Ignorance and Marital Bliss: Women's Education in the English Novel, 1796-1895

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Ignorance and Marital Bliss:
Women’s Education in the English Novel, 1796-1895

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty
of the Department of English
McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts
Duquesne University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Mary Ann Tobin

November 16, 2006
Preface

The germ of this study lies in my master’s thesis, “Naive Altruist to Jaded Cosmopolitan: Class-Consciousness in David Copperfield, Bleak House, Great Expectations, and Our Mutual Friend,” with which I concluded my studies at Indiana State University. In it, I traced the evolution of Dickens’s ideal gentle Christian man, arguing that Dickens wanted his audience to reject a human valuation system based on birth and wealth and to set the standard for one’s social value upon the strength of one’s moral character.

During my doctoral studies, I grew more interested in Dickens’s women characters and became intrigued by his contributions to what would become known as the Woman Question, and, more importantly, by what Dickens thought about women’s proper social functions and roles. Such investigations led me to a broader interest in early feminist philosophy, whereupon I discovered the efforts of mid- to late-nineteenth century feminists to resurrect so-called radical, eighteenth-century ideals regarding women’s education. As I read conduct books, educational treatises, polemics, periodical literature, and more novels—beginning with texts from the mid-seventeenth century and ending with those of the late-nineteenth century—I was struck by how many of the topics presented in them appear in today’s media. For example, I encountered rather familiar advice on the pros and cons of nursing one’s own infants, home schooling, and experiential learning versus rote memorization; dissertations on the vicissitudes of domestic drudgery, the plight of desperate housewives, and the results of insufficient pre-marital preparation; and models of femininity that offer few options besides repressing one’s sexuality or fulfilling men’s desires in order to achieve one’s own goals.
This rather disheartening discovery confirmed my belief that there truly is nothing new under the sun and that the nature of cultural history is cyclical. I also recognized the cyclical nature of feminism’s history, as evidenced by the recent devolution of second wave feminism into what Linda Hirshman refers to as “choice feminism” (1), whereby many women with advanced degrees choose to leave their careers in order to fulfill what society continues to decree women’s ideal mission: to make society a better place by rearing morally responsible children and ameliorating moral and psychological dangers that our immoral, capitalist society inflicts upon men, the fulfillment of which requires that women practice self-sacrifice and self-sublimation in order to tend to the physical and emotional needs of her entire family. I’ve been warned by many that the scope of my project could turn into a lifetime project, and I sincerely hope it does, since it presents endless opportunities for future studies that should produce at least a few forays into the twentieth century, a few hints of which appear in my conclusion.

Fortunately, I was never disheartened by the support I’ve received from advisors, colleagues, friends, and family, without whose assistance, contributions, and encouragement this project likely would have taken far longer than it has. I would like to thank my committee, who willingly took on a project that could have easily buried them under the weight of some very large novels and even larger educational treatises. The enthusiasm of Susan Howard, my dissertation director, often matched my own and inspired me to forge ahead despite my having encountered several obstacles to completing this study. I am also grateful to Frederick Newberry, who taught me the value of pith. I am especially indebted to Laura Callanan, who agreed to become my third reader, upon the passing of Richard C. Tobias, who originally held that position. Tob, as
he preferred to be called, deserves special encomia for readily agreeing, in true
Dickensian Fellowship, to intermix my musings with his enjoyment of partial retirement
from the University of Pittsburgh. May he rest in well earned peace, if the angels can
convince him to do so.

Representatives from departments other than English at Duquesne University
have been enormously helpful in providing me with some unbelievably difficult-to-find
sources and with refreshing my distant memories of classical civilizations and tongues.
Many, many thanks to Angela Fleming and Kathy Julius of Gumberg Library’s
Interlibrary Loan Department and to Stephen Newmyer of the Department of Classics.

If I could thank the Internet as well, I would, for keeping me in close contact with
reliable sources of information at other institutions. I am indebted to “super librarians”
David Murray, of Temple University’s Paley Library, and Mark Samuels Lasner, Senior
Research Fellow at the University of Delaware Library, for fact checking and providing
key details at the drop of an email. Both are to be especially commended for their
competitive natures that often spurred each of them to race to produce information that
the other may have missed. Gentleman, cool your search engines.

I am also much obliged for the friendship and wisdom of Florence Boos,
Professor of English at the University of Iowa, and Margaret D. Stetz, Mae and Robert
Carter Professor of Women’s Studies and Professor of Humanities at the University of
Delaware, both of whom brought fresh perspectives to portions of this dissertation and
encouraged me to seek out the rarer air of non-canonical works and neglected eighteenth-
and nineteenth-century feminists.
Köszönöm szépen és éljenek soká to each member of my family for her or his perpetual support and periodic reality checks. I particularly cherish the influence and inspiration of my mother, Gizella Chasko, whose interest in wedding rituals and cultural history initiated my own inquiries into how and why women get married, and how they prepare to take on their unique women’s missions.

Finally, my most sincere gratitude, fervent esteem, and deepest affection go to my editor, sounding board, and partner in all literary and personal endeavors, Thomas J. Tobin, who took every step of this long journey alongside me. Someday, we’ll write that book together and put our “book jacket portrait” to good use—just let’s not make it about Charles Dickens or Pre-Raphaelitism for a change.
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Figure 1 ........... Browne, Hablot Knight. “A Chance Meeting.” *Dombey and Son.* .... 201 London, 1848. New York: Penguin, 1985: 663.
Introduction

Revolutions in Women’s Education in British Fact and Fiction, 1791 to 1896

No magic rune is stranger than a book. All that mankind has done, thought, gained or been: it is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books. They are the chosen possession of men. Do not books still accomplish miracles, as runes were fabled to do? They persuade men. Not the wretchedest circulating-library novel, which foolish girls thumb and con in remote villages, but will help to regulate the actual practical weddings and households of those foolish girls. So “Celia” felt, so “Clifford” acted: the foolish Theorem of life, stamped into those young brains, comes out as a solid practice one day. (Carlyle 138)

In Pride and Prejudice (1813), Jane Austen presents the Bennet sisters’ negative opinion of conduct books. Most likely, the Bennets reflect Austen’s own estimation of conduct books as well, and no doubt similar views were expressed in many British parlor rooms throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Bennet girls’ aversion to hearing a conduct book being read encapsulates the central argument of this dissertation: throughout the long nineteenth-century (1790-1900) and in lengthy, unattractive prose that was often blatantly didactic, conduct books and educational treatises too often presented unrealistic models of feminine behavior together with impractical advice on the proper education of middle- and upper-class women. Therefore, in order to present what
they believed were practical pedagogies that would provide women with realistically virtuous feminine models of behavior and prepare women to determine the course of their own lives by making sound marital decisions, period novelists challenged the ideologies and methodologies of conduct books, partially modifying or entirely refuting them.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, the very proper William Collins exhibits the stereotypical dismissal of the novel that his contemporaries publicly espoused but privately ignored, and the Bennet girls rudely react to his preference for morally upright and purely didactic non-fiction. Mr. Collins “readily assented” to “read aloud to the ladies,” the narrator tells us,

and a book was produced; but on beholding it (for everything announced it to be from a circulating library), he started back, and begging pardon, protested that he never read novels. Kitty stared at him, and Lydia exclaimed. Other books were produced, and after some deliberation he chose Fordyce’s *Sermons*. Lydia gaped as he opened the volume, and before he had, with a very monotonous solemnity, read three pages, she interrupted him . . .

Lydia was bid by her two eldest sisters to hold her tongue; but Mr. Collins, much offended, laid aside his book and said,

“I have often observed how little young ladies are interested in books of a serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit. It amazes me, I confess; for certainly, there can be nothing so advantageous to them as instruction. But I will no longer importune my young cousin.” (263-4)
Kitty’s “stare” and Lydia’s “gape” signal their antipathy toward the advice found in James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), a widely read and frequently republished conduct book that also became a target of Mary Wollstonecraft’s disdain in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and of Susan Ferrier’s satire in *Marriage* (1818). Fordyce originally delivered his sermons in seven sections from the pulpit of his Monkwell Street church in London. Bound versions of the sermons were continually published from 1766 until as late as 1814 in London, Dublin, Boston, and Philadelphia. The sermons were also translated into French and Dutch and published in Paris and Amsterdam. Thus Austen takes aim at a well known and widely accepted, if not always enacted, ideology of proper feminine behavior. Kitty’s unabashed gaze, directed at a male cousin who intends to select one of the Bennet sisters for his bride, and Lydia’s vocal disruption of an instructive lecture, are offenses that Fordyce himself would not have borne from young ladies, as he considers “nothing so engaging as bashful beauty” (*Sermons to Young Women* 68) and prizes “discreet reserve in a woman” (76). Moreover, Fordyce was not alone in his preference for female delicacy. Many of his contemporary moral arbiters submit self-assertive behavior such as Kitty’s and Lydia’s as proof of the dangerous social and moral influence of the novels that the sisters prefer to read. In refusing to remain silent or to submit to the religious and moral authority of the patriarchy—here represented by the clergymen Messrs. Collins and Fordyce—Kitty and Lydia display what would have been considered distinctly rebellious and hence unfeminine spirits.

That Austen inserts such a scene into her novel without immediately condemning Kitty’s or Lydia’s unwomanly misbehavior—her sisters offer nothing more than a polite
apology for Lydia’s outburst—suggests that Austen doubts that conduct books offer valuable or viable modes of female instruction, but she also does not seem to trust novels to edify readers in a proper manner. In giving up his reading, Mr. Collins admits defeat and earns Mr. Bennet’s praise for having “acted very wisely in leaving the girls to their own trifling amusements” (264), by which Mr. Bennet implies that were Mr. Collins to continue reading for the benefit of “girls” who prefer “trifling amusements” (like the novels found in circulating libraries) over receiving moral and religious instruction, he would in essence cast pearls before swine. Yet none of the “girls” justifies their shared preference for novels, although they surely consider novels a much more entertaining means of assessing the consequences of virtuous and vicious actions than studying the dry codes of behavior in conduct books. Moreover, the very presence of novels in the Bennet home suggests that Mr. Bennet condones his daughters’ exposure to them, a circumstance that seems to confirm James Raven’s assertion that “the novel proved a fashionable form . . . adopted even by those who wished to intervene to curtail excesses or introduce to adolescents of good families the voice of mature responsibility” (112). With such incentives to read novels with paternal approval and entertaining lessons on social propriety and moral rectitude, it is not surprising that young ladies frequented circulating libraries to obtain the latest novels.

Nonetheless, Austen’s decision not to defend her chosen genre straightforwardly presents a puzzle, especially when we recall the repeated warnings that parents received from educators, pedagogues, philosophers, clergymen, and even some novelists: either to eject novels from home libraries altogether or to limit the number of and restrict children’s access to them. Hence the very fact that the novel was the chosen literature of
many young ladies entering or already in the marriage market seems incongruous and unreasonable. We know, however, that the popularity of novels continued to grow after their first introduction in the late-seventeenth century, as Richard D. Altick demonstrates in *The English Common Reader*. The sales figures that Altick provides for the works of Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollet, and Frances Burney do not in any way suggest a nationwide boycott of novels in the eighteenth century (49-50). Likewise, Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling graphically illustrate the rise of the novel into the nineteenth century in their impressive work, *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*. The sheer prolificacy of nineteenth-century fiction authors like Charles Dickens (fourteen completed novels, one unfinished) and Anthony Trollope (47 novels) indicates that prohibitions against novels continued to be ignored as the century progressed.

Altick also points out that in both centuries the largest number of readers who purchased novels or borrowed them from circulating libraries were women (41-46, 360-361); so novelists who desired profitable careers wrote with a predominately female audience in mind. Some male authors went so far as to publish under feminine pseudonyms. Thus most of the plots in the period’s novels revolve around courtship and marriage, since those issues were of central concern to women, who lacked any other respectable course of agency in their lives. The following excerpt from Trollope’s *Autobiography* (1883) illustrates the virtual necessity to include courtship narratives in his novels in order to gain and maintain readership.

In writing *Phineas Finn*, and also some other novels which followed it, I was conscious that I could not make a tale pleasing chiefly, or perhaps in
any part, by politics. If I write politics for my own sake, I must put in love
and intrigue, social incidents, with perhaps a dash of sport, for the benefit
of my readers. In this way I think I made my political hero interesting.

(263)

Similarly, in his lecture “On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement” (1868),
Trollope asserts,

We have political novels, social-commercial novels, law-life novels, civil-
service novels, fashionable-life novels . . . novels even of clerical life have
been written. In all of them there is probably some backbone of a love
story. (110)

Trollope also contends that “the taste of the community forms the writer, while the power
of the writer, such as it may be, reacts upon the public taste” (97); and “writers, let them
be who they may, will write books which the people demand” (107), by which he
acknowledges that novelists’ subject matter should reflect readers’ interests and cultural
standards if they are to make their livings by writing fiction. Trollope was also keenly
aware of the difficulty he faced in writing on romantic topics without crossing the bounds
of good taste, especially since, in the novel, “lessons of life are being taught from the first
page to the last” (110), not the least of which concern “the great bond of matrimony,” the
“social question [most] important” to British society (109). Trollope knew that he was
expected to “teach the lessons which a mother would desire her child should learn” (122)
without encouraging “idleness, desultory thinking, and a pernicious vagueness and
unreality of character” (111).
Further evidence of the novel’s ascendance in women’s education lies in some authors’ repackaging their own non-fictional treatises in novel format, a strategy for re-marketing advice originally addressed to parents and instructors in order to attract the attention of their potential students. Many polemicists and pedagogues fictionalized their previously published women’s pedagogies in order to demonstrate the destructiveness of the status quo or the effectiveness of their individual models of women’s education in action, so to speak. For example, Mary Hays’s polemic *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (written in 1791, published 1798) became her novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796); Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) formed the foundation of her unfinished novel *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (begun 1796, published posthumously 1798); and Maria Edgeworth’s treatises *Practical Education* (1798) and *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795) underlie her moral tale for young ladies, *Belinda* (1801). I will examine all of these works in the first three chapters of this dissertation.

Subsequent chapters of this study focus on novels written in order to revise or refute advice on women’s education found in conduct books or educational treatises written by authors other than the novelists themselves. Many of them recycle the distinct ideals first posited in Hays’s *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* and *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and in Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, but unlike Edgeworth their authors neither infer or claim such connections. I will demonstrate that in order to present her optimal women’s pedagogy in *Marriage* (1818), Susan Ferrier joins Hays and Wollstonecraft in denouncing Jean Jacques Rousseau and James Fordyce. Ferrier rejects Rousseau’s
romanticism entirely, but modifies Fordyce’s ideal Christian woman, deeming his valuation of Christian sympathy worth preserving. Further, in *Dombey and Son* (1846-1848), Charles Dickens evinces a desire to mesh Rousseau’s Sophy, described in his *Émile* (1762), with the contemporary standard for femininity presented in Sarah Stickney Ellis’s mid-nineteenth-century Women of England series. Ellis’s works also figure in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853), where in order to critique Ellis’s construct of ideal femininity Brontë juxtaposes Wollstonecraftian models as they were re-envisioned by Alexander J. Scott in *Suggestions on Female Education* (1849) and by an anonymous reviewer of Sarah Lewis’s *Woman’s Mission* (1839) in the January 1850 *Westminster Review*. Likewise, in *Phineas Finn* (1867-1869) and *Phineas Redux* (1873-1874), Trollope counterposes Ellis’s and Lewis’s ideals of feminine passivity with Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon’s Wollstonecraftian arguments for sexual equality and feminine agency in *A Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women* (1854) and *Women and Work* (1857). In the final chapter, I will come full circle and posit a new source for Thomas Hardy’s pessimistic view of sexual equality in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), wherein Hardy refutes Millicent Garrett Fawcett’s desexualized version of Wollstonecraftian feminism in her 1891 introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Paradoxically, each of these novels—i.e., fictional worlds in which, as Wollstonecraft envisions in *Mary*, women “may be allowed to exist,” whose “grandeur is derived from the operations of [their] own faculties, not subjugated to opinion, but drawn by the individual from the original source,” “without arguing physically about possibilities” (3)—illustrates its author’s own or preferred pedagogy for educating real
women to actualize their intellectual and emotional desires in order to determine the courses of their own lives. More often than not, what for her is the real world becomes the female character’s classroom, wherein she observes the behavior of her acquaintances, friends, and family, who act as teachers or provide positive or negative role models, from which she deduces society’s standards for feminine behavior, emulates the virtuous, and rejects the vicious exemplars. Those who successfully integrate their desires with society’s standards (or appear to have done so) select suitable mates who support their wives’ chosen lifestyles and live happily ever after (e. g., Edgeworth’s Lady Delacour and Belinda Portman, Ferrier’s Alicia and Mary Douglas and Lady Emily Courtland, Dickens’s Florence Dombey, Brontë’s Paulina Home, and Trollope’s Violet Effingham and Madam Max Goesler). Conversely, those who do not conform are typically ostracized whether they marry or not (e. g., Hays’s Emma Courtney, Wollstonecraft’s Maria, Edgeworth’s Harriet Freke, Ferrier’s Lady Juliana Courtland and Adelaide Douglas, Dickens’s Edith Granger and Alice Marwood, Trollope’s Lady Laura Standish, and Hardy’s Sue Bridehead).Rarely, we find characters like Brontë’s Lucy Snowe, who successfully supports herself in her profession as a femme sole, and Ginevra Fanshawe, who breaks all of society’s rules for feminine propriety yet achieves her own brand of marital bliss. In this sense, only Brontë can be said to have accomplished Wollstonecraft’s ideal of the heroine whose “grandeur is derived from the operations of [her] own faculties, not subjugated to opinion, but drawn by the individual from the original source” (Mary 3): Lucy and Ginevra successfully create and maintain their own feminine ideals despite continual pressure to conform to society’s model.
All of these novels simultaneously recall and critique what their authors believe to be misguided pedagogies of their recent past while they reflect the milieu of the distinct time in which they were written, bearing witness to the significant educational strides women made over the long nineteenth century. Thus a close reading of these novels along with the literature that inspired their content, yields concise histories of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women’s education and social function. As the century progressed, different models of femininity were presented, in keeping with the social, legal, and moral climate in which they were written, but all inform their readers of not only what currently seemed, for good or ill, to be their proper role in society but also of what that role ideally should be, especially regarding their interactions with men.

Therefore, these novels also provide educations in themselves: they introduce women readers to courtship rituals, mores, and customs that they otherwise may have encountered without adequate preparation, and they offer unencumbered access to the private thoughts, feelings, and domiciles of women from various levels of society. By allowing readers to experience positive and negative role models, both male and female, novels of the long nineteenth century provided women with valuable information on the standards of their day without their having to leave the homes in which they were supposed to remain.

Because these novels deal not only with what in their specific eras already constituted conventional gendered modes of behavior but with what ought to be the ideal manifestations of those modes, it will be helpful to keep in mind Judith Butler’s “theory of performativity” (xiv), in which “gender [is] a corporeal style, an ‘act’” that is “both intentional and performative, where ‘performative’ suggests a dramatic and contingent
construction of meaning” (177). Extrapolating from the works of feminists Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, Marxist Claude Lévi-Strauss, and from Jacques Lacan’s and Joan Riviere’s concepts of the “strategies of masquerade” (55) employed by gendered beings to establish their own identities under the force of “the paternal law” (58), Butler arrives at her theory, in which “gender norms produce the peculiar phenomenon of a ‘natural sex’ or a ‘real woman’ or any number of prevalent and compelling social fictions” (178). Further, Butler also determines that gender norms are “tenuously constituted in time,” i.e., products of the unique era and ethos in which they coalesce, and they are “instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (179), i.e., a command performance of those acts that society demands from a specific gender but that may not express the individual’s concept of her or his being. Essentially, gender performativity offers women and men strategies for survival in a society operating under androcentric laws, but those performances are always subject to change, just as laws are always subject to emendation as the cultural climate changes.

Conduct books, along with educational treatises and novels of the long nineteenth century reflect Butler’s concept of “social temporality” (179), as their advice for women continually evolved along with the various answers posited to what would become known as the “Woman Question.” The debate over women’s rights resulted in the reformation of social and legal conditions in England, which in turn necessitated continual revision of the curricula of courtship and marital expectations. In particular, feminist pleas for social and educational revolution that preceded social and legal reforms were continually debated. Radical ideals were proposed by a few, partially accepted by some, and entirely rejected by many, only to resurface in renewed arguments throughout the period, until
substantial reform was achieved first in the 1860s and again in the 1890s. In this dissertation, I am most interested in tracking those changes that reveal the revolving nature of nineteenth-century women’s pedagogy—from Rousseauan conservatism to jacobin radicalism to Victorian conservatism to the “New Woman’s” radical revival of late-eighteenth-century proposals for equalizing androcentric legal, political, and social conventions that compelled women to submit to patriarchal control. In particular, this dissertation traces the feminist theories of Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft that never wholly disappear in the discourse about proper women’s education throughout the nineteenth century, although their originators initially were disavowed and seem later to have been forgotten until Wollstonecraft’s texts were re(dis)covered and reiterated, in virtually identical terms, nearly a century after their initial publication.

An examination of the choices made by late-nineteenth-century biographers of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft suggests that while their determination to live according to their radical philosophical theories indeed merited renewed interest in their lives and works, a similar revival of Mary Hays’s ideals may be explained by her having been, deliberately or not, written out of jacobin history by Godwin himself. Barbara Taylor indicates that Wollstonecraft’s reclamation appears to have begun as early as the 1850s (“Mary Wollstonecraft” par. 42), but, though in 1925 Hays’s descendant Annie F. Wedd published The Love-letters of Mary Hays, 1779-1780, Hays essentially remained unacknowledged for nearly a century after her death in 1843, as M. Ray Adams notes in his 1940 article “Mary Hays, Disciple of William Godwin” (472). We know from Eleanor Flexner that Hays and Wollstonecraft were friends (Mary Wollstonecraft 222) and that Hays was present at Wollstonecraft’s death (252), notwithstanding the fact that
in his *Memoirs of the Author of “The Rights of Woman”* (1798) Godwin names only Eliza Fenwick and obliquely refers to “another very kind and judicious lady and a favorite female servant” as the three women who nursed Wollstonecraft in her final hours (269). In the first modern biography of Godwin, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries* (1876), Charles Kegan Paul, working from Godwin’s and Wollstonecraft’s private letters and papers and from Godwin’s memoirs of Wollstonecraft, makes no direct reference to Mary Hays, though he includes a fragment from a letter written by a “Miss Hayes” to Hugh Skeys shortly after Wollstonecraft’s death, in which she describes Wollstonecraft’s final moments (282). Consequently, Elizabeth R. Pennell, deriving much of the content of her *Mary Wollstonecraft* (1884)—the first biography of Wollstonecraft to appear since Godwin’s *Memoirs of the Author of “The Rights of Woman”*—from Kegan Paul’s text and his collection of “Godwin and Wollstonecraft treasures” (*Life and Letters of Joseph Pennell* 1: 121), likewise refers to “Miss Hayes” (351), seemingly unaware that this “good friend” was, indeed, Mary Hays. Thus, Hays may have simply been overlooked when nineteenth-century women’s-rights advocates Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (in the 1850s) and Millicent Garrett Fawcett (in 1891) traced their political and philosophical heritage to Wollstonecraft alone.

Yet if Kegan Paul, Pennell, Bodichon, and Fawcett were familiar with Mary Hays or her works, they may have chosen to reintroduce only Wollstonecraft’s works to the public because Wollstonecraft consistently lived her feminist convictions and offered a better precedent for their own efforts to demand sexual equality than did Hays. In death, Wollstonecraft escaped the consequences of the *Anti-Jacobin Review*’s “avalanche of abuse” heaped upon her, Hays, and other members of their circle (Adams 481), as well as
the calumny Richard Polwhele cast upon them in his poem *The Unsex’d Females* (1798). In response to what Lawrence Stone refers to as the “Moral Panic of the 1790s” (*Road to Divorce* 273) and dependent upon her pen for her living, Hays was forced to tone down her feminist rhetoric in print. But Hays’s “apparent compliance and conservatism in the early nineteenth century” (Hoagwood 9) was insufficient to redeem her reputation, since she does not seem to have “brought her own reason into submission to the established system of conduct” (Adams 483). Hays thus, ironically, may have damaged her reputation even more by backing away from her former philosophy. Therefore, because the models for women’s education in the novels I will discuss are farther removed from their late-eighteenth-century heritage, I will look back, like their creators, to Wollstonecraft alone.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the most important milestones in women’s education feature continually evolving debates over optimal yet practical pedagogies that develop women’s cognitive functions (i.e. their reason or senses) and their capacities to perceive the emotional and physical needs of others (i.e. their sympathies or sensibilities), both of which are requisite to fulfilling their culturally proscribed roles as caregivers. As I will demonstrate, long nineteenth-century theorists frequently recommend that proper women’s education balances scholastic instruction with the so-called “education of the heart” or, as Wollstonecraft refers to it, “the culture of the heart” (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 120). As Vineta Colby notes, by the end of the eighteenth century “the education of the heart” had become a “familiar slogan among educators” (100). This phrase typically refers to the process of imbuing women with enough reason to control and refine their expressions of sympathy and empathy.
(considered the most vital, distinctly feminine characteristics) within the restrictions placed upon them in accordance with their gender, social station, and marital status but without prompting them to question the righteousness of those restrictions. The authors hereafter discussed almost always justify the limits placed upon women’s actions as being the result of divine or natural ordination, which for many of them are synonymous terms. Ideally, such instruction provides women with a code of ethics and guiding principles of action that, when properly internalized and relied upon, ensure their contentment with their natural roles in society, which in turn enables them to fulfill their natural function by engendering domestic and social harmony.

The novelists whose works are hereafter examined concern themselves with delineating the proper education of a naturally feminine woman, whom they present as an optimal feminine model worthy of emulation, versus the artificially feminine or unfeminine woman, who is universally condemned. The naturally feminine woman reaps the benefit of an education that, by accident or design, cultivates a balance of “right feeling . . . and discursive intellect . . . the harmony of the two—the heart in the head, and the head in the heart,” as Alexander J. Scott describes it (62). The artificially feminine woman learns, likewise by accident or design, to mimic the cultural standard of womanly perfection but does not cultivate empathy and sympathy. The unfeminine woman more often than not deliberately chooses to develop her intellect and either neglects her emotional development or allows her emotions to overrule her intellect; less frequently, she is simply the victim of men’s sexual predation and a creature of vice. Typically, the novelists present the naturally feminine woman as the optimal feminine model and reward her for adequately wielding her “Woman’s Influence” by redeeming someone
from a vicious life, thereby fulfilling her “Woman’s Mission” to enforce, teach, and
uphold her society’s moral standards. On the other hand, the same novelists punish the
artificially feminine or unfeminine woman’s egotism with physical or social death. In
Hardy’s rather extreme case, those die to whom the unfeminine woman refuses sympathy
or righteous moral instruction.

The ideology of “Woman’s Influence” or “Woman’s Mission” is firmly rooted in
the Judeo-Christian tradition, and in these novelists’ debates over the proper education of
naturally feminine women, the particular constructions of these terms are most often
 traced to Jean Jacques Rousseau, who speaks specifically of “the special purpose of
woman” (Émile 392) to fulfill man’s desires throughout his life and to James Fordyce,
whose ideal of womanhood is based upon the “Virtuous Woman” described in Proverbs
and St. Paul’s first letter to Timothy (vii-x). Rousseau’s list of women’s duties are
unabashedly androcentric, but he blames the cosmos for having dictated women’s
subjection to men, saying, “Nature herself has decreed that woman, both for herself and
her children, should be at the mercy of man’s judgement” (392). He continues,

A woman’s education must therefore be planned in relation to man. To be
pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood,
to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant
and happy, these are the duties of woman for all time. (392-393)

Fordyce takes these basic tenets and develops what can be described as a job description
for the lady of the manor, in which he lists a considerable number of requisite functions
that would keep the Virtuous Woman at work before dawn—”she rises before the break
of day”—and after sunset—“she . . . often continues it through . . . the night” (Sermons
for Young Women 157). Her responsibilities include spinning and weaving the fabric she needs to make clothing and accessories for the entire household (servants included) befitting their ranks; feeding her family and her servants; assigning her domestics, field hands, and other laborers their daily tasks; performing whatever manual labor is left undone by her servants; exercising frugality and maintaining all household accounts; assessing, buying, and farming land; increasing household accounts by selling any extra household goods, clothing, and food that happen to be at hand; extending charity to “the indigent;” providing religious, moral and social instruction for the entire household (servants included); and educating her children (155-161). One wonders how the lord of the manor occupied his time in such a household. It is not surprising, then, that women authors of the long nineteenth century continually take both Rousseau and Fordyce to task for their unattainable womanly ideals.

Like many of the novelists whose works feature in this study, Hays and Wollstonecraft dispute much of what Rousseau and Fordyce present as being indisputable in their portrayals of woman’s sphere. But despite Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s shared conviction that “women of a superior cast” ought to have a “road open by which they can pursue more extensive plans of usefulness and independence,” even they concede that “women in the common walks of life are called to fulfill the duties of wives and mothers by religion and reason” (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 311). Notably, only the novels that bracket this study—Hays’s Memoirs of Emma Courtney, Wollstonecraft’s María, Anthony Trollope’s Phineas novels, and Hardy’s Jude the Obscure—deal directly with the issue of sexual equality, a goal that Hays, Wollstonecraft, and Hardy believe can
be realized only when an enlightened society agrees to dispense with gender roles altogether.

Sarah Lewis’s *Woman’s Mission* demonstrates the enduring predominance of Rousseau’s and Fordyce’s ideologies of women’s duties into the nineteenth century. *Woman’s Mission* was a popular and influential treatise defining woman’s moral superiority and her special duties (McFadden 20). Lewis did not, however, coin the phrase “Woman’s Mission,” nor was her book entirely the product of her own thoughts. In her preface, Lewis claims to have found enough of Louis Aimé Martin’s *Education des Meres de Famille; ou, de la Civilisation du Genre Humain par les Femmes* (1834) worth repeating that she decided to translate it from the French “and to adapt it at as far as possible to the English taste”; but finding most of Martin’s text not “immediately applicable to English society,” she incorporated “the translation of [Martin’s] thoughts” into “those ideas which have always occupied [her] own mind with engrossing interest” (i-iii). The fact that Martin was Rousseau’s pupil (McFadden 20) handily explains the Rousseauan elements in *Woman’s Mission*; the text’s Evangelical tone marks Fordyce’s presence.

In *Woman’s Mission*, Lewis canonizes Rousseau’s beatification of the doctrine of separate spheres, presenting it as having merited not merely nature’s seal of approval, as Rousseau had done, but as being dictated by a divine decree, as Fordyce had done, adding her own distinctively Evangelical stamp. Lewis liberates Woman’s Mission from its domestic boundaries but not women themselves, calling upon them to be “the regulating power of the great social machine” by influencing the husband’s and son’s judgment of “the abstract rules of right and wrong” (46). Maternal love, Lewis insists, is “the one
natural manifestation” of “that divine perfection of love,” by which practitioners will accomplish “the moral regeneration of our race” (129). The key to achieving this goal is the “postponement of self” and an “active and enduring unselfishness” (129). Lewis does not, however, exempt barren women, who also bear the “germs of that holy love” (131), from assuming this divine duty. Instead, it seems their mission expands exponentially both within and without their homes. Lewis asserts that the mission of women who are not mothers . . . is the establishment of peace, and love, and unselfishness, to be achieved by any means, and at any cost to themselves; in the cultivation first in themselves, then in all over whom they have any influence, of an unselfish and unworldly spirit; the promotion of . . . moral good. The poor, the ignorant, the domestic servant, are their children; and on them let them lavish the love which God has denied to flow in its natural channel. In any way—in every way—in which God and man can be served, it is theirs to serve, gracefully, peaceably, unostentatiously. (131)

Lewis depicts a womanly ideal far removed from the homebound Sophy but not so far away from the unflagging Virtuous Woman. Additionally, in encouraging her readers without domestic duties to take their mission out into the streets, Lewis, perhaps unintentionally, proposes that unmarried women undertake careers.

The discourse of Woman’s Mission and Woman’s Influence begins to shift from defining women’s proper duties to delineating women’s possible professions when the anonymous reviewer of Sarah Lewis’s Woman’s Mission does not in fact review Lewis’s conduct book but opts instead to expound upon his or her own opinions on the topic of
the “true work” of men and women (181). The reviewer opens with a suggestion that hitherto “circumstance” dictated the type of work each gender could perform before “machinery existed”—i.e. men’s “physical strength” empowered him “to build, fight, and do greater things to reduce to order a world as yet unmeet for him,” while the “natural position of wife and mother” fell to women, whose “lesser strength” unfit them for building, fighting, and governing the uncivilized (181)—but that a time approaches when “work for individuals” will be a matter of what suits them, not circumstance (182). The reviewer agrees with Lewis insofar as women “must emerge from that weary busy inactivity of mind and act,” remarking that “[c]onsciousness of an appointed duty . . . is stirring within [their] breast[s] and necessitates work of some kind” (186). Yet, whereas Lewis refers to sexual equality as “matter too ludicrous to be treated anywhere but in a professed satire” (*Woman’s Mission* 45), her reviewer challenges women “in a body to claim and win” their right to “tak[e] up any tools that an earnest purpose . . . may suggest the result will be safe” (186-187) and provides some examples of professions wherein women can be as effective as men, including “artists, writers, teachers,” and “clerks” (191). Moreover, the reviewer considers motherhood virtually synonymous with “work” (187) and bemoans the existing prejudice against “household work” (195), both of which he or she considers vocations just as valid as the others suggested. Nevertheless, conventional constructs of respectability inhibited many who were interested in improving the quality of women’s education from labeling the domestic duties of wives and mothers as anything but carrying out a sacred duty, because doing so would have degraded the social status of middle- and upper-class wives and mothers to that of common laborers.
But resistance to acknowledging that Woman’s Mission can only be enacted by working women, whether they remain at home or not, slowly dissipates over time. In 1851, sisters Maria G. Grey and Emily Shirreff grant that referring to marriage “as a profession . . . seems coarse and hard,” but they admit that “its harshness may serve to point deserved reprobation to the fact itself,” that marriage constitutes women’s “only alternative from poverty and dependence” (Thoughts on Self-culture Addressed to Women 19-20). In 1870, inveighing against those women who “cry . . . for leave to work,” Eliza Lynn Linton reminds them that

[t]here is work for them to do if they will do it; work waiting for them . . . but it is not the work they want to do . . . they are leaving undone that which Nature and the fitness of things have assigned to them . . . their own more special work . . . [a]ll that concerns domestic and social life. (“The Modern Revolt” 142-143)

Furthermore, Linton challenges readers to professionalize domestic and social work outside the home by becoming the “wom[e]n of taste and refinement who will undertake the task of perfecting the womanly duties” or “first-rate cooks and dinner superintendents” by whom “there is a fortune to be made,” (182) as witnessed in our own Martha Stewart. Additionally, in 1894, Sarah Grand openly refers to the fears of “well-meaning mothers” of independently minded daughters as “the survival of the days of the degradation of marriage, when it was almost the only career open to a woman as a means of livelihood” (719). With such candid portrayals of marriage in mind, combined with the content of conduct books that follow the same template used by James Fordyce, in which the women’s individual duties require some specialized training and are laid out like job
descriptions, it makes sense to refer to marriage as a profession during the long
nineteenth century.

Alongside the evolution of Woman’s Mission and women’s education, we can
also track the history of marital law in these novels, particularly those laws related to
women’s divorce and property rights. The most important of these is the British law and
custom of coverture, since it figures prominently in the plots of all of the novels. In
*Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765), William Blackstone defines coverture:

> By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very
> being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage,
> or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband, under
> whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing, and is
> therefore called in our law-French a *femme-covert*, is said to be *covert-
> baron*, or under the protection and influence of her husband, her baron, or
> lord, and her condition during her marriage is called her coverture. Upon
> this principle, of an union of person in husband and wife, depend almost
> all the legal rights, duties, and disabilities, that either of them acquire by
> the marriage. (1: 15)

This law remained unchanged until the first Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870,
1874, and 1882 brought relief for women who held title to substantial real property
before marriage or who earned their own income, as Lawrence Stone reports in *Road to
Divorce* (389). Stone also asserts that “legal support for the physical control of husbands
over their wives” did not end until 1884 (390). Yet many people still followed the custom
of coverture, as seen in *Jude the Obscure*, wherein women’s free expression of sexuality
remains contingent upon the public’s perception of her marital status. So long as their neighbors believe them to be married, Sue Bridehead and Jude Fawley cohabitate and procreate without incurring social punishment, but when Sue is questioned and admits that she is unmarried—no one questions Jude about it—their blended family begins its catastrophic descent.

*Jude the Obscure* also portrays the impact of changes to Britain’s education and divorce laws upon the lives of women in the long nineteenth century, the progress of which can also be mapped from their veritable non-existence in Wollstonecraft’s era to their achievement in the 1880s and 1890s. As I will demonstrate, all of the novels feature plots and circumstances born of Parliament’s recurring attempts in the 1840s through the 1860s to reform the British public and grammar schools, particularly the 1868 Schools Inquiry Commission’s Endowed Schools Act, by which curricula for middle- and upper-class schools were standardized (David 27). Likewise, the Langham Place Group’s effort to secure women’s access to institutions of higher learning figures prominently in novels from the latter half of the nineteenth-century, most often as a topic of debate or satire. The same holds true for influence upon the novels written after and influenced by the Divorce Reform Act of 1857, the enactment of which also was due in large part to the political activity and determination of “impeccably respectable upper-middle-class women,” like Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, Jessie Boucherette, Emily Davies, Emily Faithfull, Ann Jameson, Bessie Rayner Parkes, and later Millicent Garrett Fawcett, who organized themselves in Langham Place (*Road to Divorce* 373). Like Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft before them, the Langham Place Group recognized marriage’s function as a commercial transaction and most often ground their arguments for women’s
rights in critiques of Britain’s commercial ethos. Likewise, the commerce of marriage
certainly was not ignored by novelists or conduct-book authors. Marriage within a
patriarchal society, as Luce Irigaray notes, reduces women to mere commodities, wherein
“a sociocultural endogamy . . . forbid[s] commerce with women. Men make commerce of
them, but they do not enter into any exchanges with women” (172). Thus Langham Place
Group members directed their efforts primarily toward reforming those laws that
prohibited women from participating in Britain’s market economy in capacities other
than as laborers and in the nation’s patriarchal politics in roles other than as subjects.
Their efforts to educate women center on providing them with the means of sustaining
their own economic interests both within and without the marriage market.

The novelists under discussion unanimously present marital commerce as an
immoral custom ripe for reform; nevertheless, those female and male characters who
possess the highest level of Judeo-Christian morality—regardless of their original social
status—are most frequently rewarded with the richest mates. Those who embody such
highly valued Christian virtues as dutiful self-sacrifice, strict adherence to decorum, and
careful protection of their reputations obtain material success and preferential social
status. In other words, women’s value is frequently based on a moral scale, but success is
measured in commercial terms: when the marital transaction takes place, novelists
describe dowries, incomes, homes, and annuities as the rewards of conformity. Perhaps
the most distressing example of the commercial discourse of moral worth appears in
Dickens’s Our Mutual Friend (1864-1865), where Bella, a self-identified “mercenary,”
turns her back on her seemingly miserly benefactor, “The Golden Dustman,” whose
inheritance consists of mounds of offal, and proves herself to be “true golden gold” after
her moral reformation (843). Simultaneously—and paradoxically—commercial wealth is equated with garbage, while moral wealth is equated with gold, the highest commercial standard.

The ubiquity of this commercial/moral paradox makes best sense when approached from Marxist theory, as evinced by Luce Irigaray’s and Judith Butler’s reliance upon Marxist terminology in order to construct their feminist and gender theories. Moreover, as James H. Kavanaugh remarks, the “widespread turn to gender analysis as ideological analysis” has resulted in “real gains of feminist politics and discourse” (311). Thus, because this dissertation is concerned with the changing iterations of marital commerce and gender models within a dynamic androcentric and patriarchal society, I also rely for the most part on Marxist theory, particularly on Terry Eagleton’s most basic definition of ideology as “a kind of screen or blockage which intervenes between us and the real world” and in which “social interchanges take the form of interactions between commodities” (Ideology 11-12).

Of course, commerce can occur only between those financially and politically empowered members of society, the mercantile and leisured classes, whose vested interests in maintaining family legacies through their offspring requires standard controls over the sexual behavior of their children, particularly that of their daughters, who actually birth heirs. Therefore, throughout the long nineteenth century, the monied classes most frequently initiated and engaged in debate over female education in order to prepare their daughters to attract the most promising mates, realizing of course that women’s futures inarguably depended upon their husbands’ ability to create a comfortable life for them. For example, in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Wollstonecraft claims to
“pay particular attention to those in the middle classes because they appear to be in the most natural state” (7)—they are not yet as corrupt as the aristocracy and are more refined than the lower classes. Middle-class Maria is therefore a suitable model for her attempt at social reform. In *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), Hannah More propagates the notion that the middle class has a religious and patriotic duty to reform the morals of both the aristocracy and the lower classes. In *The Women of England* (1838), Sarah Stickney Ellis also speaks “to those who belong to that great mass of the population of England which is connected with trade and manufactures, as well as to the wives and daughters of professional men of limited incomes”—the middle class—who are “removed from the pressing necessity of absolute poverty, and admitted to the intellectual privileges of the great” but are “not to be exempt from the domestic duties which call forth the best energies of the female character” (8). By the time Ellis writes her highly influential conduct books, the particular suitability of the middle class to act as moral arbiters and models for all of England had become an established “fact of life” that continued to influence middle-class identity well into the twentieth century.

Such being the case, we can, in a manner of speaking, retrofit bell hooks’s challenge to reform so-called second-wave, American feminism (of the 1960s and 1970s) to yet another paradox of the long nineteenth century ideology. As hooks explains, “much feminist theory emerges from privileged women who live at the center” (ii), bourgeois women (8), who unwittingly do not eradicate “sexist oppression” (1) but merely transform it into yet another structure of “hegemonic dominance” (10) by insisting that “the only legitimate discourse” is their own (9). Accordingly, hooks speaks of the “central problem within feminist discourse . . . to arrive at a consensus of opinion of what
feminism is or accept definition(s) that could serve as points of unification,” concluding that “[w]ithout agreed upon definition(s) we lack a sound foundation on which to construct theory or engage in overall meaningful praxis” (17). This lack of consensus existed in the long nineteenth century as well: radical women’s rights advocates continually asserted their reformatory discourse despite suffering repeated backlashes born of the human desire for order—in this case, for perfect, immutable gender roles into which to plug imperfect, mutable beings. Thus, in this dissertation, I speak of feminisms that are just as mutable as the beings who created them; and while the more radical among them anticipate the ideals of their future, the more conciliatory among them are rooted firmly in the realities of the time in which they were created.

The texts hereafter examined indeed reflect several “revolution[s] of female manners,” but not in the sense that Mary Wollstonecraft originally intended (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 105). Society as a whole rejected Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s demands for complete educational, legal, and social parity between the sexes, but individuals within succeeding generations did not concede defeat, and their reiteration and refinement of jacobin feminist ideology spurred ongoing debate throughout the nineteenth century. As a mirror of its particular “social temporality” (Butler 179), each text I will examine represents its author’s unique endeavor to construct her or his own practical theory and praxis of optimal women’s education, in which feminist writers always seek to overturn conservative ideology and conservative authors always strive to overrule feminist dissension.

Additionally, debates over women’s rights seem to rekindle every forty or fifty years between periods of relative cultural complacence. Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s
treatises on women’s rights appeared in the early years of the 1790s, but by the end of the
decade they were repudiated along with their authors. The cause of women’s rights did
not recover until the Langham Place Group began to organize the women’s rights
movement and “openly champion[ed]” Wollstonecraft in the 1850s (“Mary
Wollstonecraft” par. 42), but none of their members aligned herself with Wollstonecraft
in print until Millicent Garret Fawcett republished *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
in 1891. Likewise, after Hays in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and Wollstonecraft in
*Maria, the Wrongs of Woman* challenge “Posterity” to “emancipate the human mind from
the trammels of superstition, and teach it that its true dignity and virtue consist in being
free” (*Memoirs of Emma Courtney* 221), their “gauntlet” (*A Vindication of the Rights of
Woman* 116) lies un-thrown by novelists until 1853, when Charlotte Brontë presents the
benefits of co-education in *Villette*, and in 1894, when Thomas Hardy echoes Hays’s and
Wollstonecraft’s pessimism that co-education can be achieved in an androcentric society.
Thus the ebb and flow of the women’s rights struggle is best depicted as a series of
revolutions (in both meanings of the term), that of Hays and Wollstonecraft being the
most radical in nature.

Therefore, in chapter one I begin by comparing the pedagogical and philosophical
content of Mary Hays’s *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* with her
*Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of
Woman* with her *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, and then comparing Hays’s and
Wollstonecraft’s feminist educational theories and praxes. Both novels are semi-
autobiographical texts, and both Emma Courtney and Maria voice their authors’
experiences of autodidactic learning that fails to meet their liberatory expectations. Both
authors also assume that an education comparable to what men received would better prepare women to enter marriage market, but they do not hold out much hope for women in a society that values only their chastity, not their intellects. Emma and Maria find themselves at a distinct disadvantage in a marriage market designed to perpetuate patriarchy and in which men regard women not as equals but as commodities, wherein they fall prey to their own romantic delusions born of their autodidactic attempts to master so-called masculine knowledge, and from which they reap marital disharmony and domestic chaos before abandoning society for a dystopian, all-female community. Ultimately, then, Hays and Wollstonecraft find women’s education to be useless in the marriage market. All of the other novelists featured in this study agree with Hays and Wollstonecraft that sexual commerce is a symptom of a larger and dangerously destructive social ill. Yet they disagree either entirely or partially that coeducation might offer a one-size-fits-all-women solution.

In chapter two, I argue that Maria Edgeworth’s treatise *Letters for Literary Ladies* and *Practical Education* displays her disagreement with Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s desire for educational parity, and in *Belinda* Harriet Freke embodies Edgeworth’s satirical opinion of Wollstonecraft and women’s rights. Belinda Portman and Lady Delacour each learn that truly rational women comply with patriarchal order and the doctrine of separate spheres in order to achieve marital and domestic harmony. Moreover, Belinda demonstrates that autodidacticism may indeed be effective, but any student’s reading must be supplemented with experiential learning gleaned from observing and reflecting upon the private and social behavior of her or his acquaintances and friends. In order to demonstrate as much, the properly educated and thoroughly rational Belinda
enters the marriage market well prepared and receives the reward of her chosen marriage partner, while those who were improperly educated fall victim to their hyper-feminine or their unsexed, masculinized states.

In chapter three, I demonstrate that the histories of Alicia and Mary Douglas in *Marriage* display Susan Ferrier’s reservations about coeducation and autodidactism. Ferrier asserts that, in the optimal women’s pedagogy, experiential learning must occur after the wisdom of Christian texts has been transmitted directly from mother to child, the most important lesson being the sincere enactment of sympathy. Moreover, Ferrier contends that while James Fordyce’s largely feudal model of femininity is outdated among the monied classes of an Enlightened society, his reverence of maternity and religious instruction should be preserved. Ferrier reserves her harshest satire for Lady Juliana Courtland and Adelaide Douglas, who refuse to engage in any form of instruction whatsoever and who spurn conventional femininity. Lady Emily Courtland most often voices that satire and may in fact represent Ferrier’s own unfulfilled desires to transcend patriarchal limits on her body and intellect. For the most part, both *Belinda* and *Marriage* demonstrate their authors’ agreement with Hays and Wollstonecraft that women have the intellectual capacity to develop rationality through autodidactic and experiential learning. However, Edgeworth and Ferrier reject the need for and negate the possibility of total sexual equality, and they seem less dismayed by the commercialization of British society and the dominion of patriarchy than are Hays and Wollstonecraft.

In *Dombey and Son*, the subject of chapter four, Charles Dickens’s history of Florence Dombey resurrects Rousseau’s philosophy that women are better able to perform their proper function in society—redeeming others, especially men, from the
immoral influences of an overly commercialized society—by altogether avoiding formalized education, unless it is undertaken for the benefit of another. Dickens also insists that women’s natural sympathies are for the most part best left to develop on their own but optimally should be supplemented with observations of sympathetic women caregivers. Dickens contrasts Florence’s seemingly accidental “study of a loving heart” (417) with Edith Granger’s marginally respectable commercial education for the marriage market and Alice Marwood’s vicious training for the sex trade, obtained in both latter cases from their own mothers. Whereas by putting their mothers’ instructions in self-m mercantilism to good use, Edith and Alice ultimately fail to secure their own livings—Edith willingly exiles herself and Alice dies of an undisclosed ailment connected to her unhealthy lifestyle—Florence replicates Sarah Stickney Ellis’s conduct-book model of femininity by redeeming her avaricious father and by procreating.

Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*, the subject of chapter five, describes and depicts the progress and results of three women’s pedagogies, each of which satisfies the desires of its pupil, whose lifestyles Brontë presents as equally conducive toward achieving personal fulfillment. In her portrayals of Lucy Snowe and Paulina Home, Brontë is the only novelist within the scope of this dissertation to present widely disparate positive models of femininity and to suggest that a supposedly negative model of femininity, like that of Ginevra Fanshawe, can enjoy domestic success if her education is tailored to her specific needs. Brontë is also the first to extend the sphere of Woman’s Mission into the professional realm, thereby suggesting that women can wield Woman’s Influence outside the home.
In chapter six, I discuss *Phineas Finn* (1876-1879) and *Phineas Redux* (1873-1874), in which Anthony Trollope assumes that women are the intellectual equals of men but that they are destined, more likely than not, to marry. Nevertheless, he considers that any pre-marital training, like the general state of education in the period, will be inadequate to the task and offers examples of women, Violet Effingham and Madam Max Goesler, who learn on the job, so to speak, during courtship properly to gauge their own and their potential spouse’s marital expectations in order to find husbands who will not enforce their patriarchal authority. Lady Laura Standish, on the other hand, exhibits the disaster in store for those women who usurp masculine authority and thus create domestic disharmony. Additionally, Trollope renounces the stereotypical conduct-book model of the ideal woman, deeming her a shell of a woman for lacking any reason to exist beyond that of serving as an appendage to her husband. Thus Trollope appears to agree with Brontë that women need not remain at home to fulfill their womanly duties.

In chapter seven, Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, completes the circuit of the nineteenth-century feminisms, all of which contend that, with the proper education, women can be useful members of society and find happiness either by complying with patriarchy’s conventional gender roles or by subverting them. Sue Bridehead, Jude Fawley, and Richard Phillotson seemingly reenact the disaster that Emma Courtney and Maria generate by their failure to conform. Yet, whereas Emma’s and Maria’s overwrought sensibilities and underdeveloped intellects abort their chances for domestic harmony, for which they are punished, Sue Bridehead’s hyper-intellectualism engenders her own destruction, as well as that of her mates and children. Moreover, Emma’s and Maria’s errors result mostly from their gendered educations; Sue experiences educational
parity but still fails to achieve marital harmony. Thus, Hardy contends, in total agreement with Hays and Wollstonecraft, that coeducation offers no remedy for sexual inequality so long as society rejects an ungendered model of humanity.

