that allows romance to be conflated with other forms of prose fiction, arguing that "[t]he categories turn out to be remarkably flexible, to the point that part of what determines the characterization of a given text is its a priori valuation by critics." 114 A definition of romance that encompasses, but is not limited by, these nineteenth-century conceptions is therefore necessary in order to trace more accurately the path of the romance and its role in education. I shall here adopt the definition used by Fuchs, that romance is a term describing "a concatenation of both narratological elements and literary topoi, including idealization, the marvelous, narrative delay, wandering, and obscured identity, that…both pose a quest and

complicate it."

This allows for a broad range of works to be considered as romance. It also, however, requires that distinctions be made within the category of romance. I argue that the primary distinction observed in the nineteenth century is that between romances written in verse and those written in prose, with a further crucial distinction made between Greek and Latin texts of antiquity and the modern romance (assuming a generous definition of modernity that encompasses everything following the fall of Roman Empire). As such, I shall retain the broad term romance to denote the modern definitions of the term and use the more specific nineteenth-century romance to signify the particular subgenre described above.

The gendered associations with nineteenth-century romance are inevitable and begin, indeed, during the eighteenth century. Laura Runge points out that "early critical standpoints… consistently overdetermine the association between fiction and the middle class female. Through the figure of the female as reader or writer of fiction, the critical discourse negotiates the gender conflicts central to British society and hence assumes a gendered literary hierarchy." (363). Vexed scenes of female readership abound in the literature of the long eighteenth century, including works preoccupied with the negotiation of prose fiction and reality by young female readers, most notably Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. Runge argues "that this gendered association contributed to and enabled the inferior status of novel writing" (364). At the same time, she points out how "novelists sought to parallel their works with the highest forms in the literary hierarchy," which is to say "the poetic genres of epic, tragedy, or, in some cases, comedy. Although available to women in translation, the writings of the Ancients were perceived to be a more powerful tool for men who enjoyed a more 'authentic' experience by reading them in their original

115 Fuchs, p. 9.
language.” Runge here makes clear the gendered hierarchy that placed poetry and untranslated texts of antiquity at the pinnacle of literary worthiness, with prose romance, which did not require a classical education to write or read, at the nadir.

Despite Runge's compelling arguments, she chooses to elide what I see as one of the most significant features of this early gendering of prose fiction, which is to say the powerful divide between realistic and didactic fictions and the more vivid, exotic, and fantastic works of romance. The texts by Austen and Lennox mentioned above would surely be wholly absurd (not to mention hypocritical) if they did not differentiate between the text being consumed by the actual reader and the texts consumed by the fictional readers whose inability to separate reality from romance is the subject of comedy and concern. Thus Austen's Catherine consumes the gothic fictions of Anne Radcliffe, while Lennox's Arabella is educated almost exclusively from the romances of Madeleine de Scudéry. There are no parallel works espousing the dangers of excessive readership of realistic moral fiction. Instead, the genre of prose fiction is internally differentiated between realistic and fantastic fiction or, we might say, between the novel and the romance.

Lennox's *The Female Quixote* serves as the ideal text to mediate between the genres of romance and realistic fiction, for it encompasses both within its pages as Lennox shows herself an apt creator in both modes, and therefore a fit judge. Lennox therefore authorizes herself, not only through her prose mastery but also through her engagement with contemporary debates on literary criticism, as one writing in the dual modes of author and critic. Within the space of her novel, she outlines the anxious competition between the genres of romance and realistic fiction while privileging critical judgment as the solution to the dilemma she poses. This judgment is shown, in some measure, as lacking in her heroine owing to an insufficient education, and the

117 Runge, 372.
novel's plot hinges on the ways that Arabella's judgment and imagination have been impaired through the consumption of romance. Yet Arabella's “cure” is effected, not through attempts to educate her into a better reader, but by direct instruction from a figure that literary history has long intimately linked with Samuel Johnson.\footnote{For a brief history of the debates over the authorship of Lennox's Chapter 11 of Book 9, see Patricia Meyer Spacks's “The Subtle Sophistry of Desire: Dr Johnson and 'The Female Quixote.'” \textit{Modern Philology} 85, 4 (May 1988): 532-42, 534.} Formal (and hierarchical) education therefore becomes the remedy for Arabella's mental landscape that glorifies violence and the absolute power of love.

The plot of \textit{The Female Quixote} is easily related. The aristocratic Arabella is raised in solitude by her father, who has been embittered by his experience with jealous rivals at court. He educates her carefully himself, but pays no attention to her reading, which is devoted to the French romances left behind by her late mother. Arabella, cloistered from society, believes that life proceeds along the lines of these romances: specifically, that love and lovers are the chief business of everybody everywhere, at such times as they are not either fighting in paynim wars or being carried off for nefarious purposes. Particularly, she understands that a woman's power over her lovers is supreme, and that he will die of despair at her rejection, or live, against any wound or disease, at her word of command. When her father requests that she marry her cousin, Mr. Glanville, she is disgusted at such an unheroical style of proceeding with things, and proceeds to make his life a torment with her romantic notions and frequent misconstructions of reality, despite the fact that both are, very fortunately, companionately attached to one another. At length, she attempts to escape a final perceived attempt on her virtue by flinging herself into the Thames and, during her resultant illness, is instructed by a learned clergyman on the worthlessness of her beloved romances, whereupon she gives up all her illusions and marries Mr. Glanville.
A text as rich and hybridized as *The Female Quixote* has, naturally, drawn a wealth of criticism that to attempt to survey here in full would be vain. Critics have found that the novel bears interest not only for its portrayal of the struggle between literary modes in the eighteenth century and the way that romance came to be gendered as feminine, but also for its investment in questions of literary reviewership and authorship. Arabella's often simplistic methods of reading have also drawn attention to the ways that her engagement with romance, in its literalism, creates “the overarching fear...that the real, transformed by romance into a referent, will become susceptible to the power of the signifier.”

Yet Catherine Gallagher contends that the real problem with Arabella's reading is not its carnivalesque disruption of the real, but its resistance of fiction:

> Although the romance does, as Langbauer points out, bear the thematic burden of untruth in *The Female Quixote*, its purpose is not to disencumber the novel of the “unreal” but to allow for the new form's self-presentation as the regulation and explicit fulfillment of what had previously been an unruly because *unacknowledged* practice. The Quixote's cure begins not with the renunciation but with the acknowledgment of fiction.

Gallagher posits that the novel's invention and “realistic” nature are only possible because they take place within a work of acknowledged fiction.

Implicitly, in both critiques above, the problem of the romance lies in its opposition to

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120 Thompson, 92.

121 Gallagher, p. 179.
reality. Certainly this critique is supported by the novel itself, which frequently juxtaposes the ordinary events of eighteenth-century life—the dismissal of a carp-stealing gardener, for example—with the inventions of romance conjured by Arabella's fertile brain. But realism, lest we should forget, is not the only literary merit possible, and Lennox makes it clear that romance can, in certain fields, be characterized as a superior form of literature. When Arabella is told that “nothing is more different from a human Being, than Heroes or Heroines” and fears that “the Difference is not in Favour of the present World,” she presents a forceful argument for her beloved romances that cannot be easily quashed.\(^{122}\) Her own person, which she has modeled on her fictitious heroines, is so frequently described as being superior to the rest of her sex, that the possibility of romance as offering worthwhile models remains. This is, perhaps, a flaw inherent in the “quixote” literature, which in presenting the reader with a sympathetic hero or heroine, fails to draw equal sympathy on the part of “realistic” society.

The effects of romance on Arabella, however, are not wholly beneficent. Ellen Gardiner points out that “the romance has actually taught Arabella superior critical judgment,” which Arabella demonstrates during her brief time in society, making trenchant judgments on the behaviors she observes.\(^{123}\) Yet Arabella's imagination is problematic as the Doctor points out, “Your Imaginations...are to quick for language; you conjecture too soon, what you do not wait to hear; and reason upon Suppositions which cannot be allow'd you.”\(^{124}\) This failing in imagination, of course, is precisely due to the fact that Arabella does not use her own judgment or experience, but instead refers the events that occur to the “solipsistic and deceptively empowering” system with which she is familiar: that of romance.\(^{125}\) Deprived by her father's

\(^{123}\)Gardiner 4.
\(^{124}\)Lennox, p. 320.
\(^{125}\)De Michaelis 193.
unreasonable behavior from learning society's codes and mores, Arabella has instead substituted a set of values more agreeable to her tastes.

Despite the degree to which Arabella's education, or lack thereof, is responsible for her skewed visions of reality, the matter is given surprisingly little treatment throughout the novel. The first chapter bears the subheading “Some useless Additions to a fine Lady's Education—The bad Effects of a whimsical Study, which some will say is borrowed from Cervantes.” The reader learns, in this chapter, that Arabella's father, “permitted her to receive no Part of her Education from another, which he was capable of giving her himself,” yet he seems, in subsequent chapters, entirely unacquainted with his daughter's romantic turn of mind or the reading material of her adolescence. The Marquis is clearly an unsatisfactory educator for his daughter; Sabine Augustin notes that “Lennox clearly seems to reject unguided learning, but a supervised approach does not seem to win her approval either.” Instead, the careless parent is replaced with the learned Doctor whose use of logic and direct instruction achieve the necessary results of engaging Arabella's intellect and freeing her from the endlessly self-referential system of romance.

I use the term direct instruction to refer specifically to a method of education whereby information is conveyed to the student using lecture or demonstration rather than inquiry. In the Doctor's education of Arabella, he uses multiple modes of education, which include both direct instruction and discussion, offering Arabella information and appealing to her rational capacities to accept it. He insists that she accept his judgment on her romances, saying, “your Ladyship must suffer me to decide, in some Measure authoritatively, whether Life is truly

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126Lennox, p. 5
127Lennox, p. 6.
described in those Books,” and lectures Arabella at length on the uses of fiction. 129 Yet he also encourages Arabella to exercise her own critical faculties: “[Y]our own penetration will enable you to judge when it shall have made you equally acquainted with both [the worlds of romance and the real world].” 130 Arabella is therefore freed from her illusions through exposure to modes of formal education that her neglectful father had omitted from her upbringing. Her education “complete,” she is then freed to accept Glanville's proposal of companionate marriage and bring an end to her own history.

Five decades later, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* takes on the problems and pleasures of reading with a similarly satirical agenda, yet Austen's text has fewer pretensions to the role of literary arbiter than Lennox's. Instead, Austen's free indirect discourse produces a novel that operates, as Debra Malina argues, on a double narrative level, creating a “two-tiered reading experience—from points of view both beside and above Catherine Morland.” 131 From the reader's perspective beside Catherine, she can operate in sympathy with the heroine, seeing the (genuinely) unsettling nature of the gothic referents presented as evidence; from the reader's perspective above Catherine, she can appreciate the meta-fictional critique that Austen performs. Yet the degree to which Austen is genuinely against the aesthetic of the gothic remains unclear. Nancy Armstrong claims that “Austen attacks gothic fiction not only for making one invest meaning in objects that do not justify that investment...She also objects to readers who crave emotional stimulation at the cost of individual judgment and sympathy.” 132 Yet readership, even readership of the gothic, is not reified in Austen's text into a single concrete function. It instead fulfills a more fluid and often communal role that serves to define

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129 Lennox, p. 379.
130 Lennox, p. 380.
characters by their modes of reading rather than their choice of reading.\textsuperscript{133}

For within the space of the text, the gothic operates not merely as a proscribed literary form in which Catherine indulges, but as a positive literary pleasure that Henry in particular can use to further his courtship of Catherine. During the drive from Bath to Northanger Abbey, Henry amuses Catherine by devising a tale of the gothic horrors that may await her there until “Henry was too much amused by the interest he had raised, to be able to carry it farther.”\textsuperscript{134} His teasing frustration of Catherine's desire to hear and know more of the tale serves only to further fix her interest on the Abbey, and on himself. His performance of the literary pastiche is the pastime of two readers, drawn together in common sympathy by the form of books that both have enjoyed. While Henry inscribes himself in this scene as the author of pleasing fictions for Catherine (much as Sir George does for Arabella, and to far better effect), his role as a reader of such fictions is also underscored.

It is, however, upon Catherine the reader that the weight of the novel's critique rests, and we must not be surprised to find that here, again, education is lacking. Yet in Catherine's education, we discover, not the mysteriously neglectful aristocratic parent, but merely the ordinary bad education of the typical late eighteenth-century girl. Particularly telling is her poetic education: “[S]he read all such works as heroines must read to supply their memories with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives.”\textsuperscript{135} There follows a list of famous quotations from Pope, Gray, Shakespeare and others that have been added to Catherine's store of knowledge. If it were at all likely that Catherine had read the works of these authors in any systematic way, her education would be

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\textsuperscript{133} Elspeth Knights, "‘The Library, of Course, Afforded Everything’: Jane Austen's Representations of Women Readers," \textit{Title 50} (Spring 2001): 19-38, 23.


\textsuperscript{135} Austen, p. 7.
rich indeed; but it is clear from these bits and scraps that Catherine has been educated from
something similar to the *Elegant Extracts* (1791), which indeed includes Catherine's text of
“The Hare and His Many Friends.” Such books of extracts were frequently used in girls'
education during this period and, while intended to cultivate literary and moral sentiments,
tended rather to produce an effect of knowing more than was warranted. Catherine has,
therefore, the panoply of a reader without the credentials.

While both Austen's and Lennox's novels seem to censure society for having allowed
their heroines to achieve maturity without the right education that would permit them to
become discerning readers, *Northanger Abbey* completes Catherine's education within the
sentimental community and in the most humiliating manner possible: “Most grievously was she
humbled. Most bitterly did she cry. It was not only with herself that she was sunk—but with
Henry.” For Catherine, there is no escape from the male-authored society to which she must
submit, nor is she given the dignity, like Arabella, of being nominally able to choose her
destiny once her education is completed; instead, as in *Emma*, husband and educator remain the
same figure. If Austen is more generous to the texts she satirizes than Lennox, it only
highlights the far less generous treatment she offers to her heroine, who has made the mistake
of reading romance badly.

The Late Eighteenth Century and the Realistic Turn

Any project such as mine that explores education in the nineteenth century, and
particularly the education of girls, is bound to be filled with accounts of diverse practices that
suggest little unity in the educational theories of the period. Standardization and examinations
towards the middle and end of the century offer an illusory homogenization, but the

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136 *Elegant Extracts; or, Useful and Entertaining Pieces of Poetry, Selected for the Improvement of Youth, in
Speaking, Reading, Thinking, Composing, and in the Conduct of Life; Being Similar in Design to Elegant
137 Austen, p. 146.
idiosyncrasies of modes as well as methods of educating girls force a broader perspective. Girls were educated in the home by parents or governesses or sent to boarding schools that did not take educational excellence as their primary aim just as often as they attended schools that propelled their students towards examinations and academic goals. One may gain a relatively clear notion of the variety of educational institutions by any review of the literature, fictional or otherwise, pertaining to girls' education. Characteristic is the genteel education that William Thackeray depicts when he says of Amelia Sedley, fresh from the establishment of the Misses Pinkerton, that "she could not only sing like a lark or a Mrs. Billington and dance like Hillsberg or Parisot: and embroider beautifully, and spell as well as the Dixonary itself, but she had such a kindly, smiling, tender, gentle, generous heart of her own, as won the love of everybody who came near her." An anonymous writer for London Society in 1870 describes her education as largely centered around "an idea that to be feminine and ladylike was to have nothing but negative characteristics" and quips, "We could not help getting a little education of a certain kind, in which what they call accomplishments played the principal part, but anything like ideas was out of the question."

Only fourteen years later, however, an advertisement offering "High-Class Board and Education for Young Ladies" promises, "It is the great aim of the Principals to discard all superficiality, whether in elementary subjects or accomplishments" and offers as its subjects "English Language and Literature, History and Geography, French, German, Italian, Latin, Logic, Rhetoric, Political Economy, Natural Philosophy, Elocution, Scripture History, Physical

138 I have chosen to focus on the education of girls from middle and upper-class families. The evolution of education for working-class girls during the nineteenth century is worthy of study in and of itself, but as those curricula were less likely to include any form of literature at all, I have excluded them from consideration here. 139 William Makepeace Thackeray, Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero. London: Bradbury and Evans, 1853, p. 4. 140 "Gymnastics for Ladies: A Letter from a Young Lady in London to a Young Lady in the Country" London Society, ed. James Hogg and Florence Marryat: 234-239, 234.
and Mathematical Geography, Arithmetic and Mathematics” in addition to a long list of the more traditional accomplishments.141 With secondary education remaining voluntary throughout the Victorian period, any attempt to refer to an undifferentiated practice of nineteenth-century education is impossible. Specific information from the archives, while invaluable, remains anecdotal and not wholly adequate to describe larger trends. Much of the current scholarly treatment of education in the nineteenth century has focused primarily on the tremendous work of opening higher education to women, and the sources which best offer an account of the day-to-day learning of girls in the nineteenth century are usually contemporary works which range from lectures and publications aimed at educators to prose seeking to document for a larger audience the changes occurring in the education of nineteenth-century women.

