THE LADY OR THE TIGER?:
EVOLVING VICTORIAN PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION
AND
THE PRIVATE RESIDENT GOVERNNESS

by

Elizabeth Dana Rescher

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of English
The University of Toronto

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0-612-45701-X
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--Abstract--

From the first few decades of the nineteenth century to the 1860s, the governess-figure moved steadily in public estimation from embodiment of pathos to powerful subverter of order, only to revert in the last decades of the 1800s to earlier type. These changes were predicated, it was felt in the period, and often, afterwards, on the degree to which her skills were culturally relevant, especially to middle-class girls' needs. This study holds, however, that much of what was negative in Victorian views of the governess reflected a generalized dissatisfaction with education in the period, displaced onto a particularly vulnerable scapegoat.

Meanwhile, in literature, the governess had long been a complex figure when she was an important character in a text. The nineteenth-century history of her literary representation thus describes a different parabola from that traced by other aspects of her image: she became a complicated and/or dangerous presence earlier, and stayed
that way later in the century. This thesis explores some of the reasons for this with a view to showing how literary demands pressured the way her stereotype both weathered and accommodated itself in the translation to fictional construct.
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Introduction

1. The Private Resident Governess Defined

"There are three kinds of people in the world: men, women, and governesses."

Indistinct terminology plagued governessing in its Victorian heyday and confuses our understanding of governesses and their profession today. Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy's *The Unnatural History of the Nanny* tries to sort out one aspect of the problem by distinguishing the jurisdiction of the nanny, or "nursery governess," from that of the "governess" proper. Gathorne-Hardy observes that

[in the nineteenth-century . . . as it became fashionable to have a governess[,] the nursery prefix would often get dropped. Where the charges are six or under and where her duties are not so much to instruct as to look after and "bring up" the children, . . . [the care-giver] is in effect a Nanny . . . . (21)

In theory, not only were the nanny's duties different from those of a governess, but the woman who fulfilled them was herself different. Before straitened circumstances prompted educated, middle-class women like Charlotte Brontë to settle for the position rather than go without employment, nursery governesses generally came from the

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1. The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life 3.
lower- or lower-middle classes. Their educational backgrounds, because of their class status, were often deficient. This was not a matter that concerned employers. While it is true that nannies often informally coached "their" children in useful basic knowledge--the alphabet, elementary reading skills, identification of numbers and their simplest properties--their dealings were only with young children at a basic level. The idea was that their charges would pass to others' care once they became old enough to profit from formal instruction. This is illustrated--literally--by the Victorian architect Robert Kerr, and described by him as well in his blueprint and explanatory comments about making accommodations for a seemly "School-room and Suite" in planning the layout of a manorhouse. The "School-room," Kerr explains, is "the name given to the apartment which is appropriated to two or three children withdrawn from the Nursery and placed under the care of a governess. . . ." He further spells out just how separate the governess's domain is to be from the nursery-governess's: "[a] place among the [adult family members'] Bedrooms will almost always be appropriate. The Nurseries need not be further off than may otherwise be necessary" (91).²

Because education was not the primary business of a nursery governess, employers cared more about their nannies'

²See also Figure 22 on page 90 of Broughton and Symes.
good health and spirits than about their academic proficiency or its lack. The primary requirement made of a nanny was that she be robust and cheerful so she could adequately perform demanding caretaking responsibilities.

On the other hand, the governess proper, whose transactions with older children required her to deal with more sophisticated charges than her nanny counterpart, usually came from the middle ranks of the middle classes and had received a lady's education. Employers expected her to be literate, have reading, writing and conversational skills in at least one foreign language, possess some academic learning (typically a stronger background in history and literature; a weaker one in mathematics and scientific knowledge) and one or more artistic "accomplishments" (ability to play an instrument, sing, work fine embroidery, paint, sketch, etc.). Additionally, she was relied on to demonstrate a lofty regard for moral principles and genteel conduct in daily life and to encourage her pupils to do likewise.

In practice, however, situations were far less clear-cut than was in theory the case. Insofar as professional duties are concerned, Gathorne-Hardy's division of the "nursery-governess" from the "governess" inadequately accounts for situations--common ones--where a governess employed to teach older children was expected to "babysit" their younger siblings in the schoolroom while supervising
the education of those who were formally her pupils, or to teach smaller children the fundamentals of learning—the nursery-governess's task in Gathorne-Hardy's classificatory system—while setting their older brothers and sisters more challenging lessons. As the experienced governess Mary Cowden-Clark recollected in her memoir, *My Long Life*, "[F]our [pupils] proved really to be five, for the youngest was oftener sent to the schoolroom than kept in the nursery" (36).

The class differences which supposedly set nannies and governesses apart proved similarly blurred. At mid-century, as I have mentioned, middle-class ladies took employment as nursery governesses out of economic necessity. Conversely, some lower-middle-class women sought to improve their status by acquiring the elements of what was considered a lady's education and then going out as governesses. The division between what are ostensibly two sorts of teacher—nursery governesses and the governess proper—, and between their job descriptions, was therefore a highly fluid one, however impermeable the Victorians and twentieth-century commentators alike have apparently wished it to be.

Ambiguous as the picture already looks, the blurred line of definition between the nursery governess and the governess is only one of a number of apparently solid demarcations with respect to the topic that shift and waver disconcertingly when subject to examination. To consider
governessing with relation to older children, as Gathorne-Hardy did the nursery governess's situation, is to find a Hydra's nest of problems improbably lodged in the Victorian schoolroom—problems overlooked by many twentieth-century scholars writing on the history of middle-class women's education. The result is that much of what has been said about the governess remains less clear than it ought to be if the subject is to be represented as faithfully as possible.

For a start, the term "governess," though often used without modifiers in the nineteenth century and almost invariably appearing this way in the twentieth, tells one little that is useful. First, it gives no clue to the class of woman meant: we have seen already how the word could refer to the lower-middle-class woman who worked in the nursery. It could equally well identify a London banker's Paris-educated daughter who was employed to "finish," or put the final social polish on a pupil's education. The very different sorts of attainments and skill levels that parents and guardians of older children required from their employees led, not surprisingly, to specialization. And even apart from issues of background and social standing, "governesses'" degrees of accomplishment, rates of pay and entitlement to autonomy in their lives and work varied considerably. The designation "governess," then, does not help us understand what specialty areas a woman had
mastered, what methods, or in what surroundings she taught her pupils. Women professionally involved in teaching in public and private schools, those visiting private residences to teach for a specified number of hours a day, others giving lessons in their own homes, and still another contingent who boarded in their employers' houses for the purpose of administering a home-schoolroom are all encompassed by the one blanket term. Yet even within the single branch of the field on which this particular study focuses--that of the private resident governess--these circumstances (where relevant) span a spectrum quite surprisingly broad.

The English private resident governess is, for the purpose of the pages that follow, a woman who lived as part of a single- (though not necessarily a nuclear) family household where she was employed to educate schoolroom-age children. It is a term used only infrequently in the nineteenth-century texts on which this study is based, and one I settle on to describe my subject because it hybridizes two more frequently used designations of the period which, between them, represent this woman's chief defining characteristics. While the resulting phrase is unwieldy, both adjectives in it are necessary descriptors because, between them, they distinguish one specific kind of teacher from two of her colleagues and competitors in the marketplace--"resident" governesses (who might "reside" in
schools rather than houses), and "private" ones (who might teach private pupils out of their own homes rather than living with their employers).

In practice, confusingly, the Victorians used the "resident" and "private" labels indiscriminately in the ways I indicate in the previous paragraph and for the private resident governess as well. To further jumble matters, they called all three varieties, and several more too, by the unmodified word "governess." Regrettably, therefore, the awkward phrase "private resident governess" is sometimes a necessary evil here. Other sorts of female educators appear in this study, and, at times, the types of teachers discussed need to be kept distinct if points are to be made clearly.

As a last preliminary comment on Victorian woman educators' titles, I would like to suggest that, while it is dismaying that the Victorians never settled on any single designation for the private resident governess, the resulting muddle offers its own consolation. It provides an evocative instance of oversight if one believes, with many contemporary cultural theorists, that what a society relegates to the margins of its attention offers insights

Furthermore, the word "governess" could, at a stretch, also designate persons with roles as different from each other's, and from the private resident governess's, as the women working as administrators of convents or flagellators in brothels.
into central issues in the conflux of social practices and beliefs that make up that culture. The way the dynamic works in this instance is one of the lines of inquiry this dissertation will explore.

2. The Nineteenth-Century Governess and the Middle Classes

The English private resident governess as instructor of middle-class children was almost uniquely a nineteenth-century phenomenon.

Through most of the eighteenth century, governesses were employed almost exclusively by the aristocracy or by very well-to-do members of the gentry. Daughters from middle-class families--children of professional men, clergy, military and naval officers--usually either learned their lessons from older female family members, or else boarded away from home in small private schools. Neither option proved routinely satisfactory, however. Home instruction by relations often degenerated into the instructional equivalent of the blind leading the blind, leaving many girls ignorant on a scale that Western society today, though given to complaining about deplorable school standards, can hardly conceive possible. Boarding schools of the period, on average, were not much better (Kamm, Hope Deferred 136-51). As suggested by their heavy geographical concentration in the fashionable spa- and seaside towns of the period,
they tended to emphasize social polish and opportunities to introduce young ladies to "smart" acquaintance and/or fashionable extramural instructors at the expense of sound intellectual or artistic training.

In a handful of untypical instances, contemporary girls who had genuine academic aspirations and/or whose parents or guardians were intellectually ambitious for them were permitted to study with their fathers or their brothers' tutors. The rarity of these cases derived from the circumstance that Georgian England did not generally place a premium on female scholarship or talent in the arts (Female Scholars 5). In fact, remarkable abilities along these lines were generally held to handicap a young woman in what was viewed as the most significant achievement of her spinster life: acquisition of a socially desirable husband. Dr. Gregory, an eighteenth-century Presbyterian minister well-known to students of conduct-book literature, counseled his daughters to conceal whatever love for study they might have from men, "who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding" (31-2). So deep-rooted was this belief that when a young lady approaching marriageable age was occupied with serious intellectual study, it was often the case that an older male family member or guardian supervising her

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1'In Female Scholars, Brink suggests that the female intellectual was, "for the most part . . . labelled . . . 'unnatural'" (5).
education deliberately intended to mold her into his intellectual companion and, sometimes, the helpmeet and amanuensis for his own hobbyist work. The arrangement was occasionally contingent on the (informal) understanding that the female scholar would not marry. 

If we leave the eighteenth century for a moment and skip over some hundred-odd years of English history to the last decades of the nineteenth and the outset of the twentieth, we find the governess's situation and the number of women employed in her profession reproduces the eighteenth-century state of affairs with uncanny exactitude. Employers of late Victorian and Edwardian governesses (and their successors) come from the same strata of society as did their predecessors in the reign of George III; again governesses are found almost exclusively in upper-class homes or those of the exceptionally affluent. The reason why this circumstance appears uncanny is that many aspects of the contemporary picture have changed around the governess. The intransigence of her position itself suggests a cultural shift has taken place in the way the profession and its practitioners have come to be viewed.

By rights, the governess's position ought to have improved throughout the nineteenth century because expansion

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Something like this may have pertained, for instance, in the case of the eighteenth-century bluestocking Elizabeth Talbot. See the discussion of her relationship with her stepfather, Edward Secker, in Myers 61-4.
of the upper-middle and upper classes took place throughout the period. This expansion of the bourgeoisie stemmed from a combination of factors, like higher survival rates for children, increases in the average woman's productive childbearing years and climbing birthrates. At the same time, flurries of appointments to the peerage and the mushrooming of personal fortunes in the prosperous economies of the 1830s, the '50s and '60s, and the last decades of Victoria's reign elevated into these classes many individuals and families born into lower ones. That these new members of the upper-middle classes, the gentry and the aristocracy did not employ a proportionately greater number of governesses in what ought to have proved a favorable environment for the governessing profession indicates that home instruction was no longer au courant. In fact, from the 1860s and '70s onward, institutional schooling for girls became popular, as it had been in the mid-1700s, with both upper-class children and their middle-class counterparts being enrolled in academic or, in the case of some daughters, finishing establishments.

In contrast with the eighteenth, late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from the early 1800s until the '60s, home education, previously an upper-middle and upper-class practice, was very much in vogue for middle-class English girls. Girls' boarding schools had been troubled in the late eighteenth century and very early in the nineteenth by
a series of elopement scandals (Kamm, *Hope Deferred* 135). The damage that resulted affected not merely the reputations of the institutions which failed to adequately safeguard the renegade girls, but, by extension, all schools of their type. Too many of a young lady's prospects for making a "good" marriage depended on her reputation for custodians to risk her implication in questionable goings-on. The boarding school scandals dramatically illustrated to parents and guardians the dangers that could befall girls entrusted to strangers' care and removed from their own families' beneficial influence; keeping a daughter at home or otherwise under family surveillance came to seem the most secure way to regulate her conduct and contacts.

Moreover, at this time, the boarding school scandals combined with other cultural forces to improve the appeal of home education for girls and to underwrite middle-class interest in governesses. Regulating women's freedoms, and not just girls', was becoming a cultural preoccupation in the first half of the nineteenth century in the form of an evolving ideology of separate spheres of activity for the sexes. According to this way of thinking, a woman's proper locus of activity centered in home and family life. Later in the period, writers like John Ruskin and Coventry Patmore would celebrate this domestic ideal. In the popular essay "Of Queens' Gardens," Ruskin would insist that

The man, in his rough work in open world
[sic], must encounter all peril and trial . . . .

But he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offense. This is the nature of home--it is the place of Peace . . . . (59)

Honoria, the female protagonist of Patmore's flowery mini-epic, The Angel in the House, embodies in her speech and manner the soft, passive virtues Ruskin attributed to women.

While this flattering literary approachfigured women as virtuous domestic queens, however, conservative Victorian commentators on gender were concerned that too much freedom might encourage women to relax their moral standards and become as rebellious as eighteenth-century boarding-school girls once seemed. The separate-spheres ideology advanced what was essentially a proscriptive agenda for women by the flies-with-honey means of enhancing the reputations of hearth-bound, unworldly young ladies as "angels in the house." As cultural currency, the separate-spheres ideology's attribution to women of qualities like those Ruskin and Patmore consecrate in prose and poetry amounted to positive reinforcement for "ladies" who conformed to the ideal of selfless domestic beneficence. For those who did not, there was negative reinforcement, since their fates were held to be similar to the one confronting women who risked their reputations through scandal: an undomestic
woman, like a woman flirting with any other ruinous inclination, would very likely be shunned by socially acceptable ladies, and would be handicapped in the day's marriage market.

Unfamiliarity with the world outside the domestic circle thus figured as a female virtue in early and mid-Victorian England. Possibly to compensate women for what were supposed to be their biological, and were unquestionably their culturally enforced disabilities in areas outside the home, the popularization of the separate-spheres ideology was accompanied by official expression of a recognition that woman possessed and generally exhibited a moral nature superior to man's. The paired ideas—that the arena in which women properly exerted influence was domestic, and that women were the morally superior sex—seemed to exalt women's authority over men's in certain jurisdictions. By according women both domestic scepter and moral halo, mid-century culture ostensibly acknowledged their entitlement to one domain of authority (domestic life) that was separate from but equal to another of man's (worldly life) and, in addition, a second (moral discrimination) that was not explicitly counterbalanced by any particular endowment of man's (though intellectualism is attributed to men during the period in such a way that ability to reason fills this role).

In practice, the notional system of specialized areas
of superiority translated into something less attractive. The "scepter" ostensibly conferred on women in domestic matters glittered unconvincingly on close inspection because women's lack of legal rights (even, until the 1870s, over their own persons) revealed them to be without legitimate, enforceable authority in any sphere whatsoever. The presumption of ethical integrity ceremoniously awarded them was therefore insubstantial; its purpose, to tempt them to complacency with the limited opportunities for self-expression allowed them by society.

Together with the fear that boarding schools were conducive to lax morals and lost reputations, the ideas that women were men's moral superiors and that their proper sphere of activity centered in home and family helped at mid-century to popularize home education for middle-class girls. The tripartite impetus worked on a number of levels to affect all members of a family. Whatever might be a mother's natural reluctance to send her children away to school was enhanced because, quite apart from whatever emotional wrench would result, she suffered a potential loss of interest, occupation and amusement, of political power in the home, and of moral cachet or standing by so doing. First, sending a daughter away could translate into a loss of companionship. Since family members constituted the milieu with which her culture told her she could most becomingly interact, and since her female family members
were, like herself, confined to activity in the domestic sphere, daughters often numbered among a mother's most constant companions. Then, although we have seen that women's claim to dominion at home under the separate-spheres ideology was insubstantial, in practical terms some women did exert considerable influence. Thus, as the size of her household shrank, a mother's powerbase diminished. In moral terms, parting with a daughter could seem a derogation of maternal duty and thus could undermine her entitlement (in her own eyes and others') to the stature accorded her as moral mother and woman. And because woman's nature was held to be morally upright, willingness to behave with what might seem laxity in sending a child to be raised in others' care called a mother's femininity itself into question.

Fathers, of course, shared in the complex reaction to children's departure from home. The separate-spheres ideology that often threw their wives and older daughters together as each others' companions awarded them, ideally, the pleasures of family life as restitution for the stresses of their labors in the world. This meant they, like their wives, potentially lost a source of interest and amusement if a daughter went away to school. They, as well as mothers, might perceive a diminishing family head-count

'Middle-class mothers were often without say-so when it came to their sons' lives. Contemporary culture reinforced the idea that healthy male children required bracing exposure to the world outside home--in practice, boarding school--too forcefully to be gainsaid.
around the dinner table as a dwindling personal powerbase. And just as their wives could be seen to slight their responsibilities as moral teachers and exemplars if their girls were sent from home, so fathers were seen to fail morally as responsible heads of household if daughters came to harm or ruin before marriage, even if this occurred while they were technically under others' care.

Last, but not least, home instruction caught on because it had "snob appeal." For centuries, private resident governesses had been relied on by the upper classes to educate their daughters. For more than half the nineteenth century, the middle classes adopted and adapted this method of educating their children as one component of their drive to legitimate themselves socially by assimilating upper-class customs while consolidating political and cultural power at the upper classes' expense.

Difficulties arose as the idea of home education gained popularity, however, because the nineteenth-century female relations of young girls were often not much better equipped as educators than their eighteenth-century predecessors had been, while cultural pressures for certain sorts of achievement among women were becoming more pronounced (Davidoff and Hall 291). Older women among the growing numbers of socially tentative first-generation nouveaux riches were at a loss to teach accomplishments they themselves had never learned. At the same time, even in
cases where women had a well-established grasp of etiquette, learning and the genteel accomplishments, the growing influence of separate-spheres ideology incapacitated or disinclined them from passing these on to others since one aspect of the ideology was the idea that a man's level of achievement in the world was visibly attested to by the degree to which women in his family performed only decorative and non-utilitarian work. Socially ambitious women's ornamental role prohibited them from performing useful tasks like teaching. At the same time, the separate-spheres ideology encouraged girls to acquire strictly ornamental skills, often the more obscure the better. This added to the dilemma. As each rising generation found it desirable to master more arcane skills, genteelly bred older women found themselves at a loss to understand the latest fashionable arts and pastimes their young relations wanted or "needed" to pursue.

Under this confusing concatenation of circumstances, home education by a private resident governess offered the single most satisfactory solution for the middle-classes to the dilemma of how at once to educate daughters formally, socialize them, protect their reputations and well-being and, at the same time, to respond to the various cultural pressures placed on a bourgeois Victorian family's ladies to be decorative and yet exemplify moral rectitude. So fashionable did the system become at around the time of
Victoria's accession that from this point until shortly after the mid-century mark was passed, it appeared not only to be de rigueur, but actually to be the prevalent mode of female education practiced among the middle classes. Certainly looking back today, the governess strikes us as she seems to have struck the Victorians themselves—-as ubiquitous. We will examine that perception's truth-value shortly.

3. The Focus of this Study
"so threadbare a subject as the trials of a governess"

This study examines the way conflicting stereotypes of the private resident governess evolved in nineteenth-century England in response to historical circumstance and to contemporary middle-class understanding of her attributes and professional role. Its specific concern is the way these are both reflected in and shaped by text.

I am interested as well in the staying-power of one particular stereotype—-that of the pathetic governess. The image of governess-as-victim has, until recently, tended to dominate twentieth-century popular and scholarly conceptions of the real women who made their livings in this profession. The stereotype reached its nineteenth-century cultural zenith in the 1840s and '50s, only to be eclipsed as both real and literary governesses came to be seen as

"Going a Governessing" 396.
opportunistic or even villainous by the '60s. This means that in constructing today's axiomatic Victorian governess, we have chosen to resuscitate an early nineteenth-century "take" on her in preference to one belonging to a time more historically proximate to our own.

With equal inconvenience to ourselves, we have gone to unlikely sources for our model. As I will maintain, recent popular conceptions of nineteenth-century subjects are largely shaped by what I call "belletristic" texts since these are among the best- and most widely known memorials of the period. (I do not use the term in its common sense here, but adapt it for convenience' sake to indicate fiction written by its author at least partially to fulfil conscious artistic aspirations, as distinct from hack-work or propaganda fiction, like that of the late 1840s and '50s. This formula writing I will take up, briefly, later.)

Research has made apparent to me that the stereotype of the pathetic governess derives force from her non- and propaganda-fiction incarnations rather than from belletristic ones. In the belletristic tradition, where they are significant characters, governesses are, by and large, complex and resilient personalities.

The power of the pathetic stereotype to assert itself over more compelling belletristic characterizations, its period of eclipse in the 1860s, problematic reappearance in The Turn of the Screw, re-emergence in the twentieth-century
popular imagination and hints of its renewed problematizing in recent scholarship are the subjects of this study. The chapters that follow trace chronologically the headway two incompatible stereotypes of the governess--pathetic and opportunistic--made in the Victorian era. The chronological arrangement best serves a project which is both a survey of intertextual influences and an examination of the effect of historical happenstance on literary representation.

I do not really expect readers to dispute the logic of my chronological format here. What I do feel necessary to address is another matter--a rather quirky approach this thesis takes to its subject. Readers may feel occasionally in these pages that they have left literary analysis behind, and discovered themselves plunged into a discourse on the history of education, while literary texts seem to have disappeared as features of the landscape. Relatedly, for stretches sometimes amounting to many pages, no governesses appear. The reason for these idiosyncrasies is that one area where this project hopes to contribute to the existing body of work on its subject is in lending it a broad history-of-education backdrop. I think this backdrop is important to include in any consideration of the subject because it conduces to setting certain prejudices relating to governesses into a context that accounts for their appearance and effect. While the private resident governess herself was not central to many of the debates on education
discussed in these pages, she nonetheless represented a nexus of values, principles and assumptions about middle-class learning that was at their heart. Viewed in this light, she has much to tell us about the education of middle-class Victorians as well as about Victorian attitudes to women's education. Moreover, foregrounded against the historical backdrop of the debates on education, her literary characterization provides a basis for examining how fiction can imbue the portrayal of cultural stereotypes with complexity, and how acquaintance with that fiction can alter "real-world" perceptions (a phenomenon I believe Henry James to be exploring in *The Turn of the Screw*).

Governesses, therefore, are not much in evidence in two chapters of what follows. Because many factors bear on the reification of cultural stereotypes, and I am concerned with identifying some of the ones relevant here, Chapters One and Six only touch glancingly on the governessing profession.

Chapter One, which introduces the topic of the governess as it draws to a close, establishes: (1) contemporary attitudes toward children, (2) what England's situation vis-à-vis education was at mid-century, and (3) what were the prospects faced by middle-class mid-Victorian women who required gainful employment. I take what may seem a historical tack in what is a literary study in order to lay the foundation for discussion of Charlotte Brontë's and Jane Eyre's governessing in Chapters Three and Four, which
in turn set the tone for the way every literary governess after 1847 is perceived by most readers, and the way a good many Victorians regarded real women in the governessing profession as well. My contention is that these perceptions are based to some extent on misunderstandings and biases, which I explore briefly. Without Chapter One's framework, a framework seldom evoked in discussions of either Brontë or Jane Eyre, the misunderstandings and biases can pass (and have passed) unexamined and uncorrected into biographical legend and lead critics into troubles in discussing Brontë and, to a lesser extent, her best-known protagonist.

Chapter Six, where governesses are in short supply, functions as a hinge dividing discussion of governesses and education in approximately the first and second halves of the century. The panels of the resulting diptych do not resemble each other much; it is the job of Six, in the capacity of hinge, simultaneously to link and segregate this dissimilar material while trying to account for the inconsistencies between the two groupings. The chapter's specific focus is on England's mood with respect to educational reform in the late 1850s and '60s as manifest in the committee-work and findings of four governmentally appointed bodies. This material lays the groundwork for a discussion of reasons for the governess's disrepute as an educator of middle-class girls in the second half of the century which, in turn, explains why authors of the period
represented her differently from the way their precursors had.

My use of Victorian texts, especially novels, requires elucidation too. Susan Nash has listed some 187 novel-length tales involving governesses as major characters which were written in the course of the nineteenth century. Her figure is probably low and does not include short tales found in anthologies, collections of the works of a single author or periodical pieces. No one has yet quantified or listed these. Nor has anyone performed a similar service by compiling bibliographical information about governess-related non-fiction; there is no question, however, that such writings were rife in mid-century periodicals. In addition, letters, diaries, privately printed materials, advertisements, instructional and advice manuals for governesses, and there are records of agencies involved with the placement of governesses or with the relief of destitute gentlewomen (including governesses). This cornucopia does not even begin to include the many insights into the subject to be found in Victorian children's literature, contemporary textbooks and manuals, etiquette books, and volumes advising women on dealing with servants.

Admittedly, I have been unable to make anything

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'The figure is derived from a list of titles in Nash's Appendix C. The list is, however, incomplete, and it fails to differentiate among different kinds of governesses or among governesses of different nationalities.
resembling a thorough survey of this wealth of data, nor does space allow full discussion here of some of the research done for this project. My rationale for selecting the texts I have consulted and/or discuss derives from precisely what these pages occasionally seem to belie: an ultimate focus on literary governesses. The texts I most thoroughly examine are, except in the case of Chapter Six, literary ones. Although I make frequent allusions to the non- and propaganda-fiction governesses of the 1840s and early '50s, the topic has been discussed adequately elsewhere and I will only gesture to, not reconstitute, those discussions.' My interest in contributing to the on-going critical discourse centering on the Victorian governess is chiefly involved with her fictional incarnations and, secondarily, with improving understanding of the part she played in the history of education.

For these reasons, what determines the depth of analysis a piece of writing receives in these pages, however canonical, however powerful it may be, is the degree to which it requires explication to show how it contributed to or changed, not conformed to, Victorian perceptions of the occupation of governessing and the women involved in it.

'For a thorough discussion of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution, its relation to propaganda literature, and its treatment in non-fiction sources, consult Beaty or Kathryn Hughes's in passim references. Nash provides more thorough coverage of the topic with reference to particular texts.
Some novels one might expect to see canvassed at length (Vanity Fair or Lady Audley's Secret, for example) get short shrift. This is because while they are more frequently read and, arguably, more complex and interesting than other works to which I devote more space (like East Lynne), they are also less singular in their handling of governess-characters. What they have to say can therefore be subsumed in a general discussion, permitting works featuring particularly evocative governesses the scope they deserve for appraisal.

Although I am chiefly interested here in the period extending from the mid-1840s through the mid-'60s, in order best to situate the subject for examination, I have cast my net somewhat wider in gathering primary source-material. This study looks back from Victoria's reign to 1762 with a glance at Emile; at the other end of the spectrum, it alludes occasionally to twentieth-century texts like Virginia Woolf's "Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights" and Barbara Pym's Excellent Women.

In consolidating my findings and determining what portion of them belongs in this study, I have been struck by the circumstance that critical perceptions of the governess in this century reproduce the changing regard in which the Victorians held her, both in types of attitude (sympathetic but condescending, or suspicious) and in the order in which they surface in popular conception (the condescending
shading into the suspicious). While this dissertation's concern is chiefly with the way the governess's earliest and (ultimately) predominant Victorian stereotype changed in response to cultural pressures, I want also to gesture in these pages to some possible reasons why one (unlikely) governess-stereotype— that of the pathetic governess— maintains hold over the twentieth-century imagination. This strand of my discussion remains subordinate to my literary and history-of-education concerns.

4. Existing Scholarship and this Study

"an ugly woman with a strained expression—perhaps a governess"¹⁰

A final preliminary word is necessary about twentieth-century scholarship and its relation to this study. In assessing the respective virtues of Charlotte and Emily Brontë as authors in her 1922 essay, "Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights," Virginia Woolf makes Charlotte's governessing experiences a touchstone for what she—Woolf—considers that author's schoolmarmish want of imagination and consequent inferiority to Emily as a writer of fiction.¹¹ Woolf's attitude derives from modernist

¹¹Pym 286.

¹¹Of course, this rather pat distinction of Woolf's fails to take into account Charlotte's own antipathy to her profession, which matched or perhaps surpassed Woolf's own. "I see now more clearly than I have ever done before that a private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living and rational being except as connected with the
assumptions about "high culture"'s separateness from and superiority to the workaday professions. It effectively glamorizes writers who aspire to produce "high art" while remaining free of, or only reluctantly harnessing themselves to, the demands of more typical careers. In Woolf's hierarchizing of Emily's and Charlotte's talent, and in the poor estimation of Anne's her omission from consideration implies, assumptions underlie a ranking-order which establishes Emily as the family's most gifted writer, assigns Charlotte second place and, by default, relegates their younger sister to non-starter standing. Woolf's scheme precisely inverts the degree of success each woman met with in her teaching career, and this is no accident.

In fact, Woolf's participation in the belief that middle-class professionalism is inferior to the creative processes which produce "high culture," like Ezra Pound's similar view, makes it seem modernist. Actually, the idea that artistic talent is incompatible with professional competence is ancient--though we will avoid being sidetracked by that now. The point needs to be made, nonetheless, because one aspect of it will be significant later. It is this: the Victorians themselves endorsed the view. Indeed, given the disparagement Charlotte Brontë suffers at Woolf's hands on this count, it is ironic that wearisome duties she has to fulfil," Charlotte wrote Emily from her first post with the Sidgwicks (Barker, The Brontës: A Life in Letters 310).
she herself endorses it. Brontë, too, believed quotidian work and art exerted opposing claims on the individual, as when she complained about an experience of hers while she was an institutional governess at the girls' private school, Roe Head:

I felt as if I could have written gloriously--I longed to write.... if [sic] I had.... time to indulge it I felt that the vague sensations of that moment would have settled down into some narrative better at least than any thing I ever produced before. But just then a Dolt came up with a lesson. (Barker, The Brontës: Life in Letters 255)

In addition to feeling that the demands of teaching stifled creative impulses within an individual, Brontë seems to have believed that artistic and governessing abilities corresponded oppositionally to each other within a person. In her 1850 assessment of her sisters' authorial gifts, written and published after their deaths, she maintains that Emily's "powers were unadapted to the practical business of life.... An interpreter ought always to have stood between her and the world." In contrast, she implicitly relates Anne's "milder and more subdued" character to her judgment that Anne "wanted the power, the fire, the
originality of her sister" (Barker, The Brontës 655).  What made Anne a capable governess—a mild, subdued, patient character—marred her as a writer in her sister's estimation. (It is interesting to speculate whether, if Charlotte had known that Mrs. Ingham, Anne's one-time employer, complained late in life that Anne tied the Ingham children to a table so that she might spend time writing without distraction, the critical older sister might have reassessed some of her assumptions. Certainly Mrs. Ingham considered that such conduct showed "originality" enough to make the young woman "a very unsuitable governess."

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Early in this century, the negative note sounded about the private resident governess by Woolf was characteristic of perceptions accorded her. The governess was not treated

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Charlotte neglected to mention Agnes Grey at all in either her biographical sketch of her sisters or the editorial preface she wrote for the novel's 1850 reissue (Barker, The Brontës 503). She found fault with the conception and execution of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (Barker, The Brontës 654). As for the respective merits of her sisters' poetry, Charlotte wrote to Elizabeth Gaskell in 1850, "Ellis Bell's poems I think good and vigorous, and Acton's have the merit of truth and simplicity" (Barker, The Brontës: A Life in Letters 299). In revising Anne's poems for publication, she alters Anne's own lines and, Barker suggests, her meaning. Barker suggests that in the original, one verse referred to Anne herself; Charlotte altered the verse so that it alluded to Emily (Barker, The Brontës 656-7).

See Brooke 239-50 for a more complete discussion of some of what are allegedly lesser-known aspects of Anne's experiences at Blake Hall.
seriously as a professional by academics: literary critics tended to dismiss her significance outright, while historians were apt to see her either as incompetent or, at best, as limited by disability. One proclivity was to belittle the profession while expressing commiseration with its practitioners. In a more generous-spirited example dating from 1942, historian G. M. Trevelyan spoke of governesses as heiresses to and perpetuators of an archaic and largely profitless tradition of women's education (58). But not all commentators showed themselves equally willing to excuse these teachers themselves from blame by pointing a finger at contemporary practices in female education. Sometimes, criticisms became distinctly *ad feminam*, as, for instance, when the private resident governess is specifically linked with inept practices in teaching.

By the middle the twentieth century, however, critiques of governesses begin to differ in several ways from Charlotte Brontë's and Woolf's comments. At this period, the private resident governess began receiving more than cursory notice from male commentators. Also, a very few full-length treatments of this Victorian educator--these written or compiled exclusively by women--began to appear.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, as female critics became more common, they proved readier than many of their male colleagues to take recuperative measures with the governess's reputation. The first full-length survey of her
appearances in Victorian literature is Katharine West's *Chapter of Governesses*. West's book is not especially academic, but it does have the distinction of being the most comprehensive published examination of governessing's literary representation, and it lays groundwork for the unpublished inquiry which is the most thoroughgoing (literary) treatment of the subject that has been made: Susan Nash's "Wanting a Situation." Today, *Chapter of Governesses* is most usefully seen as a launching-stage for study of literary governesses because it gives plot synopses of a number of rather obscure governess-novels. As analysis, it is thin and theoretically unsophisticated, but clever. (The same circumscribed praise cannot be sounded for a derivative volume Bea Howe brought out five years later. Her *A Galaxy of Governesses* fails to round out the literary characterization of the profession, while its title, resonant of West's rather than, like West's, allusive to a literary source, hints at its remote engagement with literary material.)

By the mid-1950s, with feminism beginning to develop ideological impetus (though not yet identity as a scholarly discipline), the study of Victorian women's issues gained tempo and respectability in the academy--faster, conceivably, in literary criticism than in historians' commentary. As feminist thinking won ground, the governess came increasingly to be seen as a complex figure who both
embodied and was invoked to help to contain/restrain expression of societal tensions. Feminism in the academy began to do for her what Jane Eyre itself did over a century before: call attention to the easily overlooked private resident governess as an intriguing cipher too easily underestimated by the undiscerning.

Janus-like, then, the mid-twentieth century glanced both backward and ahead in its perception of the governess. In 1960, historian G. M. Young persisted in seeing her as an under-educated gentlewoman, "a standby of Victorian pathos" (90). Literary critic Patricia Thompson tentatively kept feet in both new and old camps in 1956; for her, governesses might be either "progressive feminists" or "retrograde dependents" (56-7). Generally, however, women scholars in both literary studies and history, while reproducing stereotypical assumptions about the pathetic aspect of her nature and situation, showed an increased inclination to see her as a subject likely to prove more interesting than a stock character.

From the 1960s on, as what would become Women's Studies established a foothold in universities, governess-figures came to be seen as more compelling. In Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England, for example, J. A. and Olive

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1One example of the sort of stereotypical assumption made about the private resident governess was that she was hyperconscious of her prerogatives as "lady," e.g. Thompson 11, 38, 56-7.
Banks ascribed to her an important mediatory position in conflicts about status between ladies and servants, and in sexual tensions between mothers and their adolescent daughters (11, 62, 68, 126).

All of this is not to say that the stereotype of the pathetic governess disappeared from criticism. On the contrary. In 1982, Neil Smelser stressed that "[f]or those who were forced to gain a livelihood for themselves—the unmarried—the role of governess was virtually the only available opportunity, and it was low-paid, demeaning and without social respect" (62). Further, not only does the image of the downtrodden home educator linger on in scholarly writing in the final decades of the twentieth century; in today's popular imagination, it maintains an energetic, enduring sway reminiscent of the attitude Woolf expressed in the 1920s (cf. the phrase from Excellent Women at the outset of this chapter's subsection).

Generally speaking, however, current specialist work on the governess benefits from recent decades' academic interest in cultural developments and in experiences of and primary documents concerning hitherto obscure individuals. These tendencies have made scholars, on the whole, charier of stereotypes and sweeping, inclusive statements. With regard to the governess, for example, Joan Burstyn made us usefully rethink certain presuppositions in 1980, when she challenged conventional wisdom about their ubiquity in
Victorian society, drawing on data relating to normative Victorian incomes and salaries to argue that, except in anomalous circumstances, only the upper-middle classes could afford resident private instructors (24).

* * *

As I remark above, in the field of literary studies, Susan Nash's unpublished 1980 doctoral thesis, "Wanting a Situation," is the most thorough treatment of governesses made to date; it is, therefore, the first study I will comment on in depth. Nash's work is a feminist interpretation of the subject strongly indebted to the earlier, but more superficial analysis of Jerome Beaty. Nash divides a body of writings she describes as "governess fiction" into "religious" and "secular" strains of the genre, and she traces the expression of a gathering anger she sees expressed in characterizations of governesses made by women authors through the nineteenth century. She suggests that whether this outrage comes across relatively clearly (as in Lady Audley's Secret, with its governess-schemer), is repressed (as with the heroine of East Lynne, who masquerades as a governess in order to gain access to her own children), or is covertly but deliberately represented (as in Jane Eyre; Nash follows Gilbert and Gubar in seeing the rampaging Bertha Rochester as Jane's alter-ego), it provided middle-class women writers with an outlet to express frustration with the restrictions placed on their
sex by Victorian society.

Most recently in this vein, interest in the governess is generating readings which see her as the Bankses did—as occupying a ground where conflicting cultural tensions converge and either smolder or detonate. The image of the nineteenth-century governess, on account of her sex, her inadequate salary, and the presumption of her gentility, focuses a host of gender, class and economic concerns, making her inherently a figure of interest to late twentieth-century scholars of various political and theoretical leanings. Marxist Terry Eagleton sees Charlotte Brontë's governess-characters as "an extraordinarily contradictory amalgam of smoldering rebelliousness and prim conservativism."

The governess is a servant, [he says,] trapped within a rigid social function which demands industriousness, subservience and self-sacrifice; but she is also . . . furnished with an imaginative awareness and a cultivated sensibility which are precisely her stock-in-trade as a teacher. She lives at that ambiguous point in the social structure at which two worlds—an interior one of emotional hungering, and an external one of harshly mechanical necessity—meet and collide.

(16)

Susan Fraiman brings Marxist and feminist perspectives to
bear on Elizabeth Rigby's censure of *Jane Eyre* in an early review, believing Rigby's response is grounded in reaction to "Chartist sentiments in a specifically female protagonist." She draws the conclusion that governesses who petitioned for their rights by challenging class privilege assailed "the Victorian ideal of docile femininity" much as Chartism threatened mid-nineteenth-century complacency about class, privilege and tradition (93).

Mary Poovey's brilliant 1988 examination of the governess, "The Anathematized Race," comes out of the academic tradition that grafts together women's and cultural studies. Poovey situates the governess at the locus of an ideological intersection between class- and gender-constructs that is itself situated against the backdrop of England's economic unrest in the 1840s. She maintains that the governess "thrust into prominence the instability of . . . middle-class assumptions about female nature and the separation of the spheres on which the identity of the bourgeois subject was rhetorically and legally based" (163). One testament to the unquestionable merit of Poovey's argument in this essay, which focuses particularly on *Jane Eyre*, is that it has substantially influenced all subsequent work done on the nineteenth-century governess.

Certain problems in the tradition of commentary on the governess arise, however, out of the very pervasiveness of Poovey's influence. Studies that take their cue from Poovey
examine historical periods other than the 1840s-'50s span she covers, and literary material other than Jane Eyre, while reproducing the interpretive slant she took on her subject. In particular, this approach has painted the experiences of many historical or literary governesses with the distinctive colors of Charlotte Brontë's and Jane Eyre's brushes with employment in girls' schools and private homes. Although Brontë was miserable teaching for reasons largely due to factors outside governessing's innate drawbacks, and Jane's troubles derived more from gothic literary conventions than from Brontë's recollection of her teaching days, Poovey's followers reaffirm and help fix the Victorian governess's image within narrow bounds, failing almost entirely to consider the evolution the governess's image underwent between the beginning of the century and its end.³

Another respect in which Poovey's influence has proved limiting is in establishing gender as the key concern with which commentators on the governess must come to terms. While gender certainly constitutes one aspect of the picture of the nineteenth-century governess, it has been allowed to somewhat obscure others. Discussions of the private resident governess seem too often to be contextualized in light of the part she played in the history of women's

³Cf. the discussion on governesses in Copeland.
secondary education and the founding of women's colleges under the auspices, first, of the University of London, and, later, of Oxford and Cambridge. What has been overlooked in the process is the degree to which agitation about the state of women's attainments was matched by agitation about the state of English education generally, as reflected particularly in the anxieties which led to the appointment of the various governmental commissions discussed in Chapter Six and which were fueled, in turn, by their findings. This omission has led to a lopsided portrayal of the languishing state of nineteenth-century female education that is not countered by any compensatory understanding of how widespread low academic standards were, nor how disastrously middle-class education's curricula had become out of step with "modern" requirements. In fact, both the difficulties and shortcomings that the private resident governess encountered and the problems she caused were common ones shared by most professional educators of the time and visited on their pupils.\footnote{For purposes of quick summary, these perceived shortcomings fall into three categories: (1) educators' inadequate grasp of academic knowledge. "There is a great want of accurate grounding perceptible sometimes even in elegant scholars" (Report 24); (2) widespread lack of pedagogical skills. Speaking of the Clarendon Commission report, the Quarterly Review concluded that the dismaying discoveries led "to the inference that the fault must be with the method of teaching rather than with the pupil" ("Public Schools" 182), and (3) professional teachers' poor rate of remuneration. R. J. S. Curtis, past-vice president of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools in this century, noted in 1957 that historically the charges}
Two of the most recent scholars to turn their attention to governesses and their profession, historians Kathryn Hughes and Alice Renton, break with Poovey's example to engage a full century's worth of material. Although both critics have been significantly influenced by Poovey, neither historian advances her work much by looking still more deeply at the stereotype of the pathetic governess which she treats, nor by examining the other ontological model--governess-as-opportunist--which contends with it in the 1860s (though Hughes is better here). Renton suggests little that is new; Hughes charts interesting territory when she describes several governesses' careers in some depth. But where either historian remarks on the governess's appearance in literature, the result is disappointing. Hughes's 1993 *The Victorian Governess* devotes a first chapter to the subject; her treatment is characterized by reductive compressions of plot detail and the inaccuracies that can result from glossing rapidly over complicated material. Thus, for example, "[f]leeing to the moors, Jane takes refuge with her cousins" describes the blind flight Jane Eyre undertook after her aborted wedding ceremony, making her escape from Rochester sound like a family visit for boys enrolled in public schools were low enough that even of the proprietors or heads of these schools never made a great deal of money. His hundred-year period coincides with the Victorian one at which public schools were more profitably run than they ever had been (when run honestly), and when they enjoyed their greatest popularity ever in the wake of Arnoldian reforms (Leinster-Mackay 17-18, note 54).
rather than a harrowing period of wandering in the wilderness followed by the providential encounter with the Riverses (2). Again, Hughes suggests that Isabel Carlyle's abandonment of her husband, Archibald, for Francis Levison in *East Lynne* is "the result of a momentary madness" rather than of jealousy systematically fed by Isabel's calculating seducer combined with her exposure on repeated occasions to Archibald's insensitivity (8).

Renton's handling of the literary side of her subject is somewhat more responsible than Hughes's and benefits from her method of incorporating discussion of fictional texts into general historical discussion. (Hughes disposes of the topic in the one initial chapter.) Nonetheless, Renton does not talk about fiction a great deal and, when she does, she sometimes treats it rather as if it were autobiography rather than an imaginary construct. This is especially true when she speaks of the Brontës, as when she remarks that "it would be a mistake to suppose Anne's description of the life of a governess [in *Agnes Grey*] . . . to have been based on anything but truth. Within her own family she had ample experience to draw upon of how governesses were treated" (74). The Brontës' experience with private resident governessing, as we will see, has been subject to an excess of similar misrepresentation.