It therefore becomes clear that Sue Bridehead, who is often counted among the fin de siècle’s New Women, is truly “not so new,” as Roxanne Jurta calls her (13), but not in the sense that Jurta suggests, that Sue fails to meet a particular definition of New Womanly behavior. Neither does Sue fail to qualify as New Woman, as Anne B. Simpson argues, because her dualistic, somewhat androgynous nature makes it difficult to affix any label onto her (55). Sue is simply not a “new” woman at all, just as any of her supposed prototypes are not, whether members of the Langham Place Group, suffragettes, or women in Hardy’s life. Sue represents a late-nineteenth-century iteration of an ancient and still evolving type of woman, one who proves herself capable of matching man’s intellectual mettle but finds herself unable to earn men’s respect, thwart sexual objectification, surmount gender barriers, escape sex roles, break the glass ceiling, trade in her pink collar for a white or blue one, or have it all without sacrificing some part of herself in the process. Infrequently referred to by her full name, Susanna Florence Mary Bridehead embodies a later version of Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft, with whom this study begins.
Chapter 1

The Futility of Women’s Education in Mary Hays’s *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*

Despite the feminist optimism in their respective polemics, *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Hays in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) and Mary Wollstonecraft in *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) present chiefly pessimistic views of women’s education in late eighteenth-century Britain, citing the law of coverture and its concomitant androcentric systems of sexual commerce as forces conducive to women’s degradation and society’s commercialization. Hays and Wollstonecraft agree that, denied the academic rigor they believed to be the province solely of educated men, quasi-educated women enter the marriage market with roughly the same emotional and intellectual disadvantages as do thoroughly uneducated women. Emma Courtney’s and Maria Venable’s misfortunes demonstrate that both autodidacticism and traditional women’s instruction that exclude free exchange of ideas between the sexes are worse than ineffective means of educating women—they are exercises in futility and courses to madness. Thus both Emma and Maria eventually exile themselves from their androcentric cultures and create exclusively gynocentric households with socially inferior women who, like them, desire to direct their own destinies. Yet whereas Hays ends *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* with a sanguine vision of a future, sexually equal society, due to Wollstonecraft’s untimely death we can only speculate if the incomplete *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* would have ended in hope or despair.
Because Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s works are so similar, Gary Kelly, Eleanor Ty, and Mary A. Waters, among others, argue that the corpus of Hays’s work results more from her friendship with and reading of Wollstonecraft than from her own imaginative and cognitive powers, but the timing of Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s physical and literary interactions does not wholly support that claim. To the contrary, Hays apparently depended less upon Wollstonecraft for her opinions on women’s issues, particularly her views on women’s education, than has hitherto been acknowledged. In both her chronology of Hays’s life and her introduction to the 2000 Broadview edition of Memoirs of Emma Courtney, Marilyn L. Brooks indicates that Hays’s Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women was written between 1790 and 1791—several months before Wollstonecraft began A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, which appeared in January of 1792—but was not published until 1798 “in order to avoid duplication of [Wollstonecraft’s] ideas” (8). Brooks also notes that Hays and Wollstonecraft did not meet until June 1792 (8), well after Hays completed Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women. Similarly, Hays’s Memoirs of Emma Courtney precedes Wollstonecraft’s Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman. In a 9 March 1796 letter to Hays, William Godwin acknowledges receiving the manuscript of Memoirs of Emma Courtney and comments upon its content (Love Letters 235). In his memoirs of Wollstonecraft, Godwin notes that Wollstonecraft began work on Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman in September 1796 (264), six months after he received his copy of Memoirs of Emma Courtney. Thus Hays’s nearly complete manuscript of Memoirs of Emma Courtney predates Wollstonecraft’s commencement on Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman. Significantly, while Wollstonecraft had access through her relationship with Godwin to
Hays’s *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* in both manuscript and finished form, no evidence suggests the reverse: that Hays had access to *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* as a work in progress. Moira Ferguson and Janet Todd accordingly posit the “possible indirect influence” Hays’s novel may have had on Wollstonecraft (105), but assumptions about who influenced whom remain largely speculative and may be impossible to resolve without further evidence.

Certainly, like their literature, Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s personal lives ran in remarkably parallel courses and reflected their feminist beliefs, particularly their desires to maintain their respective independence in a society that expected women to espouse men and to embrace the authority that husbands then were legally entitled to hold over their wives. Hays resolved her issues about coverture by avoiding the marriage market altogether. As Gina Luria Walker reports in “‘Sewing in the Next World’: Mary Hays as Dissenting Autodidact in the 1780s,” Hays declared herself an “unmarried widow” when her betrothed, John Eccles, died, (par. 9).10 Hays, Walker also contends, “had ‘known’ a man through erotic explorations with Eccles” and “was expected to spend the rest of her life grieving at the loss of domestic status and interest” (par. 7), so she readily submitted to the cultural expectation to mourn as his widow, not just as his intended bride. Widowhood conferred upon Hays both freedom from domestic restraint and an independent legal identity as a *femme sole*, which allowed her a socially acceptable independent lifestyle in which she could concentrate her time and efforts on developing her intellect and advancing her writing career.

Wollstonecraft also subverted the marriage market, first through her unmarried partnership with Gilbert Imlay and later in her unconventional marriage to Godwin.
Whether, as Godwin insists, Wollstonecraft assumed Imlay’s name in order to avoid being imprisoned in the Bastille during the Reign of Terror (“Memoirs of the Author of ‘The Rights of Woman” 240), or, as Eleanor Flexner suggests, “as the assertion of a woman’s right to live as she saw fit” (192), Wollstonecraft’s relationship with Imlay conformed with the approval of marital equality and the disapproval of marital commerce that she expresses in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She believed that Imlay offered her more than “pecuniary support” (*Collected Letters* 321). Likewise, Wollstonecraft later rejected what Godwin calls a proposal of “marriage for mercenary considerations” from an unnamed friend of her editor, Joseph Johnson (326). Her letter of rejection can more appropriately be termed one of repudiation. She angrily asserts that “what I call an insult, is the bare supposition that I could for a moment think of prostituting my person for maintenance; for in that point of view does such a marriage appear to me” (327). Thus, Wollstonecraft apparently transformed her feminist theories into praxis, and her marriage to Godwin conformed with that praxis.

In *Memoirs of the Author of “The Rights of Woman,”* Godwin describes his relationship with Wollstonecraft, making it clear that, although they did not marry because they considered their union a matter “sacredly private” and saw no reason “to blow a trumpet . . . and to record the moment when it ha[d] arrived at its climax” (258), they exercised the right of sexual exclusivity traditionally granted to legally married couples but retained their respective personal and professional independence. Even after they married, Godwin spent his days in his “apartment” in a building “twenty doors from [their] house, because they believed that “it was possible for two persons to be too
uniformly in each others’ society” (263). Explaining the unconventional arrangement between them to Amelia Alderson, Wollstonecraft asserts that

> my conduct in life must be directed by my own judgment and moral principles; it is my wish that Mr. Godwin should visit and dine out as formerly, and I shall do the same; in short, I still mean to be independent.

(Collected Letters 389)

Thus both before and after their marriage, without appearing hypocritical or rejecting their stated beliefs about women’s rights and personal liberty, Wollstonecraft and Godwin enjoyed the benefits of “a mutual affection between the persons of an opposite sex” that Godwin indicates Wollstonecraft considered to be “the principal solace of human life” (Memoirs of the Author of “The Rights of Woman” 235). Such open declarations from Wollstonecraft to practice what she preached form the basis of Elizabeth Robins Pennell’s attempt to rehabilitate the early feminist’s reputation in The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft (1884), a text to which I will return in the penultimate chapter of this dissertation.

The wrongs besetting women, both Hays and Wollstonecraft contend, emanate from a system of marital commerce that ensures the continuation of a patriarchy that retains for itself supreme legal, political, and religious authority over real and portable property as well as over women, who serve as the patriarchy’s vehicles of inheritance. In particular, Hays and Wollstonecraft denounce the fact that in order to sustain its power the patriarchy practices, encourages, and perpetuates self-delusional social policy, a type of mass madness. First, in order to encourage women’s willing submission to masculine authority patriarchs devise false legal, political, and religious ideologies about women’s
moral supremacy and intellectual and physical inferiority. Second, in order to prevent women from formulating rational arguments to reject that authority, patriarchs deny women the same educational opportunities granted to men. Third, in order to consolidate and safeguard their wealth and power entirely within their own social class, patriarchs commodify women in their class by basing their sole value upon their reproductive capacities and placing the heaviest social penalties on women who transgress androcentric sexual strictures. In such a system, wherein women are forbidden to participate as active members of society, they can only be acted upon; hence, they are robbed of their personal liberty and degraded. Hays and Wollstonecraft thus anticipate Luce Irigaray’s concept of “women-as-commodities” whose “relative value” in an “economy of exchange” depends entirely on what men perceive to be their own needs and desires (176-179). As the purported memoirs of Emma and Maria demonstrate, women who do not comply with the patriarchy’s social practices are deemed mad—not those who willingly or unknowingly submit to the patriarchy’s entirely unnatural commercialization of human relations. Nevertheless, because ignorant women can neither protect themselves from sexual predators nor create domestic harmony, Hays and Wollstonecraft argue that the patriarchy ultimately risks catastrophic failure by ignoring women’s intellectual development and allowing them to formulate unrealistic expectations of courtship and marriage. Therefore, those who comply with the system are insane to think that they can achieve their goals.

Hays encapsulates the central dilemma of women in her society in a letter written to Godwin on 6 February 1796, which she later incorporates into Memoirs of Emma Courtney. She laments, “Mine, I believe, is almost a solitary madness in the eighteenth
century: it is not on the altars of love, but of gold, that men, now, come to pay their offerings” (173). Emma’s madness results from her inability to reject her supposedly delusional, romantic expectation of marriage based upon mutual affection and to accept the fact that the civil institution of marriage had become a commercial transaction for those in her class. In the same letter, Hays describes the only two modes of being left to women when commercial interests replace mutual affection:

From the miserable consequences of wretched moral distinctions, from chastity having been considered as a sexual virtue, all these calamities have flowed.

. . . Half the sex, then, are the wretched, degraded, victims of brutal instinct: the remainder, if they sink not into mere frivolity and insipidity, are sublimed into . . . refined, romantic, factitious, unfortunate beings . . .

(240)

In Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman, Wollstonecraft’s Jemima seems to have been inspired by members of the first “half of the sex” as described by Hays: her birth is illegitimate, her childhood is brutal, and her adolescence is vicious. Additionally, utterly ignorant, repeatedly raped, and eventually cast out of respectable society, misanthropic Jemima subsists on the “brutal instinct” borne of her perennial victimhood. Hays’s Emma and Wollstonecraft’s Maria, both semi-autobiographical characters, resemble the second of Hays’s types of women: while most women remain blissfully unaware of their degradation in a society that discounts their propensity for rationality and encourages them to cultivate their sensibility, Emma’s and Maria’s autodidacticism affords them only enough reason to foster their discontent.
Similarly, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft argues that the cultural directive to earn a living or to improve upon “hereditary property” (300) applies to both men and women, but the manner in which the sexes train to fulfill that directive differs significantly. While society expects both men and women to establish themselves—men in a profession and women through marriage—they are not equally provided with the means to fulfill those life goals: men “are prepared for professions” in order to secure an income, while in their formative years women remain idle but are expected to “marry advantageously, and to this object their time is sacrificed, and their persons often legally prostituted” (135). Wollstonecraft continues,

> Hereditary property sophisticates the mind, and the unfortunate victims to it . . . swathed from their birth, seldom exert the locomotive faculty of body and mind; and, thus viewing everything through one medium, and that a false one, are unable to discern in what true merit and happiness consist.

(300)

Thus women, rendered *mens insana in corpore insano*, commence upon fulfilling the cultural directive to advance their familial fortunes but will likely fail in the attempt. Furthermore, Wollstonecraft complains that “Women, in particular, all want to be ladies” (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 312), by which she refers to the then burgeoning cultural bias toward respectability by which middle-class women were discouraged from producing more than ornamental goods for home use or commodities for sale outside the home and were expected to hire domestic help to maintain the house and the people within it. Therefore, whereas men, Wollstonecraft argues, master useful skills applicable
to their chosen professions or trades, women are deliberately kept ignorant of the basic
skills requisite to fulfill the uxorial and maternal functions society prescribes to them.

Nevertheless, such women were still expected to increase the family coffers through marriage. Not unlike the advice in the modern adage that “it takes money to make money,” women were encouraged and trained to display their family’s wealth and status through dress, demeanor, musicianship, dancing, and drawing. Likewise, they were to leave rationality to men to and to rely upon their sensibility—the desire to nurture or attend to the needs of others that was deemed a providential feminine characteristic by the reigning arbiters of femininity Jean Jacques Rousseau, James Fordyce, and John Gregory.11 Simultaneously, traditional feminine qualities—most importantly the marshalling of household economy, amiability, sensibility, and modesty—were still considered to be vital for appearance’s sake, and women were forced, in Wollstonecraft’s words, “always to seem to be this and that” (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 214) without actually being economical, amiable, sensible, or modest. In other words, because society no longer expected respectable women to execute the manual labor involved in maintaining a household or nurturing anyone within it, women instead performed solely ornamental tasks and arts, and women’s education became, Wollstonecraft argues, a “system of dissimulation” (214). In Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women, Hays similarly decries a “system of contradictions” (49) in which “women cannot be in reality what men would have them be, though they must often endeavor to appear so” (76) in order to survive in a male-dominated society.

For Hays and Wollstonecraft, the absence of a rational education for women, along with the persistence of the curricula of artifice to which middle-class women were
exposed, produces commodities for the marriage market instead of productive members of society. In her 2 March 1797 letter to the editor of the *Monthly Magazine*, Hays bemoans the fact that

The greater proportion of young women are trained up by thoughtless parents, in ease and luxury, with no other dependence for their future support than the precarious chance of establishing themselves by marriage: for this purpose (the men best know why) elaborate attention is paid to external attractions and accomplishments, to the neglect of more useful and solid acquirements. (“Letter to the Editor” 276)

The consequential degradation of women is the direct result of men’s desire “to marry merely for wealth and convenience” (277), which is “deeply entangled with the system of property” (278). Agreeing with Wollstonecraft, Hays views such “venal motives” for marriage as “the worst kind of prostitution” (277).

Further, Hays and Wollstonecraft view the undirected reading of novels as compounding women’s inadequate preparation to enter the marriage market by instilling them with unrealistic expectations of courtship and marriage. Wollstonecraft complains that

Novels, music, poetry, and gallantry, all tend to make women the creatures of sensation, and their character is formed in the mold of folly during the time they are acquiring accomplishments, the only improvement they are excited, by their station in society, to acquire. (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 137-138)
Hays tells Godwin that she had been “set out in life upon very wrong principals . . . fostered, if not generated, by an early passion for novels and romances” (*Memoirs of Emma Courtney* 232). It is intriguing, then, that both women reiterated in their novels expressions of dissatisfaction with what they considered dangerous educational practices for women: their polemics utilize one of the very forms they suspected as part of the problem. According to Ann Wilson, both “jacobins and anti-jacobins alike saw fiction as a mode of discourse that necessarily partook of its author’s political beliefs and operated to inculcate its readers with those beliefs” (30). Hays and Wollstonecraft, often referred to as jacobin as well as feminist writers, recognized the novel’s power to attract and keep an audience, especially a female audience that was denied access to academic texts, and they argued that the well-crafted novel could be a valuable didactic tool for encouraging social reform. In their respective prefaces to *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, Hays and Wollstonecraft declare their didactic intent, and, considering their actual praxis in leading useful lives according to their chosen philosophical and intellectual tenets, their sincerity ought to go unchallenged.

The economic reasons behind their choice to reprise their polemics in fiction should not, however, be completely subordinated to their political rationale, and it is important to note that as women became commodities in a commercialized society, so did the novel. In fact, the commodification of women and the commodification of the novel can be traced to the same cultural shift toward a commercial economy. Richard D. Altick comments upon the rise in the “novel-reading audience [that] expanded steadily in the eighteenth century,” adding that its “growth was reflected by the proliferation of individual novels and the increased patronage of the circulating libraries” (50). He credits
women readers with the success of circulating libraries, since they “were relieved of domestic chores . . . [and] forced to fight ennui with books” (45), and he argues that the target audience of fiction became increasingly feminized in the late-eighteenth century.

Similarly, the production of fiction was also feminized. James Raven indicates that in the 1790s, the number of women writing novels increasingly outnumbered men as the decade progressed (45-47). Memoirs of Emma Courtney and Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman, in which Hays and Wollstonecraft transfer their feminist polemics into fiction in order to reach far greater numbers of women readers than their polemics had done, thus capitalize on a growing feminine literary trend in three important ways. First, writing and selling novels made both economic and political sense because the act itself proved their argument that women could be productive members of their economy and society when permitted to do so. Second, creating fiction also allowed them to cloak their radical ideas in romance, making them more palatable to a ready market of women readers while warning of the dangers of novels that lacked sound didactic value despite their assertions to the contrary. Third, Hays and Wollstonecraft took advantage of female readers’ preference for romance to “effect a revolution of female manners” so that women might “labor by reforming themselves to reform the world” (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 105). Nonetheless, while arguing for improved female education by illustrating the pitfalls of insufficient autodidactic efforts they recognize that female education is entirely useless in a marriage market designed solely to protect hereditary property. Therefore, while Memoirs of Emma Courtney and Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman appear to be personal histories, they were written to have a significant impact on social history.
II

Emma Courtney presents the curriculum—initially inspired by her romantically inclined Aunt Melmoth (her earliest caretaker), entirely neglected at a boarding school, and then minimally directed by her libertine father—of her formative years as entirely autodidactic. Aunt Melmoth’s reading aloud from the “Arabian Nights, Turkish Tales, and other works of marvelous import” (48) first inspires the motherless Emma to read for entertainment’s sake and not for educational purposes. In boarding school, where she is “obliged to sit poring over needlework” and “consigned . . . to ignorant, splenetic teachers,” Emma’s body is “tortured into forms” and her mind forced to memorize of “[English] grammar and French, mere words that conveyed to [her] no ideas” (49). She turns to apparently forbidden books to feed her intellect only to have them confiscated and to be “constrained to learn, by way of penance, chapters from the Proverbs of Solomon or verses from the French testament” (50), neither of which anyone bothers to explain for her. Thus Emma associates with punishment the only books she encounters that may have provided her with some useful instruction had their lessons been elucidated by a competent instructor. After she is recalled to her Aunt Melmoth’s home, Emma subscribes to a circulating library and satisfies her appetite for fiction, “devour[ing]—little careful in the reflection—from ten to fourteen novels in a week” (53). Therefore, the fourteen-year-old Emma approaches a marriageable age with deficient in reasoning skills and enters society entirely ignorant of the accomplishments and skills that her society expects its women to carry into marriage. Instead, she patterns herself after the heroines
of “romances” borrowed from circulating libraries (54), who embody fantastic models of femininity entirely unsuited to the marriage market.

Three years later when Emma joins her father’s household, Mr. Courtney realizes that Emma’s education in romance marks a defect in her premarital training as well as a threat to her chastity, two drawbacks that combine to make her a dubious commodity in the marriage market, especially since he depleted the fortune that would have increased Emma’s chances of attracting a suitor. In order to counteract a “sensibility, which he already perceived with regret, was but too acute” (54), which may make her “mistake [his] valet for a prince in disguise, [his] house for a haunted castle, and [his] rational care for [her] future welfare for a barbarous tyranny” (55)—like the heroines of authors like Charlotte Lennox and Ann Radcliffe—Mr. Courtney decides to “prepare and strengthen [her] mind to encounter, with fortitude, some hardships and rude shocks, to which [she] might be exposed” (53). From his locked bookcase—a particularly telling indication of the barriers placed between men’s knowledge and women’s access to it—Mr. Courtney selects a course of “historical reading,” “ecclesiastical history,” and Enlightenment philosophy (59-60) for Emma’s edification, but he does not engage her in any discussion of the texts he assigns. In the hopes improving her etiquette, Mr. Courtney requires Emma to attend her father’s gatherings, but she “never ventured to mingle in the conversations” while listening “attentively to all that was said” (59). Emma’s education therefore remains purely one-sided and hence truly autodidactic. Moreover, at precisely the wrong time, as Katharine Binnhammer points out, Mr. Courtney interrupts Emma’s reading of “the Heloise of Rousseau” (Memoirs of Emma Courtney 60) and “prevents Emma from reading its didactic warning against sexual transgression;” thus Emma “is
awakened and experiences the first transports of desire” (8-9). By insisting on the fiction of her “superior understanding” and allowing Emma to digest the contents of his library, piecemeal, entirely on her own, Mr. Courtney’s best attempts to educate his daughter thus backfire. Instead of educating a wife capable of advancing the patriarchy’s interests, he further increases the destructive powers of a sexual time bomb of sorts.

However, Mr. Courtney apparently sees some value in Emma’s education, but he does not believe it will be of any use in the marriage market, the commerciality of which he pragmatically acknowledges. The following passage, in which the dying Mr. Courtney tells Emma about his blasted marital expectations for her, illustrates Hays’s central thesis in the novel: marriage is a matter of economics, and the developed female intellect, even one as underdeveloped as Emma’s, has no value in marital negotiations. Mr. Courtney tells his daughter,

> Had I lived, it was my intention to have established you by marriage; but that is a scheme, to which, at present, I would not advise you to trust. Marriage, generally speaking, in the existing state of things, must of necessity be an affair of *finance*. My interest and introduction might have availed you something; but mere merit, wit, or beauty, stand in need of more powerful auxiliaries. (*Memoirs of Emma Courtney* 64)

Thus Emma inherits no usable fortune, either financial or intellectual, from her father, and she complains of being a “hapless woman,” uneducated “for commerce, for a profession, for labor,” and made “feeble and delicate by bodily constraint, and fastidious by artificial refinement . . . confined within a magic circle” of feminine subjectivity and heightened sensibility (65-66).
At nineteen, “unfettered, at [her] own discretion” to “make her way in the world” (64), Emma enters a world that she cannot encounter except through an overly developed sensibility. She also quickly discovers that her autodidactic efforts have been utterly futile, as demonstrated in her prejudicial distaste for teaching (perhaps the only profession for which she has some talent and training) and in Mrs. Morton’s rejection of Emma’s offer to tutor the Morton daughters. Mrs. Morton informs Emma that her daughters’ “expectations are not great, and your elegant accomplishments might unfit them for their future, possible, stations” (69). Mrs. Morton’s emphasis on the elegance of Emma’s accomplishments connotes their unsuitability in her particular middle-class social sphere. The rejection elicits a blush from Emma, and perhaps Mrs. Morton views her talents as those of a courtesan, if not of an aristocrat. Once again, Hays emphasizes the enforced passivity and utter uselessness of female intellectualism in her upper-middle-class society.

At Morton Park, Emma encounters Mr. Francis, the first person to take any interest in helping her to develop her intellect. Hays bases the conversations and correspondence between Emma and Mr. Francis upon her own actual interactions with Godwin. Because Hays copies whole sections, nearly verbatim, from her actual correspondence with Godwin into the novel’s virtual epistolary exchange between Emma and Mr. Francis, readers can safely deduce from them Hays’s thoughts and opinions on women’s education without fearing to enter the debate over authorial intent and fictionalization of her actual experience as a learned lady in the late eighteenth-century. Emma, like her creator, mistrusts her self-made intellect and asks Mr. Francis “through the medium of pen and paper” (74) to act as her conscience, since hers “has been blinded
and warped” by “prejudice” (70) much in the same way that Hays directed Godwin “not to spare to reprove, or correct” (230) her “thousand wayward, contradictory, ideas and emotions” (228). This distance-learning scheme appalls the Mortons when they hear of it, clearly indicating that Hays was aware of Emma’s unconventionality,13 but the arrangement affords a viable outlet for Emma’s effusions without her addressing the reader directly as would occur in a polemic. More importantly, however, it again places Emma’s dependence for her education solely upon the written word, and thus remains autodidactic in nature—Emma acquires knowledge through reading with no outside perspective to direct that reading.

Perhaps even more shocking than the manner in which Mr. Francis tutors Emma is his advising her to gain experience as rather than relying on books and social custom to guide her actions: “Every improvement must be the result of successive experiments, this has been found true in natural science, and it must be universally beneficial” (82). This fundamental tenet of experiential learning in all aspects of life, as expressed in Godwin’s An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Political Justice, and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness (1793), was gaining popularity at the time, as observed in the educational treatises of Catharine Macaulay and Richard Lovell Edgeworth and his daughter Maria, all of which expand upon the original theory in John Locke’s Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693). Hays, Godwin, and Wollstonecraft are alone, however, in suggesting that women apply the experiential method beyond the customs that restricted interaction between genders. Obviously, the “experienced” woman with a “history,” conventionally considered to be a profligate, flew in the face of the established feminine ideal. No doubt further disturbing to Hays’s contemporary readers, Mr. Francis
delivers a virtually anarchic edict for Emma to repudiate social custom whenever experience suggests that she ought to do so. He writes,

\textit{Obedience,} is a word, which ought never to have had existence: as we recede from conviction, and languidly resign ourselves to any foreign authority, we quench the principle of action, of virtue, of reason;—we bear about the semblance of humanity, but the spirit is fled. (82-83)

This advice directly opposes the mass of cultural, religious, and philosophical tenets of Hays’s time, wherein women were repeatedly told that obedience was their only option, since their intellectual capacities were insufficient to allow for their own rational response to the world in which they lived.

The first test of Emma’s autodidactic efforts occurs when Mr. Montague, a man of feeling deliberately based on the model of Henry MacKenzie’s eponymous hero, offers his hand in marriage. Emma immediately declines the offer, and Montague reacts with shocked disbelief. Emma reports on their resulting \textit{tête-à-tête}:

He knew not how to conceive—that a woman in my situation, unprepossessed, could reject so advantageous an establishment!

This, I told him, was indelicate, both to me and to himself. Were my situation yet more desolate, I would not marry any man, merely for an \textit{establishment,} for whom I did not feel an affection. (88)

Montague displays the same cultural expectations of marriage to which Emma’s father had earlier subscribed. First, he assumes that Emma’s position as a \textit{femme sole} is not a desirable one; second, his use of the term “unprepossessed” suggests both that Emma possesses no prospects of marriage and is not, herself, possessed by anyone; and third, he
intends to fulfill her father’s dream of providing an establishment for her from which she
can secure unimpeded access to capital. Montague’s use of commercial terminology
unmistakably indicates that he seems wholly complicit with his overly commercial
society, even though he is presented as a man of sentiment. For Hays, the attempt to
sentimentalize the world will prove to be an ineffective response to society’s burgeoning
commercial ethos. Montague views Emma’s refusal as the result of “Damned romantic
affectation” (88), and Emma admits to being “sensible that [she has] yielded to weak and
wayward feelings” (90), but her refusal illustrates her intention to live a sensible, not
commercial, existence. It also leaves her free to enter upon a purely illusory infatuation
with another man who turns out other than what he seems to be.

Of all the distinct elements of Hays’s first novel, the relationship, or semblance of
one, between Emma and Augustus Harley has received some critical attention, but, as is
the case with Hays’s entire corpus, it surely deserves more.14 Katherine Binhammer
points out that their relationship is “entirely mediated by reading” when they are in each
other’s physical presence and “purely textual” through their letters when they are
separated (11). Anjana Sharma argues that Augustus “Harley is for Emma like a new text
whose words she alone can read” (151). Both Binhammer and Anjana assert that Emma’s
disastrous infatuation with Augustus illustrates the inherent dangers in women’s reading
of men and their novels without any guidance, but they overlook the fact that Augustus
breaks through Emma’s attempts to textualize him by actively tutoring her in masculine
fields that had previously been denied to her.

Emma’s tortured passion for Augustus Harley begins in a manner as one-sided as
that in which her education had been conducted. Prepared by Ann Morton’s romanticized
description of him—an eldest son who disinterestedly parceled out his primogeniture into equal shares with his siblings, who quit the bar to which he was trained after developing a distaste for its “chicanery,” and who is devoted to “liberal studies and rational recreation” (Memoirs of Emma Courtney 85)—Emma progresses from autodidacticism to auto-eroticism by conjuring an ideal Augustus from the canvas that bears his portrait. Each time she contemplates the painted image in Mrs. Harley’s library and listens to her maternal effusions of his “virtues and talents” (91), Emma adds another layer onto her mental image of an ideal Augustus. The presence of this simulacrum of Augustus in a library is seminal to Hays’s commentary on the kinds of romantic possibilities that exist only in novels, as Binhammer notes (10), but it also recalls Mr. Courtney’s concern that Emma’s romantic bias will lead her to mistake a lesser man for an ideal potential mate. Emma’s “strong affections of [her] soul” (Memoirs of Emma Courtney 91) lead her into a far more devastating mistake, since she is twice-removed from the real Augustus while constructing her own version of him. She encounters a painted image, from which she proceeds to a mental image, neither of them reflecting reality.

Another matter of import arises from Hays’s locating Emma’s idealization of Augustus in a library. Before Augustus arrives on the scene, Emma and Mrs. Harley read unspecified books that one can assume come from that library, but Emma apparently derives nothing from those texts. She usually comments upon the effects of her reading, for good or ill, but here she says nothing. Instead, she describes her inability to escape a growing prepossession with Augustus. Emma relates her self-entrainment within a magic circle of desire for the absent beloved that she shares with Mrs. Harley, saying, “with whatever subjects [their] conversations commenced, some associated idea always led
them to terminate in an *eulogium* on the virtues and talents, or an expression of regret, for the absence of Augustus” (91). Unknowingly, Ann Melmoth and Mrs. Harley lead Emma into a romantic snare that only the learned Augustus—Hays allows her readers to hope—can unravel by unlocking the masculine knowledge that awaits in the texts of his library. This hope will be crushed, however, along with Emma’s ideal of Augustus that fails to materialize.

Reduced to “a convulsive flood of tears” when she misses her first opportunity to meet Augustus, Emma again admits to her inability to control “the sensibilities of her nature” (92). This consciousness of being excessively romantic, even to the point of forecasting its long-term effects on her ability to live usefully and comfortably, illustrates that, while Emma’s education may have begun in a vacuum, she knows she is at odds with her society. She excuses herself but clearly owns her faults, saying,

> however romantic it might appear to others, and did appear even to myself, I felt that I loved an ideal object (for such was Augustus Harley to me) with a tender and fervent excess; an excess, perhaps, involving all my future usefulness and welfare. (92)

Her experience of men like her father’s friends and Montague have taught her that relying solely upon her sensibilities may not improve her chances of securing an establishment and thereby the luxury to be useful. Nevertheless, she allows her “reason [to be] but an auxiliary to [her] passion,” (93) and willingly embraces the ideal of Augustus and the life of mutual affection she believes they can share.

The first indication that Emma’s fantasy will not be fulfilled comes with Augustus’s repeated insistence upon a fabrication of his own, that they can exist as
brother and sister. Emma speaks of her “new brother, for so he would call himself” (102). Although Augustus’s fraternal fantasy can be read as a familiar vehicle by which novelists put a respectable distance between two unrelated members of opposite sexes, in portraying Emma reveling in the proximity to Augustus now available to her—it “banished restraint, and assisted [her] in deceiving herself” (103)—Hays debunks the myth that men and women can sublimate their desires through mere words. Under the guise of a close relation, Augustus becomes Emma’s teacher, and her education becomes interdidactic for the first time. Emma describes the interactive learning environment initiated by Augustus and attended by herself and sometimes by Mrs. Harley. Augustus, she says,

encourag[ed] and assist[ed] me in the pursuit of learning and science: he gave us lectures on astronomy and philosophy . . . I applied myself to the languages, and, aided by my preceptor, attained a general knowledge of the principles, and philosophy, of criticism and grammar, and of the rules of composition. Every day brought with it the acquisition of some new truth; and our intervals from study were employed in music, in drawing, in conversation, in reading the belle lettres. (102-103)

This curriculum closely resembles those typically described in the progressive educational treatises of the time, particularly in Macaulay’s Letters on Education (1790), the inspiration for both Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s actual and ideal pedagogies for women’s education. Augustus’s coeducational and interdidactic tuition of Emma correlates with Macaulay’s radical suggestion “that the same rules of education in all respects are to be observed to the female as well as to the male children” (142). However,
we must recall that Augustus has no intention to make Emma his wife and therefore can afford to be magnanimous.

Moreover, while he appears to fulfill Emma’s desire to be released from yet another magic circle of desire for the absent by admitting her to and guiding her through the texts of masculine intellect, these lessons come too late, because whatever she perceives passes through a “medium of a distempered imagination” left unchallenged from an early age (131). She writes to Augustus,

The habits acquired by early precept and example adhere tenaciously, and are never, perhaps, entirely eradicated. . . . Hemmed in on every side by the constitutions of society, and not less so, it may be, by my own prejudices—I perceive, indignantly perceive, the magic circle, without knowing how to dissolve the powerful spell. (116)

Significantly, in much the same manner in which Emma expresses her purposeless and valueless existence after gleaning little of men’s knowledge from her undirected access to her father’s library, Emma recapitulates her intellectual entrapment within a magic circle even after Augustus leads her through the contents of his library. Because her surplus sensibility obstructs the development of her rationality, neither her father’s nor her beloved’s libraries prove to be of any use to Emma.

Hays devotes the second half of the novel to presenting the results of Emma’s many errors in judgment and unrealistic expectations of the marriage market, all of which Hays attributes to Emma’s insufficient intellectual development and the ineffectiveness of waiting until women are of marriageable age to commence their pre-marital training, as Jean Jacques Rousseau advises in Émile (1762) and James Fordyce suggests in
Sermons to Young Women (1766). Both Rousseau and Fordyce assert that, since women were expected to conform to the tastes, manners, and religious affiliations of their husbands’ families, their husbands are women’s best instructors. As I will illustrate in subsequent portions of this dissertation, Rousseau’s model of femininity also comes under attack in Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and in Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, the latter of which forcefully demonstrates the total impracticability of Rousseau’s advice on women’s education. Wollstonecraft likewise attacks Fordyce’s views on women’s education in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and Susan Ferrier in *Marriage* (1818) reduces the workload of Fordyce’s untiring ideal woman and provides examples of women’s work that constitute genuine acts of benevolence.

At their first meeting in London, Emma begs Augustus to continue as her instructor and indicates the true impetus behind her quest for knowledge: after imagining that Augustus desires an intellectual wife, she becomes his pupil in order to match what she perceives to be his ideal partner, and she expects that her careful study will be rewarded by his marriage proposal. In other words, Emma expects that her case will match that of Sophy in *Émile*. When Augustus dissolves their relationship, Emma entreats him,

Must we, then, separate for ever—will you no longer assist me in the pursuit of knowledge and truth—will you no more point out to me the books I should read, and aid me in forming a just judgment of the principles they contain—Must all your lessons be at an end—all my studies be resigned? How, without your counsel and example, shall I
regain my strength of mind—to what end shall I seek to improve myself,
when I no longer hope to be worthy of him— (130)

Emma’s entreaty ends abruptly as her “utterance” becomes “choked” by a “flood of
tears” (130), but by “him,” she means, of course, Augustus. In her next letter to
Augustus, Emma quotes from Émile, wherein the title character gives lessons in
“philosophy, physics, mathematics, history, and everything else” to his betrothed, Sophy
(Émile 465-466). No doubt, Emma’s mistaken notion of Augustus’s intentions arise from
Rousseau’s depiction of what Emma imagines to be a “union of mind and mind” between
Émile and Sophy (Memoirs of Emma Courtney 133), who marry after Émile shapes
Sophy’s intellect to his liking. Hays thus suggests that no such union of two minds can
occur when one of those minds has been neglected.

The bulk of the first twelve chapters of the second volume contain Emma’s letters
to Augustus, which can only be characterized now as pathetic, desperate, and unnerving,
and as unforgivably immodest and unchaste for Hays’s time. Her letters reflect, as Emma
describes it, a growing “distempered imagination” (131) that Mr. Francis designates
“insanity” (168). Initially, Emma admits to having “dwelt on the union between mind and
mind” that she perceived to exist between herself and Augustus (133). Next, she states
what she believes to be the end goal of her “education both of design and accident” (148):

I have labored to improve myself, that I might be worthy of the situation I
have chosen. I would unite myself to a man of worth—I would have our
mingled virtues and talents perpetuated in our offspring.

. . . My ardent sensibilities incite me to love—to seek to inspire
sympathy—to be beloved! (149)
Assuming that the only circumstance that could keep Augustus from fulfilling her desires is his intent to marry “an agreeable woman of fortune” for whom he could profitably renounce his inheritance, Emma entirely breaks the bounds of propriety and says, “*My friend—I would give myself to you*” (155). Reading this passage using eighteenth-century standards of decorum, it should be no surprise that Emma’s erotically charged use of the term “mingle” and reference to their potential “offspring” garnered harsh criticism for the novel and especially for its woman author.17 Both the critics of her day and those in future generations pointed to Emma’s letters to Augustus, and this passage in particular, to support the perceived dangers of women seeking a masculine education.18 Emma’s desire to unite intellectually with Augustus fosters a desire to unite with him bodily, thereby defying cultural taboos of female sexuality and proper literary topics. As such, it considered to be nearly pornographic content well into the nineteenth century, and when it was discovered that Emma’s letters contain portions of Hays’s actual letters to Frend, the book and its author were repudiated, as Tillottama Rajan phrases it, for “a scandalous disrobing in public” of Hays’s love life (149), which accounts for the relative dearth of scholarship on her works even today.

Emma’s failure to adhere to social standards of decorum does, indeed, make her an apt figure for censure, as even she admits to Augustus:

> The conduct, which I have been led to adopt, has been the result of a combination of peculiar circumstances, *and is not what I would recommend to general imitation*.—To say nothing of the hazards it might involve, I am aware, generally speaking, arguments might be adduced, to
prove, that certain customs, of which I, yet, think there is reason to
complain, may not have been unfounded in nature. (119)

Despite Emma’s repeated confessions of exhibiting a non-exemplary nonconformance,
Mr. Francis’s diagnosis of her “insanity,” and Hays’s preface indicating that the novel is
“calculated to operate as a warning” (36), the fact that Emma refuses to apologize for her
ersors seems to confirm suspicions that Hays favored free expression of both female
intelligence and sexuality. On the other hand, Emma excuses her behavior with a seeming
capitulation to her society’s construct of the innate intellectual deficiency and hyper-
sensibility of women, suggesting that any arguments she may have previously posited
regarding women’s intellectual equality with men are, to borrow a term from succeeding
generations, humbug. Emma’s “intellectual schizophrenia” (Rajan 147) creates a critical
conundrum about just how to read Emma, her letters, and the novel which contains them.

As indicated earlier, there are reasons to take Hays at her word—that she
deliberately intended to cast Emma as a warning for her readers—the most compelling
being Emma’s complete misreading of Augustus as a consequence of her overwrought
sensibility and romantic education. Augustus is simply not the ideal mate that Emma
pictured, and she realizes Mr. Courtney’s fears for her when she mistakes Augustus for a
suitable mate. Hays thus illustrates that autodidactic lessons based on romances followed
by autodidactic studies of “masculine” academic subjects build an erroneous and
dangerous world view upon which women base their encounters with men that even their
interactive, co-educational attempts to correct their prejudices can not overcome. At the
end of Emma’s intellectual and literary intercourse with Augustus, she enters the
marriage market as insufficiently prepared to succeed within it as she would have been if
her education had been utterly neglected. In fact, Emma’s marriageability in many ways decreases in proportion to her advances in education. Emma cries,

When will mankind be aware of the uniformity, of the importance, of truth? When will they cease to confound, by sexual, by political, by theological, distinctions, those immutable principles, which form the true basis of virtue and happiness? (192)

Lacking equitable intellectual opportunities, eighteenth-century women were rendered unfit to direct any aspects of their lives, even those of what Hays admits to be the indisputable womanly goals of wives and mothers.

Another seeming conundrum appears when Hays reveals that Augustus does not act upon a pecuniary interest in remaining a bachelor, and it only seems to Emma that he follows the example of most men who do not “pay their offerings” on the “altars of love, but of gold” (173). For Hays exposes Augustus as being just as guilty of passionate excess as is Emma, but, as a man, he can act upon his sexual impulses without harming his reputation, which is impossible for Emma. Her hope of uniting with Augustus being lost forever, Emma eventually consents to marry Montague, and the women, not the men, of the text are shown to prostrate themselves before altars of gold. Augustus jeopardizes his inheritance by reneging on his promise not to marry, and Montague is free to marry Emma because “he had fallen out with the family, in adjusting the settlement [when] Mrs. Morton had persuaded her husband to make . . . ungenerous requisitions” (196). Both the quasi-educated Emma and the uneducated Morton girls are at the mercy of the exclusively male privilege to earn, spend, and invest currency, while Montague and Augustus have the luxury to follow their hearts into marriage. They also, unlike Emma or
her cousins, have the luxury to avoid a mercenary marriage, for they have received professional training (Augustus in law and Montague in medicine) on which to earn an independent living.

For a time, Emma receives the appropriate cultural reward for obeying the custom of selling herself into marriage, just as her father would had hoped she would do, and she celebrates her “return to reason” and expresses her gratitude to Montague for the bounty of the rational lifestyle he bestows upon her (197). She admits that her own previously stated goals have been fulfilled by marrying Montague, saying, “To you I owe every thing—life, its comforts, rational enjoyment, and the opportunity of usefulness” (197). She concedes that she does not feel the same passion for him as she felt for Augustus, which she now characterizes as a “morbid excess of a distempered imagination” that led to her sacrificing “Liberty, reason, virtue, [and] usefulness” (197). Thus Hays suggests that complicity in the commerce of marriage often appears to be the only viable option for women, and true sentiment is necessarily repressed in order to succeed in that market.

Supposedly with Montague’s blessings (there being no indication to the contrary) Emma continues her education and studies “physic, anatomy, and surgery, with the various branches of science connected with them,” in order to become a true helpmate to her husband, whom she calls her “friend” (196-197). She neglects to mention whether Montague directs her efforts, but the reader can assume that she has returned to her autodidactic pedagogy. She evidently lives reasonably and usefully, and yet she reports on her married life with uncharacteristic brevity. In two short paragraphs, she delineates a life of active employment, the birth of her daughter Emma, and the joys of motherhood that dispel melancholy remembrances of the past. Emma’s apparent idyll is shattered,
however, when she nurses the wounded Augustus after he is involved in a second fateful equestrian disaster. She neglects her “conjugal” and “maternal duties,” keeping vigil at Augustus’s beside despite Mr. Lucas’s attempts to act as her conscience—he admonishes her neglect of husband and child in order to attend the wounded body of a “stranger” (202). When Augustus dies, Emma regresses into a series of errors born of her overwrought sensibilities. She “utter[s] a piercing shriek, and [sinks] upon the body” (206) in a way that exceeds the bounds of propriety, succumbs to a shock-induced fever, and sends her infant daughter “out to nurse” (206). Emma’s inability to nurse her own child, brought about by her willful sacrifice of reason to sensibility, is as unforgivable a sin for Hays as it was for Wollstonecraft; both authors insisted that women nurse their own children, for the physical and emotional health of both parties.

Emma’s hysterics and psychosomatic illness signal Hay’s explicit condemnation of Emma’s disassociation from a commercial yet successful marriage to a romantic but disastrous attachment. Emma should be able to recall herself to duty for the sake of the child, if not for that of the husband. However, Hays rejects the notion that a commercial marriage is truly an acceptable or viable alternative for undereducated women like Emma, since repression breeds emotional and mental disease. Emma’s unbalanced intellect in turn engenders a series of disastrous choices, each of which compounds the wreckage resulting from the previous error. Hays thus implicitly mourns the cultural preferences for commercial marriages that value undereducated women with overwrought sensibilities and the ethos that such unions are panaceas for the underdeveloped female intellect. Emma’s utter failure to carry out the only function society allows and expects of her illustrates the double obstacles that keeps women from
personal success and domestic harmony: intellectualized women are undesirable marriage partners, but women who lack logical and critical thinking skills create marital chaos. In the simplest terms, whether or not they secure an education equal to that that of men, women can not live and thrive under such circumstances.

Intending not to pass her inadequacies onto the next generation, Emma thus pays close attention to the schooling of the younger Emma and Augustus, but she does not attempt to grant her daughter total educational equality with her adopted son. Instead, she aspires to “renew” herself, her “existence,” and presumably that of the original Augustus by reconstructing their own tutor-pupil symbiosis between their children, “anticipat[ing] their more perfect union,” most likely a somewhat more equitable intellectual union (219). The children enjoy a co-educational experience “from the same masters” (218), in which the girl “outstrip[s]” her schoolmate, until a gendered education is deemed necessary for Augustus. The younger Emma’s formal studies apparently end, since there is no mention of their being continued, but Augustus tutors his adopted sister whenever he returns home. This idyll ends when the fourteen-year-old Emma is “blighted by a killing frost . . . drooped, faded, languished, and died” (219), like an insufficiently tended hothouse flower, and by killing off the younger Emma, Hays reiterates the futility of educating girls at all. Because the younger Augustus, a male child, is potentially more capable of fostering reform than the younger Emma, a female, whose social restraints would preclude activism, Emma writes her memoirs for the benefit of her adopted son, not for her daughter, as was usually the case in didactic texts. 20 Hays apparently sees no potential in warning a daughter of the dangers of unreasoned sensibility when she could
never hope to overcome the educational and intellectual disadvantages forced upon her by her society and by her own physical delicacy.

Hays does not content herself, however, with illustrating only the victimhood of quasi-educated women like herself who must submit to economic forces in the marriage market. She also brings Emma’s narrative to a sexually charged, highly melodramatic climax of uncontrolled masculine passion that victimizes an uneducated woman. In Montague’s horrific suicide—and its impetus as described in his suicide note—Hays presents the impossibility of sexual equality in a system of irrational sensibility, whether practiced by men or women. Montague’s frenzied passion (211), inflamed by Emma’s return to the shrine of Augustus, manifests itself in a classic outburst of male sexual tyranny over a defenseless subordinate female. Montague distorts the family maid Rachel’s “artless affection” (216) for him into an opportunity for marital vengeance, and the unprepared servant girl submits, as Emma depicts it, not to economic forces, but to masculine seductive arts. Both Rachel and her child also suffer the effects of masculine science when Montague, in his own words, “repeatedly tried, by medical drugs, to procure an abortive birth” (217), but his “hardened, desperate, and barbarous” efforts induce the premature birth of a sickly child (217). Montague determines that euthanasia is the best option for the infant, and Rachel is unable to stop his “murderous hands” from destroying her child (217). Neither of Montague’s children from loveless, masculine-dominated sexual relations—the first resulting from a commercial marriage, the second from an immoral act of passion—survive the novel. Their mothers, however, do survive, but they enter into a exclusively feminine existence together, which is masculinized only briefly when the young Augustus makes his periodic visits.
Importantly, Emma’s self-seclusion and adopted maternity nullifies a chance for her dream world of sexual and intellectual equality to bear fruit, when she distances herself from masculine society. Nevertheless, she ends her memoirs with yet another idyll of the “mingled branches” of “the olive and the laurel,” a union that will result in the “emancip[ation] of the human mind from the trammels of superstition, and teach it, that its true dignity and virtue, consist in being free” (221). Brooks’s footnote to Hays’s imagery of olive and laurel branches is partly correct in explaining that “the olive was a symbol of peace and the laurel of victory and peace” (221). Yet more must be read in these “mingled branches,” especially in the idyll’s connection to the novel’s first attempt at an idyllic coupling. The olive tree—associated with the Greek goddess Athena, who won the title of protector of Athens when her spear tip brought forth an olive tree on the Acropolis (Morphord and Lenardon 105)—was sacred in the Hellenic period and remains a chief export and source of wealth for Greeks today. The laurel—associated with Apollo whose pursuit of Daphne resulted in her metamorphosis into a laurel tree, which Apollo embraces, saying, “You shall always be my tree” (170)—is considered to be sacred to Apollo and is a sign of his favor. The honorific status of the laurel survives today when academics, athletes, artists, politicians, and soldiers literally and figuratively receive laurels for their most successful efforts. Athena, the goddess of wisdom, and Apollo, the god of literature and the arts—”the epitome of Greek classical restraint, championing the proverbial Greek maxims ‘Know thyself’ and ‘Nothing too much’” (177)—are sibling deities of physical and emotional restraint and endurance, intellectual prowess, and artistic expression. These divine siblings likely inspired Hays’s model for the pseudo-fraternal relationship between Augustus and Emma. Significantly, this bond occurs
during the children’s formative years and within their interactive and equitable learning environment. By envisioning a unification of these masculine and feminine intellectual attributes in a filial bond, Hays reiterates her argument for the liberty of both men and women to achieve intellectual and sexual equality, as well as the requisite interdependence of the sexes to reach that goal.

Nevertheless, the fact that Emma’s phantasmal and actual unions with Augustus and Montague each end in complete disaster, coupled with the aborted union of the second Emma and Augustus, illustrate Hays’s pessimism about the chances for substantial reform of either women’s education or the marriage market, both of which result from her commercialized society’s rejection of the essential equality of the sexes. She is not wholly pessimistic about the fate of womankind, however. She envisions future generations that will eventually move beyond sexual segregation. What is not clear, however, is how humankind will be able to sublimate the passions, thus leaving us today the task of deciphering the androgynous and incestuous complications of Hays’s “mingling” of the attributes of Athena and Apollo.

III

In Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman, Wollstonecraft also maintains that women’s best hope for sexual equality depends upon educating them to achieve and maintain a balance between the feminine portions of their intellects (their sensibility) and their masculine components (their rationality), and she doubts just as much as Hays that women will realize that goal before the passing of many years. There are, of course, many similarities between Memoirs of Emma Courtney and Maria, or The Wrongs of
Woman, likely resulting from Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s close personal and literary association. By 1796, when the novels were written, the women had been friends for nearly four years, during which time Wollstonecraft acted as Hays’s literary agent and critiqued some of Hays’s work. For example, Wollstonecraft once sent Hays a copy of “the Gossip’s Story to review” for possible inclusion in the Analytical Review, along with a critical note cautioning Hays about her propensity in her literary reviews to “allude to things in the work which can only be understood by those who have read it” (Collected Letters 375). The women had plenty of opportunities, then, to influence each other’s thoughts and works.

The first similarity between the novels appears in what Godwin presents as Wollstonecraft’s preface, wherein Wollstonecraft alludes to Minerva, the Roman equivalent of the Greek Athena, when describing her contemporaries’ unrealistic romantic heroines, who “are to be born immaculate, and to act like goddesses of wisdom” directly from the womb (Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman 59). Like Minerva, who sprang fully grown and fully girded in armor from the forehead of Jove (Morford and Lenardon 108), such heroines are born women with an innate intellectual, spiritual, ethical, and, most importantly, moral framework that shields their chastity. They need no instruction to negotiate the world they inhabit, because they are sui generis models of womanly perfection. Wollstonecraft contends that her “heroine” will instead follow the contemporary model of the Sentimental or Realistic hero, who “is allowed to be mortal, and to become wise and virtuous as well as happy, by a train of events and circumstances” (5), from which the protagonist constructs an ideal of human perfection.
Wollstonecraft did not intend *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, to be a romance; she intended to create a *bildungsroman*.

The most obvious similarity between *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* and *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, is their didactic use of the epistolary format, which simultaneously narrates the correspondent’s action, interprets and judges that action, and advises the reader not to replicate the correspondent’s transgressions while proposing a viable philosophy engendered from the protagonist’s self-analysis of the consequences of her actions. Emma writes to her adopted son, Maria writes to her daughter, and both repeatedly direct their readers to take warning from their narratives. Neither is convinced that her narrative can be effective on its own, however, and Mr. Francis’s advice to Emma regarding experiential learning is more vigorously asserted by Maria, who implores her reader to “Gain experience—ah! gain it—while experience is worth having” (60). Wollstonecraft rejects blind obedience to social and parental pressure to remain physically, emotionally, and intellectually “in ignorance under the specious name of innocence” (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 54).

Maria’s narrative, apparently, cannot be effective when combined with traditional values either, since “wisdom [is] too often, but the owl of the goddess, who sits moping in a desolated heart” (58). Again Wollstonecraft refers to Minerva, with whom the owl is associated (Morford and Lenardon 109), as a deficient feminine ideal. Minerva’s misguided wisdom is portrayed as being, in truth, a case of uninformed sour grapes, because her inviolate state of perpetual virginity nullifies her ability to offer a valid ethos to real women, who must eventually experience real men in the real world, willingly or not. Wollstonecraft’s connotation of experiential learning in this passage therefore
emerges undoubtedly and more unabashedly sexual than those proffered by Godwin and presented by Hays in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. Wollstonecraft’s call to “Gain experience” is rightly interpreted as a call for women’s sexual liberation as well as for decorous intellectual and emotional freedom from restraint.

The notion that women’s ideal existence involves not passivity but activity, or, more precisely, utility, forms another similarity between the two novels. Reiterating Wollstonecraft’s *apologia* “I aim at being useful” from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Maria equates utility with happiness and advises her reader to “acquire sufficient fortitude to pursue your own happiness: it includes your utility” (58). Further, she adds, “Had I not wasted years in deliberating after I ceased to doubt, how I ought to have acted—I might now be useful and happy” (58-59). Writing from her madhouse cell, in which she can neither be useful nor happy, Maria considers herself to be a failed woman and thus cautions her daughter to avoid her example.

Maria asserts that the chief cause of her unhappiness lies in her mother’s entirely neglecting her education, which made her more susceptible to adopting her uncle’s romantic, hence unrealistic world view. Additionally, in describing Maria’s uncle’s insufficient matrimonial acumen and unsuccessful managerial skills, Wollstonecraft unveils the impracticality and destructive tendencies behind the ideals presented in romances. Maria apparently receives no formal instruction, since she complains that her mother’s “indolence of character . . . prevented her paying much attention” to Maria’s education (60). Maria thus lacks the reasoning skills to counteract the insufficient, intermittent, and misguided quasi-instruction from her unnamed uncle, “a man of romantic turn of mind” who “received a liberal education” in preparation to enter the
clergy, in which he fails to succeed (60). Maria’s uncle’s disastrous attempts to reconcile his romantic expectations with reality foreshadow his eventual failure to prepare Maria to enter society, particularly the marriage market. Courting “a young lady of great beauty and large fortune,” he renounces the clergy, leaves his native land, raises a fortune in India “by good luck, rather than management,” and returns to England, only to find the object of his affection, in whom “every other passion was lost,” wed to the man who served as their intermediary (60-61). Nevertheless, he advises Maria,

Let not this example, or the frigid caution of cold-blooded moralists, make you endeavor to stifle hopes, which are the buds that naturally unfold themselves during the spring of life! Whilst your own heart is sincere, always expect to meet one glowing with the same sentiments; for to fly from pleasure, is not to avoid pain! (61)

In urging Maria to disregard the reality of his failed romance and the wisdom of conventional morality, and in advising her to cling to the false expectation that she may eventually meet her soul mate, a hope that in his own case failed to materialize, he passes on to her a dangerous philosophy and praxis of self-delusion. This advice clearly runs counter to reason and can thus be considered “insane” (OED def. 2), and Maria inherits her uncle’s madness.