Narrowly speaking, educational reform movements in the Victorian period might be said to coincide with the founding of Queens College in London in 1848, the first institution of higher learning for women in the United Kingdom which I discuss in my introduction.142 Without an option for higher education, any professionalization of female teachers was impossible, and thus reform of secondary education for girls was equally vexed. Thus, as Joyce Pederson argues, higher education and reformed secondary education are intertwined: "The curricular reforms were both a consequence and a cause of the new, more professional training and outlook of the public school teachers."143 Higher education offered both a professional standard for female teachers and a clear academic goal for female pupils who

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sought an academic goal at which to aim.

It would be tempting to try and discover some sort of sharp dividing line, both temporal and situated in individual choice of institution, between the curriculum of social control in the pre-reform era and the academic curriculum of the reformed school. In this vein, Nancy Armstrong argues,

When creating a national curriculum, the government officials and educators in charge adopted one modeled on the educational theory that grew up around the Edgeworths and their intellectual circle, which can be considered the heir to the dissenting tradition. It was basically the same curriculum proposed by eighteenth century pedagogues and reformers as the best way of producing a marriageable daughter.\footnote{Armstrong, p. 20.}

Anne O'Conner, on the other hand, suggests that "[e]ducational reform in England in the mid-nineteenth century was part of a wider movement for economic and political freedom for women, and women's education came to be seen as a necessary prerequisite for jobs, rather than as a preparation for marriage."\footnote{O'Connor, p. 32.} Both create a clear and overriding directive for educational aims of the nineteenth century, and both contain elements of truth. At the same time, we need only look at institutions of higher education for women in the twentieth century to note how entirely, though uneasily, these two aims may coexist. Secondary schools in the nineteenth century were moving gradually towards preparing women for careers, academic or otherwise, but they also retained the character of moral educators of young women destined for a life of domesticity.

Proper moral and sentimental education was one of the chief goals of the nineteenth-century education of girls. Certainly the Edgeworths, mentioned above, devote a considerable portion of their treatise on education to the importance of establishing moral values, and indeed
the chapter on "female accomplishments" is introduced by an examination of the relative value of accomplishments against other desirable attributes such as virtue and innocence.\textsuperscript{146} The respectability and "character" of a school or educator were as important as, or more important than, any kind of academic criterion that might be applied. To be sure, much of the focus on respectability was a cover for not particularly covert concerns about status, but the two are so entirely intertwined as to be inextricable. A respectable female educator required both irreproachable public virtue \textit{and} the necessary qualifications of gentility to characterize her as a lady. The centrality of the morality and virtue to the discourse of education was therefore constantly reinforced by considerations of status and money, no less for the aspiring lower-middle classes than for those who might lay claim to the ranks of gentility. Nor did the mid-century educational reforms wreak any great change in this particular aspect of education. While schools in the late nineteenth century may have had better professionalized instructors and more explicitly academic aims, in order to survive, they required still the patronage of the moneyed classes, and therefore still relied on the perception of gentility and virtue.

Instead of any clear change in direction for girls' education, the reform movement rather strengthened and was strengthened by its affiliation with more traditional goals for the education of girls. Pederson argues, "That ladies who taught should be trained separately from other ladies was antithetical to a whole cluster of status considerations which decreed that the lady-teachers enjoyed gentle status precisely because they had been born, bred, and educated like other ladies."\textsuperscript{147} While she is referring in some measure to pre-reform educators, this status model of education remains relevant throughout the nineteenth century. "Lady-teachers" might become \textit{better} educated than their non-professional counterparts, but their status as

\textsuperscript{147} Pederson, p. 111.
educators of the upper middle and upper classes relied on backgrounds as nearly similar as possible to those pupils that they taught. Instead Pederson suggests that most schools enjoyed a mix of pupils being prepared for professional and domestic pursuits: "Even though only a minority of girls in a school might be going in for an examination and only a tiny proportion going on to college, the presence of a core of such academically oriented students helped redirect the emphasis of the school to serious academic pursuits."\(^{148}\) It is precisely this blending of goals that helped to create systematic education of most girls towards the end of the nineteenth century, allowing academic subjects to gain rigor and ascendancy over the more traditional instruction of "accomplishments."

The documentation of English literature as a subject of formal study is still more complex, for it was not an invariable part of school curricula during the nineteenth century. Near the end of the century, English had become a standard subject in most secondary schools and was required for the examination for women to enter the civil service.\(^{149}\) Yet the appearance of English in a list of subjects is not an irrefutable signifier that literature has been studied. At the Manchester Mechanics' Institute, aimed at "the daughters of the lower middle class . . . we find a curriculum of English (where considerable attention was given to the art of conversation)."\(^{150}\) Literature was, however, sufficiently often a subject of study to have merited discussion in many educational texts, and there is a consistency of opinion on the question of suitable reading material for young women both in Europe and, trans-Atlantically, in the United States. I have, therefore, included sources from outside England when appropriate, while retaining a focus on the education afforded to girls within England.

While education may today be considered as a path to independence and power, many

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148 Pederson, p. 197.
149 Purvis, 72-86.
150 Purvis, p. 99.
proponents of women's education within the nineteenth century were careful to characterize it very differently. Sidney Smith, in his essay on female education, argues,

*The cultivation of knowledge is a very distinct thing from its publication; nor does it follow that a woman is to become an author, merely because she has talent enough for it. We do not wish a lady to write books,—to defend a reply,—to squabble about the tomb of Achilles, or the plain of Troy,—any more than we wish her to dance at the opera, to play at a public concert, or to put pictures in the Exhibition, because she has learned music, dancing, and drawing. The great use of her knowledge will be that it contributes to her private happiness. She may make it public: but it is not the principal object which the friends of female education have in view.*\(^{151}\)

Smith is atypical only in that he does not mention preparation for companionate marriage and motherhood in his educational aims.\(^{152}\) Education for women, and particularly for middle and upper-class women who would be strongly discouraged from competitively entering the marketplace, bore the public face of self-improvement and moral education that would support rather than disrupt the social order. The girl must instead receive from her education "the mental and emotional training for her future life as a woman."\(^{153}\) As such, curricula had to be rigidly controlled in order to prevent education from sowing untoward ideas in the heads of vulnerable girls. Thus Joan Burstyn argues, "For most of the century social control was the predominant theme of Victorian education for women of all classes."\(^{154}\)

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152 "Although the new headmistresses rejected the idea that 'femininity' involved learning accomplishments that might attract a husband, they did argue that middle class girls should be educated in order to become 'cultured' wives and mothers" (Purvis 90).
Literature, "that step-daughter of English schools," was a dangerous subject to introduce into the studies of young women, particularly as the social control of women had historically manifested itself in a severe restriction of readership. Mary Hilton and Pam Hirsch note the relevance of such concerns to questions of undirected education: "For intellectually minded young women in households which possessed a good library, a great deal of self-education took place through reading, and reading groups were often established by women when their brothers disappeared, first to public school, and then to Oxford and Cambridge." For women denied formal, systematic education, reading opened the door to self-directed education. Given the severe restrictions of the period, it is therefore unsurprising that reading in itself should be suspect, whether it might be for pleasure or self-improvement. The very ability to read fosters the availability of learning, appropriate or not. We must, therefore, remember that nineteenth-century strictures about reading and about education are often indistinguishable, for reading very often might form the primary mode of education for a young woman of the period.

The Edgeworths devote considerable attention to books that are and are not appropriate for young people, but the primary locus of consternation over inappropriate reading falls, unsurprisingly, on girls:

Besides the danger of creating a romantic taste, there is reason to believe, that the species of reading to which we object has an effect directly opposite to what it is intended to produce. It diminishes, instead of increasing, the sensibility of the heart; a combination of romantic imagery is requisite to act upon the associations of sentimental people, and they are virtuous only when virtue is in

perfectly good taste. An Eloquent philosopher observes, that in the description of scenes of distress in romance and poetry, the distress is always made elegant…\textsuperscript{157}

This fiction, which is defined primarily as "sentimental stories, and books of mere entertainment" is thus set up as a powerful detriment to correct moral education. The concern is not for cheapened intellectual tastes but for damage to the (presumably innate) moral capacity of the girl.\textsuperscript{158} A taste for reading such fictions might lead to a facility in reading itself, but it interfered with the primary goal of sentimental education, acting not on the intellect but on the heart.

There was anxiety about the results of permitting girls to read previously proscribed literature, particularly the works of classical authors: "Women might be enough like men to succumb to the temptations described in the literature they read. Greek and Latin literature would introduce women to a knowledge of sexual licentiousness and thereby ruin their purity."\textsuperscript{159} The Edgeworths, whose work \textit{Practical Education} was the central work of educational theory throughout much of the nineteenth century and which I discussed briefly in my first chapter, argued, "From the study of the learned languages, women, by custom, fortunately for them, are exempted; of ancient literature they may, in translations which are acknowledged to be excellent, obtain a sufficient knowledge, without paying too much time and labour for this classic pleasure."\textsuperscript{160} In addition to concerns of overwork, the Edgeworths are almost certainly reacting to a broader concern regarding the suitability of reading materials. Educating women in Greek and Latin might therefore open doors to works of literature that had previously been kept out of bounds through the simple expedient of leaving girls ignorant of

\textsuperscript{157} Edgeworth, p. 249.  
\textsuperscript{158} Edgeworth, p. 248.  
\textsuperscript{159} Burstyn, p. 45.  
\textsuperscript{160} Edgeworth, p. 399.
the languages in which they were written. So crucial, however, were these classical
foundations to the culture that it seemed imperative to include them in any rigorous curriculum:

Nothing can be more injurious in its tendency, upon the glowing imagination of
youth, than many of the stories connected with the Grecian mythology; and yet
they are so interwoven with ancient classical literature, and so frequently
alluded to by modern writers, especially some of the best English poets, that an
acquaintance with these fictions seems necessary to those who aim at a
knowledge of general literature.\textsuperscript{161}

A classical education, which had been considered entirely necessary for men of any pretensions
to erudition at all, had produced a culture and a literature that could not be comprehended
without recourse to that same classical education. As such, the primacy of classically-inspired
literature had made it impossible to instruct women merely in texts considered appropriate and
important—"the best English poets"—without allowing them access to less appropriate
classical underpinnings.

It is important, however, to note that this concern for the effects of much Greek and
Latin literature on girls was not universally shared, nor did it necessarily prohibit many texts
typically identified with the romance, such as \textit{The Odyssey} or \textit{The Aeneid}. In addition to the
endorsement of the Edgeworths, Elizabeth Appleton, in the early nineteenth century, considers
the field of literature and questions, "[W]hich are we to select for the instruction, the
entertainment, the refinement of our young women? May I presume to offer to their
consideration the stupendous Homer in his English dress; Virgil, supported by Dryden; and
Milton, with more than the majesty of our native language?" While Appleton's assumption
that such works ought to be read in translation prevents girls from having unfettered access to

\textsuperscript{161} Phelps, p. 147-8.
these classical texts, it nonetheless offers them as model texts to offer instruction and even "refinement." The classics, therefore, by virtue of their centrality to English culture were welcomed, albeit at times reluctantly, into the education of girls, thus suggesting that educators were unable to conceive of any kind of systematic education that did not focus on texts that had traditionally been appropriated by men and proscribed for women. In short, education itself was a masculine project and therefore could not be carried out without introducing elements that might be considered unsafe or inappropriate for young women.

The critical dominance of poetry over prose throughout the nineteenth century is one that both responds to and perpetuates the gendering of literary form. Anna Latitia Barbauld, herself an eminent figure in education, at one point queried "why the poet, who deals in one kind of fiction, should have so high a place allotted to him in the temple of fame; and the romance-writer so low a one as in the general estimation he is confined to." Nor is the writer of romances so far esteemed below the writer of realistic fiction, for Arthur Hugh Clough, after noting that "people much prefer Vanity Fair and Bleak House" to the poetry of their era, condescends to suggest that such a novel "is thrown away indeed tomorrow, but is devoured today." Clough's image of the devoured novel offers a neat analysis of one of the primary concerns that has beset prose fiction in English since its genesis: its ease of consumption. A text that requires no prior education or serious study to read, the novel is a lower art form because it is accessible, both to readers and to aspiring writers. As such, it has no place in systematic education, being instead banished to the realm of the disposable popular entertainment.

James Pycroft, in his 1861 *Course of English Reading or How and What to Study; Adapted to Every Capacity, with Literary Anecdotes* credits his intention to offer a suitable

162 Quoted in Runge, p. 364.
course of instruction to a female friend whose own study is unprofitable to her as the germ of his larger project. Novels have no place within this text (unsurprisingly, given the late accession of the novel to the academic discipline of literature), but poetry is amply discussed. To Spenser, Pycroft offers praise without stint, calling him "one of the most poetical, and certainly the most perspicuous of all Poets; an author whom men of deep poetic feeling fondly read, and others distantly admire." \[163\] He further eulogizes and enumerates, unsurprisingly, the works of Shakespeare, drawing particular attention in his survey of the comedies to those plays often classed as romances, calling *The Winter's Tale* "more than marvelous; almost a miraculous composition, and the best comedy in any language" and *The Tempest* "a play wholly unlike any other dramatic effort, and wonderful from the first line to the last." \[164\]

Pycroft here demonstrates the lack of opprobrium directed at the romance as a larger genre, even when written in the vernacular; it is rather the verse character of a work which offers it respectability and even accolades.

There was a further benefit, to those concerned with the moral welfare of girls, to the rigors of a serious education. Sidney Smith, in an extremely curious metaphor, suggests that the value of education may be largely to exclude other less acceptable influences:

> It sometimes happens that an unfortunate man gets drunk with very bad wine—not to gratify his palate but to forget his cares: he does not set any value on what he receives, but on account of what it excludes;--it keeps out something worse than itself. Now, though it were denied that the acquisition of serious knowledge is of itself important to a woman, still it prevents a taste for silly and pernicious works of imagination; it keeps away the horrid trash of novels; and,

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164 Pycroft, p. 241.
in lieu of that eagerness for emotion and adventure which books of that sort inspire, promotes a clam [sic] and steady temperament of mind.\textsuperscript{165}

The vehicle of this metaphor, growing drunk on bad wine, is startling, and yet it lends a peculiar emphasis to Smith's deprecation of "silly and pernicious works of imagination." If education is so poor a prize as to be akin to "very bad wine," then the object "worse than itself" must indeed be horrible. Similarly, as quoted previously, girls who are "idle and badly taught" will "delight in romances, in comedies, and in tales of marvelous adventures in which unhallowed love is concerned."\textsuperscript{166} The "indiscriminate reading of…romances" is "a morbid voracity" which "operates . . . as a poison."\textsuperscript{167} It would not be hard to find a hundred more nineteenth-century denunciations of the literature considered substandard and conflated with the romance. As such, no matter how dangerous education itself might be, it was hoped to at least offer the comfort of preventing girls from consuming works that, though popular and readily available, were considered the most deleterious of all possible influences, so that any potentially misguiding works of classical literature were considered preferable.

It is at this intersection of academic and moral aims that the exclusion of the vernacular prose romance occurs. If the chief aim of nineteenth-century educators was to instill, or at least possess a character for instilling, proper moral values, then any kind of learning was necessarily superior to that acknowledged enemy of womanhood, the nineteenth-century romance. Just as modern educational discourse focuses on keeping at-risk students off the street and out of gangs, Victorian educators of middle-class girls focused on keeping girls away from the distractions of idleness, chief among them the romance novel. Even the much-vaunted accomplishments were valued in a large measure "as resources against ennui, as they

\textsuperscript{165} Smith, p. 230.
\textsuperscript{166} Fenelon, p. 17.
afford continual amusement and innocent occupation. This is ostensibly their chief praise; it
deserves to be considered with respect.”¹⁶⁸ The focus on "innocent occupation," whether it be
music, learning, or embroidery, is naturally a reflection of the patriarchal society's continued
interest in the sexual control of young women.