Trev Broughton and Ruth Symes's *The Governess: An Anthology* is currently the most up-to-date publication on
the subject. It includes familiar passages by Brontë, Mary Maurice and Elizabeth Rigby to demonstrate that governessing could be drudgery and that twentieth-century stereotypes of governesses and their lives have a certain basis in fact. But one of the most engaging and valuable aspects of the Anthology is that it presents some materials which offset depressing commonplaces about Victorian pedagogy, the governessing profession and its practitioners. There are refreshing glimpses of the odd governess who enjoys excellent relations with her employers ("nothing could be kinder to me than the lady of the house" Mary Cowden-Clark recalls of one mistress [qtd. 36]), and of wit and good-humor (like the spirited way Anna Leonowens twits her new employer, the King of Siam, on their first meeting [qtd. 38-9]). Broughton and Symes incorporate passages from novels and nineteenth-century journalism to give us a sense of the business and those engaged in it, but also feature unique bits of memoirs (pupils' and governesses' alike) and swatches out of children's books. Illustrations include photos of a two-wheeled "governess cart," a pair of Victorian globes and a print advertisement for a vacant position as well as the more standard reproductions of paintings, engravings and cartoons from Punch.

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In its cultural studies focus, its engagement with Victorian ideology and nineteenth-century imagination and,
most obviously, in its location of the governess at the heart of its project, this study has much in common with the work of Mary Poovey, Susan Nash, Kathryn Hughes, Alice Renton, Trev Broughton and Ruth Symes. With these six scholars, I share a regard for the nineteenth-century governess as subject because by virtue of her sex, presumed gentility and notoriously inadequate salary, she occupied the center of a nexus of gender, class and economic concerns. However, this thesis differs from the appraisals undertaken by the historians Hughes and Renton in accommodating an extensive literary component. At the same time, it differs from the feminist literary criticism of Nash and from Poovey's cultural and literary analysis in taking an approach informed by history-of-education concerns unique (as far as I know) in literary treatments of the subject. I am interested as well in tracing the evolution of conflicting stereotypes of the governess, and, parenthetically, in the staying-power of the image of the pathetic governess.

Methodologically, examining these subject areas involves this inquiry to some extent in Foucauldian interrogations of power, in feminist issues like the nineteenth-century move to feminize the concept of mental instability, and with some of the concerns of new historicism. But while considerations of gender, economic relations and psychological interrelations among individuals
and groups of individuals all inform this project, its thrust will not directly engage developments in late twentieth-century "literary theory."
Chapter One: The Nineteenth Century Brings about a Change in Attitude toward Children

1. The Influence of Emile

"I shall not ask Jean Jacques Rousseau If Birds confabulate or no".

The Enlightenment blockbuster Emile insists that a person's childhood and adolescent experiences shape his or her character. For this reason, it argues, teaching requires a different philosophical approach and the expenditure of more mental and physical effort than, according to its author, eighteenth-century European educators typically devoted to their work.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's point was not new in Europe in 1762 when he published what he regarded as the most important of his writings. Plato had remarked on the seminal role of education when, in The Republic, he sketched a plan for children's communal upbringing and training in citizenship. Locke's suggestion that "little, and almost insensible Impressions on our tender Infancies, have very important and lasting Consequences" both predated and influenced Emile (83). Rousseau himself acknowledges debts to Montaigne and Buffon in the text. It was not, therefore, the novelty of Rousseau's insistence that childhood

'The lines are from William Cowper's "Pairing Time Anticipated: A Fable."
impressions and education were important formative influences which gave *Emile* the reputation it enjoyed in the eighteenth century (and continues to maintain), though popular accounts of educational history often imply that such is the case.

Nor was the educational program outlined in *Emile* a compelling factor in the book's success. When two of Rousseau's disciples, the English educational theorists Richard Edgeworth and Thomas Day, tried the experiment of raising children in accordance with the principles *Emile* set out, both men suffered disappointment. Edgeworth's son and namesake was found wanting by Rousseau himself during a childhood trip to Paris after the boy insisted on holding forth in what Rousseau deemed a jingoistic fashion on the glories of a passing English horse or horses and equipage. At last, and despite enrollment in a public school to make up for lost educational ground, young Edgeworth let his intellectual father down by taking up a career as a sailor and relocating to the Carolinas.

Day's luck was no better. Late in 1769, Edgeworth's earnest friend adopted two girls and set out to raise them according to Rousseauist principles. His idea was eventually to make one his wife. By the spring of 1770, he tired of one girl, Lucretia, and apprenticed her to a

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*See, for example, Patterson's discussion of instances of indebtedness, pages 12-14.*
milliner. Later the other, Sabrina, failed to dress as he prescribed. He made financial provision for her, but never saw his ward again (Gignilliat 118). The almost Swiftian outcome of this pair of attempts to put Emile's doctrines into practice intimates one propensity of Rousseau's text seldom remarked by popular educational historians: profoundly idealistic, it speaks most seductively to visionaries.

Instead of philosophical novelty or practicality, then, other circumstances ensured Emile's eighteenth-century celebrity and the lasting vigor of its reputation. Foremost among these was the timeliness of Rousseau's message. Published at the outset of a period that would be characterized by political and cultural upheaval on the Continent, and by the rise of Romanticism both there and in England, Emile's critique of Enlightenment thinking about children promoted egalitarian ideals and endorsed individualism. I will only gesture to, not expound on aspects of Rousseau's argument to indicate how they might be taken to correspond with and help rationalize the revolutionary enthusiasms animating those who embraced the concepts of Liberté, Egalité and Fraternité around 1789.

Basically, Rousseau believed his contemporaries misunderstood and misprized children because they failed to see that youngsters' physical and psychological requirements were determined by their age more than by other
considerations. Contemporary practice dictated that after infancy, children were treated as small adults and, therefore, as embryo members of whichever social class their parents' circumstances prescribed. Disagreeing with this convention, Rousseau praises the hardy upbringing of peasant children while censuring what he saw as an upper-class tendency to coddle youngsters. He blames the mistaken impulse to spoil children (and the parents who indulge it) for making young aristocrats effete and unhealthy, the degenerate counterparts of fit, resourceful young members of the working classes.

The spirit soon to animate Revolutionary France was taken by many to breathe palpably through Emile's repudiation of the belief that the upper classes were superior to the lower ones and that the contemporary social order was justly and beneficently ordained. While not a democrat, Rousseau frequently sounds like one. "[M]an is the same in every situation; . . . [T]he natural wants being every where the same, the means of providing for them ought to be every where equal," he contended (1: 284).\footnote{Indeed, this quotation comes in a paragraph that immediately precedes Rousseau's prediction of a coming revolution: "We are drawing near a crisis, near the age of revolutions" (1: 285), Rousseau proclaims, then glosses his own statement: "I look upon it as impossible for the great monarchies of Europe to be of long continuance . . . ." (1: 285, note). I use Nugent's translation because it appears to be, despite a certain degree of cataloguing and bibliographic confusion (see footnote 4), the first translation of Emile made available to British readers.}
uncomfortable implication was, of course, that hereditary advantages were of little consequence in determining integral worth: "The great may have a fall; the rich may become poor; the monarch may be reduced to a subject. Are these unprosperous strokes of fortune so rare that you should pretend to be exempt from them?" (1: 285).

Not only were revolutionary sentiments apparently manifest in *Emile* some quarter-century before the outbreak of class warfare in France and the eruption of political discontent across Europe, but Rousseau's tract sounded prophetically Romantic as well. I will turn to the subject of Romanticism shortly; what is important to recall at present is that Rousseau holds that a child and his (the pronoun is sex-specific) inclinations merit individualized attention from adults. Rousseau deplored the extent to which popular educational practices of his day parted ways with what he saw as natural and humane ideals in order to uphold artificial aims.

In connection with its Romantic tendency to celebrate the individual, *Emile* was innovative in trailblazing the generic innovation of the Bildungsroman—a narrative genre concerned with tracing the individual's (informal) education: his or her personal, intellectual and/or artistic development. Tracts and diatribes on instruction had preceded and continued to co-exist plenteously with Rousseau's book, but of these, the ones with ability to
charm tended to be written by authors for their own family members and intended for private circulation; educational writings meant for wider publication were inclined to sound formulaic and arid, penned in scholarly Latin and issued in limited print runs. Not surprisingly, they routinely succumbed to obscurity.

In contrast, the Bildungsroman format of Emile, with its "biographical" anecdotes about Rousseau's eponymous pupil and asides conveyed in a characteristically lively, conversational prose style, made the volume appealing enough as a Romantic read to ensure it an enthusiastic audience, prompted its imitation and guaranteed its formidable stature in the period's quickening debates on child-rearing and education (Bloom 6). By writing in the vernacular a text with much of the verve and some of the interest of a novel, Rousseau also carried off what the less entertaining prose of philosophers like Locke had not managed to achieve: widespread popularity with the literate, including women. This popularity meant that Rousseau's educational agenda reached an audience enabled by numbers and privileged status to effect cultural change. Moreover, women readers among this group were, by nature of their traditional gender roles, predisposed to sympathize with the writer's emphasis on children's issues as important at a time when society generally was inclined to disregard the young.

The beginning of the nineteenth century, then, saw
European perspectives on childhood strongly influenced by Rousseau's educational philosophy owing, in large part, to Emile's literary flavor and flair. Practical consequences followed almost immediately across the Continent. By 1839, Holland, France, Prussia and Switzerland had all implemented state schooling. The Kindergarten movement, Froebel's theorizing and the European emphasis on science, non-classical languages, literature and on modern subjects in general in the classroom all owe a debt to Rousseau's thinking on the needs, abilities and limitations of childhood.

In England, Emile became available in Nugent's translation a year after its publication in France, in 1763. Though it sold briskly and its literary quality was much praised and inspired imitation, the tract's egalitarian and individualist philosophy failed to spark the enthusiasm that greeted it elsewhere, especially in those countries primed for outright revolution. Its lack of

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¹Notification of the book's appearance was published in the August number of the Monthly Review. In September, the London Chronicle published an article that included extracts. But there appears to be confusion about the date of Emile's first published translation in England. J. H. Warner mistakes a translated Emilius and Sophie for this edition, though this book is a distinct work intended as a continuation of Emile. Emilius and Sophie was translated into English by Kendrick in 1762. The first indication of an English translation's publication in England that I can find is 1763. The apparently mistaken 1762 date has been perpetuated by several recent scholars, cf. Patterson.

²Some 200 treatises influenced by Emile were published before the turn of the century.
practical impact in England in the decades late in the
eighteenth century and early in the nineteenth stemmed from
its association with revolutionary causes; in the aftermath
of the French Revolution and, later still, the Napoleonic
Wars, the English remained wary about philosophizing that
bore a French provenance, associating it (in spite of
Rousseau's Swiss heritage) with what they saw as Gallic
predilections for mayhem.

Even had Emile's repudiation of the belief that class
distinctions should determine boys' treatment been
insufficient to prompt English unease, the text incorporated
other messages to offend English sensibilities. It
counseled that boys be discouraged from recognizing familial
claims on their loyalty and affection. A boy, Rousseau
said, should love his sister "as his toy" (i.e.,
perfunctorily, since he was also dissuaded from caring much
about material possessions [1: 328]). It advocated the
strategic introduction of disorder and chaos into child-
rearing. Young Emile "has no knowledge of acting by rote,
or custom; what he did yesterday, no way influences his
actions to-day; he never follows any set forms . . . ." (1: 222).
This precept flew in the face of what was reputedly
an English trait: love of order and tradition. Then again,
Emile was not to recognize the claims of authority before he
reached adolescence: "[H]e is governed by no authority, or
example . . . ." "Speak to him of duty and obedience: he
understands not what you mean; command him to do a thing, he has no notion of what you say" (1: 222-3). Finally, perhaps the most insuperable bar to English acceptance of Rousseau's principles arose in connection with his concept of negative education. At the heart of *Emile*'s educational doctrine, this "consists, not in inculcating the principles of virtue or truth, but in guarding the heart against vice, and the mind against error" by blocking exposure to them (1: 101). So as to promote an optimal environment for negative education, educators were to postpone moral instruction until adolescence, and religious education ought not be embarked on until manhood. "I am aware," Rousseau admits, "the reader will be surprised to find me attending my pupil throughout the first stage of life, without mentioning a word of religion. At fifteen he was ignorant he had a soul, and perhaps at eighteen it will not be yet time for him to be informed of it ..." (1: 400). It is hardly a matter for wonder that in England late in the eighteenth century, when the evangelical movement and what has come to be called "middle-class morality" were steadily gaining cultural ground, the message that religious education ought to be deferred until maturity was anathema.

*Emile*'s fate in England, then, was a complex one. Rousseau's celebration of childhood found an audience there on the basis of its literary merit and of certain of its arguments' impact on English susceptibilities and
predispositions (Patterson 14-15). Along with the writings of his Continental disciples, however, it had little direct impact on instructional policy or practice (Coveney 280). Richard and Maria Edgeworth and Thomas Day, among Rousseau's strongest English champions and those whose proselytizing was most warmly received by English readers, all produced tracts seconding, revising or elaborating on the convictions 
Emile articulated. But, with the single exception of the Edgeworths' Practical Education, none of them achieved wide enough circulation to spur any groundswell of public response.

What happened instead to popularize a revamped version of Rousseau's educational theories in England was a blindside offensive on English preconceptions. As Emile's liveliness and Bildungsroman format won it an audience that brought many of its messages approval, so it was literary productions by the Edgeworths and Day that ultimately influenced their countrymen and women. Here, though, the impact came largely through books written for children, stories like Maria Edgeworth's Moral and Popular Tales and Day's Sandford and Merton. By means of these and works like them, the Edgeworths and, especially, Day became known primarily as writers for rather than on the subject of children, and sold more copies of a modified Rousseauist

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"The first English kindergarten, for example, was only established in 1851."
doctrine than they were able to market in the form of texts for an adult readership. In popularizing for young readers and the adults who selected their books or read aloud with them the values Rousseau advocated, they were able to sway popular thinking, especially that of a generation younger than their own.

* * *

In England, then, children's literature did much to popularize a version of Rousseau's message. Belletristic literature intended for adults further helped the process. The period of Emile's first half-century in English translation coincided with the flowering of Romantic writing, which in itself owed much to Rousseau; contemporary revolutionary values with implications for children infused both Rousseau's work and that of the first-generation Romantics. Thus, the mood of the early decades of the nineteenth century was ripe for dissemination of the ideas Rousseau wanted to convey even if English readers balked at Emile's particular combination of a French provenance with apparently revolutionary politics.

2. Children and Literature Early in the Nineteenth Century

On the brink of the nineteenth century, English culture started the process of refiguring the child as an emblem of sentiment. Childhood was, for self-evident reasons, an apt symbol of new beginnings and hopes for the future at a time
when rapid, thoroughgoing societal change made much about the present seem disjunct from the past.

This development coincided with the circumstance that nineteenth-century children were becoming more visible than their Enlightenment predecessors had been. The numbers of children in England burgeoned in the early years of the nineteenth century. Increased urbanization also made their presence evident; people congregating in England's fast-developing towns and cities had awareness of others forced on them. In particular, factory employment of children and clusters of juvenile beggars congregating in well-traveled thoroughfares thrust lower-class youngsters into the public eye more than had been the case when they were living in a predominantly rural society with cottage industry and agricultural employment segregating them from each other and excluding them from adults' notice.

The Industrial Revolution, too, increasingly freed men, women and children from the rigor of unstinting manual work, allowing members of many families more leisure time to spend together. In combination with evangelicalism, this trend encouraged the development of a national cult of domesticity that helped foster the child's sentimental image.

In the last few decades of the eighteenth century, middle-class homes already began to reflect the new cultural awareness of children. Previously, children of all classes led lives their successors in those classes would have found
materially impoverished. But increasingly, in the houses of
the well-to-do especially, nursery floors, shelves, storage
boxes and bed- and schoolrooms would be littered with goods
designed to educate and amuse. The market for children's
goods was booming to a degree that cannot be accounted for
simply by contemporary population growth among middle- and
upper-class children.

Children's literature, too, started to corner more of
publishers' markets than ever, with writers capitalizing on
money-making opportunities to be exploited by catering to
juvenile audiences. One way to chart the progress of the
new popular attitude toward children is to examine the
evolution that took place in the tone and content of this
literature. When the nineteenth century opened, children's
books were stiff, didactic and dominated by adult characters
and their mores. Later in the century, tales became more
elaborately imaginative, adult characters diminished in
significance, and the stories tried to capture and reproduce
children's own perceptual mechanisms for interpreting the
world.

Consider also what happens in the nineteenth century to
older works recognized as classics or children's classics
and therefore deemed worthy of being "saved" from obscurity
despite dated tone and/or troubling contents. Shakespeare
is probably put through the strangest contortions of all.
While both the plays and young readers are done good service
by the Lambs, the Bowdlers travestied what they reworked
with a Dr. Moreau twist on Midas' touch. Even morally
impeccable tales like Mrs. Sherwood's The Fairchild Family,
Part One of which was originally published in 1847 and
featured a notoriously grotesque scene we will look at
later, were sanitized of graphically unpleasant contents and
remarketed alongside more whimsical books, magazine pieces
and adventure stories available for young readers by the
1870s.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, adult
literature's impact on popular perceptions of childhood owed
more to poetry than prose fiction, and the poets whose work
most featured children were the first-generation Romantics.
Particularly in the works of Wordsworth and Blake, where
they were featured frequently as sentimentalized or fey
beings, children suddenly began to receive unprecedented
attention."

But if children were beginning to appear in literature
in ways that distinguished them from adult characters, it
remained yet for them to become either the psychologically
realized or evocative figures they would evolve into as
Victoria came to the throne and shortly afterward, notably
in Dickens's novels. Blake was not influential enough in
his own lifetime, nor was his audience broad-based or

— See the discussions of Blake and Wordsworth's uses of
child-figures in Coveney 52-83.
sufficiently sensitized to the changing social iconography of the child, for his treatment of childhood poverty and exploitation in poems like "The Chimney-Sweeper" to stir popular sympathies as the depiction of a similar subject matter would with Oliver Twist just about a half-century later.

Wordsworth who, unlike Blake, did have an extensive readership, also wrote about children of both the lower and middle classes. When characterizing lower-class children, however, Wordsworth tended to locate them in imagined situations where interlocutors focused imperfect understandings on them, as in "We Are Seven." If they were middle-class boys, the children were frequently evocations of his own young self, as in the "Intimations Ode" or the early books of The Prelude. Thus, while it is true that he captures a sense of the psychological "otherness" of childhood and differentiates it from representations of "mature" understanding, Wordsworth's verse does not encourage the adult reader to empathize with the child. In "We Are Seven," the otherness of the young speaker encountered by the poem's narrator is so pronounced that it baffles his adult comprehension. Elsewhere, in Wordsworth's more autobiographical verse, fully realized children usually prove to be the poet's nostalgically reconstituted alter-egos, and readers are invited to share the insights and sensibilities of children so extraordinary that they are
more obviously poets in embryo than representatives of a more typical child's-eye worldview.

Poetry was in the literary vanguard when it came to registering new attitudes to childhood in early nineteenth-century England; prose literature followed a few decades behind. Children did not as a rule interest mainstream novelists of the 1830s and early '40s. In Gothic and Romantic fiction and their successors, Newgate and silver-fork novels and the like, to the extent that they appear at all, boys and girls usually provide window-dressing, their personalities and pursuits remaining largely unexamined. It took novelists writing with an evangelical bent or, at least, with appreciation of their audiences' evangelical sympathies to reflect the interest in the child that was becoming manifest in English culture.

Novels-with-a-purpose and the religious novels of the 1840s served didactic and moral ends. In them, writers for the first time began to flesh out child-characters because here children could be deployed to especially strategic effect. Their brief experience of life presupposed they were unconscious of the questionable ways of the world that novels portrayed. Therefore, they were ideally situated to be the reader's empathic entry-point into the story since the child, like the reader first encountering the unfamiliar text, was here plunged into a potentially bewildering terra incognita. Where fiction expressed a fundamental
satisfaction with culture's status quo, the child served as the reader's proxy; in this context, a child's ignorance made it necessary that he or she and the reader learned or had reinforced some particular lesson or lessons. Where these lessons were vehicles for social critique, the child became Beatrice to the reader's Dante; the youngster's innocence put him, or her, in the position to teach others, including the reader, right principles.

'Each of these two approaches to childhood naiveté was consistent with a long-standing view of childhood, the implications of which had been philosophically investigated in previous centuries, but without the degree of sympathy for the child that was a post-Enlightenment phenomenon. The two traditions can be associated for convenience sake with the Church father, Augustine, and "heretic," Pelagius, respectively (though their family trees are actually older and more complicated). Augustianian beliefs held that children came into the world corrupt because of their inevitable implication in original sin. Pelagius believed that children were morally undefiled at birth; it was exposure to society that promoted moral degeneration.

One can see the dichotomous views refigured in latter-day versions with Rousseau's Romantic philosophy providing the counterpart of Pelagius' standpoint and Freud's insistence that children feel and act out of the same impulses which adult society condemns representing the modern twist on Augustinian doctrine. It is crucial to understanding perceptions of childhood and education in the nineteenth century to remember that, since Rousseauist philosophy was sweeping through Europe (and making more tentative progress in England) at the beginning of the period, and Freudian ideologies were beginning to re-enact the same scenario at its end, the Victorian era in England was the setting for a clash of powerful belief systems. This accounts, in part, for some of the inconsistent contemporary views we will be looking at in the chapters ahead; it offers perhaps the best way available to understand attitudes toward governessing (and, more generally speaking, the teaching profession), and accounts ultimately for the chilling effectiveness of the last work of fiction this thesis will examine: Henry James's The Turn of the Screw.
3. Children and Educational Concerns of the Period

The Romantic assertions that the child was father of the man and that the growth of mind had its genesis in the formative experiences of childhood were expression of and impetus for development of a cultural shift toward more affective responses to childhood than prevailed through most of the eighteenth century. Until now, this chapter has been concerned with charting the emergence and defining the nature of the sentimentalizing of childhood in English culture. But this does not mean earlier attitudes toward children disappeared. Rather, English culture accommodated and assimilated the new modes of thinking and feeling so that they co-existed with older ones.

Concurrent with the move to sentimentalize children, England was grappling with specific, utilitarian concerns which, despite their industrial age manifestations, harkened back to age-old ways of thinking that saw children as economic assets. In the first half of the century, the nation was reluctantly coming to realize that its workforce was inadequately equipped by its schooling to fulfil the demands of industrialization. Factory workers and foremen needed to be literate and have acquaintance with rudimentary mathematics and science in order to understand the technological aspect of their jobs. Bureaucrats and professionals needed to keep abreast of developments in their fields in an increasingly competitive, performance-
based work environment. Administrators needed to understand the dynamics of the increasingly specialized organizations over which they presided. Finding a compromise between the new spirit of sentimentality toward children on the one hand, and pragmatic imperatives involving education and work ethics on the other, was fast becoming one of the exacting cultural balancing acts of the day.

At the outset of the nineteenth century, England showed increased receptivity to the idea that education exercised a formative influence on individuals and began, belatedly in a European context, to respond to the realization in practical terms. That the response was dilatory owed much to the complacency of well-to-do Englishmen and women toward an established order wherein heredity, not acquired skills, determined social standing. In England, this article of socio-political faith had not been shaken, as it was elsewhere in Europe, by political upheaval. An industrial rather than a political revolution first challenged and then began to debunk some of England's belief in the desirability of its status quo. As part of the process, the education of male children of all classes became foregrounded for the first time in history as a national concern. It became necessary to take schooling seriously now specialized know-how increasingly rivaled circumstances of birth as a passport to recognition and success.

Dismay about England's public schools in particular
began to gather force shortly after Waterloo, having as its focus criticisms of their administrative, not academic practices. Complaints, especially in the Edinburgh Review, were strident enough to spur governmental appointment of an investigatory body referred to as the Brougham Commission (Leinster-Mackay 5). The outcry was not, however, vehement enough yet to compel the Commission to follow through on its disheartening findings by mandating changes in the schools investigated. Calls for public school reform would wait some fifty years before the government mounted a serious campaign of reform to any effect, and the necessary changes themselves would come still more slowly.

Although the earliest significant agitation for change in nineteenth-century education was made on behalf of the privileged classes who attended public schools, the first legislative action involved the schooling of the lower classes. Despite decades of discontented stirrings, policy-makers still felt uncomfortable at mid-century about addressing faults in the way upper- and middle-class children were educated. These issues pressed unsettlingly close to home, and necessarily insinuated questions about how well-equipped the country's leaders (many of whom had public-school educations) were to hold positions of responsibility and influence. Avoiding uncomfortable criticisms of middle- and upper-class schooling, agitators and policy-makers displaced the issue onto the lower
classes. In this way, self-scrutiny was avoided while, simultaneously, the status quo was reaffirmed. In the 1840s and early '50s, following disturbances signaling working-class dissatisfaction with government (like the Hungry Forties' Chartist uprisings), arguments were voiced that improved educational opportunities for disadvantaged children would establish among them a habit of compliance to those in authority (Burstyn 11).³

At this stage in this survey, we should pause for a moment because the phenomenon we are looking at--deflection of establishment concern onto a group less privileged than itself--has relevance for contemporary criticisms of girls' education. For this reason I want to spend a paragraph or two examining some of the more disingenuous aspects of the psychological and cultural mechanisms for displacement at work in early Victorian thinking about schooling for the poor.

As voiced, the argument that education advanced behavioral amelioration by ensuring a docile citizenry was flawed. Among the upper and upper-middle classes, formal education had already to its account by the beginning of Victoria's reign a long and moderately well-advertised history of riot. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century

³The Factory Bill that made provisions for the establishment of district schools, ultimately rendered less than effectual by Nonconformist hostility in 1843, had been designed, among other things, to check Chartist agitations, riots and strikes.
school rebellions could, and did, get out of hand, attract newspaper coverage and occasionally end in Parliamentary hearings (Shrosbee 19-20). Within individual schools, figures like headmasters and masters, who might have been expected to embody in their persons the authority of the system, were routinely treated with scant, if any, respect. One master at Westminster observed in a late-eighteenth-century diary entry that he considered mob violence to be the status quo among schoolboys (Gathorne-Hardy 57). At Eton in 1810, although he was headmaster, Dr. Keate was pelted with eggs by students when he flogged the lower fifth. The egg-throwing and the reason behind Keate's mass birching—-that his 100 or so victims all failed to turn up for a roll call—clearly demonstrated that the headmaster's authority over pupils was tenuous at best (Gathorne-Hardy 41). To imagine that a modified version of the formula that sparked inflammatory outbursts among one group would quell their outbreak among another clearly makes little sense.

Later still, and contemporaneous with the palmiest days of belief that education functioned in a straightforward way as an instrument of social control, this rationale was belied by widespread disquiet on the Continent. By 1850, the English only had to look at their European neighbors to know that hopes about curbing working-class insurrection by means of institutionalized learning were ill-founded. As we saw, by 1840 France and Germany had instituted state systems
of education designed to promote a more thorough, uniform knowledge-base among these nations' lower classes. Yet the European political climate of 1848 demonstrated that discipline and classroom lessons did not reliably exert a tranquilizing effect.

Nevertheless, Englishmen were coming to recognize that educational systems like the French and, particularly, German ones provided with foresight for those nations' growing industrial economies. Traditionally minded observers might view askance the European academic emphasis on science, non-classical languages and literature (they were "modern" and practical, therefore not gentlemanly, therefore suspect and radical). But, however self-congratulatory the English might be when contrasting the relatively placid state of affairs at home with contemporary European turbulence, some observers were starting to recognize that at least Continental countries' educational practices and policies were providing them with literate workforces familiar with the subjects, scheduling and time-management skills necessary to meet the clock- and performance-driven demands of factory work and bureaucratic management. By mid-century, evidence was accumulating that formally educated children matured into more efficient workers than those who were unschooled, or got their training haphazardly or piecemeal. What arguments about the effectiveness of legislated educational reform on unruly
elements of the working classes really masked was anxiety that England might lose her international industrial edge by failing to accommodate the next generation's educational needs at all class levels.

The necessity for reform was, as we have seen, less disconcerting for the privileged to contemplate with respect to the lower classes than with themselves. Willing to take action now attention had shifted away from the public schools, in February 1839, Lord Russell announced the government's decision to set up a committee of the Privy Council to distribute educational grants. The committee engaged as its first secretary the physician, Dr. Kay (who took his wife's name and became "Kay-Shuttleworth" after his marriage). Fresh from service as assistant commissioner to the Poor Law Board, Kay believed in schooling's redemptive potential. Interested in European educational developments, he previously established at Norwood a school run on the Rousseauist lines of the European educational theorist Pestalozzi. At Norwood, children were taught to speculate about the properties of what was unknown to them by applying their understanding of related properties and behaviors of the familiar. A method of teaching reminiscent of that advocated in *Emile*, it was one the Edgeworths and Day would have endorsed.

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Kay-Shuttleworth was to become an ardent admirer of Charlotte Brontë.
Less than a decade later, the Factory Act of 1847 formally signaled the new respectability of educational reform of the poor as a social crusade, legislating a slightly shortened workday and mandating the basics of education for working-class children thirteen and under.

Far from proving a check to social disquiet, however, lower-class education ironically functioned instead as the thin end of the wedge of reform; agitation about upper- and upper-middle-class education soon followed. The place where this was initially felt was the public schools, which were fast becoming exclusive preserves for the well-to-do. Although popular thinking today associates England's public schools with social privilege, traditionally they served middle-class patrons and the charitable interests of boys "on the foundation." Children fortunate enough to be provided for in their adult lives had traditionally been educated privately—in the Middle Ages, in others' homes; more recently, in their own. In fact, the class elitism we associate with the public schools today is a relatively new historical development originating in the late eighteenth century and becoming prevalent in the nineteenth.

Institutionalized schooling started to be increasingly

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"Trollope, whose own public school experiences at Winchester he recalled with less than nostalgia, commented with some pride: "In any other country, a charity school would remain a charity school . . . . But at Eton King Henry's poor scholars and the sons of Dukes and Marquises herd together" (Trollope, "Public Schools" 481)."
popular for upper- and middle-class boys in the nineteenth century. Enrollment in boarding schools climbed steadily through the century with the rise in student numbers, in spite of steep elevations in school fees, disproportionate to the general increase in the population at the time. By 1865, so prevalent had the custom of sending the children of privileged families to these schools become that, in his volume of architectural plans and accompanying commentary, Robert Kerr comments: "The requirements for boys at home under a tutor would be parallel to those [arrangements] which have been described [for girls] . . . but as it is so little the custom now to keep boys at home in this way, we may consider it quite unnecessary to provide formally for them" (91). The trend confirms that the middle and upper classes placed more value on educational institutions than their predecessors had done (Newsome 43).

With the public schools' new popularity came changes. First, their improved drawing-power inspired them to expel charity boys to make room for fee-paying students. Originally the oldest among these institutions had been founded for vocational reasons, to help mold churchmen (hence their classical--predominantly Latin--curriculum). Now, their developing cultural status removed whatever impetus might otherwise have existed for their curricula to evolve and serve contemporary vocational needs. Filling rapidly with upper- and upper-middle class boys and
"fortunate" middle-class ones who modeled themselves on their "betters," the schools soon came to see their function to consist in turning out young men able to differentiate themselves readily from social "inferiors" who would have to work for a living. The classical curricula were already entrenched and aptly fulfilled the requirement, branding public-school students as boys able to afford to forego vocational training past the age when norms dictated less-fortunate individuals were to begin serving some sort of apprenticeship.

Second, the result of schools' popularity was at once their proliferation and a hierarchizing among them. Preparatory schools and pre-preparatory schools began to flourish where once private instruction and a handful of public schools had sufficed. As a rule, the more exalted the institution, the more consciously decorative and impractical the education it offered. At the same time, the new cultural sensitivity to children's well-being examined at the beginning of this chapter entailed changes in the way boys at school were treated at mid-century. The appalling conditions that had precipitated rioting before were now starting to attract censure, with potentially damaging

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In their "houses," where boarding-school life was largely unsupervised by masters, the same impulse led boys to learn artificial, clubby and elaborately nuanced mannerisms, inflections and vocabulary words that served as an etiquette minefield to segregate the privileged boys from pretenders to that status.
consequences for school enrollments. (Indeed, one of the reasons Arnold has been singled out for praise by students of the history of education is that he is credited with setting a tone of educational enlightenment at Rugby in the late 1830s and early '40s.\textsuperscript{13} The reality—or, perhaps, myth—of caring excellence enjoyed by schools like Arnold's Rugby or Butler's Shrewsbury began to affect the educational climate generally, first in the upper-middle class "great" schools, and then in the lesser institutions that mimicked their layout, ambiance and methods of teaching.)

With what amounted to vocational training being mooted for education among the lower classes and with a growing spirit of reform animating the public schools which were increasingly the bastions of upper, upper-middle and aspirant upper-middle-class learning, middle-class education itself was magnetized by bi-polar forces. Families with children to educate split along the dividing line.

Some families believed that for solidly middle-class young men who would have to earn their livings, exposure to non-classical subjects of the sort taught in the European school systems would be beneficial. As parents started to fear that their sons' educational provisions might lag behind those of boys less financially well-off than themselves, or the children of Dissenters (who had long been

\textsuperscript{13}For an alternate, if somewhat unorthodox treatment of Arnold's reputation, see Gathorne-Hardy, Public School Phenomenon 70-9.
driven to seek an education at Glasgow, Edinburgh or on the Continent), they agreed with the proposition that, as preparation for finding employment in industry or the expanding and evolving professions, conversance with the sciences, mathematics and with the modern languages in which many new scientific ideas were discussed would give their boys a competitive edge over young men who only knew the classics.

But if some families wanted their sons to receive a practical education, a majority preferred to have them indoctrinated in the classical education which had for a long time been what separated supposed gentlemen from those who were not. This feeling accounts for a growth in the numbers of pre-preparatory, preparatory and public schools in the country. Matriculation rates in England's universities were also sharply on the rise; between 1800 and 1826, enrollments at Oxford and Cambridge climbed annually and would continue to do so at both institutions until the

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Early in the nineteenth century, it was still commonly supposed Scotland was more advanced in the teaching of sciences than the rest of Great Britain. There is some reason to doubt to what extent this was really the case. The work of Joseph Black in the previous century had given Edinburgh and Glasgow universities a high reputation in the field of chemistry. However, in Edinburgh in the nineteenth century, chemistry was taught solely through lectures. This was not especially conducive to quality research work. Charles Darwin, at least, was disappointed with the academic situation he discovered there, observing that in their university careers, he and Erasmus Darwin had borrowed many more books from the library than any of their respective fellow students (Robbins 147-8).
As we will see in Chapter Six, through the second half of the century, training in the classics and a public-school background was held to be the ideal for boys in the general public estimation, but the appeal of a practical education was intensifying and challenging that ideal. Finally, in ragged order and reluctantly, the public schools and a host of their lesser-known imitators would make concessive gestures in response to the pressure and branch out to offer subject areas apart from the time-honored Latin, Greek and Euclidean mathematics. To the extent, however, that public schools and the universities they served as feeders held out against this cultural move until late in the century, educational curriculum and philosophy split along class lines, with many middle-class boys caught in the widening gap between the two ide als. Before saying more on this topic, however, I will revert to the subject of girls' education. At mid-century, controversy about middle- and upper-class girls' education displaced anxieties about boys' education much as concern for educational provisions for the

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15 At 1880, the annual matriculation figure at both institutions stood at about 800 (Clark 255-6). After this, the universities' populations continued to rise. See Venn for detailed analysis of this subject.

16 It is only fair to point out, though, that by the terms of many of these schools' foundations, there was an obligation to teach the classics that partially tied the hands of progressive masters and administrators (Shrosbee 25-34).
poor did at a slightly earlier date.
Chapter Two: Pity the Governess

1. The Stereotype

"'If you recollect, ma'am, there's a pathetic governess'":

Victorians were exposed in the late 1840s and early-'50s to a blitz of print discourse about the private resident governess in newspapers, journals, published reports and advertisements. In response to this flare-up of publicity and, particularly, in connection with the founding of Queen's College for the instruction of governesses and the affiliated Governesses' Benevolent Institution.\(^2\) (hereafter the GBI), a propaganda literature that took both fictional and nonfictional forms came into being, capitalizing on and adding to the governess's topicality. From being a minor cultural stereotype, the governess as ideological construct became a focal point for a mixture of intense public scrutiny, discontent and sympathy. The result was that the conception of the private resident governess as a pathetic and downtrodden individual,

\(^2\)This quotation from Frank Smedley's *Lewis Arundel* (1852) is cited in Cruse, page 60.

\(^1\)See my footnote 7 on page 24. Founded in 1843, the GBI was a charitable organization in London associated with the Christian Socialists, notably F. D. Maurice. Subsequently, it was involved with activities as various as providing annuities and banking services for governesses, keeping listings of potential employment options for them, offering them academic classes and lectures, and, to a restricted extent, housing incapacitated governesses.
miserably inadequate at her work, miserably used by her employers and, often, treated shabbily by her pupils, became so fixed in the public imagination that her mention today still carries these associations.

A certain amount of the governess's mid-century notoriety in Victorian England stemmed more or less directly from non-fiction coverage of the "Woman Question"—the much- aired anxiety that middle-class women would be left "redundant" (unable to find husbands because they outnumbered eligible men) and would find it difficult to maintain the genteel standard of living the Victorians held to be such women's birthright while their reputations remained uncompromised. There were few jobs available to "redundant" women that enabled them to earn a subsistence wage or its equivalent in perquisites and, at the same time, to sustain their own and others' sense of their privileged middle-class social caste. The most common of these were governessing and employment as a paid companion. Both occupations could be dismal, but governessing was the more desirable of the two unsatisfactory options, not least because it theoretically assured a woman of more personal autonomy (Broughton and Symes 11).^ However, the number of

^Copeland (166-71) sees the two professions (governessing and serving as a paid companion) as equally demeaning but, in making this judgment, fails to distinguish between the different situations of the nursery and private resident governess. In 1868, Josephine Butler gave an idea of the nursery governess's place in the ranks of working women when she remarked that "Many a woman rejected from the
governessing positions on offer was, like that of eligible men, too few to accommodate all the women eager to undertake them. Destitute women had to settle for unpleasant situations, as did those disqualified by their own unsatisfactory educations from doing the work required by those employers who could offer attractive posts.

Because governessing was the most viable and popular solution to the problems redundant women faced, discussions of the profession and its practitioners figured among the most-publicized aspects of the heavily canvassed two-part practical query to which the "Woman Question" could be reduced: What provisions could redundant women make for themselves? What could society do to help them? The so-called "Governess Question" that emerged as a substrate of the broader one was not properly a query or set of queries shop-till or the housekeeper's room for ignorance and inefficiency, is compelled to offer herself among the lowest class of nursery goveresses, or, failing all, to embrace the career, the avenues to which stand ever wide open, yawning like the gates of hell, when all other doors are closed" (79). Some nursery goveresses were less respected than shopgirls, and only stood a slim rung higher on the ladder of respectability than a prostitute. This was not the case for the private resident governess, who was considered, at worst, a hybrid of lady and servant. Moreover, between the late 1840s and the onset of the vogue for institutional schooling for girls in the '60s and '70s, there was pressure exerted on employers by social agitation to treat their private resident goveresses well.

at all. Nominality, it was an allusion to the "Woman Question." Actually, it was simply the consolidation under one rubric of a nexus of hotly contested issues that covered a great deal of argumentative territory in public debate. Some commentators deplored many employers' tendencies to treat governesses as members of the servant class. Others resentfully commented on the excessive pride that was allegedly characteristic of them. Many decried the governess's inadequate preparation for teaching. Quite a few insisted that her example as a moral woman with manners, not her grasp of the subjects she taught, made her valuable as a preceptress.

Overall, two strains sound as constants through the polyphony of grievances centering on private resident governesses.

The first pointed out that many of these women lacked the knowledge and/or pedagogical skills to make them effective teachers. Whether standards among governesses in the 1830s and '40s were actually in decline or, more

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'There appears to be some ground for the popular perception. The governess's humiliation at being requested or expected to perform services apart from teaching is an underlying theme in letters sent home by a number of English governesses working in the colonies (see Clarke). Charlotte Brontë's pride occasioned sufficient comment in the family of her one-time employers, the Sidgwicks, for A. C. Benson, a cousin of her former students, John and Mathilda, to recollect the comment Mathilda later made that if Brontë was invited to church with the family, "she thought she was being ordered about like a slave; if she was not invited, she imagined she was excluded from the family circle" (qtd. in Barker, The Brontës 312, 896, note 95).
probably, whether more employers were vying more competitively for superior governesses and were simultaneously demanding more talent from the women they hired, is difficult to determine. Since young boys as well as girls were governess-educated, criticism of these women's teaching was possibly due in part to the perception that, in keeping with what were perceived as the new, improved educational standards we associate with Arnold at mid-century, greater competence than ever was demanded of boys entering school (Burstyn 23).

The second area of controversy about girls' education focused chiefly on the teaching of "accomplishments," non-utilitarian skills like fine embroidery work or the ability to play an instrument. In the 1830s, clergymen particularly were vocal about the frivolous education women received (Burstyn 99). Their complaint quickly became universal, and became, as well, something of a Catch-22 for governesses. If these women's own educations had been inadequate to prepare them to enter the classroom as teachers, then adding to their knowledge-base and upgrading their skill-levels would have seemed at once to answer their practical problems and the denunciation of their detractors. In fact, self-improvement was practiced by governesses, but the practice was not advertised by the canny because to tout deliberately cultivated talents was to advertise concern with one's earning power, and therefore marked a governess deficient in
the ladylike gentility that was her foremost stock-in-trade. (At its most absurd extreme, the situation helps in part to explain the notoriously low wages many ineffectual private resident governesses received. Like earnest versions of Little Dorrit's parodic Mrs. General, they would not compromise their status as ladies by negotiating salaries or, sometimes, even admitting their existence as a formal wage. One woman, advertising in The Times in 1860, insisted "salary would be no consideration" in any position she would take [qtd. in Hughes 45].)

* * *

To some degree, the concerns voiced in the non- and propaganda fiction of the 1840s and '50s and the idea of the private resident governess they reified belonged to an old image of the governess newly magnified in cultural import. Think, for literary precedent, of the dismay expressed in Highbury society over the apparently unavoidable governessing fate that threatens Jane Fairfax in Jane Austen's *Emma*. Jane's friends and acquaintance actively regret her apparent need to seek employment. But, further, Austen clearly relies on the specific crisis of Jane's becoming a private resident governess to touch nerves guaranteed to prompt alarm among contemporary readers. She relies, in other words, on the existence of a cliché, or stereotype, current in her day that enables her to mobilize sympathy for Jane without having to bog down the story's
momentum with explanatory digressions about Jane's plight.

If thoughts of the governessing profession already prompted readers to feel a sympathetic frisson for its practitioners in 1816, what accounts for the response's magnification into the Governess Question some three decades later? As we have seen, some of the agitation was due to its implication with the Woman Question, which occasioned most distress only after Austen's lifetime. But by the late 1840s, when mere shivers of dismay became reactions capable of a minor register on the Richter scale, stronger forces were at work.

When what is familiar makes the transition from cliché to cause célèbre, it is safe to say that societal change underwrites the alteration. A cliché does not easily undergo this transformation; clichés, truisms, stereotypes--their virtue is that they are "given"s which, invoked, do not tax descriptive or imaginative powers, patience or understanding. Instead, they obviate the need for fresh thought and, licensing oversight, generally lead unexamined lives.

Unlike the retiring stereotype, the cause célèbre both distinguishes itself and calls attention to its constituent elements--its platform. Thus, redefinition of a cliché as something approximating its opposite number flags a situation where the old stereotype is required to perform a new cultural job. Somewhere, cultural perceptions have
changed, with the outcome that they make the familiar, diffident stereotype seem relevant.

That such a dynamic was at work shaping perceptions of the governess at mid-century is intimated because the governess as cause celebre inspired both outrage and sympathy out of keeping with what reason dictated. Statistically speaking, the governess population in England was quite small at this time (McBride, *The Domestic Revolution* 38-59, 47-9). Many mid-Victorian adults, middle-class though they might be, would not themselves have had personal experience with private home education, either in their own classroom days or in their children's. Historian Patricia Branca reminds us that between 1803 and 1867, roughly half of the middle-class families in England would have had incomes ranging from £100 to £300 annually, and that the greatest expansion in their numbers took place at the lower end of that range (40-5). This was an income level which seldom stretched to cover a private resident governess's salary (Burstyn 24). Even though between 1850 and '80 the number of families with more than £300 to their credit tripled, still this left only a relatively small population of about 150,000 families (Burstyn 13). At the time when live-in domestic servants were most easily and inexpensively come by in the nineteenth century--during the three decades from 1850-'80--most middle-class households took on only a cook and a housemaid, who often doubled as a
nanny (McBride 45).