Nevertheless, Maria’s uncle professes the same Godwinian self-possession and self-direction that Mr. Francis shares with Emma, providing us with still another point of comparison between the two novels. However, the ruinous results of Godwinian experiential learning in both texts hardly suggests that either Hays or Wollstonecraft believed it to be practicable for all women in the late eighteenth-century, especially if,
like Emma and Maria, they lacked access to and competent guides through men’s knowledge in their formative years. Despite referring to her uncle as her “instructor” (60), Maria does not actually describe him as being one, providing yet another indication that Wollstonecraft rejects the notion that romance provides sound pedagogy for real women. Maria provides no curriculum or reading list for her studies, and it is difficult to discern if she is her uncle’s sole interlocutor or if they engage in interactive learning. She seems merely to “imbibe his sentiments,” like an empty vessel, and adopts “his opinions” of “acting right, independent of censure or applause of the world . . . even to despise its censure, when convinced of the rectitude of my own intentions” (62).21 Like Emma, Maria confesses her willing participation in what she later considers a destructive, “romantic” education, which “animated her imagination” (62) without exercising her reason.

Maria’s education also resembles Emma’s in that it is mostly autodidactic, heavily text-based, and entirely lacking outside perspective, all of which induce Maria to conjure phantom lovers of the men she meets, who ultimately fail to match her imagined ideals of them. Maria only periodically converses with her uncle and reads only the books he brings her, books that “conspired to make [her] form an ideal picture of life” (62). Combining those fantasies with George Venables’s feigned appearance of stability, she mistakes him for a man “superior to the rest of mankind” (63) when he is, in fact, “inferior to [his] fellow men” (79), just as she regards her uncle “as one of a superior order of beings” (62) in spite of his failure to reconcile his ideals with reality. Maria admits that she “gave a meaning naturally suggested by the romantic turn of [her] thoughts” to Venables’s gallantries, and she “fancied [her]self in love—in love with the
disinterestedness, fortitude, generosity, dignity, and humanity, with which [she] had invested the hero [she] dubbed” (64). Maria repeats her error by constructing a similar phantom of her lover, Henry Darnford, from the books he lends her. The narrator says, “fancy, treacherous fancy, began to sketch a character, congenial with her own, from [the] shadowy outlines” of Darnford’s textual analyses, which appear in the marginalia of his books (18). Like Emma’s reading of Augustus’s portrait and reports of him, Maria engages in a similar auto-erotic, textual intercourse, and she synthesizes an ideal lover from Jemima’s descriptions of Darnford and from the books he lends her. More importantly, however, Maria “re-reads” the marginalia several times, extracting from them “some fresh refinement of sentiment, or acuteness of thought,” as she believes them to be, that previously escaped her (19). Concentrating on Darnford’s marginalia, not the text upon which they are based, Maria misses an opportunity to master masculine knowledge and to utilize it. Any advantage she may have gained from reading men’s texts is subsumed by the men who give her access to those texts. Again, as she did at the foot of her uncle, Maria focuses on what she deems to be the “production[s] of an animated . . . imagination” (18-19). In this manner, Venables and Darnford serve as a doppelgangers of Maria’s uncle and as co-operatives in the distempering of her intellect.

The narrator provides a sampling of Darnford’s reading list for Maria, the most resonant title being “Rousseau’s Heloïse” (21), which claims a role as prominent in Maria’s miseducation as it did in Emma’s. Again, the image of St. Preux is imprinted upon a romantic idol, and Rousseau becomes the bugbear and chief architect of a dangerous romantic idyll. Maria, “unable to quit either the author [Rousseau] or the window” glances from the book to the place where she expects to see Darnford,
attributing to him “all [of] St. Preux’s sentiments and feelings” (22). Wollstonecraft’s situating Maria’s continuation of her autodidactic, auto-erotic, and romantic education and her romance with Darnford within a madhouse seems entirely appropriate, for the open indulgence of such irrational passions cannot safely exist in a society that forces women to restrain their emotions, to hide their marital preferences, and to submit to paternal and masculine control. Like Hays, Wollstonecraft knows that her society considers a woman’s rejection of passive obedience and expression of passionate and intellectual desires as proof of madness.

However, Maria’s madhouse romance presents a realistic example of the danger inherent in the enforced passivity and domesticity of women sanctioned by Rousseau, Gregory, and Fordyce, who view emotional, intellectual, and physical restraint as the only method to ensure chaste female minds and bodies. Today’s readers may question the authenticity of Maria’s incarceration in what Jemima calls “a private receptacle for madness” (53), but in the Road to Divorce, England 1530-1987, Lawrence Stone reports on the frequency of wives being incarcerated by their husbands in the eighteenth century and provides factual accounts of such spousal abuse. Stone claims, “Apart from the home, the other favorite place of imprisonment for a tiresome wife between 1660 and 1774 was a private madhouse” (167). Wollstonecraft’s includes this seemingly gothic element as an intentional comment upon the fact that her eighteenth-century reality often proved more gruesome than its fiction. Maria, aware of her danger, “began to reflect, as an excuse to herself . . . how difficult it was for women to avoid growing romantic, who have no active duties or pursuits” (20). Although she recognizes that by absorbing Darnford’s romantic tendencies she exacerbates the faults of her misguided intellect,
Maria blames the fact that she has no one to direct her toward more rational thoughts for her inability to restrain her imagination. Her romantic idyll develops simply as a result of having nothing better to do, because she lacks the training and guidance to make more appropriate use of Darnford’s books. Therefore, Maria reaches the same conclusion about women’s education that Emma does: access to men’s knowledge proves useless to women who lack competent guides, and autodidacticism results in madness.

Ultimately, like Emma, Maria is at an educational and an intellectual disadvantage to the men who master sexual commerce, because, despite her autodidactic efforts, she enters the marriage market unprepared for its commerciality and twice mistakes a libertine for her suitable husband and ideal lover. Maria describes her marriage to Venables as the result of both her own and her uncle’s deliberate acts of self-delusion. Under the guise of securing her a “marriage of mutual inclination” (72), Maria’s uncle disregards Venable’s reputation as a libertine (i.e., he ignores conventional wisdom) and heeds only his second-hand knowledge of Venables, who has “the reputation of being attentive to business,” which the uncle imagines would “extend to the regulation of the affections in domestic life” (72). In person, Maria’s uncle perceives the young man’s reticence as “deference to his superior judgment” (72). Instead of securing a settlement for his niece, he loses five thousand pounds in his pre-nuptial transactions with Venables, and Maria agrees to the match, thinking “more of obtaining [her] freedom” from her mother than of the supreme authority over her that the law entitles her husband to exert (72). Once married, Venables displays his ability to be venal, and Maria is “bastilled” at his command, first in her own home and then in a madhouse, and Maria duplicates her uncle’s lack of managerial skills by repeatedly surrendering her pin money
to Venables in the hopes of securing marital accord. Similarly, the narrator reports that Maria relies on insufficient evidence in her relationship with Darnford, imagining that he “combine[s] all the qualities of a hero’s mind” (33). However, the narrator almost immediately hints at his potential villainy, which Wollstonecraft’s plans for the finished novel confirm (136). In the plans, Darnford either delays his return from his business trip to the continent, returns and exhibits “mysterious behavior,” or is simply “unfaithful” to Maria upon his return (135-136). The narrator recognizes and exposes Darnford as yet another libertine—he is, after all, “Accustomed to submit to every impulse of passion” (26)—but Maria chooses to focus on the positive qualities she attributes to her lover.

Maria’s misadventures in sexual commerce form only one facet in the wrongs of perpetrated against late eighteenth-century women that Wollstonecraft seeks to enumerate. As many scholars point out, the novel intentionally contains a fictionalization of the arguments Wollstonecraft presented in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In her preface to the novel, Wollstonecraft states that the novel’s “main object” is to argue for legal reform by “exhibiting the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society” (5). Responding to George Dyson’s critique of her manuscript in a letter, portions of which Godwin attaches to the novel’s preface, Wollstonecraft describes her attempt in *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, to convey a “delineation of finer sensations” than assumedly could be expressed in her polemic (*Collected Letters* 392). She also asserts that she will “show the wrongs of different classes of women, equally oppressive, though, from the difference of education, necessarily various” (*Collected Letters* 392).
Accordingly, in *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*, Wollstonecraft inserts five other narratives within Maria’s “history [which] ought rather to be considered, as of woman, than of an individual” (5). Whether they take place in domesticity, in commerce or in service, in public, or in private, abuses of women—”the out-laws of the world” (88)—occur in all levels of society and in every manner of social intercourse, and they all result from a system of “hereditary property” (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 300), under which the “education of women has, of late, been more attended to than formerly . . . [but] strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves—the only way women can rise in the world—by marriage” (35-36). Maria accordingly warns her daughter that “By allowing women but one way of rising in the world, the fostering the libertinism of men, society makes monsters of them, and then their ignoble vices are brought forward as a proof of inferiority of intellect” (*Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* 72). Maria contends the law of coverture, which mandates “the dependent state of a woman in the grand question of the comforts arising from the possession of property” (88) and places solely into man’s hands the “master-key of property” (90). Wollstonecraft uses the term “property” to refer to real and personal property, chattels, and currency, all of which, under the law of coverture, are assigned to male ownership and can be transferred to female ownership only when no male relative exists to claim inheritance or possession, as in the case of a *femme sole*. Wollstonecraft contends that, because they are legally prohibited from accessing or distributing property, women must propitiate men in order to subsist, whether through prostitution, commercial marriage (its socially accepted equivalent), or utter submission to men’s dominant physical and mental powers.
Maria encounters or hears of women whose wrongs are, like hers, the result of legal (albeit immoral) financial, physical, or emotional abuse at the hands of men—fathers, husbands, lovers, acquaintances, and complete strangers—in pursuit of property or ready cash. These women and their stories portray the thorough dominion of men in all aspects of life—domestic, commercial, and legal—at all levels of society—upper, middle, and lower class. Maria and presumably her audience are shocked first by the ravings of the “lovely maniac,” who was married “against her inclination, to a rich old man” and “lost her senses” soon after “her first lying-in” (21). Next, the sufferings of the unprotected, soon-to-be-widowed Peggy are detailed as she tries to earn a living for herself and for her children without a husband to protect her assets. The horrific example of the woman “of the true Russian breed of wives” depicts the brutality men are legally entitled to inflict upon their wives (104), and the disturbing biographical sketch of Maria’s landlady illustrates the outrageous powers men have over the financial gains of their wives (104-106).

Among these illustrations of the wronged women, Jemima’s story best encapsulates all of the abuses inflicted on women of the lower classes. As Jemima gropes her way from the bottom rungs of society to the intellectual heights from whence she must again descend after failing to negotiate the marriage market, her brutal, realistic education in the real world mirrors Maria’s sentimental, romantic education at home and in the madhouse—both prove utterly futile under the patriarchal order. Like Maria, Jemima lacks a maternal guide to direct her education. Born out of wedlock and soon thereafter motherless, Jemima assigns responsibility for her fate to “the misfortune of having been thrown on the world without the grand support of life—a mother’s affection”
Raped at age sixteen (41), she becomes by necessity a streetwalker—“a common property” (43)—and enters a brothel, where her “manners were improved” (43) enough to become a “kept mistress” (47). Her immoral situation proves to be of some value, since, “Having lost the privileged status of [her] sex . . . [she] had the advantage of hearing discussions, from which, in the common course of life, women are excluded” (45). Jemima also develops a “fondness of reading” and has “many opportunities for improvement,” including acting as a sounding board for her master’s literary efforts (45-46). Apparently, Jemima receives a more thorough education than Maria, because she participates in a truly co-educational and interactive learning environment. However, when forced to return to the streets, she views herself as being in a worse predicament than when she was wholly ignorant, because her education is useless outside of her master’s sexually and intellectually liberated household. She finds that she cannot enter society, despite the advice she solicits from her master’s associate, who answers, “the woman who could write such a letter as [Jemima] had sent him, could never be in want of resources, were she to look into herself, and exert her powers” (48). In Memoirs of Emma Courtney, Mr. Francis similarly counsels Emma, “You have talents, cultivate them, and learn to rest on your own powers” (70). These sentiments may be derived from Godwin’s An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice. Godwin thoroughly believed in women’s potential for rational self-direction, but both Hays and Wollstonecraft acknowledge the impossibility of women of any class being able to fulfill that potential in a society that refuses to allow their feminist theories to become practice. Wollstonecraft further depicts Maria’s descent into madness when Jemima’s narrative elicits Maria’s desperate plot to “snatch her [babe] from destruction” so that she may “prepare her body and mind to
encounter the ills which await her sex” (55). Notably, Maria does not desire a masculine education for her daughter; instead, she will teach a more traditional feminine curriculum of submission and forbearance.

Unquestionably, Maria’s and Jemima’s experiences, based on actual examples in Wollstonecraft’s life, represent the author’s recognition of the impossibility of intellectual equality among the sexes in the late eighteenth century. Like Hays, Wollstonecraft believes the only possibility for an independent, active, and useful existence for women is to live exclusively among themselves, for men will not allow women to come among them prepared for coequal intellectual discourse and mutual emotional intercourse. In the most developed and final plans Godwin included when he published Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman, Wollstonecraft envisions Maria, her child, and Jemima in a place of their own, and there appears no mention of Venables or Darnford residing with them (136-137). Since the novel is unfinished, however, no one can say with certain whether that circumstance is, indeed, the end of Maria’s story—or whether it is the beginning of her daughter’s heroic tale of succeeding where her mother had failed. Nevertheless, in the tenuous denouement we have to work with, Wollstonecraft removes Maria and Jemima from the male-dominated madhouse and marriage market, and she situates them in a wholly feminine world similar to that in which we find Emma and Rachel at the end of Hays’s narrative.

There can be no doubt that Hays and Wollstonecraft enjoyed intellectual engagement and emotional support from their individual relationships with Godwin and from their own friendship, and they obviously shared their ideas, held many comparable opinions, and reached similar conclusions about women’s education and role in their
society. Despite the debate over which of the two women had the greatest influence on other, we can say Hays inherited a valuable legacy from her sister author upon Wollstonecraft’s death: the power to observe the world and to temper her views, or at least her methods of expressing them, accordingly. Inarguably, Wollstonecraft garnered much more attention over the centuries, thanks in part the rapid and oftentimes vicious private and public attacks upon her character after Godwin published his memoirs and his wife’s previously unseen works. After watching her friend’s reputation being systematically destroyed, in order to rescue her own character and, more importantly, to continue living by her pen, Hays toned down her rhetoric as evidenced by *Victim of Prejudice* (1799), whose heroine we watch being dragged, literally kicking and screaming, into perdition by an unmistakable sexual predator (117). The title of Hays’s second novel most likely represents a comment upon eighteenth-century feminists as a whole, and by recognizing her contribution to women’s studies alongside Wollstonecraft, instead of behind her, we can shed more light on the aims and goals of jacobin victims of sexual prejudice.
Chapter 2

Practical Women’s Education in Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda*

Maria Edgeworth professes an entirely conservative feminism in her pedagogy and novels, despite her many points of agreement with her more radical literary predecessors, Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft. Although Edgeworth’s works exhibit her high valuation of women’s intellectual and personal freedom as well as her belief that women’s education required substantial reform at the turn of the nineteenth century, they contain no demands for total sexual equality. Edgeworth evidently had little cause to rebel against patriarchy. Her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, involved her in his own literary endeavors, encouraged her to write, and sanctioned her publishing her works under her own name. Indeed, her entire family provided her with emotional, intellectual, and financial support, the last of which she supplemented with her own income, by which means she avoided the marriage market. Thus Edgeworth enjoyed a measure of personal and financial independence that enabled her to pursue a vocation beyond the domestic sphere that few women of her time could afford. Perhaps because Edgeworth, “the highest paid and most critically acclaimed British novelist of her time” (Garner 232), liberated herself from the marriage market, in her works she seems not to be as disconcerted by the commercial aspects of marriage as are Hays and Wollstonecraft, who deplore the commodification of women in their society.

Nevertheless, the optimal pedagogy for women’s education behind Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801) certainly resonates with those found in Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s polemics and novels. Edgeworth agrees with Hays and Wollstonecraft that pedagogies designed to refine women’s innate powers of sense (rationality) and sensibility (empathy
and sympathy) in equal measure enables them to assume and fulfill their purportedly natural, regenerative roles as wives and mothers, which in turn creates domestic and social harmony. Likewise, Edgeworth concurs with Hays and Wollstonecraft that instructional methods for women that focus either too much on intellectual development or ignore it altogether produce, respectively, either unsympathetic and hence defeminized or irrational, hyperfeminized creatures, neither of whom function well within their homes or in society. Yet Edgeworth does not assert, as Hays and Wollstonecraft do, that women should be first deemed equal to and then educated like men, a difference that frustrates readers who search for more than a superficial form of feminism in Belinda, a novel written by a woman who retained her intellectual and personal freedom by remaining unmarried and contributing to her own maintenance. Instead of guiding her readers to adopt a virtually independent existence similar to her own, Edgeworth provides women with a rationale to remain within the domestic sphere in the belief that doing so will convince men that women are rational creatures, which in turn will encourage the patriarchy to abandon its misogyny and to treat women more like marital partners and less like marital property. Ultimately, Edgeworth places women’s hopes for peaceful and productive cohabitation with men on an enlightened patriarchy that permits women to pursue a practical and experiential education that honors the then-dominant ideology of women’s naturally subordinate social position. And her eponymous title character embodies Edgeworth’s preternaturally rational woman, who shows other women how to reason themselves into complying with their society’s model of ideal femininity.

Considering that Edgeworth essentially advises women to do as she says and not as she does, the rebirth of canonical interest in Belinda fittingly evinces a bipolar division
among the novel’s recent critics, some of whom focus on Edgeworth’s progressive
thoughts on women’s education and admire her self-directed pertinacity in adhering to a
virtuous, decorous, and above all rational ideology of natural femininity, while others
point to its ambiguous feminism and loathe Belinda Portman’s seemingly squeaky clean,
highly idealized, and unrealistic femininity. Most agree that Edgeworth intends Belinda
to present a model of proper femininity in a primarily didactic manner, but largely
because Belinda fails to meet most readers’ notions of heroism they disagree on the
aesthetic value and practicality of that model. Belinda seems so preoccupied with
observing and judging the acts of others that she remains entirely passive, in a sense
casting her net of criticism so far that she paralyzes herself for fear of becoming
entangled with the others. Additionally, Belinda’s rigid obeisance to conservative
morality dominates discussions of the novel named for her. Instead of attempting and
rejecting the primrose path, for instance, Belinda simply refuses to step foot upon it. For
example, she orchestrates a rapprochement between the Delacours, but refuses to initiate
one between herself and Clarence Hervey either directly, which presumably would be
indecorous, or indirectly through a mutual friend.

Even her creator had her doubts about Belinda. Despite the novel’s success,
Edgeworth later regretted having made Belinda so self-assuredly perfect, declaring that
she was “provoked with the cold tameness of that stick or stone Belinda,” so much so that
she “could have torn the pages to pieces” (Life and Letters 169) when preparing the novel
for republication in Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s series The British Novelists (1810).
Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace agrees with Edgeworth, arguing that “one of the major
flaws of the novel” is Belinda’s “complacency” (109). The recent debate over Belinda’s
heroism has become so heated, in fact, that some scholars believe that, rather than Belinda, Lady Delacour (whose *agon* between her desires and what her culture demands of her ultimately results in submission) deserves more critical attention because her flaws, self-doubt, and reformation make her an engaging and sympathetic character. Kowaleski-Wallace asserts that “Lady Delacour stands to learn a great deal from Belinda,” and thus “*Belinda* is not about Belinda” (110). Julia Douthwaite goes further and boldly proclaims, “Lady Delacour is the real heroine of *Belinda*” (43). This tendency to marginalize Belinda in her own text, however, is highly suspect; for, whether by today’s standards or those of Edgeworth’s earliest readers, Belinda obviously complies with most aspects of the culturally sanctioned model of femininity that was popular at the start of the nineteenth century and thus presents a better exemplar than does Lady Delacour.

Still, the reticence of Douthwaite and Kowaleski-Wallace to name Belinda the heroine of a text named for her is understandable, given the fact that *Belinda* does not follow the pattern of *bildungsroman* evident in many of the period’s novels, whose authors devote most of their narratives to a single, main character’s struggle to rectify her mistaken notions of her society’s dominant ideologies, and reserving that character’s eventual adoption of cultural standards for their final chapters. From the beginning through the end of *Belinda*, its main character conforms to society’s behavioral codes and helps others to do so as well. In her “Author’s Advertisement,” Edgeworth insists, “not wishing to acknowledge a Novel,” that *Belinda* is “a Moral Tale” (1)—i.e., a narrative written for the sole purpose of instructing the reader—much like those in her primer for young children, *Moral Tales* (1801), which preceded *Belinda* by only a few months.
Although Edgeworth’s disclaimer can no doubt be taken as a marketing ploy designed to appeal to the readers’ brand awareness of the successful _Moral Tales, Letters for Literary Ladies_ (1795), and _Practical Education_ (1798), the combined effort of Maria and her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, such marketing savvy serves several purposes: it attracts those customers already loyal to the Edgeworth brand and forestalls damaging Maria’s reputation as a pedagogue for writing what appears to be a novel, a genre often criticized for its lack of realistic settings, plots, and characters. Moreover, in branding Belinda a moral tale, Edgeworth declares her didactic intent more forcefully than do her contemporaries, who merely disguise their fictions by mimicking non-fiction formats, as do Hays in _Memoirs of Emma Courtney_ (1796) and Hannah More in _Cœlebs in Search of a Wife_ (1808), both of which purport or appear to be memoirs.

As a moral tale for adults, _Belinda_ conforms to the types of pedagogical experiments described in the Edgeworths’ _Practical Education_, which they designed to guide pupils through the process of applying their innate reason and their personal experiences to particular problems in order to arrive at solutions for themselves. The _bildungsroman_ that critics have hitherto tried to piece together from within _Belinda_ is therefore fraught with inconsistencies that are difficult to overcome precisely because the designation is misapplied. be Belinda is not a heroine, as I read her, but a sort of laboratory assistant to the reader, for whom _Belinda_ is a pedagogical experiment subject to the kinds of scientific processes espoused by Enlightenment scholars, very much like those presented in _Practical Education_. Staged for the reader’s intellectual exercise and rational development, _Belinda_’s characters and scenes demonstrate experiments in natural and unnatural ways of being. Observing the Delacours, the Percivals, and Harriet Freke
alongside the reader, Belinda directs the reader’s reflections upon what she reads by commenting on the demonstrations of vice and virtue these characters provide.

Juxtaposed against Rachel Hartley/Virginia St. Pierre, however, Belinda also represents a model of womanly perfection worthy of emulation, but she remains only one demonstration among many from which the reader may formulate her own feminine ideal and identity. Ideally, after experiencing the text, reflecting upon what she has observed, and collating the results with her own life experiences, the reader rejects the text’s vicious examples and copies the virtuous upon what John Locke referred to as the tabula rasa of her own identity, completing her own bildungsroman from the safety of her home. The heroine of the text, then, resides beyond the pages of Belinda—she is the reader.

Edgeworth’s relatively independent circumstances enhance the temptation to condemn Belinda for what we see as willful subjugation: we wonder why Belinda fails to prove as self-assertive as was Edgeworth herself, who rejected marriage and augmented her household economy with commercial success. Whereas critical tradition maintains that Richard Lovell Edgeworth was a domineering, controlling, and manipulative father and assumes that his demands upon her overruled Maria’s desire to marry, her correspondence reveals that her decision to remain unmarried likely resulted from a rational and highly pragmatic decision to continue her literary career unencumbered by spousal and maternal duties. Marilyn Butler recounts what little is known of Edgeworth’s refusal of a marriage proposal from Swedish Chevalier Abraham Niclas Clewberg-Edelcrantz, perhaps the only marital offer she received. Edgeworth, loath to leave her home and family, chose to remain unattached and under the paternal roof, despite the
advice of her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, to marry while she had a genuine offer (192-196). In her letters, Edgeworth explains that her suitor did not allow her enough time to determine the true state of her feelings for him before proposing. Moreover, his intention for them to return as husband and wife to his native land within a few days of marriage chilled her ardor (*Life and Letters* 107). Edgeworth’s contemplated marriage to Edelcrantz presented her with the prospect of childbirth, the consequential duties of which would have inhibited her writing. Maria certainly would have taken on sole responsibility for marital, maternal, and household duties, as her culture expected her to do. Further, after merely a few hours of acquaintance, Maria could not have assured herself of sharing with Edelcrantz the mutually affectionate intellectual partnership she enjoyed with her family at home and which she idealized in *Belinda*’s Percival family. Perhaps more importantly, the move to Switzerland would have separated Maria from her intellectual support system and workplace. Edgeworth apparently not only could but did act for herself, and refusing Edelcrantz was an act of intellectual emancipation.

Belinda similarly guards her right to determine her marital destiny, applies reason to her marital options, and refuses to be rushed into marriage. Nonetheless, faced with the unanimous agreement of both radical and conservative conduct books authors, pedagogues, sermonizers, poets, and novelists that women’s highest achievements could be attained solely from within their roles as wives and mothers, regardless of their literary or scholarly attainments, Edgeworth likely did not contemplate giving Belinda a choice over whether to marry at all. Instead, Edgeworth allows Belinda to choose among several men someone entirely to her liking, a possibility often afforded in fiction, if not in reality.
Letters for Literary Ladies and Practical Education reveal Edgeworth’s assumption that the majority of girls will grow up to be wives and mothers as well as her conviction that women must be educated in order to fulfill those roles adequately, both of which form the underlying premise of Belinda. In Letters for Literary Ladies, Edgeworth recapitulates the correspondence, unfortunately no longer extant, between her father and his friend Thomas Day, in which they debate the value of educating one’s daughters. The first letter, from “A Gentleman,” presents Day’s somewhat misogynist views on the utter futility of educating women, followed by the views of “The Friend,” which espouse Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s defense of preparing women to be “literary ladies [meaning] women who have cultivated understandings, not for the purposes of parade, but with the desire to make themselves agreeable and useful” (46). The Friend acknowledges only once the possibility of a woman remaining a spinster by choice or by chance—perhaps a subtle hint at Maria’s desire for independence—but the basic assumption is that women must marry if given the opportunity. Although the Friend expects criticism for limiting his daughter’s appeal in the marriage market by loading her with undesirable intellectual options, he insists that men will soon desire upgraded women, since

No man wishes his wife to be obviously less cultivated than those of her own rank; and something more is now required, even from ordinary talents, than what distinguished the accomplished lady of the last century. (57)

The correspondent also disputes the wisdom of leaving women utterly ignorant, “the danger” of which “extends to both sexes,” who should be “exposed to the light of reason”
and to demonstrations of virtue and vice for the sake of individual well being and social
harmony (64).

The application of reason to staged or spontaneous demonstrations of real-life
lessons forms the pedagogical foundation of Practical Education, a treatise encapsulating
and promoting the pedagogical experiments carried out by Richard Lovell Edgeworth and
his second wife, Honora (née Sneyd), who taught their younger children according to
their particular system of experiential learning. The Edgeworths formulated their highly
detailed educational system upon Locke’s An Essay on Human Understanding (1693), in
which Locke asserts that

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\text{[a]ll ideas come from sensation or reflection. Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas: how comes it to be furnished? . . . To this I answer, in one word, from EXPERIENCE. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation employed either, about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring. (75)}
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Elizabeth Harden explains the Edgeworths’ rationale:

Basic to scientific experiment was the belief that Nature is governed by laws that could be discovered. There must also be laws governing the human mind.
Their goal was to develop a system to teach their own children to read, one that would stress the child’s capacity to reason and account for individual differences. (6)

Honora recorded the outcome of their lessons and transcribed actual conversations during which her children worked logically to achieve rational solutions to given problems. Readers of *Practical Education* have access, then, not only to the Edgeworths’ advice on educating children but to the process itself, to which they are encouraged to apply their own reason in order to judge the validity and efficacy of that process. The Edgeworths, devotees of reason, spread the Enlightenment gospel of individual determinism.

Maria did not benefit from the Edgeworths’ system until after she had sampled a much more traditional education in British boarding schools, where she “learnt the routine accomplishments of the better-taught upper-class women of the period, such as French, Italian, dancing, embroidery, and handwriting” (Butler 52). Upon the family’s return to Ireland, when she was fourteen, Maria became Richard’s pupil in earnest. Butler says, “Educating Maria supplied him with an intellectual interest; besides, she promised to be the intellectual partner he had missed since Honora died” two years earlier (92).

Maria succeeded her step-mother as Richard’s laboratory assistant, continuing what has been considered his grand educational experiment, despite the fact that Honora had apparently provided the spark of genius and did most of the teaching. It is entirely fitting that Maria’s name takes top billing on the title page of *Practical Education*, however, since she collated Honora’s data with her own, wrote commentary on the combined content, and prepared the bulk of the work for publication (*Memoirs of RLE* 184-185). Edgeworth’s participation in the family’s educational experiments resulted in her
publication of *The Parent’s Assistant* (1796), *Early Lessons* (1801), and *Moral Tales*, all written for the edification of young children and, as Elizabeth Harden notes, “to illustrate the principles of Practical Education” (19).

Published so soon after the release of *Moral Tales*, the overt didacticism in *Belinda* can be thus easily explained: the novel represents Edgeworth’s attempt to extend the application of her family’s pedagogy to adolescent or adult women in or about to enter the marriage market, whose educations likely were considered to have been completed or neglected. For such women, the pedagogical experiments in *Practical Education* came too late, and the simplistic content of *The Parent’s Assistant, Early Lessons*, and *Moral Tales* probably would not have engaged their interest as much as an extended tale of fashionable life.30

In order to interest these older, and perhaps more worldly, readers comfortable with such an overtly didactic narrative, Edgeworth provides them with a suitable companion to lead them through the text, introducing Belinda as an individual whose character is “yet to be developed by circumstances” (3)—i. e., as a *tabula rasa* whose identity, supposedly like that of her reader, is not yet fully composed. Thus, Edgeworth evokes Locke’s theory of observation and reflection being mankind’s innate source of learning as the cornerstone of her moral tale and arms Belinda with an innately unassailable sense of self and an indefectible capacity for reason in order to thwart Aunt Stanhope’s commercial, Lady Delacour’s theatrical, Harriet Freke’s radical, and Mrs. Ormond’s romantic brands of femininity. Honing her reason upon the vicious examples of human interaction that Aunt Stanhope, the Delacours, Harriet, and Mrs. Ormond serve to demonstrate, Belinda scratches away each layer of false femininity from the palimpsest
others would have her be. She thereby provides the reader with a model of femininity best suited to marital and social welfare, unlike that of her foil Rachel Hartley, the moral tale’s second white paper, whose innate reason remains purposefully undeveloped by her overcautious grandmother. While in her native element, Rachel is content, but when she is removed from it and becomes Virginia St. Pierre, she becomes a palimpsest for others to inscribe upon her what Edgeworth contends is a false femininity, a mistaken notion of what she ought to be. Virginia is trained to appear amiable, economical, modest, and sensible; Belinda naturally possesses those traditionally feminine attributes and, most importantly for Edgeworth, refines them with her innate intelligence.

Whereas Douthwaite describes three types of what she terms “natural learning” in the text, I believe that Edgeworth presents the results of three types of distinctly unnatural education in Belinda, one of which (the Percivals’) appears to be superior to the others, but which is actually an ongoing experiment offered for further testing and debate, much like its lesson plan, Practical Education. In “Experimental Child-rearing After Rousseau: Maria Edgeworth, Practical Education, and Belinda,” Douthwaite suggests that a “psychological awakening” induces Lady Delacour to revive and employ her natural maternal instincts; the Virginia sub-plot exposes the dangers of male seduction of female innocence through romantic texts; and the Percivals employ the “ideal techniques” of instruction described in Practical Education (43). This use of the term “natural” is unsettling, however, because there is nothing truly natural about any of these educational systems—they are all based on artifice. Lady Delacour overcomes a psychosomatic illness after dismantling one artifice of her own making after another and transferring—not altogether abandoning—her theatricals from a public to a private setting; Clarence
intends to preserve Virginia’s innocence, but she learns to dissemble when he encourages her to read romances and leaves her with a romantically inclined guardian; and Douthwaite herself calls the Percivals’ teaching moments “apparently spontaneous, yet carefully orchestrated” (43).

Moreover, according to Dr. X’s classes of mankind, in which he valorizes the wise as products of natural pedagogical systems and denounces the fools spawned in schools of unnatural learning, Lady Delacour, Virginia, and Harriet clearly must be classified as fools. Clarence writes to Lady Delacour,

   My friend Dr. X . . . divides mankind into three classes. “Those who learn from the experiences of others—they are happy men. Those who learn from their own experiences—they are wise men. And, lastly, those who learn neither from their own nor from other people’s experience—they are fools.” (260)

Following Dr. X’s rubric, we see that Belinda and Clarence provide demonstrations of natural learning: they spontaneously observe and reflect upon their environment in order to reach rational conclusions about it. Yet Belinda also learns indirectly by observing and reflecting upon the experiences of practically everyone she meets, but she does not initiate her own experiments; Clarence, on the other hand, learns directly from his own experience by conducting social experiments (e. g., his transvestism and his attempt to transform the rustic Virginia into his ideal wife), and he observes and reflects upon the behavior and attitudes of his companions. In failing to adopt models of virtuous femininity from their self-induced domestic disharmony or from their observations of the similar failures or successes of their acquaintances, Lady Delacour, Virginia, and Harriet
demonstrate the results of unnatural learning. Lady Delacour and Virginia remain fools until they adopt experiential learning, but Harriet remains a fool throughout the text in her obstinate refusal to adopt cultural standards.

Most scholars agree that Dr. X is based on Richard Lovell Edgeworth, and Clarence’s extrapolation from Dr. X’s rubric most likely expresses Maria Edgeworth’s refinement of her father’s (and step-mother’s) ideas. Clarence posits,

The characters of those who are taught by their own experience must be progressive in knowledge and virtue. Those who learn from the experience of others may become stationary, because they must depend for their progress on the experiments that we brave volunteers, at whose expense they are to live and learn, are pleased to try. There may be safety in thus snugly fighting, or rather seeing the battle of life, behind a broad shield of a stouter [sic] warrior. Yet it seems to me, to be rather an ignominious than an enviable situation. (260)

We must bear in mind that Clarence classes himself among the wise who learn from their own experience, which may account for his bias in favoring experiential learning, but we must also recall that his author shares his bias.31 Importantly, Edgeworth contends through Clarence that only those who engage in life can hope to develop a worthy character, and those who do not will eventually stagnate. According to this theory, the observer Belinda cowardly lurks behind doers like Clarence, Lady Delacour, and Virginia, who learn from their own mistakes. Belinda is thus a multivalent exercise in rational self-determination that encourages the reader to actively engage her intellect by
observing and analyzing the examples provided within the tale while challenging her not
only to apply the same process to her own life, but to lead a life worth experiencing.

Clarence’s theory also explains and justifies Edgeworth’s distress over
republishing what she always insisted to be a moral tale among the volumes of The
British Novelists. Belinda is not a novel according to the standards set by her male
precedecessors Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Oliver Goldsmith, with whose
works Edgeworth was familiar. Their novels each present a protagonist who resolves his
or her own agon. Deliberately, Edgeworth does not show Belinda struggling against
obstacles, because Belinda functions primarily as a surrogate for the reader. Without
signaling an end to my discussion, the proof lies in the final couplet of the text, delivered
by Lady Delacour, “Our tale contains a moral, and, no doubt,/You all have wit enough to
find it out” (451), which affirms the reader’s intellectual powers and challenges her to use
them. The real heroine of Belinda is the reader, who, upon finishing the tale, puts Dr. X’s
tory into practice, as does Lady Delacour, and writes her own identity based upon her
observation of the text’s demonstrations and upon her own experiences in the real world.
While this resembles a feminist call to action worthy of Hays or Wollstonecraft,
Edgeworth carefully adheres to the existing limits upon the types of experience women
can have without destroying their reputations and, with them, their chances in the
marriage market.

Intriguingly, we know little of how Belinda manages to preserve herself from
such market influences in the first place. Readers can compile a longer list of the lacunae
of Belinda’s early history than of the few facts that are divulged. Although we know that
Belinda has at least one sister, we have no indication of her parentage, the size of her
immediate family, her relationship with its members, or whether they are all alive or dead. In the course of the narrative, the only relative with whom Belinda corresponds is her Aunt Stanhope, who may be Belinda’s legal guardian, since she exercises some authority over the ingenue. We do not know Belinda’s place of birth or her social class, and her childhood is a complete mystery. The narrator hints at Belinda’s primary education, saying only that she “is highly accomplished” and “had been educated chiefly in the country; she had early been inspired with a taste for domestic pleasures; she was fond of reading, and disposed to conduct herself with prudence and integrity” (3). There is no evidence within the text to set the narrative other than proximal to its 1801 publication. A country girl’s primary education at the time usually occurred either at home or at a day school, either of which offered as much as or less than the academic training Edgeworth herself received before becoming her father’s pupil. Further, no evidence within the text suggests that Belinda enters the narrative as a product of the Edgeworthian system of practical education. Nevertheless, her nebulous training surely proves sufficient to frustrate the first person who attempts to write upon Belinda’s *tabula rasa*, her Aunt Stanhope, who “did not find Belinda such a docile pupil as her other nieces” in her attempts to teach Belinda the doctrine “that a young lady’s chief business is to please in society, that all her charms and accomplishments should be invariably subservient to one grand object—the establishing herself in the world” (3).

Aunt Stanhope’s blatantly disaffected attitude toward the matrilineal family business of marital speculation is characteristic of the period’s “national marriage market” wherein “in order to get a daughter,” or in this case a niece, “off their hands at no cost to themselves” many “calculating and necessitous parents deliberately exploited
[the] ambiguity of motives” behind “balls, card parties, and assemblies” (The Family, Sex, and Marriage 316-317), and Edgeworth demonstrates the ubiquity of such thinly veiled marital commerce in her society by presenting Belinda’s commodification as a truly social endeavor. When Aunt Stanhope realizes that Belinda will not become her apprentice in the marriage market—Belinda’s innate disposition for prudence and integrity (which can also be read as “modesty,” “delicacy,” and “virtue”) disqualify her for the trade—she secures the best product placement she can find for Belinda’s debut on the marriage market by placing her in the home of the “fashionable Lady Delacour” (3), who has access to the top shelves of fashionable society and, as her own history attests, proven success in the marriage market. Aunt Stanhope also dispatches a potential agent for Belinda, Clarence Hervey, and cites his marketing credentials: Clarence is “quite a connoisseur in female grace and beauty—just the man to bring a new face into fashion” (4). Clarence is not wholly unaware of his commission from “the catch-match-maker,” as he refers to Aunt Stanhope, and he fully expects Belinda to be one of her “partners in all the speculations . . . in the firm of the house” (11). Thus Belinda unbeknownst enters fashionable society with a figurative retailer’s label affixed to her person that everyone around her expects her to bear and accepts as the norm.32 Later in the nineteenth century, unambiguously negative attitudes toward the marriage market appear in novels like Susan Ferrier’s Marriage, Charles Dickens’s Dombey and Son, and Anthony Trollope’s Palliser novels. Nevertheless, the recurrence of such plots in nineteenth-century fiction and non-fiction, as I will demonstrate, suggests the difficulty of abolishing the practice.

Maria Edgeworth’s applying commercial terminology to human endeavor in Belinda corresponds with the Edgeworths’ valuation of feminine accomplishments in
Practical Education, most strikingly in their chapter “Female Accomplishments, Masters, and Governesses,” wherein the term “commodities” seemingly refers both to marriageable daughters and their accomplishments. The Edgeworths attest to the value of accomplishments as “objects of universal admiration,” “tickets of admissions to fashionable company,” “resources against ennui,” and improvements in “a young lady’s chance of a prize in the matrimonial lottery” (522). Therefore they encourage readers to train their daughters to master music, drawing, dancing, and needlework, but only so far as those skills “be considered as domestic occupations, not as matter of competition, or of exhibition, or yet as the means of attracting temporary admiration” (531). In other words, accomplishments must be used in the domestic setting, not merely displayed on the open market and then shelved after marriage, like Christmas ornaments that are displayed seasonally.

The Edgeworths support their advice to avoid the “abuse of accomplishments” (531) by voicing pragmatic concerns about their wavering demand in the marriage market, but they do not denounce or even debate the morality of the commercialization of marriage, nor do they anticipate that their audience will object to their pragmatic view of the status quo. Possibly because viable experiments must be based on facts, the Edgeworths acknowledge the existence of sexual commerce in the marriage market, be it moral or immoral, natural or unnatural, and offer best practices of preparing brides to be durable goods, not impulse items. They caution mothers concerned with ornamental display, who have seen some young women of their acquaintance, whose accomplishments have attracted men of fortune . . . consequently . . .
[they] are sanguine in their expectations of the effect of their daughters’ education. But they forget that everybody now makes the same reflections, that parents are, and have been for some years, speculating in the same line; consequently, the market is likely to be overstocked, and, of course, the value of the commodities must fall. (528-529)

Thus Edgeworth points out Aunt Stanhope folly in writing plainly of the dollars and sense of marital speculation and evincing concern that Belinda develop “the name of being perfectly accomplished” (5), and Belinda appropriately refuses to play the harp for Clarence (64), since she has “the good sense and good taste to avoid a display of her abilities and accomplishments” (101). Unaware or heedless of the devaluation of accomplishments in the marriage market, Aunt Stanhope misreads her customers (i.e., her nieces’ potential suitors), ignores their actual needs, and focuses instead on what she perceives to be their desires. Nonetheless, those tempted to condemn Aunt Stanhope for pandering Belinda must recall Edgeworth’s evident complicity with her “mercantile nation” in Practical Education (530).

Aunt Stanhope’s assumption that the appearance of being accomplished is more important than actually being so also recall Edgeworth’s warnings to “those who speculate on their daughters’ accomplishments” in Practical Education (528). It also introduces the central theme of Belinda: the counterfeit (or artificial) woman supposedly demanded by the marriage market creates domestic chaos because, like an actress, she merely mimics feminine behavior that by custom has been deemed natural for her; as such, this demand must be rejected and replaced by a desire for the reified actual (or natural) womanhood, demonstrated in Belinda and Lady Anne Percival, who create
domestic peace by practicing their feminine arts solely for domestic consumption. In other words, Edgeworth advises all who are involved in courtship (i.e. matchmakers, suitors, and potential brides) to reject or to be ornamental women, whose talents are directed toward the public, and instead practice becoming useful women, who employ their intellectual and social skills exclusively in the day-to-day activities of the home.

In keeping with this theme, Belinda’s debut in the marriage market ends in discord since, by Lady Delacour’s request, she first encounters society in disguise as the tragic muse, Melpomene. In performing a role that does not reflect her true nature, Belinda is thoroughly mistaken for something she is not on several levels. First, Clarence believes that Melpomene is actually Lady Delacour and that she is open to hearing abusive comments about Belinda, whom he assumes to collude with her aunt in being “hawked about” and “as well advertised as Packwood’s razor strops” (20). To her face, hidden beneath one of Lady Delacour’s masks, Clarence declares Belinda to be “a composition of art and affectation” (20), not knowing that he describes exactly what Lady Delacour has for the moment made her. Teresa Michals correlates Clarence’s comparison of Belinda with Packwood’s razor strops as a demonstration of Edgeworth’s belief that a “creditable character supplants property for the basis of commercial relations” (13), but something more is at stake here.

The reference to Packwood also establishes as fact the thorough commercialization of early nineteenth-century Britain. Neil McKendrick devotes an entire chapter of The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England to the marketing genius of George Packwood, whose advertisements in all types of periodicals throughout the British Isles were cleverly disguised as miniature
dramas, songs, poems, personal testimonies, and news items. In a sense, Packwood was the pioneer in building brand awareness by stealth advertising, though he may not have used that terminology to describe his efforts. Contemporary readers of *Belinda* would no doubt immediately call to mind the marketing savvy of the merchant who created consumer demand for his wares through compositions of art and affectation. Comparing Aunt Stanhope to Packwood and Belinda to his razor strops also illustrates that the appearance of value in any market can be more influential on potential customers than the commodity’s actual value. Clarence reads Aunt Stanhope’s figurative label on Belinda and immediately discounts her value in the marriage market. Michals argues that Edgeworth does not “make marriage look like the marketplace, but rather . . . shows how the marketplace looked like marriage” (14). I contend the exact opposite, especially considering Edgeworth’s placing the reference to Packwood at Belinda’s debut.

Culturally sanctioned marital commerce is a priori necessary for Edgeworth’s rationalized pedagogy of utilizing womanly comportment, intelligence, and integrity within the prevailing system in order to reform it.

Belinda’s social debut also marks her entry into Lockean experiential learning and the beginning of her true social and marital education, which will provide her with the requisite means to prove that women’s true value in the marriage market lies not in the funds they transmit from one family into another, but in their capacity to generate domestic and social harmony. It also marks the first time Belinda erases the writing of another upon her identity, proving that her natural femininity is superior to and stronger than the commercial standards of her Aunt Stanhope’s manufactured brides or the theatrical modes of Lady Delacour’s artificial womanhood. Merely hearing of Lady
Delacour’s checkered past is insufficient, however; experiential learning requires that Belinda suffer the consequences of Lady Delacour’s counterproductive handling of her coming out as well as observe and reflect upon the results of her ladyship’s misguided education. Therefore Belinda does she remove herself from “the guidance of one, who was so little able to conduct herself” (60), but “for the first time in her life she reasoned for herself upon what she saw and felt” (61).

Lady Delacour’s appearance early in the text both as Melpomene and Thelia foreshadows the dichotomous roles she will play throughout the narrative, along with her tendencies toward self-destruction, since no one can forever maintain tragic and comic characters simultaneously. Before Belinda’s debut, Lady Delacour appropriately dons tragedy at home, which for her is a scene of personal tragedy. Her mercenary marriage becomes a commercial success but an emotional disaster, she separates herself from her third and only living child after bearing one stillborn and believing her breast milk to have poisoned the other (36-37), and she is convinced that she brought breast cancer upon herself (51). Publicly, however, she displays herself as the comic muse and receives “admiration” and “glory.” There, her “object with [Clarence] is to conceal from the world, what [she] cannot conceal” from herself, that she is “dying” (57). All of this, of course, is rubbish. Lady Delacour discovers that she does not have breast cancer, is not dying, and has nothing to hide, thus turning her tragedy into comedy.

Lady Delacour’s propensity for the theatrical has been discussed by Susan Bolet Egenholf (325) and Heather MacFadyen (424), both of whom argue that she, Harriet, and Virginia embody disruptive feminine forces that must be domesticated or disowned. Lady Delacour’s theatricality offers one indication of her highly artificial performance of
femininity, but I believe it should be more aptly diagnosed as merely a symptom of a social disorder contracted by a volunteer for conspicuous consumption. Lady Delacour’s participation in marital commerce, her disregard for domestic economy, and her preference for extravagant display entice her to overindulge in social commerce. Her costumes and her “power of assuming gaiety,” signaled by “loud knocks . . . which announced the arrival of company” (197), transform her maternal body into a tableau vivant and her home into a theater, where a rake’s progress is performed nightly, with the lord and lady of the manor competing for the title role. As such, Lady Delacour’s public persona reflects Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, wherein Butler considers gender to be “a corporeal style, an ‘act’ . . . a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (177) and “a social fiction” (178).

In having the reader observe and reflect upon the disorder engendered by Lady Delacour’s public persona versus the order brought about by Belinda’s more authentic femininity, Edgeworth demonstrates the ineffectiveness of unnatural education and the effectiveness of Locke’s natural, experiential learning. Lady Delacour primary demonstrates the evils of training women to perform domestic arts for outsiders instead of preparing them to practice those arts for domestic use. Accordingly, Belinda counters each of Lady Delacour’s immoral and irrational performances with righteous displays of rational and natural virtue. Thus Belinda’s narrative is bumped aside in favor of two chapters of Lady Delacour’s history, and the placement and length of time allotted to the female rake’s progress affix the ingenue and her sponsor to the opposite ends of Edgeworth’s moral yardstick as the main points of reference for the entire work.
Lady Delacour begins her history by defining herself in terms of her commercial value upon entering the marriage market. She says, “I was a rich heiress—I had, I believe, a hundred thousand pounds” (31). Her inability to provide an exact figure of her net worth indicates her ignorance of domestic economy, but she is aware that it was enough to attract “lovers in abundance” with “sixteen declarations and proposals in form” for her hand (31). Significantly, Lady Delacour uses a shopping metaphor to describe her choice of husband to Belinda, who should judge by what she feels when a dexterous mercer or linen-draper produces pretty thing after pretty thing . . . this is so becoming, this will wear forever . . . but then it’s so fashionable . . . tossing over half the goods in the shop . . . when it gets late, the young lady in a hurry, pitches upon the very ugliest and worst thing that she has seen. (31)

Lady Delacour’s assumption that Belinda will understand the metaphor—and Edgeworth’s assumption that the reader will, too—again illustrates the pervasiveness of commerce in Edgeworth’s culture. This portion of Lady Delacour’s history does triple duty for Edgeworth. First, it illustrates her culture’s acceptance of the commercial context of marriage. Second, it points out the very real feminine fact of life that marriage was an absolute necessity for women’s domestic peace, despite the temporary reversal of traditional gender roles—Lady Delacour is the buyer and Lord Delacour is the commodity—which is a privilege of wealth. Third, the reference to the short time that women could act as agents in the marriage market is a warning to them to act while they can in order to avoid replicating Lady Delacour’s miscalculation.
When Belinda convinces Lady Delacour to unlock her boudoir and expose its contents to her husband and to reject fashionable society for virtuous domestic pleasures, both are rewarded for restoring the peace. The domestic scene presented at the partially reformed Delacour mansion may be the combined idea of earthly paradise as imagined by James Fordyce, John Gregory, and Jean Jacques Rousseau. The narrator describes it through Lord Delacour’s eyes, saying,

> With the assistance of Belinda’s portfolio and her harp, and the good humor and sprightliness of Lady Delacour’s wit . . . . The perception that his talents were *called out*, and he appeared to unusual advantage made him *excellent company*; he found that spirits can be raised by self-complacency, even more agreeably than by burgundy. (268)

This scene is designedly theatrical—a matter of perception and appearance—since Lady Delacour has not yet completely reformed. She must still learn that her cancer is merely a phenomenally long-lasting bruise and that her brand of religion is as much smoke and mirrors as the false specter that haunts her. In other words, she must think and act rationally and stop fooling herself and being duped by others. Indicating that the reform is in progress, Belinda appropriately uses her harp to entertain her adopted family, and for both the matriarch and patriarch who comply with their culturally standard gender roles, complacency is demonstrated to be the soul’s succor. It must be noted, however, that while Belinda encourages the Delacours to communicate openly with each other, she is powerless in her unmarried state to confront Clarence about his secret life. Open, direct, and sincere communication between the sexes is apparently a strictly marital privilege.
In order to achieve domestic harmony, Lady Delacour must also give up her acquaintance with a woman pretending to be a ghost, the aptly named Harriet Freke. The gender-confused, cross-dressing Harriet—”I was a schoolboy—girl—I should say” (217)—is best described as an Eris figure in the text, inasmuch as her behavior is an inducement, if not entirely the catalyst, of marital discord between the Delacours. Eris, Greek goddess of discord, started the Trojan War by instigating a disagreement among Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite, who represent three aspects of female sexuality—the virgin, the chaste wife, and the sexual libertine—who appear in Belinda as Virginia, Lady Delacour, and Harriet. The saga of the Trojan War and its aftermath is essentially a casebook of marital discord taken to extraordinary extremes.33

Colin B. Atkinson and Jo Atkinson categorize Harriet’s overt masculinity as Edgeworth’s attempt to “discredit radical feminism” by presenting “radical social views echoing sources that readers would have recognized as representative of social philosophies which undermined the hierarchical social order,” like those of jacobin authors William Godwin, Mary Hays, and Mary Wollstonecraft (108). Close attention to Harriet’s arguments, however, challenge that assessment, because many of her contentions do not accurately reflect the context of female pedagogy found in jacobin texts. Rather, they mimic the misconstruction of jacobin ideals propagated by conservative detractors like Hannah More, who refused to read Wollstonecraft’s Vindication of the Rights of Woman, which she perceived as containing “metaphysical jargon,” its title being “something fantastic and absurd” (More 427).

In the chapter of Belinda entitled “Rights of Woman,” Harriet introduces herself as the knight errant, determined to “set the distressed damsel free, in spite of all the
dragons in Christendom” (212), thereby suggesting that she is an unholy champion of
sexual liberation. She truly is in error, supposing that Belinda needs or desires to be
rescued from the Percival’s house. Harriet “dashes” in on Belinda, interrupting her
reading, and denounces autodidacticism, saying,

Books only spoil the originality of genius. Very well for those who can’t
think for themselves—but when one has made up one’s opinions, there is
no use in reading. . . . [Books o]nly ruin your understanding, trust me.
Books are full of trash—nonsense—conversation is worth all the books in
the world. (214)

In her highly selective mis-contextualization of Wollstonecraft’s framework for national
education, Harriet omits reading. Wollstonecraft’s suggested curriculum, in which
children should be “excited to think for themselves” (A Vindication of the Rights of
Woman 333), includes an extensive and broad reading list that “would not exclude polite
literature” (357). If Harriet were a proponent of jacobin or radical feminism, she would
have no objection to Belinda’s reading “Essay on the Inconsistency of Human Wishes”
(Belinda 215), but she would object to a hasty, undirected misreading of it without proper
reflection and outside perspective on its contents, and so does Edgeworth. Harriet’s
mistaken notions about jacobin feminism represents the real threat to domestic peace, not
all aspects of radical feminism.