Sexual control, however, is not expressed wholly, nor even chiefly, through any kind of
express control over the body. Were this the chief mechanism for the sexual control of young
women, then surely the best solution would be to lock them up at home and never send them to
school at all. Rather it is through the inculcation of hegemony that sexual control is chiefly
exerted and reproduced: thus the supremacy of moral instruction for young women. The
nineteenth-century romance, with its improbable stories that explicitly mark it as fantasy rather
than didactic realism, as well as its focus on heterosexual romantic love, becomes, because of its
power to enlist the imaginations of its readership, one of the principal assaults on the
unceasing inducement of moral virtue in young women. While poetic or classical texts might
contain equally dangerous ideas, it is the wildly popular nineteenth-century romance that,
because of its appeal and ease of consumption, presented itself as an explicit threat. Just as, in
the eighteenth century, the Edgeworths proscribed works like Robinson Crusoe for boys on
grounds that it might incite them to desire adventure, yet never considered that Homer's
Odyssey might have similar effects, so the nineteenth century sought to do away with popular
romances without undue concern for the effects of Spenser or Shakespeare.¹⁶⁹

Educating girls in order that they may take up careers and compete with men is nearly
unthinkable, despite the progress achieved by the nineteenth-century women's movement; the
promotion for female education therefore had to be couched as intellectual and moral
improvement that might better fit a woman for domestic life. But given that education itself

¹⁶⁸ Edgeworth, p. 378.
¹⁶⁹ Edgeworth, p. 251.
was irradically masculine, centered on classical texts that might not be suitable for the instruction of ladies, a danger had to be created from which education might rescue women. That danger was the "romance," under its nineteenth-century definition, literature that would corrupt and degrade readers. The feminized genre therefore becomes the external threat from which "good" women must be protected through moral education, and traditionally masculine works of dubious morality were preferable to the threat of women consuming feminized texts that would exacerbate what were perceived as the weaknesses of their gender. As such, the larger romance is divided by language and form, with its masculine counterparts crucial to the education whose main function was to prevent encroachment by its feminized instantiations. Social control takes the form of eradicating a type of ignorance seen as more harmful than dangerous knowledge and instead inculcating masculine reason, a "steady temperament of mind."¹⁷⁰ Meanwhile the romance, entirely fluid, survives the gendered fracture and retains primacy, by other names.

¹⁷⁰ Smith, p. 230.
Chapter Three: The Novel of Education

To say that literature for women is primarily focused on education would be both problematic and true. As critics and as novel-readers, we are unconsciously taught, in the mode of George Eliot, to see novels as either weighty works deserving of serious criticism or as “silly novels by lady novelists” that, while perhaps earning a place in cultural criticism, offer little to educate the reader or merit critical consideration. Certainly in recent years the explosion of the canon has done much to derail the previous viewpoint, yet it inarguably lingers in the consciousness of readers and critics alike. We too often presume that texts can be divided along lines of pleasure and value, with some few, wonderful texts offering both. Such a viewpoint, however, ignores the ways that education through literature works: in the Victorian era, the hegemony of culture is expressed as surely through Ouida as it is through Charlotte Bronte. Female readers were defined and shaped by the works they read, becoming not only ideal wives and mothers, but also good readers of fiction, capable of discerning the social, religious, and educational messages being purveyed.

In this chapter, I will examine the Victorian novel of education for girls, looking not only at the acts of readership embodied within the texts but also at the communities of readership presumed and created by the publication of these texts. My terms of definition do not necessarily replicate the concept of the erziehungsroman, though they certainly include it. Rather, I am examining particularly novels that have the education (formal or informal) and development of girls as a key focus. Such novels may overlap with many other genres: the marriage plot, the bildungsroman, and the kunstlerroman, to name only a few. The novel of education must also be distinguished from such didactic texts as proliferated from the early modern period onward: such texts were primarily non-fictional and were intended explicitly to
instruct and inform.171 The novel of education, on the other hand, is a fictional work whose primary function is to excite aesthetic appreciation or enjoyment; its secondary purpose, however, which may be more or less clearly expressed, is to educate through the modeling and description of a young person's moral and intellectual development. A famous American example of the novel of education might be Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*; in Britain, the sub-genre veers between the most sober of novels for adult readers and the most playful works for young people.

In this chapter, I look specifically at the female novel of education. Women's literature, in common with most literature of all kinds, tends to be focused on the pleasure principle and the death drive, which is to say that it is sometimes difficult to find works that do not foreclose possibilities through the marriage or extermination of their heroines. My first section, indeed, will examine whether such plot developments are incompatible with the novel of education or whether these different kinds of narratives may coexist in an uneasy or perhaps even symbiotic harmony. I argue that the novel of education, while potentially working to impose a dominant social ideology on its readers, is important for the way that it can offer different avenues for its subjects and readers alike. These are the same avenues, I believe, that Mona Caird saw for all women in the nineteenth century when she wrote in 1888, “We see a limitless field of possibility opening out before us; the adventurous spirit in us might leap up at the wonderful romance of life!”172

In this chapter, I will consider three texts: *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, *The Daisy Chain* by Charlotte Mary Yonge, and *The Beth Book* by Sarah Grand. I have selected these


three novels because I believe that their generic diversity and common focus on female education and readership make them an ideal set of examples for considering the ideas surrounding the novel of education. Further, each operates within a different portion of the Victorian era, beginning early in the period and ending with the fin de siecle. In reading Jane Eyre, then, I shall consider the novel of education generically, looking at how it intersects with the marriage plot and questioning whether one must necessarily give way to the other and their discursive interplay. The Daisy Chain, with its moral and religious overtones, offers an ideal entrance into the world of didactic and religious fiction, and I will read it alongside conduct books and religious advice for girls from the same era in order to determine the kind of reader being shaped within the pages of the novel. Finally, with The Beth Book, I hope to consider how the novel of education is implicated in the novel of vocation and particularly what that means for the New Woman novel and movement as a whole. These texts are not only fruitful subjects of inquiry in and of themselves, but also work as a view into the attitudes towards female education throughout the Victorian period, from a focus on discipline and management to a larger perspective on the purposes of education. Through these three texts, I shall argue that the Victorian era created a new kind of literary female subjectivity in its self-reflexivity about reading and the educational possibilities of literature.

Given my subject matter, I am aware that it might be argued that I reproduce what Gayatri Spivak calls “[a] basically isolationist admiration for the female subject [that] in Europe and Anglo-America establishes the high feminist norm.”173 Indeed, I begin this chapter by examining what Spivak calls “a cult text of feminism,” Jane Eyre, in order to establish early representations of readership during the Victorian period and the way that the

novel of education intersects with other important literary genres. My work is heavily focused on the creation of the primarily middle-class adolescent female subject during the Victorian era. My primary response to concerns of “isolationist admiration” is simple; it is that examinations of female subjectivity, in all eras and locations, form an interrelated discursive field that helps to illuminate still vital questions that face us as feminists.

Spivak is not wrong—on the whole—when she argues that in a novel like *Jane Eyre*, “what is at stake, for feminist individualism in the age of imperialism, is precisely the making of human beings, the constitution and 'interpellation' of the subject not only as individual but also as 'individualist.' The first is domestic-society-through-sexual-reproduction cathected as 'companionate love'; the second is the imperialist project cathected as civil-society-through-social-mission.” I believe, however, that such an observation is limited in the kinds of demands that it makes of “the age of imperialism.” First of all, it looks primarily at “domestic-society” as answered by an idea of “companionate love,” which, while often true in literary representation, does not do justice to the larger ways in which the domestic is constructed either in literature or culture. *Jane Eyre* raises real questions about education, religion, marriage laws, and charity that are not truly answered by companionate love nor, certainly, by the novel's representation of social mission. While the “imperialist project” is certainly strong in *The Daisy Chain*, with its heavy focus on bringing religious and social change to a poor village, a glib dismissal of the novel's purpose is inappropriate: if *The Daisy Chain* is simplistic in its view of the social mission, it turns a hard, unflinching gaze on the realities of Victorian domestic life and offers no matrimonial prize for its heroine. And in *The Beth Book*, the questions laid forth for domestic society are answered not by companionate love, but by the very creation of subjectivity and selfhood that Spivak finds so problematic. Such a novel is

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174 Spivak, 244.
175 Ibid.
precisely concerned with the making—or unmaking—of human beings, yet it cannot be analyzed according to the categories that Spivak lays forth so simply.

These questions of domestic and civil society, however, are something that I will highlight as I move between the texts to illustrate both their questions. While I will take some things for granted in my readings of Jane Eyre, simply because the novel has been so well read and analyzed by greater minds than my own, both The Daisy Chain and The Beth Book have suffered from a woeful lack of critical attention, though the latter, and the works of Sarah Grand in general, has gained fresh notice in the last ten years from scholars who specialize in New Woman literature. Yonge's work suffers from a long lack of interest in religious and didactic fiction: a new generation of scholars is not always patient when presented with the explicit morals and religious proselytism that are common in her novels. What the three have in common, however, is that looking at them through the prism of the novel of education reveals a fresh perspective on larger questions for Victorian society.

Jane Eyre and the Battle for Generic Supremacy

Jane Eyre is a classic novel of education in two senses; it contains some of the most famous scenes of formal and informal education in all of literature, and it is also one of the most frequently taught Victorian novels. Further, it is often a modern young woman's first exposure to nineteenth-century literature. I know that I read Jane Eyre sometime before my tenth birthday, and many of my peers relate having done the same. I argue that the reasons this novel is usually chosen as a suitable book for girls are its developmental themes and deft modeling of female adolescent behavior: in short, its status as a novel of education. At the same time, Jane Eyre remains a favorite novel for many adults long after other childhood favorites are laid aside because it is not solely or perhaps even chiefly a story about a girl's ascent into womanhood. It is also a tale of romance, adultery, and marriage. For many women,
Jane is perhaps truly Elaine Showalter's “heroine of fulfillment.” My purpose in this section, then, is to ask the following question: does the marriage plot of *Jane Eyre* eclipse the novel of education, or do the two work in harmony?

This is a complicated question, one that looks at both the generic structure of the novel and its reception to see how different working parts function. I would like to begin, then, by delineating *Jane Eyre*’s plot of education as it is expressed through readership and formal schooling. Then I intend to look at the relationship between the plot of education and the marriage plot in the latter portions of the novel to try and determine whether Jane's romantic relationship operates as a natural conclusion to or outgrowth of her early development, or whether it is instead a literary cuckoo's child within the narrative. Finally, I will look at responses to Jane Eyre, whether they be literary, critical, or cinematic, to try and understand where the force of the novel's grip on the popular psyche lies. This multilateral approach will then allow me to answer the important question with which I began about the possibilities for coexistence between the marriage plot and the novel of education.

Early in the novel, Jane's encounters with literature are based on a particular mode of reading, one that is both solipsistic and escapist. Her first literary encounter, with which the text opens, is a model of much of her later reading:

Bewick's 'History of British Birds': the letterpress thereof I cared little for, generally speaking; and yet there were certain introductory pages that, child as I was, I could not pass quite as a blank. They were those which treat of the haunts of sea-fowl; of 'the solitary rocks and promontories' by them only inhabited; of the coast of Norway. Studded with isles from its southern extremity, the Linderness, or Naze, to the...
Northern Cape . . . Each picture told a story; mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting: as interesting as the tales Bessie sometimes narrated on winter evenings, when she chanced to be in a good humour.

Hidden in her “double retirement” (5), Jane abstracts herself from her literal surroundings in order to read herself into a more exotic, distant, and satisfactory milieu. The place names that Jane invokes become part of an imaginary rather than a literal geography, one that promotes conceptual isolation and privacy.

Travel narratives, as fantastic as possible, are formative in Jane's literary career. While the Bewick's incident is the most famous, Jane's begging for Gulliver's Travels after her illness is no less important. She describes how “[t]his book I had again and again perused with delight. I considered it a narrative of facts and discovered in it a vein of interest deeper than what I found in fairy tales.” (17). While Rochester describes Jane again and again as a creature of fairy later in the novel, Jane is no naïve child who looks for elves in the bottom of the garden. Rather, she is, by temperament at least, a colonial traveler like Gulliver, susceptible to the wonders that cannot be found in Britain, but instead far abroad. The “Arabian tales” (32) are listed as other favorites, continuing the pattern of pleasure in imaginative literature that offers some kind of mental escape from her direct surroundings.

While most readers sympathize with Jane's literary tendencies, the narrator seems less tender towards Jane's fledgling intellect. When Jane briefly examines the copy of Johnson's Rasselas possessed by the more studious Helen Burns, she is discouraged: “'Rasselas' looked dull to my trifling taste; I saw nothing about fairies, nothing about genii; no bright variety seemed spread over the closely printed pages” (43). This indictment of Jane's young,
uneducated tastes, offered by the educated Jane, suggests that the mode of reading that Jane has been used to early in the novel is not one that has prepared her well for life's journey; Helen's careful study is a better guide for the trials of a life of poverty and abandonment.

Such poverty and abandonment lead to the privations of Lowood School, privations that are so obvious and abundant that it is easy to overlook the many advantages that Jane eventually receives from her education there. Burnt porridge and chilblains are described with poignant detail, while Jane's accomplishments seem merely the meed of any extended period of directed study. Yet how often is Jane's excellent education remarked on later in the novel? When Jane's accomplishments are first reviewed by her old nurse Bessie upon her leaving Lowood, it is revealed that she can play the piano, paint “as fine a picture as any Miss Reed's drawing-master could paint, let along the young ladies themselves, who could not come near it” (80), speaks French, and can do fine work like a lady. Such accomplishments have prepared her for both the careers upon which she embarks: that of a governess and that of a romantic heroine.

It is a fair question, though, to ask both to what degree *Jane Eyre* is, in part, a school story, and why, after the typhoid epidemic at Lowood, the narrative so eschews the details of Jane's formal education. To the extent that Miss Temple and Helen are memorable characters, to the extent that events that occur during lessons are closely depicted, *Jane Eyre* follows the conventions of the school story in these early chapters. Rules, lessons, meals, and teachers, all the minutiae of a didactic establishment are closely described, and yet once Lowood is moderately reformed, Jane seems to grow up in the blink of an eye.¹⁷⁸ Must we then assume that, like Tolstoy's happy families, all decent schools are alike? Yet Lowood is the site of Jane's development into the adult whose subjectivity has inspired so many feminist critiques, and

¹⁷⁸Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* performs a similar sleight of hand—Esther is no sooner deposited at school, it seems, than she is leaving it after a career as a pupil teacher.
surely its early privations were not the only factor that played into her adult persona. The sum of Jane's education, particularly her artistic education, certainly comes to bear on her later life. There is no real answer for why Bronte chooses to omit the details of life at the reformed Lowood save that the oppressive themes of the novel might be hampered by depictions of an ordinary educational routine. Certainly in *Villette*, the focus of scenes of education is entirely on discipline, whether Lucy Snow is administering it or receiving it from her chosen “master” M. Paul. The content of education is more or less irrelevant and never reappears in Jane's narrative except in relation to her attainments, all of which fit her better to be mistress of Thornfield rather than an able instructress for the unfortunate Adele.

What we can know is that during the period after Lowood was reformed, Jane was well educated and became a pupil teacher at the institution. It seems, then, that *Jane Eyre* does not so much refuse to become a school story as refuse to become a *teaching* story. When Jane does become governess to Adele, little of the lessons she gives or the routine of the average governess is delineated. Instead, her relationship with her employer, Mr. Rochester becomes the primary focus of the novel as education gives way to romance. This is, according to Ildiko Csengei, a common feature of the Bildungsroman, as “[t]he classic *Bildungsroman* promotes happiness as the highest value, which is offered as a compensation for giving up one's freedom. The “compensation” (happiness) manifests itself in marriage at the end of the novel.”179 So much for the *Bildungsroman*, but what of the novel of education? Does it too offer happiness at the expense of freedom, and if so, how are happiness and freedom envisioned by these texts?

We are offered an entree into the meaning of freedom and happiness in the novel of education by *Jane Eyre* when Jane tries to conceive of what leaving Lowood will mean for her:

> “a new servitude” (p. 74). For Jane, there is no freedom to trade for happiness. Even her

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prayer for liberty “seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing,” as did “a humbler supplication: for change, stimulus” (ibid). It is not until the 1890s that we see liberty as a real possibility in the female novel of education, as I shall discuss in my section on The Beth Book.