If their ubiquity did not force public notice of governesses in the 1840s, neither was their notoriety due to any extraordinary and intolerable professional burden. Other working women whose lives were accessible to middle-class observation and sympathy had far more rigorous jobs. Laboring alone or with the intermittent company of only one other servant in a typical Victorian home, the nursemaid, for instance, started her chores at about 6:00 in the morning and did not finish until 10:00 or 11:00 at night (McBride 54). But neither her long hours and physically exhausting labors, nor those of other servants and working-class women generally, aroused sustained public interest or outcry comparable to that elicited by the governess (Vicinus, Independent Women 23).

It is not quite right to imply, however, as both the Victorians and scholars have done, that the combination of the governess's sex and class status in themselves was wholly responsible for the fraught nature of the Governess Question and the responses "it" elicited. In part, it is true, the furore was a by-product of the indeterminacy of the governess's identity. Many Victorian commentators held staunchly that governesses were ladies. As the lady's maid Mrs. Popkins in Lady Blessington's 1839 novel The Governess has it, women pursuing this occupation are to be detested because, neither lady nor servant, they resist
classification (1: 91). Twentieth-century scholars follow this lead. Susan Nash consolidates the position, proposing that, as part of the political and social unrest of the 1840s in England, interest in governesses grew out of a fluctuating state of social and sexual expectations middle-class women experienced as "identity confusion" (195).

This argument, however, pitches on the rock that appears, as we have seen, to be an endemic hazard in discussing governesses: Poovey, Nash and the Victorians themselves do not distinguish in their observations among different sorts of female educators. Their observations apply not only to private resident governesses, but also to teachers involved with girls' schools, "daily governesses" who visited their pupils during school hours, and those whose pupils traveled to their homes. Yet none of these women--despite sharing the private resident governess's sex and class--attracted degrees of speculation, criticism or sympathy corresponding to the one that especially animated Victorians: the idea of an impoverished gentlewoman fighting a losing battle to bring order to a home schoolroom. Nor did the situation of the paid companion arouse sympathy in any degree corresponding to that generated by the idea of the private resident governess, though she, theoretically, shared the governess's genteel background, and her job was at least as trying as the governess's and, frequently, more so. While there is thus
no doubt that the governess's sex and middle-class status were important ingredients helping galvanize reaction to her perceived plight, they do not adequately explain the dimensions of the upset generated.

It is my belief, as I have mentioned, that some of the complaints leveled against the private resident governess were due to the psychological mechanism of displacement. Specifically, I think, the outbreak of complaints about girls' instruction in the 1830s, '40s and '50s displaced onto this subject the brunt of public fault-finding with the period's instructional norms. The mechanism allowed, for a time, the skirting of embarrassments and repercussions likely to attend confrontation of problems in middle- and upper-class boys' education just as the need to better prepare young men to take their place in an industrialized society was starting to be felt, but before it was widely admitted. In essence, then, the situation reproduces the sort of indirection met with by government when it was becoming apparent that upper-middle-class boys' schooling needed to undergo reform, but discussion was rerouted into debate about lower-class schooling. Now, middle-class girls' education provided the focus for diverted attentions.

As an accommodation strategy, the debate over girls' education was crude enough for hindsight to make the issues at stake seem obvious. The case involved division among contemporary commentators. Some insisted girls' curricula
be purely ornamental; these were the admirers of accomplishments, who deemed the basic purpose of a young lady's lessons was to train her in skills and graces that would distinguish her from her social inferiors who, in turn, would spend their formative years learning practical skills. Victorians advancing opposing views expressed dismay that girls' upbringing too often took a non-utilitarian turn; these held honorable industry never yet demeaned the worker. In fact, both positions reproduce the grievances about and defenses of boys' education that had been articulated sporadically since the beginning of the century. The debate about the value of accomplishments as opposed to that of a moral education was, in fact, simply the feminized equivalent of the classical versus scientific/mathematical educational argument concerning boys (Nash 8). Thus, what feminist commentators have taken to be the disabling effects of an education in accomplishments were not more gender-related than they were class-determinate. The public schools' curriculum provided no sounder a professional training for "accomplished" girls' brothers, a state of affairs I will investigate further in Chapter Six.

2. Literary Governesses

If in the 1840s and '50s the governess would have been
a slightly exotic figure at first hand to many middle-class Victorians, she was certainly a familiar one to them from their reading. Curiously, it is precisely at this historical moment, when dissatisfaction with, and/or condescension toward real governesses reached its height among the novel-reading, governess-employing upper-middle and upper classes, that women supporting themselves in this manner came into vogue as fictional heroines, and began to receive sympathetic portrayals in secondary or minor novelistic roles. It is easy to understand why the governess seems a Victorian commonplace in our own era: our impression of her ubiquity comes from the frequency with which we encounter her in nineteenth-century texts. Because of our taste in Victorian reading matter, this means we find her chiefly in fiction (or, less frequently, biography) rather than in nonfiction—memoirs, autobiography, reprinted correspondence or journalistic writings of the period. It means, moreover, that we are most apt to encounter her in belletristic fiction, not in hack-work or the propaganda literature turned out in the late 1840s and '50s for the purpose of raising funds for the GBI.

That governesses should be recurrent figures in mid-century belletristic fiction is hardly surprising. Writers of the time with literary aspirations were themselves likely

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"Wanda Neff has argued that governesses were the "most conspicuous" working women in early nineteenth-century literature (182-5)."
to have acquaintance with and, possibly, interest in the business of education since they tended to be educated people. Then again, the focus of mid-nineteenth-century fiction was often on characters from well-to-do classes who were in the position to employ governesses.

Above all, however, to make a middle-class young woman character of the sort increasingly popular in mid-century fictions seek or hold employment as a governess was the readiest route an author could take to ensure that this character fulfil incongruous expectations the Victorians brought to their light reading. A narrative needs to develop tension to maintain readers' interest. If a character is to play an important role in a story, certainly if she is to be its protagonist, then she needs to be exposed and vulnerable to the vicissitudes and impositions that build tension.

Through the early years of the century, possibilities for portraying women who exhibited the kind of heroism that would interest readers were becoming more and more limited. In late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century opera libretti, drama and novels, upper-class women or serving girls could still be portrayed moving about—geographically and/or socially—without endangering their claims to respectability.7

7This is Emily St. Aubert's situation in Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho ("in a foreign land—in a remote castle—surrounded by vice and violence" [329]), and
Late in the eighteenth century, however, the evangelical movement was beginning to propagate bourgeois values, including interest in the appearance of respectability and paternalistic protection of women. These values continued to consolidate cultural authority in the Victorian era. Development and refinement of the separate-spheres ideology in particular curtailed the ways in which women could be represented in literature while still retaining their good name. At the same time, it meant that the pool of literate Englishwomen with time to read grew, adding to the unprecedented market for fiction about women's experience.

In the Romantic period, as bourgeois values strengthened their hold on English culture, the writers of Gothic novels particularly pursued this subject matter in narratives that described young women separated from their natural parents or paternalistic guardians, then plunged into strange and frightening situations where tribulations tested their moral fiber. These modish works chiefly centered on well-bred young ladies who were upper-middle class, perhaps connected with the aristocracy, but generally not bona fide members of it. Like their eighteenth-century precursors, Gothic heroines traveled, were placed in precarious situations, and were brought into contact with

Isabella's in Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri*, to name only two examples.
menacing characters without sacrificing their claim on readers' sympathies. Unlike them, they shared many readers' middle-class backgrounds. (In this genre, servants were usually one-dimensional, stock characters, and aristocrats frequently figured as villains). Also unlike their more autonomous eighteenth-century prototypes, Romantic heroines were placed in risky situations by events beyond their control which took them out of a patriarchal figure's safekeeping (usually a father's). Although they were consequently free to encounter experiences that were untypical--therefore interesting to readers--they had no real responsibility for placing themselves in moral or physical danger.

As bourgeois culture became increasingly hegemonic, self-satisfied and rigid in the early nineteenth century, authors were left with fewer possibilities for portraying middle-class women who, unprotected by family or friends, found themselves in the strange places and/or awkward situations which make fiction interesting. In theory, Victorian young ladies were protected from upset within their family circles. The family's buffering role, one maintenance of which was construed especially as older male family members' responsibility, served as a confirmation of their adherence to genteel, moral codes of behavior, emblematized in the idea of their reputation. Now, at mid-century, English readers, many of them women, appetites
whetted by historical romance and Gothic novels, had developed a taste for fiction involving young women whose experiences bordered on the lurid. True, Scott's and Ann Radcliffe's novels featured exotic settings removed in historical period and by location from locales like those inhabited by the Manchester, Bradford or Grosvenor Square reader of the 1840s. True too that the contemporary trend in popular fiction favored up-to-date tales of life in England, whether a reader's inclination ran to the silver-fork or Newgate-novel end of the spectrum. And true a third time that the overlapping of a taste for adventure with a predilection for "modern" stories with British settings caused authors a real dilemma. In order for a middle-class young lady to have adventures of even the most minimally lurid hue in mid-century England, her family would have had to fail to guarantee her peace and reputation, its older and/or male members defaulting in one of their primary responsibilities and thereby smirching the young woman's social viability. Thus, a frustrating paradox was in operation: virtuous young ladies led dull lives which did not lend themselves to fiction-spinning; meanwhile, a young woman who had adventures that opened her to charges of questionable morals was interesting, but would not be admired—at least openly—by readers.

Authors anxious to capitalize on the popular relish for middle-class young lady characters had, therefore, to muddle
out the problem of how to provide them with adventurous experiences while continuing to preserve inviolate the impression of their gentility and good name. To purge a fictional family of its older male family members through death or disease was a useful first step since, after all, dying fathers or brothers could not really be seen as willfully letting their living relations down. Still, if this trick worked to eliminate one problem an author faced, to arrange for a daughter to go out as a governess (often subsequent to a father's or brother's death) was, for reasons we will explore, a stratagem that allowed her to meet a whole slew of expectations and requirements Victorian readers brought to bear on their novels' heroines.

3. The Subgenre That Isn't One
"This confounded tradition"

Because governess characters appear with some frequency in mid-Victorian fiction, literary scholars Inga-Stina Ewbank, Jerome Beaty and Susan Nash have considered the circumstances in which they appear and separately succumbed to the same temptation, designating a subgenre of mid-nineteenth-century writing "governess fiction." Before I discuss the figure of the literary governess in more detail,

Thackeray in an 1856 letter to Mrs. Sartoris (qtd. in Peters 178).
it seems to me necessary to address the inadvisability of this course. This section of this chapter will also provide some background for discussion of Brontë and Jane Eyre.

In Ewbank's estimation, proto-problem novels written (mostly by women) in the 1830s and '40s show the governess subgenre to best advantage (59-70). These works address matters that both Victorian and contemporary cultures seem implicitly to have deemed of limited social significance. Often they deal with domestic troubles or the vagaries of life in small and predominantly rural communities; as well, they often deal with what we, in the late twentieth century, would call "women's issues."

Written by women, usually read by women, seen as stories about personalities rather than ideas because they foregrounded social issues less explicitly than their later counterparts would, Ewbank's proto-problem novels never achieved as much esteem from contemporary readers and reviewers as did their successors. What reputation they have sustained into our own century continues to remain flimsier than that of the problem novels of the 1840s and '50s.

In identifying the apotheosis of "governess fiction" with proto-problem novels, consequently, Ewbank relegates what she chooses as the best examples of the subgenre she identifies to a place in the second or third ranks of Victorian fiction and to what must be regarded as a dead-end
tradition. Moreover she fails to explain how governess-characters in certain remarkable works written and published during or after the late 1840s--novels like *Jane Eyre*, *Vanity Fair*, *East Lynne*, *Lady Audley's Secret* and James's novella, *The Turn of the Screw*--fit into this tradition. One might ask, of what use is a category that fails to illuminate the most interesting treatments of its subject?

Ewbank's recognition of the novels of the 1830s and '40s as the purest examples of governess fiction makes her emphasis somewhat different from that of Beaty and Nash, who, as we saw in the Introduction to this study, share an approach. Both scholars join Ewbank in arguing for a distinct subgenre of Victorian governess fiction, but differ from her in making claims for *Jane Eyre* (and *Vanity Fair* as well for Nash) as its beau ideal. Doing so, Nash differs from Ewbank in placing the "crystallization" of the governess subgenre after 1847 (169). This means she makes a bolder claim for the subgenre's status because of the higher literary quality of the works included in it, and her position extends the subgenre's historical scope as well.

I am in agreement with Beaty and Nash (and probably not in disagreement with Ewbank) that *Jane Eyre* is the most important work of the Victorian period where the treatment of a governess-character is concerned. Nonetheless, I disagree with all three scholars' designation of "governess fiction" as a category for dealing with literature of the
Victorian period, regardless of what particular works one chooses to include in it. In fact, I remain unclear as to how the idea of the subgenre works here.

Ewbank's method of identifying the texts she classes in the governess-subgenre is straightforward. The subgenre consists of fiction in which the protagonist or a main character is employed as a governess. This means, however, that even the instances she holds to be representative of the subgenre's purest form in turn belong (as Nash points out) to genres as radically different as silver-fork fiction and children's didactic tales.

Beaty and Nash join Ewbank in seeing "governess fiction" as an amorphous body of work, and this raises two difficulties with all three scholars' isolation of it as a distinctive subgenre. The first of these bears on the question, What precisely is the relationship of a subgenre to a genre? Second, do Beaty, Nash and Ewbank take that arrangement into account in their schematics?

The etymology of "subgenre" indicates that two ideas underlie the concept: first, that there is a relationship between the two ("genre" and sub"genre") and, second, that the connection between the two is hierarchical (with a "sub"genre subordinate to a "genre").

Ewbank, Beaty and Nash subvert the integrity of both notions. Granted, none of the three scholars makes a case that the category "governess fiction" ought to pre-empt the
generic classifications into which particular works are already assumed to fall, as would be the case if the trio merely confused terms but really considered "governess fiction" a genre. (None of them, for example, would ask us to think about Wilkie Collins's *No Name* as a governess novel *instead of* a sensation novel on the strength of Norah's and Miss Garth's employment as governesses and Magdalen's impersonation of one.) They do see subgenres as distinct from genres, then (though Nash occasionally mixes the terms).

However, all three scholars speak of the supposed subgenre "governess fiction" as if the designation is unrelated to other applicable generic categories. (An example of this kind of thinking would be the claim that it just so happens *No Name* is subgenerically a governess novel and generically a sensation one, but that its inclusion in the one category does not convey any useful information about its inclusion in the other.) Really what these three are doing, therefore, is insisting on regarding the subgenre they identify as distinct from and unrelated to generic constructs. What they call governess fiction is thus not authentically a subgenre, since it neither depends on nor relates to the idea of genre.

Although "governess fiction" is not, properly speaking, the subgenre that Ewbank, Beaty and Nash take it for, this does not necessarily imply their grouping of certain texts
may not prove useful. Is it? If we jettison the three
scholars' terminology, do the taxonomies retained offer
useful ways of talking about the body of literature with
which they deal?

Ewbank arrives at subsidiary ways of classifying
"governess fiction" by looking at the resolutions of
individual novels. She subdivides the class into two
categories: stories where "the governess is not the heroine
and so does not marry" and others where "she is the heroine
and marries." The second, matrimonial class, she breaks
down again into narratives in which the governess marries a
member of the clergy and those in which, Cinderella-like, she
marries a gentleman (59-63).

On consideration, Ewbank's blueprint fares badly. The
governess-is-not-a-heroine-and-does-not marry category of
fiction collapses under scrutiny because of the numerous
instances where a governess in a novel is actually of
relatively minor plot significance and nonetheless does
marry as, to name only three exceptions, happens with the
woman who becomes Mrs. Weston in Emma, Miss Silver in John
Halifax (1857) and the nameless narrator of Elizabeth Grey's
Sybil Lennard (1846). In Ellen, the Teacher: A Tale for
Youth (1814), Bread Upon the Waters (1852), Ruth (1853), and
Villette (1853), a governess is the heroine and does not
marry. Then, too, under Ewbank's grouping, such radically
disparate works as Jane Eyre and Vanity Fair belong to the
same category—governess novels in which the governess heroine marries a gentleman. Yet apart from this coincidental similarity, the pair of novels and their governesses are so different as to render their connection under Ewbank's rubric of no practical use in discussing them.

For his part, Beaty is more interested in themes and less with personalities, though in the end the approaches come to the same thing. Rather than subdividing "governess fiction" on the basis of a bridegroom's profession or social standing, he divides governess novels according to whether they demonstrate "a central religious concern" or a secular one (640). Nash follows Beaty in this; she varies from him chiefly in extending his discussion, elaborating upon it with more descriptive and analytic detail and dealing with a broader spectrum of novels than he does (137-9).

As for the dividing line Beaty and Nash propose—that governess novels can usefully be considered as expressing either religious or secular concerns—of what fictional works is this not true? Do such comprehensively inclusive taxonomic criteria, applicable to all writing, advance critics' insights into the roles governesses play in literature?

In short, then, apart from the difficulty of speaking of "governess fiction" as a subgenre, there is a difficulty with speaking of "governess fiction" at all. To do so means
to impose a distinction on a heterogeneous group of writings on the basis of a shared minor detail—a character's profession. The result of scholars' efforts to deal with a disparate body of works on such a basis is, not surprisingly, that their proposed taxonomies often break down when applied to particular cases.

At the same time that I acknowledge temptation exists to use protagonists' or major characters' occupations to help inventory works of fiction, I believe that a critical scheme that elides such different fictional types as Emily Morton and Becky Sharp, authors dissimilar as Charlotte Yonge and Wilkie Collins, and incompatible views of governessing like Charlotte Brontë's and Lady Blessington's creates difficulties instead of illuminating texts.

But one very good question to which the writings of Ewbank, Beaty and Nash give rise is, What is it about the Victorian governess as she appears in fiction that encourages us to lump her many and various incarnations together in the first place? Add to this the question raised in this dissertation's first chapter with reference to the writings of Renton, Hughes and especially Poovey, and we arrive at the related question, What makes us take the supposed aggregate of literary impressions of the governess for unproblematic "fact"? It is one thing to comment on characters' occupations or their creators' preoccupations in an attempt to arrive at critical insight—-to examine, say,
representations of political personalities and parliamentary procedure in Trollope's Palliser series by way of substantiating an argument for his view of government, or to consider Dickens' treatments of courtroom proceedings in order to address his attitude toward the legal system of his day. But Trollope's books, Dickens' *Bleak House* or the hand-washing Mr. Jaggers are seldom read as their authors' artless representations of the business of government, nineteenth-century litigation or the Victorian barrister.

"Governess fiction," on the other hand, though produced without the benefit of a single author's consistent vision over the better part of a century which saw enormous changes in British life, and written by men and women who sometimes had first-hand experience of teaching and sometimes not, is taken as being more or less of a piece. To add to the curiosity of this situation, while whole chapters in Trollope and Dickens are given over to exploration of the dramas that take place on the floor and back benches of the Commons, or in the civil and criminal courts, almost no room in "governess fiction" is given over to dramas enacted over copybook exercises or the pianoforte. This, frankly, is because these latter, though they occupied a significant portion of real governesses' lives and work, offer scant material out of which to devise compelling narratives, which rely on representations of lively and suspenseful events and material that is intellectually stimulating or poignant in
order to sustain interest. I suspect that many of us, in reading *Shirley*, race through the pages that "transcribe" the essays Shirley wrote at Louis Moore's behest because we are anxious to discover instead what follows their interruption of narrative events.

Why, then, is the governess such a popular figure in mid-century fiction? In fiction of the mid-Victorian period, there were more stories with governess-protagonists than there were, say, tales of female factory workers or needlewomen. Even though (or perhaps especially because) I resist the urge to identify a particular body of work as "governess fiction," this phenomenon demands investigation. Earlier in this chapter, I gave cursory attention to the subject. In pursuit of a better understanding, I will now look at the genesis and characterization of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Thackeray's *Becky Sharp* in the three chapters that follow.
Chapter Three: Charlotte Brontë and Governessing

"Boys! I have been dining with Jane Eyre!"¹

"Miss Brontë ... is the heroine of her two most powerful novels. ... The scenery and even the incidents are, for the most part, equally direct transcriptions from reality."²

As we have seen, when Charlotte Brontë came to the public's attention as Currer Bell in 1847, nineteenth-century beliefs about governesses had already achieved some conformity in the stereotype of the pathetic governess. Owing to Brontë's temperament and also, probably, to self-fulfilling expectations raised by her own previous exposure to the stereotype, her short experience of the profession tallied with the predominant, depressing cultural cliché. Later, when biographical information about this period of Brontë's life circulated, representation of her experiences as educator further reinforced pre-existing conceptions.

To what extent did Charlotte Brontë draw on her own governessing past when she made her most famous heroine, Jane Eyre, a governess? To what extent was the choice dictated by the sort of considerations enumerated in the last chapter--which is to say, by literary considerations?

¹Thackeray is supposed to have made this exuberant declaration after meeting Charlotte Brontë when he entered the Garrick Club smoking room in late November or early December of 1849 (Huxley 68).

These are the questions that this chapter and the next address.

* * *

Novelists, particularly women novelists, who infuse the events and personalities they describe with realism, are often confounded in peculiar ways with the heroes, heroines and fictional situations they create. Consider the surprise Elizabeth Montagu declared that she felt reading *Evelina*. Although her discriminating friend Samuel Johnson had recommended the story, when Montagu took it up, she did so predisposed to think she would find its narrative and characterizations flimsy. Why? *Evelina* had been written by a young lady, and Montagu inferred from this she could, at best, discover the work would only amount to a "pretty book . . . of mere imagination."

Montagu did not suppose Fanny Burney's novel would hold her interest because, in the mid- to late eighteenth century, young ladies like *Evelina*’s author were presumed to lead sheltered lives. How could an individual uninitiated in the ways of the world invent a plot that grappled in a sophisticated, convincing manner with substantive issues or portrayed intriguing characters? As Montagu read Burney's novel, however, her estimation of book and author changed. Finished, she reported back to Johnson that her prejudices had been unfounded (Woolsey 1: 45). Apparently a young female writer whom one might expect to prove unworldly could
successfully create a fictional milieu more varied and entertaining than her (presumably) circumscribed experiences might suggest.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Elizabeth Gaskell discovered she was the object of analogous, if somewhat more tacit assumptions than those Montagu voiced about Burney. Gaskell herself resented the freedom with which people identified her with the sentiments expressed in *Mary Barton*. After the novel's publication, she complained to a correspondent that she could not move about unimpeded because she had become a public figure soon recognized and frequently accosted, and went so far as to wish in exasperation that "poor Mary Barton could be annihilated in order to end the connection in people's minds [with herself]" (qtd. in Nord 159). The genteel clergyman's wife had little in common with the working-class heroine of her first published novel; still, because in *Mary Barton* Gaskell conveyed a gritty sense of the tribulations someone like Mary might undergo, people telescoped into one persona author's and heroine's separate identities. They did so because, by this means, they could implicitly express a disbelief akin to Montagu's initial viewpoint on Burney and *Evelina*--doubt that a "lady" could accurately and insightfully report on people, incidents and emotions generally deemed beyond middle-class women's apprehension.

If it was easy to discount the possibility that Burney
or Gaskell could write convincingly about what was outside their experience, it was perhaps inevitable that Charlotte Brontë, with her Cowan Bridge education, limited social circle, isolation at Haworth and brief stint of employment as a governess, would be assumed by the Victorians to have created the fictional north-of-England governess Jane Eyre in her own image. Indeed, even before Brontë's name was associated with the pseudonymously published novel, many members of the literate public began to assume that the book had been written by a woman, and very possibly by a woman aspects of whose identity reflected her heroine's own.

The early publishing history of Jane Eyre and the public's reaction to it are notorious. Brontë published her most famous novel as the "autobiography" of a mysterious "Jane Eyre" edited by a second enigmatic figure, "Currer Bell." Of itself, neither circumstance was provocative. Fictional autobiography was an established generic convention by the 1840s, and anonymous publication nothing new. Thus, the pair of obscure names on the title page of the 1847 publication might well not have raised eyebrows, were it not for the added factor that Jane Eyre was both unconventionally racy and, in part because of this, became popular on a scale warranting a scramble to print and issue

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3For a succinct relation of the generic problems that initially beset attempts to pigeonhole the novel due to the twin "presences" of "Jane Eyre" and "Currer Bell" on the title page, see Tromley 14, 43.
three editions within six months of publication in order to meet buyers' demands.

As things eventuated, owing to coincidence, Jane Eyre speedily became the center of a maelstrom of speculation, with readers combing the text for clues to the author's identity. When approached about issuing a second edition, Brontë felt the extent of her book's previous success validated her enough as a serious writer that she dedicated the work to William Thackeray, her favorite living novelist. By chance, Vanity Fair's early numbers started to appear some months prior to Jane Eyre's publication, and its parts kept coming out each month as excitement about Jane Eyre and "Currer Bell"'s identity heightened. The coincidence fired the reading public's imagination because one of the two female protagonists of Thackeray's novel was the governess Becky Sharp. Confronted more-or-less simultaneously with two powerful novels, one subsequently dedicated to the other's author and both dealing prominently with a governess-character involved romantically with her employer, literate busybodies drew connections between the works. Primed as readers to relish outré plot twists, they decided Jane Eyre's dedication to Vanity Fair's author was a signal that the novels were in thinly veiled, contentious dialogue with each other. Jane Eyre was taken for a kiss-and-tell account by a former governess in Thackeray's household of an adulterous dalliance between herself and the now-disaffected
Thackeray, in which she portrayed herself, as Jane, in a sympathetic light and her lover as the bigamous seducer Rochester. Thackeray, for his part, was believed to counter this story in *Vanity Fair* by sketching the portrait of an opportunistic governess in Becky Sharp. Becky's character was taken as a register of Thackeray's protest that a governess he introduced into his home made or attempted to make scheming inroads on his affections and his household's tranquility.

This perfervid explication de texte for *Jane Eyre* has lost all credibility since 1847 and '48. Nonetheless, its spirit still subtly animates twentieth-century commentators, who persistently argue that the novel has a substantial autobiographical component. In recent years, this was often held to involve psychological material Brontë included subconsciously and inevitably as part of the process of composition. Commentators imply that, properly interpreted, *Jane Eyre* lends insight into Brontë that, together with biographical information about the author and her family, help us "know" the author.

Now, knowledge of the details of an author's life can certainly illuminate texts. But in Charlotte Brontë's case, the tendency has been to bring this kind of knowledge too strongly to the fore. As Elizabeth Montagu discovered, to assume consonances exist between a writer's experiences and her characters' is not always the most effective way to
approach a literary text or body of work. In instances involving Brontë, the tendency to confuse writer and heroine requires more interpretive contortion than is becoming because not only is Jane not very like what we know about Charlotte Brontë, but so much of what we know about Brontë depends on her own published accounts of her circumstances and life, or is derived from the biased, if admirable Life published by her friend, Elizabeth Gaskell. Since Brontë and Gaskell had similar agendas to further when they discussed Brontë lives and doings and were, moreover, both skilled writers of fiction, the influence their source-material has exerted on subsequent commentators is suspect as an objective rendering of Brontë's experiences and accomplishments.

Brontë first deliberately addressed herself to posterity when she took the decision to brighten and buff her sisters' tarnished moral reputations after the publishing house Smith, Elder, encouraged by Jane Eyre's runaway success, proposed the reissue of Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey with some of the Brontës' poetry in a single-volume edition. Emily's and Anne's novels had previously attracted ad feminae criticisms because they were seen as dabbling in risqué subject matter, crudely handled. Now, seizing the opportunity that Smith's publication plans offered her to rehabilitate Emily and Anne's good names, Brontë undertook to preface the new editions with a
"Biographical Notice" about her sisters. The project arose from her desire to memorialize the pair so as to reflect her understandings of them; it was an attempt to fix authoritatively an impression of both by the survivor who arguably knew them best at first-hand.

Yet perhaps, too, there was some impetus toward Smilesian self-help in Brontë's wish to imprint in readers' minds the conceptions of her sisters she wished them to have. Whether or not this was the case, Brontë's apologia for what was "unladylike" in her sisters' writings not only rationalized a certain coarseness in them about which critics complained, it also helped explain away the lack of breeding that commentators like Elizabeth Rigby complained of in her own work, notably *Jane Eyre*. By describing Emily and Anne as unworldly girls from the rural north trammeled with degenerate Branwell for a brother, Brontë by implication rationalized and mitigated her own culpability for what G. H. Lewes suggested was "Yorkshire roughness" (qtd. in Barker, *The Brontës* 613). His criticism was not unique; as Winnifrith's examination of its reception history indicates, *Jane Eyre* alone probably smirched her name quite as thoroughly as Emily's and Anne's reputations suffered from their sallies into authorship (110-38).

Whatever the motive behind Brontë's decision to write the "Biographical Notice," after her death, her friend Elizabeth Gaskell wanted to perform for her a similar
rehabilitative service. Gaskell conceived the project of researching and writing what would become the Life in order to prompt "the world [to] honour the woman as much as they have admired the writer" (Gérin, Elizabeth Gaskell 165). In other words, she did not see it as her task as biographer to strive after a pure objectivity in recording events. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Life exhibits little concern with factual reportage in some areas; actually, Gaskell deliberately chose to suppress information or consciously misrepresent it, not least because she followed the lead of her friends the Kay-Shuttleworths in giving ready credence to a dismissed Brontë servant's stories about Patrick's harsh, eccentric treatment of his wife and children, exaggerated Branwell's moral turpitude, and consciously misrepresented aspects of it. Moreover, she suppressed what her research for the book revealed to her about Charlotte's romantic attachment to married Brussels Lycée professor Constantin Héger (Maynard 13).

The decision to fictionalize aspects of Brontë's life seems not to have caused Gaskell qualms; she was not pursuing the biographer's task in the scientific spirit we have come to understand to be its nature in the late twentieth century. Then, too, Gaskell's opinion of biography as a genre was not high. She herself was profoundly averse to letting potential biographers loose on the materials of her own life (Gérin, Elizabeth Gaskell
vii). To further undermine their claims to objective reporting about the Brontës, both Brontë and Gaskell approached their biographical tasks like novelists, exhibiting more respect for the integrity of their narratives' plot structure and effects on readers than for objectivity. Both wanted to project images that would help rationalize what seemed morally problematic in the Brontës' work or dissuade others from concluding that the sisters might have been less than genteel. Despite the lack of distance and objectivity with which the pair wrote, however, later critics have been overwhelmingly influenced by their accounts. Until quite recently, Brontë legend as fixed by Charlotte Brontë and Gaskell between them had something like the mythic autonomy and authority of Wagner's Ring.

Many scholars, heirs to Brontë and Gaskell in being privy to and protective of the somewhat hieratic body of biographical material, preserved a narrowly defined status quo where Brontë lives and novels were concerned. In 1982, Annette Tromley summed up the situation, commenting that "[w]hat is lacking in much Brontë criticism is a willingness to read the novels as inherent fictions without recourse to what we know (or think we know) of their creator--without the familiar threadbare backdrop of Haworth, without the presence of Charlotte's notorious family . . ." (9). Raymond Williams agrees: "People still have to fight past
the governess to get to the Brontë sisters" (65). Non-initiates and nonconformists reluctant to accept the truth of Brontë legend have been treated dismissively. But certain feminist readings, and then the late twentieth-century popularity of skeptical, revisionist scholarship and devaluation of biographical approaches to text opened the field sufficiently to encourage considerations of Brontë subject matter which depart in tenor from Brontë's own assessments of her life circumstances and her sisters' work, or Gaskell's similar version of these.

Publication of Juliet Barker's *The Brontës* (1994) is the strongest salvo yet fired on establishment Brontë studies; it is the more effective for being a shot fired on the fold by one who, as the former curator and librarian at the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth, once seemed to be harmlessly ensconced within it. Whatever one thinks of Barker's arguments—Charlotte was self-willed and manipulative; the virtues and claims on our sympathies of Patrick, Branwell and Anne have been under-appreciated—her meticulously researched book at once unsettles received wisdom and is so thorough as to make many of its more revolutionary points difficult to dismiss. A valid complaint against the book may well be that Barker makes

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'Juliet Barker comments, for instance, on biographers' habit of pruning derogatory remarks from Charlotte's letters when they felt these "did not live up to their idealized and sanitized image" (Barker, *The Brontës* xx).
Gaskell a straw man for much of what she dislikes about prevalent views in contemporary Brontë studies; this is ungenerous treatment of a nineteenth-century biographer who never made claims to objectivity. At least Barker's critique is, however, a salutary reminder that too much of our understanding of the Brontë family has been colored by Gaskell's partisan perspective.

In the context of this thesis, it is important to recognize how influential Brontë and Gaskell between them have been on the light in which not only Brontë herself, but also governesses and their profession have been viewed. Charlotte Brontë is, without question, the historical personage best known as a private resident governess, just as Jane Eyre is the most celebrated novel to feature a governess-protagonist. It is therefore not too forceful to claim that Brontë, her heroine and Gaskell's Life have exerted what is in many respects a decisive influence over subsequent perceptions of the field and its practitioners. Moreover, this impact has been intensified by historical happenstance; after Brontë published her "Biographical Notice" and at a time roughly coinciding with Smith, Elder's publication of Gaskell's Life of Brontë, the profession declined in numbers employed and in prestige, with the result that real private resident governesses increasingly became anomalies. This meant that the majority of literate Englishmen and women were most familiar with governesses as
they were represented in print which, in turn, meant with Jane Eyre. The next chapter will examine the connection of the character Jane Eyre with the popular image of the governess. First, however, we will look at how Brontë's description of her governessing experiences correlates with and has contributed to the reification of the image of the pathetic governess.

* * *

Mary Maurice, governess sister of the man who played a key role in the founding of Queen's College, conveniently delineates what the romanticized contemporary idea of the governess's background was in 1847, before Jane Eyre and Brontë had any influence on it. Maurice writes:

[Let us picture to ourselves the family of a country clergyman. . . . The children are growing up happy members of a peaceful home, where all the charities of life are in full exercise, where each heart is bound to each, by the holiest bonds. . . . They are trained by the constant exercise of self-denial to do good to the parish in which they dwell, and they shed a living light, the reflections of the truths their father teaches. The house is one of the beautiful country parsonages, which so sweetly adorn our land, and give at once the idea of peace and repose; but the circle rapidly increasing, the utmost economy will
not suffice to meet the growing expenditure; sickness enters the dwelling, and at length it becomes painfully evident, that the elder daughters must enter upon the life of the governess, and . . . they quit the spot so much endeared to them--sisters who have never been separated before, must go out into the cold world . . . . (18-21)

The distress these sisters can expect to encounter in their lives as governesses is accentuated by implied contrast with the domestic happiness they enjoyed during the years spent in their father's parsonage.

Examined closely, Charlotte Brontë's biographical circumstances, as related by herself and Gaskell, both replicate and depart from this description in striking ways. In reality and contrary to stereotype, a relatively small proportion of English governesses actually came from parsonage families.⁵ In both Maurice's description and Brontë's life, however, we find a parsonage background, closeness among the family's daughters, a country setting, and themes of illness, self-denial and forced domestic economy. Much of what was the supposed "norm," therefore,  

⁵Kathryn Hughes synopsizes results of inquiries published in the 1848 Report of the Board of Management of the GBI, saying that "[t]he occupations of governesses' fathers . . . were, in descending order, merchant, surgeon, military or naval officer, civil/government servant, solicitor and clergyman" (28).
closely approximates Brontë's specific situation.

Where disparities exist between the norm Maurice describes and Brontë and Gaskell's pictures of a governess's background, the differences are chiefly represented as arising from peculiarities of regional setting. London-based Maurice creates a vignette consistent with an idealized view of cultivated south-of-England landscapes and mores; Brontë's Yorkshire transliteration, and especially Gaskell's, features a less genial, less clement locale and a reserved native temperament. For Maurice's "peace and repose" at the south-of-England parsonage, substitute Brontë's vision of Haworth: a village situated in a "remote district where education had made little progress, and where, consequently, there was no inducement to seek social intercourse beyond our own domestic circle" ("Biographical Notice" 359). Gaskell's Life goes further than this, slipping Gothic elements into its evocation of Patrick Brontë's house. "The grave-yard goes round the house and garden, on all sides but one," Gaskell carefully explains (Life 1: 38), and her daughter Meta's sketch of the parsonage for the second volume's frontispiece exaggerates the graveyard's oppressive encroachment, showing the reader a view only Roderick Usher would find cosy.

Especially crucial to Gaskell's account of the Brontës' background is an implicit argument about the way in which differences in regional setting have affected the character
of the men and women living in Yorkshire. The rather provincial Brontë may not have fully recognized the implications of the way her story deviated from sentimentalized criteria for the governess's past, but Gaskell, who enjoyed more and varied society, hastened to dismiss what might well seem to readers the Brontë sisters' lapses in ladylike behavior. She rationalizes their aloofness so as to prevent possible charges that they failed in womanly sympathy or the Christian impulse that the Victorians idealized in their ideology of separate spheres of activity and interest for the sexes. According to Gaskell, neither selfishness nor unconcern lay behind the Reverend Brontë's daughters' possible shirking of responsibilities in their community; instead, the biographer justified the young women's failure to perform charitable works by alluding to Yorkshiremen and women's reticent temperament: "each man relies upon himself and seeks no help at the hands of his neighbour. From rarely requiring the assistance of others, he comes to doubt the power of bestowing it" (1: 9). In place of the amity and gentle affection shared among Maurice's girls, both Brontë and Gaskell substitute an emphasis on the creative bond that linked the four Brontë children when young.

The part of the Brontë legend which pertains to Charlotte's governessing has been so extensively chronicled
as not to require more than cursory rehearsal and reappraisal here. Brontë left her father's parsonage at Haworth to assume her first professional post with the John Benson Sidgwicks of Stonegappe, near Skipton in Yorkshire. The employment was temporary in nature—fortunately for both employers and employee, since Brontë and her employers signally failed to meet each others' expectations. Brontë's share of responsibility for the difficulties stemmed from two basic areas: her impatience and discomfort with children, and affronts (real or imagined) to her sense of dignity and self-worth, these latter habitually being deflected into complaints about the children's mothers.

Brontë appears, on the whole, not to have cared for children much. In the Life, Gaskell tries to counter any such impression by insisting her friend was fascinated by Gaskell's own youngest daughter, Julia, and reports that Brontë herself mentions the girl in several letters to her. However, elsewhere in the Life, Gaskell's comments about Brontë's interaction with the four Gaskell girls suggest Brontë observed them with almost a scientific detachment

'Cf., 2: 188: "Could you manage to convey a small kiss to that dear, but dangerous little person, Julia? She surreptitiously possessed herself of a minute fraction of my heart, which has been missing ever since I saw her"; and 2: 243: "I prized the little wild-flower,—not that I think the sender cares for me; she does not, and cannot, for she does not know me;--but no matter. In my reminiscences she is a person of a certain distinction. I think hers a fine little nature, frank and of genuine promise. . . . I believe in J.'s future; I like what speaks in her movements, and what is written upon her face."
that turned, at last, into surprise at their amiability:

The little Brontës had been brought up motherless; and from knowing nothing of the gaiety and sportiveness of childhood—from never having experienced caresses or fond attentions themselves—they were ignorant of the very nature of infancy, or how to call out its engaging qualities. Children were to them the troublesome necessities of humanity, they had never been drawn into contact with them in any other way. . . .

When Miss Brontë came to stay with us, she watched our little girls perpetually; and I could not persuade her that they were only average specimens of well brought up children. She was surprised and touched by any sign of thoughtfulness for others, of kindness to animals, or of unselfishness on their part; and constantly maintained that she was in the right, and I in the wrong, when we differed on the point of their unusual excellence." (1: 183)

The meeting described by Gaskell took place long after Brontë's stints as nursery, private resident and institutional governess, and reveal her to have had very little spontaneous rapport with children despite many collective months of contact with them.

From the first, the tone Brontë took in reporting on
the doings of the Sidgwick children held out little promise that a warm relationship would develop between teacher and students. Charlotte reported to Emily, famously, "more riotous, perverse, unmanageable cubs never grew. As for correcting them, I soon quickly [sic] found out that was entirely out of the question: they are to do as they like" (Barker, The Brontës: A Life in Letters 64). The problem seemed to be half with unregenerate offspring, half with misguided mother. Brontë typically attributed to Mrs. Sidgwick partial blame for her children's unpleasant qualities. But this is only one side of the story.

Brontë's complaint seems initially to be a criticism based in professional assessment of the situation, but it is likely her disapproval of Mrs. Sidgwick issued from personal rather than professional causes. Assertion that the mother was excessively lax in dealing with her children gives way to remarks which make clear that the worst of Brontë's umbrage arose from what she took to be the mother's slights to herself, and were wholly unrelated to parental indulgence. Not long after arriving at Stonegappe, she wrote Emily:

I said in my last letter that Mrs Sidgwick did not know me. I now begin to find that she does not intend to know me, that she cares nothing in the world about me except to contrive how the greatest possible quantity of labour may be squeezed out of
me, and that to that end she overwhelms me with oceans of needlework, yards of cambric to hem, muslin nightcaps to make, and, above all things, dolls to dress. (Barker, The Brontës: A Life in Letters 64)

Frequently cited over the years as evidence for the pathos of the private resident governess's lot, these grievances seem, in fact, to have been largely based on either Brontë's ignorance, or her wilful misunderstanding of her profession. They were thus quite possibly unjustified by the terms of her residence with the Sidgwicks.

At the outset of this dissertation, I invoked Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy's work on the nursery governess to draw a distinction between the roles of the nanny and the private resident governess. What is clear, although Brontë never describes herself as a nursery governess, is that this was the function she was hired to fill at Stonegappe. Brontë's two charges, seven-year-old Mathilda and four-year-old John Benson, were of borderline-nursery and nursery age, respectively (Barker, The Brontës 310). As the girl was the elder child, and the household only accommodated one governess at a time, learning was almost certainly adjusted to the son's rather than the daughter's requirements. And though Brontë herself never explicitly spells out the precise nature of her employment, preferring to allude to her capacity generally as "governess" (with the implication
that she held the relatively prestigious post of private resident governess), Elizabeth Gaskell, with her own experience of raising four daughters, conveys the situation with better accuracy in the *Life*:

> [T]eaching very young children was anything but a "delightful task" to the Brontë sisters. With older girls, verging on womanhood, they might have done better, especially if these had any desire for improvement. But the education which the village clergyman's daughters had received, did not as yet qualify them to undertake the charge of advanced pupils. They knew but little French, and were not proficient at music; I doubt whether Charlotte could play at all. (1: 153)

Of her experience with the Whites, Gaskell says relatively bluntly that "as her definite acquirements were few, she had to eke them out by employing her leisure time in needlework; and altogether her position was that of 'bonne' or nursery governess" (1: 182).

Brontë's well-advertised Stonegappe experiences, such as having "to wipe the children's smutty noses or tie their shoes or fetch their pinafores or set them a chair" (Barker, *The Brontës: A Life in Letters* 65), routinely fell to the nursery governess's lot. Even the nightmare chore of being presented with "oceans of needlework" was, except in households exalted enough to possess both a nursery
governess and one or more nursemaids (when the latter bore the brunt of sewing responsibilities), territory that went with her job (as Gaskell makes clear). Perhaps the inexperienced Brontë did not understand what she would be required to do in the position she accepted at Stonegappe. It is also conceivable that because she obtained the post as the result of remote social acquaintance with the Sidgwick family (Barker, The Brontës 309), she misinterpreted what her relationship with her employers would be. But, though much opprobrium has been heaped upon Mrs. Sidgwick by those influenced by Brontë's complaints in letters home to Emily, it seems questionable that fault for the imperfect relations that developed between employer and employee lay largely with the former. Mrs. Sidgwick was, in any event, close to term in her fifth pregnancy when Brontë joined the family and, being moreover "much occupied with her invalid father" at the time, is unlikely to have had leisure or energy to deal with her two youngest children much herself (Barker, The Brontës 311).

Possibly exacerbating what she regarded as unfeeling treatment, but known to Brontë before she accepted work at Stonegappe, was the additional circumstance that she was hired as what was known as a "holiday" governess. Brontë worked for the Sidgwicks to fill in for a Miss Hoby, the Sidgwick's regular nursery governess, who was absent on leave for some three months (Barker, The Brontës 309, note
Because Miss Hoby's leave came in the late spring and early summer months, it may well have been that Mrs. Sidgwick saw her employee's stopgap position as making her more of a general supervisor of her children's warm-weather activities than a formal instructor.