Harriet joins Dr. X’s class of fools because she has stopped learning, either from
her own experience or from that of others, which is apparent in her less-than-expert
debate with Mr. Percival and Belinda over the issue of female delicacy. For Edgeworth,
delicacy is both a “refined sense of what is becoming, modest, or proper” and a “delicate regard for the feelings of others” (*OED* def. 10). The argument is worth quoting at length:

“You speak from experience?” said Mr. Percival.

[Harriet responds,] “No, from observation. Your most delicate women are always the greatest hypocrites; and, in my opinion, no hypocrite can or ought to be happy.”

“But you have not proved the hypocrisy,” said Belinda. “Delicacy is not, I hope, an indisputable proof of it? If you mean *false* delicacy . . .”

“To cut the matter short at once,” cried Mrs. Freke, “why, when a woman likes a man does not she go and tell him so honestly?”

Belinda, surprised by this question from a woman, was too abashed instantly to answer.

“Because she is a hypocrite. That is and must be the answer.”

“No,” said Mr. Percival, “because, if she be a woman of sense, she knows that by such a step she would disgust the object of her affection.”

(216-217)

Harriet speaks the very question most readers ask today—why doesn’t Belinda confront Clarence? Mr. Percival delivers Edgeworth’s answer, thus articulating a main point of diversion between radical feminism and Edgeworth’s conservative feminism: open communication between the sexes ought to occur after marriage whereupon both parties contractually agree to dissolve a separation of individual interests and become a single legal entity. With this dual reference to Hays’s open, yet ill-conceived declarations of affection to William Frend, fictionalized in her *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), and
Wollstonecraft’s for Henry Fuseli, documented in Godwin’s *Memoirs of the Author of “The Rights of Woman”* (1799), Edgeworth draws her feminist line slightly before gender equality as a commonsensical matter of delicacy. The customary courtship rules of engagement dictate that women must keep their own counsels in matters in love, in order to keep their reputations; and delicacy, practiced sincerely during the process, effectively shields them from being misread as a coquettes or libertines.

The fact that Harriet does not intuitively know the righteousness of the cultural norm of womanly delicacy befuddles and silences Belinda while her interlocutors continue the debate. Harriet dismisses Mr. Percival’s idea of common sense, calling it, “Cunning! The arms of the weakest,” to which he replies,

Prudence! The arms of the strongest. Taking the best means to secure our own happiness without injuring that of another is the best proof of sense and strength of mind, whether in man or woman. Fortunately for society, the same conduct in ladies which best secures their happiness most increases ours. (217)

The doctrine of female delicacy rationally dictates that women remain silent about sexual attraction, obviously because they do not truly have the luxury of choice. Since no good can come of a woman speaking her heart before a suitor stakes his claim, she should remain silent until she is bespoken. Delicacy protects both men and women from wounded hearts, public embarrassment, and damaged reputations. Further, both parties insure their emotional and pecuniary investments by adhering to the cultural standard, which ensures social harmony.
Harriet not only refuses to consider the thoughts and feelings of others but also deliberately seeks to intimidate and terrorize anyone with whom she comes in contact. She warns Belinda to stay on her good side: “You don’t know me—I’m a terrible person when provoked—stop at nothing!” (218), but she later proves that she needs no provocation to harry others, as her name suggests. Ever ready for what she terms “frolics,” Harriet laughingly torments Miss Moreton atop a “rocking stone” at the summit of Brimham Crags (235), literally risking the life of a young woman whose reputation Harriet has earlier hastened toward destruction. Belinda rejects Harriet’s attempts to write her as a radical feminist and escapes Miss Moreton’s fate.

Witnessing Miss Moreton’s figurative teetering on the brink of disaster, Belinda is prompted to declare, “What a lesson to young ladies in the choice of female friends!” (238), but we must recall Mr. Percival’s decree that both men and women are responsible for maintaining social harmony while creating marital harmony, and one’s male friends can be just as destructive forces in the search for a mutually beneficial match that “secures the happiness” of both parties. Despite Clarence’s intention to “educat[e] a wife for himself” (343), he jeopardizes his own happiness, along with that of Belinda and Rachel Hartley, in his attempts to manufacture his own Sophy according to the model of female education described by Rousseau in *Émile*. Rousseau himself admitted to Richard Lovell Edgeworth that the pedagogies presented in *Émile* were not applicable in reality (Harden 4), and Virginia’s story serves as a warning against basing women’s education upon unattainable principles of what ought to be natural.34

Rachel’s romantic education resembles that of Emma in Hays’s *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) and of Maria in Wollstonecraft’s *Maria; or the Wrongs of
Woman (1798). A close comparison of the three texts yields too many similarities to be merely coincidental. Like Emma and Maria, Rachel is an autodidact who lacks outside perspective to direct her limited reading, which her grandmother censors. When she is removed from her natural setting, encouraged to be idle, and given undirected access to previously unavailable literature, Rachel engages in autoerotic autodidacticism and creates a phantom lover, in a manner similar to that of Emma, by endowing her mental image from a once-seen portrait with the characteristics of heroism she finds in her romances. At seventeen, Rachel discovers that her intellect has been disordered by the misguided romantic ideals of femininity she created from her romances and thus is incapable of creating and maintaining marital harmony, just as Emma and Maria come to understand they had done. An important difference among the texts, however, is that Clarence, who intends to marry Rachel, rejects her after learning to value a wife who is his intellectual equal, a situation which Hays and Wollstonecraft long for but believe to be impossible.

Like Rousseau’s Sophy, Rachel is initially presented as a “child of nature” (351). She is raised in the “terrestrial paradise” (345), far from a potentially corruptive urban setting, within the “New Forest” (344). Indeed, she is a “natural child,” born out of wedlock (OED def. 15a), and she is raised by her grandmother, who, in order to preserve her innocence, embowers Rachel in a cottage “surrounded by a profusion of rose trees” (344). This serene slice of pastoral civilization communicates freely with the “wilderness” (344) around it, suggesting that Rachel and her grandmother live in harmony with nature. Had Rachel been left there, she may have thrived, but Clarence virtually imprisons her in a Windsor cottage behind a walled, cultivated garden. He also
strips her of her native identity and renames her Virginia St. Pierre, after the heroine of Jacques-Henri Bernardin de St. Pierre’s *Paul et Virginie* (1788), whom Egenolf deems “one of the most popular icons of the eighteenth century” (332). Egenolf’s synopsis of *Paul et Virginie* describes a pseudo-sibling coupling in an idyllic setting that ends in a loss of life on a Shakespearean scale—the entire *dramatis personae* either are killed by a vengeful force of nature, commit suicide, or pine away after “the outside world impinges upon the valley of paradise” (333). Edgeworth’s reference to de St. Pierre’s romance indicates that Virginia cannot thrive beyond her natural setting, no matter how closely Clarence can approximate it in fashionable Windsor.

Clarence mistakes Rachel’s ignorance for “simplicity” and “sensibility” (348), and, believing she has “a perfectly pure, disinterested, unpractised, heart” and “natural feeling in an uncommon degree,” he anticipates that “the cultivation of her understanding” will be “an easy and pleasing task,” since “Sensibility . . . is the parent of great virtues” (348). However, his theory proves untenable because Rachel’s senses are awakened, exercised, and honed before her reason. In her mock cottage, Virginia is said to be

without companions to interest her social affections, without real objects to occupy her senses and her understanding, [her] mind was either perfectly indolent, or *exalted* by romantic views and visionary ideals of happiness. As she had never seen anything of society, all her notions were drawn from books.
Reading, indeed, was now almost her only pleasure.

Virginia had no longer those occupations, which filled a portion of her day at the cottage. (359)

This passage recalls the situations of Hays’s Emma—who also “devour[s]” her reading materials (53)—and Wollstonecraft’s Maria, both of whom complain that their idleness, isolation, and undirected reading destroy their chances of marital harmony. Ironically, Virginia could be Harriet Freke’s prime example of autodidactic peril, and the Virginia has no option but to perform femininity since she lacks the necessary skills for practical and intellectual efforts and apparently is not expected to acquire them.

Clarence forbids “common novels” but allows Virginia to read romances, which he believes “breathed a spirit favorable to female virtue, exalted the respect for chastity, and inspired enthusiastic admiration of honor, generosity, truth, and all the noble qualities which dignify human nature” (360). With no one to direct her reading of such texts, however, Virginia fails to concentrate on Clarence’s preferred content and instead focuses on the dangerous elements that Hays, Wollstonecraft, and Edgeworth warn against. Without applying reason to their content, romances inspire vice, not virtue, and “those who read chiefly works of imagination receive from them false ideas of life and of the human heart” (Literary Ladies 74). Virginia describes the result of her ill-managed education, saying, “indeed, I have only confused ideas floating in my imagination from the books I have been reading. I do not distinctly know my own feelings” (361), words that echo Emma’s complaints to Mr. Francis of her growing “distempered imagination” (131). Mr. Francis designates Emma’s mental condition “insanity” (168); Lady Delacour generously declares the romance-identified Virginia to be “only half mad” (448).
Clarence’s intermittent tutoring sessions cannot overcome Virginia’s romantic education, which is exacerbated by the romantic inclinations of her *doyenne*. Mrs. Ormond serves as Edgeworth’s spokesperson for what some, like Rousseau, believe ought to be natural femininity, which Edgeworth denounces as the antipode of her culture’s misconception of radical femininity. In this sense, Harriet’s *doppelgänger* is Mrs. Ormond, functioning as Eros, the Greek god of love, whose name gives us the term “erotic.” Appropriately, Eros is a source of frustration for classical scholars. In Hellenic creation myths, as Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon tell us, Eros is the son of Chaos, responsible for “a fury of procreation” at the birth of the world (31). Later generations recast him as the son of Aphrodite and Ares, the god of war (128). The combination of all three parental attributes results in the usual depiction of the unrestrained Eros injecting passion into his victims with his arrows of love. As such, he presents a triple threat of inciting disorder, sex, and violence among otherwise rational beings, and thus Eros is potentially a disruptive force in erotic, marital, and social harmony.

Harriet misreads radical feminist texts and Belinda, whose innate intellect, developed by reason, keeps Harriet from pushing her into the abyss to join the ill-fated Miss Moreton; Mrs. Ormond misreads romances and Virginia, whose undeveloped intellect, lacking reason, is unprotected from Mrs. Ormond’s chaotic interference. Such is apparent when Mrs. Ormond finds Virginia deeply entranced by *Paul et Virginie* and assumes that the ingenue is reading herself as the heroine of the romance and Clarence as her Paul. Virginia’s reticence to reveal what she is reading and to own her emotional confusion, proof of her “ignorance and timidity” (352), is deemed by Mrs. Ormond to be
“very natural, and a proof of [her] perfect innocence and simplicity” (361). Mrs. Ormond interprets Virginia’s insistence that she will not know “the name that is on [her] lips” to be an attempt to “dissemble” (361); and Mrs. Ormond encourages Virginia to love Clarence, since it is, she says, what she “ought—I mean, what is natural you should feel” out of gratitude for his financial support (362). Another indicator of her diametric opposition to Harriet is Mrs. Ormond’s agreement with the dominant ideology of feminine delicacy. She tells Virginia that when Clarence “expresses his love for [her], it will then be time to show [hers] for him” (362). Despite Virginia’s many attempts to set her straight, Mrs. Ormond fosters a romantic idyll of her own making—a budding romance between master and pupil—based upon how she believes women ought to behave in the marriage market. Mrs. Ormond apes Mr. Percival’s dictum that eligible bachelorettes should keep their emotional attachments to themselves until the most gratifying suitors stake their claims, but she provides no reason beyond the vague notion that young ladies ought to do so.

Instead of being a guardian and companion to an innocent bride, Mrs. Ormond behaves like a valide sultan in a harem training an odalisque, who trades affection and sexual favors in exchange for her patron’s preferment. The fact that outsiders like Sir Philip Baddely, Lady Delacour, and Mrs. Delacour misread the Windsor cottage as a brothel and Virginia as Clarence’s mistress underscores the thoroughly unnatural form of Virginia’s education. Due to her disassociation from reality, Virginia’s “imagination, exalted by solitude and romance, embodied and became enamored of a phantom” of her own creation (443). Virginia’s autoerotic autodidacticism, regardless of Clarence’s noble intentions, places her in danger of becoming, not a chaste wife but a sexual libertine
“only fit for a seraglio,” as Wollstonecraft would describe her (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman of the Rights of Woman* 36).

Clarence attempts to custom-manufacture a wife to suit his tastes, but admits his mistake after observing the unmasked Belinda. Echoing the second correspondent in *Letter for Literary Ladies*, who declares, “There is a wide difference between innocence and ignorance; ignorant women may have minds the most debased and perverted, whilst the most cultivated understanding may be united with the most perfect innocence and complicity” (74), the narrator summarizes Clarence’s reflections:

Belinda had cultivated tastes, an active understanding, a knowledge of literature, the power and habit of conducting herself. Virginia was ignorant and indolent, she had few ideas, and no wish to extend her knowledge. She was so entirely unacquainted with the world that it was absolutely impossible she could conduct herself with the discretion which must be the combined result of reasoning with experience. . . . The virtues of Virginia sprang from sentiment; those of Belinda, from reason. (359)

This description of Belinda closely follows that of the ideal lady found in *Letters for Literary Ladies* and the properly educated wife in *Practical Education*.

Further, Clarence’s discovery that “nothing could be more absurd than [his] scheme of educating a woman in solitude to make her fit for society” (445) follows the path of experimental learning recommended by all three of Edgeworth’s texts: after observing the intellectual capacities and personalities of Belinda, Virginia, the Delacours, and the Percivals, applying the guidance and perspectives of Dr. X and Mr. Percival to what he observes, and correlating all of this with his experiences in public and private
social gatherings, Clarence reasons that Virginia is unable to create or share domestic harmony with him. She would “merely be his pupil or his plaything,” while Belinda is “his equal” (358). In other words, Edgeworth agrees with Wollstonecraft that a child-bride is an encumbrance, not a helpmate, and a romantically inclined child-bride who cannot control her impulses is a destructive, not a constructive force within one’s household (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 76).

Virginia’s potential for domestic chaos is foreshadowed by Mr. Percival, who further clarifies his definition of feminine delicacy in conversation with Belinda. Seeking personal advice, she demurely asks if “a woman” should discourage the attentions of a second lover after being reasonably “convinced that she ought not to indulge a first love,” to which Mr. Percival responds,

> delicacy, like all other virtues, must be judged by the test of utility. We should run into romance, and error, and misery, if we did not constantly refer to this standard. . . . The woman who marries one man, and loves another, who, in spite of all that an amiable and estimable husband can do to win her confidence and affection, nourishes in secret a fatal prepossession for her first love, may perhaps, by the eloquence of a fine writer, be made an interesting heroine, but would any man of sense or feeling choose to be troubled with such a wife? (241)

This false notion of delicacy, “belief in the unextinguishable nature of first flame” (241), as Mr. Percival puts it, results in marital and social suicide. It is utterly futile; hence it must be discarded and replaced with an ideology of delicacy that nurtures and protects the personal and social welfare of others. The wife whose “smiles of apparent joy [are]
the efforts of a suffering martyr” (241) is merely performing femininity, like Lady Delacour; the wife who “not only seems but is happy” (241-242), like Lady Anne Percival, is admired for her utility in the household.

In a chapter appropriately entitled “Domestic Happiness,” Edgeworth describes the Percival household and its inhabitants, which Douthwaite asserts “represents the ideal of rational domesticity . . . replicat[ing] the central dicta of *Practical Education*” (44). Atkinson and Atkinson agree, calling the Percivals “articulate spokespersons for the rational morality found in the educational works of the Edgeworths” (98). Here, Clarence and Belinda witness both husband and wife equally engaged in the useful domestic occupation of jointly educating their children: “Without force, or any factitious excitements, the taste for knowledge, and the habits of application, were induced by example, and confirmed by sympathy” (203). However, the Percival household is not entirely ideal, and I believe it is not intended to be taken for an perfect model of domestic bliss, just as Belinda is not intended to be the ideal model of femininity.

Because Belinda and the Percivals are very human in their fallibility—for example, although Mr. Vincent is a compulsive gambler, they are all deceived by his stolid appearance—they serve as highly realistic best-practices models, as ideal as humans can realistically hope to be. Edgeworth challenges the reader to replicate the Percival domestic and pedagogical experiments but to allow for human error and unforeseen variances during the experiment:

Those who unfortunately have never enjoyed domestic happiness . . . will perhaps suppose the picture to be visionary and romantic; many others . . . will feel that it is drawn from truth and real life. . . .
Everybody must ultimately judge of what makes them happy, from the comparison of their own feelings in different situations. Belinda was convinced by this comparison, that domestic life was that which could alone make her really and permanently happy. (204)

Positioned as the reader’s surrogate in the text, Belinda, the unwavering “stick or stone,” continually points the way toward what Edgeworth posits as the logical conclusion of the text: individuated domestic harmony awaits men and women who develop and strengthen their innate intellectual gifts by applying reason to their observations of others and reflections upon their own experiences in public and private settings. The result of such a process is an authentic self-identity, natural to oneself and, if properly advertised, inestimably valuable in a marriage market overstocked with inauthentic, cheap imitations.

Edgeworth offers the best possible marital relationship through the observations of Belinda, who “perceived that between Mr. Percival and Lady Anne there was a union of interests, occupations, taste, and affection” (203). Again, Belinda’s perception of domestic harmony matches the desires of Emma Courtney and Maria, and, as Kathryn Kirkpatrick declares, “The Percivals . . . are clearly an illustration of Wollstonecraft’s enlightened, rational marriage” (77). Edgeworth thus presents a viable model of intellectual equality without total sexual liberty, which Hays and Wollstonecraft insist cannot exist. Based on her own personal experience, Edgeworth asserts that women can lead intellectually stimulating lives without sacrificing their femininity, and she challenges them to do so.

Clearly enough, Edgeworth urges women to restrict their efforts to the private sphere and to reject radical demands for complete equality between the sexes in order to
achieve the goal of intellectual equality. The narrator clarifies the social position of Lady Anne, saying she had, without any pedantry or ostentation, much accurate knowledge and a taste for literature, which made her the chosen companion of her husband’s understanding, as well of his heart. He was not obliged to reserve his conversations for friends of his own sex, nor was he forced to seclude himself in the pursuit of any branch of knowledge; the partner of his warmest affections was also the partner of his most serious occupations; and her sympathy and approbation, and the daily sense of her success in the education of their children, inspired him with a degree of happy social energy. (204)

Lady Anne thus fits the conduct book standard for femininity defended by the second correspondent in *Letters for Literary Ladies*, who concludes:

Dr. Gregory . . . and Lord Littleton [sic], have, in the language of affection, poetry, and truth, described the pleasures which men of science and literature enjoy in an union with women who can sympathize in all their thoughts and feelings, who can converse with them as equals, and live with them as friends; who can assist them in the important and delightful duty of educating their children; who can make their family their most agreeable society, and their home the attractive center of happiness. 38 (114)

*Practical Education* shows parents how to educate their daughters to meet this feminine standard, and *Belinda* presents the standard directly to England’s daughters.
Lady Anne’s intellectual pursuits are thoroughly homebound, are not for show, and are primarily not for her own benefit but for that of others, most notably for her husband’s. The education of her children seems an incidental benefit to Lady Anne’s prime function as motivator of her husband’s benevolence; and we see Lady Anne not from Belinda’s feminine perspective but from Mr. Percival’s just as we enjoy Lord Delacour’s vision of the partially reformed Lady Delacour and the model Belinda. Unlike Lord Delacour, however, who merely perceives his self-importance in his house, Mr. Percival knows he is king of his own castle by virtue of mutual consent with Lady Anne. The Percivals thus approach perfection in their rational domesticity, but they anticipate human error and ensure contentment by readily complying with patriarchal primacy. Belinda’s complacency, which many critics now consider a fault, is Edgeworth’s coping mechanism for the sake of establishing peace between the sexes in an imperfect world.

Belinda’s final chapter, “The Denouement,” is appropriately directed by Lady Delacour, who is no longer merely an actor, but a doer, although still an imperfect being. The fact that she considers herself to be “won, not tamed!” by Belinda’s efforts to restore her to reason and her husband’s gratitude (296) reiterates Edgeworth’s concession to human frailty and to the unique intellectual capabilities, education, and experience of human beings. The text comes full circle when Lady Delacour discovers the true state of Virginia’s heart and mind and dissolves the wall of delicacy between Clarence and Belinda, once again turning tragedy to comedy. Thus Lady Delacour, not Belinda, delivers the moral of the tale, since she has made the most complete reformation and effects the resolution of the text’s core conflict between authentic and artificial feminine identities. The *tableaux vivant* she stages, with each family displayed as proper,
harmonious units, is the final demonstration of virtue for the reader’s consideration. In
Belinda, Edgeworth argues for relatively minor changes within the extant patriarchy and
bolsters its authority by providing women with a means of actively engaging themselves
within it. By rejecting commercial, theatrical, radical, and romantic ideals of femininity
and by rationally crafting an authentic identity from their actual experiences, women can
achieve intellectual equality with men and be content, so long as they sacrifice total
sexual liberation for the sake of domestic peace.
Chapter 3

Humanizing Ideal Women’s Education in Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage*

For illustrations of the long-eighteenth century’s conduct-book model of ideal femininity, many scholars turn to Frances Burney, Jane Austen, and, to a lesser extent, Maria Edgeworth, all of whom are popular subjects of feminist literary studies and rallying points for literary canon reformation. Susan Ferrier’s novels have yet to attract much notice, despite the fact that *Marriage* (1818), *The Inheritance* (1824), and *Destiny* (1831) all met with immediate and long-lasting critical and commercial success. Multiple editions of each were printed throughout the nineteenth century, most notably within Bentley’s *Standard Novels* in 1852 and 1881. *Marriage*, in particular, was only sporadically out of popular and academic print in the twentieth century, and the Oxford University Press printed its World’s Classics edition of the novel for the fifth time in 2001. Ferrier has suffered in comparison to Burney, Austen, and Edgeworth, but Mary Douglas, the heroine of *Marriage*, is perhaps the best example of a conduct-book model of femininity found in works of this period, specifically that of fellow Scot James Fordyce’s ideal woman as described in his *Sermons to Young Women* (1766). Fordyce contends, and Ferrier agrees, that women are best educated by following the example of a truly Christian mother, whose public and private acts conform to a “spirit of Christian sobriety” (Fordyce 196) that rejects affectation, hypocrisy, and idleness and proffers genuine benevolence, humility, and above all sympathy as ideal feminine characteristics. However, Ferrier questions the viability of Fordyce’s ideal Christian woman and posits a more human than godly model of femininity, discarding antiquated ideals of domestic economy while insisting on women’s intelligence and capacity for self-determination.
She also argues that in order to fulfill their divinely ordained and hence innate feminine duties (i.e., caring for their families and educating the young) and achieve domestic harmony, women must actively avoid the marriage market, reject parental pressure by taking personal responsibility for their marital decisions, and screen potential mates for suitability. Ferrier does not offer much hope, however, that women can entirely and openly employ their intellectual gifts while fulfilling their familial duties.

Ferrier’s inability to attract post-modern readers and scholars is attributed separately and in combination to her overt didacticism, stolid religiosity, and dated subjects and tropes, but the same critiques have been made of Burney, Austen, and Edgeworth without altogether dismissing their talents. Ferrier is also described as a victim of bad timing. Scholars of her work often maintain that her career was in one way assisted and in another way hampered, ironically, by the supposed superior skills of her contemporaries Austen, Edgeworth, and Sir Walter Scott (all of whose works are mentioned in her correspondence), and builders of the literary canon deemed Ferrier’s works inferior to those of Charles Dickens and Charlotte Brontë, who followed her with similar themes written in supposedly better prose evincing tighter form and more imaginative literary techniques. Such critiques are certainly valid, but perhaps they are more indicative of our desire to resurrect only those authors who speak to our progressive notions of femininity and feminism, which often distort our judgment of what sort of literature is worth reviving, regardless of the works’ original impact on their readers. Again ironically, the white, bourgeois Ferrier has apparently become a victim of what bell hooks refers to as the restrictive feminism of twentieth-century, bourgeois, white women that considers only its own secular and largely egocentric feminist discourse valid.
and dismisses or silences dissent (8). For endowing her feminism with a Christian ethos that values self-abnegation and a life of service within one’s home and without—the antithesis to second-wave feminists demands for sexual equality in all aspects of public and private life—Ferrier seems not progressive enough in comparison with Burney, Austen, and Edgeworth, whose heroines frequently exhibit independent spirits at home and abroad.

So little scholarship exists on Ferrier or her novels that the critical tradition can be quickly summarized here. Ferrier’s biographer, Aline Grant, established a general tone of criticism that until recently has remained unchallenged. Qualifying her less-than-enthusiastic opinion of *Marriage* with a “when in Rome”—like caveat, Grant blames the conventions of Ferrier’s era for the novel’s frequent “dull compound[s] of moralizing, piety, and sensibility” (107). Nelson S. Bushnell considers Ferrier a somewhat noteworthy, liminal figure in the development of the novel of manners, saying *Marriage* “confirms and augments a current in prose fiction” begun by Burney and perfected by Austen, Edgeworth, and Scott (228). Wendy Craik sees Ferrier primarily as a talented Scottish caricaturist whose reputation would have fared better if “Sir Walter Scott had stuck to poetry” and if “no critic of her had ever heard of Jane Austen” (322). Vineta Colby, for whom *Marriage* is both a work of domestic realism and an education novel, argues that Ferrier was not always successful in balancing “didacticism and readability” (104). Ferrier’s worldview, Francis Russell Hart argues, “is severely religious” (57) and “evocative of a particular time and place” (68), characteristics that do not always translate well into the post-modern world; and Herbert Foltinek calls Ferrier a realist, who is “indebted to the late eighteenth-century educational novel” (131) but whose “colorful
record of contemporary life” (134) is often marred by her “moral pedantry” (139). Mary Cullinan, Ferrier’s most recent biographer, credits William Blackwood’s desire to capitalize on “the throes of Waverly madness” (42) for the publication of Marriage—it was begun in 1809 but was not published until 1818, four years after Scott’s novel appeared—and ponders whether Ferrier would have had a career at all if her writing and publication had not been fortuitously delayed by her father’s chronic gout and by her own frequent headaches and recurrent ocular disorder.

Feminist scholars have either tried too hard to discover Ferrier’s rebellious spirit or they have found Ferrier frustratingly ambiguous about the nascent woman question. Nancy L. Paxton contradicts Ferrier’s overt conservatism and detects “covert feminism” (19) operating in Marriage; and both Mary Cullinan and Kathryn Kirkpatrick affirm, despite Ferrier’s provincial environment, that she did not live in a patriarchal vacuum. All three critics point out that Ferrier came of age during the Scottish Enlightenment and that Ferrier was exposed to its intellectual fruits through her father’s connection to the Duke of Argyll. Ferrier’s visits to the Duke’s Castle Inverary placed her among such luminaries as Henry Brougham, MP and Lord Chancellor; Robert Burns, who wrote an elegy for Ferrier’s sister Susan (Grant 14); Henry Mackenzie, author of The Man of Feeling (1771); and Matthew Lewis, author of The Monk (1796). Further, Cullinan claims that Ferrier was blessed by Edinburgh’s relatively permeable class structure and the Scottish fondness for eccentricity, both of which allowed Scottish women greater physical and intellectual freedom than English women encountered (107). Cullinan and Kirkpatrick, on the other hand, explicate a tentative but nevertheless overt feminism in Marriage that recalls the works of “politically outspoken women such as Mary Wollstonecraft”
(Cullinan 24), who call for women to develop a “sense of personal autonomy and authority” (Kirkpatrick x), but they surmise that Ferrier’s religious and filial piety dampened her rebellious embers.

Although Ferrier certainly adhered to a traditional feminine role by remaining in and directing her infirm widower father’s household, we must also consider, I believe, the complex nature of Ferrier’s seemingly “simple stay-at-home life” (*Memoir and Correspondence* vii). Cullinan asserts that what remains of Ferrier’s correspondence (she ordered that large portions be burned) evinces that both her “own inclinations” and “her filial obligations led her to [a] reclusive life” (34). Cullinan bases her assessment on Ferrier’s letter to her friend and collaborator Charlotte Clavering, in which Ferrier declines an invitation for a long visit.39 Ferrier assures Clavering that she has no “choice” but to remain at home, explaining,

> My father, I never see, save at meals, but then my company is just as indispensable as the tablecloth or chairs, or, in short, any other luxury which custom has converted into necessity. That he could live without me I make no doubt, so he could without a leg or an arm, but it would ill become me to deprive him of either; therefore, never even for a single day could I reconcile it to my duty or inclination to leave him. (*Memoir and Correspondence* 59-60)

This letter betrays Ferrier’s rationalization, not simply her inclination, to refuse Clavering’s invitation. Figuring herself as merely another piece of furniture in her father’s house
—her presence is not an absolute “necessity” but a “luxury” turned commonplace by “custom”—Ferrier fulfills her traditional filial duty, despite the obvious contradiction in her professing not to have a “choice” in the matter: she believes that her father does not need her services, but she chooses to stay with him. Justified and supported by a Christian ethos, but not necessarily because of it, Ferrier practices the self-sacrificial life of service prized by her Presbyterian family and neighbors and keeps her customary position at her father’s table. Although Ferrier questions blind obedience to custom in *Marriage*, the novel reflects and validates her life of self-sacrificial service through the examples of Alicia and Mary Douglas and Emily Courtland that I will soon illustrate.

Notwithstanding similarities between Ferrier and Burney or Ferrier and Scott, comparisons between Ferrier and Edgeworth are perhaps the most apt. Like Edgeworth, Ferrier’s home was also her workplace, where she exercised her intellect by creating fiction at will, eventually winning the approval and support of her father, James, her brother, John, who acted as her agent at Blackwood’s offices, her family, and her closest friends who were privy to her secret writing.40 However, considering what her grand nephew John Ferrier calls the general “feeling that there was about professional authorship a certain taint of Grub Street, a something of Bohemia and of uproarious and rather indecent publicity” (23), Ferrier made anonymity a condition of writing *Marriage* and of her subsequent publications. In a letter to Clavering, Ferrier writes, “let me entreat of you: if we engage in this undertaking, let it be kept a profound secret from every human being” (*Memoir and Correspondence* 77). Considering Lewis’s adverse reaction to Ferrier’s rumored novel writing, she was right to protect her reputation. As Cullinan reports, Lewis writes to Clavering’s aunt, Lady Charlotte Campbell, “I have an aversion,
a pity and contempt for all female scribblers” (45). By writing at home while attending to her father and publishing anonymously, Ferrier balanced her Christian duty of self-sacrificial service and her desire for self-expression at home while protecting her reputation from taking on a tint of blue. Moreover, Ferrier may not have agreed in toto with Fordyce, but she practiced what he preached—that “the female world” should not “abound with . . . Learned Ladies of any kind” (146), but that women’s chief role was to “teach the young idea how to shoot” (24). Ferrier tells Clavering that “the only good purpose of a book is to inculcate morality, and convey some lesson of instruction as well” (Memoir and Correspondence 75), and through Marriage the childless Ferrier fulfills this feminine duty of educating the young.

Mary Douglas, the heroine of Marriage, improves upon Ferrier’s happy domestic industry by bestowing her charity both at home and abroad and by marrying a suitable mate. She therefore exemplifies the ideal Christian woman as described by Fordyce but modified and made practical by Ferrier. Mary succeeds because she brandishes the pious and rational weapons provided by her habitually self-sacrificial and rigorously moral adoptive mother, Alicia Malcolm Douglas, against the always selfish and oftentimes irrational demands of her amoral and irreligious birth mother, Lady Juliana Courtland Douglas. Both of Mary’s mothers suffer the effects of poorly managed marriages, including financial hardship and a loss of social status: Alicia sacrifices love but submits to religious and filial duties by settling for Archibald Douglas, who is her social and intellectual inferior; Juliana rejects her religious and filial duties and her social status for the love of the younger Douglas brother, Henry, whose underdeveloped intellect matches her own. Without violating religious or filial piety, or overstepping the conventional
boundaries of feminine intellect and delicacy, Mary weds her spiritual and intellectual equal and is rewarded with a title and a castle. Most intriguingly, Mary manages her coup without once entering the marriage market, a pitfall that neither her natural nor her adoptive mother could entirely avoid. In *Marriage*, ostensibly a *bildungsroman* with a true heroine struggling to maintain an authentic feminine identity by observing others in her society, assimilating their virtuous habits, and rejecting their benign or vicious attempts to commodify her body, Mary succeeds precisely because she never fully enters the society she scrutinizes. She takes seemingly extraordinary measures to sequester herself within her domestic setting, briefly visiting several private and public places and sampling various social gatherings, almost exclusively among women, without making formal debut. In a sense, Mary increases her marital value by making herself a rare commodity in the marriage market.

Hitherto approached as a mere marker in the timeline of the English novels of education, manners, and/or domestic realism, Ferrier’s departure from eighteenth-century conventions has been overlooked. Burney’s, Edgeworth’s, and Austen’s heroines do not avoid entering or being placed in the marriage market (however briefly), thus implying that, for these authors, the marriage market is an unavoidable obstacle women must surmount in order to find suitable husbands. Ferrier contends that the marriage market, like her “simple stay-at-home life,” is a necessity only by custom. However, unlike women’s socially and religiously sanctioned self-sacrificing role in the home, their stalls in the marriage market should be abandoned, because marital commerce clashes with Christian charity, humility, and sympathy. Although Ferrier’s indebtedness to Burney, Edgeworth, and Austen is undeniable, Mary’s bypassing the marriage market is a step
toward the Victorian ethos of the ideal woman, particularly toward Dickens’s similar *modus operandi* of maintaining the purity of his ideal female characters by keeping them in the home, away or removed from schools, society, and markets, all of which are judged corrupting and destructive forces to marital and social harmony.

Paxton correctly asserts that Mary “resembles the passive ingenue who becomes a stock figure in Dickens and later Victorian fiction” (20) and that Alicia “anticipates sentimental heroines like the ‘angels in the house’” in the same novels (22). Yet Paxton misplaces the novel’s pedagogical basis and radicalizes a text that rationalizes and emphasizes Christian duty, not feminism, as a golden means to women’s self-determinism. Ferrier, Paxton contends, “condemns the popular Dr. Fordyce’s advice” (23) and Mary is “educated as if she were a boy” (23), “according to a very different pattern Rousseau described for his pupil, Sophia [sic],” like that of Émile (24). My reading of Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762), Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women*, and Ferrier’s *Marriage* suggests just the opposite. *Sermons to Young Women*, it is true, corresponds closely with large portions of *Émile*’s Book Five, entitled “Sophy, or Woman,” but it deviates in two important ways: first, Fordyce insists that scripture is the most appropriate source of women’s education (*Sermons to Young Women* 208), whereas Rousseau disputes the efficacy of religious instruction for women (*Émile* 407-412); second, Fordyce recommends that girls be reared upon scripture from an early age (*Sermons to Young Women* 211-212), while Rousseau believes that women’s religious instruction is best left to their husbands (*Émile* 430). While writing *Marriage*, Ferrier appears to have had in mind Fordyce’s sermons, which are mentioned three times in the novel, and her female characters mostly embody Fordyce’s examples and warnings.
Alastair McIntyre characterizes Fordyce as a preacher without a specific creed, saying, “it would be easier to prove that [Fordyce] belonged to no sect, than that he held the principles of any” (par. 1). Although Ferrier was a devout Presbyterian, she most likely was drawn to what McIntyre calls Fordyce’s “true spirit of Christian philanthropy” (par. 7) that resonates throughout *Marriage*, but she satirizes the unrealistic and outdated ideals in the sermons.

For example, Ferrier consistently lauds Alicia and Mary Douglas for their “true Christian spirit[s]” (*Marriage* 39) and their useful interactions with and genuine sympathy for the underprivileged, infirm, or bereft and ridicules the Douglas aunts Grizzy, Jacky, and Nicky for their homebound devotion to outmoded housekeeping skills and parsimony. As Fordyce would have her do (*Sermons to Young Women* 156-157), Alicia tames the wilderness of her highland home by training the local youth to cultivate and share in the proceeds of her gardens (*Marriage* 97-98), thereby increasing the value of the Douglas family’s property without decreasing the family’s funds and keeping the children’s idle hands out of, so to speak, the devil’s workshop. Corresponding to Fordyce’s opinion that “[w]ith the character of a Christian woman nothing, methinks, can better correspond than a propensity to melt into affectionate sorrow” (*Sermons to Young Women* 133), Mary’s “generous heart [is] ever open to the overflowings of the wounded spirit” (*Marriage* 291), which feeds her desire to shun the excesses of idle society: she “sacrifices” what was to be her debut ball in order to soothe “the agitated spirits of her venerable friend,” the blind Mrs. Lennox (294). Alicia and Mary thus, according to Fordyce’s model, earnestly enact virtuous womanly duties and channel their sympathies in a manner that proves spiritually beneficial both to themselves and others. On the other
hand, the Douglas aunts also follow Fordyce’s tenets, especially his belief that women clothe their families with homespun fabrics for the sake of domestic economy (Sermons to Young Women 155-156), but the narrator interprets such works as being properly “the portion of the poor” and not the “employment of the affluent” that improperly “kept bread out of the mouths” of “half the poor women in the parish” (Marriage 40). While Ferrier agrees that charity begins at home in many ways, she argues that extending charity beyond the home is more praiseworthy. Considering that Fordyce’s ideal woman “rises before break of day” and “does not always conclude her work with the day, but often continues it through much of the night” (Sermons to Young Women 156-157), Ferrier’s modification of Fordyce’s ideal woman may have been thought slightly radical but indeed welcome to many of her contemporaries.

In Marriage the Douglas aunts thrice press Fordyce’s sermons on women as an infallible primer for proper womanhood instead of referring to the original source of those sermons, the Bible. Ferrier satirizes their interpretation of Fordyce’s sermons, in which they focus on the portions that suit their ideals and customs and ignore those passages that do not, just as many Biblical scholars do today. Thus Paxton believes that Ferrier attacks Fordyce, when Ferrier is really pointing out the absurdity of the Douglas sisters, relics of an ignorant past, who also place faith in the medical quackery of Lady Maclaughlan, believe in the extrasensory powers of the Scottish “second-sight” (Marriage 113), and profess the remarkable, beauty-enhancing qualities of the “Girmachgowl collar,” a cage-like device worn by generations of Douglas women in order to train their bodies to retain an erect posture (163). Yet the Douglas sisters are forgiven their eccentricities, since Mary judges their “feelings, however troublesome,
were better than no feelings at all” (273) and therefore superior to her natural mother’s selfishness and her twin sister’s “perfect indifference” (278).

Fordyce bases *Sermons to Young Women* on the “Virtuous Woman” of Proverbs 31:10-31 (as I discussed in the introduction to this study) and on St. Paul’s thoughts on women’s roles both in the Christian church and at home as outlined in 1 Timothy 2:8-10. The passages are (in)famous for their ubiquity in high and low literature composed over the centuries for the edification of western women, especially texts composed by conservative groups wishing to preserve patriarchal authority. Fordyce provides the text: “I will that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness, and sobriety; not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becomes women professing godliness) with good works” (3). Fordyce transforms this rather brief passage on St. Paul’s edict against costly, fashionable adornment into a 220-page code of feminine behavior covering nearly every aspect of women’s lives. Fordyce, like many others over the centuries, interprets Paul’s statement, which appears as personal opinion (i.e. “I [Paul] will”) in his biblical translation, as divine revelation (i.e. “the Lord commanded”). Women’s worth, for Fordyce and for most Presbyterians like Ferrier, is displayed in their reputations for good works, not in their physical appearance, especially not when enhanced by the trappings of fashion and wealth. In *Marriage*, Ferrier recapitulates the primacy of good works for assessing women’s worth from Fordyce’s criteria.

In *Marriage*, Ferrier also echoes Fordyce’s condemnation of parents “selling their sons and daughters into marriage” while intending to “strike the matrimonial bargain” (108-109), and she exposes the myriad vices created by the marriage market that she
believes increase in absurdity and destructive force with each succeeding generation. She advises women to oppose parental pressure to marry for wealth and to take personal responsibility for what was then the most important decision they could make, namely whom to marry. Abuse of parental authority and mercenary marriages are, for Ferrier, immoral and reprehensible acts. She begins her attack on the marriage market at the very start of the novel with a brutally frank discussion of marital commerce between the Earl of Courtland and his daughter, Juliana, in which the earl decrees that she shall marry the suitor of his choice for “the purpose for which matrimony was ordained amongst people of birth—that is, for the aggrandizement of her family, the extending of political influence—for becoming, in short, the depository of their mutual interest” (2). Volume I focuses on the novel’s first generation of marriageable women, Juliana and Alicia, each of whom “has thrown herself away on a man unworthy of her,” as Fordyce would describe them (12), and on the proper observance of marital and maternal duty, especially the supremacy of maternal influence over hereditary behavioral traits. Volume II shifts the reader’s attention to filial duty as illustrated in the rearing, or apparent lack thereof, of the next generation of Courtland and Douglas women, namely Juliana’s twins, Mary and Adelaide Douglas, and their cousin, Emily Courtland. The final volume traces the courses of the second generation’s nurtured or neglected native intellects and follows the three daughters through courtship and marriage. Ferrier argues strongly that nature’s intellectual and spiritual gifts must be enhanced by maternal nurturing and religious instruction, since only Mary, who receives dutiful maternal care, succeeds in making a suitable match of mutual affection.
Marriage, Colby argues, “might more accurately have been entitled ‘Education,’ for its theme is the effect of childhood conditioning and training upon character” (102), but this interpretation of the text, I think, is inaccurate because none of the Courtland, Douglas, or Malcolm women truly receives an education at all, even by the standards of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when pedagogues like Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Hannah More, and Priscilla Wakefield called for rational and vocational training for the future mothers of England.45 None of these authors called for total educational equality between the sexes, but all were distressed by the prevailing methods of female education that overemphasized dress, musicianship, and foreign languages and de-emphasized intellectual development—by which, they asserted, women would rationally determine for themselves the necessity of fulfilling their traditional domestic roles. In a sense, Ferrier updates Fordyce’s advice on women’s education in Marriage, but she does not offer a distinct system of her own.

Fordyce speaks of developing the “culture of [women’s] minds” (152), referring to the “female accomplishments,” which he separates into “three classes, domestic, elegant, and intellectual,” as essential qualities toward “maintaining the sobriety enjoined by our Apostle,” St. Paul (155). Sobriety, for Fordyce, is both the “avoidance of excess or extravagance” (OED def. 2) and “staidness, gravity, seriousness, soundness or saneness of judgement” (OED def. 3). Ferrier’s mothers and daughters can be assessed as failed and successful women in one or more of Fordyce’s classes, since each displays either too much mastery in one or two of these areas, lacks all three, or strikes a moderate balance between the three and achieves sobriety. The narrator describes Juliana:
Educated for the sole purpose of forming a brilliant establishment, of catching the eye, and captivating the senses, the cultivation of her mind, or the correction of her temper, had formed no part of the system by which that aim was to be accomplished. Under the auspices of a fashionable mother, and an obsequious governess, the froward petulance of childhood, fostered and strengthened by indulgence and submission, had gradually ripened into that selfishness and caprice which . . . formed the prominent features of her character.46 (4-5)

Hints scattered throughout the narrative reveal that Juliana speaks French and Italian, and she may play a musical instrument. These talents are shown to be utterly useless in the Scottish Highlands, however, and Juliana never actually plays music, although she asks for a harp at Glenfern Castle, where there is none (23), and claims that Alicia’s harpsichord is not tuned for proper playing (98). The latter excuse may indicate that her musical skills are, in fact, nonexistent. The talents of this “high-bred beauty” (13) are unappreciated, or she is deficient in what Fordyce calls “the elegant accomplishments” (155), and the narrator tells us that she lacks the intellectual capacities to put them to good use in any case. Juliana is therefore doubly inferior in elegant accomplishments: she apparently can neither actually perform nor even mimic some of what she has been taught.

Also a stranger to what Fordyce calls “domestic accomplishments,” Juliana prompts Laird Douglas’s ire by holding herself “above fulfilling those duties, which he had ever considered the chief end for which woman was created,” to “nurse her bairns, make their clothes, and manage her house” (69). She is “in the most blissful state of
ignorance respecting the value of pounds, shillings, and pence” (125), and prefers the company of her dogs to that of her children (120). Fordyce’s “intellectual accomplishments” are equally foreign to Juliana, who spurns his *Sermons to Young Women* (*Marriage* 60) and is uninterested in both Lady Maclauglan’s medical library and what her ladyship calls the only novels “worth a Christian’s reading,” Tobias Smollet’s translation of *Gil Blas* (1748) and Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1747-1748), the latter of which Fordyce praises highly (*Sermons to Young Women* 105-106). Juliana rejects all of these works because they do not conform to the French and German romances that she finds appealing (*Marriage* 109). Deficient in all three of Fordyce’s classes of accomplishments, Juliana is only partially a woman, a “spoilt child” (*Marriage* 53) minimally capable of performing a few useless ornamental feminine accomplishments without practicing more useful ones, like marital and maternal affection, private and public charity, child rearing, and frugality. Juliana’s failings call to mind Wollstonecraft’s woman in a “state of degradation” (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 119), and Ferrier evidentially was familiar with *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, although she never mentions the polemic or its author in her novel.

Juliana is the antithesis of Fordyce’s ideal woman, who devotes all of her efforts to increasing the household stores, caring for her family, and bestowing benevolence at home and abroad (*Sermons to Young Women* 155-161). Fordyce warns that some men “would like a sprightly companion in marriage, but none a dissipated one” (101), and he complains that he often sees women “disfigured by affectation and caprice” (152) with perverted intellects and tainted souls who pass those flaws on to their own daughters (112). Through Alicia, Ferrier applies Fordyce’s standards to Juliana and recapitulates the
cleric’s fears for future generations of potentially lost souls. Patiently listening to her sister-in-law’s complaints, Alicia thinks,

Oh, what an awful responsibility do those parents incur . . . who thus neglect or corrupt the noble deposit of an immortal soul! . . . This unfortunate will herself become a mother, yet wholly ignorant of the duties, incapable of the self-denial of that sacred office, she will bring into the world creatures to whom she can only transmit her errors and her weaknesses! (Marriage 99)

Ferrier’s emphasis on maternal duties and self-sacrifice echoes Fordyce’s doctrine that women “were manifestly intended to be mothers and formers of a rational and immortal offspring” and providers of “a certain grace and embellishment over human life” (Sermons to Young Women 151-152), qualities which Juliana simply does not possess. She does, however, resemble Rousseau’s ideal woman, who “is made specially for man’s delight” (Émile 385); and Wollstonecraft would call Juliana “a fanciful half-being—one of Rousseau’s wild chimeras” (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 92). At least regarding women’s proper marital and maternal roles, Ferrier is in agreement with Fordyce, not Rousseau. In this instance, moreover, Ferrier anticipates Victorian ideologies of maternal duty toward succeeding generations. For example, in The Women of England (1838), Sarah Stickney Ellis beatifies maternity as a “sacred duty of training up the young,” in which mothers “stem the desolating tide which seems to threaten [her society’s] domestic peace” (106). Yet Ferrier’s primary concern does not involve the earthly benefits of women fulfilling their social duties, but the preservation of women’s own immortal souls and those of their children.
Alicia occupies the high moral ground in the novel as this divinely inspired maternal ideal. She is “gifted by nature with a warm affectionate heart and a calm imagination” into which her governess “instilled . . . a deep and strong sense of religion” that “safely guided her through the most trying vicissitudes” (*Marriage* 74). Alicia’s maternal impulses spring from nature, but religious instruction forms those impulses into conduits toward eternal life. No other course of study for Alicia is mentioned, but her perfect spoken English and unerring sensibility, which for Ferrier is more a matter of good taste than of decorum, may be the residual effects of being raised with her privately tutored cousin Sir Edmund Audley (75). Half-Scotch by birth, orphaned, and raised in England by her aunt Lady Audley, Alicia exhibits an “natural open manner,” the narrator tells us, that “blend[s] the frankness of the Scotch with the polished reserve of the English woman” (75), and her antiquated Scottish aunts deem her “a most, superior woman, though she has rather too many English prejudices” (17). Alicia marries Archibald because she “felt less repugnance towards him than to any other of her suitors” (91), and she thus embodies Fordyce’s under-appreciated, “unequally yoked” woman, of whom he asks,

> how much are they themselves objects of compassion, thus condemned to drag a wretched life with beings, on whom all their endeavors to delight are lost! How sensibly must such a situation pain a delicate and ingenuous mind! What can reconcile her to it, but the strongest principles of religion? (*Sermons to Young Women* 21-22)

Alicia’s “Christian spirit” (*Marriage* 39) and “eternal constancy” allows her to succeed, we are told, in “mak[ing] up her mind to the lot which had devolved to her” and to “bring
it in to such a frame of cheerfulness as should enable her to contribute to her husband’s happiness” (92). While Rousseau advises women to resort to coquetry and deceit to make their subservience bearable (Émile 393), Fordyce offers religiously supported uxorial duty as a panacea for feminine ills, and on this point Ferrier mostly agrees with Fordyce.

Juliana’s disastrous elopement and Alicia’s lackluster marriage demonstrate their antipodal positions in the text as, respectively, selfish and self-sacrificial women. Where Juliana rejects parental authority entirely and selfishly suits herself, Alicia selflessly accepts maternal authority and sacrifices herself and/or her inclinations (Ferrier is not specific on this point) in order to save her lover from his “mother’s malediction” (Marriage 87). Juliana thwarts her father’s best effort to make her a vehicle for inheritance by eloping to Gretna Green with Henry, but she experiences “envy, anger, and repentance” when she reads of the new duchess’s bridal equipage, which could have been hers (110). Alicia, on the other hand, submits to Lady Audley’s will, releases her cousin from his promise to marry her, and places herself on the marriage market “where opportunity is not wanting,” she reasons, in order to “finish the sacrifice” (91) of her forbidden love. Their stories are hardly the stuff of romance, and neither is happily married: Juliana regrets losing her opportunity to aggrandize her own life through a noble union, and Alicia “diligently strove not only to contrive to exist, but to be extremely contented with existence” (72). Ferrier thus suggests that neither the extreme of selfishness nor self-sacrifice guarantees marital happiness, although Alicia is rewarded with a suitable husband and contentment for her submission, whereas Juliana is punished for her rebellion when her marriage disintegrates for lack of love and money. Further, Juliana relinquishes responsibility for her choice by separating from her husband and
fleeing to her brother’s protection, while Alicia takes full responsibility for her choice and willfully makes the best of her situation.

In order to demonstrate the supreme good of a sober mother’s useful instruction over the evil of an insipid one’s destructive influence, Ferrier sets up another oppositional pairing in Juliana’s twin daughters, Adelaide and Mary, and separates them soon after birth, placing Adelaide with Juliana and Mary with Alicia. Ferrier does not, however, present a simple dichotomy of good versus poor nurturing. She complicates the issue by exposing Emily, the twins’ cousin, to both Juliana’s and Alicia’s maternal influences in order to show, in part, that “one’s character is not entirely in the hands of one’s teachers,” as Cullinan argues (62). Emily’s childhood is spent in Juliana’s selfish shadow, but at age eighteen Emily is introduced to Alicia’s self-sacrificial influence by observing Mary’s behavior. But Emily, I believe, presents more than just a contradiction of assigning one’s teachers the blame for one’s faults, however. Together, Emily and Mary debate the effects and defects of their extreme maternal models and modify their behavior and martial expectations accordingly. By moving beyond Juliana’s model and adapting some of Alicia’s standards, Emily reinforces Ferrier’s central challenge to women to take responsibility for themselves and to determine their own marital fates.

Emily is somewhat fortunate in not having much of Juliana’s influence to overcome in the first place, since neither she nor Adelaide receive instruction from Juliana. In fact, they are taught very little. At an unspecified time during Adelaide’s and Emily’s childhood, Juliana decides to educate the girls herself and orders “modern treatises on the subject of education,” none of which she ever opens. Thus she is ignorant of the pedagogues’ unanimous antipathy to foreign governesses (Marriage 185). 48 She
abandons her resolution after three days and hires an Italian governess, a “bigoted Catholic” who sings, and a French governess, an “esprit fort” who dances (186). Even worse, the Bible does not appear in Juliana’s library, and Juliana is herself “ignorant as the Hottentot or Hindoo” about scripture and catechism (185), a lack of knowledge which disqualifies her as a teacher in both Fordyce’s and Ferrier’s estimation. While their musical skills are developed, Adelaide’s and Emily’s educations omit religious and civil morality. They are thus prepared to perform artistically but not to practice the feminine qualities that Fordyce and Ferrier prize most: benevolence, sympathy, and familial affection.