In 1847, however, Bronte writes the education of the female as Rousseau would have prescribed—education to “constraint.” Yes, Jane is a rebellious character, maddened by injustice and cruelty, but as the novel develops, she becomes a perfect example of self-imposed restraint. While her passionate love for Rochester leads her away from the repressive St. John Rivers and towards personal happiness, her essential character is not one of abandon or self-license. Thus Csengei's generic observations on the _Bildungsroman_ are irrelevant to the early Victorian female _Bildungsroman_, for freedom is not even on the horizon, much less in play as a piece to be bartered for matrimonial bliss.

What is at stake, however, is personal development and discovery, and I would argue that this is why Diana and Mary Rivers and perhaps even the long vilified St. John prove a greater threat to the marriage plot of the novel than any other. That the Rivers family is a bright reflection of the dark shadow of Jane's childhood amongst the Reeds is evident. In them, Jane finds sisters and a brother who accept the beggar-child at last and, rather than reviling her quiet ways and studious, literary turn, instead share a similar temperament and appreciate her. For while Jane may have found passionate love with Rochester, it is from the Rivers sisters that she learns to enjoy true friendship: “I could join with Diana and Mary in all their occupations; converse with them as much as they wished, and aid them when and where they would allow me. There was a reviving pleasure in this intercourse, of a kind now tasted by me for the first time—the pleasure arising from _perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles_” (p. 180).

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180 Helena Michie writes meaningfully about how Jane's personal journey towards expressing her own wants, including the want for romantic love, is expressed through eating and food, from her starved childhood to her period of beggadorm after she departs Thornfield Hall (Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987, pp. 24-25).
Jane, having laid aside her childish tastes, has now the intellectual power to truly join with her proper companions: the Rivers sisters lend her books, discuss them with her, and “[t]hought fitted thought; opinion met opinion” (308).

It is here that Jane's education resumes. From Diana she begins to learn German and as “the part of instructress pleased and suited [Diana]; that of scholar pleased and suited me no less” (ibid). And on Jane's return to Moor House after her tenure as a schoolmistress at Morton (where, again, there are no scenes of instruction whatsoever), St. John convinces her to take up the study of Hindustani—his excuse is that teaching her the language will help fix it more completely in his own mind. Again the content is irrelevant; the relationship of teacher to taught is at stake here. It is as her teacher that St. John becomes Rochester's greatest rival, for “[b]y degrees he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind: his praise and notice were more restraining than his indifference” (350). Jane finds St. John attractive, after a fashion, and he finds in her a suitable helpmeet, yet Jane discovers that “[h]e wanted to train me to an elevation I could never reach; it racked me hourly to aspire to the standard he uplifted” (351). In Jane's relationship with St. John, romance and education are closely linked—we see here Bronte's idee fixe at work. For St. John Rivers is, in truth, no different from M. Paul of Villette, Louis of Shirley, or the eponymous hero of The Professor. The only difference—admittedly a significant difference—is that St. John does not truly love Jane, nor she him. But he is still the interjection of Bronte's fascination with the interrelationship between education, discipline, and sexuality.

And it is, at least in part, St. John's menacing demands that finally drive Jane from her home with the Rivers family and lead to the inevitable triumph of the marriage plot. Marriage to St. John and the assumption of missionary duties are inextricably linked with death in Jane's mind: “If I join St. John, I abandon half myself: if I go to India, I go to premature death” (356).
Moor House is no longer a comforting nest where Jane can be a happy pupil, discovering the family she had always dreamed of. The novel of education is destroyed by sexuality. For Jane, there is no home except in marriage, and her childhood reveries of far-off lands do not extend to the punishing realities of St. John's proposals for a missionary life in India. Marriage to Rochester, the companionate marriage that eventually consumes the plot of education, is finally the only option.

To look at *Jane Eyre* through the lens of other readers is both a challenging and rewarding task. My methodology for doing so includes first-person accounts of readership as well as examining how the work has been artistically reimagined and what elements survived or were discarded in that process. Doing so permits this criticism to “read the reader” whether that reader is a solitary one or a group that is rediscovering an adapted text. For in determining which generic modes are most successful within the novel, whether the novel of education survives its contact with the marriage plot, one must look to the reception of the book as well as the ways that the genres and tropes play out within the text. I will try, from these data, not to try and determine whether the novel is one thing or another, but rather to examine the way that genres overlap and vie for dominance, perhaps more or less successfully in different eras.

While different readers have, as may be expected, accessed different things from *Jane Eyre*, overall the reception seems to be that it is primarily a novel of excitement and passion. Indeed Harriet Martineau (once thought to be the author of *Jane Eyre*) is one of the few who attached particular importance to the scenes of childhood within the volume, saying that on reading the novel, “I was convinced that it was by some friend of my own, who had portions of my childish experience in his or her mind.”

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 nineteenth-century scholars have acknowledged Harriet Martineau’s influence on Brontë’s work. Indeed, Harriet Martineau is one of the few who attached particular importance to the scenes of childhood within the volume, saying that on reading the novel, “I was convinced that it was by some friend of my own, who had portions of my childish experience in his or her mind.”

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apparent authenticity rather than their creative or literary merit. But if Martineau saw primarily her own life, others saw something very different. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, on reading *Shirley*, criticized it by saying that it did not seem “equally suggestive of power (so far) with *Jane Eyre*.” This term power, while apparently describing merely the literary quality, perhaps, of both novels, feels like an important one, which seems somehow to suggest a connection to the gothic that was part of what was so prized in *Jane Eyre*. Margaret Wharton, in describing her childish experiences with literature and play in the early twentieth century, said, “I have plotted against pirates along with Jim Hawkins and I have trembled with Jane Eyre as the first Mrs Rochester rent her bridal veil in maddened jealousy.” The moment of the bridal veil's destruction seems pivotal for many readers as a ten-year-old Annabel Huth Jackson was terrified by the same incident in the 1870s.

In examining the reader, however, I will permit myself to be personal. I first read *Jane Eyre* at approximately the same age as its heroine at the novel's commencement. Rather than fixing on the incident of the bridal veil, my chief impressions of the novel were focused on the gothic horror of the red room (just as my understanding of *Wuthering Heights* was somehow fixed on the moment when the narrator saws the spectral wrist across the shattered windowpane to try and chase poor Catherine away). I also recall finding myself largely uninterested in Mr. Rochester and most of the novel's romantic developments. While Bessie and Miss Temple and Helen loomed large as the novel's primary characters, the rest of the book seemed merely of a piece and without particularity. Perhaps this accounts for my critical choices in reading *Jane Eyre*, and even for the chosen scope of this project as a whole. *Jane Eyre* was for me “a new romantic world,” such as Alice Foley describes, but the romance of the novel had nothing to do

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with passion or sexuality and everything to do with the struggle of a child against injustice and repression.185

The enduring popularity of Jane Eyre has led to an extraordinary number of film adaptations. For purposes of containing the length of this analysis, I will focus only on the 2011 film adaptation of *Jane Eyre* by director Cary Fukunaga. While demonstrating a strong textual fidelity, the film nonetheless acts, as critic Ryan Fong notes is common among feature adaptations of *Jane Eyre* in the twentieth century, to “distill [the events of the novel] to foreground Jane and Rochester’s romance above all the other aspects of the story.”186 Fukunaga's adaptation does include extensive scenes at Lowood as well as at Moor House. Yet by framing the entire presentation with Jane's escape from Thornfield, the novel prioritizes adult Jane and her trials over those of her youth. The entire experience of Lowood then serves only to heighten Jane's friendless, orphan state. Jane's education is formative, but only in a negative sort of way. Such a reading can be understood, even applauded, yet it trivializes the truth of Jane's subjectivity by creating her as a victim rather than a complex character who is able to take what serves her from her harsh upbringing. The omission of the Moor House plot in other adaptations is rather easier to understand. Even William Thackeray in reading *Jane Eyre* felt that “St John the missionary is a failure I think,” though he did qualify that he was a “good failure.”187

In conclusion, I think that if *Jane Eyre* is a generic intratextual battle, then there is, at least in the minds of its readers and interpreters, a clear winner and a clear loser. The novel may dally in scenes of education and modes of education, but taken as a whole it is primarily a

185 Flint, p. 232.
romance, with strong links to the gothic. The text, however, looks between the gothic past and the conjugal future, balancing both and functioning as a kind of literary monument for its hybrid nature and the transitions that it facilitates. Yet this does not, and cannot, mean that romance and education cannot coexist. It does, however, suggest that when two such plots are put forth, the readers will, as a rule, gravitate to the romantic rather than the pedagogical particularly when the novel works within the dominant modes of nineteenth century literature.

Good Girls Make Good Spinsters: The Daisy Chain and Womankind

Forgotten, chiefly, to the ages, Charlotte Mary Yonge along with Elizabeth Missing Sewell and, for unfathomable reasons, Sir Walter Scott formed a trinity of High Church novelists. Yonge's intellectual development was carefully shepherded by John Keble, whose The Christian Year became an overwhelmingly popular touchstone for Tractarians. Yonge, more than almost any other novelist of her era, is didactic in purpose. As a young woman, Yonge wrote for and edited The Monthly Packet, a High Church magazine, contributing a number of stories for young people. Her Heir of Redclyffe (1853) was an enormous popular success and famously appears in Alcott's Little Women in the hands of the March daughters, who might indeed be supposed ardent admirers of Yonge's style of fiction, as Alcott's own works bore many thematic resemblances to Yonge's. To Hester Cholmondeley, sister to novelist Mary Cholmondeley, “All Miss Yonge's stories are very young-lady-like...exclusively written for schoolroom girls.”188

It is that aspect of being “exclusively written for schoolroom girls” that I wish to explore. While Yonge's novels were demonstrably not read only by the younger set (Tennyson read them, and the poet Edward Fitzgerald unwittingly complimented them by saying, “I cannot get on with Books about the Daily Life which I find rather insufferable in practice about

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me. I can't read the Adam Bedes, the Daisy Chains, etc., at all."189), their tone and subject matter suggest that an audience of schoolgirls was something that would have gratified rather than troubled their author. Lucy Lyttelton claimed that "...I should certainly place in the first rank of books that influenced my girlhood Miss Sewell's and Miss Yonge's," and Lyttelton, with her strong High Church family, was exactly the sort of reader at which Yonge and Sewell took aim.190 While certainly a broad range of literature was consumed by young women of the period, Yonge had the advantage of representing very clearly an establishment perspective on how girlhood should be formed. Her lively talent as well as her unshakeable principles made her peculiarly suited to such a role.

*The Daisy Chain*, one of Yonge's most explicitly didactic fictions, forms an ideal of the novel of education as it appeared at midcentury. It is a novel that focuses on learning and growth of its protagonist while working as a model for the reader--even the experiences of appropriate reading and education are set forth in the fiction. In this section I will analyze the contexts of *The Daisy Chain* by reading it against Yonge's non-fictional work, *Womankind*, thus demonstrating how Yonge seeks to create ideal young women through her fictional and non-fictional prose.

*The Daisy Chain* is, as it calls itself, a family chronicle. As said family includes eleven children, the book does not want for scope, but is loosely tied together by the chief goal of its protagonist, Ethel May: to build a school and a church for the poor of Cocksmoor. Early in the novel, Ethel makes a vow to see a church raised there, and through the eventual endowment from her sister's fiance and hard work of all her family, this comes to pass. But the undertaking is not without its costs: Ethel, who at the novel's inception is an eager scholar of the classics

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190 Lucy Lyttelton, quoted in Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and Their Reading*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, YEAR, p. 46.
and keeps pace with her brother in all his studies, is forced to abandon those inappropriate pursuits and devote herself completely to the more suitable duties of keeping her father's house and educating the poor children at Cocksmoor. In doing so, she leaves off her “careless” ways and becomes the chief prop of her widowed father and something like a mother to her youngest sisters and brother. For a modern feminist, reading The Daisy Chain can be very painful; Ethel's family is merciless in their attempts to turn her into a “proper woman,” and much of the novel's early parts consist of what we would today consider emotional abuse, extravagantly awarded for minor sins such as a muddy frock, an untidy dresser, or a French lesson in bad handwriting. In her foundational work on the subject of how girls are educated through the fiction they read, Good Girls Make Good Wives, Judith Rowbotham argues as follows:

> It should not thus be seen as surprising it was presumed by adults that carefully written and chosen didactic fiction could be used as a means of social control for children. It was thought that stories could have the effect of painlessly leading youthful readers to the paths that adult society wished them to follow to ensure that the next generation would maintain the values and traditions of its parents and teachers.  

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What I have therefore described as emotional manipulation within The Daisy Chain is just that: a conscious manipulation of the reader to assume certain behaviors or characteristics. Through emotional threats, girls are taught that their most important duties are within the home, and neglecting those duties will have some horrific consequence, whether it is parental disapproval or setting the baby on fire.

Certainly, The Daisy Chain has not held up to the years so well as its transatlantic counterpart Little Women, chiefly because its didacticism and purposes of religious

indoctrination are far more plain. It is those very qualities, however, that make the novel a useful study for those who wish to closely examine the roles fiction played in the development of young girls in the Victorian Era. More particularly, *The Daisy Chain* operates as a kind of ideal of the novel of education that I described in the first portion of this chapter. While the plot is varied and includes elements of courtship and boys' school stories, it begins and ends with Ethel. Her development and education (formal or otherwise) form the unifying element to the plot, with the Cocksmoor Church acting as a symbol of her spiritual and emotional gains throughout the text. What is notable about this progression is not either the means of constraint imposed on Ethel's intellectual ambitions, nor her eventual success in achieving her goals (both are deeply conventional), but rather the intense pragmatism that guides these processes. Yonge is very clear in differentiating between, for example, the kind of ostentatious shame shown by Ethel's brothers for her scholarly accomplishments and the realistic concerns that place those accomplishments into relief with a society that cannot value them properly. Ethel's eldest sister, Margaret, on whom the authority for the household initially devolves in the wake of her mother's death, is perhaps the most clear-sighted about what can and cannot be hoped for. Early on Margaret muses, “Dear, dear Ethel, how noble and high she is! But I am afraid! It is what people call a difficult, dangerous age and the grander she is, the greater danger of not managing her rightly. If those high purposes should run only into romance like mine, or grow out into eccentricities and un-feminineness, what a grievous pity it would be!”

Margaret is, throughout the novel, unswayed in her admiration of her younger sister, but she is also the person who most effectively constrains Ethel's behavior and ambition.

It is Margaret, on the advice of Ethel's rigid governess, who puts a stop to the chief part of Ethel's scholarship, and her argument is more or less unassailable. When Ethel pleads to be

allowed to keep up with her brother Norman, Margaret reasons, “‘His work, after he goes to
Oxford, will be doing his very utmost...If you could keep up with him at all, you must give
your whole time and thoughts to it, and when you had done so—if you could get all the
honours in the University—what would it come to? You can't take a first-class.”” 193 While
Yonge herself was unsympathetic to the idea of formal education for women, preferring “home
education” by “sensible fathers,” here she demonstrates the clearest and best argument against
it: very simply that the society of her era has no mechanism with which to reward female
accomplishment in intellectual endeavors. 194 I do not mean, here, to argue that Yonge was a
reformer who yielded reluctantly to the realities of her period-- *The Daisy Chain* is rife with
oppressive gender essentialism masked by Christian piety—but rather to suggest a more
complicated portrait. Yonge, well educated herself by both her father and Keble, and
encouraged in her literary ambitions, creates in Ethel the painful specter of intellectual hunger
and denial. Yonge was a woman for her era, but she was also a woman who helped form the
very intellects that went on to reform female education in England. Lucy Lyttelton, mentioned
above, or Lucy Cavendish, as is called the college for women that takes her name, was, like her
father, an ardent and effective supporter of women's education in England.

*The Daisy Chain* is moreover exceptional as a novel of education for its singleness of
purpose and gentleness of constraint. Unlike *Jane Eyre*, no marriage plot arrives to complicate
or overwrite the narrative of development. While Ethel does experience a small romance, she
immediately flees from the prospect out of the fear of being undutiful towards her father.
Instead, Ethel's cultivation of intellect and spirit are put to use in her community projects,
causing her to earn the respect of many for her self-sacrifice and dedication. It could even be
argued, though I am not sure I would venture so far, that *The Daisy Chain* offers a narrative of

193 Yonge, 181.
professional as well as personal development. Certainly Ethel's role in raising the church at Cocksmoor, though necessarily conducted from behind the scenes, offers the kind of fractal complication of public and private spheres that I discussed in my first chapter. Ethel learns how to control both herself and a committee meeting of church women over the course of the novel, and neither is an easy task. Indeed, Ethel might well serve as Ruskin's ideal, with her serious study and her awareness of woman's larger duty in society.