In fact, as indicated by the direction in which her complaints about the Sidgwicks to Ellen Nussey and Emily tended, menial work like sewing was not really the root of Brontë's discontent. Household mending was a much more genteel chore than many she had already taken up or would later, phlegmatically, in Haworth. At home, working on behalf of her own family, she could report cheerfully to confidantes about, or was seen by friends pursuing a round of, duties that included blacking grates, ironing, making beds and cooking. All these were chores which, in the servants' organizational hierarchy in a well-to-do household, would regularly devolve onto lesser menials even than the nursery governess.

What seems really to have troubled Brontë at Stonegappe was a combination of three things which she seems to have consistently regarded as irritants throughout her unmarried adult life: children, a woman who was neither a close acquaintance nor a family member placed in a position of authority over her, and a rigorous schedule set her to

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7E.g., her experiences with women who do not act the part of friends (as Margaret Wooler of Roe Head did), such as Madame Héger or Mrs. White.
conduce entirely to another person's or other people's convenience. Obviously an individual who objected to this trio of provocations was radically unsuited to pursue governessing as a profession.

Whether because she misunderstood the nature of her employment, or simply because she rebelled against female impositions on her, Brontë was not only unhappy at Stonegappe, she was also, from the Sidwicks' standpoint, a semi-catastrophic hire. In speaking of the nanny at the beginning of this study, I observed that rude good health and a cheerful disposition were two of the foremost criteria of her fitness for her work. According to Mrs. Sidgwick's report, however, her governess frequently took to her bed for the day (Barker, *The Brontës* 311). If her employer's description of her as the possessor of "a most unhappy difficult, temper [sic]" and being prone to take offense where none was meant (Barker, *The Brontës* 312) was accurate, her disposition left a good deal wanting.

Brontë attempted private governessing again in March of 1841. This was the first and only occasion when she was technically what her sister Anne was for several years with the Robinsons at Thorpe Green--a private resident governess. Brontë's experience in this capacity lasted roughly nine months.

On the second occasion of her employment in a household, Brontë was responsible for the six-year-old son
and eight-year-old daughter of the Whites of Upperwood House, Rawdon, in a village located between Leeds and Guiseley in Airedale. The household was less grand than the Sidgwicks' had been: John White was a Bradford manufacturer. On the other hand, while Brontë now found her charges "wild and unbroken," she also declared them tentatively to be "apparently well disposed," evidently a moral cut above the Sidgwick youngsters (Barker, The Brontës: A Life in Letters 89).\footnote{It is worth noting, perhaps, that these comments come in a letter to Ellen Nussey, with whom Brontë was frequently more circumspect in her observations, and less acerbic, than she was when corresponding with Emily. The assessments of the Sidgwick children that I cite come from Brontë's correspondence with the latter.}

Nonetheless, before her first month of employment with the Whites was over, Brontë requested leave to spend a restorative weekend with Ellen Nussey. Far from happy even under improved professional circumstances, she also wrote her aunt before the year was out, pressing Miss Branwell to consider the idea of helping to fund a small school where Charlotte and her sisters would make up the faculty and where, presumably, no one would be in a position to wound Brontë's easily piqued pride.

As before, however, Brontë was disposed to find fault with her female employer. Both class-conscious and feline enough to censure Mrs. White for assuming airs Brontë felt she could not successfully carry off, she commented in a May
1841 letter to her old friend, Ellen Nussey:

Well can I believe that Mrs W has been an exciseman's daughter—and I am convinced also that Mr W's extraction is very low—yet Mrs W talks in an amusing strain of pomposity about his & her family & connexions & affects to look down with wondrous hauteur on the whole of "Tradesfolk" as she terms men of business—I was beginning to think Mrs W—a good sort of body in spite of all her bouncing, and boasting—her bad grammar and worse orthography—but I have had experience of one little trait in her character which condemns her a long way with me—After treating a person on the most familiar terms of equality for a long time—If any little thing goes wrong she does not scruple to give way to anger in a very coarse unladylike manner—though in justice no blame could be attached where she ascribed it all—I think passion is the true test of vulgarity or refinement. (Barker, *The Brontës: A Life in Letters* 91)

The criticism very quickly resolves along lines that suggest Brontë is defensive over what she perceives as an unwarranted attack on herself, to whom no blame could justifiably attach. It is clearly being treated as an employee rather than a lady on "familiar terms of equality"
Perversely, given her distaste for what she took to be Mrs. White's pretensions, Brontë's thinking on matters of caste is not consistent. She associated one of the more satisfying moments of her residence at Stonegappe with the idea of Mr. Sidgwick's "gentlemanliness; alternately, in censuring her Upperwood House employer, Mrs. White, she ridicules the woman's attempt to lay claim to a genteel pedigree and criticizes her lack of refinement. Yet, on the whole, Brontë preferred life at Upperwood House to her grander situation at Stonegappe because, at least in happier moments, she felt her female employer was treating her as a social equal.

Moreover, Brontë probably preferred her post at Upperwood House at least in part because the White children were older than the little Sidgwicks, and very likely more thoroughly socialized as adults. Brontë was, as Gaskell observed, temperamentally better suited to the work of a private resident governess than she was to hold a nursery governess's post, and though the White children were of nursery age, they were still older than the Sidgwick children.

Another factor influencing Brontë's judgments about her two jobs may have been the changed status that went with teaching slightly older children at the Whites'. There, in contrast with her time with the Sidgwicks, the terms of her
employment more closely approximated those of a private resident governess. Although Brontë herself refers to both her stints of employment as if they involved comparable work, they would have been minimally different in kind, and probably involved slightly different expectations on the part of both employers and employee. The imprecision Brontë cultivated in her letters and reminiscences to friends has had the effect of veiling these minor distinctions, and has therefore led to much stigmatizing of the Sidgwicks by Brontë biographers, beginning with Gaskell. In a more general way, Brontë's evident reluctance to refer to herself as a nursery governess has also promoted the pathetic stereotype that attached to the idea of the private resident governessing profession through much of the nineteenth century, and with which it is still lumbered today.

* * *

In truth Charlotte Brontë, though well equipped by wide reading, imagination and ambition to achieve the literary distinction that, as Frank Turner has it, made her one of "the major figures of British intellectual life ... active ... between 1825 and 1865" (40), was poorly constituted to be a governess and was an inadequate one. Her repertoire of the popular "accomplishments" of her day was, by normative standards, deficient. Moreover, she was inexperienced. In light of this, it is important to remember that part of the reason she was able to acquire her first position (with the
Sidgwick's) was that it was temporary. The Sidgwick's were not, in finding a substitute for their regular employee, under compulsion to canvass for a governess whose skills and gifts would approximate whatever lofty ideal the family pocketbook could accommodate. They simply required a teacher as a stopgap. Even so, Brontë did not prove a particularly satisfactory one. She was proud. She was either constitutionally weak, or inclined to neurasthenia. Intellectualism was not a requisite of her profession on the level at which she practiced it and, in fact, could often prove a detriment. Add to this Charlotte's intolerance for children and the diffidence she displayed around the majority of people who did not belong to her parsonage household or share with her an acquaintanceship of long standing and it is easy to see why her sojourns with the Sidgwick's and the Whites proved unhappy for everyone involved.

Charlotte Brontë's experiences, of course, were not singular; many governesses found themselves unhappy, poorly paid and badly treated in the homes in which they were employed. But these women, as a rule, were those who, like Brontë, were inadequately equipped, either professionally or temperamentally, to enter on a teaching career and therefore unable to be selective about the situations they accepted. The fact is that Brontë's appeal to prospective employers as a governess was significantly more tenuous than scholars,
concerned as they are with her literary achievements, have recognized.

Then again, as middle-class Yorkshire employers, the Sidgwicks were neither aristocratic nor wealthy enough to entice first-rate governesses into their employ. Proficient candidates for employment tended to gravitate toward situations in London, or take places with families that maintained a London base of operations for the Season.

Fortunately for herself and, as Muriel Spark points out (13-20), for potential employers and children who might have come her way had she remained in the private resident governessing profession, financial necessity was eased in Charlotte Brontë's case by success as a novelist. Here Brontë was able, at last, to get her own back on the households where she felt she had not been adequately appreciated by transforming them into unprepossessing materials for fiction, and representing the governess figures about whom she wrote as admirable women in a refiguration that carried over to her autobiographical comments, and colored Gaskell's biography.

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At the outset of this chapter, I suggested that biographers of Charlotte Brontë have tended to confuse certain aspects of her governessing experiences with elements of her novels, with Jane Eyre, in particular, being relevant in this context. (Jane Eyre is, of course, the
only one of Charlotte Brontë's novels to deal with private resident governessing in any depth; elsewhere her novels involve only tangential treatments of private governessing [like Mrs. Pryor's horror-story in Shirley], or institutional instruction.)

Unquestionably, elements of Brontë's life fed story elements of *Jane Eyre*. The unfortunate Sidgwicks, her first employers, seem to have been partially transmogrified—unflatteringly—into the Reed family. The indifference Brontë complains of in Mrs. Sidgwick's treatment of her may have its partial counterpart in Mrs. Reed's emotionally aloof or cool reactions to Jane. Mrs. Reed's son John can certainly be described by the adjectives Bronte used to sketch the little Sidgwicks' personalities—"riotous," "perverse," and "unmanageable." Like Mrs. Sidgwick, Mrs. Reed fails to recognize the shortcomings of her indulgent mode of parenting. Given this, it must have given Brontë satisfaction to write into *Jane Eyre* the mother's deathbed admission of misguided management of her family in the days before Jane was exiled to Lowood. And what Hanson has referred to as the one verifiable "fact" of Bronte's Stonegappe employment also finds its way into her imaginative construction of Jane's early life. On one occasion there a Bible was pitched at her (70; Barker, The Brontës 312), an incident reminiscent of the one which precipitates Jane's coup d'état against Reed authority in
the novel and her eventual removal to boarding school.

The Whites seem to have fared slightly better in the translation to fiction than did the family at Stonegappe. The pretentiousness of the Brocklehurst ladies is perhaps an echo of the "pomposity" about "family & connexions" and the "hauteur" towards "Tradesfolk"/ men of business that Brontë associated with Mrs. White.

Like any fully characterized heroine, however, Jane Eyre neither springs fully constituted from the imagination of her creator nor is derived wholly from her author's personal experience. As with Angrian heroines like Elizabeth Hastings, she derives from a blending of literary precedent, "real" incident and reaction to it, and anecdotal material. In Chapter Five, a glance at Thackeray's Becky Sharp and that governess's antecedents reinforces one's sense of the many ingredients that go into characters' invention. But first, we need to investigate further Brontë's desire to dissociate herself from Jane Eyre.

*   *   *

The confusion of Brontë herself with Jane, her heroine, was anathema to the author in her lifetime. After Brontë's death, several of her literary friends--interestingly, female ones--rallied round to dispel the notion that the first novel Brontë published had a strong autobiographical flavor. In her obituary notice of Brontë, for instance, Harriet Martineau points out that although "Jane Eyre was
naturally and universally supposed to be Charlotte herself; . . . she always denied it" (qtd. in Allott 303). In the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Gaskell attributes to Martineau a recollection that Charlotte supposedly confided to the latter about a moralizing lesson she had set out to teach her sisters. According to this, Charlotte, Emily and Anne had been discussing their various writing projects together on one occasion in 1846 or early '47, as was their habit, and it became clear to Charlotte that Emily and Anne had decided to portray the heroines of what would become *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* as physically attractive women. The anecdote, as Gaskell relates it, allegedly reveals an aspect of what Henry James would have called the *donnée* of *Jane Eyre*:

[Charlotte] once told her sisters that they were wrong—even morally wrong—in making their heroines beautiful as a matter of course. They replied that it was impossible to make a heroine interesting on any other terms. Her answer was, 'I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours.' Hence "Jane Eyre," [sic] said she in telling the anecdote: 'but she is not myself, any further than
that.' (2: 9-10)\footnote{
Gaskell is being somewhat disingenuous here, as Brontë herself indicated that some of Jane's experiences—even some Gaskell herself describes (like the famous book-hurling episode)—were based on her own.}

The disavowals that Charlotte and Jane resembled one another made consistently by Brontë, Martineau and Gaskell were all aimed, with no very complete success, at stemming the threatening tide of innuendo that Brontë had behaved in any unladylike way during her lifetime. Danger to her reputation lay, of course, in the fact that, in a fictional context, her best-known heroine, Jane Eyre, did.
Chapter Four: Jane Eyre

"What a reverse, in the space of a few months! An orphan!

Your inheritance lost!"

Peter Coveney has suggested that Jane Eyre was possibly the first English heroine "to be given, chronologically at least, as a psychic whole" (105). While I disagree with this statement—where, for example, does it leave Moll Flanders?—it is nonetheless insightful. Claims for historical precedence aside, it is shrewd both for what it implies and where it remains reticent: Coveney indicates Brontë shows continuities between Jane's childhood and adult experiences, while he avoids calling her novel a Bildungsroman. To see that continuities mark Jane's progress from girlhood to marriage and motherhood without drawing conclusions about the novel's genre is astute because, while a Bildungsroman traces aspects of a hero's or heroine's progress over the course of a novel, as Jane Eyre does, it also gives evidence that, over time, this individual changes significantly in terms of his or her emotional, intellectual and/or artistic development, which Jane does not. In fact, one of the remarkable aspects of Brontë's story is that it shows a pattern of continuity which ought, by rights, either to lead to its heroine's

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ruin, or force a change in her character. Instead, this heroine's intransigence proves to be the making of her.

Georgian and early Victorian literature abound in child characters who exhibit a wide range of moral behavior. In almost all of them (with the exception of certain sorts of pornography), youngsters with reprehensible habits meet unhappy ends. Consider, for example, one of the most popular children's books of the first half of the nineteenth century, a work whose first volume was printed in its seventeenth edition a year after *Jane Eyre*'s publication. Ponderously entitled *The History of the Fairchild Family; or, The Child's Manual, Being a Collection of Stories Calculated to Show the Importance and Effects of a Religious Education*, Mary Sherwood's episodic three-decker recounts the stringent methods employed by Mr. and Mrs. Fairchild to raise their children as virtuous Christians. In perhaps its best-known episode, Mr. Fairchild takes them to see the body of a fratricide where it hangs in a gruesome state of decay. The trip points a warning: if the trio of young Fairchilds continue to quarrel in the nursery, the corpse's end may well be theirs.

\[\text{According to F. J. Harvey Darton, the grandson of one of Sherwood's publishers and her biographer (The Life and Times of Mrs. Sherwood [1771-1851], from the Diaries of Captain and Mrs. Sherwood. [London: Wells, Gardner, Darton and Co., 1910]), "[d]uring its vogue . . . it was perhaps as widely read . . . as any English book ever written for children." Darton is quoted in the entry for the three 1840s volumes of *The Fairchild Family* listed in The Osborne Collection Catalogue 1: 301.}\]
Sherwood possessed a strong Calvinist bent, so The Fairchild Family's adherence to no-nonsense principles was strict. Unquestionably the story's nineteenth-century succès d'estime has struck an unsettling chord with twentieth-century readers; Sherwood's biographer F.J. Harvey Darton commented in 1910 that the tale was "as completely ridiculed, and as honestly condemned by child-lovers, as any English book written for children." But equally, he admits, it was probably "as widely read" as any other, too;¹ further, unlike later readers (for whom editorial changes were made), mid-century Victorians tended unhesitatingly to regard the senior Fairchilds' educative techniques as consistent with the actions of loving parents. Extreme measures in child-rearing and education, whether portrayed in literature (like the young Fairchilds' trip to view a decomposing body), or tangible (e.g., Keate's birchings at Eton), did not disturb many men and women deeply so long as they promoted the desired long-term result: behavior guaranteeing an orderly society on earth and the soul's eventual promotion to heaven. English bookbuyers of juvenile literature responded to evangelically inspired child-rearing philosophies well into Victoria's reign; demand for the Fairchild saga spurred the issue of reprints through most of the century and inspired imitation.

¹Darton is cited in The Osborne Collection Catalogue 1: 301.
Of course, one cannot assume on the basis of Sherwood's appeal to the early Victorians and our own tendency to recoil from many of its features that children and parents in the early decades of the nineteenth century were necessarily different from their modern-day successors. What may reasonably be assumed, however, is that the ideals mainstream culture represents as desirable for children's behavior have changed. Nowadays, child protagonists in Western culture are expected to demonstrate more feisty self-reliance than was held appropriate a century-and-a-half ago. Having grown up familiar with a different norm, we therefore have to exert conscious effort to achieve what J. G. Herder termed Einfühlen—a vision of the past that refrains from superimposing anachronistic glosses on it.

The Fairchild Family helps us recapture a relatively unalloyed sense of what early nineteenth-century reaction to literary incidents involving children, transgression and punishment were likely to be. As I remarked in Chapter One, throughout the century editors made nips and tucks to palliate its grislier aspects and accommodate bookbuyers growing increasingly squeamish about graphic and unpleasant content in children's reading matter. Because the story was not once, but repeatedly recalibrated, the changes made index changing tolerance-levels in popular taste. For instance, a 1902 edition edited by Mary Palgrave cut altogether Sherwood's notorious scene with the gibbet and
decomposing corpse.'

But the bowdlerizing was far from wholesale. If putrefaction came by three-quarters of the way through the period to be regarded as excessively strong preventive medicine to dose out in mainstream didactic children's literature, consider one episode let stand. In 1848's seventeenth edition, which became Part One, young Henry Fairchild filches an apple from a tree his father has declared off limits. Henry subsequently lies to Mr. Fairchild about the apple's disappearance, but the wise father is not fooled; he catches Henry out in his falsehood, sentencing him to a punitive spell of confinement (62-68).

Because the nature of Henry's come-uppance parallels Jane Eyre's incarceration in the red-room and the two texts were published at more or less the same time, the two incidents make an interesting pair. Equally fascinating are the contrary responses the scenes evoked from readers.

So stoically did the nineteenth century take Henry's

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¹The 1902 edition omits the prayers and hymns, "much of the moralizing," and the gallows chapter, among other deletions.

²Moldering corpses may have been rooted out of mainstream children's literature, but they found a home, along with blood, mayhem and general horrors, in the inexpensive Penny Dreadfuls young people tended to buy for themselves.

³Of course, Jane Eyre is not intended as pedantic fiction in the mold of The Fairchild Family and its message is leveled at adult readers; its lessons are subversive, where Sherwood's reinforce societal expectation.
punishment that, to date, I have been unable to find any critic troubled by the measures taken to correct him. One might suppose on the basis of this tacit acceptance of the terms of his punishment that Jane's demeanor at Gateshead and Lowood would earn critics' disapproval. Her displays of frustration with, and anger against Mrs. Reed, and her wilful, anti-social temperament more generally, would have been far more sensationallay "wrong" by ordinary Victorian standards than Henry's apple-thievery and subsequent fibbing, which are practically set pieces in contemporary literature about boys' childhood experiences. For her part, in finding fault with the sorts of shortcomings she sees in Jane, Mrs. Reed does no more than agree with the writer of a "Report on the Treatment of Lunatics" in The Quarterly Review's June 1844 number, who states that "premature knowledge"--precociousness--in a child is less becoming than any degree of ignorance (9). "I was a precocious actress in her eyes," Jane specifically remarks (21). Clearly, even she recognizes why Mrs. Reed might dislike her, admitting that "she sincerely looked on me as a compound of virulent passions, mean spirit, and dangerous duplicity" (21).

Contemporary reviews ought, then, to echo Elizabeth Rigby's assessment of Jane Eyre (without, perhaps, its vituperative tone), by insisting with it that young Jane is excessively "proud" and "ungrateful too" because while "[i]t pleased God to make her an orphan, friendless, and
penniless—yet she thanks nobody, and least of all Him, for
the food and raiment, the friends, companions, and
instructors of her helpless youth for the care and education
vouchsafed to her" (173).

But, oddly, Rigby's distaste for the child proved an
aberration. Jane's appearance on the literary scene in
October 1847 was greeted by an almost universal outpouring
of sympathy for her and outrage over her treatment by the
Reeds that shifted blame for Jane's share of the uncivil
conduct manifested by everyone at Gateshead onto one or more
members of her adoptive family. The Spectator absolves her
for her angry reprisals against them, commenting that

At first we see her as an orphan, dependant upon a
rich aunt by marriage, and subject to the bad
treatment of a poor ill-favoured relation. Her
temper is soured by the oppression of grown-up
people and the tyranny of children . . . . (1074).

Likewise, both The Atlas and The Athenaeum excuse her
contributions to what today we would characterize as her
"dysfunctional" relationship with the Reeds. In the latter,
the critic Henry Chorley speaks of her as "thrown upon the
protection—or, to speak correctly, the cruelty—of
relations living in an out-of-the-way corner of England; who
neglect, maltreat, chastise, and personally abuse her"
(1101). The Atlas's reviewer unaccountably forgets
altogether about the Reed children, and sees their mother as
the culpable contender in what is essentially a one-on-one battle of wills with her ward. He notes Jane is

[o]utwardly adopted but inwardly repudiated by a hard, unfeeling woman, her aunt, who outrages the affections of the child, and would fain crush her spirit. The little girl turns at times against her oppressor; and resistance strengthens the hatred and stimulates the cruelty of the bad woman. (719)

Again strangely, amidst this outpouring of sympathy for Jane and contumely against the Reeds, the one truly horrifying scene at Gateshead, John's assault on his cousin that culminates in his throwing a heavy volume of Bewick's *History of British Birds* at her, is not mentioned by reviewers. Here is the one authentic incident of abusive treatment at Gateshead that cannot be gainsaid—unless jesuitically to doubt its occurrence at all and take it for Jane's fabrication. Apart from this, however, Jane's interpretation of events and others' feelings entirely shapes the narrative and readers' perceptions of them. The circumstance that we hear Jane's side of events from Jane herself, recalling her childhood perspective at ten years old from a removal of roughly fifteen years, is completely unremarked (although, across the Atlantic, Poe was even then busy setting readers chilling lessons about the unreliability of first-person narrators). As it is, Jane
herself, if she does not regret the troublesomeness her childhood gave others, can at least demonstrate a less partisan standpoint on it than many critics. Still speaking of the Reeds, she comments,

If they did not love me, . . . as little did I love them. They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathize with one amongst them; . . . a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgment . . . .

(19)

This glimpse of herself that Jane gives is of one who (the participial verb form tell us) habitually cherishes indignation and feels contempt of her adoptive family's judgment. If we believe her, the little girl seems to be upholding her own part of the feud with the Reeds, however much, at other times, she denies her responsibility for the hostilities.

Contemporary reviewers overlooked all this. Taken as a whole, the nature of their responses to Jane's punishment and to Henry Fairchild's would make one intimate that the punishment for wrongdoing Jane suffered was extraordinary in comparison with the likes of Henry's. But in Sherwood's story, the Fairchild boy, who is "between six and seven" years (1) to Jane's ten, is left alone, without food, from the time his father discovers his crime early in the morning
until after darkness falls that night. This is a far longer period than the few late-afternoon or early evening hours Jane does penance in the red-room. Moreover, unlike Jane, Henry is shut away in an isolated room in his parents' house, remote from its inhabited regions, so that no one can hear his cries and crying—both of which he indulges considerably to no effect. Jane, in contrast, has hysterics and is immediately attended on by Bessie and Abbot, her Aunt Reed's servants, and visited (albeit with an unhappy outcome) by Aunt Reed herself.

Why, then, did critics greet the narrative of Henry's punishment with indifference and Jane's with outrage? Though Brontë's literary reputation far eclipses Sherwood's, the division cannot be due to negligible authorial talent on the part of the latter. She was a seasoned writer perfectly capable of appealing to her audience, as her prolific body of work and her stories' sales figures demonstrate. And unquestionably this story in particular appealed: we have

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The punishment assigned Jane was not unusual by contemporary standards (cf., Lucy 78).

At this point, Mrs. Reed extends her punishment, but the additional time she must stay shut away is only an hour.

The entry for "Sherwood, Mary Martha Butt" in Volume 1 of The Osborne Collection Catalogue reads: She wrote about three hundred and fifty books and tracts . . ., and perhaps stood first among the moral writers of the period as the sternest mentor of the faults and failings of childhood" (298). Despite her stern Calvinistic streak, The Fairchild Family was popular enough to run through some seventeen printings within a year of its initial publication.
seen how quickly *The Fairchild Family* ran through multiple printings.¹

Were the responses varied because the intended audiences for the two stories were different? As its full title indicates, *The Fairchild Family* was intended as juvenile literature. But the story was also read carefully by adult reviewers and editors anxious to predict its effect on adults. After all, it would be adult consumers who would buy the expensively bound volume, who might well "vet" the story for young readers, or who stood otherwise apt to become acquainted with it while reading it aloud with children. It seems unreasonable to assume the same kind of audience who complained of Jane's treatment were going to endorse Henry's fate as a lesson to young people, particularly in an era when children's stories were being rendered more civilized--or insipid, depending on viewpoint--in an effort to squelch their potential for disturbing the young.

A third possible explanation for the different responses is that because Henry is a little boy and Jane is "only" a girl, Victorian sexism elicited pity for Jane's situation but only indifference for Henry's. The unrelentingly instructive Fairchild saga itself, however,

¹Mary Sherwood's popularity is further attested to by the fact that a London publisher approached her rather than vice versa about providing a sequel to what became Part One of *The Fairchild Family*. 
suggests the inadequacy of this explanation.

In *The Fairchild Family*, hypocritical and disobedient Augusta Noble's tale, like the episode involving Henry's punishment, weathered decades of editorial snippings and substitutions intact; one is hard pressed, therefore, to suppose this anecdote, any more than the other, offended sensibilities. Haughty little Augusta chronically engages in annoying pranks. At last, however, poetic justice dictates the wages of her sin: ignoring repeated admonitions not to play with fire, the girl is horribly incinerated. Within *The Fairchild Family*, no one sheds a tear. Outside it, I can find no critic who remonstrates that the penalty exacted by fate (or Sherwood) is too extreme, or that justice ought properly to be visited on the inattentive, indulgent and/or cowed grown-ups who people Augusta's small world. Augusta's unbewailed departure offers mute testimony that Victorian double standards for the sexes did not mitigate the punishments authors could, with impunity, visit on vexing little fictional girls.

Victorian sexism, in fact, *should* have colored critics' responses to Jane more than it seems to have done, and not with the effect of excusing her conduct. In theory, prevailing double standards should really have spurred

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"Some neighborhood censure, it is true, is directed toward her governess and mother. Augusta's background is blamed for her bad behavior, but, ultimately, unlike Jane, she is still held accountable for her conduct. Augusta's story is told in Sherwood on pages 149-56."
complaint that Jane's transgressions were not more rigorously chastised, or that sterner retribution should be visited on a girl of her cast of character than the like meted out to Henry Fairchild. As we saw in Chapter One, early in the nineteenth century it was felt to be legitimate for boys to indulge in some limited testing of the bounds of adult authority as part of their preparation to think and act independently as men who would transact business in the world. Recall *Emile* and its influential status; remember that it is an important part of Rousseau's educational scheme that his boy-pupil not even recognize authority. On the other hand, Rousseau's expectations for girls are constrictive; they are to be gentle, docile and obedient and, consequently, his advice is

> they should be inured betimes to bear the abridgment of their liberty . . . . They will be slaves during their whole lives to a continual and most rigid restraint, namely, that of decency and good manners: They should be therefore accustomed betimes to a restriction of their will, to the end that habit may render easy to them. (2: 197)

Seen in this light, one of the strongest subtextual implications of both Henry Fairchild's punitive experience, and Jane's, is that they are instances of transgression and reprisal intended to "educate" the two characters in properly gendered conduct.
In *The Fairchild Family*, Henry's disobedience re-enacts Eve's role in the Fall: he steals and eats forbidden fruit, lies about doing so, and is punished by a stern father. Henry's punishment generally, and its terms in particular, are a rite of passage that reconstitute him. Where once he behaved in an inappropriate, "feminine" manner, he emerges chastened into an "appropriately" masculine new stoicism from the isolated room where he was locked in retribution. Viewed in this light, it is interesting to note that in another episode in Sherwood's story, Augusta Noble also pilfers apples--this time from her ineffectual governess. Augusta escapes immediate punishment for this particular transgression (97-8) with its boyish associations, but with poetic justice, the masculine, Promethean crime of playing with fire ultimately visits retribution on her.

At Gateshead, Jane, on the other hand, behaves in what

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12 Henry's sister, Lucy, draws attention to this similarity the evening before he takes one of them, commenting "the devil may tempt you to take one of them, as he tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit" (63).

13 One must be careful, however, not to make too much of this gender-bending behavior and its correction from our twentieth-century perspective. After all, the six-year-old boy would not even have undergone the masculine rite of passage of being measured for long pants, and *The Fairchild Family* anticipates machismo-defining muscular Christianity by more than half a century. The floods of tears he sheds during the long hours of hungry punishment do not mark the child as effeminate; they just show a tendency that, from Sherwood's standpoint and that of many of her readers, required early correction.
is a typically "boyish" manner in the context of early Victorian fiction by engaging in a physical scuffle and speaking out precociously. As a result of her quarrel with John and Aunt Reed, she is punished not by a paternal equivalent of a heavenly father (like Mr. Fairchild), but by her weak-natured female guardian (Mrs. "Reed") and female servants. Rather than experiencing banishment to Henry's attic chamber, she is shut away in the "red-room," at once suggestive, with its invocation of the Scots word "redd" ("to clean"),\(^4\) of traditionally gendered women's work and of female biology (specifically, menstrual blood). She is oppressed and suffocated by her incarceration in a place that, in a womblike, over-determined parody of "woman's sphere," at once figures her as woman and child, and contains, restricts and literally sickens her. Even when she cries out in protest at her victimization, she is not delivered, but rather has enjoined on her the stricture that she will be freed only when she demonstrates "perfect submission and stillness" (21) of the sort nineteenth-century antifeminist writers like Sarah Ellis declared to be ladylike.

Unlike Henry, Jane is not successfully transformed by the attempt made to reconstitute her into conformity with conventional gender construction. That confinement in no

\(^4\)The word used in this way was almost certainly familiar to Bronte both from her reading of Walter Scott and from its currency in Yorkshire dialect.
way amends her as is made clear when later, incarcerated at Lowood Institution, she explains to Helen Burns "I must resist those who punish me unjustly" (49). In an educational context, then, Henry Fairchild, the little boy, learns the coercive lesson set him about transgressive gender behavior. Stubbornly, Jane refuses indoctrination; rather, her interactions with others are designed to teach them a lesson: when present, she will prove a dissident, nonconformist element in their midst. In a manner of speaking, therefore, it is unnecessary to talk of Jane "becoming" a governess; she has never really been anything else.

The question remains: If Jane is unappealing as a child—if, in a very real sense and one that requires further investigation, she is never really a "child" at all—why did Victorian readers and professional critics (like Chorley) exonerate her conduct?

The answer, I think, can be approached by looking back ten years from Jane Eyre's publication to 1837 when, in Oliver Twist, Dickens anticipated Brontë in testing early Victorians' tolerance for a fictional child's transgressive behavior. Just as Jane stirred up dissention at Gateshead and Lowood, so Oliver broke workhouse rules and incited riot by asking for a forbidden second portion of gruel. Like Jane, Oliver was intended to be a character who appealed to readers; the authors creating both characters set out
deliberately to ensure that their transgressive children's "misbehavior" did not irritate. Dickens frustrated the possibility by surrounding Oliver with characters of a coarseness which contrasted with his fine-tuned sensibilities and by making his "crime" of supposed impudence inoffensive; Brontë did likewise with Jane. Dickens invests his scene with a disarming blend of pathos and humor; Brontë is less deft at conveying emotional nuance through tonal shadings, but ultimately achieves a very similar effect. She can do this because the trump card both authors play to win readers' sympathy is that neither child is associated with a loving family: Oliver is a foundling; Jane's parents are dead.

* * *

If the sentimental account of the orphan was almost overdrawn by 1879 or '80, when W.S. Gilbert sent up paterfamilias Major-General Stanley as an "orphan-boy" whose parentless condition reduced Penzance's pirates to tears, there was considerable emotional capital in the concept of orphanhood at the beginning of the century. Nina Auerbach remarks that in the early to mid-Victorian period, the idea of the orphan in literature carried with it an aura of "winsome fragility" (Auerbach, Romantic Imprisonment 58). In Oliver Twist's case, aura and characterization mutually reinforce each other: the notion of winsome fragility makes sense in the context of what we see of Oliver's
vulnerability of character. The adjectives "winsome" and "fragile" seem radically inappropriate, however, when applied to Brontë's pint-sized pugilist, Jane.

Nevertheless, as Brontë may well have surmised, this disjunction between image and reality did not signify in practical terms. As stereotype, the evocative impact of the idea of orphanhood alone was powerful enough, even without substance, to generate a sympathetic response from readers. The Reeds and Brocklehursts of Jane's childhood may have been too insentient to succumb to the spell her orphan status cast, but the "aura" worked predictable magic on readers and reviewers. At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted the remarks three Victorian critics made about Jane as a child. Each of their reviews of the novel mentions her orphanhood. Nor are these anomalous. A significant number of the excerpts in Miriam Allott's *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* follow suit, showing that contemporary reviewers readily queued up in expressing compassion for a character who probably would have seemed as vexatious and self-willed to them as *The Fairchild Family*'s Augusta Noble had she been presented as living with one or both of her parents.

Just as Charlotte Brontë invokes the cultural paradigm of the orphan in order to draw on its pathetic associations, so too, in the Thornfield section of the novel, she relies on governessing's association with pathos
to mobilize readers' sympathy for an adult Jane. In both cases, Brontë could anticipate that readers would bring impressions formed by exposure to cultural stereotypes to bear on her text. But in neither case does Brontë's representation match the stereotype so as to justify the associations usually made. Where Jane's orphanhood elicited sympathy for a little girl inherently unlikely to appeal to readers, her profession deflects attention from the fact that, over the course of her involvement with Rochester, the work with which Jane busies herself is the subversive recharting of mid-Victorian novelistic romance, not the supervision of Adèle Varens's studies.

Jane Eyre's departure from more conventional contemporary treatments of romantic subject matter can best be approached by means of the question, Just how convincing is Jane as a garden-variety governess, even a garden-variety belletristic governess?

As we saw in Chapter Two, it is unproductive to speak of "governess fiction" per se; it makes more sense to speak of uses to which the governess-figure is put in fiction. Prior to Jane Eyre, there were, roughly speaking, three traditions for the governess, whom (as we saw in Chapter Two's sixth footnote) Neff has characterized and discussed as the "most conspicuous" of working women in the period's literature (182-5).

The first tradition is the oldest, dating back
ancestrally to the time during the eighteenth century when boarding schools for girls were fashionable. Initially, the kind of teacher portrayed in this literature was not a private resident governess, but instead taught children in a school setting (e.g., Sarah Fielding's *The Governess*, or the anonymously published *Ellen, the Teacher*). In later decades, as boarding schools for girls fell into disrepute, this textual mode was spliced onto another gaining popularity just then: children's primers, like the often-maligned Mangnall's *Questions*. The fusion of the two, influenced by the developing vogue for home education for girls and by perceptions that young boys needed a better academic grounding than previous generations' before entering preparatory or public school, yielded books in which a private resident governess (or mother) instructs children in a home setting. These were intended to be read under the guidance of an adult instructor. Transparently didactic, they portray the fictional governess (or mother) as stand-in for a "real" flesh-and-blood teacher: both the material discussed and the behavior exhibited by this adult comprise set lessons for all the children under her instruction--fictional pupils and the "real" students reading or being read to from the "stories."

The second governess-tradition involves instances where the pathetic stereotype described in Chapter Two is invoked in works about the interactions of adult characters. Here,
readers focus on the governess as they would on any other female character; her role as preceptress is not foregrounded and, in fact, the reader rarely (if ever) sees her engaged in her work. The main reason the character in question has been made a governess at all in this sort of writing is to identify her with the governess's cultural stereotype: either she conforms to this, and therefore to other characters' and readers' expectations, or she defies it by emerging as something other than an embodiment of the usual downtrodden victim. (As remarked earlier, generally she conforms to type if a minor character, and departs from it if a significant one.) Novels such as Lady Blessington's The Governess (1839) belong to this category; we will consider this story shortly with relation to Jane Eyre.

Third, the idea of the governess is sometimes used with an irony which can be intentional or not, in a scenario which offers enactment of the paradox of watching the teacher taught. Where this occurs and the governess is the story's heroine rather than a minor character (and this is rare), the work is a female Bildungsroman. Elizabeth Sewell's Amy Herbert, an affirmation of the virtues of retiring femininity and evangelical morals, is an example of such a novel.

It is almost a certainty that Brontë knew each of these three literary uses of the governess when she wrote Jane Eyre, and anticipated her readers would as well. Inga-Stina
Ewbank has suggested the likely influence on Brontë's novel of *Ellen, the Teacher*, mentioning that there was a copy in the Keighley Mechanics' Institute library where the Brontës borrowed books (20-1), while Jerome Beaty calls attention to stylistic and thematic similarities between the two novels (e.g., both girls suffer from isolation and poverty; both providentially find shelter when they run away, etc. [622-3]). Beaty contends as well that Mary Sherwood's *Caroline Mordaunt* (1835), Lady Blessington's *The Governess* (1839), Elizabeth Sewell's *Amy Herbert* (1844), and/or Rachel MacCrindell's *The English Governess* (1844) quite possibly influenced *Jane Eyre*, and that certain of them doubtless came to mind for readers perusing Jane's story.

*Jane Eyre* does not, however, follow any particular one of the literary precedents available to Brontë; instead, it breaks precedent by intermingling the three. The novels I have mentioned, and others like them, conform more or less snugly with one distinct category or other. The Thornfield section of *Jane Eyre*, on the other hand, uses the second tradition (the governess as victim) as a stalking-horse behind which to advance a mixture of the first and third (Jane indoctrinates others, while apparently only taking up the pen to relate her history in an autobiographical female Bildungsroman). We have already looked at the stereotype of the pathetic governess; let us now consider the odd relation in which *Jane Eyre* stands to autobiography and the
Bildungsroman as a preliminary to investigating the lessons Brontë's governess teaches those who, surprisingly, turn out to be her pupils.

* * *

It is customary to refer to autobiography's close generic cousin, biography, as constituting a "life." The term, of course, is verbal shorthand to indicate that biography records what is purported to be its subject's life-history. Both biography and autobiography foster the reader's sense that he or she "knows" the subject (or, in the case of a biography like Juliet Barker's The Brontës, subjects) at first hand. For the reader, in turn, the written life often comes actually to stand in for that (those) subject(s); he or she "familiarize"s him- or herself with what is often the most intimate knowledge of the person(s) readily available.

Autobiography's tone, however, is confessional where writers of biography conventionally strive for some semblance of objectivity. In autobiography particularly, therefore, a reader's feeling that he or she gets to know the subject through reading is qualitatively different from the sense of relationship between subject and reader sustained by biography: it is both personalized and intensified. Invited by a voice which is ostensibly the subject's own to share intimate knowledge, the genre positions the reader as confidant. A number of conventions
further create for the reader the illusion that a bond of complicity links writer/subject and him- or herself. The writer's use of first-person pronouns, for example, compromises the reader's consciousness of individual identity while the reader metonymically understands the words to refer simultaneously to the subject and him- or herself. Then, too, nineteenth-century preference for a chronological arrangement of narrative events in the genre reproduces the life-history in a format "natural" and familiar to the reader from his or her own chronologically organized experience of the world. Such an arrangement does not jar the reader out of absorption with the unfolding storyline by calling attention to the reading experience's artificiality.

Jane Eyre's "autobiographical" approach to "her" material allows Brontë to build emotional intensity into her audience's reading experience, encouraging readers to feel they "relive" Jane's experiences, perceptions and feelings with some sensation of immediacy (Tillotson 295-9). The story adheres to a basically conventional and chronologically ordered presentation. The narrator speaks consistently with Jane's voice and in her persona. In general Brontë avoids flashbacks, scenes which leap-frog out of sequence to provide glimpses of the narrative future, abrupt changes of setting, and out-of-character editorial philosophizing, all of which would put distance between Jane
the reader. The cumulative effect is to discourage that reader from developing distance and perspective enough on the text to attempt its dispassionate analysis.

While the novel's first-person pronouns and sequential plotline derive from Brontë's autobiographical approach to her material, they also position the reader to feel empathy with Jane as "autobiographical" subject. To notice this is to recognize that Brontë's decision to write *Jane Eyre* as autobiography is reminiscent of her manipulative strategy of deploying stereotypes (like those of the orphan or governess) to elicit sympathy for Jane. Brontë's choice of authorial strategies to deploy in telling Jane's story consistently positions Jane as character to evoke positive feelings from readers although, when viewed objectively, she is unlike the sort of female character who typically would elicit favorable opinion from Brontë's contemporaries.

Early on in this chapter, I suggested that *Jane Eyre*'s first pages introduce and identify with Jane a pattern of resistance to change; the rest of the novel after this is taken up with instances where others--Brocklehursts, Rochester and Riverses--try vainly to change her (Loe 355). In an apposite comment meant for another context, Nina Auerbach says about the more routine sorts of heroines who are Jane's opposite numbers in Victorian literature that, "[c]ast as they were in the role of emotional and spiritual
catalysts, it is not surprising . . . [they] are rarely allowed to develop" past a childlike state of immaturity (Auerbach, *Romantic Imprisonment* 147-8). Jane is the mirror image of the sort of heroine Auerbach means, the type Dora Spenlow seems to be, but nevertheless Jane resembles that type insofar as she withstands change as Dora does, while different from women like David Copperfield's first wife in being perpetually adult, even when a child in years.

Plenty of narratives in the early to mid-nineteenth century attest to the truth that the son is father to the man, the daughter to the woman, but Brontë's is not one of them. As we saw Coveney remark at the outset of this chapter, Jane Eyre's childhood circumstances are recorded with apparent care taken to emphasize continuities between her pre-Thornfield experiences and reactions, and those of the adult woman whose interior life the "autobiographical" novel chronicles. The reader is indoctrinated in the first few pages into what proves at last to be almost a ritual pattern of instances of provocation or temptation offered her that Jane must resist. The lure--or danger--she must avoid is temporizing with these in a way which hazards her integrity.

Initially, one supposes Jane's unwavering steadfastness of outlook is accounted for by the circumstance that Mrs. Rochester's adult retrospection shapes and unifies the narrative (e.g., Auerbach, *Romantic Imprisonment* 208;
Tillotson 294). But more is at work than this. Wilhelm Dilthey has said about the Bildungsroman that it documents [a] regulated development within the life of the individual . . . observed . . . [;] each of its stages has its own intrinsic value and is at the same time the basis for a higher stage. The dissonances and conflicts of life appear as the necessary growth points through which the individual must pass on his way to maturity and harmony.²³

From this description, it follows that a Bildungsroman that is autobiographical in format must register some indication that the "writer"'s youthful self does not hold views congruent with those he or she expresses at the time of writing. The affectionate irony with which Dickens's Copperfield looks back on the boy or young man he was, for instance, lends the impression of a changed perspective by giving the reader a double exposure on two stages in the evolution of its narrator's consciousness: there is the naive David (who is the subject of the autobiography, is deceived by Steerforth, and so on), and there is Copperfield, the ostensibly mature author who is Agnes' husband. Whatever one may think of this second figure, it is at least true that he differs from his younger self in

revealing, when he looks back on that incarnation, amusement conditioned by an irony that is missing from his earlier self-perception.

This is not the case in *Jane Eyre*. Exercising hindsight, Mrs. Rochester does not ironize or critique the portrait she draws of her childhood self. By failing to analyze Jane's character in light of a more mature or, at least, differently constituted view of it than her own (adult) perspective, she creates another kind of self-portrait from David Copperfield's gentle, ironic reflections on his youthful self---one that, in some of the ways we have already considered, thwarts the reader's inclination to develop ironic or analytic psychological distance on Jane or her perspective.\(^{1}\)

The consistency with which Brontë juggles strategies conducive to the forging of a bond of sympathy, affinity or complicity between Jane Eyre and "her" reader suggests that she---Brontë---is writing with a specific aim in mind. I will try to identify how the connection is made by both borrowing and deviating from more genuine versions of Bildungsroman narratives than her own. But, first, we need to return to the question posed earlier in this chapter---How convincing is Jane as a governess?---because to understand the extent to

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\(^{1}\)My reading here differs from many critics, e.g., Tillotson (295); Rowe; and Abel, Hirsch and Langland, who assert that "*Jane Eyre*, more than any other heroine, conforms to the male *Bildungsheld*" (15).
which she fills this role is to understand why \textit{Jane Eyre} is not the female Bildungsroman for which it is often taken. This entails taking a closer look at Jane's childhood, and at the pivotal Thornfield section of the novel.