Both Adelaide, whose femininity and intellect remain entirely undeveloped, and Emily, whose natural resources are underdeveloped and undirected, are only half-women, like Juliana. The cousins’ pre-marital training is superficial and artificial, since to “implant principles of religion and virtue into [their] mind[s] was not within the compass” of Juliana’s own (186). Determined not to let either girl “marry for love” as she claims to have done, Juliana “expatiate[s] on the never ending joys that attend on wealth and titles, jewels and equipages” (186). Using a horticultural metaphor, the narrator condemns Adelaide, whose “surface was covered by flowers,” but whose “soil,” it is implied, is barren (187). Ferrier thus implies that mothers who are inattentive to their children’s spiritual and intellectual development at best improperly cultivate—and at worst contaminate—their natural resources and their souls. Emily undergoes “exactly the same process” of miseducation that her cousin endured, but empowered by “a naturally high spirit,” she “resists the sophistry of her governesses and the solecisms of her aunt” and remains “in spite of both precept and example . . . insupportably natural and sincere”;
but Emily is a wild child, whose “notions of right and wrong [are] too crude” to foster self-control (Marriage 187). Without proper cultivation, Emily’s nature remains corrupt, and despite Mary’s influence, which provides some direction to cultivate and refine Emily’s spirit and intellect, Emily’s cynicism precludes her total reformation. Ferrier therefore illustrates her belief that religious instruction must begin in infancy if it is to take root and flourish.

Predictably, Adelaide and Emily fail to choose suitable husbands. Indeed Adelaide exceeds her mother’s matrimonial folly by marrying the Duke of Altamont in order to satisfy “the craving passions of [her] perverted mind” and, she hopes, to spite Mary, who rebuffs the Duke’s attentions (316). Altamont presages Dickens’s Paul Dombey in a more benign form. Like Dombey, Altamont willfully marries an ornament for his house—he believes Adelaide would “look well as Duchess of Altamont”—and becomes preoccupied with the “public display of conjugal duty” (429). Yet the duke’s preference to organize grand dinners to the extent of deciding himself upon the menu and plate—tasks traditionally allotted to the lady of the house—feminizes him and lessens the impact of his misogyny. He therefore presents a rather benign example of a marriage-market consumer. Nonetheless, the marriage fails when Adelaide elopes with her cousin Edward, and the blame lies not only on Adelaide’s amoral upbringing, uncultivated intellect, and selfishness, but also on “Rousseau and Goethe,” promoters of “French and German sentiments” whose books aid the couple in transforming “the purest of all earthly emotions” into a “criminal passion” (432). Although La Nouvelle Heloise (1759), not Émile, is most likely the French culprit in this passage, Ferrier’s attack upon its dangerous content is nevertheless another indicator that she would not have modeled her
heroine on Rousseau’s works. The implied joint condemnation of French and German romances in the passage, coupled with the narrator’s description of the morally and religiously corrupt French and Italian governesses, bespeaks a general suspicion of foreigners that debars any but an Anglican feminine ideal in *Marriage*.

Adelaide’s failed marriage illustrates Ferrier’s belief that women bear chief responsibility for making their own informed marital choices, despite their active participation in or rejection of the marriage market. In other words, the marriage market may be responsible for many unhappy marriages, but failing to assess both one’s own character and that of one’s intended spouse is a fatal error no matter how one’s match is made. Ferrier’s sentiment echoes that of Fordyce, who also places the responsibility for making a suitable match squarely on the shoulders of eligible bachelorettes, asking them, “Is it not your business to inquire into the character of the man that professes an attachment? Or is character nothing?” (95). While Fordyce focuses on the danger of courting and marrying men with evil intentions, his question is just as pertinent in matters of suitability, as Ferrier suggests when Juliana and Henry quickly discover each others’ baser qualities (6) and Adelaide fails to overcome the Duke’s antipathy to balls and social calls (428). Juliana’s elopement may have allowed her to escape the marriage market, but she errs in shirking her responsibility to learn the character of her intended spouse and to assess her own needs, as mercenary as they are. Adelaide “revers[es] the fate of her mother” but redoubles Juliana’s selfishness, compounding her own error by willfully participating in the marriage market and by marrying Altamont “while her affections were bestowed on another,” condemned by Ferrier as a type of pre-marital, emotional adultery (367). Juliana may gather some sympathy from readers by following her heart
into error, but Adelaide’s entirely commercial marital bargain and inconstancy is wholly unsympathetic.

Careful consideration of one’s potential mate does not ensure marital bliss in *Marriage*, however, as the well-reasoned choices of Alicia and Emily demonstrate. Despite Alicia’s and Emily’s apparent benevolence, humility, and sympathy, Ferrier argues that forms of self-sacrifice that nullified one’s God-given talents are not worth emulating. Emily, in particular, presents a challenge to scholars, inasmuch as among the women in the text she comes closest to being a feminist, yet she is just as incapable of making a suitable match as is the novel’s most submissive woman, Alicia, and is seemingly punished for openly displaying her intellectual gifts. The contradictory messages that Ferrier delivers through Emily’s mouth often frustrate readers, like Paxton, who glimpse radical Wollstonecraftian sparks in Emily’s satirical speeches only to see them squelched by Ferrier’s staunch conservatism. Emily seems to favor Wollstonecraft’s ideal of intellectual equality among the sexes, but she immediately backs away from that ideal. For instance, when she imagines that she and her ideal husband “shall have a more equitable division” of household responsibilities, she adds, “man is a reasonable being, he shall know and own that woman is so too—sometimes” (385), implying that women, unlike men, are not always rational beings. Emily capitulates to customary checks on the feminine intellect, much in the way that Ferrier expresses herself and teaches the young through her novel in secret and initially publishes anonymously.

Cullinan’s conjecture that Emily “most closely resembles Susan Ferrier’s private correspondence and reflects the author’s own creed—unspoken, but obvious throughout her writings” (62) is an accurate assessment, especially given that Emily often conjures
galleries of absurd or feminine stereotypes, which she critiques, much as Ferrier does in her letters (*Memoir and Correspondence* 49) and in peopling her novel with characters modeled upon her acquaintance. Nevertheless, as Cullinan and others point out, Emily is obviously not the heroine of the text, and her marriage is appropriately as imperfect as she is. We might, I’ll add, consider Emily’s story as Ferrier’s vision of what she would have done, or what she may have been forced to do, had she had the opportunity to marry. There is only one mention of a suitor of any type in Ferrier’s extant correspondence, and its rather tongue-in-cheek tone makes its veracity suspect (*Memoir and Correspondence* 63-64). Although Emily’s choice of Edward Douglas, the twins’ brother, may disappoint readers who want her to make a more suitable match—after all, the moral of the tale is the ideal of marital suitability—it nevertheless fulfills Ferrier’s recommendations for women to stay out of the marriage market, to take personal responsibility for that choice, and to select one’s husband after careful deliberation, regardless of parental or social pressures. Edward is, in a sense, a luxury for Emily: his customary presence makes it possible for her to avoid the marriage market and to make her own informed marital decision. At age six Emily declares “her intention of marrying her cousin” (*Marriage* 187) and later honors that intention, considering herself “quite as an old woman—at least as a married one” (357), thereby shielding herself from entertaining and/or courting other potential suitors. Emily admits she is “certainly cleverer than Edward,” but that his “faults are real, genuine, natural faults” with which she has been made “familiar from infancy” (443-444). More importantly, however, because Edward’s imperfections are preferable to the affectation she expects to find in the marriage market and because she has become accustomed to them, Emily determines
to settle for a less-than-ideal situation, much like Ferrier’s choice to remain at home in her customary filial position. Nevertheless, Emily sacrifices a portion of herself in order to marry. She claims that her marriage tames her into “a fond, faithful, rational, humble, meek-spirited wife,” who must “turn [her] head into a museum, hang up all [her] smart sayings . . . there to petrify as warnings to all pert misses” (465), clearly suggesting that Ferrier recognized marriage and the open expression of feminine intellect as potential pitfalls to women’s intellectual well being. Cullinan is probably justified in claiming that Ferrier chose not to have “serious romantic attachments in her life” (14), and Emily’s intellectual self-sacrifice may provide insight into why Ferrier chose to remain unmarried.

Emily also channels Ferrier’s dislike of “clever women,” despite the fact that one could argue that both Ferrier and Emily are themselves clever women. Both the narrator and Emily frequently attack clever women in *Marriage*, and they do so with such conviction and invective that Ferrier’s intention is unmistakable: clever women are, more often than not, incapable of fulfilling their divinely proscribed feminine duties, especially when their cleverness leads them to absurd extremes of behavior. Although there is no specific record of Ferrier’s education, Grant gathers from literary references in Ferrier’s correspondence and in her novels that the author “read widely in poetry, history, biography, travel, and moral philosophy,” including the works of Byron, French prose, and Italian poetry (114-115). In her various writings it is also apparent that Ferrier was familiar with novels, romances, educational treatises, conduct books, scripture, religious tracts, and published sermons, snippets of which appear as epigraphs before each chapter and within the body of *Marriage*. Certainly, Ferrier surpassed the norm in women’s
education, but as Cullinan asserts, it is “disconcerting to find Susan Ferrier, who so much
enjoyed intellectual activity herself, poking fun at women whose interests extended
beyond the domestic” (107). Likewise, despite Emily’s assertion that she “got the better
of her governesses” and rejected their lessons (Marriage 286), her conversation evinces
mastery of English and French, familiarity with aristocratic manners, customs, and
etiquette, and an impressive facility for common sense and satiric wit.

Far from evincing an outright antipathy to custom, however, Ferrier’s writings
display an antipathy to extremes of any sort, and in particular to avoiding one’s domestic
duties or obsessing over them. Ferrier is not, I believe, dissatisfied with women who
simply prefer intellectual pursuits to domestic ones; she wishes rather that women
balance their domestic duties with their intellectual desires, instead of living half-lives
where they are neither the domestic economists some claim to be nor the intellectual
amazons others believe themselves. The most substantial evidence for this argument is
Emily’s classification of clever women, beginning with an attack on Mrs. Downe Wright,
who has “acquired the character of being, Oh, odious thing! a clever woman!” (286). The
interjection of “Oh, odious thing!” hints at Ferrier’s satiric, if not sarcastic, view of
society’s antipathy for the feminine intellect, and Emily’s two categories of so-called
clever women clarify Ferrier’s position on the matter. Emily argues:

There are two descriptions of clever women, observe; the one is endowed
with corporeal cleverness—the other with mental; and I don’t know which
of the two is the greater nuisance to society; the one torments you with her
management—the other with her smart sayings; the one is forever rattling
her bunch of keys in your ears—the other electrifies you with the shock of
her wit; and both talk so much and so loud, and are such egoists, that I rather think a clever woman is even a greater term of reproach than a good creature. (286)

From this passage, we can infer Ferrier’s opinion that women who flaunt their domestic or intellectual successes are more at fault than women who humbly flaunt nothing, but both extremes are nonetheless worthy of reproach. This assessment of clever women is reiterated after Mary’s visit to Mrs. Pullens, during which she observes and is repulsed by an absurd reversal in behavior. Mrs. Pullens’s “domestic economy” is “her own theme,” and she accentuates it with “feelings of conscious virtue” and “an air of self-approbation” immediately after loudly berating her cook (410-411). Similarly, Mary judges Mrs. Bluemits—an obvious play on the term “bluestocking”—and her literary circle as utterly superfluous beings “who only read and talk of their reading” instead of adapting their learning to practical use (423).\(^5\) In Ferrier’s estimation, women must not only apply their intellectual and domestic skills but do it quietly and without calling attention to themselves, somewhat like Fordyce’s ideal woman who begins her work before anyone rises and completes her tasks after the household has gone to bed.

A further indication that Emily functions as Ferrier’s mouthpiece is Emily’s direct avowals of the novel’s major themes. As such, she is a proto-Dickensian character, for she often recapitulates messages already illustrated in a bevy of preceding episodes by hammering their points home in open declarations, just in case readers mistakenly overlooked the import of the episodes. For example, Emily decrees “A mother’s merit must depend solely upon how she brings up her children” (282), as demonstrated in the stories of Adelaide, Mary, and Emily. Emily also summarizes Ferrier’s warnings against
affectation of any kind, claiming that “even innate vulgarity is bearable—stupidity is pardonable—but affectation is never to be endured or forgiven” (387). Further, Emily’s above-mentioned discourse on clever women echoes the examples of the Douglas aunts’ misguided full devotion to housekeeping (40) and Mrs. Guffaw’s deliberate abandonment of housekeeping to her feigned delicacy (201). While her feminism may be ambiguous, Ferrier’s opinions on affectation, the importance of maternal influence, and the fulfillment of feminine duties, become clear through indirect and direct means.

Based on the marital disasters and sacrifices of the novel’s other four prominent women characters, three of which directly result from exposure to inappropriate maternal influence and faulty educations, one might expect the heroine’s education to follow a highly structured curriculum designed to instill her with Ferrier’s ideal feminine characteristics of benevolence, humility, and sympathy. Yet Mary does not seem to be educated at all, because Alicia’s pedagogy resembles John Locke’s practical model of conveying instruction through “variety and freedom” (“Some Thoughts Concerning Education” 235), not Rousseau’s self-admittedly unattainable models for Émile or Sophy.52 Preparing to educate Mary, the narrator remarks that Alicia “read much, and reflected more, and many faultless theories of education had floated in her mind. But her good sense soon discovered how unavailing all those theories were, whose foundations rested upon the inferred wisdom of the teacher” (Marriage 158). This passage suggests that Ferrier’s dissatisfaction with the available stock of conduct books and educational treatises as a whole, including Fordyce’s Sermons for Young Women, because they are often overly theoretical. Considering that Mary is rescued from her great-aunts’ devotion to Mr. Fordyce and their “sucking pots, colic powders, and other instruments of torture”
and eventually removed from Glenfern Castle altogether, it seems evident that Ferrier disapproves of simply handing a girl Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* and teaching her to sew plain and fancy stitches, in the manner in which the Douglas aunts and sisters have apparently been raised. Ferrier reasserts this position when Dr. Redgill suggests that Mary replace church attendance with “Sunday’s reading” of sermons and instructive essays like those in the *Spectator* (249), an offer that Mary considers insufficient to fulfill her Christian duty.

Ferrier depicts Alicia’s curriculum as a combination of Ferrier’s own ideas and Fordyce’s best advice on religious instruction and proper feminine industry and delicacy, all of which are best transmitted orally or by example via unrestrained access to nature and charitable human interaction. Alicia begins educating Mary almost immediately, in order to “engraft into her infant soul the purest principles of religion” (158). Such immediacy demonstrates Ferrier’s typical Scottish Presbyterian approach to education that considered “even the babes . . . corrupt, born in original sin, and the sooner they were disciplined the better” (Lochhead 182). The narrator continues,

> The fear of God was the only restraint imposed upon [Mary’s] dawning intellect; and from the Bible alone was she taught the duties of morality—not from a dry code of laws to be read with a solemn face on Sundays or learned with weeping eyes as a weekday task—but adapted to her youthful capacity by judicious illustration, and familiarized to her taste by hearing its stories and precepts from [Alicia’s] lips. (*Marriage* 158)

In this passage, we read Ferrier’s foray into the pedagogical battle over the Bible itself as a more appropriate teaching tool than books and sermons based on the Bible. Making
the Bible Alicia’s only textbook, Ferrier in accordance with Presbyterian doctrine places high value on the role of scripture in education and in society—Lochhead characterizes the Bible as “the heart of all culture” in Ferrier’s Scotland (348)—but her suggestion to condense and simplify scripture for young minds deviates slightly from the more prevalent Anglican practice of waiting for children to reach an unspecified age of reason before granting them either direct or indirect access to sacred scripture. Ferrier thereby favors an oral tradition of the Bible that corresponds to what Lochhead describes as the Scottish penchant for storytelling as a means of conveying cultural identification (10).

References to Mary’s other reading materials occur near the end of the novel. During Mary’s observation of Mrs. Bluemit’s circle, the narrator declares that she “had been accustomed to read, and to reflect upon what she read, and to apply it to the purpose for which it is valuable, viz. [sic] in enlarging her mind and cultivating her taste” (Marriage 415), and although we are told that she “had scarcely read a novel in her life” (331), we are not told what she did read or when. Fordyce defers speaking on the “duty and advantage of reading the Scriptures,” but he advises women to educate themselves first by “reading aloud . . . unadorned Narrative, short Stories, and Familiar Epistles” adding “by slow and almost imperceptible progression . . . Allegories, Orations, Moral and Religious Discourses” and “the most beautiful and elevated parts of Holy Writ” (Sermons to Young Women 208-212). Ferrier’s silence on Mary’s apparent autodidacticism suggests agreement in the main with Fordyce, but it also suggests that Ferrier places the onus for instruction on the mother, not on the child. Such an argument vastly differs from Hays, Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth, and, for the most part, Austen, all of whom view male-directed interdidacticism as women’s best means of securing an
education, no matter how deficient it may be in comparison to men’s intellectual development.

Because it resembles Locke’s pedagogy, Alicia’s system of education is akin to that of Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, but Mary’s wholly unrestricted and spontaneous experience of Alicia’s application of scripture and Presbyterian doctrine to real life supplants the Edgeworths’ carefully orchestrated educational experiments. Alicia’s pedagogy also follows Fordyce’s predilection for “assisting Nature; not forcing her in directing the understanding, not hurrying it . . . in molding the behavior without constraint” (Sermons to Young Women 25), evinced by the Douglas aunts’ complaint that they “never could discover when or how it was that Mary got her lessons,” though conceding that she “can do things” (Marriage 160-1). Mary, “happily endowed by nature and under the judicious management of her aunt,” has no “dancing master, [yet] her step [is] light, and her motions free and graceful”; she is also a talented singer, draws well, and is skilled in “modern languages,” all without the benefit of specially trained masters or governesses (159). Instead, Alicia teaches Mary practical means of being useful and amiable and instills in her pragmatic life expectations, devoting

Mary’s time to . . . the great duties of life; in administering . . . to the

wants and misfortunes of her fellow creatures, without requiring from

them that their virtue should have been immaculate or expecting that their

gratitude should be everlasting. (158)

The result of Alicia’s course of instruction is an intellectually and spiritually strong Mary, described at age eighteen as a “refined yet unsophisticated child of nature” (198), in the Rousseauan sense that her education takes place in the country, in the Lockean sense that
she enjoys her learning, and in the Fordycean sense that her innate talents are gently nurtured.

Alicia educates Mary and forms her character by fostering her natural resources and by focusing on those traditional feminine tasks and attributes that can be accomplished by an actual woman, not those that Fordyce enumerates as the ideal women’s duties in eight pages of *Sermons to Young Women*. The narrator implies that Alicia is unaware of fulfilling her maternal teaching duties, however, and with regard to Mary’s seemingly osmotic infusion of Alicia’s life lessons, says,

> while [Alicia] was almost unconsciously practicing the quiet virtues of patience, and fortitude, and self-denial, and unostentatiously sacrificing her own wishes, to promote the comfort of others, her example . . . was shedding its silent influence on the embryo blossoms of her pupil’s heart.  

(*Marriage* 245)

In order to ensure that Alicia meets her own doctrine that women’s duties be self-sacrificially enacted with humility, Ferrier equips Alicia with a nearly superhuman ability to effect positive change without being entirely conscious of doing so. In this manner, Ferrier again illustrates Fordyce’s recommendation to “insinuate knowledge and piety by . . . conversation and example, rather than by formal lectures and awful admonitions” (*Sermons to Young Women* 25). Mary mimics Alicia’s selflessness and, according to the Douglas aunts, “waste[s] her time and squander[s] her money amongst the poor, instead of being taught the practical virtues of making her own gowns and of hoarding up her pocket-money” for her own use (*Marriage* 181); she is later said to have benefited from watching Alicia give “a large portion of her time, her thoughts, her fortune, to the most
sacred of all duties—charity, in the most comprehensive meaning” (424). By observing Alicia’s example of performing good works with genuine humility and sympathy and then replicating that model in her own dealings with the world, Mary transforms traditional ideals into viable praxis and develops a unique virtuous feminine identity.

That identity, raised in the secluded and temptation-free Scottish Highlands, is tested and refined in Mary’s reflections upon the women she meets during her journey to Beech Park; in her social calls to members of Bath society; in her interactions with Juliana, Adelaide, and Emily; and in her ministrations to Mrs. Lennox at Rose Hall. All of these interactions demonstrate the superiority of Alicia’s system, particularly by highlighting Mary’s selflessness and sympathy versus Juliana’s selfishness, Adelaide’s indifference, and Emily’s cynicism. In Mary’s first encounter with her unfeeling relatives, Ferrier is perhaps overly concerned with showing the disparity between the heroine and her foils. Mary feels entirely too much upon the sight of her mother and faints into Juliana’s arms, a situation that initially elicits Juliana’s maternal impulses but ultimately results in rousing her jealousy. Juliana rejects both Mary and the “hideous vulgar appellation” of “mother” (223), and Adelaide immediately returns to her harp “as if nothing had happened” (223). Given Ferrier’s penchant for satire, one might imagine that she cannot resist a jibe at the popular sentimental heroine of her day, but it is more likely that Ferrier intends a vivid demonstration of Juliana’s and Adelaide’s deformed femininity. They display more than just cold shoulders to their nearest relation when they exhibit their icy, unsympathetic souls to both Mary and readers. Ferrier thus makes the comparison between Juliana’s and Alicia’s examples and Adelaide’s and Mary’s resulting temperaments most striking. Mary’s response to her less than enthusiastic
reception and continued neglect is the triumph of Alicia’s precepts. When writing to
Glenfern’s residents, “Mary knew that to breathe a hint of her own unhappiness would be
to embitter the peace of those she loved, and she therefore strove to conceal from their
observation the disappointment she had experienced” (241). Mary thus represses her hurt
feelings, sublimates her need for consolation by focusing on the happiness of others, and
resolves to make the best of her situation. Thus, in her own home, Mary replicates
Alicia’s coping system in her unsuitable marriage.

Genuine sympathy is the central theme of Mary’s and Emily’s discussions about
proper feminine filial, maternal, and charitable duties, and Mary’s relationship with the
blind and bereft Mrs. Lennox is frequently the locus of that debate. The properly maternal
Mrs. Lennox also operates as a foil to Juliana, both as a stand-in for Alicia and as a
worthy object of Mary’s sympathy. The antipodal roles of Juliana and Mrs. Lennox are
apparent in their nearly identical introductions to Mary. On the morning after her fainting
spell, Mary “eagerly seize[s] her mother’s hand, and presse[s] it with fervor to her lips”
and hides her tearful face. Juliana responds, “Absurd, my dear!” and chides Mary for her
“foolish weakness” (227). Upon first meeting Mrs. Lennox, Mary takes her hand and
“presse[s] it with fervor to her lips, while her eyes overflowed with tears” in open “tribute
of pity and respect” (266). While sympathy is garnered for Mary in her unappreciated
sentimentality at meeting Juliana, Mary’s sympathy for Mrs. Lennox recalls Fordyce’s
opinion that women are most beautiful when they are in tears of pity. He says, “never do
your eyes shine with a more delightful effulgence, than when suffused with all the
trembling softness of grief . . . or of solicitude for friendship in danger,” and he praises
the “sigh of compassion stealing from a female breast on the mention of calamity”
Mrs. Lennox’s blindness and her loss of all but one of her children are appropriate targets for Mary’s sympathy. Because sentiment is intrinsically egocentric for Ferrier, it is inferior to sympathy, which is ideally directed toward and benefits another, and tears are not enough to demonstrate Mary’s refined femininity without offsetting the suffering of the truly afflicted.

Ferrier demonstrates the superiority of altruistic sympathy over egocentric sentiment in a debate between Mary and Emily, the latter of whom claims not to “understand the nature of that mysterious feeling called sympathy” (*Marriage* 268). Mary’s desire to ease Mrs. Lennox’s suffering contrasts with Emily’s attempt to supplant her own tears and Mrs. Lennox’s bereavement with laughter that merely minimizes her own pain without alleviating Mrs. Lennox’s sorrow. Emily admits she is made “wretched to witness suffering that [she] can’t relieve” (268)—she is more concerned for her own comfort than for Mrs. Lennox’s discomfort. Mary denies, when asked, that Emily’s disassociation is truly sympathetic behavior. Emily counters that neither is it sympathetic “to blow one’s nose,” presumably like Mackenzie’s sentimental Harley, or to “read the Bible,” like More’s overly pious Lucilla Stanley. Through Emily’s satiric wit, Ferrier channels her critiques of the sentimentalists’ view that “effusive emotion was evidence of kindness and goodness” (*Dictionary of Literary Terms* 616) and the Evangelical practice of combining benevolence with proselytism (Kowaleski-Wallace 64). Mary presents Ferrier’s preferred definition of sympathy as freely “bestow[ing]” veritable and unconditional “consolation to the afflicted” (268) and promoting a congenial atmosphere by repressing emotion, not “look[ing] as if [one] were of ladies most dejected and wretched when every body else is gay and happy” (270). Mary’s willful demonstrations,
or, more precisely, example of sacrificing her time, relative comfort, and her own emotions for the benefit of whatever company she keeps reiterate the efficacy and superiority of direct, positive maternal guidance in proper feminine education. The undirected Emily mistakes mere distraction for sympathy; the properly guided Mary pragmatically turns the theory of traditional feminine duties into beneficial social praxis.

Ferrier also negates the necessity of a heroine’s entrance into fashionable society when Mary deliberately quells “hope and expectation fluttering at her heart” and gives up her “anticipated début” to comfort Mrs. Lennox (293). Mary thus avoids the marriage market, but she is rewarded for having done so by meeting her ideal mate in the process. The eighteenth-century heroine typically meets her ideal husband at her début and overcomes various obstacles (e.g., misconceptions, parental or social barriers, and prejudices) in order to claim her reward, as do, for example, Burney’s Evelina, Edgeworth’s Belinda Portland, and Austen’s Elizabeth Bennett. Ferrier turns this convention on its head, making Mary’s happy marriage a consequence of sacrificing her début in order to fulfill what she believes to be her Christian duty. Mary readily renounces the ball in order to attend to Mrs. Lennox, since she

had never been accustomed to lavish the best feelings of her nature on frivolous pursuits . . . but had early been taught to consecrate them to the best of the most ennobling purposes of humanity—even to the comforting of the weary soul—the binding of the bruised heart. (291-292)

Again, Ferrier emphasizes Alicia’s teaching and maternal influence as the foundation of Mary’s goodness and of its consequential rewards, namely a well suited mate. Mrs. Lennox confers the reward herself, saying, “only [Charles Lennox] can repay you for the
good you have done me this day!” (294). By sacrificing her inclinations and doing good works, Mary sanctifies herself and comes closer to godliness by rejecting lesser uses for her talents. At the risk of carrying Ferrier’s metaphor a bit farther than she may have intended, Mary is a true Christian: she replicates the example of Jesus Christ, who succored the afflicted; and the sacrifice of her “best feelings” is akin to the ritualistic sacrifice and consecration of the Eucharist before its distribution to Christian congregants in remembrance of Christ’s ultimate sacrifice on the cross.

In yet another way, Ferrier departs from the romantic and sentimental novel in her relatively brief treatment of the heroine’s marital quandary, which is radically different from the amount of time Ferrier’s predecessors spend on their heroines’ matrimonial deliberations. Unlike Burney’s Evelina, Edgeworth’s Belinda, and Austen’s Elizabeth, who meet, interact with, and evaluate their eventual mates early in their narratives, Mary’s deliberations over pleasing her mother by marrying Downe Wright for his money or pleasing herself by marrying Charles Lennox for love are comparatively swift, and the consequences of her choice are dealt with entirely in Volume III. Ferrier also inverts another familiar romantic trope by having Mary first encounter her eventual mate in portraiture, but Mary does not auto-erotically construct or fall in love with an idealized phantom of Lennox based on his portrait, as do Hay’s Emma Courtney or Edgeworth’s Virginia St. Pierre. Despite Emily’s and Mrs. Lennox’s best efforts to call her attention to the portrait, Mary makes no comment upon it or its subject, and the narrator states that she is “too much affected to trust her voice with the words of sympathy that hovered on her lips” (266). Mary is apparently too engaged in sympathizing with Mrs. Lennox to contemplate romantic thoughts, an exocentrism that is precisely the characteristic
Ferrier argues most deserves merit and reward. In this regard, however, Ferrier seems to contradict her usual distaste for extremes by portraying Mary as being extremely hard to get.

Mary’s radical aversion to Mrs. Lennox’s matchmaking is attributed to her “sense of wounded delicacy” (297), which “unknown to herself” (327) prevents her immediate return to Rose Hall until her benevolent spirit recalls her to Christian duty. Mary is first put on guard by a pseudo-betrothal enacted by Mrs. Lennox, who at their introduction joins their hands together and remarks upon Mary’s kindness to her (297) in a scene thereafter reified in an actual betrothal alongside Mrs. Lennox’s deathbed (401). Later, Mary is humiliated when she overhears “herself recommended to the love of a man [Lennox],” whom she believed to be indifferent to her (335), and worse “whom [she] heard solicited to love” her (336). Mary is not so much appalled by Mrs. Lennox’s salesmanship but by Lennox’s apparent disaffection—he actually yawns during his mother’s “eulogium” of Mary’s assets that include the standard qualifications for an early-nineteenth-century bride, “very pretty—very amiable—and very accomplished” (335).

More importantly, however, Mary is repulsed by the possibility that Lennox will misread her unknowing participation in Mrs. Lennox’s efforts to “parade” her accomplishments (339). Further, Mary’s own sketches elicit “excited feelings of mortification” when she recalls Mrs. Lennox’s “request” to show them to Lennox (339). Ferrier thus again presages Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* with Mary’s painful reflections of her incognizant display of her accomplishments, which are very like those knowingly performed and later denounced by Edith Granger in her courtship with Paul Dombey.
Both Mary’s and Edith’s drawing, embroidery, harp playing, and singing are presented to their suitors for inspection. Edith openly complies with Dombey’s direct requests to prove her talents (Dickens 369-370); Mary retrieves her sketches from “her porte feuille, at Mrs. Lennox’s request to show to her son” (339).

Mary is most indignant, however, that her sense of delicacy and social custom does not permit an éclaircissement. Through “scalding tears of shame,” Mary broods that she cannot openly express herself, thinking,

how despicable I must appear in his eyes—thus offered—rejected! How shall I ever be able to convince him that I care not for his love—that I wished it not—that I would refuse, scorn it tomorrow were it offered to me. . . . he must ever remain a stranger to my real sentiments—he might reject—but I cannot disavow. (Marriage 336)

Unlike Edgeworth’s notion of delicacy as both a “refined sense of what is becoming, modest, or proper” and a “delicate regard for the feelings of others” (OED def. 10), Ferrier’s concept of delicacy seems entirely directed toward one’s own feelings, or more precisely to one’s concern over others’ perception of oneself. Also unlike Belinda, whom Edgeworth allows to be misread by Clarence Hervey at her debut, Mary does not undergo such a public trial, and we are not privy to Lennox’s opinion of Mary, suggesting that for Ferrier delicacy is a more egocentric matter than it is for Edgeworth.

Ferrier further complicates the issue of delicacy by revealing that, while Mrs. Lennox encourages Mary to attract Lennox, Juliana “procure[s] for [Mary] a most excessive good establishment” and strikes a matrimonial bargain with Mr. Downe Wright, later Lord Glenallen (345). Mary’s “heart revolt[s] from the indelicacy of such
measures, and [can] not for a moment brook the idea of being *bestowed* in marriage” (345). Again Mary’s delicacy is egocentric, but, beyond the revolting commercial aspect of Juliana’s settlement with Downe Wright, this time Mary’s aversion arises from being thwarted in her desire to enact “the highest feelings of filial reverence”; instead she finds “herself perpetually called upon either to sacrifice her own principles or to act in direct opposition to her mother’s will” (345). In other words, Mary cannot reconcile her notions of delicacy with her filial duty. She is also “confounded” by the fact that Juliana has usurped her culturally approved right to personally accept or reject a marriage proposal. She is not “urged to accept Mr. Downe Wright, but . . . told that was actually done” for her already (346). Mary insists upon acting as her own marital agent and demonstrates her alignment with Fordyce in demanding time to discern Downe Wright’s “character—his principles—his habits—temper, talents—in short, all those things on which [her] happiness would depend” (346). Mary applies the same standard to Lennox, observing over time his “character as it unfolded itself” and seeing “much to admire in it,” but because Mrs. Lennox will not allow the courtship to take its own course, it goes nowhere (331). Regardless of whether the assault on Mary’s delicacy is somewhat benevolent, as in Mrs. Lennox’s matchmaking, or entirely selfish, like Juliana’s matrimonial bargain, Ferrier portrays parental pressure to marry as being at best counterintuitive and at worst counterproductive, and she again places the onus on the potential bride to control her own marital destiny.

In order to keep her heroine out of the marriage market, Ferrier places Mary in an impossible situation and herself in an authorial dilemma. Attempting to modify Fordyce’s
model of femininity, Ferrier essentially comes to an impasse with the preacher, who calls “disobedience to parents . . . unnatural and vile” but considers “temptations to this crime . . . usually inconsiderable” and infrequent (Sermons for Young Women 90), as if parents are almost always like Alicia, benevolent, humble, and selfless, and not like Juliana, who is just plain selfish. Fordyce warns women to take responsibility for discerning their intended’s character (94-95), and he implies the social corruption resulting from “matrimonial bargains” (109), but he neglects to resolve how women can avoid the marriage market and marry for “mutual fondness” (108) when parents abuse their parental authority in order to transact sexual commerce either for financial and social gain, as in Juliana’s case, or for domestic stability and economy, as in Mrs. Lennox’s case.

Because Mary believes that Mrs. Lennox exerts undue influence on her son and because Juliana forbids the match, Ferrier would contradict both her warnings against abuse of parental pressure and promotion of filial duty if Mary quickly accepted Lennox. Emily describes the Gordian knot that binds Mary, saying, “even my genius is at a loss how to extricate you. Gretna Green might have been advisable . . . that would have been following in your mamma’s own footsteps; but it is become too vulgar an exploit” (448). Mary cannot retain her integrity and violate her filial duty by accepting Lennox openly or by eloping. Neither can she dismiss her sense of wounded delicacy and comply with the blind woman’s genteel pandering. Therefore Mary cannot immediately practice what Ferrier preaches: she cannot determine her own marital destiny without violating two key elements of Ferrier’s pragmatic model of femininity, and she errs on the side of caution by simply removing herself from the marriage market altogether. Assuming that Mrs.
Lennox compels her son to propose marriage, Mary is prompted by her “wounded delicacy and woman’s pride” to work “herself up to a pitch of heroism” in order to refuse Lennox (Marriage 387): she “submit[s] to all the restrictions that were imposed and the torments that were inflicted, if not with the heroism of a martyr, at least with the meekness of one” (446-447), and determines to “try the effect of patience and submission . . . rather than openly set at defiance one of the most sacred duties—the obedience of a child to a parent” (448). It may not result in an ideal situation, but by sacrificing her romantic inclinations, as Alicia had done in part, and refusing to act, Mary at least retains her integrity, increases her moral worth, and garners more sympathy from her readers in the process.

Ferrier also resolves the issue by again juxtaposing Juliana and Mrs. Lennox, characterizing Juliana’s efforts to arrange Mary’s marriage as a selfish act and Mrs. Lennox’s desire to unite Mary with her son as a proper act of maternal duty. The narrator claims that “Lady Juliana resolved that her daughter should marry to please her” (348), while Mrs. Lennox “sought for the happiness of her son,” not for own benefit (360). Mrs. Lennox promptly dies to prove this point (401), and Juliana abandons Mary yet again to join Adelaide in extravagant exile, telling Mary to “marry whom [she] pleases” (451) before she leaves. Mrs. Lennox’s matchmaking thus appears more appealing than Juliana’s. Further, Mrs. Lennox delivers the most direct warning in the text against complying with parental pressure to marry. She bemoans Mary’s reported engagement to Downe Wright, saying,

Mary, my dear, let me advise you to beware of being led, even by a mother, in such a matter as this. God forbid that I should ever recommend
disobedience towards a parent’s will; but I fear you have yielded too much
to yours. . . . Surely parents have much to answer for, who mislead their
children in such an awful step as marriage! (359)

This speech echoes Alicia’s prophecy of Juliana’s corruptive maternal influence (99) and
aligns Mrs. Lennox with Alicia as a model of maternal duty. Mrs. Lennox, not the
satirical Emily, thus reiterates Ferrier’s message of self-determination and provides a
morally authoritative excuse—or at least a rational dispensation—for Mary to refuse a
mercenary marriage with Downe Wright and to evade total submission to Juliana.

Juliana’s selfishness diminishes, but does not entirely cancel, her parental authority, and
Mary’s sacrifice of her lover is a lesser evil than sacrificing herself, as Alicia had done.
Mary thus escapes the fates of both her natural and adoptive mothers, and of her sister
and cousin, whose marital choices resulted in outright marital discord or regrettable
intellectual and emotional concessions.

Emily does, however, deliver Ferrier’s core messages that women’s educational
experiences cultivate or corrupt their capacities for self-determination and that direct,
positive maternal influence is essential to the process of creating a feminine identity that
conforms with traditional gender roles but is practical and conducive to domestic
harmony; and she predicts that Mary will be happily married as a direct result of Mary’s
education. Emily tells Mary, “you are to marry for love—that’s the old story, which, with
all your wisdom, you wise, well educated girls always end in” (383), which implies that
proper women’s education, as Ferrier presents it, can secure marital bliss. After Lennox
dissolves Mary’s reserve by soliciting her sympathy—he argues that Mary’s avoidance of
his company “will inflict an incurable wound upon [his] vanity,” since he believes that
she is ashamed of “being seen in such company” (360)—Mary employs in her courtship with Lennox the life skills she acquired from Alicia’s teaching and example by observing him in conversation with Emily, to whom “all the flow of his conversation, the brilliancy of his wit were directed” (361). Mary thus adheres to Fordyce’s tenet that women’s “business chiefly is to read men” (198) while inconspicuously assessing Lennox’s suitability to herself. The final passage of the novel attests to the supremacy of Mary’s education that prepared her to determine her own blissful marital fate, one in which she can practice the model of femininity Ferrier champions. The narrator describes the lifestyle of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Lennox, saying,

in a virtuous attachment, they found as much happiness as earth’s pilgrims can ever possess . . . . The extensive influence which generally attends upon virtue joined to posterity was used by them for its best purposes. It was not confined either to the rich or the poor, to caste or sect, but all shared in their benevolence whom that benevolence could benefit. . . the poor, the sick, the desolate . . . . (468)

Emily’s ideal of a suitable union between intellectual equals who are mutually engaged in household decisions and tasks (385) is thus realized in Mary’s household, where both the husband and the wife participate in creating domestic harmony and extending their beneficence throughout their society.

In *Marriage*, Ferrier weaves a matrix of multiple antipodes in order to demonstrate the effects of proper and improper maternal influences in women’s education and to illustrate the possibilities for self-determination that result from her proper model. Ferrier juxtaposes two pairings of the extremes of selfishness and self-
sacrifice and offers them as warnings against faulty female education and its resultant marital discord: the miseducated Juliana and Adelaide marry for selfish reasons and create domestic chaos; the overly submissive Alicia and misdirected Emily sacrifice portions of themselves in marriages to inferior men and willfully accommodate themselves to conjugal unsuitability, as Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth would have them do. In order to construct a more practical model of women’s education, Ferrier also assesses the useful and outmoded aspects of competing pedagogies, specifically scrutinizing Fordyce’s, Locke’s, and Rousseau’s ideal women’s curricula along with their preferred texts, respectively the Bible, sermons, and treatises. Contrasts of Juliana’s and Alicia’s educational practices demonstrate the importance of maternal influence and religious instruction in women’s education, and comparisons of the motives behind Juliana’s and Mrs. Lennox’s matchmaking delimit the propriety of parental authority in marital decisions. And Ferrier counterposes Mary, her pragmatic feminine model, against all of the other women in the novel who fail to meet Ferrier’s standards for a proper balance between conservative feminine qualities, like genuine benevolence, Christian humility, and sympathy, with progressive feminist capacities for intelligent and rational self-determination.

The construction of such an intricate web of references and cross-references that demonstrate, reiterate, and reinforce Ferrier’s thesis that women must take personal responsibility for directing their lives should, I believe, be enough to attract the notice of scholars. That such a message resonates with similar feminist calls for personal responsibility made before and after Ferrier’s time also justifies revisiting her works, especially in light of her progressive stance that women’s education and self-
determination are essential to their intellectual and spiritual well being. Ferrier need not continue to suffer in comparison with Burney, Edgeworth, Austen, Scott, Dickens, and Brontë, and returning to her works will yield further insight into the development of feminist thought during its prolonged labor and difficult birth. If these reasons to revive interest in Ferrier’s oeuvre still seem insufficient, perhaps the recommendation of one her more famous contemporaries will encourage doubters. John Ferrier quotes the epilogue to Tales of My Landlord, in which Scott praises the then-anonymous author of Marriage, saying

I retire from the field [of Scottish fiction] conscious that there remains behind not only a large harvest, but laborers capable of gathering it in. More than one writer has of late displayed talents of this description, and if the present writer, himself a phantom, may be permitted to distinguish a brother or perhaps a sister shadow, he would mention in particular the author of the very lively work entitled Marriage. (Memoir and Correspondence 146)

While scholars have continually compared Ferrier’s works unfavorably to those of Sir Walter Scott, perhaps his support of Ferrier will help reverse the trend, as I have sought to do here, and posthumously replace her among the luminaries in the development of the novel and of the Scottish Enlightenment with whom she associated.
Commercial versus Natural Women’s Education in Charles Dickens’s *Dombey and Son*

Virtually all of Charles Dickens’s works involve courtship and marriage issues, but Dickens grapples with the commercialization of marriage most forcefully and succinctly in *Dombey and Son* (1846-1848), where he equates the marriage market with prostitution. Focusing on the supremely mercantile (and hence unnatural) Dombey family, Dickens argues for universal reform of an overly commercial society. To this end, he details the victimization of the non-commodifiable Florence Dombey, the prostitute Alice Marwood, and the bartered bride Edith Granger Dombey, who exemplify disastrous mercantile relationships across the social strata, and admonishes his male readers for their dubious participation in the marriage market. In so doing, Dickens reiterates portions of Mary Hays’s and Mary Wollstonecraft’s theories regarding the commodification of women, but he does not demand sexual equality. Moreover, although in *Dombey and Son* Dickens recognizes that the marriage market reflects the same laws of supply and demand by which any other commodity trade functions and that the market economy of nineteenth-century Britain primarily serves the interests of the men who regulate and trade within it (as Hays and Wollstonecraft had done), Dickens directs most of his ire toward the middle-class mothers of England, arguing that they pervert their chief duty to mitigate the destructive influences of commercialized society by educating their daughters to sell themselves into marriage. In this manner, Dickens adheres to a cultural ideology promulgated by conduct book authors Sarah Lewis and Sarah Stickney Ellis, who place the burden of nineteenth-century humanity’s salvation almost entirely upon women.
In their works, Lewis and Ellis declare mothers to be ideally responsible for educating Britain’s youth. Since boys were sent out to acquire knowledge beyond their mothers’ limited spheres of action, Lewis and Ellis focus on home schooling for girls, but they cast the importance of woman’s influence in the broadest social terms, resulting in the virtual apotheosis of “Woman’s Mission,” which entails the proper application of “Woman’s Influence.” Because Ellis refers readers to the “able and eloquent writer on ‘Woman’s Mission’” for a precise definition of the term (Daughters of England 5), we may rely on Lewis’s succinct rendering of it, as follows: “We claim for them [women] no less an office than that of instruments (under God) for the regeneration of the world, restorers of God’s image in the human soul” (Woman’s Mission 11). Woman’s influence, the means of such regeneration, is “boundless in its operation,” since men “frequently resist power, while they yield to influence as unconscious acquiescence” (13). Lewis continues, averring that “to inspire virtue . . . is peculiarly the province of women” (22). Therefore “it follows, that the education, properly so called, of the child, depends almost entirely upon mothers” (23). While we lack evidence to suggest that Dickens read the works of either of these women, in many of his works he concurs in the main with Lewis’s and Stickney’s ideals of Woman’s Mission; however, he presents a harsh reality in which those ideals no longer seem practicable. For Dickens, society had transferred its energies away from nurturing human interactions toward economic transactions, and in Dombey and Son he highlights this ruinous transfer of commercial interests from the public sphere into the private, one example of which is marital commerce. Dombey and Son depicts various types of domestic disharmony resulting from androcentric marriage and prostitution markets that devalue women’s capacities for sympathy, affection, and
moral integrity. Dickens attacks venders in these markets, who encourage women to seek and protect their own self-interests, to hide their emotional and intellectual shortcomings with artifice, and to cloak their immoral self-promotion in moral vacuity. For Dickens, Woman’s Influence had been usurped by Market Influences.

Whereas Hays and Wollstonecraft blame patriarchy itself for the subjection of all women, regardless of their class, Dickens considers the commodification of women in the Victorian marriage and prostitution markets as symptoms of a sick patriarchy in need of some remedy but not purgation. Additionally, like Hays and Wollstonecraft, Dickens maintains that the type of education that individual women receive, or are denied, depends upon their birth status and determines their particular levels of commodification. However, Dickens argues, as Hays and Wollstonecraft do not, that a substantial difference separates uneducated prostitutes and miseducated bartered brides, both forms of fallen women for him, the latter of which he considers to be more corrupt than the former. In classifying commodified women and their education according to class, Dickens apparently supports Luce Irigaray’s assertion that “women-as-commodities are thus subject to a schism that divides them into categories of usefulness and exchange value,” who “among themselves are thus not equal, nor alike, nor different. They only become so when they are compared by and for man” (177).

Dickens’s prostitutes more often than not emerge from the lower classes after being duped into their trade by amoral mother-figures or, if orphaned, by unscrupulous men, under whose influence they become unwilling or unwitting victims of male passion. Patricia Ingham argues that Dickensian prostitutes’ participation in immoral sexual acts “declasse[s]” them (Dickens, Women, and Language 48) and renders safe targets for
subsequent unsanctioned male consumption, which precludes their marriageability because the paternity of their offspring will always remain suspect. Thus Dickens presents extramarital sexual knowledge as a social contagion very much like venereal disease, as a physical and moral virus that must be eradicated. Hence his prostitutes’ complete reclamation can be achieved only by physical or social death. In *Dombey and Son*, the prostitute Alice, born illegitimately to an apparently declassed mother, recalls how she traded her own body in order to secure a living for herself and for her mother, Mrs. Brown, who, having realized the impossibility of a respectable living for them, sacrificed Alice’s child body and spirit for the sake of their subsistence. Alice recollects having received no academic, domestic, or religious training; instead, she describes Mrs. Brown’s instructing her to attract men and to profit from fulfilling their sexual desires.

Because bartered brides have the potential to pass their immorality onto their children and thus threaten the ruling classes with social destruction from within, they represent a greater threat to Dickens’s ideal of domestic harmony than do prostitutes, who forever remain outside the pale of respectability. Most often members of the middle or upper classes, bartered brides’ self-interested mother-figures oversee their educations in the same fashionable accomplishments prized by earlier generations (e. g., mastery of decorative and performing arts, deportment, foreign languages, and domestic economy) in the hopes of attracting financially secure suitors with socially respectable homes for their daughters and perhaps themselves. Dickens portrays bartered brides as highly artificial beings who willingly, if not always happily, exchange their hearts and souls for the comforts of wealth and the appearance of respectability, as living mannequins who provide first their parents and then their husbands with opportunities to demonstrate their
wealth. They may act as their own commercial marital agents, as does Edith in *Dombey and Son*, or they may be traded by those who have custodial or legal power over them. Although Dickens’s bartered brides remain chaste commodities while marketing themselves or being marketed by others more for men’s ornamental than sexual usage, the fact that bartered brides eventually end up, like prostitutes, in a state outside of marriage (social or physical death) suggests that, for Dickens, their commodification makes them as unfit for marriage as prostitutes. Therefore, in *Dombey and Son*, Alice and Edith can be read as Irigarayan women-as-commodities, who, lacking any other indicator of their value, “give up [their] bodies to men as the supporting material of specularization, of speculation” (177) without overcoming their subjugation.

On the other hand, like the romantic heroines whom Wollstonecraft dismisses in her preface to *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* (5), Dickens’s non-commodity women possess, *sui generis*, the attributes that make them perfect and viable marital partners: they demonstrate expertise in domestic skills and exhibit highly developed, incorruptible moral characteristics that are incompatible with commercial enterprise. Unlike their less fortunate sisters the prostitutes and bartered brides, whose mothers educate them to trade their bodies or accomplishments for financial security, non-commodity women are often left motherless at an early age and thus remain undefiled by mercenary maternal marital machinations. Therefore, they begin and end their narratives with an innate moral righteousness that provides the only guide they need in order to fulfill the benevolent, sympathetic, and regenerative feminine models prized by Lewis and Ellis. Most often these women retain virginity even after suffering an unsuccessful, actual or symbolic attempt on their virtue and physical or financial
privations, achieving the reward of a suitable husbands with whom they produce children. Instead of wielding the destructive forces of prostitutes or bartered brides, non-commodifiable women administer redemptive powers to reclaim family members who fall away from the text’s moral center. Their abilities to create domestic harmony, Dickens asserts, makes them not unvaluable, but invaluable. Of all of Dickens’s un-commodifiable women, the motherless Florence Dombey perhaps best fits this model, since what little education she receives is almost entirely autodidactic and undertaken to benefit not herself, but her brother, Paul Dombey III.

The full title of the novel, *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son, Wholesale, Retail, and for Exportation*, obviously announces Dickens’s intention to expose the dehumanizing results of conflating domestic and commercial spheres of action. Based on the title, the reader perhaps expects to enter the doors of the firm and to discover there some acts of commerce. Instead, the novel opens with the at-home birth of the firm’s newest partner, Paul Dombey III. Mr. Dombey’s first words in the novel—he congratulates his wife for supplying him with an heir—immediately establish his literal incorporation of his private family and public firm into a single entity. Addressing her formally as “Mrs. Dombey,” he proclaims, “The House will once again, Mrs. Dombey . . . be not only in name but in fact Dombey and Son” (49). Victoria Glendinning characterizes what she calls the “protocol of names” in Victorian England as being “heavy with significance,” because “a man[’s] use [of] a woman’s first name” could, like a “sexual advance,” hold “the value of a caress” or indicate a deeply affectionate if not intimate relationship between the parties (375). Dombey’s second awkward attempt at unfamiliar intimacy, “my—Mrs. Dombey,” makes one painfully aware of his having less
practice in building emotional attachments as opposed to as his apparent proficiency in transacting commerce.

Dickens capitalizes “House” to indicate that Dombey calculates human worth according to a commercial value system, including his valuation of each member of his family, his wife, the newborn Paul III, and the elder Florence. Dombey welcomes Paul more as a new member of the firm than as his child, a displacement of paternal feeling into a commercial assessment that the narrator attributes to the Dombey family’s overriding concern for respectability as the basis for all human interaction in the House, even those concerning marriage, birth, and death. The narrator discloses Dombey’s rationalization of his wife’s position in the House: Dombey reasons,

[t]hat matrimonial alliance with himself . . . must, in the nature of things, be gratifying and honorable to any woman of common sense. That the hope of giving birth to a new partner in such a House could not fail to awaken a glorious and stirring ambition in the breast of the least ambitious of her sex. That Mrs. Dombey entered into that social contract of matrimony . . . with her eyes fully open to these advantages. That Mrs. Dombey had had a daily practical knowledge of his position in society. . . . That Mrs. Dombey must have been happy. That she couldn’t help it. (50-51)

For Dombey, marriage literally incorporates husband and wife in a secular union designed to benefit the firm that ideally must improve the family’s commercial and social prominence. That Mrs. Dombey might characterize it differently does not enter his consciousness, and this passage establishes Dombey’s willful blindness to any other
manner of human existence. Accordingly, Dombey anticipates Mrs. Dombey’s death not as a personal loss but as a debit to the House account: “if his wife should sicken and decay, he would be very sorry, and that he would find a something gone from among his plate and furniture, and other household possessions” (54). Dickens thus presents what Dombey sees as the culturally accepted state of society as a curious misconception of familial duty that will eventually develop into a monstrous distortion of devastating individual pride.