The other remarkable feature that illuminates *The Daisy Chain* is the degree to which it abstains from issuing large-scale humiliation and reproof upon its heroine. The scene I described above, in which Ethel is obliged to give up keeping pace with her brother Norman, is perhaps the greatest setback that she receives. And while her family is for the most part unsympathetic to the sacrifice entailed (her brother, so far from sharing her sentiments, finds it “silly” that she should continue to study with him), causing Ethel real unhappiness, there is a great deal of difference between the checks that occur on Ethel and the misery and death visited on Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*. And while Eliot's novel is the more sympathetic for the real anger felt by its author about the waste of female intellect, Yonge's work accomplishes what Eliot's does not: it sets a practical and achievable model for female accomplishment (in this, it might be more appropriately compared to *Middlemarch*). While it is probably neither pleasant nor true to think that the Victorian woman could only earn approbation through following Ethel's model of complete self-abnegation, I would argue that Yonge's work offered women a vision of scope and authority authorized by the church and laid the foundations for a broader understanding of what women's work was all about.

Turning to Yonge's *Womankind*, we can see more clearly the relation between Yonge the novelist and Yonge the social conservative, for here she lays out her ideas about the relative positions of the sexes plainly. Her very first page declares, "I have no hesitation in declaring
my full belief in the inferiority of woman, nor that she brought it on herself." While she goes on to argue that the birth of Christ “ennobled” the mother and virgin alike, making it possible for woman to escape being viewed merely in relation to a man, her sense of female inferiority is inscribed throughout the work. The greatest woman, she proposes, must inevitably fall far short of the greatest man. At the same time, Yonge is always cognizant of the woman of intellect, whom she treats with a kind of exceptionalism—the exceptionalism that informed her own education and career. As in The Daisy Chain, Yonge lauds the home environment as the ideal space for the education of girls. This is not a decision made on academic grounds, certainly, but Yonge fears that "...it is not possible to have large numbers of young girls boarding together, without injury to qualities more essential than intellect." This is in opposition to her views on boys, who, she argues, tend to regulate one another in a group setting.

Like Ruskin, however, Yonge takes a serious view of what a woman's larger duty in the world may mean. She makes a case for governesses to be treated professionally rather than scornfully: "[a governess] is a lady with a profession, just as much as a barrister is a gentleman with a profession." Young governesses, she proposes, should be able to produce a certificate, and she suggests that girls should generally strive to take the Cambridge Local Examinations, which I discuss in depth in my fourth chapter: “As these are conducted in writing, and are not competitive, they do not seem to me to involve anything unfeminine or undesirable; and the benefit of having a well-considered scheme and system given, and of being stimulated to work for an object, is very great. It is very desirable that all who are educated up to the needful point should work for it." 

196 Yonge, Womankind, p. 31.
197 Yonge, Womankind, pp. 34-5.
198 Yonge, Womankind, p. 84.
being developed properly, given objects to work for, while eschewing all that is “unfeminine” and might therefore draw censure. That such certification happily coincides with professional women having a genuine credential to use in securing employment is implicitly part of the consideration. But Yonge's main focus is on the importance of discipline and mental training (Rousseau would call this constraint). Rowbotham explains this logic by describing the prevalent attitudes of female inferiority at the time, the kind Yonge herself espoused: “There was simply no possibility that anything comparable to the peak of make genius could result from a woman's brain...It was thus necessary to find alternative reasons for educating the feminine mind and for selecting the subjects that would form part of the curriculum.”

The pursuit of knowledge is therefore dedicated towards training girls to be good helpmeets or to have disciplined habits: the content of education is vacated. The emphasis on “accomplishments” is more logical from within this framework: music, for example, is repeatedly lauded to the degree that it is pleasing to weary male relations. Reading “good books” or moral books or improving books allows for the mental training that Victorians earnestly desired for their daughters, while the morals and sentiments within these books always pushed their consciousness back into their home lives and what they might do to support that life of the home.

“Books in the running brooks”: The Beth Book and Authority

In this section I will explore the ways in which The Beth Book is distinctive as a novel of education and how reading and formal education are portrayed within the rich tapestry of experience that is its heroine's childhood. Originality and direct experience are highly prized within The Beth Book, with books initially de-privileged as second-hand sources of information, but always present within Beth's life. Instead Beth is influenced by the attitudes

199Rowbotham, p. 115.
and literary tastes of her parents, by the rich evidence of her senses, and by the demands of her own imaginative genius. The novel's narration interrogates separate spheres and the inferior education given to girls during the Victorian era and engages with pre-Freudian developmental psychology in order to offer a broad view of the ways in which a child's impressionable psyche engages with the world.

*The Beth Book* (1897) by Sarah Grand tells of the development of Beth Caldwell Maclure, a “woman of genius.” Born more or less unwanted to parents already well-supplied with children, Beth nonetheless shows from her infancy a particular sensitivity and gift for making verse. Though her mother is a savage disciplinarian, Beth receives early encouragement from her father, who recognizes Beth's potential. Unfortunately, his early death leaves Beth more or less an alien within a family who cannot understand or tolerate her erratic behavior. Beth is given little training or education, save by a great-aunt who values the expansiveness of Beth's generous spirit rather than disliking her capricious ways. But Beth suffers, overall, from a very disjointed and mainly useless education until she reaches an age to seek learning herself after her young marriage to the doctor who is, unbeknownst to the family, retained by a lock hospital and of generally vicious character. Beth nonetheless blossoms with the attentions of sympathetic friends, and her distinction grows as she leaves her home in the country, goes to London on her own, and finds her vocation at last as a minister after certain romantic tribulations.

I have chosen a New Woman novel as my final novel of education not only because

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201Victorian lock hospitals were used to contain and “cure” prostitutes who suffered from sexually-transmitted diseases. They were particularly distasteful to moralists and advocates of women's rights, who held that the government in this case acted the part of a pander, punishing female prostitutes while allowing their clients to spread disease to their families unchecked.
they take female ambition seriously, but also because the birth of the New Woman movement closely coincided with the fruition of the labor of so many advocates of female education. During the 1890s, schools like public day schools for girls flourished through decisive, professional female leadership and teaching. *The Beth Book*, filled with vigorous narrative opinings on the mismanagement of girls' education in times past, shares something of that new emphasis on the professional and the turbulent *fin de siècle* energy surrounding women's rights.

It is the words Grand places in Beth's mouth with regard to conventional novels, however, that express most clearly why I call this work a novel of education. Beth complains that too many novels hinge on love affairs; she finds it a one-sided view of life, one that ignores every other important aspect of human existence: “In writing a life, if one could present all sides of it, and not merely one phase—the good and the bad of it, the joys and the sorrows, the moments of strength and of weakness, of wisdom and of folly, of misery and of pure delight—what a picture!” (p. 373) Grand, whose overly didactic *Ideala* found few readers and fewer admirers, in *The Beth Book* proves equal to the challenge she sets herself: in writing about Beth's vocation, more than half the novel is devoted to Beth's development and girlhood, which shape her into the woman she becomes. This is a novel of education because it treats education seriously, allotting attention not merely to the romantic peregrinations of its heroine, but to the broad range of factors that shape Beth from infancy on.

Indeed, it is that depth of detail on Grand's part that makes her work, more than Bronte's or Yonge's, a true novel of education. There is a slight romance in the book, but those who swoon over Rochester would need to look further for their pleasures than Beth's idealized and hastily sketched courtship at the end of the book. Though Beth's formal education is but brief and scarcely sufficient, Grand spares no length in detailing for her readers the precise causes of formation of this “woman of genius.” The books she reads (and more importantly the books
read to her), the mockery of lessons that she receives from her untaught mother, the tutelage in cooking and cleaning received from an unprincipled but kindly housekeeper, the poetry Beth writes to herself, and her ecstatic and often terrified reactions to nature all combine to present an ideographic mode of explaining the development of Beth Caldwell Maclure. Grand relies heavily on pre-Freudian developmental psychology in creating the portrait of Beth's childhood, in particular the work of Sir Francis Galton. Galton argued in 1883 that “[o]ur abstract ideas being mostly drawn from external experiences, their character also must depend upon the events of our individual histories.” Thus in constructing her “woman of genius,” Grand takes care to plant the seeds of her eventual intellectual blossoming within her childhood.

Though neither, probably, would claim the relationship, there is a strong similarity between Yonge's work and Grand's. Both take the stuff of daily life and child development as their primary subject matter, both are profoundly religious, and both take the question of a woman's vocation very seriously. That they come to different conclusions on almost every one of these matters is to be expected—this has the beneficial effect of allowing a better comparison between the conservative, mid-century Yonge and the progressive fin de siècle Grand. One of the most important distinctions between their views on the development of children in general and girls in particular is that Grand is very focused on the questions of modeling and direct experience. While Yonge fetishizes family life and the sacred duties between parents and children, she oddly never seems to note the importance of young people observing their elders acting with the virtues they are trying to instill. In The Daisy Chain, Dr. May is probably Ethel's chief critic—for the very faults of strong emotion and carelessness that he does not seem to work very hard to overcome in himself. What is improbable in Yonge's narration is not that a parent should espouse a mild hypocrisy, but rather that the otherwise

202Galton and Grand shared the common cause of eugenics.  
203Francis Galton, Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development. Ebook, np.
intelligent and insightful Ethel does not notice that her father cannot, on these matters, claim any kind of moral high ground.

Beth, on the other hand, is a most noticing child. As a young girl, she calmly tells her father, “If you drink whisky, you'll be drunk again” (15) and is surprised and chagrined at the injustice of receiving a slap for this helpful observation. She is a harsh critic of hypocrisy, and, as she informs the great-aunt who despairs of her tendency to tell hard truths, “only says what everybody knows.” Beth is raised with many hard words and hard knocks, but the only thing that has any sway over her is a gentle example. Beth is at her best as a child when she is taught and guided by her ascetic, strongly religious great aunt Victoria. Though stern creeds disagree with Beth's sensitive spirit, the old woman's honesty, kindness, and excellent example turn Beth into something quite other than the gypsy child who is her mother's despair.

Beth's positive responses to behavioral modeling rather than attempts to instill virtue without its practice are part of Grand's overall emphasis on direct experience as an important factor in development. As a child, Beth has little use for books. At age eight, she can only scarcely follow the prayer service in a book. She regards them, impatiently, as ciphers: “The truth was that she had no use for letters or figures. The books of nature and of life were spread out before her, and she was conning their contents to more purpose than anyone else could have interpreted them to her in those days” (19). But when she has the opportunity to tutor a poor girl named Emily (a rather erratic and eccentric procedure, to be sure), Beth suddenly learns her own lessons as never before. Beth's urgent desire for context and use for her knowledge make the bad teaching that she receives nearly intolerable. When taught the date of the Battle of Hastings, Beth impatiently demands, “But what did it do?” only to be laughed at by her instructor and schoolmates. What she asks, of course, is for some context for the facts that she is being taught; what she asks is the question every too-clever child has always asked: “Tell me...
why it matters.” Her teacher calls her “silly,” and Grand interjects into the narration that “it
was not Beth who was silly. Miss Smallwood had had nothing herself but the trumpery
education provided everywhere at that time for girls by the part of humanity which laid
undisputed claim to a superior sense of justice...” (296).

Grand is punctilious in describing the failings of mid-century education for girls. Beth
is primarily taught by her mother, who herself has little or no formal education. While Yonge
argued that girls should be educated at home by “sensible fathers,” Grand demonstrates the
insufficiency of such a measure. Even the most careful of papas may have little time to educate
his daughters in the face of a demanding job, or may perish early, as Beth's father does, leaving
his daughters ill provided for. And even had Mrs. Caldwell a greater sympathy with her
dughter's nature and greater patience as an instructor, she herself is the product of similar
academic neglect. “Everybody who could read, write, and cipher was supposed to be able to
teach in those days,” (p. 115) Grand notes from a temporal distance. Because Mrs. Caldwell
has a limited income, such money as she does have is devoted to educating her sons. Even
when Great-aunt Victoria dies, leaving her small income for Beth's education, Mrs. Caldwell
wheedles it out of Beth in order that her sons may have a larger share of pocket money. It is
only Beth's continuing wildness and misbehavior that finally settles her mother that she should
be sent to school. The first school she is sent to, a school for officers' daughters, offers little in
the way of stimulating education: it is here that she receives mockery for asking about the
Battle of Hastings. Beth does poorly there because of her want of discipline and low tolerance
for physical confinement, and is afterward sent to a finishing school in London, where the
environment is beneficial; Beth's education there is cut short, however, by the death of her
sister, which requires her to return home. Moreover, again, scenes of positive education seem
unnarratable: though the method and effectiveness of her lessons at that school are praised, we
never see them, nor hear the title of even one book that Beth studies there.

Most of the unhappy insufficiency of Beth's education is blamed explicitly on the notion of separate spheres. Grand demonstrates that confining a woman to a home sphere not only keeps her from fulfilling her potential, but also, within the middle classes, operates as a hypocritical trap—the Victorian middle class woman's sphere might be within the home, but she received as little useful education in homemaking as in anything else: “If we had listened to advice and done as we were told, the woman's-sphere-is-home would have been as ugly and comfortless a place for us to-day as it used to be...” (175) Grand's commentary demonstrates not only the degree to which the doctrine of separate spheres had lost its potency by 1897, but also the distrust she demonstrates, both through narrative interjection and through Beth's development, for established authority.

So throughout her childhood, “Books [Beth] flung away impatiently but the woods and streams, and the wild flowers, the rooks returning to roost in the trees at sunset, the horses playing in the paddocks, the cows dawdling back home from their pastures, all sweet country scents and cheerful country sounds she became alive to...” (102). By resisting books until she is old enough to use them as tools, Beth preserves what is original within her. In contrast, both her mother and sister have been educated into a deep conventionality. Her sister Mildred is studious, but lacks Beth's genius: “she was naturally, so to speak, an artificial product of conventional ideas; Beth, on the contrary, was altogether a little human being” (123). In this way Beth develops into not merely a person of force and originality, but a “New Woman” who looks beyond established wisdom and works to find her own truth.

The novel of education, as I hope this chapter has demonstrated, is not a rigid or homogenous genre. The tropes of the novel of education can be used to signify differently depending on the author's purpose. Bronte uses the portrait of Jane's deprived and friendless
girlhood primarily for purposes of character, crafting an enduring subjectivity for her heroine out of Jane's literary yearnings and slow socialization. For Yonge, writing about girlhood is a way of creating a model of ideal girlhood: self-sacrifice combined with high purpose create an uneasy mix, but also show historical progress towards a larger vision of woman's purpose. Grand's novel of education is a medium for talking about social questions concerning education and the role of women in Victorian society. The novel of education takes readers deep into the heart of girlhood to witness and sympathize with the small triumphs and failures of its heroine. But in its purest form, it also takes female vocation seriously. It explores, even when extolling, the constraints placed on Victorian femininity, offering not merely a social record as valuable as a first-person narrative, but also a mirror into changing attitudes about reading, education, and the place of woman in Victorian society.
Chapter Four: “What shall I read?”: Positive Reading Models

In 1904, Sara Burstall, headmistress of the Manchester School for Girls, gave an address to the Old Students' Guild of Alexandra College in Dublin. Alexandra College, like the Manchester school, was a secondary school for girls and was founded in 1866. In speaking to the “old girls” of Alexandra, Burstall drew on her expertise from years of teaching girls; her subject was “Reading as an Element of Women's Lives,” but while the address is specifically directed to women, most of her examples tend to be the girls in whom her life's work was invested. “What could be more delightful to a girl, buried in the country among the many details of domestic and parish work, than to draw the curtain and see depicted before her the dramatic action of Shakespeare, of Molière, and of Thackeray?” she asks rhetorically. She notes, further, that “many girls can only get . . . wider knowledge from books” and in speaking of poetry, points out that “[t]here are many girls in England who cannot read poetry,” though she politely suggests that this deficiency may be less common in the “poetical land of Ireland.” Her address was reprinted in *The Magazine of the Manchester High School* for the edification of her students, providing them with a positive model of reading.