A favorite device in Gothic literature was to physically separate an adolescent heroine or young lady protagonist from the family member(s) who would ordinarily protect her from worldly vicissitudes. Often this separation took place as the result of a death or deaths in her family. Cries like that of Anne Radcliffe's heroine Ellena--"Alas! ... I have no longer a home...! I have no longer even one friend to support, to rescue me!" (The Italian 220)--resound through such writing. \textit{Jane Eyre}, which draws on this tradition, departs from precedent by shifting to an earlier stage in its heroine's life the moment when she is thrown onto her own resources. In picking up Jane's story with her childhood, Brontë weds the heroine- and emotion-centered Gothic with the Bildungsroman tradition, which had hitherto featured male protagonists almost exclusively and generally taken up their stories from an early stage in their lives. This generic cross-cutting imposes on an emotionally charged Gothic treatment of the vicissitudes of a woman's life the sort of serious-minded engagement with a life-history typically accorded the Bildungsheld, but not the Gothic heroine.

It is not, however, its intermingling of Gothic
traditions with the Bildungsroman that disqualifies Jane Eyre from female Bildungsroman standing, though the unusual combination would already qualify it as a curious instance of a genre that typically conjures up a world recognizably akin to the "real" one. The crux of Jane Eyre's disqualification is its resistance--like Jane's own--to fulfilling expectations--this time generic ones--since Brontë's novel is not the story of its heroine's apprenticeship or education.\textsuperscript{7} Nonetheless, the novel is about education, if not Jane's.

Previously, I suggested that in Jane Eyre, Brontë conflates two existing literary traditions in which the governess had previously appeared. In one, her role as governess was incidental to the story's main focus, which turned on the conceit of seeing the teacher taught. I remarked that this tradition is allied to the Bildungsroman. The other textual tradition is the oldest of the governess-related traditions, involving a text that functions similarly to a primer. Here, parallels between a fictional pupil (or pupils) who learn(s) lessons, and a "real" one who reads the story, can be drawn. While it seems on the face

\textsuperscript{7}Jane scatters hints to the contrary, but they fail to convince. Abbot says that a propensity for insurrection "was always in her" (17). She is consistently a "heterogenous thing" at Lowood, Thornfield and the Riverses. Even when we first see her, she is seated cross-legged like a Turk--an individual belonging to a nationality Jane herself later associates with uncivilized behavior in an exchange with Rochester (197).
of it unusual to think of Brontë's novel as a didactic primer, unquestionably one character in it receives an education, and that is Rochester. Jane Eyre's project, and Jane's, is to bring about the sentimental education of Edward Rochester. At the same time, the events and viewpoints the novel describes and articulates may exert a formative impact on the reader. And on a certain sort of reader, at that. Presumably the mid-Victorian who picks up a novel titled with a woman's name, like Pamela or Emma or Jane Eyre, has been sufficiently conditioned by literary convention to expect to find him- or herself confronted with a particular type of story, probably one with a significant, more-or-less conventionally worked-out romantic component. Similarly Rochester, when he "picks up" Jane as a romantic partner, thinks he knows what outcome to expect from their association. Jane Eyre, in thwarting these expectations, thus has the opportunity to simultaneously and programmatically transform both Rochester's understanding of romance and the reader's. Just as the governess Jane Eyre corrects Rochester's ignorance and misconceptions, Jane Eyre, the book that presents itself as Jane's "life," may well "correct" the reader's.

The lessons Rochester and the habituated reader of nineteenth-century romance alike must learn are the virtues of self-governance, the desirability of a realistic outlook and the pitfalls that threaten those given to persistent
romanticizing. In keeping with Brontë's custom of inveigling readers' sympathies through what amounts to strategic misdirection, Brontë camouflages a feminist primer as an apparently familiar type of romantic tale.

In certain respects, Jane Eyre observes the protocol for popular romantic fiction best embodied, for our purposes, in Lady Blessington's The Governess. I have already mentioned this novel briefly, and pointed out the probability that Brontë knew it. Its heroine, an appealing young woman who is a governess, loves a man society regards as above her station, and is saved at the eleventh hour from contracting what his social circle would treat as a misalliance. What saves her and also allows for a satisfactory outcome to the narrative is the timely discovery that she is an heiress with well-placed connections. She can marry her titled suitor with a clear conscience after all.

Stripped to essentials, the story is Jane's. Both Blessington's Clara Mordaunt and Jane are Cinderellas in black stuff gowns; their profession is figured by the Victorians as virtually as exploitative for women of their class as was their precursor's hearth-sweeping; their heroes prove as adept as Prince Charming at spotting their obscured attractions, though in the nineteenth-century demeanor, not shoe size, triggers the recognition. Jane Eyre does not, then, break ground either in its choice of a governess as a
romantic heroine, or in making her the connection of Mr. Eyre of Madeira and the Riverses and in entitling her to an inherit a substantial sum of money in the end. It is therefore something of an ironic tour-de-force that buried in the familiar storyline is a subtext that urges on the reader skepticism about romantic conventions and the merit of a realistic outlook.

To say *Jane Eyre* contains the subtext I have just outlined is to say nothing new. Jane's lack of the romance heroine's usual beauty and breeding excited widespread comment even in the earliest reviews of the novel. In physical appearance, the heroine is diminutive and plain. She favors an unadorned style of dress and a direct rather than flowery or flirtatious style of speech that is its verbal counterpart.

A more subtle but equally drastic departure from tradition is *Jane Eyre's* overturning of the romantic formula whereby a wise male character imparts to a naive heroine a truth that promotes her maturation. Part father-figure, part lover, *Emma*'s Mr. Knightley is precisely such a hero. Brontë gives Rochester enough attributes like Knightley's—her hero is older than the woman he loves and tries to "mentor"; has a wider experience of the world; is her social superior and a landowner; is attractive to women and respected by men—that a first reading of the novel might give rise to the suspicion that *Jane Eyre* will follow a
scenario much like *Emma*'s.

A possibility of this sort strikes Rochester, too. I said in the previous paragraph that he tries to mentor Jane, and drew a parallel between Brontë's lovers and Austen's. Part of the reason for the appeal each set of lovers feels for each other, and their charisma for readers, is the latitude each couple permits for frank interchange. Indications that the pairs are well-matched are chiefly verbal; each delights in give-and-take, and this bodes well for their performance in marital situations demanding compromise.

The dynamic does not entirely reproduce itself between novels, however. In *Emma*, one reason that the idea of a match pleases the reader is because Emma brings a spontaneity and freshness of enthusiasm to marriage that complements Knightley's judiciousness. Practically, what this means for the narrative is that, after struggling with the recognition that her own judgments are often flawed, Emma acknowledges Knightley's superior wisdom and yields, at last, to his pre-eminent, humane rationality.

The Thornfield chapters of *Jane Eyre*, meanwhile, develop in such a way as to suggest that Jane and Rochester's courtship may recapitulate this plotline. Indeed, Rochester himself goes so far as to make the case to Jane (and the reader) that he is more worldly-wise than she. The implication is that, from his wider fund of experience,
he has gleaned a superior capacity for judgment to her inexperienced one. The irony is that we discover that his worldly experiences amount to an abbreviated catalog of Don Juan-like encounters with immoral "ladies" abroad, from which connections he has learned nothing. Now, Jane too has learned nothing from her past. But where she differs from Rochester here is that she need not apprentice herself to learn a sense of others' right worth; Rochester must. Jane's assessments of the men and women she encounters, both her attractions (as with Miss Temple and Helen Burns) and her antipathies (to John Reed and the Brocklehursts) make native good sense. Rochester, though, who ought to have been better tutored by the eye-opening relationships that developed on the basis of his romantic misperceptions of women like Bertha Mason and Céline Varens, has been left fundamentally naïve. His abortive wedding day dawns to find him back at Thornfield, ready to make the same sort of impetuous mistake again.

In initially getting to know Jane, Rochester expressed appreciation of the unconstrained manner and forthright speech that, from the reader's perspective, distinguish her from the conventional romance heroine. But, as the prospect of his marriage-day with her approaches, he treats her less as consort and equal, more as possession. This lapse marks a degeneration in their relationship; its occurrence is in no respect analogous to Emma's epiphantic realization that Mr.
Knightley's judgment is superior to hers and subsequent yielding to his primacy. In Rochester's case, the reader must understand that Jane is, in fact, Rochester's moral superior, and that his assumption that worldliness ought to guarantee him ascendancy over her is unfounded. Out of his misunderstanding, Rochester presses unfair advantages in his polemical verbal mating-dance with Jane. The result is that he pushes the whole disposition of his last encounter with her before his abortive wedding over the top into an implausible realm of fantasy. The weird, possessive, hyperbolic vision of life on the moon Rochester spins for Adèle during the carriage ride into Millcote is an apt prelude for the whole (mis)adventure of that outing. Millcote itself, on arrival, is transformed into an upscale commercial fairyland that has nothing in common with the impression the reader formed of it when Jane was anticipating her removal from Lowood to Thornfield, or passing through it to take up her governessing post. Then a northern community "seventy miles nearer London than the remote county where [she] now resided: . . . Millcote was a large manufacturing town on the banks of the A-" that failed to capture Jane's fancy because of "the idea of long chimneys and clouds of smoke" (71).

Now, on her visit with Rochester, Millcote boasts a silk warehouse and a jeweler's, where Rochester munificently takes her shopping. Afterward, he bends on her a smile
"such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched."

"You need not look in that way," I said: "if you do, I'll wear nothing but my old Lowood frocks to the end of the chapter . . . ."

He chuckled: he rubbed his hands: "Oh, it is rich to see and hear her!" he exclaimed. "Is she original? Is she piquant? I would not exchange this one little English girl for the grand Turk's whole seraglio...."

Jane reacts:

The eastern allusion bit me again: "I'll not stand you an inch in the stead of a seraglio," I said; "so don't consider me an equivalent for one; if you have a fancy for anything in that line, away with you, sir, to the bazaars of Stamboul...."

(197)

Rochester's perverse vision transforms the city of smokestacks into an consumer paradise where not only do the warehouses and shops offer exotic goods, but Jane herself becomes commodified into a third-person pronoun susceptible of appraisal ("Is she original? Is she piquant?" What is her market value in the Middle East?), and Rochester himself sounds like a combination of barker and exultant pasha as he extols and objectifies her.

Vision still intact at this point in the novel,
Rochester sees his position with regard to Jane least clearly now. Self-deluded, he is less Knightley than Oedipus, failing to recognize his own unsuitability to govern her. Far from being suited to act as Jane's mentor, as he imagines himself, what Rochester needs is to serve an apprenticeship to his eighteen- or nineteen-year-old governess, where his education at her hands will consist in learning appreciation for a Jane who will not fulfil the fantastic terms and conditions ascribed to in the persons, behaviors and philosophies of romance.

One key to unlocking this truth is also a measure of how carefully designed a novel *Jane Eyre* is. Turkish imagery appeared before the trip to Millcote, albeit incidentally. On the first occasion the reader meets Jane, she is withdrawing from a drawing-room tableau featuring the Reeds to sit, "cross-legged, like a Turk" (13), daydreaming nightmare visions over Bewick's *History of British Birds*. The attitude is recognizably characteristic, though manifest so early in her life. Aloof, "unfeminine," self-reflexive, it amounts to passive resistance and sets the tone for the pattern of repudiation we will see her show to the constraints placed on the girl-child or woman in traditionally ordered society.

Jane insists at the beginning of Chapter Two of *Jane Eyre* that fighting back against oppressors is "a new thing" for her at ten (16). Physical resistance is new to Jane, it
is true; in fact, since we never again see her squabbling or exhibiting any talent for fisticuffs, the physicality of her quarrel with John is not only "new," but unique. Jane's insistence that it is unprecedented, however, makes her seem to want us to imagine a transformation in her character takes place when, in actuality, none does.\textsuperscript{12} Defiance is present in the rebelliousness against feminine convention of her Turkish pose on the breakfast-room windowseat at the beginning of the novel. By this first page in the story, too, we know by report from Bessie the nurse\textsuperscript{13} that Jane has not been behaving in civilized and childlike ways (13). And we see it, though twentieth-century readers may not fully appreciate this, when, in an exchange about her behavior, Mrs. Reed accuses Jane of taking her up in a "forbidding" manner because the girl asks, "What does Bessie say I have done?" (13). The question seems innocent today, but Mrs. Reed's angry response was not born of wilful misconstruction; it was wholly reasonable in an era which maintained little girls were to be seen and not heard. Resistance to imposition characterizes Jane's conduct from

\textsuperscript{12}Believing Jane's claim, critics take the novel for a female Bildungsroman in which she learns a fitting appreciation of herself and her merits, and a proper manner of bringing others to share them.

\textsuperscript{13}Incidentally, it is highly improbable that there would be a nurse and no governess in a well-to-do household like the Reeds' where the youngest child (Jane) is ten years old.
the beginning of the novel until Thornfield is razed and she comes to Ferndean.

The supposed catalyst for Jane's transformation is the genuinely awful little drama that occurs when John hurls a volume of Bewick's *British Birds* at his cousin. It is the first lengthy passage of action and index of psychological response in *Jane Eyre*; in it, Jane's attitude is represented as a coherent, consistent whole throughout. Physically removed from the Reeds, she is discovered sitting cross-legged in her own domain behind the red moreen curtain. John Reed imperiously summons her and she comes, apparently "dreading the blow" she knows he will deliver. But a passive defiance of terror characterizes her response as well. As he taunts her, "I mused on the disgusting and ugly appearance of him who would presently deal it" (15), she remarks. Able to "muse" on the effect of John's grimaces, she contemplates her tormentor with a degree of calm and composure. A moment later, reeling under and bleeding from the blow he delivers her, she still remains mistress enough of her faculties to recall famous despots from her reading of classical history ("You are like the Roman emperors! I had read Goldsmith's History of Rome . . . ." [16]). Her physical distance from John may be compromised, but in the heat of this allegedly decisive and transformative encounter, her mind and spirit remain as aloof as her person was behind the curtain a moment before. The "passion" she
manifests when she fights on the floor, far from being the "new thing" her autobiography claims, is actually just a fresh manifestation of the same response to adversity she has made all along: a cool, decisive drawing of boundary lines between herself and others' encroachments on her sense of identity.

The most obvious of these encroachments throughout the novel are made by men. All of Brontë's male characters--John Reed, Brocklehurst, Rochester, Rivers--are solitary representatives of their sex living in ordinary circumstances in otherwise female communities but, until quite close to the novel's end, these solitary figures provide domineering focuses for those communities' lives. In itself, this is unsurprising. Sketching the way men interact with women in these circumstances gives Brontë the opportunity to stage enactments of the logical outcome of the conventional practice of separate codes of conduct for the sexes; the idealized mid-Victorian woman, as we saw in the first chapter of this thesis, was supposed to practice the kind of selflessness and accommodation of men that commentators like Sarah Ellis advocated. In contemporary terms, then, a woman was to exhibit self-control interpreted as self-restraint and glossed as moral virtue.

Jane Eyre resists this and, in doing so, radically redefines for herself contemporary gendered expectations about self-control and decision-taking. From the outset of
Brontë's novel, self-control for Jane means something quite apart from self-restraint. It means control over herself on her own terms, an autonomy tempered by consideration for others and respect for moral convention, but nonetheless altogether incompatible with the self-repressive, accommodating manners of the sort practiced by the angel in the house, a breed of whom Jane is curtly dismissive (Nash 206-9). Aloof behind the curtains at Gateshead (or Thornfield), or routed out of solitude, she dramatizes protest after protest against the status quo in contemporary gender relations, whether her resistance to their imposition is passive, physical or verbal. It is hardly any wonder, therefore, that Rochester's inclination at Millcote to show what is figured as eastern despotism and misogyny makes no effective inroad on the self-possession of a woman who showed herself capable of taking on a Turkish attitude, or standing up against the impositions of a would-be Nero, when a mere ten-year-old, and has figuratively been doing so ever since.

In fact, in adulthood, not only does Jane at last escape attempts to correct her nonconformity with gendered expectations, she becomes a more profound disturber of the status quo than ever by going on to "correct" aggressively masculine behavior and thinking as she confronts them in one man (Rochester), successfully withstands their forceful impositions on her by a second (Rivers), and, in perhaps the
most difficult challenge of all, finally rejects the demands of paternalism altogether, decisively, by refusing the life of selfless service St. John represents as expected of her by his masculine version of God, who, as Nash points out, turns out to be "the [unfeeling] God of Brocklehurst and Lowood" (161).

· · ·

Jane rejects the tenets of behavior recommended to the nineteenth-century governess as she educates Rochester and nineteenth-century readers as to what a woman of spirit and intellect can be. In an 1814 treatise, Thomas Babington counsels employers that in the choice of a private resident governess:

- good principles, good sense, good temper,
- sobriety and firmness of mind, and competent knowledge [rather than accomplishments,] are the first requisites . . . . (220-1)

Four years later, R.C. Dallaway, allegedly writing after "more than twenty years" as a governess, states in the preface to a governessing manual that

an instructor who is satisfied with seeing her pupils accomplished fine ladies, will find this work [the book] perfectly useless, and uninteresting. It is intended for those only, who are convinced, that in every rank of life, an education formed upon the PURE PRINCIPLES of the
CHRISTIAN RELIGION, lays the best foundation for temporal and eternal happiness. (v-vi)

And twenty years on, in 1838, S.F. Ridout offers similar wisdom to the would-be preceptor in the first part of Letters to a Young Governess, on the Principles of Education and Other Subjects Connected with her Duties:

The extent to which you may be enabled to carry your principles into practice, must depend, in part, on the will of others, and in part on circumstances over which you have no control. Expect many discouragements; prepare for many failures: but resolve to rise above them all; and, by God's help, to overcome any obstacles, not insuperable, by good sense, good temper, and consistent conduct. (6-7)

These representative selections of advice show that the interests of employers and of private resident governesses, at least as expressed for public consumption, were bent on achieving the same outcome: to instill correct feminine behavior and morals in pupils through example.

The spirit of the "good" governess, which hovered as a shadowy but instructive presence in many nineteenth-century

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2: One needs to be circumspect about assuming that Dallaway has the governessing experience for which she claims credit. She also wrote a volume called The Servant's Monitor, detailing the duties of servants; there seems some possibility that she was a professional or part-time writer of advice manuals.
governessing manuals, had to be a paragon of patience and a
well-spring of virtue. Prior to 1847, these ideals of self-
repressive self-control were also shared by most of her
belletristic counterparts, a circumstance which renders
their stories uninteresting to late twentieth-century tastes
because displays of good sense, calm temper and consistent
conduct make for excellent teaching, but translate into dull
reading.

Like most literary governesses and, indeed, most post-
Enlightenment heroines, Jane Eyre interests readers because
she suffers emotional vicissitudes. The kind of suffering
she undergoes, however, is very different from the sort
experienced by other private governesses in mid-century
belletristic fiction--the Clara Mordaunts, Ruth Chuzzlewits
and Agnes Greys--most of whose anguished moments derive from
difficulties that arise directly out of their employment.
In short, these governesses suffer as women in their
profession were expected to suffer by readers primed to
regard them in particular ways on account of their
contemporary stereotype. Readers anticipated they would see
private resident governesses in literature bearing up like
so many Patient Griseldas with agonized sensibilities
aggravated by impositions heaped on them by ill-behaved
children and insensitive employers. Prior to the 1860s, if
the governess was a heroine, readers anticipated she would
behave with the moral scrupulousness of a conduct-book
heroine and the femininity of a literary one in the teeth of extraordinary difficulties.

As do the great majority of her fictional predecessors in the private governessing profession, Jane Eyre suffers after she takes up a teaching career. Most of her life at Thornfield proves less painful, however, than was her previous, non-private-governessing life at Gateshead or at Lowood School. And in those instances where Jane is most miserable at Thornfield, her unhappiness derives from sources unrelated to teaching. It does not stem from contact with her affectionate, biddable pupil, Adèle, nor from an employer who is wholly undemanding—regarding her work. It arises, instead, from her romance with that employer and the uneasiness that gels into recognition that his mad wife, Bertha, both lives, and lives upstairs. Jane's moments of anguish are therefore incidental, not integral, to her position as an educator, but crucial to her role as quasi-romantic heroine.

Which brings us again to the lessons taught by Jane, and those by Jane Eyre.

As we have seen, the self-control practiced by Jane throughout Jane Eyre meant self-determination or governance, not self-repression. If Jane Eyre were a Bildungsroman expressing conventional nineteenth-century views, it might well illustrate how Jane, a shrew, is tamed. But Jane is unregenerate, and in this regard, it makes sense to think of
her in conjunction with Bertha Rochester. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, for instance, maintain that "Bertha has functioned as Jane's dark double throughout the governess's stay at Thornfield. Specifically, every one of Bertha's appearances--or, more accurately, her manifestations--has been associated with an experience (or repression) of anger on Jane's part" (360). In such a reading, Bertha's manifestations essentially work as palpable instances of "the return of the repressed" in Jane's psyche.

The connection Gilbert and Gubar made between Jane and Bertha Rochester as alter-egos not only makes sense in terms of post-Freudian understandings of "the return of the repressed"; it makes sense in nineteenth-century medical terms too. According to mainstream medical theory in the first half of the century and to the contemporary popular beliefs which both emerged from and helped to rationalize such thinking, there was good reason to associate governessing and madness. In turn, the association bolstered the belief that the governess was inherently a figure of pathos.

During the early decades of the nineteenth century,

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"It is interesting to note, incidentally, that Elizabeth Rigby was more sensitive to the novel's atmosphere than many contemporary critics despite her profoundly negative reaction to it. On some level Rigby seems to have registered that Jane Eyre functions, and is organically consistent, on the level of psychodrama. This intuition anticipates readings of Jane and Bertha as alter-egos, which readings like Gilbert and Gubar's in The Madwoman in the Attic have made current."
insanity enjoyed on a minor scale in the popular press something of the vogue that the Woman Question and, especially, the Governess Question, did in the mid-to-late 1840s and '50s. As was the case with the governess, the degree of agitation was sizeable in proportion to the phenomenon which gave rise to it, a circumstance made evident by available statistical information from 1844, when the interest in insanity shown by periodicals had already crested, but the institutionalized were still a focus of

"The reforming spirit we identify with the Victorians and often associate with figures and movements belonging to the period between the forties and seventies (e.g., Florence Nightingale and sanitary amelioration, the Chartists, Women's Rights and its advocates), were heralded by preliminary flurries of "progressive" activity focusing on issues with negligible or oblique political connections. Among these was a fascination with lunacy and the need for asylum reform. The absorption was to some extent an outgrowth of eighteenth-century interest in the madhouse as a locus of popular entertainment. Early nineteenth-century zeal to revamp caretaking practices in these institutions signaled a departure from this position, pointing to the new era's growing unwillingness to treat displays of suffering as public spectacle. (Attendance at executions, for example, was also falling off.) However, while the shift in sensibility developed in part out of reaction to the bloodthirstiness of the French Revolution, enthusiasm over asylum reform was to some extent a French import. Despite the anti-French sentiment kindled by the Napoleonic Wars, it was French physicians mandating amendment, in particular Charcot and Pinel, whose modifications of existing asylum management systems were widely lauded in Britain, where the pair were regarded as innovators in an area that required substantial overhaul. However, rather strangely, the English showed themselves anxious not so much to distinguish themselves by developing theories to account for the outbreak, or cures to stem the occurrence of mental disease--areas in which many British commentators credited other nations with insight superior to their own--as to stake their pre-eminent claim to what experts saw as the generative climate for the problem.
interest. The chart below, reproduced from the 1844 Quarterly Review article "Report on the Treatment of Lunatics," offers perspective on the numbers of Englishmen and women involved (426):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where confined</th>
<th>PrivM</th>
<th>PrivF</th>
<th>PauperM</th>
<th>PauperF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County Asylums</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>1,924</td>
<td>2,231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethlem/St Luke's</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Public</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed Met.</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Prov.</td>
<td>748</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>973</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though these listings do not provide an infallible index to the numbers of certifiable lunatics in England at the time—to recognize this we need only remember the madwoman supposedly incarcerated in a house in Norton Conyers who may have provided Brontë's inspiration for Bertha—they nonetheless suggest that the problem of insanity, like that of unemployed gentlewomen later, intrigued journalists and their readers for reasons unrelated to fears the country would suffer Malthusian inundation—by either lunatics or female educators.

Elaine Showalter, among others, has ably shown how it
is that madness became feminized in Victorian society. The presumption that women's suffering was somehow more evocatively freighted with pathos than men's was due to gender biases beginning to crystalize into the sort of mid-nineteenth-century reification of female sensitivity that praise of "the angel in the house" brings to mind. But another factor enters into the period's thinking on insanity and gender, and that is class. A lower-class woman was not the object of pity to mid-nineteenth-century sensibilities that her genteelly bred sister was.

Even in the early years of the century, it was specifically the well-born or genteel madwoman who piqued interest among the literate. The apogee of this phenomenon would come at the cusp of the 1860s, with publication of Wilkie Collins's The Woman in White. Nonetheless, long before Collins took up Anne Catherick's story, the provocative contrast between the self-restrained, private lives led by well-bred ladies and the conditions of public display and self-forgetfulness in which their deranged counterparts lived exercised widespread fascination. At the same time, the similar class backgrounds well-bred madwomen shared with genteel readers also offered for those readers' contemplation the gratifying moral that privilege was no guarantee of peace of mind. This realization at once had the power to horrify and titillate, prompting the frisson that goes with the thought "This does not touch me. But it
Stories of incarcerated gentlewomen stuck in the mind, so that when Edward Wakefield was asked by an investigatory committee of 1814 about his reactions to a springtime tour of Bethlem, he called "remarkably striking" the case of [one female . . .; she mentioned her maiden and married names, and stated that she had been a teacher of languages; the keepers described her as a very accomplished lady, mistress of many languages, and corroborated her account of herself. The Committee can hardly imagine a human being in a more degraded and brutalizing situation than that in which I found this female, who held a coherent conversation with us, and was of course fully sensible of the mental and bodily condition of those wretched beings, who, equally without clothing, were closely chained to the same wall with herself . . . . ("Insanity and Madhouses" 408-9)

Even in what might be thought of as the democratizing rags-and-chains ambiance of unreformed Bethlem Hospital, "accomplishments," the badge of her (supposed) class and her sex, distinguish this woman's case from her fellow-patients' in Wakefield's thinking.  

23 The patient knows her former gentility is a key to winning visitors' sympathy, too, and plays it up: "[s]he entreated to be allowed pencil and paper, for the purpose of
Reformers shared Wakefield's concerns about the sex and class of patients. In reference to a move to set appalling asylum conditions to rights a few years after Wakefield's Bethlem visit, consensus was expressed in the medical community that "[t]he great objects to be aimed at [are] that the invalids be separately and properly classed, . . . in respect of their ages, sexes, condition in life, and kind or degree of their disorder" ("Insanity and Madhouses" 412). The passage's syntax implies that inmates' diagnoses were not considered to be any more definitive indicators as to appropriate courses of custodial care and/or treatment than was their sex and station. Seventeen years later, in 1833, patients' social status was still a key determinant of the kind of care they would receive. Lord Brougham introduced an act ratified by Parliament that required a pair of physicians should pass judgment on every institutionalized lunatic to ascertain he or she was provided the comforts requisite to his or her station.\(^2\)

But if a woman giving way to mental illness under trying circumstances was a more pathetic being than her male counterpart to Victorians early in the century, more active amusing herself with drawing, which were given to her by one of the gentlemen with me" (409).

\(^2\)A Quarterly Review article for 1844 indicates that "[b]y an Act introduced by Lord Brougham, and passed in 1833[,] two physicians . . . . [must] ascertain whether every lunatic has those comforts which are suited to his property, and the allowance made for him" ("Report on the Treatment of Lunatics" 442).
concern was shown about keeping men sane. As the practical need to demonstrate educational proficiency began making itself felt in entrance exams for public schools and the institutions that mimicked them, and competitive exams for entrance into certain professions became increasingly popular, widespread fears that study would promote madness became displaced from boys and young men to girls and young women. A Quarterly Review article for 1829 sets out a representative statement of the former position, stating with authority that:

No physician doubts that precocious children, in fifty cases for one, are much the worse for the [academic] discipline they have undergone. The mind seems to have been strained, and the foundations of insanity are laid. ("Gooch on Insanity" 176-7)

Only thirteen years later, a commentator in the same periodical declared with relief that the "fashion of compelling children's minds into an unnatural excess of application, to the great detriment of health, moral and physical, is now, we believe, upon the decline" ("Books for Children" 62).

Among boys, both writers mean. Girls' education among the fashionable and their imitators, on the other hand, was, just at this period, codifying into what amounted to a recipe for mental debility according to the day's medical
philosophies, which held that

[a] pernicious effect may . . . often arise from a too rapid succession of various pursuits; for instance, from a superficial attention to an ill-digested course of reading . . . . [while] a multiplicity of studies, too closely pursued, without sufficient exertion of the judgment, has bewildered a mind amply stored with various funds of knowledge, but too little regulated by the dictates of solid reason and common sense.

("Haslam, Arnold, Etc. on Insanity" 171)

This is the typical mid-century ladies' course of education in a nutshell; in the next chapter, we will see almost identical passages written by several of the Clarendon commissioners to describe courses of study in female academies, aspects of which they witnessed first-hand in the early 1860s.

If boys were increasingly believed hardy enough to withstand the rigors of study, women were not—at least after they experienced the onset of puberty. Contemporary medical theory throughout most of the nineteenth century held that, because of the strains put upon her physiology by menstruation, at puberty a girl's education ought to deviate radically from her brothers'. Thomas Babington, whose views regarding girls' education erred, if at all, on the side of liberalism for 1814, writes obliquely:
During the greater part of the period under consideration, [children's prepubescent years,] the modes pursued with the different sexes should, I think, be very similar. In the last year or two, the boys and girls will begin to separate both in their studies and in their amusements. It is not necessary to be more particular on this subject. (219-20)

George Stephen, writing thirty years later, held much the same opinion (76).

Though medical stipulations on the subject of girls, puberty and menstruation tended to relax somewhat as the century progressed, the gendered disabilities associated with more stringent views were not easily exorcized.25 According to mid-nineteenth-century medical belief, women in their child-bearing years were apt to have unstable, oversensitive dispositions. Notice, for example, the metonymic elision between "enfeebled ... [and] nervous constitutions" and women of an age to menstruate implied by what almost seems to be an appositive phrase in this 1838 passage on

25In certain medical circles, in fact, the theory was debunked very early in the century. Many medical men, however, were slow to give it up, as is the case with this writer, who notes: "Mr. Haslam very properly objects to the insertion of mental labour in the catalogue of the usual causes of insanity: but we see no reason to doubt, that the fatigue occasioned by intense thought, which certainly often produces head-ach, may also sometimes become the exciting cause of a maniacal attack, where there is a predisposition in the constitution" ("Haslam, Arnold, Etc. on Insanity" 171).
suggestibility and animal magnetism: "[e]nfeebled or nervous constitutions, women between the ages of fifteen and forty-five, &c., &c., are readily excited by magnetism. Old ladies and robust gentlemen are non-conductors" ("Animal Magnetism" 275). Later still, such theories remain vestigially present in the medical philosophies of doctors like the physician and now-infamous writer on physiology, Acton.

It is via the conjoining routes of psychiatric illness and women's learning that we return to Bertha Rochester and Jane Eyre. As we have seen, Gilbert and Gubar and their followers see Bertha as a manifestation of Jane's repressed anger. This reading gains authority from Susan Nash's argument that the governess in the Romantic and post-Romantic eras was not infrequently linked with the madwoman as an expression of the powerlessness, isolation and anomalous social status of each.\(^2\)

Add to this the medical basis for the association which none of these critics specifically adduce, but which explains why ladies' companions, who were theoretically genteel women in the same powerless, isolated, anomalous situation as governesses, escaped the suspicion of being

\(^2\)Nash comments that "governess characters raise . . . questions of female powerlessness and female rage, but the often imperfectly-integrated intensity of that powerlessness, that rage, shadows the conventional contours of their plots, and, as we shall see, echoes again and again through the classical governess fiction of the 1830s and 40s, until it finally explodes in the 50s and 60s" (129).
psychological powder-kegs. If it was regarded as unwholesome for young girls to pursue serious academic studies or the butterfly curriculum of the accomplishments, how much more unhealthy was it for the private resident governess, a spinster in her twenties or thirties almost by definition and thus subject to the ills to which a fertile woman was routinely considered heir, to engage in these same activities?

Last in the volatile mix is one final ingredient and, given this, it is little wonder that governessing was considered practically a prescription for insanity. One of the foremost causes of mental derangement, according to the physician Haslam in the early decades of the century, was "disappointed pride." This was among the passions that led to a particular form of disorder, "moral insanity." The genus was relatively rare. "To the head of mania and its sequel dementia may be referred two-thirds, and often three-fourths of the cases in the great lunatic asylums. The instances of partial madness, whether included under monomania or moral insanity, are much less numerous," reported the Quarterly Review in 1844 ("Report on the

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"[A]mong the moral causes [of insanity according to Haslam are], grief, ungratified desire, religious terror, disappointed pride, fright, anger, the habitual indulgence of any passion whatever, and any sudden or violent affection" ("Haslam, Arnold, Etc. on Insanity" 170).
Pride is the sin often seen by the Victorians as besetting the governess, and the governess's pride was, of course, presupposed by the pathetic stereotype to be of the "disappointed" variety. The position of the private resident governess, as we have seen, was considered fraught with humiliations to a young lady's amour propre—as a sexual being, as a woman belonging to the privileged classes, as an adult entitled to autonomy, and as an individual whose consciousness of personal worth was belied by a pittance of a salary.

The classic governess's disability, moral madness, is another link forged in the connection between Jane and Bertha. It is of pride that Elizabeth Rigby accuses Jane Eyre in her review of Brontë's novel, and the mental illness from which Bertha Rochester suffers is moral insanity.²³

²²On the same pages, the author comments: "It is a matter of complaint in most of the large asylums that so great a proportion of space is occupied by cases of dementia. Dementia is not insanity properly so termed. It is the hopeless result of insanity; that final obliteration of the faculties which ensues on a long continued excitement of disordered feelings and disturbed processes of thought. To the head of mania and its sequel dementia may be referred two-thirds, and often three-fourths of the cases in the great lunatic asylums. The instances of partial madness, whether included under monomania or moral insanity, are much less numerous."

²³For other observation of the connection, see Grudin 145-57; Boumelha 61 and Martin 124-39, who all point out that Bertha suffers from moral insanity. J.C. Prichard (Esquirol's chief popularizer in England) put this category of mental illness on the map as distinctive, although vague discussions of the malady had been conducted earlier.
Charlotte Brontë's awareness of moral insanity and identification of the disease with Bertha are flagged by a letter she wrote to W.S. Williams (her reader at Smith, Elder) on 4 January, 1848, a few months after *Jane Eyre* appeared. In it, she addresses complaints that she had made Bertha excessively unpleasant:

The character is shocking, but I know that it is but too natural. There is a phase of insanity which may be called moral madness, in which all that is good or even human seems to disappear from the mind and a fiend-like nature replaces it. . . The aspect in such cases, assimilates with the disposition; all seem demonised. (Wise and Symington, 2: 173-4)

But what ultimately demonizes Bertha, strange as it seems, is that she represents the Victorians' idea of femininity taken to excess. In appearance, it is telling that her Junoesque proportions make her physically resemble Blanche Ingram, who is the novel's idealized type of romantic beauty, and Jane's beau ideal too, as we see when the governess sketches her portrait, sight unseen, as a conventional imperious brunette beauty and reality turns out to match the image.

Prichard described moral insanity as "a morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, and moral dispositions, without any notable lesion of the intellect or knowing and reasoning faculties and particularly without any maniacal hallucination" (826).
Bertha represents "natural" feminine impulse carried too far in terms of temperament and inclination. The era's publicly proclaimed attitude towards women generally was that they "are probably best as they are--in possession of that intuitive right judgment which is safe at first thought," while for men, "the stronger half of the intelligent creation," "'second thoughts are best'" (James Davies 50). Bertha is a woman who acts intuitively, impulsively, animalistically even, and in whose case second thoughts would be better. If Jane is "unfeminine" in habitually thinking rationally, and is therefore problematized as a romantic heroine, then Bertha becomes monstrous through indulging too much of what Victorian culture regarded as a "good thing." The result is grotesque and therefore, perversely, unladylike, masculinizing her in traditional terms by making her not just Junoesque, but monstrous, powerful and aggressive.

Earlier on in this chapter, I suggested that Brontë subversively undermines the usual course of nineteenth-century romance in Jane Eyre, and that, in part, she does so by constructing Jane herself as an anti-type of the romantic heroine. This does not mean, however, that the novel is lacking in more conventional romantic types. Bertha, oddly enough, is one; Jane Eyre ironically makes monsters or fools of conventional heroine-types while instead fleshing out the governess-character so easily overlooked in the early
nineteenth-century novel. In the Thornfield section of *Jane Eyre*, we meet not only Bertha, whose character contrasts with Jane's, but also two other such women, with the three constituting a trio conjured up as though in eccentric response to the Sphinx's riddle. Bertha is exotic, dark and dangerous; the innuendo of degeneracy inherent in her West Indian blood has blossomed into full-blown moral depravity when we meet her, escaped from the attics, well past her prime. Next, pert, frivolous Adèle Varens, small carbon copy of the *demi-monde* Parisienne coquette and actress (and, possibly, homicide) who is her mother, stands in for the undeveloped character of Céline. Finally, there is Blanche Ingram, a highly bred young English lady of the spirited school, like Diana Vernon (without Scott's heroine's attractions). Wife, "daughter" and presumed fiancée; of West Indian, Continental and English heritage; respectively corrupt, unformed and ripely post-adolescent in development --these three women are suggestive of the range of conventional sorts of heroines portrayed in romance fiction and Byronic types of poetry.

* * *

In closing this chapter, I would like to suggest an alternative to the view that sees the governess and madwoman as linked together in an expression of the powerlessness, isolation and anomalous social status of literate Victorian women authors, as Susan Nash articulated the connection in
1981. Instead, I would prefer to say that nineteenth-century authors who brought much attention to bear on a governess-character tended to include in their story(ies) someone who contrasted with her, as Walter Scott paired dark-complexioned *femmes fatales* with fair ingenues in his novels, or Gothic fiction offered worldly-wise women "of a certain age" as foils for its persecuted young heroines. If a mid-century governess is a wholesome and retiring innocent, like Lucy Morris in Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds*, it is desirable from a storytelling standpoint to contrast her with another kind of woman altogether, one resembling shady, opportunistic, dazzling Lizzie Eustace. If a governess is unscrupulous but attractive, like *Vanity Fair*’s Becky Sharp, a useful counterpoint is a naive heroine of Amelia Sedley's stamp. In the context of this arrangement, what is interesting is that *Jane Eyre*, which established the mid-century vogue for governess characters, presents also one of the century's first sophisticated versions of it, where bifurcation is not made between the governess and another woman, but rather between Jane and a range of types representing conventional literary "takes" on femininity.

From 1847 on, when a text takes a governess for a significant figure, it frequently follows the example of Brontë's novel in similarly engaging the issue of what constitutes correct female conduct. This is the case, most
obviously, in the sensation novels we will turn to in Chapter Seven.

First, however, we will briefly investigate some of the sources which informed Thackeray's characterization of Becky Sharp, a governess-figure whose genesis owed nothing to Brontë, and much to circumstances at odds with hers.
Chapter Five: William Thackeray and Governessing

"Come quick O model governess!"

On December 31, Charlotte Brontë closed her exciting literary and business transactions of 1847 by writing W.S. Williams, her editor at Smith, Elder, from Haworth, "I have received the Scotsman, and was greatly amused to see Jane Eyre likened to Rebecca Sharp--the resemblance would hardly have occurred to me" (Smith, The Letters 1: 587). Brontë is not alone in finding the idea of a resemblance surprising; rather than finding the two similar, most Victorian commentators saw them as so radically different as to represent opposing traditions of the governess as heroine. Susan Nash and other twentieth-century literary critics, too, have typically paired Jane and Becky in opposition rather than together, as the Scotsman (and Elizabeth Rigby) did, owing to the way each character can be fitted into a distinct Victorian stereotype--Jane, into that of the pathetic governess (an ill fit), and Becky, in the mold of the governess as opportunist.

In many respects, these separate categories make sense. The two authors certainly approached the subject of the governess from diametrically polar positions. Thackeray was a man living in London; Brontë, a Yorkshirewoman. Thackeray was relatively well (if unhappily) educated with publ-
school experience at Charterhouse behind him. Brontë was educated piecemeal and much of her learning was self-directed. Thackeray was a man with a growing reputation on the national literary scene; Brontë, a woman geographically removed from city life and made uncomfortable by others' presence unless she knew them well. She had been a governess and detested the experience, feeling the failure of governessing arrangements lay with employers. Thackeray, for his part, searched assiduously for suitable governesses for his daughters Anne and Minny but, for reasons involved with his unusual household circumstances, the topic of private resident governesses made him uneasy enough to help explain why, in Becky, he created a character both captivating and dangerous to know. We have already considered Brontë's personal relationship to the idea of governesses and their profession. This short chapter reverts to the relationship between art and "life" I introduced at the beginning of Chapter Four and investigates plausible sources for Thackeray's irrepressible governess villain, whether literary, real and/or fantastically imagined in mordant response to the father's quest to locate a companion and educator for his two motherless daughters. Its purpose is both to argue that Becky's precedents belonged as much if not more to the "real world" than

\[\text{For evidence of nineteenth-century fascination with Becky, see Nash 210 and footnote 89 on 391.}\]
Brontë's did, despite popular convictions to the contrary, and, more importantly, to highlight a different perspective on governesses than the one Brontë and Gaskell made notorious.

* * *

Becky Sharp's first avatar appeared in 1841 in a short story by Thackeray called "Shrove Tuesday in Paris." In "Shrove Tuesday," Thackeray created a character based on a Frenchwoman he claimed to have known who, tired of governessing in an English family, decided to return to the destitute but independent existence she led before her employment. But the unconventional thinking and behavior of this "Mlle. Pauline" in throwing over a life of security and ease in order to achieve personal satisfaction might, Thackeray worried, either scandalize or perplex bourgeois-minded English readers. Since he intended to place the story in a magazine with a largely middle-class readership, Fraser's, and to make his heroine English, Thackeray decided to damp down the iconoclastic spirit the French governess had shown. Such force of character was, he felt, foreign to genteel English womanhood. Thus, in reconfiguring Mlle. Pauline's story to suit his intended audience and in making her fictive counterpart an English governess, Thackeray transformed his version of Mlle. Pauline into a more docile and conventional-thinking incarnation (Peters, Thackeray's Universe 257).
The ethically dubious but winning Becky of six years later seems to owe more to Thackeray's recollections of Mlle. Pauline herself than to her milquetoast likeness in "Shrove Tuesday." Thackeray neither wholly Anglicized Becky nor transformed the villainess of Vanity Fair into a bourgeois heroine. Rather, he implied what, in keeping with his own preconceptions, provided a rationale for her moral shadiness, and made her background a mix of the right principles of an idealized English womanhood and the questionable attributes he believed characterized Frenchwomen. Becky's father's English blood therefore accounts for her eagerness to consolidate her status and reputation in polite society; from her French mother, on the other hand, Becky inherits boredom with priggishness and prudery and consciousness of Society's hypocrisies.

Several English originals for Becky can also be posited. Anne Thackeray Ritchie, Thackeray's daughter, remembers as a child seeing a woman greeting her father whom many supposed to be Becky's prototype. Long after the fact, she wrote:

I may as well state here that one morning a hansom drove up to the door, and out of it emerged a most charming, dazzling little lady dressed in black, who greeted my father with great affection and brilliancy, and who, departing presently, gave him a large bunch of fresh violets. This was the only
time I ever saw the fascinating little person who was by many supposed to be the original of Becky; my father only laughed when people asked him, but he never quite owned to it. (Qtd. in Gérin's *Anne Thackeray Ritchie* 233)

Thackeray's biographer, Gordon Ray, identifies the visitor as Theresa Revis, the illegitimate daughter of Thackeray's close friend, Charles Buller (*Buried Life*, cvii-cix).