In depicting Dombey’s destruction of his relationship, or lack thereof, with his elder child Florence and his regression toward his suicide attempt, Dickens most powerfully illustrates the absurdity of Dombey’s commercial ethos. Florence’s sex, of course, precludes her participation in the firm’s dealings as it would any other respectable, middle-class woman, which in turn means that she holds no value in a House such as Dombey’s. Therefore Dombey discounts her: “what was a girl to Dombey and Son! In the capital of the House’s name and dignity, such a child was merely a piece of base coin that couldn’t be invested—a bad Boy—nothing more” (51). Dombey apparently even discounts her potential marital value, since he neglects her education and thus seems wholly unconcerned with preparing her to enter the marriage market. Paradoxically, however, as neither a potential debit nor credit to the House, Florence’s nullity allows her to escape the commercialization and commodification that her mother failed to avoid and to foster and maintain what Dickens perceives to be natural, womanly moral qualities that later enable her to rescue and regenerate the spiritually and morally bankrupt Dombey.
Ostensibly because Mrs. Dombey’s death leaves her newborn without the sustenance of mother’s milk, the wet nurse Polly Toodle becomes a member of the Dombey House, but I believe that Dickens intends Polly to serve a slightly more ambitious function within the text than merely providing Paul III with human mother’s milk. In presenting the Toodle family to Mr. Dombey and installing Polly in the House, Dickens infuses a portion of the natural world into the commercial and introduces a major theme of the novel: contrary to the middle-class Victorians’ desires to be wholly separate from the lower orders, Dickens argues that, because the working classes remain free of the artifice and hypocrisy employed by the middle classes to maintain their veneer of respectability, interactions between the classes ought to be sought for their potentially humanizing influence, not avoided. Laura C. Berry’s assertions in “In the Bosom of the Family: The Wet-nurse, the Railroad, and Dombey and Son” support this reading. Berry argues that, because most wet nurses were found among the lowest stratum of Victorian society, Dickens anticipated that his readers would have objected to Dombey’s choice, which for them would have seemed a “risk . . . not just to health, but to the moral fiber of the child” (4). Berry explains, “In the discourse of the medical texts, although [notably] not in Dombey, the wet nurse is always understood to be the mother of an illegitimate child, a fallen woman” (3). According to conventional wisdom, the suckling child, regardless of its infantine insensibilities, would pick up “low” habits from contact with such a nurse. Therefore, in order to calm readers’ fears about biological and moral contamination, the latter of which Dickens considers to be absurd, Dickens invites readers to inspect Polly’s healthy and legitimate family along with Dombey.58 While Berry’s assertions certainly make sense, I believe that in removing Polly from her home
amidst the natural elements of earth, fire, and water—Mr. Toodle had been a collier and became a stoker—and transplanting her into a House built on a purely commercial foundation, Dickens attests to the innate power within working class women to enact Woman’s Mission. Accordingly, as evidence of her ability to make proper use of her Woman’s Influence, Dickens has Mr. Toodle testify that his marriage with Polly brought him “to the level” after having worked “mostly underground” (70)—i. e., Polly restored her husband to a relatively more healthful and natural environment in the light of day.

Polly’s position, however, quickly becomes the most unnatural in the novel, when Dombey sets conditions upon her employment in the House, insisting that she assume the masculine name of “Richards” and that she abandon her own family. Margaret Wiley asserts that Dombey’s provisos represent standard cautions to avoid cross-contamination between lower-class wet nurses’ households and the middle-class families that employed them (220), but I read a more sinister motive behind Dombey’s demands. Anticipating the formation of a bond between the wet nurse and his child—a natural form of human interaction—Dombey dehumanizes Polly’s role in the House by subjecting her to his commercial ethos, declaring her contributions to the House nothing more than “a mere matter of bargain and sale, hiring and letting;” furthermore, Dombey warns Polly not to let her emotions enter into her dealings with Paul III (68). In Polly’s contractual obligation to abandon her natural family, including a six-week-old infant who must now suckle elsewhere, in order for Paul to draw milk from her breasts Dickens accents the immorality of Dombey’s negation of the essential bond between nurse and suckling, forcibly pointing out how unnatural the merchant has become in his commercialized state.
Polly’s entrance into the House also marks the beginning of Dickens’s assault upon the various insufficient and commercial educational systems that were in place in the 1840s, whereby he argues that, although cases to the contrary certainly exist, natural human interaction more often occurs in the working class, whose members frequently have less contact with commercial ideologies. Neither Polly nor her husband can read or write, but Polly

was a sober steady-going young person, with matter-of-fact ideas about the butcher and the baker, and the division of pence into farthings. But she was a good plain sample of a nature that is ever, in the mass, better, truer, higher, nobler, quicker to feel, and much more constant to retain, all tenderness and pity, self-denial and devotion, than the nature of men. (81)

Polly’s seemingly inadequate education conforms with what Rosemary O’Day describes as the typical working-class children’s education in the 1840s, which included little more than the ability to read selections from scripture and the ability to write and to cipher enough to avoid being cheated by tradesmen (62). Dickens focuses the reader’s attention, however, not on what Polly learned at school but on her innate womanly qualities that are superior to those found in men, especially men like Dombey. Disregarding his direct orders and indirect warnings from her fellow servant not to do so, Polly extends and exemplifies her innate powers of sympathy and Woman’s Influence to the motherless Florence, passing on the theory and demonstrating the praxis of Woman’s Mission, thus enabling Florence to fashion herself upon a model of femininity derived quite literally from a fount of the milk of human kindness. From Polly’s example, Florence develops
her filial duty, which she lavishes on the only willing recipient in the House, her brother Paul, whom she serves a surrogate mother after Dombey dismisses Polly.

In fulfilling her filial duty to Paul, Florence enters a self-directed course of study toward proper womanhood, which includes selfless familial devotion, self-sacrificial nurturing and nursing of the ill, and steadfast adherence to an innate moral code of sympathy, empathy, and disinterested human kindness. Apparently in order to preserve Florence’s natural sympathies, and perhaps in compliance with the existing social disapproval of feminine academic prowess, Dickens purposefully obfuscates the details of Florence’s education and places several masculine obstacles between Florence and her access to masculine knowledge. Notably, John Forster indicates that *Dombey and Son* was the first novel for which Dickens prepared advance “slips” constituting plans for the narrative’s major action and some of its minor incidents. Therefore, there is little room for debate regarding Dickens’s intentions for most of the novel. In his *Life of Charles Dickens* (1872-1874), Forster includes portions of a letter he received from Dickens in which he shares his plans for Florence’s education, saying, “I propose showing her learning all sorts of things, of her own application and determination, to assist him [Paul III] in his lessons” (339). Thus Dickens deliberately shows Florence’s autodidactic literary quest to be directed at fulfilling her brother’s needs, not her own. While an entire chapter is devoted to “Paul’s Education” (215-236), in only a few sentences Florence’s maid, Susan Nipper, characterizes Florence’s limited studies as having been a concession forced from a hostile Dombey. In response to Florence’s asking Susan to procure copies of Paul’s primers, Susan replies,
you have books upon books . . . and masterses and mississes a teaching . . .

everything continual, though my belief is that your Pa, Miss Dombey,
ever would have learnt you nothing, never would have thought of it,
unless you’d asked, and offering when unasked, Miss, is quite two things .

. . . (230)

Florence’s direct appeal to Dombey for an education does not appear in the novel, and we
know of it only through Susan’s rebuke of Florence’s seemingly excessive bookishness.

In order to further dissociate Florence from an unwomanly desire for education,
Dickens has her commission her maid Susan—armed with a list constructed in secret
from Paul’s “little books” (230)—to act as her agent in purchasing the books, and he
shows Susan first begging not to be shown the list and then repeatedly being denied
access to the textbooks before “entrap[ping]” the aid of a “white-haired youth . . . from a
library where she was known” to act as her purchasing agent before she can “return home
in triumph” (231). Florence thus encounters a double bar to her academic endeavors:
Susan recognizes both the conventional and parental prejudice against Florence’s
learning, and even Florence’s agent, Susan, must herself hire another—a male library
clerk who symbolizes the propriety of masculine literary authority—in order to purchase
the textbooks. In this passage, Dickens memorably encapsulates the difficulty women
faced in pursuit of an education but, he apparently does not wish to see the situation
amended. He presents Susan’s clever yet surreptitious foray into men’s bookstalls as a
mock epic struggle, without suggesting that she should have free access to men’s
knowledge.61 Moreover, Dickens depicts Florence’s mastering Paul’s textbooks under
cover of darkness with the aid of “that most wonderful of masters, love,” (231). In the
world of the novel, no public discovery of Florence’s academic pursuits occurs, and since love is her teacher, the reader can forgive her academic transgressions, which might otherwise cast Florence as “learned” or “blue,” like Paul’s defeminized tutor, Cornelia Blimber.

Upon Paul’s death, Dickens’s emphasis shifts from Florence’s brief encounter with masculine education to her domestic, feminine education. The fact that Dickens presents no ideals of blending masculine and feminine education—as Hays, Wollstonecraft, Maria Edgeworth, and Susan Ferrier had done—confirms his disinclination to advance the cause of educational parity between the sexes. The House and all of its remaining inhabitants go into deep mourning when Dombey leaves the scene of his perceived paternal failure, and, at fourteen, Florence is left alone to wander a decaying house, being declared its mistress by Dombey upon his departure (329), despite the fact that she has little understanding of her requisite duties. Moreover, with “no one to interfere” with her and no one on whom to bestow her feminine influence (316), Florence’s education becomes even more surreptitious than it had been before. With her mother’s picture watching over her—a posthumous blessing on her own voyeurism—Florence vicariously learns about natural paternal and filial interrelations from sources beyond her dysfunctional House, observing whatever models of behavior present themselves outside her windows. She observes, for instance, a widowed father returns to a home made comfortable by his eldest daughter:

the elder child was always dressed and waiting for him at the drawing-room window . . . and when he appeared, her expectant face lighted up with joy. . . . The elder child would come down to the hall, and put her
hand in his, and lead him up the stairs. . . . The elder child remained with her father when the rest had gone away, and made his tea for him—happy little housekeeper she was then! . . . and she could be as staid and pleasantly demure, with her little book or work-box, as a woman. (319)

The behavior of the “happy little housekeeper,” another child innately gifted with womanly talents, resembles the model of domestic femininity espoused by Lewis and Ellis. Because the following passage so clearly encapsulates *Dombey and Son’s* central thesis regarding the domestic harmony created by a very similar model of femininity, Ellis’s rather lengthy description of the proper English woman’s domestic duties is worth quoting at length. In *The Women of England* (1838) Ellis writes,

> In England there is a kind of science of good household management . . . by which all [English women’s] highest and best feelings are called into exercise. Not only must the house be neat and clean, but it must be so ordered as to suit the tastes of all . . . Not only must a constant system of activity be established, but peace must be preserved, or happiness will be destroyed. Not only must elegance be called in, to adorn and beautify the whole, but strict integrity must be maintained by the minutest calculation as to lawful means, and self, and self-gratification, must be made the yielding point in every disputed case. Not only must an appearance of outward order and comfort be kept up, but around every domestic scene there must be a strong wall of confidence, which no internal suspicion can undermine, no external enemy break through. Good household management, conducted on this plan, is indeed a science well worthy of
attention. It comprises so much, as to invest it with an air of difficulty on the first view; but *no woman can reasonably complain of incapability*, because *nature has endowed the sex with perceptions so lively and acute, that where benevolence is the impulse, and principle the foundation upon which they act, experience will soon teach them by what means they may best accomplish the end they have in view.* (10)

I emphasize this last clause in order to demonstrate how imbedded the ideal of innate femininity had become by mid-century. As Ellis suggests, the women of England can fulfill their Woman’s Mission even when they have no one to show them how to do it, because they innately possess the knowledge they need to create domestic harmony and their experiences can confirm that knowledge. Thus the Edgeworthian model of feminine education, in which women hone their innate powers of sense and sensibility by observing and reflecting upon their own experiences, also survives into the mid-nineteenth century, as evinced in *Dombey and Son*. Focussing on the self-reflective power of sight, Dickens forces his reader to mimic Florence as she observes the domestic harmony of model home across the street and reflects upon the disharmony in her own House. The inhabitants of the model home, a widowed father and his daughter, mirror those of the Dombey House and the repetition of the phrase “the elder child” directs the reader to compare the “happy little housekeeper” to Florence, who has been denied her rightful function by a father who blinds himself to her true, financially incalculable value.

Florence and the reader encounter two more models of proper parent-child interaction in a chapter entitled “The Study of a Loving Heart” (417-429), a phrase echoing Wollstonecraft’s “the culture of the heart” (*A Vindication of the Rights of
Woman 120) and Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s “the education of the heart” in (Practical Education vii). While visiting the home of Sir Barnet and Lady Skettles Florence encounters “Children who were as frank and happy with fathers and with mothers . . . who had no restraint upon their love and freely showed it” and considers “what was there she could learn from these children?” only to realize “[i]t was too late to learn from them” (419-420), since natural parent-child relationships do not exist in her empty House. To make her situation even more pathetic, Dickens places Florence behind a screen of “intervening boughs” in the Skettles garden, before which Kate, a true orphan—both motherless and fatherless—questions her aunt about Florence’s virtually orphaned state (421). Kate’s aunt takes advantage of this teachable moment, responding that Dombey lives in perfect health in England but “shuns and avoids” Florence, circumstances from which Kate (and the reader) learn that “not an orphan in the wide world can be so deserted as the child who is an outcast from a living parent’s love” (422-423). In having Florence immediately transform Kate’s natural sympathy for herself into a mission to redeem her father—“What she had overheard was a reason, not for soothing herself, but for saving him; and Florence did it, in pursuance of the study of her heart” (423)—Dickens emphasizes Florence’s innate, womanly, self-extinguishing compassion for others.

At this point, Florence’s education appears to be effectively complete, since she subsequently comes into contact with no other positive models from whom she can learn her feminine duties, and her mistaken desire for her stepmother’s tutelage forms her only other attempt to further her domestic education. The narrator describes Florence’s reawakened hope to inspire parental affection upon her meeting Edith Granger:
And now Florence began to hope that she would learn from her new and beautiful Mama, how to gain her father’s love; and in her sleep that night . . . her own Mama smiled radiantly upon the hope, and blessed it.

Dreaming Florence! (487)

Again Dickens depicts Florence as receiving a posthumous maternal blessing on her desire to openly display her filial piety, but she can not comprehend that a marriage can indeed exist without love, or that Edith, a woman like her supposedly with an innate capacity to love that has not been fostered, exemplifies a destructive model of femininity.

Dickens typically focuses on the negative in order to prove a positive, and because his negative characters are often more realistic examples of humanity than many of his too-perfect positive characters, their villainy is a powerful didactic tool. Their narratives are also effective because Dickens provides most of them with valid psychological and emotional histories that engage the reader’s sympathy, and their misdeeds always meet appropriate punishments. Alice and Edith embody prime examples of this didactic strategy. In his novels, Dickens’s prostitutes occupy the margins, just as they did in Victorian society. They are rarely permitted to take center stage for more than a limited amount of time, and they are never fully realized characters. As Nina Auerbach argues, “Generally, the fallen woman functions emblematically” in Victorian fiction (160), and for Dickens the prostitute is a formulaic character who is shaped to match the expectations of his readership.

Alice Marwood is such a marginal figure in *Dombey and Son*. She doesn’t appear until Chapter 33 (almost exactly in the middle of the novel), figuring in only six of sixty-two total chapters in the novel, and her introduction immediately indicates her
emblematic function as the recalcitrant Magdalene. In the rain, wind, and “darkening moodily” dusk, Alice offers no resistance to the elements in “a dauntless and depraved indifference to the weather: a carelessness of what was cast upon her bare head from Heaven or earth” (563). Naming it the catalyst of her downfall, Alice unbinds her “thick wet hair,” which falls “down below her waist,” throwing it down and flinging it “back as though it were a heap of serpents” (565). Alice’s long, unbound, flowing hair symbolizes her profligate sexuality, and its comparison with serpents displays both Judeo-Christian and classical typologies that mark her as an ancient type of *femme fatale*. Likewise, Dickens casts Alice from the mold of John Milton’s pathetic but prideful Satan when the narrator describes the “ray of departed radiance of the fallen angel” that “shone through all her wayworn misery and fatigue . . . Lost and degraded as she was, there was beauty in her, both of face and form” (572). Alice’s beauty, combining the destructive powers of the seductive Magdalene, the fallen Eve, the petrifying Medusa, and the rebellious Lucifer, thus manifests as an attractive, quadruple threat to society.

In order to impress upon the reader the severity of Alice’s unnatural state between life and social death, Dickens situates the exposition of Alice’s back story in a macabre setting that suggests her mother engages in the human trade, both of the living and the dead. Alice emerges from the darkness in her mother’s dimly lit hovel, where Good Mrs. Brown, amidst a “heap of rags, and a heap of bones” and under “black walls and blacker ceiling” (566), sits before a fire “as if she were watching at some witch’s altar for a favorable token” (567). Joss Lutz Marsh points out the significance of Mrs. Brown’s dark habitation and vocation: “the bones associate her with death, with the human body as a commodity broken down into its units of currency” (409). Mrs. Brown thus conjures her
lost daughter from the total darkness into the shadows of her abattoir, which she feeds with discarded body parts, and Alice returns to the scene of her initial consumption, where her mother produced a commodity instead of having raised a daughter.

Alice embodies a painful example of the inherent dangers of an immoral, commercial education, which she received from her mother, who was herself a victim of male desire. Speaking of herself in the third person—an acknowledgement, perhaps, of her spiritual death—Alice she chastises her mother for setting her on a destructive course. Addressing Mrs. Brown, Alice says, “There was a child called Alice Marwood . . . born among poverty and neglect and nursed in it. Nobody taught her, nobody stepped forward to help her, nobody cared for her” (570). Mrs. Brown’s neglectful behavior ended, however, when Alice entered puberty and “brought good looks out of this childhood” (570). Among the middle classes, the onset of puberty traditionally initiated a shift in a girl’s education from general elementary studies toward domestic vocational training. It was also the time that young middle-class ladies would adopt adult women’s clothing, hairstyles, and deportment in order to mark her debut, her entrance into the marriage market. Alice’s entry into womanhood was not, however, targeted toward marriage, as she recalls, “There was a girl called Alice Marwood. She was handsome. She was too well cared for, too well trained, too well helped on, too much looked after. You [Mrs. Brown] were very fond of her—you were better off then” (570). The germ of Alice’s criminality lies in the distorted form of maternal duty practiced by Mrs. Brown, who taught Alice to display her wares in order to attract men and then pandered her body for their limited use. Alice thus became a casualty in the extramarital female trade, a demon of profligacy opposed to middle-class Victorian moral sensibilities. The initial, private
outcome of her commodification is, of course, the fruition of a bad seed: “What came to that girl comes to thousands every year. It was only ruin and she was born to it” (571).

Alice’s background resembles that of an actual prostitute’s personal narrative recorded in Henry Mayhew’s *London Labor and the London Poor*, in which Bracebridge Hemyng reports the prostitute’s description of having been one of many girls brought up from their earliest infancy by their pseudo-protectors with the full intention that they shall embark in the infamous traffic as soon as their age will permit them to do so remuneratively. (213)

Alice’s story may, in fact, be based upon Dickens’s personal interviews with potential inhabitants of Urania Cottage, a Magdalene house he co-founded with his friend Angela Burdett-Coutts (Marsh 415).

Although the details of Alice’s past remain undisclosed until later in the novel, she immediately describes the social consequences of her immoral commerce, and by showing that she has suffered more wrongs than she has created Dickens tips the scales of social justice in Alice’s favor and enhances the reader’s sympathy for her. Alice continues,

There was a criminal called Alice Marwood—a girl still, but deserted and an outcast. And she was tried, and she was sentenced . . . how grave the judge was on her duty, and on her having perverted the gifts of nature—as if he didn’t know better than anybody else there, that they had been made curses to her! (571)

Here Dickens removes the blame from the prostitute and places it onto the commercial society that hypocritically produced, marketed, consumed, and disposed of her; end-users
are more at fault than the vendors, who are often themselves victims of the law of supply and demand. Dickens holds Good Mrs. Brown, not Alice, responsible for Alice’s profligacy, since Mrs. Brown turned her daughter’s natural gifts into advertisements and (in)vested her body for commercial gain. Alice allows her mother some excuse, albeit a weak one, for her immoral commercial enterprises, saying, “Your childhood was like mine, I suppose. So much the worse for both of us. I don’t want to blame you, or to defend myself. . . . I am a woman—not a girl now” (571). As a woman, Alice can better appreciate the culturally induced circumstances in which her mother recycled her own misguided social, educational, and physical commercialization into the commodification of her daughter. Dickens also holds the legal system responsible for punishing this victim of sexual commerce. Alice’s judge, perhaps one of her pedophilic customers,64 empowered with “the strong arm of the Law” handed down her punishment of deportation after having refused “to save her, when she was an innocent and helpless little wretch” (571). Mayhew and Hemyng later seconded and popularized similar remonstrations against blaming victims of sex crimes, denouncing the “inducements held out by men of lax morality and loose principles [so] that procurresses find entrapping girls into their abodes a most lucrative and profitable trade” (213).

Alice functions as a warning of what happens to women who become unsanctioned objects of transaction after receiving an improper female education. They are punished for using their sexuality as their means of merchandising themselves, regardless of whether they initiate the transactions or not. Dickens completes Alice’s story with the regeneration of her conscience by a woman who embodies the Victorian
feminine ideal, Harriet Carker, which precedes Alice’s redemption. More for the benefit of the reader than for Harriet, Alice continues her personal narrative:

   When I was young and pretty . . . my mother, who had not been very mindful of me as a child, found out my merits. . . . she was covetous and poor, and thought to make a sort of property of me. . . . I was made a short-lived toy, and flung aside cruelly and carelessly than even such things are. (847)

Again, Dickens presents Alice as a victim, not as a perpetrator, although she is transported for being involved “in every part . . . but the gains,” of a robbery masterminded by Carker, whose “usage” first “made a Devil” of her (847). Alice’s worst crime, then, involves not her involvement in Carker’s larcenous conspiracy nor her free or forced expressions of sexuality; she dies for her involvement in sexual transactions that occurred outside the sanctioned mode of marital commerce. Because she was not taught to safeguard her purity from within the safety of a strong maternal barricade, Alice is doomed, but she dies repentant. Had she been sold into marriage, however, society would not view her crime as quite so heinous, but Dickens suggests that it should be seen so.

   In Dombey and Son, a similar fate awaits the bartered bride whose education prepares her for a socially acceptable form of pandering, and Edith provides as powerful an example of a bartered bride as Alice does of a prostitute, primarily because Dickens gives both women their own voices with which to decry their commodified states. Like Alice, Edith has an opportunity to relate her own tale of being prepared, packaged, and marketed, in her case for marriage, and of her consequent dehumanization. Edith and
Alice therefore represent two sides of the coin of prostitution—one socially sanctioned and one not—both of which are transactions involving masculine consumption and feminine complicity. Edith’s mother, Mrs. Skewton (known sometimes as “Cleopatra”), like Mrs. Brown, distorts her duty and produces a commodity instead of raising a daughter, but she disguises her own commercialization and that of her daughter behind a carefully constructed fiction of being, like the heroines of romance, “devoted to Nature” (362), thereby presenting herself and her daughters as hyper-feminine, wholly artificial beings whose outward beautiful appearances conceal their actual moral and emotional vacuities. As Forster remarks, “Edith’s worst qualities are but the perversion of what should have been her best. A false education in her, and a tyrant passion in her husband, make them other than [what] Nature meant” (363).

As the product of a distorted version of the education proffered and sanctioned by Lewis and Ellis, Edith’s “very willful, very haughty” bearing (359) indicates the potential for corruption in that form of education when the inner resources of a woman receive less attention than the outer. Edith apparently received training in accomplishments, but little else. On his first visit to Edith’s apartments, Dombey catalogs and appraises Edith’s domestic value based upon her accomplishments. First, he notes a “variety of landscape drawings . . . which were strewn about the room” (369), which serve as window dressing for Edith, the focal mannequin on display. Dombey, seemingly armed with a checklist of standard features of a marriage market item, asks Edith to inventory and verify her readiness to assume the role of Mrs. Dombey, and her demonstration becomes, in a sense, an audition, since Dombey seeks an ornament for his House, not a domestic partner. Inspecting her sketches, Dombey asks Edith,
“Are they yours?”

“Yes.”

“And you play [both harp and piano], I already know.”

“Yes.”

“And sing?”

“Yes.”

. . . “You have many resources against weariness at least,” said Mr. Dombey.

“Whatever their efficacy may be,” she returned, “you know them all now. I have no more.”

“May I hope to prove them all?” said Mr. Dombey, with solemn gallantry, laying down a drawing he had held, and motioning toward the harp.

“Oh, certainly! If you desire it!” (369-370)

Dombey, like a consumer testing the claims a sales associate makes regarding a desired object, initiates and directs all of Edith’s performances, and Edith adopts a responsive sales approach to suit her potential consumer, showing him only what he demands to see. Nonetheless, Edith struggles to maintain her dignity and disassociates herself from her own agency while matching Dombey’s dehumanized courtship with an affectless, professional demeanor, as the narrator describes:

She answered all these questions with a strange reluctance; and with that remarkable air of opposition to herself . . . Yet she was not embarrassed,
but wholly self-possessed. Neither did she wish to avoid the conversation
. . . . (370)

Yet she does not withdraw herself from the transaction. Her “self-possession” indicates
that she retains absolute control of herself, body and soul, and she seems to need no
external agent to negotiate the transfer of her assets. Unlike Alice, then, Edith has a
choice in whether or not she will trade her body for financial gain. Additionally, Edith
views her body as a marketed commodity and places her value in her flesh and not in the
accomplishments Dombey inventories and which society expects. Edith asserts, “There is
no slave in the market: there is no horse in a fair: so shown and offered and examined,
and paraded, Mother, as I have been, for ten shameful years” (473). Edith even admits to
having committed the cardinal female sin in submitting to “The license of look and
touch,” just as a prostitute would, while being “hawked and vended” before a multitude
of potential suitors (473). Thus Dickens portrays an education for the marriage market as
being analogous to that which prepares prostitutes to enter the sex trade—both transform
women into commodities for male sexual consumption—but Mrs. Skewton’s and, more
importantly, Edith’s conscious choice to engage in the marriage market marks their
endeavors as the more sinister form of female trade.

Edith further disassociates herself from the situation by forcing her mother and
Dombey to finalize the details of the transaction and ceding her traditional bridal rights to
her mother and Dombey. Edith allows Dombey to furnish the house without her direct
input, Mrs. Skewton orders and purchases the attire for the entire wedding party and the
trousseau while “[s]ometimes Edith sat in the carriage” (511), and Edith relinquishes her
proscribed privilege to choose the timing of the wedding by insisting that her mother and
Dombey set the date. Furthermore, Dombey and Mrs. Skewton complete the marital bargain without Edith’s input despite her presence during their negotiations. The narrator reports, the “conversation was almost entirely sustained by Mrs. Skewton. . . . Edith never uttered one word, unless in answer to a question. Verily, Cleopatra worked hard for the establishment that was so nearly clutched” (508). Edith’s refusal to take more than a nominal role in that establishment—notably not a home—from its very beginning indicates that she is willing to adorn the House, but not to throw her heart or spirit into the bargain.

In one of the first of many opportunities for direct comparison between the Edith and Alice, Edith admits her role in her own commodification while berating her mother for educating her to become a commodity, but in Edith’s *apologia* Dickens dehumanizes Edith more than he does Alice, which again indicates that he views the bartered bride as a more immoral type of woman than the prostitute. Addressing Mrs. Skewton with a “mocking emphasis” on the word “Mother,” Edith says, “You know he has bought me. . . . He has considered of his bargain . . . [and] he is rather proud of it; he thinks that it will suit him, and may be had sufficiently cheap; and he will buy tomorrow” (472). Alice speaks of herself in the third person as if her life were over; Edith speaks of herself as never having had a life to begin with, replacing the pronoun “me” with “it,” thus referring to herself as a “thing without life” (*OED* B1a). Edith also berates her mother for being too thorough in her hyper-feminine curriculum:

> What childhood did you ever leave to me? I was a woman—artful, designing, mercenary, laying snares for men—before I knew myself, or
you, or even understood the base and wretched aim of every new display I learnt. (473)

Whereas Alice describes having spent her childhood in neglect and learning her trade after first experiencing innocence, Edith complains she was denied even the innocence of childhood, when she was “taught to scheme and plot when children play” (473).

Therefore, Dickens implies that the child Alice may be redeemable after having exercised, one assumes, her innate womanly sympathies during her neglected childhood, but that Edith, never having a similar opportunity, remains irredeemable.

What is most striking in *Dombey and Son* is that Dickens allows his negative female exemplars to define themselves, instead of relying purely on the narrative voice to point out their fatal flaws. Just as Edith declares her irredeemability, in unwittingly describing her own unnatural state Mrs. Skewton exposes herself as being more blameworthy than Mrs. Brown. However, because Mrs. Skewton intends to deceive her listeners, whereas the others state their cases openly, the narrator steps in to ensure that the reader catches the irony and hypocrisy of Mrs. Skewton’s unintentional disclaimers.

When Mrs. Skewton asks Dombey if he “is devoted to Nature,” implying that she is so devoted herself, the narrator decodes her sentimental doublespeak:

“What I want . . . is heart.” It was frightfully true in one sense, if not in that in which she used the phrase. “What I want, is frankness, confidence, less conventionality, and freer play of soul. We are so dreadfully artificial.” We were, indeed. (363)

By letting the reader in on the irony of Mrs. Skewton’s admission of being heartless, deceitful, untrustworthy, and false, Dickens exposes both her own and the
uncomprehending Dombey’s willing complicity with their culture’s commercialized conventions. Moreover, whereas in Alice’s *apologia*, the prostitute implies, but not directly state, that Mrs. Brown initiated Alice’s unsanctioned trade by pandering Alice, Dickens actually shows Mrs. Skewton engaging in marital speculation in consultation with Major Bagstock, who introduced Dombey to the mother-and-daughter sales force. Mrs. Skewton insists on keeping up appearances, however, while Bagstock repeatedly interjects with the reality of their actions. Mrs. Skewton, for example, speaks of the “amount of Heart” in Dombey’s dealings with Edith (445), while Bagstock speaks of Dombey’s having “beat up these quarters” in which she and Edith live (446), a hunting term used to describe the flushing of game birds from cover.Claiming to be weakened and made faint while discussing her daughter’s marital prospects, Mrs. Skewton nevertheless directly questions Bagstock on how best to secure Dombey, to which Bagstock responds with the question, “Shall we marry him to Edith Granger, Ma’am?” Although she feigns to be “shocked” by the bluntness of “the mercenary wretch,” Mrs. Skewton smiles “with so much archness and vivacity” that one can not mistake her approval of Bagstock’s suggestion and his manner of making it (448). While mother and daughter both desire to disassociate themselves from the overt financial impetus of their marital machinations, Mrs. Skewton’s exaggerated, hyper-feminine façade of delicacy is particularly distasteful since it, too, is a perversion of ideal femininity. In order to further expose her as a humbug, Dickens portrays Mrs. Skewton’s nightly deconstruction, when

The painted object shriveled under her [maid’s] hand; the form collapsed, the hair dropped off, the arched dark eyebrows changed to scanty tufts of gray; the pale lips shrunk, the skin became cadaverous and loose; [and] an
old, worn, yellow, nodding woman . . . alone remained . . . The very voice changed, as it addressed Edith, when they were alone again. (472)

Just as her maid removes Mrs. Skewton of her cosmetics and exposes her as a withered hag, Dickens symbolically strips the marriage market of its false sentimentality and betrays Dombey’s and Edith’s engagement as a sale.

In order to force a comparison between the prostitution and marriage markets in the real world and to admonish his female readers to discard their morally sanctioned complicity and his male readers to abandon their traditional sex trades, Dickens repeatedly juxtaposes the mother-daughter firms of Brown and Skewton in Dombey and Son. First, Dickens makes the mother-daughter pairs nearly identical in physical and symbolic appearance: the daughters are close in age, tall in stature, dark-haired, handsome, and proudly defiant; and the mothers are haggard, bent, prone to palsy, and associated with decay and death. The most overt connection between the pairs occurs when they briefly interact in the chapter entitled “Domestic Relations,” in which Dickens foreshadows the fact that the pairs are actually related. Edith notes that the approaching Mrs. Brown and Alice appear to be “an exaggerated imitation” of her mother and herself (662). Edith also notices that Mrs. Brown seems “a distorted shadow of her [Edith’s] mother,” while Alice looks “enough . . . like herself to strike her with an unusual feeling. . . . Edith could not but compare the younger woman with herself” (662). Hablot Knight Browne’s illustration of “A Chance Meeting” (Figure 1, below) depicts the pairs of women mirroring each other, suggesting that Dickens wanted to make a visual comparison available to the reader to further enforce his intention that readers view the women as coequals.
Second, no doubt in order to call the reader’s attention to what we now refer to as a “cycle of abuse” within families and the social hypocrisy that allowed it to continue, Dickens makes Alice and Edith first cousins (921). The Skewton brothers, who “were the gayest gentlemen and the best-liked that came a visiting from London” (921), supply the familial link: one marries Mrs. Skewton, producing Edith, while Mrs. Brown had been seduced by the other Skewton brother, giving birth to Alice. In the nineteenth century, the
term “gay” often denoted engagement in immoral sexual commerce, and the Skewton brothers were apparently very good customers. At Alice’s deathbed, Mrs. Brown’s verbal strike at her hypocritical social superiors exposes the hypocrisy of society’s blessing the first brother’s legal union while ignoring the second brother’s illegal one. Mrs. Brown cries, “There’s relationship without your clergy and your wedding rings—they make it, but they can’t break it” (921). Dickens also emphasizes the physical similarities between Edith and Alice when Mrs. Brown divulges their relationship: “if you could have seen my gal . . . side by side with the other’s daughter [Edith], you’d have seen, for all the difference of dress and life, that they were like each other” (921). The close relationship between the Skewtons and the Brown/Marwoods signifies their formation of their own House of sexual commerce for wholesale and retail trade, thus recalling the novel’s full title. As Robert Newsom points out, the “distinction between dealing goods wholesale or retail has of course to do with whether they are sold as a whole lot or divided into individual pieces. The word “retail” in fact comes from the French retailler, meaning “to cut again” (199). Although Newsom employs this definition to explore the idea of physical dissection in *Dombey and Son*, we can also apply it to Alice and Edith’s sexuality: Carker wholly consumes Alice, who is then removed from the marketplace, while Edith figuratively retails only those portions of herself that Dombey wants—the items on his mental shopping list—not her whole self.

Third, the omniscient narrator equates Alice’s prostitution with Edith’s loveless marital bargain, a comparison which the pair echo in their own words. The chapter introducing Alice closes with a direct query to the reader: “Were this miserable mother, and this miserable daughter, only the reduction to their lowest grade, of certain social
vices sometimes prevailing higher up? Say, Edith Dombey! And Cleopatra, best of mothers, let us have your testimony!” (579). Edith sees something of herself when “the faded likeness of [her] sex has wandered past” her window, which may indeed be the vigilant Alice (514). Alice sarcastically insists, “No great lady ever thought” of making a property “of a daughter yet, I’m sure . . . it’s never done, we all know” (847), mockingly negating the norm to press her point. Dickens hammers home his equation of the marriage market with prostitution from the introduction of each commodified woman until each meets her social or physical termination.

Although Dickens entirely excuses neither Alice nor Edith for their participation in sexual commerce, he lays more blame for their fallen states upon their male consumers/customers, who abuse their absolute authority over women by initiating both the production and supply of female commodities in order to satiate their own immoral demands. As Steig rightly avers, “The explicit theme of Dombey and Son seems to be that mercenary and power-hungry men like Dombey and Carker make victims of women” (122), but Dickens was certainly not alone in voicing such concerns. A decade after *Dombey and Son*, in *The Education of Character* Ellis, then the reigning authority on the conventional wisdom behind female submission to masculine authority, pragmatically states that “as a general rule—as a law of our social existence—men have it in their power to make the characters of women whatever they wish them to be” (131). In recognizing the potential for male tyranny as the chief source of the legal and quasi-legal forms of female trade in his society, Dickens anticipates Ellis’ assessment of absolute masculine dominion over women but does not condone its abuse. Both Dombey, who views women solely in terms of their ability to advertise his commercial success (or, in
today’s parlance, to “build his brand”), and James Carker, a serial sexual predator who destroys Alice, menaces Florence, and attempts to seduce Edith, do greater harm to themselves than they do their female victims. Dombey survives only because Florence’s interrupts his suicide attempt (939); Carker dies unrepentant, crushed literally by the wheels of progress—he falls off a railroad platform, landing under an approaching locomotive (875).

In Dombey’s conflation of the domestic and public spheres of human interaction, which Victorian society expressly forbade but tacitly condoned, Dickens presents the self-destructive results of Dombey’s equating commercial success with human worth. Frank McCombie asserts, “To Dombey, Edith is simply an acquisition” (28), but Edith does not function as merely another objet d’art purchased purely for her aesthetic properties. Perverting the ideals of Woman’s Mission, Dombey marries Edith so that she may improve the value of his social status, not his morals. The narrator explains that Dombey

had imagined that the proud character of his second wife would have been added to his own—would have merged into it, and exalted his greatness.

He had pictured himself haughtier than ever, with Edith’s haughtiness subservient to his. (648)

Thus Dombey attempts to accrue Edith’s pride to his own account, but Edith rejects his value system. Finding “the splendid means of personal adornment, and the luxuries of dress” scattered about Edith’s room, he catalogs the items that Edith treats with “disregard” (650), which Dombey conlates with Edith’s devaluation of himself. Just as he had inventoried Edith’s accomplishments in assessing her value, Dombey tallies
“Chaplets of flowers, plumes of feathers, jewels, laces, silks and satins . . . despised, poured out, and made of no account” (651) when he intended for Edith to display the objects upon her person to reflect his own self-value. Furthermore, Dombey makes Carker his “confidential agent” (683) both at the office and in the House, unknowingly bringing about the fall of both establishments. After Dombey, in front of Carker, redresses Edith for failing to exhibit a “positive show and confession of deference before the world” (652), Dombey initiates a virtual separation of bed and board through Carker, who desires Edith for himself. Carker’s inappropriate presence in the House culminates in the chapter entitled “The Thunderbolt,” when Carker witnesses Dombey’s final attempt to force Edith to reflect “credit on his proprietorship” (736), whereupon she leaves him.

Originally, Dickens planned for Edith to suffer the same fate as that of Alice, but he rejected the idea of making Edith an adulteress. Instead, Dickens presents “an inverted Maid’s Tale” (Forster 364) wherein Edith rejects both Dombey’s and Carker’s attempts to possess and use her commodified body to achieve their own ends and redeems herself from her commodified state. Because one’s home should not be a place of business and because Edith is Dombey’s wife, not his employee Dombey’s attempt to bring Edith to account, so to speak, fails miserably. Edith’s responds by decommodifying herself at last, avowing that

I will be exhibited to no one, as the refractory slave you purchased. . . . If I kept my marriage day, I would keep it as a day of shame. Self-respect!

Appearances before the world! what are these to me? (748)
Thus Edith rejects Dombey’s version of self-respect gained from external sources and completely adopts a self-validated self-esteem and upon leaving the House, she literally redeems herself by voiding the marriage and repossessing her person. Instead of improving his household account, both Edith and Florence escape Dombey’s commercialized domestic establishment and leave it bankrupt of woman’s humanizing potential.

Additionally, Edith proves to be her own mistress by bringing her commercial education to account for herself by, in a manner of speaking, using the masters’ tools to deconstruct Dombey’s House, to entrap Carker in the snare he had designed for her, and to construct a new cage of her own choosing. Edith explains that her decision to marry Dombey was not predicated after all on purely economic reasons saying,

Grown too indifferent for any opposition but indifference, to the daily working of the hands that had molded me to this; and knowing that my marriage would at least prevent their hawking of me up and down; I suffered myself to be sold, as infamously as any woman with a halter round her neck is sold in any market-place.70 (587)

Here Edith exposes her marriage to Dombey as a deliberate subversion of the marriage market. She cannot, however, completely end her commodification until she frees herself of her defective marriage, and she does so by deflecting the weapon of public opinion from herself toward Carker. Edith begins her declaration of independence by explaining the method behind her supposed madness in leaving Dombey:

I am a woman . . . who from her childhood has been shamed and steeled. I have been offered and rejected, put up and appraised, until my very soul
has sickened. I have not had an accomplishment or grace that might have been a resource to me, but it has been paraded and vended to enhance my value, as if the common crier had called it through the streets. (856)

Edith thus cites her commercialized education in self-marketing as a crucible of heart-hardening humiliation that inured her to the voice of public opinion. Paradoxically, her callousness becomes her means of escape from the marriage market altogether. Edith continues,

I have thrown my fame and good name to the winds! I have resolved to bear the shame that will attach to me—know that it attaches falsely—that you know it too—that he does not, never can, and never shall. I’ll die, and make no sign. . . . For this, I have been seen here by [the hotel staff] . . . (860)

Looking forward to keeping her innocence a secret until her physical death, Edith chooses a social death by acting the part of a ruined woman. She tells Florence as much, saying, “When you leave me in this dark room, think that you have left me in the grave” (969). Therefore, both Edith and Alice, commodities traded in the prostitution and marriage markets, pass through processes of “wholesale, retail,” and “exportation” in their “dealings with the firm” of either Skewton and Brown or of Dombey, as anticipated in the novel’s full title, and meet similar ends: Alice’s profligate sexual commerce results in her transportation, and she dies after returning to England; and Edith commits social suicide by seemingly committing adultery, after which she exports herself to Italy to live an independent existence prohibited in English society.
Florence undergoes a similar process in her non-commodifiable state, although after her exportation she returns to England as an exemplar of filial, marital, and maternal duty, redeeming her father and establishing a new model home built on a foundation of proper human interaction. Scholars often overlook, however, the fact that Florence, refusing to acknowledge her father’s commercialized heart and eternally obstinate in her attempts to win her father’s love, remains, like her father, willfully blind to the realities staring her in face. Regardless of repeated rebuffs, she continues her quest, insisting that their dysfunctional father-daughter relationship is solely her fault. For instance, Florence pleads with Edith to aid her in securing Dombey’s love, using language very similar to that used in both Alice’s and Edith’s personal narratives:

I have never known how to be. I have missed the way, and had no one to show it to me. Oh, let me learn from you how to become dearer to Papa.

Teach me! you, who can so well! (589)

Whereas Alice blames intentional maternal neglect for making a monster of her, Florence claims responsibility for her inability to overcome being the accidental victim of maternal neglect. Just as Florence shifted Kate’s aunt’s sympathy from herself onto Dombey, she transfers blame for her inability to attract Dombey’s love from her mother and onto herself, intuitively demonstrating her ability to enact the self-sacrificial ethos of Woman’s Mission by reflecting positive social energy toward those who most need it and deflecting negative social energy away from those who do not deserve it.

Importantly, Edith recognizes this ability in Florence and responds to Florence’s request in a manner that echoes what Ellis in *The Daughters of England* (1842) declares to be the English woman’s *raison d’être*: “To love is a woman’s nature—to be beloved is
the consequence of her having properly exercised and controlled that nature. To love, is woman’s duty—to be beloved is her reward” (8). Edith refuses to aid Florence, saying, “Heaven forbid that you should learn from me! . . . That I should teach you how to love, or be loved, Heaven forbid!” and, placing her hand upon her breast, “Never seek to find in me . . . what is not here” (590). Both Edith and Alice suffer the consequences of their improper educations: having no love to offer, they have no reason to exist in a society that leaves women no other respectable occupational options in which to exercise and control their feminine natures, so they must die or leave. On the other hand, Dickens rewards Florence’s relative ignorance with the love of both her husband and her regenerated father, both of whom benefit from her proper exercise and control of Woman’s Influence.

Considering that Florence can not fulfill her Woman’s Mission in the commercialized Dombey House, Dickens provides her with an opportunity to do so in another commercial domicile. Solomon Gills’s home above his nautical goods resale shop, however, lacks commercial success but abounds in relationships of mutual esteem and affection. Therein, Florence performs the daughterly functions forbidden in Dombey’s House for Captain Cuttle, who watches with “delight and wonder at the quiet housewifery of Florence in assisting to clear the table, arrange the parlor, and sweep up the hearth” (775). Florence also presents the captain with his pipe, bids him to smoke it, and lights it for him while preparing “a perfect glass of grog for him, unasked” (775). Granted, Florence may have witnessed similar womanly acts of service at the Skettles’s home, but lacking prior evidence to verify her abilities to perform these acts, let alone to do them perfectly, the reader must again suppose Florence to intuit the practical
application of her proper feminine duties. Her womanliness having been established, Florence can realize her potential value and invest herself in a home worthy of her “angelic character” (799). After being absent for three years (or thirty chapters), Walter Gay returns to find Florence in her wholly non-commodified and perfected womanly state, worthy of his “respect” and “reverence” (804), neither of which have calculable value like Dombey’s costly gifts to Edith.

Dickens fittingly depicts the inception of the Gays’ entirely non-commercial marriage as a virtually clandestine event, directly inverting the Dombey’s very public wedding. The Dombey wedding party attracts the notice of the entire neighborhood, including servants, “the men who play bells . . . the marrow-bones and cleavers . . . and a brass band” (518), acquaintances and associates (52), and a long-distance traveler, Edith’s cousin Feenix “from Baden-Baden” (524). Conversely, Florence orders that there be “no marriage party, and nobody will distinguish us by our dress from other people” (885). She has “no bridesmaid,” and the wedding takes place in a dark, “dusty” church with “wormy registers” of past nuptials, births, and deaths; the “amens of the dusty clerk appear, like MacBeth’s, to stick in his throat a little;” and “No gracious ray of light is seen to fall on Florence [since] the morning luminary is built out, and don’t shine there” (903). After a few days, the newlyweds quietly export themselves to China, where supposedly they fulfill their noncommercial marriage vows.

Florence’s leaving England completes Dombey’s triple punishment for his failure to separate commercial from domestic concerns. Carker orchestrates Dombey’s financial bankruptcy before absconding with Edith, thus stripping Dombey of his economic valuation system and Dombey’s means of embodying his wealth; Edith’s departure for
the continent leaves him a marital bankrupt; and Florence’s voyage across the seas finalizes his moral bankruptcy. Fittingly, Dickens also strips the House of its grandeur by staging a public sale (926-929). Florence, of course, returns in time to prevent Dombey’s suicide, whereupon he submits to her embraces and entreaties “with a docile submission” (940), and the pair leave the House forever, entering the Gays’ home, where “[a]mbitious projects trouble him no more. His only pride is in his daughter and her husband” (970). The foretold transformation of *Dombey and Son* into Dombey and daughter (941) represents a rarity among Dickens’s novels in its regeneration of a formerly monstrous parent, a denouement replicated only in *Hard Times* (1854) with the elder Thomas Gradgrind’s renouncement of a miseducation equal in destructive potential to those which pervert Alice and Edith.

Notably, Florence is only eighteen or nineteen years old by the end of the novel, as evidenced by her explanation of having returned home immediately upon the birth of her first child, which occurred at sea. Therefore, Florence receives virtue’s reward at the tender age of seventeen, four years before the legal age of maturation, i. e. before she becomes an adult. The narrator describes the seventeen-year-old Florence as a “child in innocent simplicity; a woman in her modest self-reliance, and her deep intensity of feeling; both child and woman seemed at once expressed in her fair face, and fragile delicacy of shape, and gracefully to mingle there” (743). McCombie points out the obvious connection between Florence and Dickens’s beloved sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, who at the age of seventeen died in his arms. Mary’s apotheosis in Dickens’s eyes has been commented upon by scholars as being the basis for many of Dickens’s heroines, and it need not be further deliberated here except to point out the impossibility
of the static ideal that Dickens presents in Florence. Dickens relies on the example of his own angel, the dead Mary Hogarth, to create a positive non-commodifiável model of proper feminine behavior, and Florence survives and thrives in perfected stasis to procreate and populate the world of the novel. Perhaps this explains why Florence’s wedding reads more like a funeral than a wedding. Conversely, because Alice’s and Edith’s womanly natures did not remain static but had been perverted and commodified, and because their miseducations ill prepare them to pass on anything but perversion to their potential daughters, they apparently must not be allowed to reproduce. Although Florence embodies Dickens’s best hopes for his society—a thoroughly non-commodifiável, regenerative model of femininity, the fact that she represents a model of perfection attainable only in death is quite unsettling and ultimately fails to provide a realistic exemplar for women in any age.
Chapter 5

Student-oriented Women’s Education in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*

Charlotte Brontë is one of the fortunate few nineteenth-century women writers to attract a broad audience beyond academia after the initial feminist scholarly effort to re-popularize such works in the latter years of the twentieth century. Mary Jacobus, Sandra M. Gilbert, and Susan Gubar receive most of the credit for reintroducing readers not only to Charlotte but also to her sisters Emily and Anne, and the Modern Language Association’s electronic bibliography seems to support such claims. Jacobus’s article “The Buried Letter: Feminism and Romanticism in *Villette*” and Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* first appeared in 1979. A subject search for “Brontë, Charlotte” displayed only 240 items before 1979; only eight of those 240 concerned *Villette* (1853). In the 1980s, the numbers jump to 310 and 57 entries, respectively. Searching the next decade yields 658 items for the author and 91 for her last completed novel, and the new millennia’s scholars have thus far produced 247 articles, books, and dissertations on Charlotte Brontë, with 45 of those works devoted partially or entirely to *Villette.*

*Jane Eyre* (1847) continues to hold the lion’s share of attention in Charlotte Brontë studies, but *Villette* is catching up with her elder sister, because more so than *Jane Eyre*, I believe, Lucy Snowe grapples with a problem that has forever been a locus of debate among feminists: Lucy, like many women today, asks if she can have it all—education, career, love, marriage, and personal fulfillment. Certainly, as many have claimed, in her own quest for an identity, Lucy observes and analyzes the behavior of other women, discarding some of their characteristics and incorporating others. In the
process of becoming an emotionally and intellectually liberated woman like those envisioned by eighteenth-century feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and regenerated by an anonymous contributor to the January 1850 *Westminster Review* and nineteenth-century educator Alexander J. Scott, Lucy rejects but does not wholly condemn the life strategies of the feminine models that she encounters. Instead, she describes the successes of affectionate homemakers like Louisa Bretton and Paulina Mary Home DeBassompierre, who are patterned after Sarah Stickney Ellis’s ideal woman, and that of Ginevra Fanshawe, who embodies the affected hedonist universally denounced by Victorian readers. Through the bittersweet achievement of her mostly autobiographical heroine, Brontë argues that all three types of women have equal chances of economic success and domestic harmony in their world, so long as their educations adequately prepare them to meet their preferred expectations. Unfortunately, more often than not those goals are contingent upon emotional or intellectual sacrifices, and none of the types of women presented in *Villette* eventually has it all—not even the liberated Lucy—which suggests that Brontë concluded that no woman in her society could.

Considering the aforementioned number of Brontë references, it should be apparent that Charlotte’s life is well documented, and there is no need for a detailed retelling of it here. However, Lucasta Miller suggests that Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Life of Charlotte Brontë* and subsequent biographies based upon it may be more fictional than factual, and that Charlotte herself was her “own mythologizer [who] invented two distinct and conflicting myths:” one accounts for the unconventional feminist who spoke through Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe; the other depicts a “quick and trembling creature, raised in total seclusion, a martyr to duty, and a model of Victorian femininity” (4). Miller’s theory
follows the general trend to divide Brontë’s heroines, and by extension the author herself, into two or more split personalities. Jacobus, for example, speaks of Brontë’s “divisive relationship” with Romanticism and reason, within which “Brontë herself is constituted as woman and writer,” and of the resulting “duality that haunts” Villette (58); Brenda R. Silver calls Lucy a “divided being” whose “economic and emotional needs are continually at odds with each other” (290); Diane Long Hoeveler refers to Lucy’s “bifurcated vision” that causes her “to polarize people and places in a manner that reflects her own internal polarization” (234); and, along with Gilbert and Gubar (416), Eleanor Salotto raises the specter of “schizophrenia,” calling Lucy “an unrelated self in time” (70). Such theorists contend that while in her fiction Brontë imagines what women’s roles could be and seems to align herself with radical feminists like Wollstonecraft and her own friends Harriet Martineau and Mary Taylor, in reality she refuses wholeheartedly to embrace a radically feminist viewpoint or to transgress standard feminine roles. This certainly appears to be the case in Villette, and Lucy Snowe, I contend, embodies Brontë’s determination to be her “own woman . . . uninfluenced or swayed by the consciousness of how [one’s] work will affect other minds” and resistant of “the inclination to assimilate [one’s] thoughts to the thoughts of those who feel kindly, but sometimes fail to see justly” (I’ll get page numbers from vol. 3 of letters/Gaskell 409-410). Lucy is an emblem of Brontë’s resolution to maintain a core identity of her own creation, despite others’ well intentioned but unjust coercion to adopt their conservative or liberal standards of femininity.