If I have spoken little of positive reading models so far, it is only because nearly hysterical negative prohibitions on girls' reading seem to be more common during the period than practical advice about how and what girls should read. As an educator and an educated woman speaking to other educated women, however, Burstall's address is free from prohibition and instead focuses on the ways that reading does and can function in a woman's life. Her address is full of specific authors and texts that women should consider reading, but it is hardly dry and prescriptive. Burstall exhibits lively sympathy for the lives of women whose path was

205 Burstall 44 and 46.
different from her own professional one, and indeed her main focus seems to be enriching the
life of the home through reading. She argues, somewhat anachronistically, that “after all the
changes which have taken place in the last fifty years, to which we owe so much, it is still true,
and always must be true, that the main sphere of a woman's life is in the home.”206 While it is
somewhat disheartening to see a pioneering professional woman limiting her fellow women to
such a narrow sphere, and while Burstall's dim predictions for the future have not, happily,
been fulfilled, it is this practicality that allows Burstall to engage with her audience, many of
whom must have been young wives and mothers.

Throughout her address, Burstall maintains her focus on how reading complements the
private lives of women. This gives her talk, at times, a narrow feel. The three purposes she
proposes for women's reading are “Joy, Enrichment, and Consolation.”207 While enrichment
sounds promising, there is no sense within the text that a woman might be preparing for a
professional career of her own. In discussing enrichment, Burstall focuses exclusively on how
such enrichment helps support the life of the home: “In all the relations of family life women
lose enormously because they do not understand.”208 To rectify this lack of understanding,
Burstall suggests that women should read “manly books” such as Kipling's.209 She further
adheres to the ideas I set forth in my last chapter, that reading and study for girls and women
are primarily a type of discipline that is in itself a good rather than the means towards a greater
purpose. She proposes that “one should have a solid subject, something which will be a
harbour when the storms of life are raging,” but the subjects she proposes seem to have
minimal practical utility, with only two exceptions.210 “Suppose you are a Church worker, you

206Burstall 42.
207Burstall 43.
208Burstall 44
209Burstall 43.
210Burstall 46.
can take up Divinity or Ecclesiastical History; if a teacher, you may find an interest in ethics, psychology, or philosophy.” While it is only natural that Burstall should have something to say for the teaching profession, her mention of Church workers in the same context suggests that she primarily views women's sphere of action as taking place within circumscribed limits, those of the “caring professions” as they are called in modern parlance. Burstall notes that as women “To-day we claim our share in the Commonwealth of Action, but we claim our equal share in the Commonwealth of Ideas. More especially for the work we have to do for others must we claim our share in this commonwealth.” Here Burstall reframes the work done by women, emphasizing not accomplishment, but service; it is service that justifies the work that women do and gives them purpose.

Yet it is not when she speaks of action, but when she speaks of domestic confinement that Burstall is most eloquent and sympathetic. In discussing books as a consolation, she draws a moving picture of female distress:

Trouble comes to all, and perhaps comes to a woman more than to a man because she is a creature of heart, and because when it comes to her she has not the distractions that a man has. She cannot run away or shut herself up; she has to stay at home, and meet the same people, when perhaps every meeting is pain; she has to pass through temptations and griefs and disappointments, and smile all the time. Sometimes even she has to struggle with storms of passion; to find herself all but swept away over the brink of a downfall she shudders to contemplate. In all this, it is much to have books.

Burstall refers to “distractions” that men have to console them—presumably the wide and

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211Ibid.
212Burstall 42.
213Burstall 45.
varied entrancements from her “Commonwealth of Action”: work, self-chosen society, and the liberty of movement within the world. Books, then, are emissaries from that Commonwealth, entering into the narrow sphere of domestic life and bringing similar distraction and consolation. Here Burstall delineates, poignantly, the dark side of the doctrine of separate spheres, albeit without ever calling the doctrine itself into question. Books—good books, Burstall is careful to note—become not a means of serving others, as she proposes when talking about enrichment, but rather a method of preserving and caring for the self. They become a substitute for real action—the desire a woman may have to “run away or shut herself up”—but they also offer an escape that is available to women and men alike.

In describing the books she finds suitable for the purposes of consolation, Burstall is careful to point out that women should read what they like. “One likes Milton, others cannot read 'Paradise Lost.' If you are one of these, do not try to read 'Paradise Lost.' Perhaps Sheridan will suit you; Sheridan is not Milton, still Sheridan is good.”214 Despite the snobbery of her provisions, Burstall goes on to argue that if women will seek out the literature that they love, they will find that reading is not a duty, but a pleasure. It is more important, in her schema, to read some kind of good book rather than abandoning good books altogether because Milton or some other worthy is not to the reader's taste. Books become a woman's “treasure-house,” where there is something for everyone who will take the time to discover it.

Here, as elsewhere in her address, Burstall suggests books that have the power to bring the broader world into a woman's life. She emphasizes the importance of foreign literature, and French literature in particular, claiming that “English girls and women can learn most from the study of the best French literature, because French literature is rich in just those elements of culture in which England is deficient.”215 She goes on to recommend study in the classics,
which “ought not to be neglected” and praises the study of Italian literature: “now Dante is again becoming a possible part of a woman's intellectual life in England.” This she proposes as a “cure” for “this evil of narrowness in women's lives,” which she compares to the lives of women in Eastern culture. Over and over Burstall notes the problems of narrowness, confinement, and constraint in women's life, but recommends only reading as a cure; perhaps it is unreasonable to expect Burstall to have a real solution for these social ills. Yet Burstall was a pioneering educator, one of the headmistresses who helped bring about real reform in British education. She did so not through championing women's rights or railing against the status quo, but by doing what she does here: educating. This is the cure that Burstall has to offer Edwardian women: the cure of learning, of reading, and of education. Seeking to strengthen minds that have been trained to be weak, Burstall offers “only” books, yet by using something so seemingly anodyne, she avoids controversy and is able to be an effective champion for the causes of women.

I open with analysis of Burstall's address in order to highlight what I consider to be a missing piece in the scholarship of reading history, particularly as it relates to girls. While we are all aware and, by now, overaware of the ways that literature was perceived as dangerous to girls. There is an abundance of prohibition directed towards girls and their reading, which was imaged alternately as a drug or as unwholesome food for its somatic effects on the body. The fact that is often overlooked, however, is that there was an equal abundance of literary prescription aimed at young girls and their anxious mammas. In this chapter, I therefore wish to examine positive models of reading—moments of instruction and selection on the parts of authority. In this chapter, I will particularly use the Manchester High School for Girls as a case study for what formal education looked like near the end of the Victorian period. The

216 Ibid.
Manchester High School, of which Burstall was headmistress, was one of the new day schools that offered professional teaching and a rigorous secondary curriculum for girls. That curriculum was largely based around the Cambridge Senior Local examinations, which themselves provide a model for literature education, but also establish a literary canon of a kind. I will further use media analysis on periodicals of the era whose audience was middle class girls to demonstrate the kinds of reading that were seen as appropriate for girls. I will conclude with a thought experiment of sorts—in the last section of this chapter, I will construct the reading biography of an ideal Victorian girl as a capstone that synthesizes the reading experiences described by life writing and reading histories.

This chapter is focused primarily on the 1880s and the later part of the period generally; this is both necessary and deliberate. Since schools like the North London Collegiate and the Manchester High School did not exist in the early and middle years of the Victorian period. But, once established, they exhibited a strong hold on public interest and imagination. Sally Mitchell argues that the culture of girls was strongly shaped by the idea of school rather than the reality:

> Even by the end of the period, however, less than a quarter of all girls between twelve and eighteen attended any sort of school. . . Although [school stories] had little relation to most girls' reality, they spread school mores, the image of girls in groups, and the culture of schooling as an institutional separation of adolescents . . . It was thus primarily in fiction that school became a privileged space for girls' interactions and ethics.\(^{217}\)

Here Mitchell puts forth school and school stories as an idealized space that houses ideas of autonomy and action. While my work does not analyze school stories as a genre, the trajectory

that Mitchell traces for the images and ideas contained in school stories only mirrors the larger effect that the existence of real formal education for girls had on Victorian culture. Schools, and day schools in particular, bridged a gap between private and public in a very necessary way.

The Manchester High School for Girls

The Manchester High School for Girls was founded in 1874 and intended to be a model school for girls in the region. Its curriculum was created in consultation with the pioneers of women's education: Dorothea Beale of the Cheltenham Ladies' College was consulted, and rules and regulations were based on those of the North London Collegiate, founded by Frances Mary Buss. When the school launched its search for a headmistress, governors asked advice of Emily Davies, founder of Girton, and made every effort to favor Cambridge-educated women in the search. The curriculum was mainly based around the requirements of the Cambridge Senior Local, which was the first certifying and qualifying examination regularly available to young women. Over the course of the 1880s, the number of girls taking the examination increased dramatically; in 1873 only 401 senior girls took the examination, but in 1889 that number had more than tripled to 1354. The exam was most useful to middle class girls who were formally educated with the intention of working professionally in a career such as teaching where the certification became a basic prerequisite.

Since the actual content of the Manchester School's early curriculum has been scattered to the ages in a thousand exercise books and lost lectures, it is worth pausing and asking what, precisely, the Cambridge examination syndicate expected girls to know and have read. In my archival work in Cambridge, I went over the reports and examination questions from the years 1876-1889, looking specifically at the literature that appears in those documents to construct a sense of the canon of literature as it was taught to girls in the 1880s. Each year a series of
books were chosen and announced ahead of time as the focus of the literature examination. One play by Shakespeare was included every year; other authors included between 1880 and 1883 were More, Milton, Chaucer, Bacon, and Pope. There were no references in the examination to any literature produced after 1800; to the examiners, encouraging the serious study of contemporary literature would have been absurd—this penchant being a later development in scholarly pursuits. Exemplifying the focus on older forms of English literature, students in 1879 were required to “Give the meaning and illustrate the etymology of-
herbergage, gree, in-fere, fonge, fyn, algates, kythe, sythe, triacle, boist, fetys, al plat, henne, so theech, thewes, engyn, sonde.”218 The curriculum of the schools was shaped by these examinations, and lessons given in English Literature would have included few, if any, authors of the nineteenth century.

In 1885, eleven years after its foundation, the magazine of the Manchester School published a piece called “What to Read and How to Read” by a young lady who called herself “Sappho.” This piece, written for an institutional magazine by one of the students, offers a window into the ways that the school framed ideas of reading and readership for its pupils. Because it was written by a student rather than a teacher, yet given official sanction within the publication, the piece is less self-conscious than might be expected if put forth by an authoritative source. Sappho feels no need to justify study for women—she is part of an institution that validates women's learning, and as a result, she spends no time at all on the doctrine of separate spheres, which arises over and over like a melancholy refrain in so much literature about girlhood and reading. Instead, she writes from the perspective of a schoolgirl, albeit an uncommonly serious one. Her opening observations are phrased with the sobriety of a Victorian sage:

At the present time the range of our literature is being daily so greatly widened that it would seem impossible ever to be at a loss what to read. Nevertheless, on all sides may be heard that melancholy query, 'What shall I read?' and, indeed, taking into consideration the extremely desultory kind of reading indulged in by some girls, it is scarcely to be wondered that they do not even know their own tastes.219

“What shall I read?” is the question that gave title to this chapter, and given the preponderance of prohibition over prescription in the advice of the period on girls' reading, it is not to be wondered that girls of the era felt some confusion on the matter. On the one hand, students at the Manchester school were being taught to value their intellect; but on the other hand, there was a strong effort made by such schools to ensure that students were not “unsexed” by their learning. In her memoir, *A London Girl of the 1880s*, Mary Hughes writes of her admission to the North London Collegiate School that the most frightening trial she had to undergo was demonstrating that she could sew a buttonhole, a skill required of all pupils by the school's founder, the redoubtable Frances Mary Buss.220 While the new professional headmistresses sought to prepare students for their place in a world that increasingly desired their skills, they also took care to ensure that students were not left unfit for a more traditional position as wives and mothers by their education.

But Sappho seems oblivious to the contradictions and reconciliations that underpin her whole existence. Instead, she argues for reading as a vital part of any education. Her decrying of the “desultory” reading of some girls reflects her overall sense that reading is a way to make sense of lessons. “Certainly long strings of dates, learned as a task, without reference to the

substance of the history to which they refer, present few charms to the learner; but if we read and understand the narrative of the reign in question...the events will become so firmly fixed in our minds that the dates will follow as a natural consequence,” she argues.\textsuperscript{221} That a long string of dates was the ordinary method of educating young people, she seems not to mind. Yet practically and seriously, she proposes that reading histories and literature will enable young women to enter into their studies in a holistic way. Indeed, her essay is less about what and how to read than on reading as a way to make meaning from an education that may be less than ideal. “We cannot expect to find our studies very interesting unless we pursue them in a more extensive manner than do textbooks, which are...only written as introductions to the studies of which they treat,” she argues; seemingly it has never occurred to her that a textbook could provide that holistic learning.\textsuperscript{222} In the reflections of this studious girl, we see, not an appeal for reading as a pleasure, as Burstall offers, but instead a place for reading within study. That reading may be a pleasure outside of study, Sappho is certainly aware, but she does not choose to make this a focus. Hers is a student's pragmatism: she acknowledges that some may claim that her schema of reading takes too much time, but argues that by following a serious program of study, “it will not be necessary to devote so much time to 'reading up'...as the facts will cling much more firmly to our minds when established there in an interesting and attractive manner.”\textsuperscript{223} Throughout Sappho's essay, there is this subtle but undeniable critique of Victorian methods of education. Reading offers to this student not an escape from her studies, but an indispensable means of understanding them. Within her essay, education appears as insufficient, offering only facts, dates, and other information to be learned by rote. Reading, on the other hand, is a treasure house of interest and inspiration that can make learning

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\textsuperscript{221}“Sappho,” 339. 
\textsuperscript{222}Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{223}“Sappho,” 340.
meaningful; it is the resource that makes education complete.

But let us move from Sappho to the institution that shaped her. In the section that follows I read critically the catalog of the Manchester School's catalog, giving due observation to both the presences and absences that give hints to the character of the document and the institution itself. Of the forty-one pages that constituted the catalog of the school library for the Manchester High School for Girls, only one is devoted to English prose fiction. Poring over this distillation of officially-sanctioned novels is enlightening, and I have attached a reproduction of the page in Appendix A. On a first perusal of the list, two things stand out: the authors who are not included, and the wealth of George Eliot. In these absences as well as in the authors who are present, I will try to parse the unwritten rules that seem to have governed the acquisition of this slender collection. This is, certainly, an exercise in speculation. It is perfectly possible that this collection was created wholesale out of the donations of some Eliot enthusiast and therefore reflects nothing more than that the school was in possession of these volumes. But given the care devoted to this catalog and the strong holdings in sciences, biography, and history, I believe that this list constitutes a viable mode of interrogating the positive reading models presented by the school and its officials.

In some ways, this list is more notable for authors not included than for authors it promotes. Authors whose works are not represented in the prose fiction catalog include Dickens, any Bronte, Trollope, Yonge, Sewell, and Scott. Certainly some authors must have been rejected merely on the grounds that the girls would be likely to have access to them at home. Probably that is the case with the Brontes, whom Burstall specifically recommends in the address described in the introduction to this chapter. Perhaps it is the case with Dickens as well, although in 1883, Dickens may also have been considered old-fashioned. Probably not more old-fashioned, though, than Elizabeth Gaskell, whose work *Wives and Daughters* is the
sole representative of her oeuvre in the catalog. Yet Dickens, who to modern audiences stands peerless as a representative of Victorian literature, is notable for many absences in positive reading models put forth for Victorian girls. There are more references to Macaulay than to Dickens in advice for girls, and it is worth pausing on this Dickensian hole to try and understand it. Leslie Stephen, father of Virginia Woolf and considered a first-rate critic in the late Victorian and early Edwardian era, said of Dickens, “If literary fame could be safely measured by popularity with the half-educated, he must claim the highest position among English novelists.” It would seem, then, that the works of Dickens in 1883 had not yet outlived both the positive and the negative results of their popularity. While Amy Cruse in the first half of the twentieth century would sum up “the splendid four—Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot,” Dickens was too much an author of popular fiction—too much a man of penny lending libraries—to be allowed into this more select collection in 1883.

But Sir Walter Scott is worth a pause as well. Scott was one of the most admired writers of the nineteenth century, and his work is described by a number of sources as approved family reading. Why, then, would the library choose not to have Scott's historical fiction? I believe this question is best answered by looking not only at the absence of Scott, but at the absence of Yonge and Sewell as well. To a modern observer, the fact that a very small collection would choose not to include what history has deemed a couple of minor novelists may seem very insignificant. But given that Yonge was, during her period, one of the most respected novelists for young people (in my third chapter I discussed Yonge's significance as a novelist), her omission is as curious as the lack of Scott, if indeed not more so. My speculation, then—and this is indeed pure speculation—is that the Manchester School chose

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224Quoted in Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and their Reading*, p. 173.
225Cruse, p. 173.
not to include Scott, Sewell, and Yonge all for the same reason: each of them was strongly associated with the High Church. All three were High Church in their personal observances, and while Scott was primarily co-opted by the Oxford Movement and others posthumously, Yonge and Sewell were both very clear in the construction of their audiences. An inclusion of these novels might have been seen as an unwarranted rather than beneficial kind of religious instruction by parents. The Manchester School was founded to be explicitly non-denominational, and the exclusion of these authors may have been part of this practice.