Another biographer, Catherine Peters, suggests a surprising third conceivable prototype for Becky: his wife, Isabella. Isabella Thackeray, whose naivete and childlike qualities captivated Thackeray while he was courting her and in the first few years of their marriage, became insane and lived apart from the family after the birth of the Thackerays' second child, Minny. Anne characterized her mother as "sweet" on the basis of frequent visits to her, but Peters points out that at times, Isabella could be a demanding and difficult mental patient and Thackeray, whose dealings with his wife seem always to have been considerate and devoted, certainly harbored ambivalent feelings about the anomalous position he was placed in as a married man forced, unwillingly, to live as a bachelor. The worst of Isabella's outbreaks, combined with this ambivalence, Peters speculates, "must have made it seemed to Thackeray that she had become a different person" (163), much as Jos Sedley was to find Becky metamorphose monstrously from Amelia's
apparently decorous schoolfriend into the formidable and scheming woman who may have been plotting his murder. Peters argues that Thackeray learned to value simplicity (like Amelia's) in women because his experiences with Isabella Thackeray created in him a "fear" of "devious and manipulative elements" that could underlie the public persona of a canny woman (like Becky). She also points out that Becky is given Mrs. Thackeray's physical characteristics--diminutive size, slenderness and red hair--and particular field of accomplishments--musical ability and taste (163). Additionally, as Becky did with her husband, Rawdon Jr., (though not for Becky's reasons), Isabella Thackeray left the care of her children to their father. Perhaps there is even a slight echo of Mrs. Thackeray's maiden name, Isabella Shawe, in the name Thackeray gave the opportunistic Rebecca Sharp.

A fourth hypothetical source for Becky's character was Sydney Morgan (Stevenson 547). Morgan, along with other older female novelists Thackeray knew well, like Mrs. Gore and Lady Blessington, was still living in London and participating in its literary life during the 1840s. The child of a mixed marriage (an Irish father and English mother), Morgan grew up familiar with her father's improvident life in the Dublin theater. Her mother died

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1This is in contrast with Becky's English father and French mother.
when she was a child and her father frequently had to dodge creditors, but managed to secure his daughter a limited education at a good boarding school, after which she turned to governessing to earn a living. Morgan's accomplishments included a variety of musical abilities; she was gifted at impersonations and exhibited alternately modest and flamboyant aspects of character. Ambitious and pragmatic, she managed her publishers with a blend of feminine coaxing and perspicacity. She was companion to the Marchioness of Abercorn for a time and mixed in Society, married Dr. T. C. Morgan, and successfully demanded that her aristocratic patrons arrange a title for him. The Morgans' reception in exclusive Parisian circles soon after Waterloo annoyed English society. In her small house in Dublin, Lady Morgan ran a salon frequented by artists of all kinds, especially musicians, and Whig politicians (Nash 143-4).

Lionel Stevenson points out, moreover, that Vanity Fair itself points to the Sydney Morgan connection in introducing the character Glorvinda O'Dowd. It was Morgan who revived the old Irish name of "Glorvinda" for use in her bestselling Wild Irish Girl (1806). Susan Nash reminds us, too, that a less celebrated Morgan novel, O'Donnel (1814), has autobiographical elements in it that also may have filtered into Vanity Fair.

The character of Charlotte O'Halloran, the governess who became a duchess and, for a time,
the rage of the fashionable world, obviously parallels that of Becky Sharp. We remember that O'Halloran's father, like Becky's, was a portrait painter, a bohemian. Both Charlotte and Becky are themselves "artists" of sorts, and both attract powerful, aristocratic admirers by their art, though the "old roué" Duke of Belmont in O'Donnel is only the faintest of echoes of Lord Steyne.

(144)

But Becky is not necessarily the reflection of any single individual. Thackeray had a vexed history of relationships with governesses and candidates for the post of governess to his two daughters, Anne and Minny, after his wife's mental illness became pronounced and necessitated her removal from home. Early in his career, the problem was wondering how to afford a good companion and educator for his children and whether he was to choose a governess himself or allow his mother to make the selection. Later, he wondered how, respectably, his household was to accommodate both an unmarried young governess and himself, since for practical purposes, he lives as a single man. Both Thackeray and his mother, Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth, were highly conscious of the temptation to romance or adultery it would be to have an unattached, dependent young woman at home. "Unless I liked a Governess I couldn't live with her and if I did--O fie. The flesh is very weak, le coeur sent

Initially, Thackeray took on his mother's candidate for her grandchildren's governess, plain and rather dull Bess Hamerton, an Irishwoman who had the advantage of being a trustworthy family friend, but was poorly schooled and lacked accomplishments. Within six months, a despairing Thackeray asked her to leave, complaining in a letter to his mother about her vulgarity and inability to befriend his daughters, particularly the precocious Anne. Thackeray then retained a Miss Drury who, again, was deliberately selected because unattractive enough not to prove a temptation to romance. By October 1847, she too departed.

By the time Miss Drury left, the first numbers of Vanity Fair had been printed, and Thackeray was reading an advance copy of Jane Eyre supplied him by Smith, Elder. Caught up in the novel, Thackeray reported he had difficulty putting the book aside to finish his own work for an impatiently hovering printer's devil. But, while he admired Jane Eyre greatly, recent experiences and apprehensions centering around his own recent problems with the employment of governesses struck a chord with him as he read. Later, he expressed bitterness over the potentially compromised situation of men and the governesses they hired, and connected the phenomenon with Brontë's novel. When, in 1856, Fanny Kemble's husband, Pierce Butler, found himself
accused of an affair with his governess, Thackeray alluded feelingly to *Jane Eyre* as participating in a "confounded tradition" in a note to Kemble's sister, the fashionable soprano Mrs. Sartoris. In it, he indicated that he himself had been subject to like suspicions by "relations" (probably his mother), involving the story of *Jane Eyre*, seduction, surreptitious family in the Regents Park, &c wh. you may or may not have heard, all grew out of this confounded tradition, ... & as the calumny has been the cause of a never-quite-mended quarrel and of the cruellest torture & annoyance to me, whenever I hear of poor gentlemen and poor governesses accused of this easy charge, I become wild and speak more no doubt from a sense of my own wrongs than theirs. (Peters, *Thackeray's Universe* 178; Ray, *Age of Wisdom* 11)

* * *

Clearly, a sense of his own precarious romantic position and its potential for scandal rather than an investigation of feminine ideals colored Thackeray's portrait of Becky Sharp as opportunist. However, as we will see in Chapter Seven, a burgeoning fear of prowling governesses among well-to-do Victorians, would make Becky's appearance seem to predict the tradition of governess-opportunists at which we will soon look.
Chapter Six: The Changing Educational Scene

1. The Four Educational Commissions

"[A]uthors are most useful, pawn'd or sold"¹

If Rousseau and the Romantic idea that dignity inheres in a "natural" (uncorrupted) state of being gave impetus to educational reform in the first half of the century, their motivational counterparts in the second were statistical inquiry, compartmentalization and competition. The assignment of four Royal Commissions between 1850 and '68 to the task of investigating and reporting on education in England and abroad coincided with inception of a nationwide census, a governmental mania for blue-book data, and Darwin's taxonomic account of the processes of natural selection.

The first of the four educational commissions, appointed in 1850, was formed in response to criticisms leveled at Oxford and Cambridge universities.² Enrollments at both institutions dropped significantly after the eighteenth century because the education offered at each (largely classical at Oxford, including some mathematics at Cambridge) was increasingly seen as irrelevant to the needs

¹The line is from William Cowper's "Tirocinium."

²Their findings, for the most part extremely negative, would lead to the opening up of these hitherto closed corporations by means of the Oxford University Act (1854) and the Cambridge University Act (1856).
of young men without career plans that involved entering the Church. From the '30s on, informed complaints about both institutions snowballed. The classics were often poorly taught (Jones 30). "Immoral" extracurricular pursuits seduced half-heard scholars from their books. That the situation was out-of-hand is indicated by the mere fact of governmental intervention; the circumstances' severity is emphasized by the make-up of the Commission, which was constituted of men both sympathetic to the idea of revamping regulations and curricula, and bold enough to face down criticism of their interference in what, time out of mind, had been a pair of almost completely self-regulatory bodies.

Given the widespread abuses of the university system in the period and the liberal bent the committee members brought to their work, it comes as no surprise that the Commission's findings proved disheartening. As Mark Pattison, a commissioner who, as Oxford insider, was a particularly well-qualified observer, commented, the "three great temptations" besetting Oxonians, "fornication, wine and betting" (qtd. in Simon 294), exerted an alarming influence over students, most of whose legitimate business made hardly any demands on them.

The second investigation of English education, the Newcastle Commission (1858-1862), was organized for the purpose of commenting on "elementary" (rudimentary) education. Its mandate lay among schools frequented by the
poorer classes; this put the focus of its investigations at the opposite end of the social spectrum from those of the earlier commission. But while the liberal leanings of its predecessor signaled the government's readiness to back university reform, appointments to the Newcastle Commission suggest politicians were less prepared to tackle the restructuring of the hodgepodge of existing schools that (inadequately) served poor children's needs. The Newcastle Commission's lukewarm approach was rationalized by concern about expense. Already the annual Parliamentary grant for education, instituted in 1833 as £20,000, had skyrocketed so steeply as to stand at nearly five times that. Meanwhile, funding for Britain's role in the Crimean War had depleted the Exchequer. Therefore, though the Commissioners were instructed to propose solutions for whatever shortcomings they found, it was also made clear to them that their recommendations ought to require only a minimal outlay to implement.¹

As it was, the Newcastle Commission's findings, like those of its predecessor, were dismaying. Some million-and-a-quarter school-age children did not attend the grant-aided schools which had been founded to educate them (Jones 41).

¹Two of the most important conclusions the Commission reached were the counterproductive recommendations that (1) the state should merely continue to assist, not replace religious bodies in coping with children's educational needs, and (2) state grants should correlate with results attained by teachers as measured by examination results.
Of those who did attend, only about 29% were over the age of ten, and only 19% over eleven (Barnard 109). To further darken the picture, what formal learning did take place among those who were enrolled in and regularly attended school was, for the most part, negligible.

Despite publication of this discouraging news, the government did not implement the Newcastle Commissioners' recommendations. As Chapter One of this study suggested, interest in working-class children's education tended to dissipate into concern that, if radically improved and "modernized," it might leave middle-class children behind in preparing for employment. Rather than focusing on the many horror stories that came to light as a result of the Newcastle Commission's investigations, certain middle-class parents (and their spokesmen and women in the periodical press) took alarm on hearing about the handful of schools that did admirable work in educating poor children in arithmetic and the sciences. These (rather than the multitude of inadequate schools) were held up to public scrutiny as evidence that England was doing more to educate its lower classes than their middle-class "superiors."

Overlapping slightly with the Newcastle Commission, the Clarendon Commission (1861-4) was implemented to report on the nine public schools that served as principal feeders for
Oxford and Cambridge. Although the "great" public schools tended at this time to serve a small clientele primarily made up of children of the minor aristocracy and of either affluent or well-connected parents or guardians, they formed the educational ne plus ultra which an increasing number of ambitious, newly founded schools emulated. Because its primary concern was with middle-class education, the Clarendon Commission therefore receives more attention in this study than was devoted to either of the two preceding inquiries.

The public schools, like the universities, had drawn sporadic fire for decades from informed commentators in certain of the more high-minded periodicals. Their morals, living conditions and courses of study were descried; in 1835, one writer in the intellectually inclined Westminster Review asserted with distaste that students at Eton were likely to acquire "a confirmed taste for gluttony and drunkenness, an aptitude for brutal sports, and a passion for female society of the most degrading kind" (qtd. in

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'Eton, Winchester, Westminster, Merchant Taylors', St. Paul's, Charterhouse, Harrow, Shrewsbury and Rugby.

'In the end, Rugby was the only school of the nine investigated by the Clarendon Commission to escape scalding criticism. The commissioners recommended the transformation of the schools' governing bodies, a broadening of the curriculum, more academic competition (prizes for merit, examination, a more regular marking of work), and the privileging for matriculation of boys able to bring fees in and open competition scholars, all at the expense of poor scholars and locals.
Simon 101-2)--fitting indoctrinations to the Oxford attractions we saw Pattison denounce a moment ago. But it was not anxieties about fast predilections and slow learning that brought fault-finding with the public schools to a head. Rather, financial determinants achieved this. The financial problems were of two kinds, each reflecting the independent concerns of the groups which expressed them, and each voiced as complaints in publications that catered to these respective audiences. Both sets of criticism were leveled particularly against Eton, the most celebrated of the "great" schools and, by tradition, the training-ground for English statesmen.

In April 1861, following a flurry of upsets about the college that brought unfortunate publicity to it, an article in the highbrow Edinburgh Review accused teachers at Eton of embezzlement (45). The following month, a leader aimed at the more stolidly middle-class readers of the Illustrated London News observed that

Latin and Greek without anything else go far towards making Master Jacky a very dullard.
Parents are beginning to feel this, and to ask whether a skinful of classical knowledge, with a little birching thrown in for nothing, be an equivalent for the two hundred a year they pay for the education of a boy at Eton. (qtd. in Barnard 126).
With its Tory slant, the Edinburgh Review piece has as its thrust allegations about the ethical failings of Eton's fellows and trustees; the Illustrated News expresses the more stereotypically bourgeois dismay that the school fails to return parents a value plausibly commensurate with the money they have spent on tuition. But whether a periodical's slant was Tory or whiggish, such articles' appearance marked development of a new cultural insistence on public accountability; where money was entrusted to educators, responsible, accountable and professional conduct was demanded. From this point on, in response to the growth of this sort of feeling, there would be a slow decline in the number of collegiate sinecures filled by men unqualified to hold them.

Meanwhile, already in 1824, an article in the Westminster Review had identified middle-class education as being "of the greatest possible importance to the well-being of the state." This assertion, like many of the individual, isolated ripples of protest made concerning the state of learning at this early date, dispersed with no immediate consequences. Nonetheless, it is a sign of the growing hegemony of the middle class some three-and-a-half decades later that the most thorough of the four educational investigations the government launched was the Taunton Commission, whose appointees were nominated in the same year.

"Westminster Review (1824) 68-9, qtd. in Jones 34."
the Clarendon Commission to report findings on the great public schools. The Taunton Commission's mandate was to explore provisions for the education of middle-class children. With the exception of the nine schools studied by the Clarendon Commission and the "elementary" schools that served the working class, the Taunton Commission's brief was to canvass existing institutions and to recommend practicable and expedient reforms. Tellingly, unlike the Newcastle Commission, it was not advised to rein the scope of its suggestions in where reform might prove costly.

Like the commission assigned to investigate the universities in the previous decade, the Taunton Commission was composed of men sympathetic to change. But the bulk of investigatory work did not fall to the commissioners themselves; rather it devolved onto twelve assistant commissioners, men also prepared to advocate change, who amongst them undertook to examine some 800 endowed schools along with selected private and proprietary schools. The Schools Inquiry Commission (as it was formally called) began its task in 1864 and heard the last of its witnesses in July 1866. Its findings were consolidated in a one-volume summary, including recommendations, and elaborated on in the twenty subsequently issued volumes of the Report of the Schools Inquiry Commission (published between 1867-70, with certain single volumes running to more than 1000 pages). These volumes treated conditions in particular schools and
included surveys of findings in specific academic areas as well as presenting written and oral evidence accumulated through interviews."

The Commissioners grouped the schools they examined into three "grades" according to the social class of their students; they ultimately recommended efforts to develop both existing and new schools in conformity with a class-oriented blueprint. The first so-called "grade" would include public and proprietary schools (like Eton and Rugby) and more noteworthy grammar schools (like Uppingham). These institutions (boarding-schools for the most part) would provide a classical education for the sons of the upper and upper-middle classes until they reached eighteen. Second-grade schools would provide an education in Latin, English literature, political economy, mathematics and science for boys up to age sixteen. They would be primarily day schools; the Commissioners advocated their establishment in every town with a population exceeding 5,000 where no such schools were present for the purpose of preparing sons of professional men for the army, medical and legal professions, civil service, civil engineering and business.

The Commission's working papers no longer exist (Allsobrook 189). Typical of a commissioner's *modus operandi* was the method of T. H. Green, focusing on Birmingham, Staffordshire and Warwickshire. His investigation usually began with a visit to the master of the school; then he would decide on a day when he might return and review the teaching. Afterwards, he sometimes interviewed trustees and parents.
and commercial interests. Third-grade schools would serve the sons of small tenant farmers, tradesmen and superior artisans through age fourteen with a grounding in Latin or one of the modern foreign languages, English history, elementary mathematics, geography and science. Taken together, the proposals were meant to ensure the education of the middle classes in a manner that would respect and preserve class distinctions while still allowing academically gifted children some degree of upward mobility (Simon 322). Opposed to the idea of a free education for poor or local children, they recommended that established endowments that had allowed these children access to specific schools, sometimes for centuries, be revoked. They advocated that the funds which had enabled their attendance be redirected into the foundation of new scholarships instead.

As for what they found in practice, the Commission, in a summary in Volume I, reported a poor quality of education existed in the endowed schools, a problem they attributed to "untrained teachers, and bad methods of teaching, uninspected work by workmen without adequate motive, . . . and the complete absence of all organizations of schools in relation to one another" (Report 1: 139). In comparison, they found the standards of the proprietary schools, often of a more "modern," less classical bent in their instruction, to be, on the whole, quite high (Report 1: 310
22). Private schools, meanwhile, ran the gamut in terms of competency.

2. Girls' Education

Proving the liberal bent of their thinking on educational subjects, the Taunton Commissioners showed themselves surprisingly ready when asked to incorporate inquiries into female education into their investigations. Their parliamentary mandate did not contain explicit directions to do so and, by going out of their way in this voluntary manner, they shouldered a considerable additional workload that leaving the subject untouched would have spared them.

A second surprising feature of the Taunton Commission's proceedings is the sympathetic perspective the commissioners brought as a body to their published analysis of girls' education. On the whole, their attitude is extremely favorable to the concept of female scholarship, though they remark on multitudes of deficiencies in contemporary practice. Interestingly, while their observation is that girls' education is generally inferior to boys', none of the commissioners relates this to supposed biological disabilities in the sex, despite contemporary medical and popular precedent for this line of argument. (In fact, where these suggestions appear in the one-volume commentary on girls' education Victorian headmistress Dorothea Beale
excerpted from the Report and published separately, it is
Beale herself and several schoolmistresses interviewed who
make them.) The male commissioners and, even more
enthusiastically, assistant commissioners join in building a
case that the intellectual capacities of the sexes tend to
be evenly matched.

If the commissioners assume the sexes to be endowed
with the same capacities, they also indicate that often the
same shortcomings beset the teaching of them. In both
girls' and boys' schools,

short and irregular attendance is complained of;
in both, [there is a] want of preparatory
elementary teaching at home, even sometimes up to
the age of 16; and in both, thoughtful judges
equally recommend the general principle that all
the earlier years of education should be devoted
to general as distinct from special or
professional training. (Beale 11)²

²By this mid-Victorian period, the concept of
professionalism had achieved a dignity that had never
previously attached to it. If "thoughtful judges" believed
that children's schooling should be ecumenical, the whole
impetus behind the four educational commissions of the 1850s
and '60s was a new drive to make education relevant to the
needs of industrial society, and, therefore, in some degree,
specialized—in a sense to make it serve on a nationwide
basis the functions that apprenticeship had formerly served
in a less systematized, less ambitiously inclusive way.
What the broader context of the above-quoted passage shows
this particular assistant commissioner to be arguing for is
the value of a classical education leavened with the
"modern" subjects (mathematics, the "hard" sciences,
Continental languages), not the jettisoning of the Greek
Not only was preparing students for professional careers increasingly becoming a concern for those interested in boys' academic study, it was matched by an unprecedented degree of worry that the standards of pedagogy were not what it might be—that is to say that teachers themselves were not particularly professional in approaching their work. Want of professionalism vexes the Taunton Commissioners on behalf of both male and female students; the teachers of both groups, with rare exceptions, are found to lack any sense of how the art of pedagogy is to be pursued. The assistant commissioner covering Lancashire complains that "[s]pecific and express training for this end [teaching] is perhaps not more uncommon among women than among male teachers; it hardly exists among either" (Beale 67). In fact, as will be discussed below, a certain amount of professional training was beginning to become available to women interested in pursuing teaching as a vocation; the pioneering work in this new field was begun by a handful of organizations like the Home and Colonial Institute, designed specifically to educate girls and women in the art of teaching. As yet, however, there was nothing comparable to serve the needs of the larger number of boys and young men who planned to become schoolmasters, or members of that dying breed, private tutors.

and, especially, Latin that were believed to constitute the most significant part of a gentleman's education.
The two worst problems the commissioners found distinguishing girls' education, and which, at last, enabled them to claim it to be inferior to boys' were (1) widespread reliance on old-fashioned catechistical or rote learning of the sort notoriously associated with Mangnall's question-and-answer lists (reprehensible because it failed to foster close, logical thinking), and (2) undue emphasis being placed on music, especially piano playing.

Beale, characteristically critical of her fellow schoolmistresses, is quick to concur with the former complaint, commenting that many elsewhere obsolete practices have been handed down traditionally in Ladies' Schools. Books and plans, upon which our excellent grandmothers were educated, must, it is argued, exercise a beneficial effect upon their descendants. I maintain that we are not following the steps of those cunning housewives, unless we adopt the best methods available. They laid aside spinning wheel and distaff, they would have used the sewing machine for the needle, they would have travelled in railways instead of coaches. Still, however, their Pinnocks, their Mangnalls, their Lindley Murrays are in daily use . . . . (Beale i).

At the same time, as the inspector from Lancashire comments, music "occupies pretty nearly as much of a girl's
life as classics do of a boy's. Two hours a day is a very
moderate allowance . . ." (Beale 63). Some lukewarm
attempts were made to justify the concept of a musical
education--the argument being that the "grammar" of music
could perhaps be made to serve the same purpose as the study
of Latin did in a boy's education, because the complexity of
musical theory, harmony, arrangement, notation, etc., in
many ways parallels the problems posed to the students of a
language. However, the difficulty with this, it was argued,
is that instead of devoting time to the study of these
subjects, many fundamentally untalented girls were made to
hammer assiduously at pianos, were usually called
individually to do so during time when their classmates were
progressing in their academic studies (thus disrupting both
the individual girl's progress and the class's continuity of
study) and were often forced to practice on badly tuned or
inferior instruments, so that girls' ears remained untrained
and only their fingers were productively employed.

On the face of it, this pair of arguments for the
inferiority of girls' education to boys' seems compelling,
not least because they are constants sounded throughout the
Report almost everywhere it touches on female education.
Commissioners, assistant commissioners, schoolmistresses and
expert witnesses alike censure the quantity of time devoted
to what proved, in most cases, the production of inferior
results.
But however open-minded the commissioners’ thinking regarding female scholarship, the gist of their criticisms reveals a disposition on their parts to wish to find female education inferior to male where, ostensibly, it differed most from it. That is to say that the many commentators represented in the Report, however progressive their attitudes toward female educability, aspired to prove its merits by measuring it against the loftiest ideal already in place for the male sex, which meant a gentleman's education carried into effect under optimal circumstances. While the prevailing feeling in the Report is that male education needed to have its curriculum broadened, none of the commissioners or assistant commissioners wanted to see it reconstituted entirely, and most of the assistant commissioners express the belief that classical scholarship naturally strengthens analytical skills.

While this belief in the value of a classical education is not surprising when one considers either the make-up of the investigatory body (members of the nobility, professional men, and academics), or of the assistant commissioners (professional men and academics), all of whom were likely to have experienced precisely this sort of schooling themselves, it is perhaps disconcerting to find it vigorously promoted by women like Beale, Buss and Davies. For although a growing number of the middle class expressed discontent with the supposed narrowness of learning imparted
by a public-school/Oxbridge education, many promoters of female education also wanted to see teaching for girls and young women approximate this tradition.

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The Report's argument that rote learning and piano playing are evils of female education that account in part for its inferiority to male education is problematic in several respects. First, the complaint itself seems directed at two problem areas—one concerned with academic subject matter, one with a popular accomplishment. In fact, this is disingenuous. Piano-playing, the discipline which consumed a preponderance of a girl's or young woman's time and effort in school, was found unproductive because, as one assistant commissioner, Bompas, says, it "affords very little exercise to the mind" (Beale 176). Yet this, obviously, was the basic dissatisfaction with rote learning. This means that although the Taunton Commission seems to uncover the fact that a pair of problems beset female education, these actually boil down, on examination, into a single one: the prevalence of practices that encourage mental stagnation.

The mental stagnation that girls and young women encountered in school meant, the Taunton Commission held, that their ability to reason and analyze was not constructively developed. (This is the root of the Victorian link between female mental instability and the
butterfly curriculum of a lady's education.) In this respect, their education was regarded as inferior in outcome to a traditional, classical education, where a thorough grounding in Latin grammar and the work of translation were supposed to teach the virtues of systematic thought and focused discipline. Because great faith was placed in the value of these lessons, a preponderance of school time (in the first "grade" schools) was devoted to classical exercises--the equivalent, as we have seen, of the time girls and young women spent at their pianos. But as the Taunton Commission's own investigations into the endowed schools indicated, the state of learning in these schools could be alarmingly bad--in fact, often worse than in the proprietary schools, which usually boasted a broader, more flexible, "modern" curriculum. Nor need one read the ponderous, twenty-volume returns of the Commission to realize that, whatever merits inhered in the concept that classical learning taught boys and men to reason closely and well, the actual practices of schools and masters fell radically short of actualizing the promise of that concept. Light fiction like Tom Brown's School Days (1857) or Master Verdant Greene at Oxford (n.d.) give an unvarnished idea of the "rigor" with which many boys and young men approached their tasks of parsing or translation in days when schoolmasters and college fellows were prone to set their classes the same lessons year after year. "Cribs" and
"trots" were widely circulated even at the great public schools, and cheating was so universal a problem that it was hardly even recognized as such. Needless to say, this meant that much of the "learning" of boys and young men was, in essence, of a rote or catechistical nature. Then again, it begs credibility to believe that the proportion of boys able to translate poetry from Latin or Greek into graceful English or vice versa (a common public school exercise), or to compose good original poetry in one of the two languages (a university-level assignment) exceeded that of girls able to play their instruments with ability and taste. A good indication of the nature of the problem is given by Winston Churchill, whose experiences on entering the Ascot preparatory school St. George's in 1888 were representative too of those of schoolboys from a slightly earlier period. Confronted for the first time by his Latin master, Churchill found himself plunged immediately and confusingly in medias res. The man handed him a textbook, saying only, "This is Latin grammar. . . . You must learn this. . . . I will come back in half an hour and see what you know" (Churchill 10).

In effect, the problems singled out by the Taunton Commission investigators as unique to female education, the

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*Churchill characterizes his prep school as "one of the most fashionable and expensive in the country" (10). St. George's was a recognized "feeder" institution for Eton.*
ones that boil down to the complaint that girls and young women did not learn strong thinking skills, are not unique to one sex. The Commission's presumption that differences between the subject matter studied (e.g., piano-playing vs. Latin) or approaches taken (e.g., Mangnall's Questions vs. set ones posed by a master) in male and female education necessarily translated into qualitative differences, was not the case. Although a girl who had memorized her day's pages of Mangnall or a boy working off a crib sheet would be able in either case to respond to a teacher's promptings, neither student would necessarily have any grasp of the subject matter he or she "elucidated." In truth, one infelicitous pedagogical method could, and did, prove every bit as useless as the other, and for the first time in English history, this was starting to arouse significant concern. Professionalism, pedagogy and competitiveness are the issues to which I turn next.

Perhaps the most marked difference of opinion betrayed by any two Commissioners in the Report's findings concerning women's education is that between Fearon (London) and Bompas (Herefordshire, etc.) and centers on the question of the relative qualifications of women and men to teach. It arises over the preparation teachers would receive before instructing the respective sexes. Fearon points out that the existence of Oxford and Cambridge and of the public schools provided an atmosphere of competition that created a
healthy climate for achievement missing from women's education. "Schoolmasters . . . are far from being what might be desired, either in point of knowledge or of mental cultivation," he admits. But the situation could be worse, and is, he feels, in the case of schoolmistresses.

"Conceive," he suggests,

what schoolmasters would be if there were in England no universities, nor any foundation schools either of the higher or the lower grade, and if the private schools, by which alone education would then be supplied, were to lose the reflex influence and the stimulating rivalry of these public institutions. That is exactly what the state of the teachers of girls is now. (Beale 67)

Women's education, never exposed to the vitalizing competition provided by many and varied rival institutions, was unable to benefit from invigorating exposure to struggles in the contemporary marketplace.

An unintentional rebuttal is provided to this argument by Pattison, who has stronger reservations than his colleague on the subject of just how healthy the atmosphere promoted by the universities actually is.

There is in particular an extraordinary and . . . wholly misplaced reverence in England for an Oxford or Cambridge degree. People suppose that
instead of proving merely that a man has resided for three years in one of those seats of learning, and has acquired a certain limited (and probably to him quite profitless) knowledge of Latin and Greek, with the merest smattering of mathematics or history (frequently got by rote), it witnesses to high literary or scientific capacity. With university honours the case is different. But parents don't know the difference between a class, and a poll or pass degree, and even trustees in making appointments to grammar schools are seldom competent to judge of the value of university distinctions. (Beale 68).

The university requirements, except in the case of honors degrees, are not demanding enough to promote much learning, and even honors degrees do not provide a grounding in pedagogic skills. Attendance at certain schools, therefore, does not translate automatically into an ability to educate others effectively.

What underlies the comments of both assistant commissioners is a concern that gets widely aired both by them and elsewhere in the Report, a consciousness beginning to pervade thinking in the period which is perhaps most succinctly laid out in Darwin's writings: that meeting the demands of a competitive environment enhances performance. In the late 1850s and early '60s, belief in the value of
examinations was consolidated. The Oxford and Cambridge locals date from 1858. Open competition was gradually introduced into the Civil Service from 1855 on (although vis-a-vis the educational preparation of the candidates to which he was privy as moderator for the new Civil Service exams, Sir John Shaw-Lefevre observed in 1861, "[W]e are under the necessity of keeping the standard very low, in order to prevent the inconvenience which would arise from indiscriminate rejection" [qtd. in Allsobbrook 180].)

The linked modern drives toward professionalism and competitiveness that led to new scrutiny of educators at this time also threw fresh emphasis on the need for teacher training. It was a twin emphasis that caused those dedicated to female education to seek the imprimatur of legitimacy of women's inclusion in university examinations. For teachers it meant that their profession, one of the first respectable middle-class vocations open to women, was eager to regulate itself as a necessary step in the quest to be regarded as a serious profession. In a manner of speaking, it was the thin end of the wedge that was being introduced into the hitherto closed, male world of the professions.

Given these trends, it is perhaps puzzling how reluctant most women directly involved in the teaching profession were to press energetically for reform in the face of the Taunton Commission's sympathetic perspective--in
effect, what grudging feminists many of them were. Emily Davies, the most outspoken and progressive spokeswoman giving evidence before the commissioners, was not a teacher per se; she was brought in as an expert witness on the subject of female education, however, because of her efforts to secure women's access to university examinations. Among the professional educators interviewed, Frances Buss's testimony reads as perhaps the most forceful "feminism" to be put forward by any of the women summoned before the Commission, but her personal demeanor on being consulted belied that forcefulness; she was tearful and tremulous, and Emily Davies had to be called during her hearing to provide her with moral support. Dorothea Beale, Principal of the prestigious Cheltenham Ladies' College, was, on the other hand, personally intrepid, but her testimony steers a middle course between feminism and antifeminism.¹⁵

Although Beale has traditionally tended to receive a lion's share of the credit for pioneering secondary school female education, in part on the strength of the role she played in gathering together those portions of the School Inquiry Commission's Report pertinent to girls' education and arranging for their separate publication, her own approach to the subject of female education, as indicated by

¹⁵For a cogent discussion of Beale, Buss, their gender politics, and their impact on nineteenth-century women's education, see Dyhouse's "Miss Buss and Miss Beale," especially page 28.
the preface she produced for the volume, was not untainted with what we would call sexism. In fact, the quotation most often cited from her preface in histories of women's education, the assertion that "[t]he old rubbish about masculine and feminine studies is beginning to be treated as it deserves. It cannot be seriously maintained that those studies which tend to make a man nobler or better, have the opposite effect upon a woman . . ." (v-vi), is a very close paraphrase from Fearon, one of the assistant commissioners sympathetic to the cause of reforming women's education.

Beale's evidence, then, while it does reinforce the position that boys and girls ought to study many of the same subjects, was not informed by principles as feminist as the allegedly tearful Buss's. Where she sounds most forward-looking in her preface and testimony, Beale voices opinions in keeping with the commissioners' generally held views, with Buss and with Davies. But where she differs from these women, and from the more progressive commissioners as well, is in expressing a certain contempt for her sex. "[I]f there is one goddess before whom women bow in blind and abject submission, it is the goddess of fashion" (iii), she comments early on in her Introduction, setting the slightly misogynistic note that characterizes the piece as a whole. Education is necessary, she seems to feel, to save her sex from themselves--to prevent girls from succumbing to the silliness that will naturally overcome them if they are left
to their own devices. Again, evidently directing a blow at the popular argument that study was medically harmful to women (though she says "children," Beale's context makes it clear she specifically means girls), she says that sometimes doctors

find a child feverish and excitable, and they say, stop the lessons.

But a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, and if these doctors knew more, they would find that various causes are capable of producing the same result. The strange and remarkable adventures of "Lydia Languish" may be the cause of a nervous fatigue commonly supposed to be produced by the intensely exciting nature of French verbs or the History of England. If children are not provided with suitable mental food and occupation, they will provide themselves with unsuitable; exciting day dreams, and sensational novels will take the place of grammar and history . . . . (xii)

This attitude was already somewhat dated in the 1860s, the decade that saw the publication, and success of, Charles Dodgson's Alice in Wonderland.

If some of the pioneers of formalized secondary female education act, or sound, remarkably unmilitant in their
dealings with the progressively minded members of the Taunton Commission, this was perhaps because they found a conciliatory route advanced their cause more quickly to the high ground they wanted to achieve. Emily Davies sounds more like a twentieth-century feminist than a Victorian in her responses to the Taunton Commission, yet she planted her prettiest students in a front row after arranging for a group of young women to sit the Cambridge local examinations in the 1870s so as to forestall public caricature of them as unnatural and unappealing bluestockings (Dyhouse, "Miss Buss and Miss Beale" 25).

3. The Governess

"One of the chief beauties in a female character, is that modest reserve, that retiring delicacy, which avoids the public eye . . . ."

By the beginning of the 1860s in England, changing cultural views on education, women and professionalism caused the stereotype of the governess to be subjected to pressure.

To some degree, the 1840s' conception of the pathetic governess maintained integrity under the new strain. This was due partially to the force of inertia; in part, it owed to what were, despite slight variances, consistencies of feature between the two decades. In the '40s, for example, Gregory 26.
the most conspicuous difficulties seen to compel genteel women to work outside their homes involved improvidence regarding household economy, family size or estate planning; now, in the '60s, following well-publicized but failed commercial ventures, investment catastrophes joined their ranks. And now Crimean losses rather than those sustained fighting Napoleon were cited to explain the scarcity of young men available as marriage prospects.

If culture consisted in a stable set of conditions producing uniform and predictable effects, then the persistence of the circumstances under which the stereotype of the pathetic governess had flourished in the 1840s ought to have ensured it lasting authority. Increasingly, however, the stereotype was challenged by one with which it was fundamentally incompatible: that of the opportunistic governess. A combination of circumstances accounts for the forceful way the opportunistic stereotype emerges just after mid-century. Not least was what appeared to be, and may in actual fact have been, an increase in the number of governesses employed in England.

It is a commonplace that statistics are ambiguous indicators of what they are presumed to measure. In any era, they throw curves to interpreters because they depend for accuracy on respondents' goodwill, integrity and capacity to understand reporting procedures. This holds especially true of mid-Victorian England's initial
experiments with national censuses. Because census-taking on a nationwide scale was new to England in 1851, mid-century Victorians were tyros when it came to responding in the two census years that concern us here: 1851 and '61.

Fortunately, both governesses' own families and households employing governesses were likely because, presumably, they contained at least moderately well-educated individuals, to be able to answer census questions responsibly. Still, no guarantees exist, especially because there appears to have been little or no standardization in the way each household answered the queries. Often, responses were made by one person for everyone under his or her roof. For our purpose, this leaves unresolved questions like whether women registered as governesses saw themselves in that light; how many unemployed, would-be governesses were ultimately listed under this heading or, even, what precisely the term "governess" meant in the mind of a person providing a response. As we have seen, an ambitious lower-class child-minder or a member of her family might use the term "governess" loosely, trading on the word's cachet. Conversely, near the other end of the social spectrum, a well-bred young lady or someone in her household might be reluctant to advertise her unladylike dependence on professional earnings. To make matters even more confusing, the catch-all nature of the term "governess," examined in this study's Introduction, makes it impossible to determine
what percentage of registered governesses would qualify as private, resident educators rather than being governesses of the nursery or daily kind, or schoolteachers.

While the relevant census figures are treacherous, it is clear there were more governesses in 1861 than there had been a decade before. In 1851, 21,373 women in England and Wales had associated themselves, or were associated by others with the profession. By 1861, the number rose to 24,770. By the later date, then, some 3,397 more women were apparently "governesses" than had been the case ten years earlier. This substantiates contemporary nineteenth-century belief that the number of those employed in the profession was on the rise, and most twentieth-century scholars in fact assume that this was so. Apart from census statistics, other reasons lend the supposition credence. A strong economy was making the employment of governesses more viable than it had once been. In an earlier chapter, we saw Gorham assert that previous to and into the middle of the nineteenth century, a majority of middle-class girls were taught by mothers, fathers, older sisters or family friends (20). Only the upper and upper-middle classes employed private resident governesses, since girls were expected "to make do" with piecemeal education by relatives (Davidoff and Hall 291). The salaries paid to accomplished governesses (contrary to propaganda-inspired belief) were steep enough to be prohibitively high for most lower-middle and middle-
class families to pay (Gorham 20).

By the 1860s, though, industrialization and the lucrative business of Empire had brought increased wealth to many professional, merchant and manufacturing families. With the expansion and economic betterment of the middle classes, the number of potential employers of governesses multiplied (Purvis, History 67). Even without the unreliable information provided by Victorian census data, then, it seems reasonable to suppose that many of these potential employers would become real ones.

An increase in the number of employers of governesses suggests that a change in class-affiliation was taking place in the kind of family which hired governesses. We have already considered some reasons why most parents and guardians of the period would have chosen to employ a private resident governesses if they could afford her salary: the advantage of having one's children and their teacher accessible and under one's personal supervision; governesses' cachet as status symbols because royal and aristocratic families had traditionally employed them; the likelihood that a good governess could impart more academic learning, polish and refinement to daughters and young sons of the newly moneyed classes than parvenu parents could themselves (Purvis 67). Another reason was suggested by the Bishop of Bath and Wells in his evidence to the Taunton Commission. The Bishop speculated that farmers in his
diocese were increasingly employing governesses because of the lack of good, cheap schools in their sparsely populated counties (Kathryn Hughes 24).

Now more than before, acquiring a governess with a low or merely competent standard of proficiency need not have counted as a luxury. Through the 1850s, the ratio of supply to demand was such that would-be private resident governesses, despite the likelihood that they were being hired in greater numbers than they had been, existed in overabundance enough to depress wages in the profession for the teacher who was merely competent. These conditions made such women more affordable to hire than ever, especially in the context of mid-century prosperity and when weighed in the balance against the period's steadily climbing school fees. So much did the economy favor employers at the governess's expense, in fact, that while it did well, the average governess's pay continued to be about what it had been fifteen years earlier (roughly subsistence level for many of the less able, therefore less competitive sort).

But while employing a governess might continue to impart a vague aura of glamor to a family with arriviste pretensions, the governess who worked for such a family lost caste. Typically, individual governesses derived their social standing from the families which employed them. The mid-nineteenth century was only beginning to recognize a need to assimilate into its thinking the anomaly of genteel
women who worked outside their homes. Before and, occasionally, still, such women were (in theory) accommodated as honorary members of their employer's family. This old-fashioned dynamic (and its shortcomings) are illustrated by Anthony Trollope in the "affectionate consideration" that Lucy Morris of *The Eustace Diamonds* "enjoys" with regard to Lady Fawn's household so long as she "knew her place and did her duty" (22). Paternalism like Lady Fawn's suited conservative Victorians because it was in keeping with established social protocol that associated spinsters with their fathers' standing, and married women with their husbands'.

But as a shift took place, or was seen to take place, in the kinds of families which employed governesses, an alteration in public attitudes resulted. The conventional association of the governess and the upper classes weakened as the former apparently became more of a commonplace in the households of the newly wealthy. As a result, esteem and, even, public tolerance for the profession and its practitioners underwent a decline.

Generally speaking, the mid-nineteenth century was an era fast making a minor religion of professionalism. In this respect, comparison of the governess's situation with the domestic servant's is informative. Competent domestic help was growing scarce as lucrative jobs in industry offered alternative employment, and servants' wages rose
accordingly. The improvement offered servants in opportunities for employment was, in turn, reflected in the way they regarded themselves and their work: many started seeing themselves less as hangers-on of particular households and more as specialists whose skills, properly cultivated, would enable them to switch employments with deliberation that would allow them to improve their working conditions and salaries over the course of their working lives. As a class, therefore, servants were less willing than they once were to believe that their own interests were bound up with their employers'. The concept of the faithful family retainer was becoming an anachronism.

The economic good times that helped enhance the domestic servant's lot might have improved the governess's fortunes, too, had enough of these women proved willing to embrace the possibility that genteel women could be professionals, too. But governesses' marketability had for so long depended specifically on twin principles—the presumption of their ladylike gentility and the credo that ladies did not labor (they had, in fact, been publicly championed in the propaganda literature of the 1840s precisely they were amateurs)—that they naturally resisted

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Although the governess also often changed employment, the radical dissociation from the concept of professionalization of the image of the "lady" she was supposed to cultivate, and a popular preference for young governesses, meant that she was worse off than her social "inferiors" in terms of career-building.
seeing themselves as professionals, despite the circumstance that a change in perspective would have been timely. In the more professionally oriented '60s, their cultivated amateurishness and genteel unwillingness to discuss money matters abetted employers' reluctance to pay and contract with them. Unlike domestic servants, therefore, governesses as a class failed to wrest advances in pay or status from their employers (Renton 83). During the time when the roles of her social "inferiors," domestic servants, evolved away from subservience toward professionalization, the governess's niche in society was still determined, except in unusual cases, by her employer's status, while she was hampered in striving to better her lot by the pretence that she shared pseudo-familial ties with her paymaster, and by Victorians' insistence that to show interest in financial matters was unladylike.

Admittedly, in a few extraordinary instances, the governess's peculiar standing could prove of benefit. The most conspicuous example of this was the case of Louise Lehzen, Queen Victoria's teacher, whose position as trusted instructor, confidante and advisor to a young princess situated her advantageously when her young charge came to the throne. Lehzen wielded considerable political power during the early years of Victoria's reign and managed to retain her influence at Court until Albert, who disliked her, contrived her removal. Even then, she was pensioned
off generously to Germany and made a baroness.

But Lehzen's position was unique and only a small percentage of other governesses worked for impressionable members of the nobility. Given the growth in and redistribution of England's wealth during the period together with nineteenth-century society's tacit understanding that it took three generations for the taint of a manufactory or shop to dissipate from newly acquired money, and it seems certain that more governesses were working for less socially exclusive families than before. Owing to the system of caste determination that allied governesses' status with their employers', this meant that those who found employment with nouveaux riches or socially ambitious lower middle-class homes lost status. The proportionate increase in society of governesses of this type, or at least perceptions of it, raised questions among Victorians about how genteel not only these women, but also their colleagues and profession really were.

In this inquiry, of equal importance with the unanswerable conundrum "How many private resident governesses were there in the mid-Victorian period?" is the question "How many did people think there were?" My concern is with stereotypes, which finally depend on perception rather than "reality" for their potency. Whatever the actual increase in the number of private resident governesses between 1851 and '61, the truth is that editor
Bessie Raynor Parkes exaggerated considerably when, in the initial, 1858 issue of the feminist English Woman's Journal, she declared that "all our lady readers have received instruction from some class of governess" and "there is probably not one [reader] who has not also some relative or cherished friend either actually engaged in teaching, or having formerly been so engaged" ("The Profession of the Teacher" 1). The exaggeration is significant, nonetheless, because it highlights a perceived reality, one which, together with governesses' amateur standing and association with parvenu employers, undermined sympathy for these educators and brought about a detrimental effect on the pathetic governess-stereotype in the late '50s.