As early as 1844, Charlotte’s letters evince the onset of her own conflicts over filial duty, career aspirations, and desire for mental and physical activity, conflicts
complicated by her perception of the likelihood of a desirable matrimonial opportunity. Despite her training and teaching at Margaret Wooler’s school in Roe Head and at the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels—the latter deliberately undertaken in order to open a family-run school at Haworth Parsonage—Charlotte never kept a school of her own. Upon returning from Brussels to find her father, Patrick Brontë, increasingly blinded by cataracts, she tells Ellen Nussey that she cannot, “yet permit [her]self to enter upon life . . . on Papa’s account” (Letters of Charlotte Brontë 1: 341) and later reports “the school scheme” has been abandoned for lack of students (1: 408). As in Susan Ferrier’s case, Charlotte’s claim that filial duty precludes a life outside the home is puzzling and may indicate more of a personal preference than an absolute necessity to remain at home, especially considering that Emily remained at Haworth and “willingly [took] up her old domestic duties” and, along with a servant, ran the household after the death of their aunt, Elizabeth Branwell (Fraser 180). With Emily at home to care for Patrick, Charlotte could have left Haworth if she had chosen to pursue a career in teaching; instead, she writes of being “buried away from the world” and complains that: “it seems as if I ought to be working and braving the rough realities of the world” but that her filial “duty [is] to restrain this feeling” (1: 341).73

Charlotte’s remaining single for nearly her entire life is also somewhat perplexing, considering her desire—and the number of opportunities she had—to marry. Brontë biographer Rebecca Fraser indicates that in 1845 Charlotte “[more] and more . . . brooded on the lot of women—their lives determined by marriage, and the sort of women who got married . . . convinced that she was not one” (225). However, a few months later in a letter to Margaret Wooler, Charlotte seems hopeful of a productive life as a “lone
woman” after visiting her former teacher and employer (*Letters of Charlotte Brontë* 1: 448). Charlotte thanks Wooler for her company and for her encouraging example of a successful *femme sole*, saying,

I speculate much on the existence of unmarried and never-to-be-married women nowadays, and I have already got to the point of considering that there is no more respectable character on this earth than an un[n]married who makes her own way through life quietly pers[e]vering—without support of husband or brother and who . . . retains in her possession a well-regulated mind . . . . (1: 448)

The prospect of an active, independent life, realized by the commercial success of her novels, no doubt induced Charlotte to remain unmarried, and her father’s age and condition kept her at Haworth, from which she safely conducted a professional literary career. She refused a total of four proposals over her lifetime, accepting that of Arthur Bell Nicholls in April 1854 when she was thirty-eight years old, nearly two years after it was first made, only when her aging father reversed his considerably acrid and long refusal to consent to the match (Fraser 457). Patrick initially deemed the proposal both disingenuous and degrading (*Letters of Charlotte Brontë* 3: 95), and his “disproportionate” “[a]gitation and anger,” as Charlotte characterized it (3: 93), prompted her to remain “entirely passive” and submit to his will (3: 149). She also speaks of her own lack of affection for Nicholls and seems grateful for her father’s “antipathy” toward him, by which she “escap[es] the yoke of [Nicholls’s] morose temper,” despite being fearful of “losing the purest gem” of “genuine affection” (3: 149). Patrick’s distaste for Nicholls compounded her inclination to remain single, and her longing for noble and
fulfilling work outside marriage—possibilities which she depicts and defends in her fiction—was as much the result of chance as it was of choice.

In many ways, Brontë’s tenure as a governess and as a teacher, as well as her views on marriage and honorable women’s employment, recall the life and opinions of Mary Wollstonecraft, and an incidental connection between them appears in a review of *Jane Eyre* written by James Lorimer in 1849, who characterizes Brontë as “a woman pretty nearly unsexed” (*The Brontës* 116), just as Wollstonecraft had been described in Richard Polwhele’s *The Unsex’d Females* (1798). Although Hoeveler supposes that Brontë “was most likely introduced to [the works of] Wollstonecraft” by her friend Harriet Martineau (223), I will demonstrate that we can affirmatively trace the Wollstonecraftian paradigms of sexual liberation and women’s education in *Villette* to Brontë’s readings of Alexander J. Scott’s *Suggestions on Female Education* (1849) and to an anonymous review of Sarah Lewis’s *Woman’s Mission* in the January 1850 *Westminster Review*. Having resolved her own dilemma over fulfilling her filial duty while pursuing an active career by remaining and writing at home, Brontë turns to the much broader Woman Question, and her ruminations eventually generate *Villette*’s content and themes. In the latter half of the 1840s, The Woman Question was a recurrent theme in Brontë’s correspondence, as it was in the popular press, and in July 1849 she candidly shares her views with her publisher William S. Williams (*Letters of Charlotte Brontë* 2: 226-227). Williams’s daughter Louisa was considering entry to Queen’s College, and Brontë encourages him to support Louisa’s studies, calling education “a priceless advantage” and a “step toward independency [sic]” and insisting that his “daughters—as much as [his] sons—should aim at making their way honorably through
life” with “some object” to occupy their “existence” (2: 226). While such advice seems to convey an entirely feminist backing of women’s equality with men in the workplace, it is important to note Brontë’s reason for providing women with something to do—activity can alleviate loneliness. Brontë asks, “Lonely as I am—how should I be if Providence had never given me the courage to adopt a career . . . sisters lost . . . a resident in a moorland parish where there is not a single educated family?” (2: 227). Nevertheless, she ends the letter with a Wollstonecraftian sentiment that reappears in the review of Woman’s Mission: “I wish all your daughters—I wish every woman in England had also a hope and a motive” upon which to base their lives (2: 227).

In a 19 March 1850 letter to Williams, Brontë revisits the topic of women’s education, in particular its treatment in Suggestions on Female Education, a publication of two lectures Scott delivered before the Ladies’ College at Bedford Square in the previous October. She thanks Williams for one of the many parcels of books he periodically shipped to Haworth for her perusal (Letters of Charlotte Brontë 2: 364-365), and her own list of the package’s contents includes the lectures, of which Brontë says, “I read [it] with unalloyed pleasure. It is very good; justly thought, and clearly and felicitously expressed” (2: 364). She also happily notes,

The girls of this generation have great advantages; it seems to me that they receive much encouragement in the acquisition of knowledge, and the cultivation of their minds; in these days women may be thoughtful and well-read without being universally stigmatized as “Blues” or “Pedants.” Men begin to approve and aid, instead of ridiculing, or checking them in their efforts to be wise. (2: 364)
Brontë’s inventory also lists women’s biographies, novels written by women—including three of Jane Austen’s novels and Grace Aguilar’s *Woman’s Friendship: A Story of Domestic Life* (1850)—and recent treatises on women’s education, particularly Maria Grey’s and Emily Shirreff’s *Thoughts on Self-Culture, Addressed to Women*, which had just been published (*Letters of Charlotte Brontë* 2: 362-3n.). Upon Williams’s recommendation, Brontë specifically requested some of Austen’s novels (2: 349) and relays her impression of *Emma* (1816) to Williams two months later, calling Austen “rather insensible,” by which she means unfeeling, because “the Passions are perfectly unknown to her” (2: 383). We do not know if Charlotte specifically requested that copies of these works be sent to her; however, apparently only Scott’s text warranted Brontë’s express opinion. Still, as demonstrated by the list and by her references to the texts in her letters, it is safe to assume that the Woman Question, women’s education, and the woman’s novel occupied Brontë’s thoughts.

In *Suggestions on Female Education*, Scott justifies English Literature as a field of study, especially for women, and argues that women must be taught to observe and analyze the whole of their environment in order to form a rational world view and code of behavior—subjects and ideas that appear in many of Brontë’s letters and in *Villette*. Scott, a professor of English Language and Literature both at Bedford Square and at London’s University College, complains that many women are done more harm than good by their well-intentioned parents who, attempting to educate “their daughters to purity and simplicity . . . place religious awe and prohibition” between them and English literature and thus “fence them within Eden,” thereby provoking them to “dream of a Paradise that lies beyond, and look there for a further knowledge of good and evil” (8).
Having less to occupy their thoughts and time than their brothers, women turn to literature, which for Scott includes popular novels, in order to “fill a craving void” or “to occupy powers otherwise stagnant” (13); and the benefits of literature—lessons of “propriety, integrity, or obedience to parents” (17)—are “misconceived” and negated when read indiscriminately (12). In his lecture on “Moral Philosophy for Young Ladies,” Scott demonstrates the benefits of the “science” of applying “empirical” and “scientific reasoning” to one’s experiences and then “systematizing” and “comprehending multifarious particulars in an orderly organic whole” (47).

Befitting the liberal ideals of the Ladies’ College, Scott resurrects Wollstonecraftian ideals in calling for a balanced moral and intellectual education:

> Were I bound to characterize what appears to me the right method in teaching . . . I would say, not a training to experience and observation, not a training to reflection and argument, not the one first and the other in addition to it, but the combination of the two. They must often be pursued separately; but . . . they may be afterwards made one. What is wanting in English women is neither right feeling nor active and discursive intellect, but the harmony of the two—the heart in the head, and the head in the heart—the equipoise of the soul. (62)

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft calls reason “the simple power” of “discerning truth” and “an emanation of divinity” that “must be the same in all;” and she complains that “the soul of woman is not allowed to have this distinction” and demands reparation of a “false system of female manners” that denies women the “power of generalizing ideas, of drawing comprehensive conclusions from individual
observations, [which] is the only acquirement . . . that really deserves the name of knowledge” (120-123). Scott agrees with Wollstonecraft, claiming that an “exercise of the entire mind . . . constitutes the often talked of practical character of England,” which, irrespective of gender, benefits the entire nation (Suggestions on Female Education 63). His sentiment anticipates the utopian vision of the reviewer of Woman’s Mission.

Brontë critiques the review of Woman’s Mission in her 27 August 1850 letter to Elizabeth Gaskell. She affirms that the article “contain[s] a great deal that seemed to [her] just and sensible,” and she asserts that the “amelioration of our [women’s] condition depends on ourselves” despite her concession that men were beginning to grant women more leverage than they previously had done (Letters of Charlotte Brontë 2: 457). Further, although she contends that women can reverse unspecified vices of their own making, Brontë speculates that “there are other evils—deep rooted in the foundation of the Social System—which no efforts of ours can touch—of which we cannot complain—of which it is advisable not too often to think” (2: 457). Brontë abruptly ends her commentary on the review and its subject there, without enumerating on those “other evils,” and immediately changes the subject to her less-than-enthusiastic thoughts on Alfred Lord Tennyson’s In Memoriam.75 Because her relationship with Williams was then on a much stronger footing than her newly formed acquaintance with Gaskell, Brontë’s letters to him evince a comfortable articulation of her opinions on women’s education. Perhaps Brontë was unwilling to comment further on the Woman Question in this her second letter to Gaskell, to whom she had been introduced only a few weeks earlier (Gaskell 333). It is also likely that Brontë at this point has an incomplete opinion of the Woman Question. Nevertheless, reflecting upon her own experiences, she begins
to ponder if she could apply the radical ideals in the review to her own present or future life. *Villette* is likely the result of such ruminations.

The unidentified reviewer of Sarah Lewis’s *Woman’s Mission* presents perhaps one of the most radical answers to the Woman Question to appear in the popular press at the time, and it unmistakably forecasts Lucy Snowe’s struggle toward independence, as I will show. The review’s author envisions a time when the “material world is to become spiritualized,” leading future generations to reject the ideology of separate masculine and feminine spheres and to demand “not so much for each other’s work, as for the motive of such work” to “speak to [their] whole natures” (181-182). Further, “the developed man, or woman, with intellect and passion spiritualized” (183) will concede that “what has seemed for ages may not be” the natural order of things and will discard gender prejudices in academia and the workplace (184). Upon developing and exhibiting “what is to be traced in woman as God made her, and not as the world and herself have fashioned her” (184), woman “herself is free” (186) to “trust herself” and “tak[e] up any tools that an earnest purpose . . . may suggest the result will be safe . . [to] work without heed or fear of opposition” (187). Thus liberated, “[w]hatever [woman] can be, she may be” (187), and society may safely renounce marriages of “convenience, of prudence, and worldly calculation,” preferring “unions of kind” (192). Women then “need not marry for other reasons than love” (187) and can perform honorable labor—“[w]riting, speaking, governing, [in] the warehouse and the mart, with art and science” enjoying “a life of Being” (186), in which she “is and works, works and is” (187)—until she marries a suitable mate with mutual interests and affection not “to cure ennui by the noise it shall make around her, nor for the ephemeral attentions that she wins by it, and still less to
avoid the odium that attaches itself more or less to the unmarried” (187). Likewise, women who are “led to encourage abstract thought, to fill their minds with the beauty and greatness of elementary truth” will rationally “consolidate” their “affections” (193) and enable society to acknowledge “that whatever is justly allowable for him, is the same for her” (193). Ideally, marriage then may be viewed “as one possible field for woman’s labor” among many (193). Considering that when this review appeared the law of coverture continued to subject women to masculine authority, its ideals are so progressive that the term “radical” seems insufficiently strong to connote its departure from convention.

As progressive as they appear, the reviewer’s ideals simultaneously evoke models of sexual liberation and coeducation described nearly sixty years earlier in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Although the reviewer rather obliquely seeks to transcend the norm, while Wollstonecraft details a rational revolution of the status quo, their thesis that desexualized academic and professional occupations will result in happy marriages and honorable occupations for women outside of marriage is essentially identical. Wollstonecraft asserts that “the most perfect education . . . is such an exercise of understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent” (58). Wollstonecraft also believes “that to improve both sexes they ought . . . in public schools to be educated together” and “predict[s]” that marriage will never be held sacred till women, by being brought up with men, are prepared to be their companions rather than their mistresses . . . till the virtues of both sexes are founded on reason; and till the affections
common to both are allowed to gain their due strength by the discharge of mutual duties. (349-350)

Wollstonecraft and the reviewer of *Woman’s Mission* suggest that liberation of both sexes is possible if they reject culturally proscribed sexual and intellectual repression. Wollstonecraft, Scott, and the reviewer all call for a union of moral and rational thought, a blend of sentiment and logic, which Brontë reformulates in *Villette* as a union between intellect/reason and passion/imagination that acknowledges and treasures sexual difference.

More than an attempt to “exorcise” “past images of women,” as Eleanor Salotto argues (61), *Villette* is an intellectual exercise in which Brontë synthesizes her own marginally progressive notions of femininity with the ideally liberated and Wollstonecraftian professional women presented in the *Westminster Review’s* critique of *Woman’s Mission* and the Wollstonecraftian educated women in *Suggestions on Female Education*. In *Villette*, Brontë hypothetically positions several conventional women, each based on a particular feminine model, against conventional economic, educational, religious, sexual, and social barriers to self-determination and self-actualization. As Lucy Snowe considers adopting an entirely new model of effective and independent agency, the reader observes each of those conventional and radical models as they negotiate their ways around, over, or through those obstacles. Through Lucy’s observations, Brontë analyzes the failures and/or successes of the conventional and liberated models and concludes that each is viable. Brontë does not, however, present the effective-independent agent as an ideal model of femininity. She seeks rather to present the liberated professional woman as being equally capable and deserving of success as her
conventional sisters, who all must make tradeoffs in order to actualize their chosen lifestyles.

Brontë lays the groundwork of her experiment by analyzing the existing modes of femininity before positing a new one. Thus the novel begins with Lucy observing the culturally accepted standard model of woman’s mission in the appropriate sphere of action, like those described by Ellis in her widely popular conduct books, *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (1838), *The Daughters of England: Their Position in Society, Character, and Responsibilities* (1842), *The Mothers of England: Their Influence and Responsibility* (1843), and *The Wives of England: Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence, and Social Obligations* (1843). Although we lack evidence to suggest that Brontë read Ellis’s conduct books, Brontë’s biographers and scholars assume that she questions the beliefs of “Mrs. Sarah Ellis, who represented the traditional role-for-women camp at its strongest in her ‘Women of England’ series” (Fraser 147), including Margaret Smith, editor of Brontë’s correspondence (68n.). Ellis authored numerous conduct books and primers for men, women, and children, and, considering their ubiquity and frequent republication, it would not have been easy for Brontë to overlook them entirely. Ellis’s model of femininity was no novelty in the mid-nineteenth-century, and she admits as much in her preface to *Women of England*, saying, there are “many valuable dissertations upon female character” as well as works on women’s education and religious duties (3). Her concern is “the particular minutiae of practical duty” (3) and the “cultivation of habits . . . the minor morals of domestic life” (4), particularly as they occur in the Christian household.
In *Women of England*, Ellis presents the maternal home as a refuge for the harried young man-of-the-world, where his “mother does what no one else will condescend to do . . . interested in his amusements because they are his, she talks to him about his sports, his companions,” while her son “is happy and grateful to be thus encouraged to speak . . . to be his better self” (52). The ideal woman’s ability to nurture the better nature of her male partner in conversation can be traced to the eighteenth-century novels by, among many, Frances Burney and Samuel Richardson and in the conduct books of Hester Chapone, James Fordyce, and John Gregory. Early nineteenth-century authors sustain the ideology, for instance in Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* and Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage*. Throughout the nineteenth century, potential brides are warned that men expect their wives to provide the same home-life they enjoyed with their mothers, and Ellis encourages her readers to master “that kind of conversation which is best adapted to his tastes and habits, yet at the same time capable of leading him a little out of both into a wider field of observation, and subjects he may never have derived amusement from before” (38). Women’s conversational powers are of enormous importance for Ellis, who insists that women be educated to “assist in redeeming the character of English men from the mere animal, or rather, the mere mechanical state, into which, from the nature of and urgency of their occupations, they are in danger of falling” (103). In other words, ideal mothers and wives provide intellectual, moral, and spiritual nourishment to the men in their lives in order to preserve men’s souls.

In *Women of England*, Ellis also advises young ladies not to “imitate the heroines they read of” but to
plunge into the actual cares, and duties, and responsibilities of everyday existence . . . intent upon fulfilling the great end of their existence . . . to bethink themselves every hour what is best to be done for the good and the happiness of those around them [i. e., their current family members and future husbands] seeking [their] own happiness only in the happiness of others. (65)

Thus, in *Daughters of England*, Ellis asserts that “To love, is a woman’s nature—to be beloved is the consequence of her having properly exercised and controlled that nature. To love, is woman’s duty—to be beloved is her reward” (8). Therefore the girl who entertains this sentiment in its profoundest character, lives no longer for herself. . . . For herself, and in her own character alone, she is at the same time retiring, meek, and humble, content to be neglected by the whole world—despised, forgotten, or contemned; so that to one being only she may still be all in all. (101)

Moreover, Ellis claims that “affection in a particular manner constitutes [woman’s] wealth. Beyond the sphere of her affections, she has nothing, and is nothing” (84), and she directs young ladies to confer with “the aged woman” who is “rich in experience” and knows “the operation of principles upon the lives and conduct of men” (85-86). We may gather then that the continuance of maternal guidance from each generation to the next perpetuates matrimonial and domestic harmony through the ages, or as Jacobus succinctly puts it while discussing Lucy’s examination of “La vie d’une femme” (*Villette* 234), “woman” becomes the “bearer of ideology” (46).
In *Villette*, Brontë tests the practicality of Ellis’s feminine ideal and finds it particularly well suited to those who freely choose such a lifestyle or who are predisposed to do so by education, custom, or exclusive exposure to it. Therefore, in an apparently semi-autobiographical novel that purports to be the memoirs of Lucy Snowe, the narrator’s first words refer not to herself but to “My godmother,” the affectionate homemaker, Louisa Bretton of Bretton (3), who soon welcomes home her heir apparent, Paulina (Polly) Mary Home. Brontë therefore begins *Villette* not as Salotto suggests with the conventional model ingenue Paulina (56) but with an experienced conventional model matriarch, an aged woman, who sets the standard for domestic harmony in the novel and forecasts Polly’s eventual acceptance of that model. Lucy then focuses on seven-year-old Polly, narrating the “spectacle” of her “monomaniac tendency” (12), or cycle of masculine dependency, during which Polly feels too much, too quickly. Polly descends into melancholy upon being separated from her father and then “sudden[ly] and dangerous[ly]” ascends to “a trance of content” when he briefly returns (12-13). Upon her father’s departure, Polly again plunges into despondency, falling to her knees, crying out, “‘Papa!’ . . . low and long; a sort of ‘Why has thou forsaken me?’” (23), and refusing comfort for three days, until she Graham’s attentions resurrect her, whereupon she transfers her filial affections to him and fulfills Mrs. Bretton’s prophecy that if Polly “were to take a fancy to anybody in the house, she would soon settle,” or make herself at home (10). It is surprising that Polly’s Christ-like lamentation and three-day depression did not result in specific critical accusations of irreverence, although contemporary reviewer Anne Mozley protested “the outrages on decorum [and] the moral perversity” that pervade the novel (203).
Graham also foretells Polly’s conversion of filial duty into uxorial duty toward him, and upon their first meeting and in Mr. Home’s presence Graham declares, “I am going to be a favorite: preferred before Papa soon, I dare say” (18). This statement no doubt led many readers to consider the scene an indication that *Villette* would be a conventional courtship novel featuring a conduct-book-model heroine whose father happily transfers his authority over his daughter to her husband. But Brontë presents this conduct-book-model as a Wollstonecraftian nightmare of perennial self-sacrifice, even associating Polly with a spaniel (483), thus recalling Wollstonecraft’s complaints of the “spaniel-like affection” that degraded women display in order to please men (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 82). In another allusion to the suffering Christ who sacrificed his blood to please his father by enacting his will, Polly first attracts Graham’s notice as she fulfills her filial duty, literally sacrificing her own blood to her paternal deity while hemming a white handkerchief for him and “pricking herself ever and anon, marking the cambric with a track of minute red dots” (15). This imagery of bloodied purity recurs when Graham becomes sexually attracted to the seventeen-year-old Paulina, who, dressed in “white, sprinkled with drops of scarlet” (318), is welcomed home to the reconstituted Bretton at La Terrasse. Mrs. Bretton’s and her son’s prophetic visions no doubt prompted an unknown *Athenaeum* reviewer to comment that he or she had “hoped that Currer Bell [Brontë’s penname] was going to trace out [Paulina’s] girlhood, courtship, and matrimony” (188), not realizing that Brontë displays Polly’s model for demonstration purposes only. The story of Polly/Paulina Home de Bassompierre Bretton, desirable as it was for its contemporary audience, is told somewhat briefly in only ten of a total of forty-two chapters. Salotto is correct in assuming that, because it had already
been told innumerable times, Brontë need not tell Polly’s complete story (60) nor that of the affectionate homemaker model exhibited by her and Mrs. Bretton and Brontë’s recycling of their physical appearances, behavior, locales, and relationships symbolizes the already existing, wholly self-replicable and self-sustaining culturally accepted cycle of life. Expanding upon Salotto’s idea, we see that Polly’s ministrations to her father reflect Mrs. Bretton’s attendance upon Graham, and Polly and Graham later replicate this male-master and female-servant relationship when their households merge. More precisely, Mrs. Bretton and Mr. Home “sympathize” with each other’s dependency on their children, whom they call their “comfort[s]” (15), and Mr. Home allows Graham to interact rather intimately with Polly just as Mrs. Bretton encourages Polly to assume her role while interacting with Graham.

Brontë’s frequent references to Polly’s doll-like appearance emphasize Mr. Home’s and Graham’s manhandling of Polly and characterize her as both man’s and boy’s plaything, thus demonstrating men’s prerogative to direct the course of women’s lives. Lucy describes Polly “look[ing] a mere doll” with waxy complexion and silky hair pulling a “square-inch or two of pocket handkerchief from the doll-pocket of her doll-skirt” (7), and depicts her being “caught up” by her father, “rapt” from Lucy’s sight, carried indoors, and deposited at his feet, whereupon she “lean[s] on his knee and gaze[s] up into his face,” like an adoring puppy (12-13). Later, under papa’s watchful eye and with his tacit approval—at least he says and does nothing to stop their behavior or to reprimand them—Graham advises Polly that he shall also treat her as a plaything, expecting to “get out of [her] . . . that precious commodity called amusement” (17). He then lifts her above his head with what Lucy calls “the freedom, the disrespect of the
Here, Lucy channels Wollstonecraft’s complaint that men often act as if women are “created to be the[ir] toys” when “dismissing reason he chooses to be amused” (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 82). Polly is thus established as the Bretton household ornament and domestic-engineer-in-training, and when her father is absent, Polly transfers her affection and service to Graham, “volunteer[ing]” to hand Graham his tea (23) as she had insisted upon serving her father, saying “I must hand his tea” (14). Graham exceeds Mr. Home’s authority, however, by asking Polly to fetch food for him as well, whereupon Mrs. Bretton directs the girl to “choose for him,” thus transferring her maternal duties to Polly, who becomes Mrs. Bretton’s pupil in the proper care and feeding of Graham (24). Readers might again be tempted to expect a typical courtship novel when Graham prophecies their eventual union for a second time, “promising that . . . she would be his housekeeper” and “perhaps . . . his cook” (24). Lucy then finds them “breakfasting tête-à-tête,” like a married couple or a bride and groom enjoying a private wedding breakfast, with Polly “refus[ing] to touch the marmalade” she fetched especially for Graham (24). If one accepts, as Herrera suggests, that the Brettons represent Britain itself (70), then Polly behaves toward the young Graham Bretton exactly as the conventional British woman, as Ellis describes her, is expected to behave toward her countrymen: she is an amiable, self-denying, and servile companion, who learns her masculine-defined role from the source with additional maternal guidance.

The semi-erotic play of the sixteen-year-old Graham and the seven-year-old Polly at Bretton foreshadows their eventual courtship at La Terrasse and their marriage, and demonstrates the supremacy of the eventual husband’s rule over that of the father’s. Accordingly, Brontë also enters into the topic of sexual commerce as Polly and Graham
hone future life skills with the patriarch’s tacit approval and the matriarch’s explicit direction: Polly improves her self-sublimating qualities and learns the true cost of men’s gifts and the propriety of accepting them; Graham studies the power of masculine authority and the proper manner of giving without being duped. With Polly at his feet, Mr. Home again remains unconcerned as Graham attempts to “seduce her attention” and tease her, “displaying the multifarious contents” of his desk and letting a drawing fall and catch her interest,” thus tempting Polly to leave her father’s protective custody (20). Polly at first refuses the gift of the drawing of a boy and a dog—”to accept would be a compromise of dignity”—until Graham threatens to “Cut it into strips for lighting the taper . . . right through Fido’s head, and splitting little Harry’s nose” and compels Polly to obey his command, “come to me” (20-21). Polly succeeds in diverting Graham’s mock violence from Fido and Harry, but the boy demands “a kiss” as “payment” for the drawing (21). When Polly begs Mr. Home to intervene, Graham confidently forestalls Mr. Home’s authority, saying, “I’ll not be sent away” (21). As he tries to collect his debt from Polly, she meets Graham’s threat of violence with an actual blow to the eye, but she alone suffers the result of her temporary rebellion. Graham mocks the injury and Polly apologizes, collapsing into “emotion, faltering, weeping,” for which Mrs. Bretton chastises her son (22). Mr. Home, however, dismisses Polly’s outburst by insisting “It is all nonsense” and therefore condones Graham’s behavior and implicitly encourages him again in “snatching Polly aloft” and continuing their mock-violent sex play (22). To describe their pseudo-erotic interaction, Brontë uses unnerving words like “seduce,” “kiss,” and “snatch” and Polly’s cries of “Please—don’t,” “No! No! No!” (20-21); one is not entirely sure if Polly enjoys her playtime with Graham or not.
Even at La Terrase, the seventeen-year-old Countess Paulina Mary Home de Bassompierre—a name that thoroughly grounds Polly as a member of the landed aristocracy and implies that she has some authority—fulfills conventional feminine duties, submits to patriarchal control and masculine authority, and becomes Graham’s sexual playmate as she had done as Polly at Bretton. Again without Mr. Home’s interference, Graham teases Paulina by placing a desired object out of her reach—this time a wassail cup from which everyone but Paulina has imbibed, implying she alone remains a child with a delicate constitution among adults who can stomach strong drink. Accordingly, Lucy reports that Paulina “again . . . seem[s] a child for him” and is “again almost his playmate”(326) noting the presence of “the child of seven . . . in the girl of seventeen” (327). Paulina does not plead for intercession as before, but she does respond to Graham’s enticement, begging for “A little more—a little more” and eyeing Graham directly, “look[ing] up exactly with the countenance of a child that longs for some prohibited dainty” and “petulantly touching his hand with her forefinger” as Graham “indulged himself in the gratification of letting her taste [the mulled ale] from his hand . . . one drop at a time” (326). The pair thus partake of a loving cup, sharing a symbolic kiss as each holds the vessel while Paulina presses her lips presumably where Graham’s had been, and the grown Paulina pays the child Polly’s debt. Behaving as she does without a hint of rebellion, Paulina is nevertheless punished for her flirtation, as any ingenue who oversteps decorum and delicacy would be: the draught is “bitter and hot and takes away [her] breath.” Declaring, “Your old October was only desirable while forbidden,” Polly “rejoin[s]” her father, and, taking his arm, “her natural place seem[s] to be at his side” (327). Paulina’s self-control and mastery of her emotions, qualities she did not fully
possess as a child, compel her to assume the culturally requisite distance between undeclared lovers. The relationship between the adult Graham and Paulina is thus shown to have transcended the childish mock-violent and pseudo-erotic phase of the drawing scene into a childlike but increasingly genuinely erotic stage in which the pair approach sexual intercourse but maintain their innocence, delaying consummation until its proper time.

In Paulina’s breakfast with Mr. Home at La Terrasse, Brontë illustrates the complex matrix of interrelations among the keepers of what Jacobus refers to as “the status quo” (48), by presenting the fluidity of filial and uxorial duties in yet another recycled moment from Polly’s days at Bretton. Unlike Ellis, however, who insists on maternal control of daughters’ educations, Brontë emphasizes the supreme authority of the patriarch in such matters. Although Graham takes some credit for teaching Polly to read parts of the Bible (367), Mr. Home appears to be Paulina’s only instructor (332). In this scene, Graham “reddens” at Mrs. Bretton’s recollection of Polly’s preparing rolls for him at Bretton, complete with “just the same sort of marmalade,” in reenacting the breakfast for her father at La Terrasse (328). Mr. Home assuages Graham’s embarrassment, saying, “Never blush for it [the implied comparison between himself and Graham as Polly’s favorites] . . . Polly showed her sense in catering for a friend’s material comforts: it was I who put her into the way of such good manners—nor do I let her forget them” (2329). While in his possession, Mr. Home sanctions Paulina’s service to others and especially to Graham, and thus Brontë demonstrates that, in conventional home-life, paternal as well as maternal guidance channels women’s affections and duties toward men in general, as when Paulina entertains her father’s guests at theHôtel Crécy
(361-362), and toward the male successor in particular, as when she prepares Graham’s meals in her father’s absence.

With all of the foregoing signs pointing toward the union of Graham and Paulina, Brontë must have felt it unnecessary to provide a detailed account of their courtship and wedding. Lucy remains an outsider, receiving only sporadic invitations to the consolidating Bretton-Home realm, and on one occasion she witnesses the ebb and flow of a minor conflict engendered when the happy couple’s transient, informal, and private playtimes are replaced by initially clandestine and later open declarations of love. Indeed, the climax of the affectionate homemaker’s story, her betrothal, reads like poorly manufactured melodrama in a text often praised (and sometimes condemned) for its realism. Perhaps, in this portion of the novel that deals with the conventional courtship of a conventional feminine role model, Brontë inserts a conventional and easily overcome roadblock to the heroine’s happiness, befitting the genre of such novels. Nevertheless, Mr. Home’s rather childish tantrum over Paulina’s and Graham’s betrothal correlates with the childish interactions that precede their marriage. A few pages cover the agon, thinly veiled by sarcasm, between Mr. Home and Graham, and Mr. Home inflicts physical pain on Graham in a handshake “grasp like a vise,” but coaxed into acquiescence by Paulina’s repeated assurances of a dual allegiance to father and husband (504), the consolidation of paternal and uxorial authority over Paulina transpires in the manner in which it began, in mock-violence, but all parties are shown to be immature. Such infantile behavior recalls Wollstonecraft’s warning that the patriarchy “depraves both sexes” (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 294).
Graham’s and Paulina’s betrothal marks the impending incorporation of the Bretton-Home families, and Brontë appropriately situates the combined households’ initial public offering on a park bench amidst symbols of an ever-regenerating patriarchy in which women literally and figuratively provide the means of familial incorporation but hold neither shares of its profits nor controlling interest in its operations. Lucy observes the happy couple and Mr. Home “sitting on one seat” in the gated “grounds of the palace at Bois l’Etang [the wooded pond]” amidst “green sweeps” and “a forest of flowering shrubs” (505). Notably, in describing the scene Lucy detachedly refers to the trio’s public personae without indicating her personal acquaintance with them: she speaks not of “Mr. Home” or “Graham,” but of “three persons, Count de Bassompierre, his daughter, and Dr. John Bretton” (505). Moreover, Lucy refers to the count’s “daughter” and later to “Paulina”—not to the “Countess de Bassompierre”—and describes “Paulina [sitting] between the two gentlemen,” while “plaiting together” locks of Mr. Home’s and Graham’s hair, and binding them with “a tress of her own” (505) Brontë thus portrays Graham’s and Paulina’s marriage as a transfer of a mere woman in the continuance of the androcentric status quo but emphasizes the irony that the patriarchy’s very existence depends entirely upon women’s regenerative powers. Since Lucy does not describe their wedding—indeed, it is difficult to ascertain whether Lucy attends the ceremony—one assumes that it is not an important aspect of the Bretton-Home merger, yet Lucy provides evidence of Paulina’s physical fecundity and spiritual potency by describing the couple’s future happiness and that of their children. Lucy tells us that Graham eventually benefited most from the transaction, noting that “his faults decayed, his virtues ripened; he rose in intellectual refinement, he won in moral profit” because of Paulina, “the cornerstone” of
“his happiness” who filtered the “dregs” out of the “clear wine” of his character by “keeping his love” and “aid[ing] in his progress” (506). Paulina thus depicts Ellis’s ideal affectionate homemaker, who is rewarded for her efforts “with great prosperity [and] great goodness” (507). Their children, of course, “gr[o]w up according to inheritance and nurture” (507), and no doubt eventually replicate their parents’ home-life, reaping the same benefits of privileged birth (inheritance) and conventional moral standards (nurture).

Mr. Home’s relationship to and with his niece Ginevra Fanshawe suggests that, in some way, her fate is also determined by the patriarchy, but without his direct paternal presence, the maiden Ginevra rebels against masculine authority. As Mr. Home’s blood kin and pupil, Paulina is naturally heir to his way of life. Conversely, Ginevra—who is named for her maternal aunt, Mr. Home’s deceased wife, whom Mrs. Bretton calls a “silly and frivolous . . . little flirt” and a “butterfly wife” (5) and whose early death implies the danger of an ill-matched marriage—seems destined to self-destruct. In Victorian fiction, affected, mercenary women like Ginevra, as Silver notes, typically are punished for their pursuit of worldly riches via marriage (303), as opposed to the affectionate homemakers like Paulina, whose genuine affection and self-sacrifices are rewarded with financial success and the intangible wealth of ideally suited husbands and marriages of mutual affection. Nevertheless, Ginevra marries her chosen beau and lives happily ever after, presumably passing on her own less-than-ideal but nevertheless functional life strategies onto her progeny, just as, in Jacobus’s view, Paulina’s marriage perpetuates the conventional patriarchy (48). Thus, I contend, Brontë indicates that, despite behaving, virtually point-by-point, in a manner entirely contrary to popular
nineteenth-century standards of femininity and morality, Ginevra’s supposed immorality proves just as effective as Paulina’s unquestionable morality as a strategy to achieve economic success and marital harmony with a suitable mate, because both are educated to meet their chosen marital objectives.

In effect, Ginevra is the anti-Paulina, and Lucy’s comparisons of them demonstrate that *Villette* is an experiment set up in part to test the effectiveness of a variety of women’s lifestyles like theirs. Ginevra resembles the type of women who appear to the reviewer of *Woman’s Mission* to be shoddy raw materials for spiritualized humanity. The reviewer describes “the woman of rank,” who “with heartlessness of nature. . . . seem[s] to guarantee the deepest sensibility [but is] intensely selfish, brilliant, radiant with smiles, beautiful in all perfect grace of movement and attire, and all this through love of self” (184). These flaws are shown to be the result of faulty women’s education: “as a rule, the class called ‘Young Ladies’ enter life from their schoolroom with no other thought than that of forming a marriage; for this they sing, dance, study, dress, and seem amiable in look and in manner” (192). Like Paulina, Ginevra makes a brief appearance early in the text and resurfaces to take on a larger role when Lucy secures a career and the leisure to concern herself with the behavior of others. Ginevra’s sins against delicacy and propriety, according to Lucy, are many. She shuns domestic arts, especially the “needle-drudgery” necessary to maintain her fashionable clothing (96) and is a “child of pleasure” (162) who comes to life in the presence of many men (362) not for the “one being only,” as Ellis put it (*Daughters of England* 101), whose comfort she should tend. Without reservation or an intention to please anyone but herself, she accepts and flaunts Graham’s gifts (102), takes pride in “wind[ing] him round [her] little
finger (98), and publicly displays disrespect for Mrs. Bretton (250). Ginevra unabashedly writes letters to her wealthy relations with “unequivocal applications for cash” (219), carries on both clandestine correspondence and assignations with Alfred de Hamal (126, 548-549), who Lucy describes as a male version of Ginevra (237-238), and elopes and illicitly marries Alfred without first gaining her parent’s or patron’s approval of the match (548-549). Ginevra’s studies, Lucy tells us, “were little better than nominal,” except for music, dancing, and “embroidering the fine cambric handkerchiefs, which she could not afford to buy ready-worked” (98). In order to demonstrate the polarity of their characters and interests, Brontë contrasts Paulina, who prepares a cambric handkerchief for her father, and Ginevra, who sews reluctantly for her own use. Lucy tells Graham that “[t]ossed about all her life from one foreign school to another, [Ginevra] may justly proffer the plea of ignorance in extenuation of most of her faults” (259).

However lackluster Ginevra’s scholarly aptitude appears to be, Lucy presents her as diligently concerned with maintaining a placid appearance in order to conceal a fiery personality:

never was any duchess more perfectly, radically, unaffectedly nonchalante

than she . . . her other faculties seemed to be in [a] flimsy condition: her liking and disliking, her love and hate, were mere cobweb and gossamer;

but she had one thing about her that seemed strong and durable enough,

and that was—her selfishness. (96)

As such, Ginevra is also a Wollstonecraftian degraded woman, but of a more sinister type than the docile Paulina represents. Paulina willfully and happily gives of herself with a genuine interest in Mr. Home’s and Graham’s welfare, attending to their needs and
offering them amusement, and is rewarded with their favor; conversely, Ginevra’s carefully cultured feminine arts and genuine interest in her own welfare allow her to attend exclusively to her own needs and amusement by enticing Graham and taking his gifts. Therefore both women are social parasites—Paulina’s attentions nourish and support her hosts, while Ginevra lives upon her hosts’ attentions—and as such they may well deserve Lucy’s pity or condemnation or authorial censure. Instead, Brontë allows them to prosper for having learned and mastered the symbiotic systems that keep them alive.

The most comprehensive comparison of the results of a paternally directed education in affection and a fashionable education of affectation occurs at what could be considered Lucy’s debut, but such a characterization of the event escapes her notice as she focuses on the stereotypes embodied by Paulina, Mr. Home’s daughter, and Ginevra, his niece. Lucy seems not to participate in the soirée and again becomes an onlooker, observing Ginevra in an attention-grabbing “deep crimson” gown and speaking of her superior “material charms;” but Ginevra speaks French poorly and fails to “regale” Graham with her conversation, and she is petulant while in women’s company but vivacious amidst men, who mostly ignore her display of accomplishments. Paulina, “faultlessly neat” in a gown “clear and white” befitting her character, is graceful and amiable, converses “on many subjects in letters, in arts, in actual life, on which it appeared that she had both read and reflected” in idiomatically perfect French, thus drawing and keeping Graham’s attention (361-364). While Ginevra largely fails to draw attention to herself, Paulina is “drawn into discourse” by a “very learned” Frenchman, while her father looks on and is “gratified” that his lessons are so ably displayed (362).
Ignored by Graham, Mr. Home, and presumably his male guests, Ginevra’s eventual elopement in some manner constitutes a total rejection of their conventions and authority, yet she is not punished for her rebellion; and by marriage achieves exactly the same social status as Paulina, a countess by birth (551). She writes to Lucy, “Alfred and I never intended to be spliced together in the humdrum way of other people”—suggesting that she will not be so easily subsumed into the person of her husband—and she rebukes Mr. Home’s initial refusal to accept the marriage on account of her age, saying “As if that made any difference! I am just as much married as if I were a hundred” (550), implying a consummation of the relationship from which there was no turning back that no doubt further irked Brontë’s prudish contemporaries. Conversely, the elopement also demonstrates the efficacy of Ginevra’s self-serving duplicity, because it forces Mr. Home to fulfill her desires despite his disapproval. She tells Lucy that she will be remarried in the conventional manner, with a trousseau, portion, and wedding visits, which is more information than we received of Paulina’s wedding.

Paradoxically, by placing Paulina and Ginevra in suitable matches and equal social spheres, Brontë contradicts the reviewer of Woman’s Mission and grants them both “unions of kind,” despite Ginevra’s being an obvious marriage-seeking “Young Lad[y]” (Woman’s Mission 192). Although Ginevra’s journey to the altar is far from the traditionally favored method—beginning with parental consent, then preparing and signing pre-marital contracts to protect hereditary assets, and ultimately having one ceremony with the requisite witnesses—Lucy describes Ginevra’s marriage and home-life as being largely conventional, like Paulina’s. Lucy reports that Alfred and Ginevra settle into domestic habits, and Ginevra becomes, if not entirely exemplary, at least a
doting mother (552). Accordingly, Ginevra joins Paulina in representing the portion of the female population that—because of beauty, social status, and patriarchal favor—is blessed with the opportunity to disregard economic or social forces and freely to choose marriages of mutual affection, intellect, and tastes. Nevertheless, however successful they appear to be in the experimental world of Villette, Paulina and Ginevra fail to meet Lucy’s standards of ideal femininity because neither exhibits a harmony of intellect and affection or—”the heart” and “the head”—as Scott recommends (62), and Lucy’s disapproval of certain aspects of their personalities indicates that Brontë rejects them as ideal feminine models. She speaks condescendingly of Paulina’s emotionality and self-sacrifice, and she questions her ability to surmount adversity (36). In turn, she condemns Ginevra’s lack of sympathy and common sense that both often provoke Lucy’s open hostility. Thus, from their negative examples, Lucy learns to strike a balance between emotionality and intellect, a willingness to fulfill her own desires and those of others, and thereby liberating herself from the forced symbiosis of the patriarchal parasitical femininity.

Salotto’s assertion that Lucy’s story is “encased in [a plot] not entirely of [her] own making” (56) largely dismisses, I think, Lucy’s agency both in directing her life’s course and relating her life story. Further, such arguments underestimate the power Lucy wields from her purposely detached vantage point along the borders of the societies she inhabits. Except for her hysterical flight from Madame Beck’s Pensionnat de Demoiselles between its sessions, during which she has no active society from which to isolate herself and thus has nothing to watch and from which to learn (175-189), and aside from the temporary, opium-enhanced self-delusion she describes after mistaking M. Paul’s ward
for his intended bride (541), Lucy possesses supreme control of herself, choosing when to
dissolve into and emerge from the background. She avows early in her tenure at the
pensionnat that she “must not complain” of neglect in a “house full of robust life,”
because she “might have had companions,” but “chose solitude” over “intimacy” with her
colleagues, who are foreign to her both by birth and in character (144). Similarly, she
later describes herself as a “sensible hermit” (309) while attempting to convince herself
that she is not truly neglected by the Brettons. Lucy argues that hermits are, indeed,
pitiable beings but that they choose solitude as a path toward spiritual enlightenment,
thereby exercising complete control over the frequency and mode of their interactions
(310). She rereads Graham’s old correspondence but refuses to resume contact by
sending either of the Brettons a letter of her own. From the shadows, Lucy gains
uninterrupted insights into both women’s and men’s roles, and, in this sense, for Lucy,
knowledge is power, and as Margaret L. Shaw correctly claims, “particularly . . . the
power to reform” (814). Paradoxically, Lucy’s persistence in remaining essentially
solitary, empowers her to conserve herself despite multiple pressures to match another’s
feminine ideal, no matter how tempting that ideal appears to be.

Nevertheless, Lucy owes to someone else the emotional, financial, and
intellectual liberation she eventually enjoys, and, particularly disturbing to feminist
scholars, that someone is a man, Monsieur Paul Carl David Emanuel, who coaxes her
from the shadows and goads her toward independence. Although her curriculum is quite
different from that of Paulina or Ginevra, Lucy accesses her education in a manner that
does not differ much from theirs. All three women are educated by way of man’s
beneficence: Mr. Home directly teaches Paulina the domestic arts and social skills
required of an aristocratic lady and enables Ginevra, as her patron, to be fashionably
educated abroad; M. Paul directly and indirectly teaches Lucy, lending her his books and
upon request guiding her through his texts and teaching her his language. The fact that in
Brontë’s view liberated women are as much products of male manufacture as are
degraded women does not sit well with the aforementioned feminist scholars, who would
prefer that Lucy and her creator assert themselves without men’s help or seeming
coercion. Thus many scholars attempt to decode Lucy, the self-described “cypher”
(*Villette* 413), seeking to expose a feminist bravado beneath her carefully constructed
defense mechanisms (Schaeffer xx), often disappointedly concluding that she is either
intentionally deceitful (Jacobus 43), cleverly useful of blarney (Hennedy 6), simply
ambivalent toward traditional feminine intellectual and emotional limits (Christ 60), or
ultimately undecipherable (Lawrence 455). Likewise, Lucy’s desire for man’s knowledge
is often conflated with her desire for the knowledge of a man or, as Andrea O’Reilly
Herrera conjectures, the “love of a man” (74). This popular approach follows that of
Martineau, who, in a letter to Brontë, privately declares that there is “unconscionably too
much” “love” in *Villette* (*Letters of Charlotte Brontë* 117) and in her unsigned review of
the novel publicly denounces the novel’s women for being “full of one thing . . . love”
(172). I do not want to augment or dispute these well established views of the novel and
its heroine. Rather I propose to demonstrate how Lucy, from her chosen position outside
patriarchal limits and control, liberates herself by mastering both the man, M. Paul, and
his knowledge.

Like Wollstonecraft, Brontë recognizes that, in order to achieve fully productive
and independent lives, women are solely dependent upon men, whose political and social
power allows them to regulate the dissemination of knowledge, to share their intellectual bounty in a coeducational environment. Therefore she allots M. Paul more time and space within Lucy’s and the reader’s sight than she does to either Paulina or Ginevra, while, conversely, he exerts his influence initially from the shadows, occupying as much time and effort in the margins of the pensionnat as Lucy does. The *vaudeville* episode, where M. Paul forces Lucy to abandon her preferred role as “looker-on” in order to perform publicly the role of a man, forecasts the pupil-student relationship between Lucy and M. Paul and the pedagogy he tailors to suit her intellectual talents and vocational needs. M. Paul gives Lucy a text, in this case a masculine role in “a mere trifle” of a *vaudeville* in which she might act in a manner entirely antithetical to her nature, that of a gregarious and faithless man; next, he challenges her to master the role by appealing to her superior intellect and uniquely Anglican, imperturbable self-esteem—“not a girl in this school would hear reason, and accept the task . . . their vile *amour-propre*—that base quality . . . would revolt from it” (153)—and locks her in an attic alone with the text; he then returns to examine her and comment upon her mastery of her part, advising her to tone down facial expressions [“Et point de grimaces”] but to be less timid [“A bas la timidité”] (156); and finally encourages her to perform for an audience (160). In other words, M. Paul introduces masculine knowledge to Lucy, whom he considers to be a worthy pupil, and entices her to learn it by challenging her to expose herself and her talents. Intriguingly, in order to “please another,” Lucy disregards her culture’s longstanding disapproval of women appearing on a public stage; and while her performance can be read as a capitulation to a man’s desire, like that of Paulina to Mr. Home or to Graham, she admits that M. Paul’s prodding resulted in her choice to act “to please [her]self”
Lucy’s liberation in the vaudeville, instigated and directed by M. Paul, is later replicated when he becomes her teacher.

Unlike Wollstonecraft, however, Brontë does not advocate total sexual equality through an equalized union of feminine and masculine intellect, and Lucy is not entirely unsexed. By incorporating only a few masculine attributes, she remains womanly but becomes an exceptional woman, intellectually set apart from other members of her sex, just as she once had set herself physically apart from them in her self-isolation. Thus Lucy does not “assume” a man’s entire costume for the vaudeville, only those attributes that will indicate a masculine habit over her “woman’s garb” (159); she opts to keep her “gown of shadow,” in which she feels “at home and at ease” (151), and, “without the slightest retrenchment,” adds only “a little white vest, a collar, and cravat, and a paletôt [jacket]” (159). One further point must be made here to counter arguments like that of Helene Moglen, that Brontë, channeling her own desires, has Lucy cede control to M. Paul in order “to reconcile [her] independent self-realization with her need to be submerged in the powerful, masculine ‘other’” (225). Despite M. Paul’s seeming to be “a species of tyrant,” which he insists he is not after having locked her in a tower of sorts (154) he remains “neutral” to Lucy’s insistence upon dressing herself and leaves her alone to devise her own identity for her public performance (159). M. Paul thus facilitates Lucy’s incorporation of masculine traits for the vaudeville, but Lucy determines the content and rate of incorporation, clearly preserving her femininity. Throughout their pupil-student relationship, Lucy similarly directs the course and content of her learning by selecting texts, customs, and beliefs from M. Paul’s various offerings, portraying their interdidacticism as M. Paul’s surreptitious tests of Lucy’s emotional and intellectual
mettle, from which he reckons her capacity for self-determination. Their interactions recall the sex play between Graham and Paulina, but in Lucy’s and M. Paul’s case an impish—Lucy calls M. Paul a “brownie” (398)—and feigned misogyny replaces mock violence. ⁷⁸

Readers are often puzzled and offended by M. Paul’s behavior, failing to note that he intentionally assumes a misogynist position in order to rouse Lucy’s independent spirit, goading her desire to defend and strengthen her self-esteem. Only M. Paul advises Lucy and the careful reader not to judge him or his actions solely on their appearances; and he alerts Lucy to his peculiar pedagogical methods, saying he “would dare [her] anger for the sake of her good” (385). Teasing Lucy for having worn a pink gown—a gift selected by Mrs. Bretton that Lucy believes inappropriate for herself (240)—M. Paul purposefully exaggerates the color as being “scarlet” and advises her to wear a brightly colored gown if she so desires but to preserve her “same spirit as if . . . its hue were pitch grey “[gris de poissière]” (386-387), the color Lucy usually wears. ⁷⁹ The debate over the allowable brightness of hue of Lucy’s gowns and the size of the flowers under her bonnet seems trivial and peevish, yet M. Paul’s advice does not so much concern Lucy’s outer appearance as it does her inner being. M. Paul wants Lucy to be only as feminine as she herself wants to be, resisting Mrs. Bretton’s efforts to hyper-feminize her as she had Paulina. M. Paul likely speaks for Brontë here as she reiterates the advice of the reviewer of Woman’s Mission and tells women to compose their own identities despite the patriarchy’s attempts to form them, even when other women try to enforce men’s preferences. Likewise, Brontë’s repeatedly calling attention to Lucy’s robe rose (440), despite its being the gift of the Mrs. Bretton, is significant to our understanding of Lucy’s
character. As I indicated earlier, in the scene in which Lucy makes the most complete comparison between them, Paulina’s gown is white and Ginevra wears crimson (361); therefore Lucy’s pink gown symbolizes her intermediate position between the affectionate homemaker Paulina and the affected hedonist Ginevra. Relevant in this regard is an entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* under “pink” from 1837: to characterize someone as being “politically left of center [or] progressive” (def. B3). It may well be that by having Lucy select a pink dress, Brontë subtly indicates that she will reform traditional femininity into a progressive, more liberated model.

Brontë illustrates M. Paul’s and Lucy’s deceptively antagonistic engagement in interactive learning by having M. Paul lead Lucy away from the Rubenesque “The Cleopatra” and turn her attention to the Biedermeierish “La vie d’une femme.” Lucy admits she enjoys “keeping cool, and working [M. Paul] up” (233), to which he responds with a “teasing, hostile” tone, “grimac[ing] a half-smile” when Lucy offers him her seat before the “hideous” paintings he pretends are proper subjects for “demoiselles” (237). On the surface, M. Paul appears shocked by Lucy’s “insular audacity” and the singularity of English women like her [“Singualières femmes que ces Anglaises!”], who roam continents and art galleries without proper escorts (233), but Lucy notes that he places her in such a way that she can see “The Cleopatra” if she chooses (237). Moreover, since Lucy reports that M. Paul openly “glance[s]” at her as she observes him viewing “The Cleopatra” (235), M. Paul is shown deliberately to select Lucy’s seat to facilitate her view of subjects traditionally forbidden to maidens—men and their erotic art—in order to gauge her capacity for autonomy and desire for independent thought. Were Lucy to sit quietly before “La vie d’une femme,” obediently examining images she finds revolting
merely because a masculine authority bade her to do so, she would not pique M. Paul’s interest.