The abundance of George Eliot is more curious: eight works of Eliot were kept on the library shelves, more than any other by a fiction author. In my first chapter, I argued that Eliot puts forth in her works a powerful intellectual hunger, one that demands a scholastic response. Certainly in an earlier part of the century, young girls would have been permitted an expurgated edition of Eliot, if they were allowed the book at all. Amy Cruse notes that, “In most families George Eliot's works were absolutely forbidden to the young,” and Lucy Lyttelton records a mention of a bowdlerized *Adam Bede* in her diary in 1859.\(^{226}\) *Middlemarch* was Dorothea Beale's favorite of Eliot's works; the earnest zeal of Dorothea appealed strongly to women reformers like Beale and Burstall. Eliot's moral and philosophical tone make her works proper companions for the sober worthies such as Carlyle and Macaulay that the library also included in its collection.

This, then, is the tone of the library catalog: books are included because they are instructive or worthy of study. Just as Sappho suggests in her essay on how to read, literature is regarded as a tool for learning rather than a source of delight. The overabundant imaginations of a Dickens, a Bronte or even an Austen have no place here, suspect and unworthy. Though the Manchester School in the 1880s offered girls a positive model of reading, it offered a model

\(^{226}\)Cruse, p. 63.
entirely devoid of the delight and whim that Burstall herself praised in her address to the women of the early twentieth century. Sappho's lament that girls do not know their own tastes becomes more understandable: how should a girl, dosed with literature like medicine, ever know the joys of a Jane Eyre or an Aurora Leigh, shut up with an old book?

Surely the girls could, and did, find delight elsewhere, perhaps in the scorned “novels of the moment” or the wholesome girls' school stories of L.T. Meade, just as surely a portion of Burstall's audience, told that Sheridan was not Milton, went home and read a silver-fork novel by Ouida. But their library and their institution were communicating a bleakly utilitarian view of reading by not promoting a spirit of pleasure within the students. Educating girls formally was a relatively new endeavor during the Victorian era, and I do not mean to condemn as illiberal an institution that helped girls develop their intellects and shape a new generation, bringing forth social change. But by excluding light reading in their prescriptions for girls, they consequently lost the opportunity of shaping that spirit of delight, sending girls into the hands of the popular press for their entertainments.

The Earnest Delights of the Periodical

Periodicals aimed directly at girls were, like quality secondary schools for girls, an innovation primarily of the 1880s. While prior to that decade there were periodicals meant for the consumption of families and young people (Yonge's *Monthly Packet* being an example), the 1880s brought about a stronger sense of girls as a separate group to be catered and advertised to. The popular *Girl's Own Paper* ran from 1880 until the 1950s, and *Atalanta*, on which I shall chiefly focus, was only published between 1887 and 1898. My reason for focusing on *Atalanta* is mainly that the *Girl's Own* was very much written “to the old tune.” Published by the Religious Tract Society, it focused on home duties—a typical stanza from a poem entitled “The Girls of England” and written anonymously in imitation of Felicia Hemans follows:
May God bless the homes of England
And each one do her part
To serve Him in her low estate
With steadfastness of heart.
With his love all the rest will come,
The little sphere increasing,
Until it touch the eternal home
And end in joys unceasing.\textsuperscript{227}

Such lines suggest clearly that the only role available to girls is that of helpmeet and keeper of the hearth rather than as enacting paid labor of any kinds or even necessarily encompassing any form of social work. If the “New Girl” ever existed, she did not exist in the pages of the \textit{Girl's Own}.

In her seminal work \textit{The New Girl}, Mitchell argues that while in “[e]arly fiction girls generally emphasized home life and home duties,” by the end of the Victorian era girls' books depicted larger concerns or “dwelled on the values of ethics, and interactions of girls themselves, with hardly any adults present.”\textsuperscript{228} While Mitchell acknowledges that many girls continued to live under the close supervision of adults with very little freedom, she argues that the “New Girl” nonetheless had a “cultural reality” and “exercised an imaginative and emotional power with fertile potential for nurturing girls' inner selves.”\textsuperscript{229} Her work chronicles “cheap and popular” fiction for girls: “We may once have been taught that great literature endures because it is universal; more certainly, however, fiction that becomes very popular and


\textsuperscript{228}Mitchell, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{229}Mitchell, p. 3.
then fades into obscurity draws on the values, interests, and concerns of a specific group of
readers at a particular time.”

Mitchell outlines the types of audiences reached by different periodicals and describes *Atalanta* as “suggest[ing] that the readers Meade hoped to reach were daughters of the gentry and upper middle class between about fourteen and twenty-five—intelligent, serious girls who needed only support and guidance in order to become women on the new pattern.”

While every periodical offers a model of reading merely by its selection, I wish to focus particularly on the ways that *Atalanta* worked to educate its readers rather than merely entertain them. The Atalanta Scholarship, Reading Union, and School of Fiction was a strangely ambitious hybrid project that sought to unite girl readers in the act of reading and writing. Each month featured an essay on some aspect of fiction; since the works were submitted by different authors each month, there is considerable variation in tone and sense of audience. W.E. Norris, for example, on writing “Style in Fiction” named as good stylists Addison, Gibbon, Macaulay, Carlyle, Ruskin and Sterne. It seems unlikely that even the most serious of girls would, on desiring a model for style in *fiction*, pick up a weighty volume of Gibbon. Norris also uses “he” as the standard author pronoun. But Norris's complete oblivion to the audience of *Atalanta* is a stand-out in the style of the essays. L.B. Walford in “The Novel of Manners” addressed herself very clearly to “literary girls,” offering gentle advice: “And yet, if you will believe me, dear young girl, who might write and write well if you would only take the pains, and not set your standard so terribly low, and not be thirsting to see your name in print, and hear what your companions have to say about it...” Walford urged girls to aim higher in

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230 Mitchell, p. 5.
231 Mitchell, p. 11.
their literary endeavors and to emulate Thackeray and Jane Austen. In a self-conscious moment, Walford notes that “I may be laughed at for naming these two together, but I know who would not have laughed—Lord Macaulay would not have laughed, neither would Sir Walter Scott.” She concluded by urging girls to read Austen, Edgeworth, and Burney in order to better understand what a novel of manners should be; in this moment, we can almost sense Walford performing a proto-feminist rescue of women's texts who are not valued properly during her period. She invokes the authority of male figures to answer imagined critics who might laugh at her high valuation of women authors. In her contribution, Louisa Parr argued that “[w]e all know the pleasure we derive from the fresh, natural, unaffected conversation of an unspoilt girl. Well, then, I want you to write as you talk.” Parr implies that her readers must be “unspoilt” and therefore naturally pleasing. Her construction of the *Atalanta* readership mirrors the description given by Mitchell of those readers: “intelligent, serious girls who needed only support and guidance in order to become women on the new pattern.”

But the *Atalanta* Reading Union offered girls more than just essays. Each month there was a selection of assignments for girls to write on as well as a series of “search questions” that required readers to identify quotations, tell what they knew about figures like Sancho Panza, and find obscure lines of Milton. A typical essay assignment included the following choices in October of 1892:

*A. A dialogue between two well-known characters. (After the model of Landor's Imaginary Conversations)*

*B. An account of any Historical Incident—in the style of Macaulay*

*C. Description of an Imaginary Episode; the Heroine has lost her way in a*

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235Mitchell, p. 11.
lonely tract of country and night is approaching. Describe the situation.\textsuperscript{236}

The selection offers girls not only the opportunity to write a serious academic style of essay after the model of Macaulay, but also a push to creativity in the rather gothic scenario outlined. Girls who subscribed to the reading union would have their essays marked by an examiner and returned to them and were allowed to compete for monthly prizes. Girls who consistently submitted admirable essays were then eligible to compete for £20 and £10 scholarships. The 1892 scholarship essay topics were Britain's position and influence 1837-65 and Britain's political and social progress in the years 1837-65. Through its rigorous requirements and selections of essay topics, \textit{Atalanta} constructs its middle-class readers as young women who could discourse with some fluency on historical and geo-political subjects: girls whose interests and knowledge extended far beyond the domestic sphere. The scholarship offered wasn't just an opportunity for education, it was a ticket to modernity and New Womanhood.

Readers of \textit{Atalanta} were shaped and constructed in other ways than the reading union, however. The magazine published a feature on questions of Women's Suffrage by J. Kirkpatrick that presented three arguments—one for full enfranchisement, one for limited enfranchisement, and one for total disenfranchisement—as though put forth by different writers. Kirkpatrick concluded,

\begin{quote}
Dear Atalanta, kindly decide which of these three views is the sound one—
which is the most consonant with whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, and lovely? There are no better judges in the kingdom than you and your readers. If you will but deliver a clear and emphatic judgment in the case, you will confer an immense boon both on the fair sex and on society at large.\textsuperscript{237}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
Kirkpatrick's emphasis on the fitness of *Atalanta* readers to be judges of this difficult question itself suggests girls and young women as able to interact with and make decisions about the public sphere—which ability was itself at the heart of the question of women's suffrage. And indeed, *Atalanta*'s readers were happy to weigh in. The next month, a correspondent named only by the initials B.A., London, wrote in to eviscerate the arguments for disenfranchisement systematically. No other responses to the question appeared; either B.A. spoke for her generation in her emphatic desire for voting rights, or *Atalanta*'s editors selected only this letter to stand in for the thoughts and desires of girl readers.

But the magazine promoted its own view of girlhood more subtly, as well, through the subjects of its features. Certainly the magazine offered light fare to entertain girls—the “Brown Owl” section for some time housed a series called “Impressions of a Debutante” written by a young woman pen-named Una de Gray.238 The so-named debutante gave her own impressions, rather carelessly written, of upper-class entertainments and travel, offering an aspirational window to middle-class girl readers, who formed the largest share of the magazine's audience. They were also given a window of a different kind by Eleanor Bairdsmith's description of “Our Club”: “There are a hundred ways at the present time in which girls can help each other, but not one that is more useful or of greater interest than the work that is being carried on nightly in all our great towns by clubs for working girls.”239 Bairdsmith described the advantages of clubs for factory girls, outlined the “guilds” of the club including the Snowdrop and Temperance Guilds, dedicated respectively to pure living and abstention from alcohol. These values, closely tied with women's suffrage during the late nineteenth century, were intended to be transmitted from nice-minded middle class girls to their less

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238It is, of course, within the realm of possibility that Una de Gray was her given name, but I hope for better things.
fortunate sisters. In May, a letter was published for the “Flower Mission to Young Women in London Workrooms.” This mission took in donations of flowers and money and delivered to working young women a bouquet of flowers along with an illuminated Bible verse. Middle class girls were expected to exhibit compassion for girls who earned their living and include an effort to civilize and Christianize them. Though this kind of work mirrors the work done by young women as district visitors throughout the Victorian period, it goes further in extending the mission to the poor into crowded urban areas and operating without the direct authority and supervision of the Church.

Feminine accomplishment was not, however, mainly modeled through these charitable endeavors. *Atalanta* used classical imagery to inspire girls to achievement. Atalanta appears on the magazine's masthead, implicitly evoking a desire to emulate the freedom-loving classical maiden, who could beat any suitor in a fair footrace. Essays on Brynhild and Charlotte de Corday presented heroic and dramatic figures for girls to learn about and admire. Tennyson's “Dream of Fair Women” featured in the Reading Union questions, and quotations from both Sara Coleridge and Christina Rossetti were used. When reprinting Marlowe's “Passionate Shepherd to his Love,” the magazine devoted the following page to Raleigh's witty “Nymph's Reply”, which flatly answers the shepherd's promise of beds of roses with “flowers do fade” and rejects the hedonistic, *carpe diem* call of Marlowe's poem. *Atalanta* readers were expected to sympathize with the nymph in her desire for greater things than Marlowe's shepherd “in reason rotten.” The magazine further offered notes from the early Cambridge women's colleges for some time, giving girls a window into what a scholarly life for women might look like.

Throughout, *Atalanta* mirrors a culture whose values for girls were changing. While still offering “ladylike” entertainments and features, the magazine also created an imagined
community in the way that Benedict Anderson suggests that newspapers do.\textsuperscript{240} Girls who were widely separated by geography, perhaps even by class, were drawn into community with their sisters through projects like the Reading Union that made girls aware of themselves as an ambitious, thoughtful force for social change. Unlike the \textit{Girl's Own, Atalanta} looked for its readers not in the homes of England merely, but in the workrooms, the colleges, and the women's clubs.

\textbf{The Reading Life of Clara Thomas}

\textit{Mrs. Caldwell thought again of the fire and the book. She had read a good deal at one time, and had even been able to play, and sing, and draw, and paint with a dainty touch; but since her marriage, the many children, the small means, and the failing strength had made all such pursuits an impossible luxury. The fire and the book—who knows what they might not have meant, what a benign difference the small relaxation allowed to the mother at this critical time might not have made in the temperament of the child? Perhaps, if we could read the events of even that one day aright, we should find in them the clue to all that was inexplicable in its subsequent career.}

--Sarah Grand, \textit{The Beth Book}

In \textit{The Beth Book}, which I examined in my last chapter, the narrator asks the question above within the first page or two, as Mrs. Caldwell is nearing the end of her term carrying her daughter Beth. The fire and the book that are denied to Mrs. Caldwell become an emblem for the life of difficulty and deprivation that Beth is born into as a woman with few material expectations in the Victorian era. In the sketch that follows, I shall attempt to creatively answer Grand's question—I begin, like Grand, with the fire and the book, but from there my path is

very different. My aim in this section is to create a holistic portrait of the ideal Victorian girl reader. Scholars and storytellers ask and answer very different kinds of questions, but here I shall attempt to provide storytelling as a means of scholarship, as a way to enter into a world that is foreign to us, despite all our studies. For if the past is another country, then too often as scholars we are visitors who read dozens of well-researched guide books and fail to pick up the novel that might provide the key to understanding that foreign culture.

What follows, then, is the reading biography of Clara Thomas, a girl who never existed. Yet though Clara never existed, hundreds of her sisters did exist, and some recorded their thoughts, their reading, and the progress of their intellectual lives. Clara is a composite of these girls, whose thoughts have been so much to me and my research, but she is also an ideal—she is the reader presumed and desired by the literature of the period. I take for my style a mode of pastiche, which is neither wholly Victorian nor wholly modern, yet allows me the privilege of speaking in a voice that would seem rather ill-suited to a modern feminist. Throughout, I have taken the privilege of reserving footnotes for those points that seem to require further interrogation or explanation or dates that need to be established.

When Clara made her final, determined stirrings within her mother's womb, she did so greatly against the inclinations of that lady, who had just reached a very interesting part in *David Copperfield*. For fully half an hour, Mrs. Thomas repressed her birth pains, until at last poor David reached his new home with Miss Betsey Trotwood and was welcomed therein. Then she laid the volume aside, sighed with relief, and called for a servant, now able to focus her attention on the breeding process. Clara the child was named, for Clara Copperfield and Clara Peggotty both, though in her adult years she was to declare an emphatic preference for

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241The first serial publication of *David Copperfield* was released in 1849, but Clara was born in 1870—Mrs. Thomas evidently came late to the work.
Perhaps it may be proper, here, to establish the circumstances of the infant Clara's family, for though she was born into an age of social mobility, yet those circumstances could not help but play a large role in Clara's upbringing and education. Her father, Alexander Thomas, made his living in the bustling industrial north of England, designing parts for the enormous power looms. The younger son of a Manchester mill owner, he was educated well in the sciences at the University of Edinburgh and was able to support his family comfortably, though not extravagantly. Though a man of science, Mr. Thomas was an avid armchair critic of literature. He had been early thrilled by the works of his era's sages, and his wife occasionally teased that if her husband had a triptych like a Russian, it would feature Ruskin, Carlyle, and Arnold. In matters of poetry, he was more off-handed, though he maintained a fondness for the verse of Scotland, which recalled his happy student years, and he allowed that Arnold had written tolerable verse as well.