We looked before at the exposure and popularization of the "plight" of the governess in the press, periodicals and propaganda literature of the late 1840s and '50s. This publicity was largely well-intentioned, being, for the most part, intended to heighten governesses' public visibility and to broaden the sympathy-base for their supposedly downtrodden state. In the short term, this charitably intentioned movement furthered its cause by, for example, increasing awards to the GBI and the retirement home connected with it. Ironically, however, the initiative also undercut the governess's image with literate men and women so that, ultimately, the originally charitable impulses engendered harm.
Damage was done insidiously. In the first place, advertisement of the governess's "plight" in print and through artistic means like cartoons in *Punch,* or paintings like Richard Redgrave's *The Poor Teacher* (1844) produced within a decade or so the desensitizing effect that seems typically to meet repeated appeals for public sympathy made over time.

Second, the unrelenting coverage non- and propaganda fiction focused on the governess recoiled on her. A large part of the mystique that underwrote notions of ladylike gentility in the period depended on a "lady"'s maintenance of the impression of exclusivity. To remain exclusive, she must remain out of the public eye. According to convention, the governess was supposed to be genteel so, of course, this rule of conduct ought to have applied in her case. Unfortunately given this circumstance, a major thrust of the propaganda engine set in motion on the governess's behalf involved shocking readers by foregrounding how many suffering governesses there were and, in effect, presenting these women as ubiquitous (as Bessie Parkes did). In consequence, far from appearing exclusive and diffident, the governess or, at least, her depiction, greeted Victorians

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1: E.g., the cartoons reproduced in Kathryn Hughes 60 or Broughton and Symes as Figures 13 (58), 14 (66), 17 (77), 21 (88), 39 (183) or 43 (206).

2: The painting is in possession of the Bridgeman Art Library. It is reproduced as Figure 29 on page 121 of Broughton and Symes.
everywhere, fostering the sense of familiarity that breeds contempt.

Third, motivated by the wish to advocate popular sympathy for the governess, propaganda writers harped relentlessly on the private resident governess's poor pay, tenuous job prospects and unfortunate working conditions. In the 1840s and early '50s, these novel media-based appeals to public sympathy worked. The second half of the century, however, was beginning to counterdefine itself against the first, with quasi-religious beliefs in progress and the healthiness of competition capturing the contemporary imagination and ensuring that, more and more, individual entreaties for public sympathy based on claims of weakness and pathos (of the sort the GBI had encouraged) met with chilliness and closed pocketbooks.:

In the 1850s, optimism and energy ranked high among national watchwords. We have noted the growth of a new, professional ethic among the servant classes as one aspect of this. Pride in industrial progress and the attainments of Empire at mid-century were foregrounded in the Great Exhibition. Darwin's *The Origin of Species* had yet to go to press, but it only set an imprimatur on an already influential cultural belief that competition was expedient

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*Gertrude Himmelfarb's *Poverty and Compassion* discusses the increasingly scientific and systematized nature of charity work in the second half of the century.*
for realizing improvement; the attraction exerted by the idea of competition is evident even in the developing mania for organized games in public schools developing at mid-century. Add to these indices of changing times the era's strengthening agitation for reforms to girls' education that would slowly help redefine its objectives to meet employment-related rather than decorative needs, and one can see why pleas for sympathy for governesses lost ground.

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In the early 1860s, Beale's testimony to the Taunton Commissioners reflected the new, peremptory attitude with the old stereotype:

> I dislike to hear a teacher talking in a pitiful voice about being "compelled to teach, in consequence of loss of money." . . . Of course, those are to be pitied who are driven to a work in which they find no pleasure, or who want faith in education--such work is slavery. Let us turn, with their faces to the wall, those pictures of unhappy sentimental girls who have the misfortune to be teachers, and let us resolve to make ourselves fit, and to live for our work, never fancying that our own education is finished.

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*See the discussion of a growing obsession with organized sport in Gathorne-Hardy, *Public School Phenomenon* 237 ff.*
Beale's "slavery" metaphor echoes Charlotte Brontë's earlier allusion to "the trials and crosses" of the governess's situation (Smith 193) and recalls, too, Jane Fairfax's implied protest in Emma that governessing was a slave-trade. But her reduction of a governess who bemoans her fate to the status of an "unhappy[,] sentimental" girl undercuts both the 1840s anger implicit in Brontë's exclamation against the evils of governessing, and Emma's 1816 evocation of pathos, which also resonates through the petitions for subsidy made by the obscure governesses of the late '40s and the '50s who inundated the GBI with written appeals. In contrast, Beale sketches a picture that hints at the self-indulgent immaturity and consequent Darwinian un"fit"ness of such "girls" to meet the demands made on them by a rigorous, increasingly professionalized discipline fast multiplying with serious practitioners.

In the 1850s, thanks to the growing conviction that girls would benefit from an education that stressed more than just "accomplishments," the teaching field was booming. The rapidity with which a training-school like Queen's College filled with middle-class pupils eager to tackle a relatively intense course of learning was an index of this. Indeed, for our purposes, Queen's College's early years offer a conveniently encapsulated case-study reflective not only of changing attitudes toward academic learning and
institutionalized schooling for girls, but also of what these meant for private resident governesses. The college opened in London in 1848 as a day school specifically designed to educate governesses, but almost from its inception, evolved differently. Soon, it was instead a thriving mecca drawing young women avid for exposure to lecture classes and a milieu of their intellectual peers and, at least in terms of credentials, their superiors. Many of these young women intended to become schoolteachers, not the private resident governesses whose education the institution had been intended to promote.

The course plotted by institutionalized girls' education in England after the 1840s tells the rest of the story. By 1850 there were approximately 500 certificated women teachers in England (Renton 86). Throughout the second half of the century, the pay and position of schoolteachers improved. Private schools were beginning to offer a wider range of subjects, taught by experienced instructors (Renton 77). The most prestigious of them, Cheltenham Ladies College, was established in 1858 with Queen's College graduate Dorothea Beale as headmistress. (And, parenthetically, we have already seen in what low regard Beale held private resident governesses. Professionals like her had no use for amateurish practices in, or practitioners of, the discipline they embraced as, essentially, a minor religion.)
Perhaps influenced in some measure by the new emphasis on and pride in the professional image of the schoolteacher came, at last, a willingness among some few governesses not only to undertake special preparation for teaching, but to insist that such preparation might be an asset and to call for extensions of the kind of certification plan that Queen's College had initially thought to offer them. In certain areas of the country—chiefly the South and particularly in London—some institutionally trained private resident governesses began to enter the market and to trade deliberately on the preparation they had undertaken for their work.  

Fearon, Taunton assistant commissioner for the London area, endorsed one which was also known for producing schoolteachers, the Home and Colonial Institution, remarking, "The only schools of the first grade in which I heard lessons given by the governesses which showed any real acquaintance with method and any signs of systematic teaching were some in which the governesses had been trained in the Home and Colonial Institution. . . ." (Beale 91). In one of the superior girls' schools to which his investigations took him in the summer of 1865, he even discovered that a particularly enterprising headmistress had retained one of the Institution's teachers to instruct her faculty in effective means of teaching arithmetic and

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17 There were several institutions in London dedicated to "preparing governesses for the duties of their profession" (Beale 91).
grammar. He found the outcome excellent:

At the subsequent examination held by the Cambridge syndicate at Christmas, 1865, there was a most surprising improvement in the results obtained by the pupils at this school. Whether the improved teaching, or the stimulus afforded by the examinations, chiefly caused this effect, I will not pretend to decide. Probably both operated. (Beale 91).

Fearon credited increased professionalism in teaching, provision of a competitive atmosphere and the incentive of working toward a goal with raising the level of student achievement over a few months.

However, as one left London further and further behind geographically, one came across fewer private resident governesses, and encountered less professional training. Bryce, another Taunton appointee, estimated that only a small proportion of Lancashire girls were educated by governesses at home, and guessed the number was probably less than was the case closer to the metropolis (Beale 70). Fitch, assigned to collect data in Yorkshire, believed that "[t]he number of governesses who have been educated with a view to the work, and who have contemplated the adoption of it as a profession, is very small; not more, as far as I can judge, than six or seven per cent" (Beale 26). His colleague, Green, commented that employment of governesses
was a common practice among wealthy farmers (Beale 156), but the governesses he considers are not institutionally trained to undertake their careers: "[a]ccording to common usage" girls "need"ing to become teachers would be articed at 14 or 15, and after three years would seek situations either as governess in a family or assistant in a school (Beale 157).

That women were still becoming governesses because, despite the low salaries paid, it was one of the only ways of supporting themselves is indicated by Green's reference to "need" and the endurance of the stereotype of the governess as a young lady from a once-affluent, now-decayed household. Taunton assistant commissioner Mr. Stanton's discussion of a training school at Bolham makes clear that the stereotype was a persistent one. The school, one of a fresh, but limited crop of its kind, differs from competitors like the Home and Colonial Institution in concentrating its emphasis strictly on private resident governessing. The school

is the private property of Miss Heathcote, and is intended exclusively for ladies whose families have been reduced from affluence, and who are desirous of becoming private governesses. The pupils come for two years, and pay £18 a year, which includes everything. There is a school at Hackney which serves as a preparatory school to Bolham, where younger children go.
Forty ladies were being trained here for governesses at the time of my visit. The attempt to meet one of the greatest wants in girls' education, namely, a good supply of teachers, is here in full operation. At £18 per head it is impossible the school can be self-supporting; neither the accommodation nor the instruction given could be supplied at that price. Two years is a very insufficient time to fit a backward girl--as many of those who came used to be--for the duties of teaching. This evil has been partially met by Miss Porter, the mistress, requiring that all who apply for admission shall, by a preliminary examination, satisfy her as to their fitness to enter on the school course. (Beale 118).

Green's comment is interesting on a number of counts. First, it is clear that Heathcote has set up her school as a charitable institution designed to accommodate young ladies fallen on hard times. In this respect, its philosophical underpinnings harkened back to an earlier tradition of governess-related charities we saw epitomised by the GBI. In keeping with this tradition, Miss Heathcote has designed her school to train her young ladies as private resident governesses, clearly seeing this as a more genteel occupation than teaching in a school. However, Porter, the
headmistress who must deal with day-to-day practicalities (like poor educational grounding on the part of the girls and young women who come to her and the inadequacy of a two-year training program to compensate for this), takes the "modern" route of screening applicants by examination. In part this difference between the benefactor's approach to teaching and her headmistress's reflects the different social position of the two women: the viewpoints are fostered by financial complacency and awareness of exigency respectively. For this reason alone, the situation of the school at Bolham is fascinating; here is a case where the traditional attitudes towards female education co-exist with more progressive outlooks and practices at a moment of historical transition.

Apart from entry examinations, there were other forward-looking features to training at Bolham. One was the borrowing of the "feeder" system that had been in place for some decades in boys' education. Just as certain preparatory schools channeled boys into specific prep schools, which in turn had time-honored affiliations with either Oxford or Cambridge (and usually with particular colleges within those universities), so a school at Hackney laid the groundwork (inadequate as it may sometimes have been) for the governess-training program at Bolham.

But Miss Porter did not merely adopt organizational strategies from the successful practices of boys' schools.
A "distinctive" feature of her program that Green points to and comments favourably on is her devising of a program whereby girls were "systematically" given a course of instruction upon the art of teaching. "I cannot but attach much importance to this," the assistant commissioner says. "The study of character, the necessity of promptitude and decision, the power of sympathy, the endeavour to make work interesting, are all of them points capable of expansion, and may be usefully dwelt on by a mistress preparing those who themselves will have to teach others" (Beale 118).

Porter was, in fact, among the pioneering administrators in instituting such a system. Green takes note of this new trend among the educators of a future generation, and congratulates women teachers and administrators like her with an innovation almost unknown in boys' education: "in this respect, and this one only, as it seems to me, secondary education of girls has a little advantage over that of boys in London, namely, that some attempts have been made to afford to mistresses of secondary schools the means of learning the duties of their profession, and of preparing themselves to discharge those duties properly; whereas young men who intend to be masters in grammar schools and other secondary schools have no such opportunities whatever" (Beale 91).

The instruction in pedagogical method that today we associate with preparation to teach in elementary and
secondary education seems to have originated in a few forward-looking girls' schools in Victorian England. Because the period was one of transition, however, there were inevitable reversions to practices the Taunton Commission members deplored. Giffard remarks

[amongst the private schools I visited there were three whose main object was to train pupils for situations as private governesses, and for these music is found indispensable. One lady told me that "a girl could not get a situation unless she knew something of music. However unmusical she may be, she may always learn enough to be able to teach little children. I had one pupil, otherwise clever, who became a governess, but could never get a higher salary than £15 a year; the reason being that she could not teach music." (Beale 125)

But the trend that would result in the twentieth century in the mainstreaming of girls' education with boys', and the preparation of teachers to undertake their work by mastering teaching technique and learning pedagogical theory, is nonetheless already evident.

* * *

Female education in the 1860s thus saw a new trend coming to the fore, one marked by a loosening of the hold of popular beliefs that girls and young ladies ought to be
housed and taught in an environment that approximated as closely as possible that of the (idealized) middle-class home. This trend meant that enthusiasms for both the private governess plan and small schools were increasingly giving way to the feeling that girls and women were best served by larger institutions that approximated the public schools in size and curricular scope, save in not being boarding institutions. Beale, who had very little use for either home education or cosy, homelike schools, closes her preface to her one-volume reissue of the Taunton Commission's findings on female education by dismissing them from notice. "I have in my remarks almost taken it for granted that girls will be taught eventually in large schools," she says prophetically (Beale xxviii).

Along with this change, a swing of power away from parents to schoolmistresses began in this period (Hunt 9). This was prepared for by several factors which meant that the experiences of a generation of young women were increasingly disjunct from their mothers'. One was the decline of evangelical influences in England and a concurrent move toward more liberal rights for women. A second was increased social mobility. A third was the realization in the wake of the 1851 census that a number of young women were statistically unlikely to marry; the number of eligible women exceeded that of eligible men, a fact, as we saw, that was given considerable airing in discussion of
the Woman Question. Finally, after a time of national prosperity, a series of economic reverses led to financial disaster for many investors. All these factors meant that whether a woman married above or below her parents' social station, or found herself needing or even wanting to work outside the home, her mother was quite possibly not equipped to provide the training she would require in her own different life.

Schoolmistresses of the period consolidated the power this swing of public opinion accorded them, moving to find fault with parents, private resident governesses and the proprietors and mistresses of small schools for the moral and academic deficiencies of the children and young ladies sent to them. In giving her evidence to the Taunton Commission, Buss was asked by Lord Lyttelton whether she thought girls educated at home or in cosy, homelike schools had highly developed moral standards (their academic abilities, she had already found wanting). "With regard to the schools from which girls come to you; do you think better of them in respect of the general moral training than as to the intellectual instruction?" "No," she responds. "I think in the very small schools the pupils have it their own way; it is so entirely a matter of necessity for the mistress to live that she is obliged to allow the children to do as they like, and the parents too" (Beale 219).

Home schooling did not answer. Small schools failed to
serve pupils well. Groundwork was being laid to provide schooling for girls which would more closely approximate that given their male counterparts.
Chapter Seven: The Governess, the Law and the Sensation Novel
"Let in the tigress"

To recapitulate briefly, then. The predominant 1840s stereotype of the governess, molded in large part by investigative and editorial journalism, sentimental periodical essays and GBI-inspired stories, emphasized her dispossession from class birthrights in order to construct her as an object of pathos, a creature of refined sensibility unconscionably set adrift in the world without the perquisites granted "ladies." In the mid-to-late '40s, simultaneous with the heyday of these propaganda pieces yet running counter to their pathetic tenor, belletristic governesses challenged the assumptions made about these women. Whether evoked or painstakingly avoided, the stereotype of the governess as a genteel woman down on her luck and deserving of pity provided belletristic authors with a representational baseline, divergences from which sent messages to readers about a character's character.

Where a governess is a protagonist in a novel, though, as in Jane Eyre, we have seen that she is virtually always an exception to the pathetic stereotype because the type failed to offer authors scope to manufacture heroines charismatic enough to suit post-Enlightenment readers'...

1Collins, Armadale 253.
tastes. Even where she shares a novel's limelight with other female protagonists or important women characters, the governess usually varies to some degree from type. Take class affiliation as an example. In 1844, Ruth Pinch in Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* has not been genteelly bred. But Dickens makes Ruth, like her brother Tom, one of nature's own gentlefolk; in her case, inherent graciousness and appeal contrast with and throw into particularly disreputable light the unattractive qualities of her supposed "betters" in a novel concerned with exposing the ugly (money-grubbing, cutthroat-competitive) side of the Victorian ideal of progress. *Vanity Fair* provides another instance. In the novel's opening chapters (which ostensibly represent a Regency world but, of course, belong to a novel written in the '40s), Thackeray has Becky Sharp deliberately cultivate the sympathy to be gleaned at the Sedleys' by invoking the pathetic stereotype when talking about her impending governessing fate. Here, as later in the novel, Becky moves with plausible assurance in "good" society. Yet Becky is the daughter of a musician and a Parisian ballet rat.

A more noticeable departure from the stereotypical governess begins to take place in some literary works of the 1850s. Ruth Pinch and Becky Sharp, though unalike in terms of moral integrity, are both more closely allied with the stereotype of the genteelly bred governess down on her luck
than is, say, the harridan Mrs. General, whom Dickens creates in *Little Dorrit*. Prior governesses, even those whose claims to gentility are suspect, have in common, at least, that they can carry them off. They have at some stage in their lives been exposed to genteel behavior, and brought away from that contact a veneer of refinement convincing enough that they can pass for ladies, if birth itself does not account for the propriety of their demeanor. Ruth Pinch comes from a family which, though idiosyncratic, maintains a bourgeois respectability of attitude and conduct (witness Tom’s respect for manners and others’ feelings). Becky has been educated at the fashionable Miss Pinkertons' London establishment. Mrs. General, however, comes out of nowhere . . . and comes with the uncompromising, unladylike force of one of Stephenson's locomotives.

By the early 1860s, cultural perceptions of the governess moved in the direction predicted in ’47 by moral (if unconventional) Jane Eyre and amoral Becky Sharp, and began to approximate belletristic representations as Victorians started to see the governess as a more complex and problematic figure. Now, people often harbored suspicions that the profession had become more than just a means by which an impoverished gentlewoman could earn a living while clinging to vestiges of respectability and lady-hood. Dismay mounted as governessing was seen by growing numbers of Victorians to have become, for invidious
women, a stepping-stone to make use of in crossing proscribed class boundaries.

This perceived trend stirred comment from a pair of women not notably alarmist. In 1861, addressing the phenomenon, the characteristically outspoken Harriet Martineau put her finger on one unnerving aspect of what she saw as a disgraceful strategy for self-advancement. Inveighing against women who, while ostensibly teachers, were actually "adventuresses who hope to catch a husband and an establishment," she identified an effective strategy by which unscrupulous women of the lower classes could turn governessing to the ends of profit and self-promotion: as an entrée to circles where they could make advantageous marriages ("The Governess" 269). In 1864, Jessie Boucherette observed less judgmentally that women turned to governessing "for the sake of social advancement, just as men sometimes go into the Church or the army in order to become gentlemen by profession" (25).

There appears to have been some historical justification for these views. From the 1861 census enumerators' handbook for Paddington, it appears that daily governesses in urban areas were coming from far from genteel backgrounds. Kathryn Hughes suggests that, by this time, the label "governess," with its implication of refinement, had become a tag which some urban lower middle-class women used to describe activities that amounted basically to
babysitting (37).

In the mid-nineteenth century, conservative notions of class construction were complicated by the growth of the middle classes and the challenge *nouveaux riches* posed to the exclusivity of established gentry. Governessing was a natural focal point for alarm since it was a locus where class boundaries were notoriously shifting and nebulous anyway: was the governess a lady or a servant? Historically the marketability of women in the profession was supposed to correspond to the extent to which they were refined gentlewomen; it did not, according to popular myth, correlate with deliberately acquired expertise. Servants, needlewomen, factory girls and prostitutes might add to the basic stock of skills with which they began employment and thus make themselves more competitive in the marketplace or move up the hierarchy that existed within their profession. But their professions were, essentially, trades. No improvement they could make in their performance was likely to cause widely held beliefs about social status itself to totter or, conceivably, topple.

A governessing career, on the other hand, depended, in theory, on the practitioner's ability to convince others she belonged to a particular class; it was widely denied that her marketability was contingent on skills acquired for employment purposes. This, indeed, was part of the rationale underlying the charitable impulses society
directed toward these women in the 1840s and '50s; the ladylike governess required others' help, commentators held, precisely because she could not undertake any action to improve her situation without sacrificing her class status.

As Victorians began to wrestle with the idea that lower-class women adopting a veneer of gentility were infiltrating houses as governesses, they were forced either to confront, or else wilfully ignore, a troubling pair of considerations related to class construction. First, if their fears had grounds, then young ladies instructed by members of classes "inferior" to their own might pick up unsuitable ideas and behavior from their governesses. Inevitably over time, should this happen, the middle and upper classes would degenerate into indistinguishability from society's "lower orders." If, on the other hand, young ladies remained uncorrupted by their contact with governesses of inferior station, and these governess-wolves remained undetected in their sheep's clothing, this implied that the behaviors by which "ladies" defined themselves in opposition to women of less fortunate backgrounds were susceptible of cultivation by all women.

The pathetic-governess stereotype had for a time forestalled popular recognition of these alternatives by constructing a perceived and symbolically disenfranchised "other"--a failed sector of the middle class whose position contrasted with, and highlighted, gratifying Victorian
success stories. As Elizabeth Rigby remarked in her excoriating review of *Jane Eyre*: "[w]e need the imprudencies, extravagancies, mistakes, or crimes of a certain number of fathers, to sow that seed from which we reap the harvest of governesses" (177). The pathetic stereotype refined and reinforced boundary distinctions between privilege and (relative) penury, with most commentators situating themselves with the privileged members of their audience. Now, though, it was becoming clear that perceived class differences between a fortunate "us" and an unfortunate "them," an enfranchised and a dispossessed segment of the population, could collapse under scrutiny. Fears about opportunistic governesses threw into doubt the comfortable notion that ladies were a select and socially distinct group.

The threat of an intermingling of the classes, or its acknowledgment, could be held at bay so long as a limited local habitation—the governess's quarters—and a name—"adventuress"—could be given to class instability seen to be fast getting out of hand. In the person of the governess, Victorians could identify a scapegoat in whom contemporary concerns of the sort just discussed could be incorporated, addressed and, both figuratively and literally, dismissed.

At the same time, association of these concerns with the women who taught middle-class girls in those girls'
homes reveals precisely how worried Victorians were that social leveling was becoming broadly invasive; in the governess, it potentially infiltrated the middle-class home itself which, according to separate-spheres ideology, ought to provide a moral counterweight to the corrupt world of getting and spending. For conservative-minded Victorians, such a breakdown bespoke the encroachment of something very like chaos.

For less conservatively-minded men and women of the era, however, the ideological desanctification of domestic life could be seen as liberating. One vital new forum for imaginative experimentation with the prospect was the sensation novel. Winifred Hughes claims that the genre was not "developed under middle-class control. . . . [Its] content and implications . . . tended to diverge from or even attack the most cherished of middle-class values" (42). Pertinent for our purposes, among these values was the secular beatification of women as angels in the house (Brantlinger 39).

In the propaganda literature and nonfictional writings of the 1840s and early '50s, the governess was made a cultural symbol for embattled middle-class virtues and values. She was especially sympathetic as a symbol because female. The sensation novel of the early '60s, on the other hand, capitalized on these associations with the middle class, with morality and with femininity, but complicated
them by further associating the governess with dawning anxieties about lower-class opportunism. Precisely the liminal position she occupied on the boundaries of proper lady-hood, the tenuousness of which had made her a figure of pathos in the 1840s, now allowed the private resident governess to be seen as an ominous cipher at a time when the status of "lady" as both a class- and gender-construct was under pressure. In other words, the governess-figure who proved not to be genteel after all could be deployed in the sensation novel as a medium through whom to explore "ladies'" unladylike thoughts and conduct without openly challenging sentimental contemporary ideals. Since propriety still dictated that the validity of lady-hood not be canvassed openly (especially by women novelists and the women readers who, popular wisdom had it, were especially drawn to the sensation genre), these novels relied on covert signification in their project of questioning accepted bourgeois practices and ideologies of the day. The unmasking of selfish aims in an apparently genteel governess struck an oblique blow at the concept of "the angel in the house" in exactly the same way that critics like Winifred Hughes now understand these novels' flirtation with bigamy as a screen for explorations of themes like adultery and women's sexuality outside marriage.

Then, too, the sensation novel was the governess's generic equivalent in literature: a hybrid that
transgressed the delimitations of class boundaries. Writers drawn to the genre had ostensibly to uphold bourgeois values like the sanctity of marriage and the rule of law in order to achieve publication and find an audience. This meant that, like the duplicitous governess, they had therefore to seem to embody and reinforce the mores society considered seemly. But the genre was fundamentally a subversive form and its narratives typically express preoccupation with deviance from "normative" cultural standards. By betraying the conventional codes of conduct for romance heroines and the middle-class mores with which the governessing profession was associated, the duplicitous governess of the sensation novel was quintessentially a force for subversion.

As we saw, prognostications of the governess's latest incarnation appeared as early as the late 1840s. Jane Eyre set a precedent for the explicit intersection of gothic trappings and governess-heroine realized again in Lady Audley's Secret and Armadale. Additionally, one could argue that Jane's repression of her passionate nature (and, possibly, its manifestation as unquiet Bertha Rochester) helped pave the way for the sensation novel's exploration of the disturbing possibility that "ladies" might conceal tumultuous psychological depths under composed exteriors, just as Becky Sharp's wheelings and dealings also reveal her to be less than a simple, direct personality. Indeed, in possessing a morally ambiguous nature—sometimes
benefactress to the mealy-mouthed Amelia, at others adulteress and, very possibly, murderess--Becky is positioned directly in the line of Lucy Audley and Lydia Gwilt.

* * *

The better-known sensation novels of the early 1860s are, to a surprising extent, the stories of a clutch of women who take up private resident governessing to promote personal ends. The remainder of this chapter will deal, in varying degrees of depth, with several of them.

In Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and Ellen Wood's *East Lynne*, two of the most popular of all novels in the genre, and Wilkie Collins's *Armadale*, a third which is baroque in its complexity, a central female character becomes a governess so as to construct an identity discrete from that which was hers in a deliberately buried past. All three feature a governess-villain who is additionally, for all practical purposes, the story's heroine, and who is pitted against that powerful policing agent for bourgeois society, the law.\(^2\) In each of this trio of novels, the governess-villain ultimately succumbs to the danger the law represents to her. In Collins's *Man and Wife*, the outcome is more bizarre yet.

The role of law and the lawyer in nineteenth-century

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\(^2\)The law had, for instance, been used late in the eighteenth century and earlier in the nineteenth to repress social radicalism during the Napoleonic Wars (Harding 333).
century fiction, Lynne Marie DeCicco argues, are to preserve or establish social barriers and to define culturally acceptable parameters for conduct. In terms of the subjects we have been discussing, this is relevant because it means the mechanisms representing "official" justice are invoked in many Victorian novels to reinforce a status quo supportive of custom and privilege as constructed by society outside those novels. This society was dismissive of Englishwomen of the period, as we have seen; women were not even recognized as autonomous legal entities by law through much of the century. Therefore, in much Victorian fiction, women's relationship with the law, which could not be relied on to serve their interests, is troubled. In her discussion of Wilkie Collins's *Woman in White*, DeCicco proposes that the figure of the solicitor, who is the law's proxy and whose job is to act as an advocate for stability and immutability, opposes the interest of the texts' women, who represent flux and indeterminacy and who repeatedly stymie his attempts to fix meaning (175). Helena Michie points out in the contexts of other novels that one way they manage to do this is by spinning multiple identities for themselves, an activity associated with criminality in stories like *Lady Audley's Secret* and *East Lynne* (59).

The kind of opposition between lawyer and women that DeCicco finds in the Victorian novel at large has special significance for sensation novels and their governess-
protagonists. If the sensation novel is fundamentally a subversive genre and its governess-villains facilitate subversion, logic tells us they will be characterized sympathetically in the genre. This, in fact, is so—even in improbable cases. Ellen Wood's family background and bourgeois outlook have been credited with leading her to endorse the morals of two members of the middle class, the solicitor Archibald Carlyle and Barbara Hare, the daughter of a justice of the peace, over those of her aristocratic heroine, Isabel Vane, in the bestselling *East Lynne* (Mitchell xvii). As we will see, this is not quite right. Meanwhile, both Mary Braddon and Wilkie Collins felt differently toward "middle-class morality" from Wood. Yet, like *East Lynne*, *Lady Audley's Secret*, *Armadale* and *Man and Wife* employ governess-figures to undermine and expose shortcomings in middle-class culture as encoded in the law as regulatory institution. In all but one of these novels, investigation by one or more legal professionals or students of the law exposes as a sham the middle-class gentility of a villainous governess-heroine, but cannot sabotage her attractiveness as a character. In the fourth, the woman's villainy is finally espoused by the law as virtue.

*East Lynne*

*East Lynne* features a governess-character close in type to the pitiable women made familiar in the 1840s and '50s periodical treatments and propagandistic stories about
governesses. Several strains of popular governess-lore guaranteed to play upon readers' sympathies meet in Jane Vine. First, she feels uncomfortable in the house in which she is employed. As with similar sorts of portrayals, her discomfort has to do with her mistress's undervaluation of her gentility, with her unfriended status, and with sexual tensions arising from her dealings with the master of the house. In the face of difficulties, she wins readers over because her care of the three Carlyle children is by and large more attentive than either their stepmother's, or their own father's. But all this is hardly surprising. Madame Vine, otherwise Isabel Vane, is the disguised first wife of her employer Archibald Carlyle, who divorced her after she eloped with a scoundrel. She is, in fact, the mother of the children she is employed to instruct.

Isabel's odd situation as employee in the household at East Lynne where she was once mistress reverses the standard trajectory of narratives where the governess is heroine. In a moment of queasy desperation, when asked by her former sister-in-law what her Christian name is, Isabel seizes on the name "Jane," and it is revealing to consider this Jane alongside the predecessor with whom she shares a profession and who is, very likely, the source for the name she lights on, "Jane" Eyre. Like many governess-heroines--most of them based on her--Jane Eyre leaves a tenuous or unhappy set of background conditions to go find work as a governess, where
she catches the eye of a man whose social class is above her own. She discovers she has semi-illustrious relations. Her story closes after she becomes the wife of her employer and mistress of his house. Thus her story involves her in a steady progression from unloved orphan to beloved to beneficiary of fortunate family connections to loved wife.

This is not Jane Vine's case. The estate East Lynne, where Isabel comes to work for her former husband and his second wife, Barbara, once belonged to Isabel's father, the Earl of Mount Severn. Financial exigency stemming from dissipation and unbusiness-like conduct forced the Earl to sell the property to the rising solicitor Carlyle, ostensibly a John Halifax-figure. After Mount Severn's death, Carlyle consolidates his new squirearchical position in the community by marrying (to give her title) Lady Isabel.

Several years later Isabel, jealous of Carlyle's close but "innocent" relationship with Barbara, elopes with

"East Lynne makes the case that he does so because of chivalry, Isabel having no resources of her own and being thrown upon the mercy of the new earl, whose wife harbours animosity toward her. Nonetheless, subtextual implications suggest Carlyle is, as one character calls him outright, "a cute young lawyer" "like his father before him" (77). Carlyle's father married money after his first wife died, and "the 20,000£. brought . . . by his second wife had been chiefly instrumental in the accumulation of his large fortune" (31). In A Social History of English Law, Alan Harding contends that "[t]he average solicitor earned no more than £200 or £300 a year," in the early decades of the century; although earnings almost certainly rose by the time Wood was writing East Lynne, normal inflation rates would have been offset by the fact that the field was steadily becoming more competitive (351). The "cute" Carlyles seem to be men who marry to enhance their welfare.
the rascally Levison. Carlyle divorces her but remains at East Lynne with his new wife, Barbara, where Isabel rejoins them, disfigured by an accident and in disguise, as her own children's governess.

The raw components of Isabel/Jane Vine's story are thus the same building blocks out of which Brontë constructed the very different story Jane Eyre. In each case a woman who is down on her financial luck and who is thrown on the dubious mercy of unpleasant relations, but who has illustrious (Mount Severn) or at least noteworthy (Governor Eyre) family connections marries the most desirable man in her circle of acquaintance, despite the fact that he was born into a different social caste from hers and, moreover, in the face of competition posed her by an attractive, unattached female of his own class (Blanche Ingram, Barbara Hare). In each case, the male protagonist spends a portion of the novel living in anomalous circumstances under one roof with two women, one of whom is his wife according to the law and, respectively, one of whom (Jane Eyre) he is ready to make his wife bigamously, or whose continued existence, though divorced from him, would preclude his remarriage if only he recognized her (Jane Vine). Both heroines inhabit the male

\[\text{While the law, specifically the Divorce Court, has dissolved Carlyle's legal bond with Isabel, the lawyer himself does not recognize this as an absolute dis} \]

\[\text{severance of their connection—both he and his sister Cornelia persist in seeing him as a married man until the (false) report of Isabel's death comes back to them from France. Technically, therefore, in marrying Barbara, Carlyle becomes, according}\]
protagonist's house for a substantial portion of their respective novels as governesses to the man's child(ren) or, at least, ward.

In certain respects, then, East Lynne is a reversal of patterns found in Jane Eyre. Jane Eyre's class standing generally improves throughout the novel as she moves from being a teacher in somebody else's school to a private governess, and from this to being mistress of her own school with genteel family connections (the Riverses), then to a relation of Governor Eyre's and, finally, to the position of gentleman's wife. Isabel's situation steadily declines as she loses caste first by marrying below her rank, then by eloping to the Continent with Levison and, at last, by returning to East Lynne as governess. In Jane Eyre, Bertha, Rochester's legitimate wife, is mad and that madness takes the form of moral depravity. In East Lynne, Isabel, who is no longer Carlyle's wife, exhibits classic symptoms of hysteria and has it put to her that the elopement which ended her marriage was an act of madness.

However, where heroes are concerned, Rochester is to his own principles, an unwitting bigamist.

'There is, of course, the brief period of homelessness and near-starvation Jane undergoes before she meets the Riverses, but this is merely a temporary setback in what is otherwise steady progress up the social hierarchy.

'As Levison's mistress in France, apart from issues of morality and conscience, Isabel lived a life more lavish in perquisites (elegance of dress; the civility of servants) than she would experience as a governess at East Lynne.
passionate-natured for much of Brontë's novel and Carlyle the reverse in Wood's. What romantic passages Wood gives us occur in the first few chapters of East Lynne and are sketchy at best. The romantic encounters between Jane Eyre and Rochester comprise a significant portion of the governess's story and tend to be what readers (Victorian and contemporary) center/ed their attention on; today the episodes involving the Reeds, Lowood School and the Riverses are often telescoped for brevity or cut altogether from film or stage versions of the tale.

Twentieth-century critics read the two novels very differently too. Brontë's novel, as we have seen, is often invoked to trace a Victorian tradition of the female Bildungsroman, to discuss the drama of interplay between will and passion and/or to address feminist concerns. East Lynne, on the other hand, is most frequently read as an anatomy of middle-class virtues in the persons of Carlyle and Barbara Hare, celebrated at the expense of upper-class decadence and, indeed, criminality.

This reading, it seems to me, fails to do justice to Wood's novel's intricacy, which turns on the issues of maturation (education by experience), the working of the law, and the idea of humane justice. If Jane Eyre is not a proper Bildungsheld, as I have argued, neither are Isabel or Barbara. In fact, neither woman in East Lynne develops a meaningful understanding of herself or her circumstances,
while both are considerably flattened out in terms of character development over the course of the story. To understand how this process of diminishment works in the novel, and what exactly her rebirth as the governess represents within it, we must turn to East Lynne's structural organization.

Wood's story divides into two parts broken almost midway through the narrative by Isabel's elopement with Levison. For most of the first half, Isabel is Carlyle's wife and Barbara, though on the scene, is an emotional outsider and the unhappy voyeur of the couple's supposed marital happiness; for much of the second, Barbara is Carlyle's legitimate wife and Isabel, as the governess Jane Vine, occupies the uncomfortable role of jealous onlooker to the marriage. To add drama to this premise, East Lynne develops two plotlines that increasingly intersect, with ramifications for all the major characters. Alongside the emotional dramas arising from Carlyle's relationships with the two women, a mystery is interjected into the novel. This is the supposed murder by Barbara's brother, Richard, of a law clerk who worked in Carlyle's office when it was his father's. Together, Barbara and Carlyle doggedly piece together the circumstantial evidence that will exonerate Richard from the charge of murder which has forced him to flee his home in disguise, returning infrequently to set the "detectives" (Barbara and Carlyle) on, or to provide them
with bits of the evidence they need to pursue their task. It is, in part, through observing Barbara's close rapport with Carlyle as the two work at unraveling the mystery plot that Isabel comes to doubt her husband's affection and dedication to his marriage—a problem that servants' gossip and the seducer Levison (who turns out to be the murderer) exacerbate.

It is where intersections between the marriage and mystery plots occur that both Victorian and contemporary readers and critics are prone to find fault with Ellen Wood's plotting and characterization. Isabel, once she becomes governess at East Lynne, is the heart of the problem.

In the early chapters of the novel, Wood portrays Isabel as a feminine angel (subgenera aristocrat) in her father's house(s). At this stage in the novel, she is a moral touchstone whose impulses are unerringly right—if not in the worldly view of her relations, then certainly in the view of the implied reader. Invited to a soirée at a Duchess's, she wears a cross given her by her mother. Emma Mount Severn, whom we are meant to dislike, scoffs because she has not put on her diamonds, but individuals as different as old Mrs. Levison and a young, nameless Oxford student both admire the young heiress's appearance despite her lack of jewels. Later, Isabel outrages her elegant maid by donning her diamonds to attend a village concert to raise
funds for a worthy but struggling music master; it is her hope (which is realized) that her attendance in grand style will encourage the lesser gentry and inhabitants of the village to subscribe to the concert and thus make the occasion a financial success. Via these mirror-image vignettes, Ellen Wood lets us know that Isabel does not indulge herself in fine ladyisms and has a generous nature and instinctive knowledge of the morally correct uses of her elevated position in society. Still, despite Wood's heaped-on testimony to her goodness, Isabel never becomes merely saccharine. She remains a truly likeable character.

Barbara, on the other hand, begins the novel as a frank, impulsive, impatient creature with a number of minor imperfections that contrast badly with Isabel's considerate, refined disposition. While Isabel is loving and a delight to her father, Barbara repeatedly shows vexation with both her parents, particularly her (admittedly unreasonable) father. She is no angel in the house. Further, unlike the upper-class Isabel, who generally exercises restraint in the manner of her dress, middle-class Barbara has a weakness for finery. We half see, half hear about an episode where the magistrate's daughter decks herself out lavishly for church on hearing Isabel will be there, while Isabel herself wears only simple muslin. Relatedly, Isabel seems almost unaware of the effect of her manner and appearance on men. Barbara, on the other hand, contrary to Victorian traditions of
propriety, allows her conduct with Carlyle to raise gossip in the local village. As readers informed like insiders about the facts of that situation, we discover she counts on him to propose to her and, first as his preference for Isabel becomes marked and then, subsequent to the couple's marriage, we see her indulge in tantrums and even go so far as to tax the married Carlyle with jilting her.

Wood plots her novel carefully; the reader's natural inclination to compare and contrast the qualities of the two young heroines drawn together by their mutual implication with Carlyle is encouraged by what are almost like paired acts in a play, the first and second halves of the novel, and by shorter paired scenes which give us keys to the women's respective characters. In one pair of vignettes, Wood provides symbols that prognosticate each woman's fate in the second half of the novel. Isabel's mother gave her a cross that she wears around her neck; in an early chapter of the novel, Levison clumsily breaks it. Later in the novel, Isabel's return to East Lynne as governess, where she must daily witness the intimacy between her former husband and Barbara and be part of her children's lives only through the formal relation of teacher, not mother, is repeatedly called the "cross" that she must bear in punishment for abandoning her family to elope with Levison. Similarly, Carlyle brings Barbara a heart-shaped locket as a gift before his marriage to Isabel. In the second half of the novel, Barbara
presumably receives another "heart" from Carlyle when he asks her to become his wife.

I have said that I do not view *East Lynne* as an unproblematic female Bildungsroman, though not for quite the same reason that I would argue that *Jane Eyre* is no Bildungsroman at all. Isabel and Barbara both learn lessons, but neither can be said to mature satisfactorily given the novel's move to flatten out its female characters' personalities in its drive towards closure. What Isabel learns is that to have made one error in judgment—leaving Carlyle and her children for Levison—is to bring unrelenting suffering upon herself. She also learns to love her former husband once she is no longer his wife. Barbara, on the other hand, learns to be an insufferable moral prig. Nor can what becomes objectionable in her be ascribed to the effect of encountering her as a twentieth-century reader confronted with the moralizing character she becomes in the book's second half. Victorian critics ready to condone heavy-handed message-making in fiction also had difficulties with the book's end. As Margaret Oliphant commented with some acidity: "there is not a reader who does not feel disposed to turn her [Isabel's] virtuous successor to the door and reinstate the suffering heroine" (qtd. in Mitchell xiii).

The problem with the developments late in Wood's novel, with the fruits of the experiences these women harvest, is
that while *East Lynne* is ostensibly a spokespiece for the virtues of moral earnestness and Victorian propriety in a way that, say, Wilkie Collins's novels never were, it confounds the reader's belief in these virtues, even while it builds its case. I use the word "case" deliberately here, because it seems to me that one of the things *East Lynne* sets out quite intentionally to probe and question is the imperfect nature of justice.

The entire thrust of the mystery-plot strand in the novel has to do with the miscarriage of justice--the wrongful condemnation of Barbara's brother Richard on a charge of murder. Richard looks particularly guilty of the crime (though he did not commit it) because he ran off after its commission. The village of West Lynne, and in particular Richard's own magistrate father, have accordingly passed judgment on him *in absentia* so that, found guilty of a capital crime, he must adopt a disguise in order to escape seizure and retribution when he returns home. In short, his situation offers a provocative parallel to Isabel's when she is disguised as the governess Madame Vine. In disguise (as he is), universally condemned for her elopement with Levison (as he is for murder), Isabel differs from Richard only in that she *did* commit a social "crime" while he *did not* perpetrate a legal one. But the entire thrust of the mystery-plot portion of the novel centers on the need to examine detail, gradually to build a case out of
circumstantial evidence until a right apportionment of blame can finally be laid. And it is precisely this we are implicitly invited to do in the story's marriage-strand.

In the mystery strand, there are three approximate positions taken on the matter of Richard's guilt. The legal system, in a party headed by "Justice" Hare (Richard's father), has passed judgment on him: he is guilty in the eyes of the law. At the other end of the spectrum of judgment is Barbara, who, out of sisterly love and knowledge of his character, believes him innocent. Uncomfortably in the middle, though he betrays no discomfort with his position, is Carlyle. As a lawyer, he is presumably bound to respect and uphold the findings of due judicial process; as a friend of Richard's family--and particularly of Barbara--he is prevailed on to help clear Richard of the charges laid against him. In fact, though Wood never emphasizes this point, Carlyle's position is an untenable one. In befriending Richard's cause, in meeting secretly with the disguised young man to provide him with money and in keeping his whereabouts a secret, Carlyle is abetting a "known" felon.

In contrast to Carlyle's willingness to investigate the matter of Richard's guilt in the mystery strand (although here Barbara is the primary mover and the more inspired

This is not an aberration, either; he breaks the law again later when he lets Levison lie low to escape his creditors at East Lynne.
detective), Carlyle remains obstinately blind to the nuances of his relationship with Isabel when she is his wife in the marriage plot, as when he overlooks the unfortunate effects of his sister's interference in their household affairs. Nor is his conduct above censure in his ongoing relationship with Barbara--they are blameworthy in being together tête-à-tête enough to spark servants' gossip; moreover, by Victorian standards, his private meetings with her after she has confessed a love for him that he does not return are reprehensible. Given these missteps of his, it is astonishing that critics, especially twentieth-century ones, are prepared to applaud the man.  

What has diffused the tendency to find fault with Carlyle is the unanimity with which the narrator's voice, and the voices of other characters in the novel, call the man "fair" and "honorable," virtues which Carlyle repeatedly says he himself strives to manifest. In part, this is owing to his respectable position as solicitor in his community. But for readers to accept the appearance of his rectitude unconditionally for this reason is foolish, and even East Lynne seems, when it is not endorsing Carlyle, to indicate this might be the case. Carlyle may excel at business dealings with Mount Severn's creditors; with his clerk Dill, with servants and with his governess Jane Vine, his conduct

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E.g., Anne Cvetkovitch, who finds Carlyle honorable. Helena Michie proves an exception.
is impeccable. But the novel provides an almost overwhelming multiplicity of incidents that show Carlyle's boorish treatment of those who are closest to him. It is a capacity for sentiment he lacks, and when Barbara becomes his wife in the second half of the novel, her passion is compressed out of her to be replaced with a penchant for shallow moralizing. (Isabel "take[s] up her cross" in the second half of the novel; she also assumes the whole quota of emotionalism that had been divided out between the two women during the first half of the novel.)

Impressionable Isabel suffered under Carlyle's insensitivity. Barbara must change and become diminished from a fully realized character to one who complements her husband in order to accommodate the new, Carlyle-oriented dispensation at East Lynne. By the end of the novel, she treats her once-coveted role as Carlyle's wife as a business transaction.

As I remarked earlier, it has been argued that East Lynne is a celebration of the middle classes and their virtues staged at the aristocracy's expense. We have already seen how the novel traces the opposed trajectories of Lady Isabel's loss of caste and Carlyle's steady climb up

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"This tendency of Carlyle's is carried to such lengths in his sister, Cornelia, as to make her almost a caricature.

"The notable exception to this is the uncharacteristic moment near the end of the novel when Barbara notices that William is chilled in the hall during a false alarm of "fire" (468)."
the establishment ladder (near the close of the novel, like the self-made John Halifax, he is named MP for his community). The novel's two blackest villains, Emma Mount Severn and Francis Levison, are both members of the aristocracy. We are clearly meant to find fault with Isabel's blue-blooded father for running through an enormous inheritance and leaving his daughter destitute. And certainly as the daughter of a prosperous glove manufacturer, Ellen Wood had personal reasons to be supportive of the claims and gains of middle-class enterprise.

However, what is one to do with the fact that Isabel is at her most likeable, and acts on the strictest Christian principles of any character in the novel, when she is an aristocrat? She only embarks on the morally ambiguous phase of her career after muddying the waters of her class affiliation by marrying "down." In the book's early chapters, the earl's daughter is both a capable agent in her own domain (as when she handles payments) and flexible at adapting to new situations (she makes a mental note to offer the piano-tuner Kane food the next time he comes to East Lynne after learning he is probably hungry). No whit stodgy, she has a natural flair for the newfangled and innovative, as when she buys tickets for a village concert and has Carlyle broadcast her intention to attend with a view to boosting ticket sales for the event. Finally,
unlike many middle-class governesses, real and literary, when the earl's daughter sets out to earn her bread (even before having the impetus of dealing with her own children), she does a steady and conscientious job that earns her recognition.

Meanwhile, what of the middle-class Carlyle? Like John Halifax, the lawyer is held up as an enterprising and successful exemplar of the rising middle-class man; unlike John Halifax, it is by no means so clear he is unproblematically to be accepted as the good man for whom he is universally taken. We have seen that he is boorish in his personal dealings. There is an even more explicit subversion of his disposition, though. In discussing Wood's portrayals of Isabel and Barbara Hare, I identified a favorite literary device of the author's: the pairing of episodes that invite the reader to compare and contrast two characters. At a crucial point not quite midway through East Lynne, a curious pair of passages suggest we consider Carlyle and Levison in such a conjunction. Richard has been visiting his family home in disguise. As he is leaving, he catches sight of the man he recognizes as the murderer for whose crime he has been sentenced. He returns to his old home to tell his sister Barbara that he has seen the murderer in a lane nearby, walking fast, with a small parcel in one hand (229).

Only one page earlier, before Richard's excited
exchange with Barbara, another man leaves the Hares' house after talking with Barbara. He is running late, in a hurry, and carrying a small parcel. That man is Archibald Carlyle.

The juxtaposition into which Ellen Wood throws her hero and her villain at this point in *East Lynne* reminds one of the description of her two heroines, Isabel and Barbara, at church near the beginning of the novel, before either woman becomes Carlyle's wife. Isabel, the aristocrat and supposed heiress, is simply outfitted in muslin; Barbara wears an elaborate dress and a hat with a particularly swashbuckling feather. Both appear in the same venue, but Isabel's unassuming character is illustrated and made to contrast with Barbara's brasher one through the choices they make in dressing for the occasion. The paired incidents with Carlyle and Levison differ from this scene in that rather than bringing characters together to point dissimilarities between them, the similarities between the two men, right down to the parcels they carry (both gratuitous from any plot standpoint), encourage us to see them as alike.

There is, moreover, an implicit contrast insisted on by the paired plots of the novel. Carlyle energetically helps Barbara pursue for Richard a "justice" that has its foundations in love at the same time as he resolutely disowns Isabel from the moment she is found to have eloped,

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"Barbara dresses to the hilt because she knows the earl's daughter will be attending the service; her thoughts are clearly on worldly, not religious matters."
and speedily turns to the Divorce Court. It never occurs to the tenacious detective of the mystery plot to investigate or question the circumstances within the marriage-plot--his own marriage--that led to Isabel's departure. His lack of insight here is underlined by his inability to recognize his own (admittedly disguised and disfigured) wife when he is placed in close daily contact with her. He cannot see beyond the governess-façade; she is too Protean a being for Carlyle to comprehend and adequately classify and codify by fully defining. Only on her deathbed does he recognize the woman who has been living under his roof, in some respects a tortured Bertha Rochester-figure whose viewpoint we share as if in anticipation of Wide Sargasso Sea.

**Lady Audley's Secret**

As a sensation novelist, M. E. Braddon had, on the face of it, a greater personal stake in the genre's project of dissection of articles of cultural faith than Ellen Wood did as the respectable, middle-class daughter of a glovemaker and a clergyman's wife. In 1857, as a twenty-two-year-old, Braddon supported herself and her mother by going on the stage. Three years later, she stopped acting and began instead to write, first under the aegis of a much older country squire with whom she was probably romantically involved, and then for married publisher John Maxwell, 

"Braddon's biographer, Robert Wolff, discusses this literary patronage by John Gilby rather fancifully as an expression of the fact that the squire was "in his own way
with whom she entered knowingly into a bigamous relationship
mildly reminiscent of the fate that nearly befell an
unknowing Jane Eyre." Perhaps more than any other
successful sensation novelist, Braddon's sex, life and
attitudes made her a likely candidate to investigate the
extent to which the rigid ideals of what Mary Poovey has
called the "proper lady" were artificial constructs and not
an integral part of a woman's life.

Braddon's early experiments with fiction were largely
modeled on Jane Eyre (Wolff 44). She showed promise, and
The Welcome Guest of 20 October 1860 carried a short story,"My Daughters," written about the agonies a parent undergoes
watching his daughters encounter a series of more or less
contemporary texts, including John Halifax, Gentleman (Wolff 89). This first published work reveals Braddon to have been
familiar with both the stereotypical and the more subversive
incarnations of the governess before she came to write her
sensation bestseller, Lady Audley's Secret.

What is interesting about Lady Audley's Secret when

in love with her" and anxious to put the young actress "on
her feet financially" before proposing to her (83-97).

Maxwell's wife was incarcerated in a Dublin madhouse.

In fact, the same sorts of criticisms that were
leveled against Brontë by Elizabeth Rigby also plagued
Braddon. Commentators complained, for instance, that she
lacked knowledge of how the "quality" lived. She was
criticized for portraying country gentlemen as too fond of
alcohol and too ignorant in John Marchmont's Legacy (Wolff
193).
considered alongside that other bestselling novel involving a governess, *East Lynne*, is a reversal of the pattern set in the other novel— together with the different effect this achieves. In *East Lynne*, Isabel marries below her rank to unhappy effect. She ends by becoming a governess, and, while she does so by choice to win access to her children (and, one suspects, to Carlyle's presence, too), the overall trajectory of her story thus reverses the classic one of the pathetic governess. With whatever singular alterations to the formula, *East Lynne* is basically the riches-to-rags story told in so many subsidy applications to the GBI. Like theirs, its goal is to elicit the reader's pity.

*Lady Audley's Secret*, in contrast, is out to disturb its audience.

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In *Lady Audley's Secret*, the first glimpse given the reader of Audley Court, seat of Sir Michael Audley and his new bride, the former governess Lucy Graham, is of the stable clock that presides over the entryway to the buildings. Braddon borrows from painterly, and predicts filmic technique as she describes the process by which one wends down the drive that runs to the house:

there was no thoroughfare, and unless you were going to the Court you had no business there at all.

At the end of this avenue there was an old
arch and a clock-tower, with a stupid, bewildering clock, which had only one hand; and which jumped straight from one hour to the next, and was therefore always in extremes. (1)

Ultimately, however, all the characters who come to Audley Court (prior to its final transformation into historical site) do have business there, and that business is either to be tried on their mettle or to submit in other ways to processes of judgment. The hero, Robert Audley, comes to practice as an amateur those inquisitorial skills he ought in theory to put into professional practice as a gentleman called to the bar. George Talboys comes to sort out the precise nature of the marital predicament in which he finds himself on his return from Australia to England. By the end of the story, tourists come to gape and, like Audley and Talboys, ask questions—especially about "the pretty, fair-haired woman" (446), Lucy Audley, whose customarily veiled portrait, reminiscent of Fra Pandolf's painting in Browning's "My Last Duchess," hangs in the octagonal chamber outside her former bedroom.\(^\text{15}\)

In Braddon's novel, Audley Court becomes precisely that—a courtroom where two male Audleys, inheritors of that name by birthright, sentence a provisional Audley-by-

\(^{15}\text{The tourists' interest is to ask questions about Lucy Audley as Robert Audley did but, in keeping with the deflated tenor of the novel's close, the fact-finding effort has degenerated into uncommitted voyeurism.}\)
illegitimate marriage (no real Audley at all) to exile and social excommunication. The novel's gothic or, more precisely, pre-Raphaelite setting becomes the seat of a kangaroo court proceeding whereby, with the help of a tame physician, Lady Audley is sentenced to incarceration in a Continental madhouse. Robert Audley makes the choice to conduct the affair in this hushed, sub rosa manner because he is anxious to avoid involving his new aunt in the scandal of a courtroom trial for murder. To do so would mean, he points out, pain for his uncle and, the doctor--possibly less disingenuously--points out, bringing his family into disrepute. (In this, Audley is unlike Archibald Carlyle, who in dealing with personal calamity applies posthaste to the Divorce Court to rid him of his unfaithful wife. The difference in reaction of the two men signals their different class affiliations: Audley's roots in the minor aristocracy incline him to settle the matter privately in the centuries'-old gentlemanly tradition; the middle-class Carlyle's impulse is to take recourse to the new, very public Divorce Court.)

Given a choice between making Lady Audley liable to prosecution for the murder of George Talboys and arranging for her walling-up in a Belgian maison de santé, Audley opts for the latter. His grounds for undertaking to punish his aunt at all, however, are negligible. Her victim, George Talboys, is not dead, though even Lady Audley believes him
to be, since she seems to have pushed him down a well. (She certainly tells Robert that she has, and her maid, Phoebe Marks, bears this out. Neither one of these women is necessarily credible, however.) Suggestions are made in the novel that Lady Audley may be mad. George Talboys himself, the character most likely to be reliable on the subject, alludes to the episode in obscure terms, and insists that "my chief thought was of the safety of the woman who had betrayed me" (443), a phrase which is as apt to relate to his wife's betrayal in trying to convince him that she had died, when what she had really done was assume a new identity and contract a bigamous marriage. In any event, in a letter he entrusted for delivery to her after clambering out of the well, and which is never sent, he promises "You need fear no molestation from me" (421). Molestation comes from Audley instead.

The offstage occurrence of the "murder" of George Talboys has its parallel in the other "crimes" committed by Lady Audley (the breaking-and-entering episode at Robert Audley's Fig-tree Court chambers and the nighttime arson at Marks's Mount Stanning inn). In each case, circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that Lady Audley is the culprit, but not only is this never made clear by the narration of events (which would undercut the story's suspense), but it never comes out in any elucidating "wrap-up" after the action of the novel has concluded (which would not).
The only transgression of which Lady Audley is demonstrably culpable, therefore, is bigamy, and the remedy for that transgression, as Dr. Mosgrave suggests, is "to send her back to her first husband; if he will have her" (377). Of course, at this point in the narrative, Robert believes that first husband to be dead. He is on the horns of a dilemma, the dimensions of which he never realizes and which the reader can only get the measure of when Lady Audley's Secret has ended. Robert wants to punish Lady Audley for a murder she did not commit but of which he believes her to be guilty. He does not want his uncle to suffer from loss of faith in this woman, whom he (the uncle) loves, but Robert feels that revenging Talboys is his first priority. However, since Talboys is not dead, and in fact was willing, we discover, to allow Lady Audley to continue her bigamous life "unmolested," Audley is bringing his uncle's marital affairs to a crisis he ostensibly deplores, paining his uncle and "sentencing" his aunt, completely out of a false understanding of the situation in which he has chosen to embroil himself. Furthermore, Lady Audley remains incarcerated in Belgium for almost a year after Robert discovers that Talboys escaped death before word is brought to him of her own death, which resulted from this incarceration. Talboys is alive when Lady Audley is informally "sentenced" for his murder; Lady Audley is dead, and Audley responsible when the novel closes.
Meantime, the argument that Lady Audley is sane, despite her fear that she carries a predisposition to insanity inherited from her mother, is well enough known to need no rehearsal here. It is not just twentieth-century critics influenced by studies of the Victorian feminization of madness who interpret the text in this way; within the novel, it is also the opinion of the doctor who is called in to examine her, and who, hearing her story from Audley, declares she is not insane at all, but rather just "dangerous." Michie is reminded of Jane Eyre and Bertha Rochester, suggesting that Robert Audley's unpeeling of a series of name-bearing labels on Lucy Audley's hatbox recalls the scene in Brontë's story where, on the eve of her wedding, Jane sees what will be her married name, "Mrs. Rochester," affixed to a trunk and feels disoriented about her future identity. As Jane and Bertha elide under that one fixed name in the text, so Lucy Audley's various personae coincide briefly and are established by the labels' incriminating print (68).

In the final chapter of Braddon's novel, as in East Lynne, there is a general diminishment in the scale of the personalities, events and settings from the ones that have absorbed us through much of the novel. The "Court" of Sir Michael Audley has been replaced by the middle-class institution of the small-"c" court where his nephew Robert practices law. The business of matrimonial infelicity that
has absorbed so much of Robert's attention throughout the novel, and has been played for "sensational"--scandalous and emotional--effect on readers there, has become desensationalized; in the story's last pages, Robert entertains a courtroom audience with "deliciously comic" renditions of "the faithless Nobb's amatory correspondence" in a breach of promise case (445).

In keeping with this note, the closing chapters give us a new venue dominated by a new clock as Braddon and Robert Audley take us to the Talboys' house with its rigorously scheduled routines and the unrelenting, "maddening" tick of its tyrannical clock. Although Robert Audley, reformed like Hamlet, has put both his listless self and the time right by the close of the story that involves him, there is to pay a general deflation in the scale of the world represented. *Lady Audley's Secret* has had two handsome women on offer to tempt him to thoughts of romance through most of the text. The one is his fascinating aunt. The second, Lucy's step-daughter Alicia, is far more outspoken and athletic than the hyper-feminine Lucy, and Robert finds her rather engaging tendency to be a "bouncer" off-putting. Halfway through the novel, a much less fully characterized Clara Talboys gives him a third romantic possibility. Unlike the other two women, Clara is an escapee from the realms of Greek statuary and tragedy with her aquiline features, noble brow and taste for revenge, and is about as suitable a potential spouse for
the shiftless, charming young man as a marble Antigone or Elektra would be. Yet it is she the hero marries in an unconvincing end to a book that has brought two female characters to more full-blooded life.

The potential for subversion of the picture of the happy home Braddon closes on is encapsulated in the likening of the young Audleys' matrimonial house to a "fairy" cottage. Such a dwelling is the last place one can envisage lackadaisical Robert Audley or his marmoreal wife settling down to a comfortable posterity. But Braddon settles matters more ominously still, since throughout the novel "fairy" is a word that has consistently been linked with Lady Audley and her attractiveness in domestic environs.

**Armadale and Man and Wife**

As in much of *Lady Audley's Secret*, the world of *Armadale* is ruled by the sense of a time out of joint, a sense concretized by another erratic clock. In *Armadale*, the clock's design is the preoccupation with which amiable Major Milroy distracts himself from the intolerable atmosphere his wife has created at home ever since invalidism transformed her to a harpy. Perversely, its mechanical figures enact a futile, violent little drama no less disturbing than what he seeks to escape.

The performance began with the opening of the sentry-box on the right-hand side of the platform, as punctually as could be desired; the door on the
other side, however, was less tractable—it remained obstinately closed. Unaware of this hitch in the proceedings, the corporal and his two privates appeared in their places in a state of perfect discipline, tottered out across the platform, all three trembling in every limb, dashed themselves headlong against the closed door on the other side, and failed in producing the smallest impression on the immovable sentry presumed to be within. An intermittent clicking, as of the major's keys and tools at work, was heard in the machinery. The corporal and his two privates suddenly returned, backwards, across the platform, and shut themselves up with a bang inside their own door. Exactly at the same moment, the other door opened for the first time, and the provoking sentry reappeared with the utmost deliberation at his post, waiting to be relieved. (126)

The suggestion is even stronger here than in *Lady Audley's Secret* that no benevolent God fulfils the role of regulator-clockmaker, a suggestion made more explicit still in the ongoing struggle represented between a belief system organized around the concept of divine order (*vide* Decimus Brock) and one that champions fate (represented by Allan Armadale/Ozias Midwinter's father in his revelatory letter
to his son). As in *Lady Audley's Secret*, the absence or inadequacy of an authoritative organizing principle throws doubt on the efficacy of human attempts to deal in justice.

In common with Braddon's novel, *Armadale* goes the further step of indicating that with regulatory agencies AWOL or haywire, one cannot rely on traditional Western standards for judging human beings. Both works play this out most simply on the level of names. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Lucy, the ostensible Lady Audley (née Graham) is actually Helen Talboys (née Maldon). Nomenclature becomes still more tangled in *Armadale*. The governess-villain Lydia Gwilt is properly Lydia Manuel; there are five Allan Armadales and two Ozias Midwinters whose respective stories the reader must keep straight. Mother Oldershaw is also Mother Jezebel and Dr. Downward "buys" the name of Dr. le Doux: when he purchases that physician's testimonials and sanatorium. Throughout the novel, names and identities are assumed solely for convenience' sake; the essences of people and things remain unfixed.

Relativity pervades various other verbal and non-verbal clues to character throughout the texts as well. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Lady Audley, with her gold curls, affectations of delicacy and femininity, genteel demeanor and accomplishments, is the "embodiment of the [conventional mid-Victorian] feminine ideal" (Pykett 89). *Armadale*'s Lydia Gwilt is a more problematic beauty. She has a
sensuous figure and lovely face, but her hair is the vivid red that conventional Victorian taste decried, and jealous Mrs. Milroy, at least, assumes that the sway of her hips when walking betrays sexual self-consciousness. Each woman passes for younger than her chronological age. And each is a mistress at fabricating autobiographical detail and at reinventing herself—as a governess—in pursuit of financial security.

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Both Lucy Audley and Lydia Gwilt are caught out and punished for their machinations. Yet more subversive, even, is the portrayal of governess Anne Silvester in *Man and Wife* (1870). Protesting the laxity of Scottish marriage laws of the time, *Man and Wife* involves Anne Silvester's attempts to discover whether or not she is legally married to her friend and pupil's fiancé, Arnold Brinkworth. She and Brinkworth together deceived the landlady of a country inn, pretending to be a married couple so Anne may escape suspicion as a lady travelling alone and friendless, and contemporary Scottish law leaves enough ambiguity in mutual declarations of this sort, even without the involvement of clergy, to throw the issue in question.

Given his own anomalous position as common-law husband to both Caroline Graves and Martha Rudd from 1868 on, we need not suspect that Collins means Anne Silvester's bigamous position to allude in any way to Lucy Graham's.
Anne's moral and self-sacrificing nature markedly differentiates her from another governess-bigamist, Lucy, as does the close nature of her relationship with her pupil, Blanche. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, governessing is a way for Lucy to support herself while creating a new (and false) identity as a single woman. When the opportunity to better her economic and social position comes along in the form of Lord Audley's proposal, lamia-like, she shifts identity again and becomes his wife. Anne, on the other hand, apparently emerges from the old tradition of the governess which sees her primarily as her pupil('s/s') friend and, practically, relation, and only secondarily as paid retainer and instructress. Anne's mother and Blanche's were close friends; one young child was left well off and the other, older one in straitened circumstances. Blanche's family takes responsibility for Anne by employing her. In this case, the position of governess resembles that of paid companion as much as it does that of teacher.

Nonetheless, though Anne is presented throughout the novel as moral touchstone and is arguably the story's "real heroine" "in her undemonstrative and unselfish devotion and her capacity for courageous self-sacrifice" (Page xix) (a fact signaled by her claim to both the respect and, finally, the hand of Sir Patrick Lundie, the novel's wisest character, and, Norman Page suggests, possibly "the true hero of the story" [xxiii]), this impression advances what
is, in fact, a subversive view of Victorian morality.

Anne's need to stay at the Craig Fernie inn that threw her together with Brinkworth was due to her situation as a pregnant unmarried woman, and, perhaps worse yet in light even of conventional Victorian standards, pregnant by a man with no redeeming quality save brutish sex appeal. Stranger still, love is never convincingly invoked to explain Anne's improbable slip into immoral conduct, and in the confines of the novel itself, she pursues Geoffrey Delamayn, her child's father, to insist that he make her the reparation of a marriage neither she nor he wants on sentimental or economic grounds, and that he does not want at all.

This pursuit of an unwilling man by a woman anxious to wed him in an irregular Scottish marriage is central to the story's plot development, and its centrality is physically evidenced by a document that is the prize in a search carried out by all the novel's chief characters, and which

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*"A woman, in an atmosphere of red-hot enthusiasm, witnesses the apotheosis of Physical Strength. Is it reasonable--is it just--to expect her to ask herself, in cold blood, What (morally and intellectually) is all this worth?--and that, when the man who is the object of this apotheosis, notices her, is presented to her, finds her to his taste, and singles her out from the rest? No. While humanity is humanity, the woman is not utterly without excuse"* (77).

"I shall apply to some of my mother's old friends--friends of hers in the time when she was a musician. Everybody tells me I have a voice--if I had only cultivated it. I will cultivate it! I can live, and live respectably, as a concert singer. I have saved money enough to support me, while I am learning . . . ." (86).
itself foregrounds Anne's anomalous position. This document is a letter written by Anne to Delamayn when she was trying to inveigle him into meeting her to discuss the need for a marriage to be celebrated between them. The last pages of this letter he used as notepaper at a later date to fob her off when canceling their appointment. To appease her, he wrote that he intended to marry her, and went so far as to call himself her "husband" in response to her superscription of herself as his wife. The exchange of statements of intention is later determined by Sir Patrick, formerly an Edinburgh-based judge, to constitute in itself marriage in accordance with sanctioned Scottish custom. Predating her Scottish marriage to Brinkworth, it thus invalidates it.

Anne's breaches of morality in first sleeping with, then pursuing an unwilling man ought to condemn her in the context of traditional mid-Victorian judgments, but the end of Collins's novel resoundingly finds for her as a proper lady—indeed, she is literally entitled to the claim as she becomes "Lady Lundie" after her marriage to Sir Patrick. Man and Wife does not visit death punitively on her, as do the other treatments of governess-transgressors we have looked at in this chapter. It is true that morality necessitates a plot-twist involving the loss of Anne's baby by Delamayn, and dictates she lose it painfully and undergo a long period of illness and recuperation afterwards, but the event that gives the nod to the proprieties does not
seriously affect the plot's course, or the reader's image of Anne.

*   *   *

The novels considered above reveal how the governess was a "natural" to co-opt into the sensation novel's project of dramatizing conflict between weak human impulse and the implacable law that represented middle-class morality. In the 1860s, as we have seen, her image evoked two sets of useful associations. On the one hand, it still conjured the idea of the pathetic, downtrodden gentlewoman familiar to readers from the non-fiction and propaganda writings of the '40s. In the context of this tradition, she commanded sympathy. On the other, however, contemporary impatience with private female education in a home setting combined with the fear that certain lower-class women were opportunistically seeking to better their prospects in life by taking to the profession. Additionally, interrogation of the governess's entitlement to consideration as a lady opened a Pandora's box of disturbing questions about the concept of lady-hood. The questions that resulted could ultimately be reduced to the query, To what extent were the qualities of ladylike gentility artificially acquired? The indeterminacy of names in all four of the novels discussed underscores the nebulous nature of identity. Isabel Vane transforms herself into Jane Vine. Is Anne Silvester really Anne Delamayne or not? How would Lydia Gwilt's monogram
properly read? The transgressive governess's slipperiness as entity is thrown into relief by the inadequacy of any single tag to fix the multiple facets of her persona.

"Everyday legal practice," Susan Edwards has written in a study of women and the law, "provides a setting for an elaboration of the control over female sexuality through language, discourse and cultural organization" (17). Helena Michie remarks that the heroines of sensation fiction are often preoccupied with "selfreproduction," while the detective-figures in these stories strive, in opposition, to confine them "to a single identity, a single name, and [often,] a single place [,] . . . the grave" (59). In practice, as we have seen, this dynamic repeatedly takes on the form of a representative of the law arraigning a duplicitous governess. Perversely, because of the genre's alignment with subversiveness and deviancy, this governess-villain maintains appeal for readers despite her criminality and/or insanity. 

By employing governess-characters who combined aspects of both sympathetic heroine and suspect villain, writers in the genre could efficiently add layers of nuance to stories that, superficially, seemed only entertaining and improbable.

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1: In the eyes of nineteenth-century British law, criminality, insanity and womanhood elided closely anyway. Criminality and insanity were understood to be the product of aberrant female sexuality, so that female lawbreakers were characteristically described as unstable (Edwards 91).
Oddly enough, it was feminists who, in the second half of the nineteenth century, reified the stereotype of the pathetic private resident governess that has become part of today's conceptualization of the Victorian world. Protofeminists of the second half of the nineteenth century were predictably moved by the notorious plight of the governess. Arguably, however, they did her a disservice by the manner in which they took up her cause. Out of what was ostensibly a sympathetic impulse, these writers and others like them did not deny, but instead justified the perceived inadequacies with which these educators were taxed, as Elizabeth Wolstenholme-Elmy did in 1867:

> It is not the fault of the existing body of teachers of girls that they themselves were badly taught. It is not their fault that they had no right training in teaching as an art, and have never been led to look upon education as the practical application of the highest science.

(151)

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1. E.g., Barbara Bodichon, J.S. Mill, Bessie Parkes.

2. Elizabeth Wolstenholme-Elmy (1834?-1913) played an important role in organizing the North of England Council for Higher Education in the mid-1860s and was involved in the suffrage movement, the Married Women's Property campaign and protests against the Contagious Diseases Act.
If it was not their fault, Wolstenholme-Elmy made clear that the situation was, nonetheless, a disastrous one to perpetuate.

Feminists' backhanded condemnations of the private resident governess resulted in a double effect. First, they republicized the criticisms leveled by those who disparaged her. In repeating the unflattering claims without dismissing them, ostensibly "sympathetic" writers broadcast them in precisely the manner the governess's detractors had done, drawing more attention to them, and, potentially, helping them reach a wider audience than they already found. Second, by justifying the governess's perceived inadequacies, these commentators accorded the complaints' plausibility.

What made Victorians sympathetic to the cause of women's education and educability fail to take the obvious step of extricating governesses from the charges directed against them? Essentially, all that was necessary to accomplish this was to contextualize the deficiencies of private resident governesses and their pupils' learning within the broad educational picture of the day, where flaws would dwindle into perspective. The common denominator shared by the various agendas of early feminists explains the mystery. Some argued that women exhibited a weaker grasp of logic than men not because of inherent disabilities of the female brain, but on account of the dilettantish
nature of their education relative to men's. This camp said that to expose girls to the same classical curriculum that public school boys studied would be to improve their capacity for reasoning. They, therefore, wanted to eliminate distinctions between the curricula taught to the two sexes. Other feminists were more immediately concerned about the lack of employment opportunities for women. The more conservative wanted simply for women to earn a living wage for the normatively gendered work they performed. Radicals among the group, on the other hand, wanted to see women challenging the exclusivity of traditionally male professions (like medicine).¹ But however mild or militant an individual mid-Victorian feminist's thinking on gender might be, all agreed that the most straightforward route to achieving their aims lay in attacking some one aspect of gender discrimination.

Given this, the private resident governess posed a vexed problem to the Victorian feminist. As a middle-class working woman often discommoded by an education inadequate to her needs, and who tended to receive scant compensation for her services (though a member of one of the best-respected occupations open to women of her class in the period), she embodied the exact mix of disabilities and

¹See, for instance, Emily Davies' paper "Medicine as a Profession for Women," read at the Annual Meeting of the National Association for the promotion [sic] of Social Science in 1862 (Thoughts 34-40).
virtues that ought to have rallied feminists to her cause. Unfortunately, the governess's association with fine-ladyism--represented by the compounding of her image with such things as accomplishments and abhorrence of financial discussion--made her represent the antithesis of female progressivism.

Feminist response to the governess's situation, then, was complex. Feminists might sympathize with women caught in the binds that beset the occupation of governessing, or argue that governesses were women scapegoated by their society's unwillingness to deal responsibly with the Woman Question. To co-opt them thus far as a focus for sympathetic attention was to gain a point. But, on the other hand, to validate private resident governessing by suggesting that the work and the nexus of ladylike values the governess theoretically embodied had merit would cancel whatever ideological gains feminists might otherwise make in calling attention to their plight. Moreover, to dismiss the contemporary cultural reproaches being heaped upon governesses and governessing by suggesting they were indicative of the shortcomings of all branches of formalized Victorian schooling, not just girls', was to relinquish the powerful feminist argument that to whatever extent women might be frivolous and/or illogical, their educations made them so. Retort would thus bolster the theoretical position many commentators held that to be female was a biological
disability which cultural overhaul could not redress. To capitalize on the iconographic potential of the pathetic, ineffectual governess which non- and propaganda fiction of the 1840s and '50s had promoted, feminists had to ensure that she was associated with a type of education and women's employment that was not viable.

* * *

The private resident governess's lack of viability as educator late in nineteenth-century society was attested to in a literary context by the appearance of a literary private resident governess-type unable to cope with her duties any better than the pathetic governess stereotype of the 1840s. Like her '60s colleagues, she is a source of and/or magnet for trouble. Sometimes consequences can be humorous. In The Importance of Being Earnest, for instance, Cecily Cardew's governess, Miss Prism, is responsible for a considerable mess, having once confused a baby in her care with the manuscript of a sentimental novel she had written, leaving the baby in the cloakroom of Victoria Station, and wheeling the manuscript home in a pram. Miss Prism, seemingly innocuous before this bit of past history comes to light, thus proves surprisingly multi-faceted as the source of an identity mix-up with consequences for the play's protagonists and a hidden propensity for storytelling. These circumstances make her an unlikely sister of such

'E.g., Romanes 10-31.
nominal shapeshifters, tale-spinners and name-changers as Lady Audley and Lydia Gwilt, though Miss Prism's control over the stories she generates is never so absolute as that of those self-aware villains.

But the consequences of inadequate governessing can be dire, too. The 1840s' tradition of the exploited private resident governess and '60s' captivation with her duplicitous counterpart were simultaneously capped at the close of the nineteenth century by Henry James, who knew both Jane Eyre and Lady Audley's Secret (which, indeed, he reviewed for the Nation's 9 November 1865 issue). *The Turn of the Screw* sustains each antithetical nineteenth-century "take" on the governess in a masterful sleight-of-narrative-hand that asks the reader more overtly, even, than sensation fiction had done, to determine her nature—to judge, in the phrase Alice Renton employed in her 1991 study of the governess, whether she is victim or tyrant. To do so, it creates what is, in some respects, a re-write of *Jane Eyre* that affirms that novel's anti-romantic tenor while putting forward a woman of a very different disposition from

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1E.A. Sheppard provides a useful overview of background information on *The Turn of the Screw*'s relation to *Jane Eyre* in light of James's 1895 reperusal of the novel and 1897 "preoccupation" with Charlotte Brontë (43-9).

2T. J. Lustig also remarks that "[t]o an extent, this choice [between perceptions] underlies the depictions of governesses throughout Victorian literature" ("Introduction" xxiii).
Brontë's governess-heroine."

In Chapter Three, I discussed Jane Eyre's real governessing task as being Rochester's and the reader's indoctrination into a recognition of the perils of romanticizing. It quickly becomes evident in The Turn of the Screw that James's governess, unlike Brontë's, is a romantic thinker of confirmed bent, and that literature, either directly or via familiarity with plotlines of celebrated works, has shaped her tastes and outlook. In this, she shares a penchant for fiction-reading with many mid-nineteenth-century heroines whose social or geographic circumstances leave their imaginations unfulfilled, as hers seems to have been in her prosaic country-parsonage home."

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Parallels between the two novels have often received comment before. One of the best succinct treatments of the subject is in Lustig's "Introduction" to the Oxford University Press's edition of the novella (xix-xx). As previously mentioned, Sheppard (42-60) discusses correspondences at greater length.

"E.g., Jolly 99-101.

"James's governess-narrator says little about that early period in her life but later, when affairs at Bly with Miles and Flora became tense, recollections of it are an anodyne:

It was . . . over my life, my past and my friends alone that we could take anything like our ease. . . . I was invited--with no visible connexion--to repeat afresh Goody Gosling's celebrated mot or to confirm the details already supplied as to the cleverness of the vicarage pony. (51)

From the sequestration of this dull background, perhaps self-consciously like a Gothic heroine, like Emily St. Aubert leaving the protection of La Vallée, the governess embarked on a journey, very possibly hoping to bring her life to a more climactic turn.
Like the others (e.g., Scott's heroines and Radcliffe's), James's governess escaped to books, but unlike them, she did not have a taste for classical literature and romance, like the writings of Tasso and Ariosto. Rather, what piqued her curiosity was romantic literature from the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth--the sort of reading which a good deal of mid-Victorian medical theory insisted unhinged the female mind. In the course of James's tale, the reader learns the titles of three novels she either has read, or the plots of which are familiar to her: The Mysteries of Udolpho, Jane Eyre and Fielding's Amelia. The last she reads at Bly. The other two, she must have encountered previously in one form or another, because her first sighting of Peter Quint during an evening walk precipitates allusion to them:

Was there a 'secret' at Bly--a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement? I can't say how long I turned it over, or how long, in a confusion of curiosity and dread, I remained where I had my collision . . . . (17)

The "insane, unmentionable relative" is, presumably, Bertha Rochester.

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Emily St. Aubert, whose "pleasantest hours [early in The Mysteries of Udolpho] were passed . . . with a book to overcome, or a lute to indulge, her melancholy" (123). In Walter Scott's Waverley, the eponymous hero avidly reads these authors.
The governess not only harbors a predilection for romantic stories, but also, significantly, misapprehends the gist of the books she reads and/or stories she hears. Both Brontë and Radcliffe, though writing ostensibly gothic tales, debunk inclinations to romanticize situations and people. Chapter 5 discussed some of the ways in which Jane Eyre punctures romance conventions. Similarly, in The Mysteries of Udolpho, phenomena that initially provoke fright because they seem supernatural turn out not to be uncanny after all. Yet as James's governess ponders the meaning of a strange man's appearance on a battlement, she feels (as Austen's Catherine Morland might) "a confusion of curiosity and dread" that an astute reader who had assimilated Brontë's and Radcliffe's lessons about the dangerous false seductions of Gothic- or romantic-inspired tales would dismiss in favor of practical assessment and response.

The three texts invoked in The Turn of the Screw give other insights into the governess as well. In each story, a fundamentally virtuous woman is tested by trying events and emerges from attacks on her integrity with honor and principles intact. This reveals to us what kind of narrative and heroine appeal to the governess; when she comes to record her own experiences, as one might expect, she casts both her recollection of events and role in them accordingly: she is agonizingly tested and responds bravely
and with virtue.

Yet what is one to make of the fact that the three novels James's governess cites were censured as racy by many of the more uncompromising Victorians? Certainly the pair she knew before taking up her career, The Mysteries of Udolpho and Jane Eyre, are texts the reading of which would not have been approved in her father's parsonage. Radcliffe's 1794 novel, while quite popular, belonged to a genre looked on by later generations as risqué, frivolous, and/or trivial. It would not have been welcomed where "last-century fiction . . . of a distinctly deprecated renown . . . never . . . reached . . . and appealed to the unavowed curiosity of my youth" (40). It follows that the more recent Jane Eyre, which we saw was considered shortly after its publication to be something of a risqué book, would not have been warmly admitted into the parsonage household either. Apparently, the governess read or familiarized herself with them on the sly while living at home in Hampshire. This modus operandi reveals her to be fascinated by things which are taboo and also shows her to be quite at home with the idea of keeping secrets.

Still, although The Mysteries of Udolpho doubtless spoke to the governess's wistful longing for a more eventful life than was to be found at home, it is Jane Eyre that was

"Terry Castle points out that the novel was "one of the most celebrated and influential European fictions of its epoch" (xx).
fresh enough in her mind to inform the expectations with which she began her career. *Jane Eyre*, indeed, offers definitive testimony about the time in which the governess's story is set: since she read the novel or at least heard of it while living in Hampshire, she must have been there for its October 1847 publication date, at least. But we can be more exact than this. To see why this is the case, we must revert for a moment to the Christmas-party frame story that introduces James's *tromp d'oeil* narrative of life and death at Bly. One of the purposes served by the story's frame is to furnish the governess's manuscript, which makes up most of the tale, with a provenance. It establishes that events at Bly belonged to a "historical past," and situates the reader more-or-less explicitly with relation to it.

Time is important in the frame narrative. So is seasonality. James's novella is, among other things, a Christmas story, which is to say it is a genre piece published in or around December and widely associated (in James's day as in our own) with Dickens. Dickens, an innovator of the tale with a Yuletide setting marketed to take advantage of quickening Christmastime sales, wrote five such stories.

Unquestionably, *A Christmas Carol* was the most successful; because readers have long associated the

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ii Robin Hoople overlooks this when maintaining, "We are as easily authorized to date the setting of the Bly adventure in 1816" as to ascribe it to the late '40s" (221).
Christmas story with Dickens and, particularly, with *A Christmas Carol*, then, works in the genre frequently imitate its attributes. *A Christmas Carol* represented events that seemingly take place at a time contemporaneous with the time of writing and publication, and the importance of time within the tale itself is stressed by the manifestations of the ghosts of present, past and future and their insistence on Scrooge's accountability for the immediate moment: his and others' futures depend on decisions he must take, and take speedily.

One of the characteristics of the successful Christmas story as pioneered by Dickens, therefore, was rough contemporaneity of setting with publication. The coincidence is not one at all, in fact, because Dickens saw his first story's purpose, apart from bringing in much-needed income, as being
to raise the Ghost of an Idea which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me.

(Preface)

It was to conduce to a particular effect, to spur an immediate wash of benevolent feelings on the part of the reader to his or her fellow human beings. Readers and critics also understood the story as a call to action. In the spring following its publication, *The Gentleman's Magazine* noted that "more extensive kindness has been
dispensed to those who are in want at the present season than at any preceding one" (Glancy xii). The tale's effects, then, were seen by author and audience in the context of an immediate relevancy to readers' lives.

Just as within The Turn of the Screw's frame-narrative, Douglas decided after a long silence to give the governess's story a Christmastime recitation, so James appears to have begun work on the ghost story which he had long been mulling over in October of 1897 in order to offer it as holiday provender in Collier's Magazine, where it first appeared late in January of 1898 (Kimborough xi). Its identity as a Christmas story thus gives rise, especially with respect to its frame's Christmas setting, to expectations about that setting's temporal context. Taking a 1897 or '98 Christmas as a starting point, it therefore becomes possible to approximate some specifics of the governess's adventure: we can ascribe a relatively precise date to goings-on at Bly because the frame-narrative offers four markers which permit or, even, encourage calculation. First, forty years have passed since Douglas initially met his sister's governess (3). Second, the governess was older than Douglas by ten years (2). Third, Douglas was down from Trinity for his second year's summer holidays when the pair met. If he matriculated at Cambridge at the usual age for the period,

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13 This is also the line taken by Brooke-Rose (cf., 138).
this would make him twenty, give or take a couple of years. And, fourth, the governess was herself twenty when she took employment at Bly.

From these clues, we can extrapolate. If the date of the Christmas house party of the frame narrative coincides with the time James was mulling over the story in 1897, or with its 1898 publication year, then, and we subtract from that the forty years in which Douglas maintained silence about the governess's story, we discover he must himself have heard it in 1858, or closely thereabouts. Douglas was roughly twenty at that time and the governess ten years older than he. She must therefore have been about thirty when she was acting as preceptor to his sister. Since she had been twenty when she was at Bly, the events described in her narrative would have taken place ten years before Douglas met her, or around 1848. This means that they must have "occurred" quite shortly after Smith, Elder published *Jane Eyre*, with which the governess was already familiar when she went to Bly.

It seems to me that James focuses the temporal setting of *The Turn of the Screw* in this way in order to invite us to compare his narrator-governess's experiences, and her understanding of them, with *Jane Eyre*'s. That close ties exist between James's text and Brontë's is not a new observation, nor has it passed unremarked that the structure of James's governess's account of affairs at Bly engages
Jane Eyre's Thornfield memories with a looking-glass effect that reverses their shape and distorts their import. What I would like to suggest is that, by allowing us to postulate an 1848 date to the governess's adventures, naming Jane Eyre as a text with which she was familiar, and giving us insight into her tendency to misunderstand the romance fiction she read, James creates a text that reaffirms the power of the generative imagination which Brontë's governess, Jane Eyre, in some respects denied. He does so by writing a story so slippery that, in it, words and signs elude denotation, therefore necessarily baffling judgment. Is the governess a virtuous would-be savior, or does insanity turn an admirer of Jane Eyre into Jane's Bertha Rochester alter-ego? Or is indeterminacy the point after all?

James's governess's story begins with text, just as it ends in the manuscript she wrote detailing her experiences at Bly. She associates texts--an advertisement, missives from Harley Street--and writing them--her part in the "brief correspondence" which results in her successful London interview, her story's manuscript itself--with answering challenges that arise in life, and in answering them "triumphant[ly]," as she says about the successful outcome of her application for work. But unlike Jane Eyre, the individual whose maiden name is her story's title, the

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\(^4\) For a brief rehearsal of this connection's history in textual criticism, see Hoople 298, note 9.
governess whose manuscript Douglas reads remains anonymous both in the context of her own account of events at Bly and in the frame narrative which introduces it. Unlike Jane Eyre the novel, her manuscript remains as nameless as she herself is, a fact foregrounded by a short exchange in the frame-narrative between Douglas and its (also-nameless) narrator.

[Lady houseguest.] 'What is your title [for the manuscript]?'

[Douglas.] 'I haven't one.'

[Narrative voice.] 'Oh I have!' I said. But Douglas, without heeding me, had begun to read . . .

The Turn of the Screw is magnificently open-ended in most respects, including that of a name for the governess's manuscript. By taking an indeterminate tack with its subject matter, it asks the reader to make judgments about the personalities and events it depicts, going one step further, even, than the attractions of sensation novels' villainous heroines did in provoking us to examine those presuppositions about right, wrong and appearances with which we began to read. Unlike the sensation novel, The Turn of the Screw does not merely present a fascinating but transgressive protagonist who appeals to our sympathies while "requiring" punishment for transgression; instead, it gives us one whose character and possible misdeeds evade
classification while she herself avoids any seriously damaging personal come-uppance with lasting consequences.

Historically speaking, throughout the period we have examined, the governess moved steadily in public estimation from figure of pathos to potentially powerful subverter of order, only to lapse once again, as the century closed, into ineffectual stereotype. These changes were predicated on (among other things) the degree to which governesses' skills were seen as culturally relevant, especially to middle-class girls' educational needs. Quite possibly, they also reflected dissatisfactions with more general educational arrangements in the 1840s as these were displaced onto women educators. As education became increasingly professionalized and so did women's work, the governess's relatively amateurish status with respect to the trained schoolteacher made her occupation seem outmoded, and she was figured, particularly by feminists, as an anachronism.

Meanwhile, in belletristic literature, the governess had long been a more complex figure where she was at all an important character in a text. Her literary manifestations thus follow a slightly different parabola from her cultural ones: she became complex and/or dangerous earlier, and stayed that way later, though as time passed she was seen to operate without conscious control over her circumstances and whatever narratives involve her. James's governess wants to
be another Jane Eyre, but manages to inscribe neither her name as title, nor an unambiguous picture of her attributes, into the version of her story that she herself writes.
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