It was his wife, the Dickens-loving Mrs. Thomas, who maintained the interest in poetry between them. She was an avid admirer of Wordsworth, and when that poet laureate died, she wept and secretly prayed, actually prayed to God, for Mrs. Browning to succeed him, though she learned to love Tennyson later. Cecelia Thomas was born to a wealthy Manchester family, and she suffered the educational neglect common to girls during the first and middle parts of the nineteenth century. She was not sent to school except for a year at the end of her girlhood to pick up languages, needlework, and a little history; instead she was raised by a series of governesses whose qualifications were social rather than pedagogical. Mangnall's Questions featured largely in her learning, and she knew well “In what light were the Spartans considered” but little indeed to capture the roving spark of her intellect.\footnote{R. Mangnall, \textit{Historical and miscellaneous questions}. London, 1856, p.5} But her home
included a library (furnished with books bought by the yard to make the library look proper), and Cecelia learned to love the dramas and verse of Shakespeare, the epic of Milton, and the fantasies of Spenser from those handsome volumes. To this was added the literature of Harriet Martineau, read to her by governesses who hid their yawns at her political economies; as a young lady she was stirred by the romance of *Jane Eyre*, though she learned to prefer Mr. Thomas to Mr. Rochester eventually. She spoke French and Italian, though not well; still she could read the literature of those countries, and enjoyed both.

There was a third party whose education had a profound impact on Clara's life, though education might be too strong a word for the mode by which knowledge had been imparted to Sarah Martin, the nursery-maid who was Clara's closest companion before she ascended to the schoolroom. Sarah had been sent to a Sunday school every week as a child, and she knew her prayers. But she also knew stories of brownies and hobgoblins and things that roamed the moors, which made her a very satisfactory source of entertainment. She was, further, heir to the great treasury of oral culture known as nursery rhymes, and so before Clara knew a from b, she knew of Old King Cole and Jack and Jill and all their ilk, absorbing the sounds of poetry before she knew what poetry might be. She also knew, unfortunately, about the hobgoblin up the chimney who took away naughty children, and her belief in him was to survive until a very long and serious conversation about empiricism with her father and some tentative exploration of said chimney finally convinced her that the hobgoblin was probably not up there.

When Clara was two years of age, her intellectual life received a stroke of good fortune; her baby brother Hugh was born. Clara's father, before he could be persuaded that John Stuart Mill's account of his childhood had not been a prescription, had attempted to instill Greek in his infant son while his daughter sat quietly over a piece of sewing, wondering at the beautiful sounds of the Homer read over Hugh's crib. Though the sporadic readings failed to awaken
any infant genius on the part of Hugh, the romance of them kept a vague but determined hope of “learning Greek someday” alive in Clara's heart while her intellect suffered ill nourishment.

When she succeeded to the schoolroom, however, Clara and Hugh had the good fortune to be instructed by Miss Locke, a governess who had been well educated at a real secondary school. Harriet Locke had attended North London Collegiate, where she had gained from Miss Buss herself the habit of serious study that served her well in her career. When Mr. Thomas interviewed her, he was quite startled and discomfited at her ability to repeat long passages of Rousseau by heart and in the original and could do little else but offer her the job on the spot. Clara therefore had the good luck to have her first lessons given by one who knew her business and was further much aided in her scholarship by a natural sisterly desire to beat her little brother at lessons.

When Miss Locke arrived, things changed much for the better. Clara's lessons before that point had predominantly consisted of a dreary set of repetitions and sums. The great poetry of the King James Bible was destroyed by the little voice lisping out verses with dutiful ignorance. Miss Locke had, however, the power of making lessons not only memorable, but also pleasurable, and soon her young charges were murdering each other in a makeshift tent (Jael and Sisera), arising from the dead (Lazarus), and rearranging the schoolroom to reflect the tactical advantages of the Normans at the battle of Hastings. More, Miss Locke would read aloud—long, fascinating accounts from the Thousand and One Nights (Mr. Thomas was exceedingly distressed by this until he understood that the volume from which she read was nothing like a certain illegal edition he kept hidden in his study243) and the Ingoldsby Legends and, as soon as her quick French chatter had taught Clara and Hugh the basics, Madame

243Unexpurgated translations of the Arabian Nights tales were printed privately for subscribers during the Victorian era—their focus on sexuality and foreign sexual mores meant that bowdlerized editions were commonly printed for young people.
d'Aulnoy's *Contes de fees*. Clara found Miss Locke's reading much more to her taste than her father's habits of reading Trollope aloud in the evening; kept carefully separated from much of the world around her, Clara could not understand the worldly machinations of Trollope's characters nearly as well as princesses that came out of lemons.

It should not, however, be presumed that Mrs. Thomas then ceded all instructional authority to Miss Locke. Relieved of the effort of teaching, to which she was wholly unsuited, she soon took a lively interest in her little daughter and, on seeing the pleasure and alacrity with which the young child could repeat the details from her mother's reading of “Goblin Market,” with its cat-faced, rat's tail, hurry scurry goblins, she soon taught the girl the whole of the poem and even allowed Clara use of the precious volume to copy pictures from, though Mr. Thomas said the Rossettis weren't really fit to have in one's home. Mrs. Thomas, however, who treasured her copy of Christina Rossetti's *Called to be Saints* beside Keble's *Christian Year*, felt there could be no question of Miss Rossetti's fitness for the schoolroom. For Mrs. Thomas, whose religious upbringing had been as High as her husband's was Broad, Newman's defection was now almost out of memory, and she taught Clara her faith using not only the Book of Common Prayer, but also some of the earlier *Tracts* that she thought might be less influenced by apostasy. When Clara turned eight and was judged to be old enough at last, Mrs. Thomas presented her own girlhood volume of Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe* to her daughter and felt an ineffable satisfaction in seeing Clara devour the volume and weep over it as she herself had done.

So it was that the chief pleasure of Clara's life at around eight years of age was to rotate between certain well-known and loved books until they were nearly memorized and half-dead from the curious, impatient handling. Alice first, and Rossetti's *Sing Song*. Then Yonge and Elizabeth Sewell as she grew old enough to understand them. Her father attempted to impart
the contents of *The Water Babies* as a kind of muscular antidote to so much High Church fiction, but since Clara could not see the sense of it, this failed terribly. After lengthy consideration, *Jane Eyre* was permitted in her little library, though Clara had no interest in the book after Jane left school—leaving school being a time so far beyond her ken that it seemed the remotest kind of fiction. These, with a few children's Christmas gift books, formed the main part of her schoolroom library.

When Clara was nine, however, her world expanded immeasurably. Hugh was sent away to school, and Clara, as a consolation for the loss of her brother, was given free access to the family library. From there Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and Gaskell became her great friends, with whom innumerable hours were spent. When Mr. Thomas found his daughter, now much more enlightened and worldly, hanging on his every word as he read aloud of an evening, a bond was formed between them that had been previously only dimly established—since Mr. Thomas rarely expected to see his progeny for more than an hour a day, it was not to be wondered that they were slow in establishing intimacy. After that, though, father and daughter were thick as thieves, and Mr. Thomas was often observed stealing into the schoolroom so the two could have “just a chapter” of *Daisy Miller* before dinner.

He began, too, taking a more careful interest in Clara's education and insisted on Miss Locke's teaching her from his own volume of Gibbon, which was perhaps more fitted for bludgeoning children than teaching them. In letters to her Aunt Priscilla, Clara wrote at this time of the Roman Empire's state just as another child might have described an ailing relative: “Roman empire sinking very fast now,” she wrote in 1870, but the subject was discontinued when Mr. Thomas found her in the library trying to con over a volume of Psuetonius to learn what precisely Caligula had done. The fright this caused delayed the beginning of Clara's Latin lessons for another year or two, even as little Hugh happily learned to decline and conjugate at
his school.

But Clara was a bright child, and during this time she was picking up the foundations of a very solid education between her mother's poetic romances, her father's prosy readings, and Miss Locke's careful tuition. She learned history, arithmetic, botany because Mr. Thomas insisted on a whole course of Ruskin's *Wayside Flowers*, political economy, French, German and, after long discussion and Mrs. Thomas having to throw a fit of wailing over how she herself would never, ever be able to read the *Eclogues*, Latin and Greek as well, though several cabinets in the library were kept well-locked after that. Clara never minded those deprivations, though, not while Miss Locke was helping her sound out the words of Homer carefully and teaching the structure of languages and grammar. Though her learning was not broad, her teachers conspired to make it deep and rich, and her mind expanded under this careful tuition, though she tended to be more serious than her mother always thought proper for a girl of her age.

When Clara was twelve, however, and beginning to be pretty in an elfin kind of way, Miss Locke approached Mr. Thomas for a long series of discussions. She confounded him, first, by asking what the point of educating Clara so well was, after all, and then went on to recommend that Clara be sent to the Manchester High School for Girls as she approached womanhood. That school was patterned after her own *alma mater*, the North London Collegiate, and it seemed a shame that a clever girl such as Clara shouldn't have her chance to benefit from a broader range of intellects than the home sphere could provide. At first her suggestions were dismissed out of hand. Clara could not attend school—she would become slangy and “rough” and wholly unsuited to home life. And, while Mr. Thomas tried to make the point delicately, his daughter had no likely expectation of needing a governess's work, given the comfortable state of his own investments. But Miss Locke was tireless in making her
arguments, night after night, week after week. Suppose Clara should be an authoress like Mrs. Gaskell? There could surely be nothing more proper than that, and Mrs. Gaskell's own daughter attended the Manchester School. But despite these persuasive points, it was only when Mrs. Thomas pointed out that Clara would make such a wonderful helpmeet to a scientific man if she could only learn chemistry and spent several days in nervous prostration contemplating her own lacking womanly attributes of learning that Mr. Thomas finally relented, if only to ensure peace and harmony at the breakfast table.

And so when Clara was thirteen years of age, she was finally allowed to attend school. Enrolled in the Manchester High School for Girls under the headship of Elizabeth Day, she took to the environment like a duck to water, and when Mrs. Thomas tried to find fault in her daughter's needlework on prize giving day, just as a gentle corrective to any overly advanced ideas that Clara might be obtaining, she had to admit that the practiced stitchery was the equal of her own. What she did not know (but perhaps intuited) was that Clara had stitched in a dream; her plain sewing work was always attended by a mistress reading some pleasurable book of the sort that was wholly foreign to the school's general curriculum. Indeed, from Clara's perspective, the chief advantage of attending school was not in her lessons, which were far duller than those given by Miss Locke (who had gone on to teach in one of the schools established by the Girls' Public Day School Trust), but in the ability to swap books and papers with her schoolmates. She remained a quiet, bookish girl, and in spite of one frightening incident when she banged the door open, called her mother “mater”, and put her boots up like a man; the feared roughness never took.

In her schoolwork, Clara excelled particularly at the classics; by this time, Mr. Thomas was so far beyond his early fears that he could hear talk of examinations calmly and insisted on hearing Clara's Greek lessons for himself. Now daughter repeated to father the sonorous words
that first captivated her heart in the nursery days, and she could not be caught out on matters of sense either, for her romantic heart could see the wine-dark sea and rosy-fingered dawn easily. There was a little sorrow in Mrs. Thomas's heart at seeing this easy intellectual camaraderie between the two into which she could not enter, but the good woman consoled herself by taking the whole burden of Clara's preparation for confirmation on herself. Since there was no prayer at the Manchester School, Mrs. Thomas took this duty with great seriousness; poor woman, it cost her many a long hour to answer why Milton wasn't a blasphemer (for Clara took great exception to “He for God only, she for God in him”) or why exactly woman was still inferior to man after being “ennobled” by the Virgin Birth as Miss Yonge insisted. But in trying, not very well at first, to answer Clara's questions, Mrs. Thomas found one or two of her own, and her resulting research developed into an absorbing interest, so that she was soon as likely to answer Clara's questions with translations of Aquinas as with Pusey. But Mrs. Thomas's acquaintance with that sage of the Church was not considered very satisfactory by the lady herself; she found some objectionable references to prostitution. A little timid inquiry to her husband about such women and that disturbing little hospital that the carriage drove past so quickly soon revealed to her that Aquinas and the apologists for male vice were well and alive in England. Shortly thereafter Mrs. Thomas attended her first public meeting in the cause of repealing the Contagious Diseases Act and after that, there was no ceasing the scratching of her pen across the page as she wrote letters and attempted to distribute pamphlets amongst her acquaintance.

Clara's education therefore provided amusement for the family as a whole, though Hugh

244The Manchester High School was specifically founded to be non-denominational; its first headmistress, the evangelical Elizabeth Day, had to petition the Board of Governors to be allowed to pray with students who requested it.

245The Contagious Diseases Act, first passed in 1864, were not repealed until 1888, when a broad-based coalition of women centralized in the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act gained their goal of ending the brutal penalization of sex workers while their male clients were free to spread disease as they saw fit. This disease and the conditions of the lock hospitals form an important part of the plot in The Beth Book; Beth first learns to despise her immoral husband when she learns that he is employed in a lock hospital.
was somewhat wont to resent his elder sister's educational laurels. He could not use a Latin quotation in the holidays to sound grand without his sister's capping his verse, and the lad was so mortified by this that he was, consequently, the least supportive family member of Clara's education. It was Hugh who provided the proper question for the occasion when his sister, having sat for the Cambridge Senior Locals and passed them with flying colors, left the Manchester School and, after great discussion and difficulty and many domestic scenes, was admitted to Girton. “Well, Clara,” he said, assuming a schoolboy grandeur, “who'll marry you now?”

And though no one had a good answer for him at the time (besides his father, who gave him a sound thrashing for being ungallant), Clara was no more reluctant to entertain suitors than she was to entertain new possibilities, and her eventual career in the civil service was not, in fact, unmixed by marriage. But here, as Clara departs for Girton and leaves girlhood behind, I must draw a curtain over the scene, adding only that Mrs. Thomas so far lost all sense of propriety as to end up entertaining the Misses Pankhurst in her home, and in her old age was to avail herself of the privilege of voting with all due haste.
Conclusion

On reviewing the shape of my dissertation, I am taken aback at how thoroughly informed it is by the doctrine of separate spheres. Certainly at the beginning of this project, I had no notion how thoroughly separate spheres would come to dominate my discourse, nor did I have any intention of reifying this paradigm. The Victorians themselves, however, seem to have had no such scruples, and they refer to these distinct spheres over and over. Famous educators like Elizabeth Sewell and Sara Burstall are only too comfortable in asserting that the place of girls' education is to prepare them for the domestic sphere, and the discourse lingers longer than might be expected, with the last mention I have noted taking place in 1904. I argued in my introduction that middle-class gentility relies on this division of labor, with women taking on the genteel, “leisured” work of the home and supervising servants, but the degree to which the doctrine of separate spheres was promulgated by the Victorians suggests that other anxieties are also at work. Such anxieties almost certainly include a blind refusal to imagine what their world would look like if women were given a public voice and sphere of activity in addition to concerns about sexual availability and the sanctity of the home.

On a more suggestive note, I also find that questions of communities arise time after time. Communities of readers in the Victorian era were shaped around religion (such as the High Church novels), class, age and gender, but they were also shaped around geography. This geographical aspect is not one that I have been able to pursue, however I believe that this work could be extended most fruitfully by examining the experiences of colonial girlhood. Much work has been done on how the English novel was used as a tool of colonialism in educating the native peoples of India and other British colonies, but I believe there is equal interest in the complex experience of the colonists' efforts to transmit British culture, “untainted,” to their children. Organizations like the Girl Guides offered a structured way to transmit the values of
the homeland, while retaining in their leadership and adaptability the character of the places in which their troupes were located. Reading was another form of value transmission, and such a project would include the novels surrounding the 1854 Indian Mutiny as well as the life narratives of girls growing up in the colonies such as Elspeth Huxley and others. I believe that my work points the way towards these questions of moral education and community building while still retaining its strong focus on readership.

Finally, what I hope my dissertation achieves in accomplishing is in “making strange,” to borrow a formalist term, the Victorian period and its attitudes towards girlhood. The idiosyncrasies of the era are numerous and bizarre. My research led me to mentions of back-braces for middle-class girls to improve their posture, poor girls having to take in washing at school, and elderly aristocrats chaperoning girls to their college lectures. I have tried not to note the merely curious or strange except where it implies some greater point, but I have also tried to be as faithful a scholar I could in recording the real-life practices that reflected how the ideals of the era were put into practice. I said, in my last chapter, that too often critics read the past like a dry guidebook—I might also have said the reverse. Too often literary critics read the past as a novel, seeking narrative and consistency where none exists. I have attempted, insofar as my training and intelligence have permitted me, to avoid both pitfalls.
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