Upon determining Lucy’s unique propensities, M. Paul does not, however, directly offer to instruct her. Instead, he provides the means for her to instruct herself until she reaches her autodidactic limits and requires assistance, whereupon he prods her to master traditionally masculine subjects for her own use while protecting her core identity without defeminizing or hyperfeminizing her in the process. Initially, under cover of darkness, he leaves Lucy “a fresh interesting new work, or a classic . . . a romance . . . pamphlet [or] magazine” (398), not intervening until—no doubt from the shadows—he “accidentally overhear[s]” her bemoaning her poor mathematical skills (407). As he did prior to the vaudeville performance, M. Paul hands Lucy “some books,” “appoint[s her] some tasks,” and sends her off to master their contents on her own, providing “tenderness and helpfulness” upon request (407-408). When Lucy “voluntarily double[s], treble[s], quadruple[s] the tasks, to please him” instead of learning for her own sake, M. Paul again mockingly assumes a conventional position of masculine authority and condemns Lucy’s misguided academic vigor, taunting her by denouncing her “pride of intellect” and accusing her of “tresspass[ing] the limits proper to [her] sex” (408). Lucy admits that, “before . . . penetrat[ing his] motives,” she has misinterpreted M. Paul’s reverse psychology as “injustice,” which at first inspires her “ambitious wishes” but soon incites rebellion; she returns M. Paul’s books saying, “I never asked to be learned, and you compel me to feel very profoundly that learning is not happiness” (409). This statement can be read as an indication that Brontë agrees with Wollstonecraft on the futility of educating women in a manner that is not entirely equable with that of men.
However, it is more likely that Brontë reduces Wollstonecraft’s more dire assessment of degraded women, suggesting that women who educate themselves or allow themselves to be educated for men’s benefit—like Paulina to entertain, like Ginevra to dupe, or like the as-yet-unenlightened Lucy to placate—do not fully estimate the potential of human knowledge, although they may achieve their own chosen objectives and enjoy economic and domestic success.

Brontë’s vision of women’s education conforms with that of the reviewer of Woman’s Mission, who idealizes a lifelong, symbiotic, and mutually beneficial interdidacticism between the sexes. The reviewer asserts,

> Men and women, it seems to us, cannot be what they may without each other; cannot develop fairly the love and knowledge that shall lead to wisdom without; thought and act shall want much strength and clearness, purity and fire, without; and any kind of social intercourse, so be it honest, shall be better for both. . . . (183)

Where Wollstonecraft calls “the word masculine . . . only a bugbear” (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 37) and envisions a desexualized intellect, Brontë advocates the sexual liberation of learning and knowledge, which she believes is possible only when both masculine and feminine intellects are mutually engaged without eradicating one another, like Lucy’s semi-masculinized vaudeville costume. Brontë clarifies her position on such an ideal learning environment when M. Paul tests Lucy once again by pretending to attack the “woman of intellect” and praising the “lovely, placid, and passive feminine mediocrity;” yet he obviously adds “a note of interrogation intended to draw” her into argument (411-412). Lucy refuses to be baited, saying, “Don’t look at me: that’s not my
concern” [“Cela ne me regard pas: je ne me’en soucie pas”], thereby making clear her rejection of the traditional, gendered view of human intellect as being justifiably separated into mutually exclusive masculine and feminine divisions. What’s more, when Lucy admits ignorance of masculine fields of study like Greek and Latin, but avers that she “sometimes, not always, feel[s] a knowledge of [her] own” (412), Brontë again incorporates the goal of the reviewer of Woman’s Mission, who states that man and woman “each is a distinctness, an individual, working not from the other, but from a law of his or her own being;” and “as that law is better obeyed . . . the more subtle, intimate, and enduring” their relationships, “from that of marriage to the most passing communion,” will be (183). This internal law is best defined as one’s core identity or, as the reviewer puts it, “the whole nature” of a person (181). By refusing to be drawn into such an argument, Lucy liberates herself from traditional gender boundaries altogether, placing herself alone into a category of her own making that is neither a degraded nor an unsexed woman. She is, as the reviewer would call her, “developed” and “spiritualized.”

In order to demonstrate Lucy’s mastery of both M. Paul and his knowledge, Brontë reverts to “la robe rose” (440) when Lucy employs M. Paul’s knowledge for her own use and attains a distinct level of femininity that accurately reflects her whole nature. At his picnic, M. Paul mockingly adopts an “irate” tone upon discovering Lucy again in her pink gown, but Lucy coolly responds, “It is only cotton . . . and cheaper, and washes better than any other color,” rationalizing the cost and durability of pink, thereby disarming M. Paul’s attack on the gown’s feminine hue (440). Undaunted, M. Paul adopts his usual misogynist guise to rile Lucy, accusing her of being as “flirtatious as ten Parisiennes” [“Et Mademoiselle Lucie est coquette comme dix Parisiennes”] and
thanking her for making herself beautiful on his account [“suis content qu’on s’est fait si belle pour ma petite fête”], but Lucy further frustrates M. Paul’s efforts to goad her, saying, “my gown is not beautiful . . . it is only clean” [Mais ma robe n’est pas belle, monsieur—elle n’est que propre”] (440). Where she earlier retreated into silence, attempted to divert M. Paul’s attacks on “women of intellect,” and ultimately ran away from conflict with him (411-412), Lucy now commands reason—a traditionally masculine basis for argument—to defend her choice of a feminine garment. Additionally, I translate “propre” as “clean”—as opposed to “fit, nice, tidy, suitable,” or, as Deborah Lutz translates it, “neat” (“Notes” 586)—because I believe that Lucy’s slightly sarcastic retort indicates her growing affinity with M. Paul, with whom she takes liberties that others would not dare. Lucy repeatedly depicts M. Paul’s disheveled appearance, describing his paletôt as “soot-dark” (392) and “ink-stained” (398), and when he suggests that he does indeed “brush” it, Lucy contradicts him, saying, “No, monsieur, it is too plain; you never do that” (469), apparently without raising his ire or embarrassing him. Such open communication seems inappropriate between a professor and his pupil-teacher, but it is entirely fitting between friends or, perhaps, equals.

When Lucy half-refuses/half-fails to display her knowledge to M. Paul’s colleagues, Messrs. Boissec and Rochemorte, Brontë displays Lucy’s now complete “insular audacity”—not in the sense that M. Paul uses the phrase to describe Lucy’s strong Anglican self-esteem (233), but rather in the sense of her dogged determination to share her core identity only with those who also want to preserve it intact or to protect it from those who want to supplant it or simply do not recognize it. Lucy ambiguously describes her struggle, suggesting that she is unsure whether fright or pride prevents her
from answering Boissec’s and Rochemorte’s questions. She says, “ideas were there, but not words. I either could not, or would not speak” and when they ask, “Is she an idiot?” [“Est-elle donc idiote?”], Lucy mentally retorts, “an idiot she is, and always will be, for such as you” (465). Curiously, this passage is book-ended by Lucy’s reasoned rejection of Père Silas’s and Madame Beck’s version of M. Paul, after which Lucy determines M. Paul to be her “Christian hero,” and by the freest conversation yet to occur between her and M. Paul, when she exposes her knowledge of him, prompting them to form a pseudo-sibling relationship in which they are “kindred in all but blood” (472). Their pupil-student relationship reverses when Lucy effectively assumes M. Paul’s pedagogy, pretending to envision him as a hypermasculine being, calling him “stern, dogmatic, hasty, imperious . . . active and willful, quick to originate, hasty to lead, but slow to persuade, and hard to bend” (468), thus revealing that she comprehends his lessons and his method of instruction. Signaling Lucy’s achievement, M. Paul insists on complete reciprocity in their future intercourse, encouraging her to “tease and try her wayward brother till she has drilled into him what she wishes” (472). Being thus encouraged freely to apply what she knows of M. Paul and his pedagogy to their relationship, Lucy is “happy . . . in making him secure, content, tranquil” and more freely exposes her core femininity to others.

In Lucy’s mastery of both M. Paul and his knowledge, Brontë revives Mary Hays’s and Mary Wollstonecraft’s ideals of women’s liberation through educational parity and confirms their claims that, for both sexes, equality and full humanity depends upon men’s and women’s equal access to what was considered to be masculine knowledge. Hays’s Emma Courtney asks,
When will mankind be aware of the uniformity, of the importance, of truth? When will they cease to confound, by sexual, by political, by theological, distinctions, those immutable principles, which form the true basis of virtue and happiness? (Memoirs of Emma Courtney 192);

and Wollstonecraft asserts,

“not only the virtue, but the knowledge of the two sexes should be the same in nature, and . . . women considered not only as moral, but rational creatures ought to endeavor to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the same means as men (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 92).

The interdidacticism that M. Paul shares with Lucy embodies those ideals and allows them to transcend the interference of the “fraternal alliance” (476) of religion, family, and society (represented by Pére Silas, Madame Walravens, and Modeste Beck respectively). Thus Lucy Snowe achieves what Emma Courtney and Wollstonecraft’s Maria could not do: instead of retiring from society into a entirely feminine community of her own making, Lucy supports herself as an active member of her society. Nevertheless, Brontë corroborates Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s contention that men must lift the androcentric restrictions they place on educating self-sufficient beings, and M. Paul represents the type of liberated man necessary to accomplish this goal.

Additionally, by applying reason to the gender prejudices and personal biases of others and by reciprocating the “tendernesses” and “softness” beneath M. Paul’s bluster, Lucy achieves what Scott calls “the equipoise of the soul,” harmonizing “the head and the heart” (62), and she begins to engage with others, instead of merely observing them. Yet her first attempt is extremely brief and entirely private, but in keeping with her desire
to share her core identity only with a chosen few and entirely on her own volition. Aided by “relentless necessity” and à la M. Paul—she says she “half ridiculed” her class and “was severe”—Lucy publicly attacks a student who will not stop weeping over the professor’s impending departure and “forc[es her] to conquer the convulsion” (508-510). Lucy bids the girl to remain behind and, in an attempt to commiserate over their loss, she does “what [she] had never done to one among them before . . . press[ing]” the girl to her “heart and kiss[ing] her cheek” (510). Further, from her pensionnat at Faubourg Clotilde, Lucy reveals her “paradox,” revealing that the “secret to [her] success” is “a new state of circumstances, a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart” that encourages her to improve the establishment M. Paul leaves in her care (571). Laura E. Ciolkowski reads Lucy’s paradox as locating her happiness in fulfilling conventional expectations after having rejected them: “Like a proper Victorian woman, Lucy is caretaker of someone else’s capital” (229). In my view, however, Lucy’s paradox is more subtle than that.

Lucy’s paradox lies in her discovery that she need not live according to the demands and desires of others, even those of M. Paul, and that her unique core identity, independent of both conservative and radical biases, possesses the power to exist meaningfully outside the confines of patriarchy. Lucy embraces and employs the singular power of one in sole proprietorship of her own pensionnat, and by choosing her life’s work, she determines her own fate. Granted, M. Paul makes all of this possible by facilitating Lucy’s means of self-sufficiency, just as he had facilitated her means of educating herself, but Lucy chooses to accept the challenge of becoming her “own woman,” thus liberating herself from Madame Beck’s relentless oversight. At Faubourg Clotilde, Lucy expresses gratitude for being “left a legacy” that she considers “a thought
for the present . . . a hope for the future . . . a motive for a perseverance, a laborious, and enterprising, a patient and brave new course” that banishes vexation, intimidation, and depression (571). This passage recalls Brontë’s letter to Williams, in which she wishes his daughters and “every woman in England . . . a hope and a motive” upon which to base their lives (2: 227), and it resonates with the reviewer’s prophecy of society’s rejecting the ideology of separate masculine and feminine spheres and demanding “the motive” of freely chosen employment to “speak to [their] whole natures” made by the reviewer of Woman’s Mission (181-182). Within three years, Lucy rents additional space, adds boarders to her ranks of day students, and prepares a library for M. Paul, ostensibly to provide him with a motive to work at his chosen endeavors (571-572). Unlike Paulina or Ginevra, whose financial and emotional successes are entirely dependent upon their husbands’ providence, Lucy’s prosperity depends solely upon her own efforts.

In light of Lucy’s capacity to motivate herself and to achieve success on her own, Brontë most likely judged Lucy’s physical union with M. Paul superfluous to their spiritual one, and thus Brontë leaves him tossing on tempestuous seas. Nevertheless, readers are left to reconcile Lucy’s obvious attempt to repress her mourning for the surely departed M. Paul with Brontë’s equally obvious struggle to imagine her own liberated woman in the throes of wedded bliss. Brontë had not yet discovered matrimonial blessings herself when Villette was published, and for this reason Moglen concludes that she simply “did not know what would happen to [Lucy’s] emergent self if it were joined in marriage . . . to any man,” adding that perhaps Brontë’s “own marriage might have taught her the answer” (228). Unfortunately, we can only speculate whether Mrs. Charlotte Nicholls would have eventually tired of her “identity being quite submerged in
her husband’s” as Fraser characterizes Brontë’s final months (477), which might have spurred her to depict the lives of heroines who indeed find ways to have it all—self-determination, a motive to engage in fulfilling work, financial and emotional success, and a mate with mutual interests and affection. Perhaps Brontë might have incorporated the professional and household management skills of Gaskell, whose carefully balanced performance of literary and domestic talents Brontë praised (Letters of Charlotte Brontë 654-655), and with whom she felt a strong affinity, preferring the conventionally maternal “nourishing efficacy” of Gaskell’s prose to that of Martineau’s radical-feminist “sovereign medicine,” which was “harsh . . . but potent to invigorate” (676). Regardless of such speculation about Brontë’s marriage and the heroines that would be born of it, Villette leaves the reader with the knowledge that women’s professional and domestic lives have equal value so long as women determine their own life courses—as affectionate homemakers, affected hedonists, or liberal women—and are educated to match their end goals.
Chapter 6

Overcoming Inadequate Pre-marital Training in

Anthony Trollope’s *Phineas Finn* and *Phineas Redux*

Because Anthony Trollope’s works do not resemble what we call social problem novels, scholars have consistently asserted that they offer scant evidence to connect Trollope with the reform movements of his day, particularly reforms involving women’s education. Few scholars discuss even the general subject of education in Trollope’s novels, and although there has been considerable debate on the function of marriage, women, and women’s issues in his literary *corpus*, no one has yet combined these topics. Instead, scholars focus on delineating the larger issues of Trollope’s political and social satires and his enigmatic liberal tendencies. Nevertheless, Trollope did not completely ignore the controversial topic of women’s education. Between the lines of the seemingly innocuous *Phineas Finn* (1867-1869) and *Phineas Redux* (1873-1874), Trollope hints that his society must address the inequities of women’s educational, legal, and marital rights. In these novels that Trollope insists are to be read as one narrative (*Autobiography* 265), he responds to seminal texts in the debate on women’s education and marital reform from the 1840s onward, specifically to the works of conduct book authors Sarah Lewis and Sarah Stickney Ellis and suffragette Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. While analyzing the distinct ideals of women’s education and spheres of action found in these women’s works, Trollope asserts that women can overcome their inadequate educations by observing and reflecting upon the various models of femininity proffered by their acquaintances and potential spouses. In this manner, women’s social circles act as vocational schools, wherein they can obtain practical pre-marital training and adjust their
expectations of marriage accordingly. Those who learn to synthesize their own desires with their suitors’ marital expectations and with cultural standards—or at least appear to do so—can achieve personal liberation within their culturally sanctioned professions as wives and mothers. Those who do not do so risk thwarted expectations and marital disaster when they are forced into on-the-job training under the direction of husbands whose legal rights entitle them to dictate their wives’ professional standards. Thus, despite what he perceives as being unjust laws regarding women’s property, Trollope rejects arguments that through such statutes women’s lives should be entirely controlled by men, who most often wield financial, legal, and marital power during both courtship and marriage. He insists rather that women must determine both their own destinies and those of their husbands through their marital choices.

Indeed, it would have been difficult for Trollope to avoid entirely the clamor of the various reformists around him, considering that the span of his prolific career coincided with a period of significant cultural upheaval in regard to women’s educational, marital, and professional prospects. In fact, mid- to late-nineteenth-century Britain has often been characterized as a period of continual cultural conflict, in part because “the extension of scientific assumptions and methods from the physical world to the whole life of man” (Houghton 33) spawned the Victorian predilection for analysis and classification and prompted debate over traditional ideologies on modes of being. All fields of human endeavor were scrutinized, and distinct methods of vocational training were developed for those bound for either manual labor or professions, each with its own set of academic requirements, methodologies, and procedures that were concurrently undergoing standardization.
The various British public- and grammar-school reforms of the 1840s and 1850s offer particularly apt examples of the standardization of an existing institution and the professionalization of its workers. Miriam E. David describes the successes of Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, who in 1836 and 1840 enacted reforms of working-class schools, the latter of which was sanctioned with Parliamentary approved teacher-training grants in 1842 and 1843 (105-106). David dates the professionalization of teaching to 1846, when the Privy Council standardized gendered curricula for the single-sex, working-class schools and instituted the “pupil-teacher system,” whereby students were “apprenticed to their head teachers” and permitted to instruct their younger classmates in some course content (106-107). This self-replicating system, inspired by the apprenticeships of the laboring classes, was applied to nearly all branches of academia, including the university level, and the perceived successes in working-class educational reform engendered widespread and vociferous demands from middle-class parents for suitable schools and curricula.

Prior to 1868, when, as David reports, the Schools Inquiry Commission’s Endowed Schools Act provided middle- and upper-class schools with a “‘rational’ system of secondary and higher education” that “trained [children] for particular purposes in life, . . . explicitly their places within the family as mothers and fathers” (27), the lack of governmental regulation of such schools forced parents either to rely on the conventional wisdom found in existing but outmoded conduct books, educational treatises, and primers or to trust their contemporary self-professed experts, who attempted to fill the void with their minimally updated publications. Margaret Marwick, for instance, points to the Schools Inquiry Commission’s discovery that in 1864 *Magnall’s Questions*, a primer
“first published in 1800” that “gave young people, and particularly girls, a catechism of useless and superficial knowledge handed down from mother to daughter,” was still widely assigned reading for schoolchildren of both sexes (17). The flyleaf of my own copy of an 1822 reprint of Hester Chapone’s *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind Addressed to a Lady*, originally published in 1773, features another example of the extraordinary long life of some eighteenth-century conduct books. The dedication, written in pencil, reads, “Elizabeth M. Messer / January 1, 1831,” indicating that Elizabeth probably received the book as a new year’s gift. In another hand, Elizabeth marks the day of her marriage with the words, “On 22 May 1832—I gave my heart and hand to my beloved. / E. M. A.” One typically finds such a memorandum in a family Bible, not in a conduct book, and marking her wedding day in Chapone’s text may indicate that Elizabeth read the book as she prepared to change her situation in life. Underneath the memorandum She writes, “I now give this book to my granddaughter Ethelberta P. Smith, April 4, 1894.” Elizabeth may have intended merely to pass on a curious heirloom, but the multiple strokes of dark indigo ink marking passages about the importance of heeding the advice of one’s parents while choosing a husband (86) and of doing one’s duty to God above all others (86-87) suggest that at least one of the book’s owners considered that advice worth remembering. Whether or not these pen marks were made by Elizabeth, her granddaughter, or someone else, we can conclude that Chapone’s advice was read and appreciated for more than a century after its first publication.

Whether old or new, few primers or conduct books could overcome the damage done by undereducated mothers or by insufficiently trained day- and boarding-schools instructors. Thus Sarah Lewis and Sarah Stickney Ellis, whose works remained popular
long after their initial publication dates, predicated their works on the assumption that readers’ primary educations were inadequate preparation for adulthood, and they claimed to write for women who had left off studying grammar, geography, languages, and accomplishments, but who lacked practical knowledge of their womanly duties. Throughout *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal*, Deborah Gorham cites the memoirs and diaries of many women who recall personal experience with inept teachers and educational drudgery, whether their schooling took place at home or abroad. More often than not, men were just as ill-prepared to enter the workforce, as evinced by Trollope’s description of his own insufficient schooling in his *Autobiography* (12-16).

The lack of basic life skills among the populace fostered a nearly universal belief that existing forms of education were at best ineffectual and at worst injurious, particularly for women. For example, in *Woman’s Mission* (1839), Lewis is deeply mistrustful of “so-called mental cultivation” that “frequently consists only of a pedantic heaping up of information valuable indeed in itself, but wanting the principle of combination [meaning practical application] to make it useful” to members of either sex (62). In *The Education of Character with Hints on Moral Training* (1856), Ellis anticipates the shock that many women will feel when making their “first appearance in society after leaving the college or the schoolroom in which “the all-absorbing thoughts and interests which now present themselves were never so much as hinted at . . . as facts upon which so much of their future happiness or misery would hang” (132-133). Trollope agrees with each of these authors’ appraisals of women’s education, adding “the fault is, I think, that with women education stops short at a certain very early period of life, and that after that the mind and the intelligence become lost in the liberty which is allowed to them (‘Higher Education
Trollope thus cites the entire social system, not only the educational one, for women’s faulty intellectual development. Based on the recurrence of such concerns in these works as well as in the periodical press, members of the middle class were skeptical of the schooling available to their children, particularly to their daughters, and hungry for helpful knowledge and useful methods by which to prepare them for adulthood.

While middle-class men’s careers were categorized into professions, women’s work was accordingly scrutinized in the public- and the private-press debates of “The Woman Question,” characterized by Candida Ann Lacey as “never before” the mid-nineteenth century having been “so widely discussed” (1). The umbrella term “The Woman Question” refers to a bevy of contemporaneous public quarrels over several but often interrelated women’s issues—namely women’s employment, legal, parental, and property rights—considerations of which further complicated the debate over the proper form and function of middle-class girls’ education. Lacey points to radical demands for vocational and professional training for middle-class women, many of whom would not marry because of the continuously rising number of marriageable women versus the declining pool of eligible bachelors, as demonstrated in census records from 1851 and beyond (10). Miriam E. David calls women’s education “perhaps the major educational issue of the 1860s” (116) and describes the efforts of the Women’s Educational Movement, which pressured the Schools Inquiry Commission to include girls’ institutions in its survey of educational resources in England. Despite its appeals, the commission reported on only twelve girls’ schools, as opposed to eight hundred boys’ schools, and it made no recommendations for the improvement of female education, citing a lack of funds to support their enactment (28-30). It is understandable that the
commission avoided the issue since the education of middle-class girls was particularly problematic.

Notwithstanding the evidence presented in the various publications of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and other members of the Langham Place Circle (some of whom were also involved with the Women’s Educational Movement) that many women would not be blessed with domestic bliss but would be forced to support themselves by their labors and thus needed vocational training for professions outside the home, young women were prevalingly expected to become wives and mothers, and their marital success depended upon the purity of their souls and bodies as well as the proper cultivation of their morals and sympathies. Elizabeth Missing Sewell points out the dangers of sending girls to school in Principles of Education Drawn from Nature and Revelation and Applied to the Upper Classes (1866). Because girls’ minds are “so easily sullied,” Sewell argues, “there is sufficient reason for supposing, even on a cursory glance, that to educate girls in crowds is to educate them wrongly” (397); therefore, “we despise day schools; they are looked upon as plebian, and unquestionably there are serious disadvantages to them” (401). Sewell leaves the exact nature of the disadvantages to the reader’s imagination, but her use of the term “plebian” suggests that she eschews the intermingling of several socio-economic backgrounds. Although some ladies’ seminaries both in England and abroad succeeded by virtue of long-standing cachet among the elite (Purvis 68), many boarding schools had even worse reputations than day schools. Because moral and religious matters were (and continue to be) difficult to categorize or standardize in schools, for much of the nineteenth century women’s
education was left to direct parental oversight, just as such instruction today is believed to be best learned at home.

The separate ideological and cultural shifts of professional categorization, educational reform, and The Woman Question coalesce in the conduct books of Sarah Lewis and Sarah Stickney Ellis, who works featured in my discussion of Charles Dickens’s *Dombey and Son*, where I focused on all three authors’ belief that the salvation of their overly commercialized society depended upon the proper enactment of Woman’s Mission in the home. Lewis, however, maintains that woman’s influence should ideally extend beyond the typical feminine duties of tending her family’s needs into a larger social ethos that Trollope believes should remain an exclusively masculine field: politics (*North America* 264). Lewis asserts, “Woman, at present, is the regulating power of the great social machine, retaining . . . the power to judge of questions by the abstract rules of right and wrong,” a power that men, “chafed by opposition and heated by personal contest” are too jaded to wield effectively (46), making woman’s “political mission of immense importance!” (47). Nonetheless, Lewis preserves the “principle of divided labor” that “seems to be a maxim of the divine government” (45) and reminds women to fulfill their social mission from their homes, since “the combination of legislative and maternal duties would indeed be a difficult task” (46). Lewis thus ostensibly presents women’s influence as a divinely endowed, gender-specific, supreme power over unwitting brothers, husbands, and sons that can induce social progress. In reality, however, Lewis’s construct of women’s influence amounts to a clandestine, subliminal attack upon men’s subconscious intellects—or more accurately upon their consciences. Because women’s influence remains subject to men’s authority to act upon or disregard
it, what Lewis presents as an acceptable means by which women can engage in political and social action is, in fact, a delusion. Even worse, by barring open communication between the sexes, limiting the exertion of women’s influence within the home, and prohibiting any form of employment outside the home, Lewis merely makes the pursuit of Woman’s Mission a slightly more engaging exercise in domestic futility than tatting antimacassars or painting fire screens.

The same themes and issues appear in Phineas Finn and Phineas Redux, both of which contain Trollope’s thoughts on the inadequacy of primary education for both sexes, the professionalization and propriety of women’s endeavors, and The Woman Question. Trollope overtly toes culturally hegemonic lines in these novels by discrediting primary education, suggesting that both men and women learn their life’s work best through on-the-job vocational training, and confirming that men’s ideal workplace is in public or social service while women are ideally situated in entirely private and domestic enterprises. Nevertheless, as many scholars have noted, evidence in his autobiography, lectures, letters, and within the Phineas novels themselves suggests that Trollope was at least mindful of women’s desire for meaningful lives if not entirely sympathetic to women’s rights. Particularly in the Phineas novels, the conventional wisdom regarding women’s education and roles presented in the works of Lewis and Ellis are sometimes subjected to serious discussion but are more often satirized, while Bodichon’s radical ideals, though subversively muttered in thinly veiled sarcasm, are expressed and to a large extent realized by the successful women of the complete narrative. Violet Effingham and Madame Marie Max Goesler publicly adhere to conventional wisdom but privately follow Bodichon’s model with variant degrees of success.
By overtly satirizing the Woman Question *in toto*, Trollope subversively champions a somewhat radical model of femininity without risk of offending his readers’ sensibilities, and that subversion results from his consumer-savvy and thoroughly pragmatic approach to writing. He admits to fashioning his tales according to the demands of the literary marketplace. For example, in a 13 April 1860 letter, he informs aspiring author Catherine Gould, “My belief of book writing is much the same as my belief as to shoemaking . . . a man or woman must learn the tricks of his trade before he can make money by writing” (*Letters of Anthony Trollope* 1:100-101). Likewise, in his 1868 lecture “Higher Education of Women,” Trollope admits that he is “absolutely dependent” upon his readers for his “daily bread” (69). In *Phineas Redux*, Lady Laura reminds Phineas that, “a horse won’t get oats unless he works steady between the traces” (1:57), a statement applicable to Trollope’s role as an author in the same way Lady Laura cautions Phineas to tone down his calls to separate church and state.85 Therefore, in order to speak his mind in his novels while keeping in mind the demands and expectations of his customers, Trollope attacks and satirizes contemporary educational, legal, and marital systems but sagaciously obscures the feminism that inspires those satires.

While readers today may not want to call anyone a feminist who publicly claims to have “discarded altogether” “women’s rights” (“Higher Education of Women” 77) and who pragmatically declares that “married people have a better time than old bachelors and spinsters” (*Letters of Anthony Trollope* 2: 509), in the Phineas novels Trollope allows Violet Effingham and Madame Marie Max Goesler to exercise financial, intellectual, and physical liberty throughout the narrative. Instead of following Victorian literary
convention by valorizing the self-repressed, self-sacrificing, and eternally constant Mary Flood Jones and utterly destroying the self-professed, self-aggrandizing, and continually inconstant Lady Laura Standish, Trollope rewards the self-regulated, self-actualizing, and reasonably constant Violet and Madame Max with positions of comparative marital power in mutually affectionate marriages. Trollope breaks with tradition and kills in childbirth the culturally accepted ideal of womanhood embodied by Mary, effectively punishing her more harshly than her antipode, Lady Laura, who suffers only premature aging and social death. Notably, both Lady Laura and Mary openly proclaim their intentions to adhere to their apposite ideals on women’s role, while Violet and Madame Max often couch their radical views on women’s rights in sarcasm. Furthermore, Lady Laura and Mary seem paralyzed by an inability to learn new ways of exceeding the original states in which they are presented in the novels, while Violet and Madame Max adapt themselves to their changing circumstances and thrive. Trollope thus destroys the submissive woman and punishes the rebellious woman and commends discreet women who are complete mistresses of their minds, bodies, and purses.

Attempts to decipher Trollope’s final answer to The Woman Question have sometimes resulted in his being portrayed, as Deborah Denenholz Morse points out, either as a “male chauvinist” or as “a feminist” (1), while Morse herself joins the largest group of critics who straddle the fence between Trollope’s conservative and liberal ambiguity. While Morse admits that Trollope’s “perceptions of Woman’s roles are limited” and “more elastic” than those of his contemporaries, she contends that they are at best held fast within the bounds of “egalitarian marriage” (6), though I am not entirely convinced that this adequately describes the relationships between the Chilterns and the
second set of Finns, a subject to which I will return. Jane Nardin also observes
boundaries around Trollope’s feminism, aptly asserting that whatever sympathy Trollope
felt for unmarried women without husbands to support them or children to keep them
occupied is “countered by a more conservative public stance,” because what “he thought
the public wanted to hear” was not entirely in keeping with “what he wanted to say about
women” (18-19). Priscilla L. Walton places women solely at the mercy of men in the
Phineas novels, despite their attempts to break free, arguing that patriarchy a priori must
have “a subordinate Other” in order to function (44). Walton explains that by entering
Parliament via noblesse oblige and seeking the hand of a British noblewoman, first Lady
Laura’s and then Violet’s, Phineas Finn attempts to jockey his way into the locus of
control until he accepts the fact that his ethnicity prevents him from doing so, at which
point he gives up his Parliamentary seat and marries a suitably eccentric bride, Madame
Max (48-49). Walton extends Finn’s eccentricity to the women in the text, who are
likewise barred from traditionally masculine pursuits like politics and thus socially
marginalized (63). Most recently, in agreement with Morse’s assertion that Trollope’s
feminism is at best “subversive” (6), Christoph Lindner claims that Trollope “complicates
feminist readings” by denouncing but not rejecting the “paradigm of capitalist order” in
which women are forced to comply with their commodified role in the marriage market
(39). In this manner Trollope is less daring than Charles Dickens, who, as I have shown
earlier, entirely rejects the commodified female body and equates the marriage market
with prostitution. Despite scholars’ frequent attempts to uncover Trollope’s feminism,
glimpses of it behind the patriarchy’s padded walls thus far have been fleeting.
Among those cursory feminist moments are those connecting Trollope with Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and her works, a relationship to which scholars typically give short shrift because, beyond references to their introduction at the home of George Eliot (Glendinning 325), there is little evidence in Trollope’s own personal documents upon which to demonstrate their direct interaction or to draw irrefutable conclusions about the effect Bodichon had on Trollope’s personal views on women’s issues. Nonetheless, the Palliser novels indeed bear unmistakable evidence of Trollope’s familiarity with the suffragette’s polemics *A Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women* (1854) and *Women and Work* (1857). In the former, Bodichon, who co-founded Girton College (the first residential college for women in England) argues for female suffrage, bemoans the androcentric laws of inheritance and coverture, and complains about the lack of respectable, paid employment opportunities for women. She expands upon those issues in the latter pamphlet, asserting that women want meaningful work (6) and attacking the hypocrisy of preparing all young women to marry while “ardently desir[ing] that women should not make love their profession” (9). She concludes that women with careers outside the home will “ennoble marriage” by creating partnerships between “two workers . . . equal in intellectual gifts and loving hearts; the union between them being founded in their mutual work” (12).

Such arguments recall the sentiments of the reviewer of Sarah Lewis’s *Woman’s Mission* in the January 1850 *Westminster Review*, who envisioned an enlightened British populace that rejected traditional gender roles. They also mark the uncompromising resurgence of Mary Wollstonecraft’s ideals as presented in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). It is worth noting here that while Lewis bases *Woman’s Mission* upon the work of
Louis Aimé Martin, a student of Jean Jacques Rousseau (McFadden 20), Bodichon’s arguments can be traced virtually point by point to Wollstonecraft’s polemic, in which she refutes Rousseau’s ideal model of femininity (79-94). Thus it is apparent that women’s roles and women’s education, as well as the means of debating their propriety, remained essentially unchanged for more than a century.

In her discussion of *Can You Forgive Her?* (1864-1865), Margaret F. King alludes to Alice Vavasor’s near vicinity to the “‘learned ladies’ of Langham Place” (308), one of whom in reality was Bodichon, but King does not expand upon the connections between the novel and *Women and Work*. The narrator of *Can You Forgive Her?* says that Alice may have “thought too much” about marrying whom we might call Mr. Right, until “her mind had become filled with some undefined idea of the importance of her own life” (109-110). What has often been taken as Trollope’s own opinion on women’s proper role follows this description of Alice’s predicament:

> What should a woman do with her life? There had arisen round her a flock of learned ladies asking that question, to whom it seems that the proper answer has never yet occurred. Fall in love, marry the man, have two children, and live happily ever afterwards. I maintain that answer has as much wisdom in it as any other that can be given;—or perhaps more. (1: 110)

This statement seems to answer Bodichon’s questioning “[y]oung women . . . of sixteen or seventeen,” who ask, “What am I created for? of what use am I to be in the world?” (*Women and Work* 7) with a confirmation of the propriety of the traditional view of
woman’s happiness as being ideally centered on her husband and children. However, the narrator continues,

The advice contained in it cannot, perhaps, always be followed to the letter; but neither can the advice of the other kind, which is given by the flock of learned ladies who ask the question. A woman’s life is important to her—as is that of a man to him—not chiefly in regard to that which she shall do with it. The chief thing for her to look to is the manner in which that something shall be done. (*Can You Forgive Her?* 1: 110)

Here the narrator clearly indicates that neither traditional nor feminist views of women’s roles, options which are likened to those of “a young man” between “whether he shall make hats or shoes,” can themselves guarantee happiness. Rather, women’s happiness depends upon their taking proactive measures to make for themselves good or bad lives—”good shoes or bad” (1: 110). In other words, whether a woman believes herself to be a victim of society, powerless to determine her own life’s course, or whether she actively determines to follow cultural standards or to rebel against them, her subsequent satisfaction with her lot lies entirely in her own power to fashion a good life for herself. Alice, in fixating on a Mr. Right who can make her happy and lacking a clear sense of what she wants to do with her life is off to a doubly bad start, but she is not yet entirely lost. More importantly, however, Trollope thus places the onus for women’s happiness entirely upon themselves. Trollope’s ideal woman, then, in being capable of making or breaking her own life, is to a certain extent liberated from masculine control.

Here we may have a clue as to why Trollope spent so little time developing the character of Mary Flood Jones, who abdicates volition and embowers herself in a
physically and emotionally remote location far from Phineas Finn, upon whom she pins her happiness. In her first brief appearance, Mary follows the strictures of feminine deportment required of women before they are officially affianced, like that of those offered by Ellis, who warns daughters that although the “restrictions of society may probably appear to her both harsh and uncalled for,” in order to protect their reputations they must obey the “laws of etiquette,” especially those that govern the interaction between a “young lady” and her “lover” (Daughters of England 101-102). Mary repeatedly distances herself from Phineas in spirit and in body: she pointedly assures Phineas’s sister Barbara that he “is nothing” to her and commands Barbara not to speak of a connection between them; she is “careful to go to a part of the room quite remote from” Phineas when she joins his company; she deflects Phineas’s talk of marriage away from herself as his potential bride; and she chastises Phineas, albeit gently, when he kisses her and takes a lock of her hair (18-22). If Mary were the heroine of the novel, her tactics certainly could be read as fairly standard modus operandi for the stereotypical Victorian ingenue—i.e. as effective measures to protect her reputation and her heart.

Another clue may be that while Trollope names a chapter each for Lady Laura Standish, Violet Effingham, and Madame Max Goesler, he does not do so for Mary Flood Jones, and we must also recall that Mary rarely appears in Phineas Finn and is dead before Phineas Redux begins. Her remoteness, then, presents a conundrum for scholars who wish to cast Trollope as an entirely conservative author. Trollope admits that he “was wrong to marry [Phineas] to a simple, pretty Irish girl, who could only be felt as an encumbrance” upon his hero’s return to England and its more important political arena in Phineas Redux. Trollope continues, “I had no alternative but to kill the simple pretty Irish
girl” (Autobiography 263). Mary seems such an enigma that the narrator doubts whether
the reader will remember her upon her reintroduction a full fifteen chapters after her first
appearance (Phineas Finn 1: 144). Notably, this seemingly minor instance of the
narrator’s skepticism of Mary’s memorability indicates that Trollope dismissed Mary’s
model of femininity early in the process of constructing his larger tale. Moreover, each
time Mary re-enters the text, in body or in spirit, she is described or describes herself as
being in limbo, endlessly waiting, and stagnant. Mary declares her intention to remain in
stasis until Phineas returns and reanimates her, saying, “If he ever chooses to come for
me, here I am. If he does not, I will bear it as well as I can” (2: 107). Even after their
engagement—a rather important fact about himself that Phineas keeps secret from
everyone in London (2: 271)—Mary writes to Phineas in London, “reading Tennyson, as
you told me . . . I could in truth be a Mariana” in Ireland (2: 287). The reference of course
is to Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “Mariana,” who grows “aweary” waiting many years for
her lover to return (Poems of Tennyson 18-20). Surely, besides injecting a bit of irony
into their love story, Trollope thus indicates that Mary is aware of facilitating her own
isolation and that she should take warning from Phineas’s directing her to the poem that
he does not intend to return to her very soon. Such sentiments are in keeping with Ellis’s
dicta “the whole law of woman’s life is a law of love” (Daughters of England 8) and that
she “who entertains this sentiment in its profoundest character, lives no longer for
herself” and is “content to be neglected by the whole world” (101). Conversely, in
showing Mary as being, in a manner of speaking, already dead and buried in Phineas
Finn, Trollope argues that such a woman lives an essentially meaningless, empty, and
futile existence without direct and continuous contact with her man.
Nevertheless, in order to validate her self-exile, Trollope ensures that Mary passes what we can call Ellis’s constancy test. Despite the apparent contradiction between her former assertion that when her lover is absent a woman truly in love should prefer solitude to company, Ellis’s decrees,

woman’s love, at least all that deserves that name, is almost universally exalted and noble in its commencement; but that still wants its highest attribute until she has been put to the test. Let no woman, therefore, boast of her constancy until she has been put to the test. . . . My meaning refers to faithfulness of heart, and this has many trials in the common intercourse of society, in the flattery and attentions of men, and in the fickleness of female fancy. (Daughters of England 102)

In order to prove herself a truly estimable potential bride, Ellis insists, a woman must withstand masculine assaults upon her dedicated heart, within the bounds of respectability of course. By thus providing women with an ostensible but relatively safe means to exercise self-restraint, Ellis imbues their physical and emotional remoteness with meaning. When Mary and Phineas meet after a long absence, the narrator reports her mental checklist of why she deserves his proposal, recalling their kiss and his possession of her hair and her refusing “almost ignominiously” another man’s “offer of marriage” while Phineas was in London, after which she “told herself that she would never be false to Phineas Finn,” despite knowing “that in his position” as an unpaid member of Parliament he “could not marry at once” (1: 144-145). Thus the portionless Mary displays her constancy, and, perhaps more importantly, her pecuniary disinterestedness by refusing to marry Elias Bodkin, the employed “young partner” of Phineas’s father (1: 19)
and by waiting for Phineas, who is dependent upon his father, to espouse her. Trollope further confirms Mary’s constancy through the narrator’s and her own repetitions of her fealty to Phineas. She vows “that she would be true to Phineas for ever and ever, in spite of her mother, in spite of all the world—in spite, should it be necessary, even of himself” (1: 146). Trollope thus shows that Mary’s constancy is not wholly an accident of her physical remoteness from Phineas—it is her calculated determination.

Mary’s death is likewise remote, but because it is far from the traditional methods of disposing of ideal women—who are typically either married to ideal mates, like Charles Dickens’s Florence Dombey, or martyred for their author’s particular cause, like Little Nell Trent—it is entirely meaningless. In *Phineas Redux*, the dead Mary is merely declared no longer to be an “impediment” to Phineas’s return to politics; the news is related by Laurence Fitzgibbon, a tertiary character of somewhat questionable moral value (1: 6). Fitzgibbon describes Mary’s passing in twelve words—”the poor thing died of her first baby before it was born” (1: 6)—and she is denied the conventional reward of living happily ever afterwards with her man and two children, as the narrator of *Can You Forgive Her?* describes it. After Mary is pushed thoroughly beyond the margins of the text into actual non-existence, neither her life nor her death receives much additional notice. One might argue that the story of a conduct-book model heroine had already been told so often that Trollope may have felt that Mary’s story was simply not worth developing, as has been said of Charlotte Brontë’s patchy presentation of Paulina Home de Bosompierre’s story in *Villette* (Salotto 60), or that Trollope quickly recognized his mistake in creating Mary and redirected his energies and time from developing her character in *Phineas Finn* to those who were more complex and vital to the entire
narrative. Considering that, in Trollope’s own words, “In writing Phineas Finn I had constantly before me the necessity of progression in character” (264), it is more likely that Trollope intended to point out the error of Mary’s choice to consign the direction of her life and happiness to Phineas. When Phineas retreats to Ireland and marries her, Mary may temporarily be rewarded for her constancy, of which Ellis certainly would have approved. Yet because Mary achieves her only goal upon marrying Phineas, Trollope can no longer trace the progress of her character as he follows Phineas in his various quests for Parliamentary seats. Thus the manner in which Mary remains constant to Phineas proves to be her death sentence.

Unlike Mary, who is more often than not quickly passed over in discussions of the Phineas novels, Lady Laura Standish has attracted considerable scholarly attention, justifying Trollope’s dubbing her the tale’s “best character” (Autobiography 265). For my part, I contend that Trollope submits Lady Laura as a worst case example of women who misinterpret Sarah Lewis’s call to exercise political influence as the entirety of Woman’s Mission. Moreover, I believe that Trollope bases Lady Laura’s character on aspects of Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon’s eccentricities and uses the suffragette’s polemics in order to show that Lady Laura is ultimately responsible for the ruin of two patriarchies, her father’s and her husband’s, despite the inequitable laws regarding marriage, divorce, and women’s property rights under which she is compelled to remain part of that system. Lest the reader somehow miss the point, Trollope repeatedly has Lady Laura or the narrator declare her guilt and sole responsibility for her disastrous marriage. For example, Lady Laura writes to Phineas, “I have done wrong, and have shipwrecked every hope in this world. . . . I am conscious, too, of continued sin—a sin unlike other sins—not to be
avoided, of daily occurrence, a sin which weighs me to the ground” (*Phineas Redux* 1: 172); she tells her brother, “I disgraced myself when I gave the hand for which [Phineas] asked” to Robert Kennedy (2: 96); and the narrator reports her internally confessing to having “marred the happiness of three persons by the mistake she had made in early life” (2: 222). Trollope thus arguably blames a victim of her society’s customs and laws, but the same level of pragmatism that keeps him from demanding or even condoning total sexual equality presumably compels him to warn women that upon marriage England’s androcentric legal system can hurt them only if they are ignorant of or disregard those laws during courtship. As I will demonstrate, the successful bride selects a husband who will not or can not exercise his legal right to control her environment. Having neglected to proactively determine the course of her life, both Lady Laura’s misguided initial enacting of and reaction to her unsatisfactory marriage is shown to be the true catalyst behind the destruction of two houses.

Lady Laura in many ways embodies Bodichon, an “atypical Victorian woman,” as Candida Ann Lacey describes the feminist (3), particularly regarding the Standish family connections with Whig reformists and Lady Laura’s desire to influence the course of national politics. The narrator reports that Lady Laura is “related to almost everybody who was anybody among the high Whigs” through several generations (1: 38), like Bodichon, whose father, Benjamin Leigh Smith, served as a member of Parliament and as a Whig supported the repeals of the Corn Laws both in 1838 and 1841 through 1847 (*Concise Dictionary of National Biography* 2770) and whose grandfather, William Smith, also a Whig, followed the leadership of the abolition Charles James Fox (1058). Additionally, like Bodichon, Lady Laura openly expresses a desire to exert political
influence. The narrator describes Lady Laura’s “ambition to be brought as near to political action as was possible for a woman” (*Phineas Finn* 1: 89), an ambition akin to Bodichon’s assertion that “The time has arrived when women are wanted in the Commonwealth” (*Women and Work* 51). Yet unlike Bodichon, who dismisses “talk of the absurdity” of women’s “mixing in political life” (*Women and Work* 51) and publicly campaigns for women’s suffrage in *Reasons for the Enfranchisement of Women* (1866), Lady Laura believes she can wield political influence “without surrendering any of the privileges of feminine inaction” and behaves as if she were an exception to Lewis’s edict to carry out Woman’s Mission clandestinely through only her own male relatives.90 The narrator continues,

That women should even wish to have votes at parliamentary elections was to [Lady Laura] abominable, and the cause of the Rights of Women generally was odious to her; but, nevertheless, for herself, she delighted in hoping that she too might be useful—in thinking that she too was perhaps, in some degree, politically powerful. (*Phineas Finn* 1: 89)

Described as such, Lady Laura is, in a sense, a sexually confused creature, craving the traditionally masculine power to effect social policy from the conventionally feminine domestic haven of her home. Her selfishness is immediately apparent in her desire to wield political power without, like Bodichon, petitioning Parliament to extend it to all women. Thus, for a woman of her time, Lady Laura evinces a dangerously egocentric, rebellious, and decidedly unfeminine spirit early in the narrative that transgresses several conventional gender boundaries.
At the risk of sounding as if my topic were ripped from the headlines of our own media outlets for popular culture, both during and after her courtship Lady Laura first willfully disregards crucial contemporary cultural standards of femininity in her quest for power and then violates the sanctity and laws of marriage when she is not permitted to exercise that power. Unlike Mary, who apparently has no desires beyond securing Phineas Finn, Lady Laura marries Robert Kennedy in expectation of securing a position from which she can advance liberal policies. She errs, however, in marrying a man who behaves in a manner exactly opposite to her expectations. Thinking Kennedy, like her father, would allow her complete freedom of action within his home, Lady Laura compounds her error by refusing to submit to his authority as both custom and law require.

The narrator of Phineas Finn implies that Lady Laura’s eventual rebellion partly results from her upbringing in a dysfunctional family, specifically one in which the patriarchal order has been supplanted by the filial. Phineas, the narrator explains, is most “struck” by “the unlimited confidence which [Earl Brentford] seemed to place in his daughter” (1: 32). Lady Laura, the only female relation remaining in the household, wields “perfect power of doing what she pleased. She was much more mistress of herself than if she had been the wife instead of the daughter of the Earl . . . and she seemed to be quite as much mistress of the house” (1: 32). Ellis tells us that “mothers, wives, and daughters” are responsible for the “supererogation” of their family’s “daily comfort,” the fulfillment of which “is one of the happiest and most ennobling duties of woman” (Women of England 8), and so Lady Laura in the main follows convention by becoming the lady of the manor. But Ellis also speaks of “the sacred and inalienable bond between
a daughter and her parents” (73) that requires young ladies “to be dutiful daughters” (79). In this regard Lady Laura transgresses conventional morality by forcing Lord Brentford, “in obedience to her requirements,” to take a cabinet position and by using his house for her political purposes (1: 89). Moreover, according to William Blackstone in _Commentaries on the Laws of England_, Lady Laura’s behavior is unnatural if not criminal. Blackstone explains, “The duties of children to their parents arise from a principle of natural justice and retribution. For to those, who gave us existence, we naturally owe subjection and obedience during our minority, and honor and reverence ever after” (1: 16.3). Hence Lord Brentford literally retains primacy and figuratively holds pride of place in his house, and Lady Laura abuses her limited authority by exercising power over herself, her father, and her father’s house, regardless of doing so from within her proper sphere.

Although the narrator implies that Lord Brentford abdicates his parental rights and that Lady Laura lacks a suitable, in-house model of domestic engineer—her mother is dead, her sister married, and her aunt in the country (_Phineas Finn_ 1: 31-32)—many contemporary readers might not have easily forgiven Lady Laura’s filial offenses, because she refuses or neglects to overcome her unfortunate upbringing in order to conform with cultural standards. Ellis, who claims that “despite the prejudices of early education” women are capable of learning and fulfilling their proper roles (_Women of England_ 78), certainly would have held Lady Laura accountable for her sins of filial omission. Ellis further clarifies her position: “though the fault may, in some cases, have been originally with the parents, there is little excuse for daughters who are of age to think and act for themselves. Habit, we know, is proverbially accounted second nature;
but we know also, that even our first nature is capable of being changed” (*Women of England* 79). Thus Ellis assumes that her readers are inadequately educated but places the onus on adult daughters to seek out and supply the gaps in their learning. Lady Laura, held to such standards, is solely responsible for her filial offenses for refusing to conventionalize her behavior both before and after her marriage.

We can assume from the narrator’s account of Lady Laura’s unwomanly mannerisms that she has not sought out a culturally standard model of femininity upon which to base her own behavior and probably unlikely to do so. As the narrator tells us, she “would lean forward when sitting, as a man does, and would use her arms in talking . . . and pass her fingers through her hair—after the fashion of men rather than of women . . . and she seemed to despise that soft quiescence of her sex in which are generally found so many charms” (*Phineas Finn* 1: 33). Contemporary readers would hardly expect such behavior from a member of the aristocracy, who should have received lessons in deportment (Purvis 69). Yet the narrator indicates that Lady Laura’s manliness is not solely the result of her miseducation, saying “Her hands and feet were large—as was her whole frame” (1: 33). Thus, in the discreet movements of her manly physique and in her general freedom of movement within the earl’s house, Lady Laura is depicted as a natural *virago* whose apparent lack of womanly training places her well beyond the norm, so far beyond that “from her earliest years of girlish womanhood she had resolved she would use the world as men use it, and not as women do” (2: 11). Despite Phineas’s admiration for her (1: 33), the narrator, and perhaps Trollope, clearly advises the reader not to seek a heroine in Lady Laura.
Nevertheless, Lady Laura is capable of benevolence, a characteristic universally attributed to what Ellis calls “a woman of right feeling” (*Women of England* 9), and her selfless devotion to her brother, Lord Oswold Standish Chiltern, partly accounts for Phineas’s admiration of her overall character. Paradoxically, however, the consequences of her one selfless act are quite literally unfortunate, not only for herself but for her husband, Robert Kennedy. In order to pay off Chiltern’s debts, Lady Laura lends him her personal fortune (*Phineas Finn* 1: 139), the amount of which we learn in *Phineas Redux* is a rather significant forty thousand pounds (1: 341), enough to make her independently wealthy for life. She then determines not to “allow herself the same freedom of choice which would otherwise have belonged” to her (*Phineas Finn* 1: 139) and accepts Kennedy’s proposal of marriage in order “to blaze into power” (*Phineas Redux* 1: 106). Instead of “meddl[ing] with high politics” or “discuss[ing] the reform bills” with or alongside her husband as she presides over a political salon in, so to speak, her own house, Kennedy sets Lady Laura upon a belated and rigid course in domestic economy and religious dogma, “seem[ing] to expect that his wife should read the books he had named . . . in the time he had allocated for reading them” (1: 208). In other words, Kennedy displays the typical late-nineteenth-century prejudice of the young lady’s inadequate training in domestic duties and provides Lady Laura with on-the-job “tutelage” (*Phineas Redux* 2: 267) to meet his specific professional standards as a Scotch laird and member of Parliament. The hitherto domestically unrestricted Lady Laura interprets her husband’s behavior as “tyranny” (*Phineas Finn* 1: 208) and returns in disgrace to her father’s house (2: 243), effectively ending any chance of a political or domestic career for both herself or her husband. Kennedy responds by demanding
“restitution of his conjugal rights,” including his legal claim to his wife’s fortune (2: 286) and in pressing his suit goes mad, sickens, and dies (Phineas Redux 1: 91, 2: 100-104). Lady Laura initially absconds to Germany (1: 92) and when widowed settles into “the life of a recluse” (2: 360). Lady Laura thus does more than, as she phrases it, “grievous harm” to Kennedy (Phineas Finn 2: 308) by marrying him with delusions of personal glory and then deserting him when he tries to bring her in line with his own and with cultural standards—she brings about her own social death and hastens his physical death. Likewise, in their self-imposed exile, Lady Laura at age 32 appears “old, worn, angular, and hard-visaged” (Phineas Redux 1: 96), and Lord Brentford “passe[s] from manhood to senility” (1: 100).

Granted, since both Mary Flood Jones and Robert Kennedy enter freely into their marriages, both are partly responsible for their own deaths. Still, the rather intriguing fact remains that Trollope kills both Mary, a woman who insists on embodying an ideal of her gender, and Kennedy, a man who expects his wife to match that ideal. Their deaths suggest that Trollope favors reformation of the conduct book model of femininity. Mary’s eventual disappearance and Kennedy’s gradual loss of mens sana and corpore sano serve as a warning to both men and women that in order to enjoy marital harmony they must reject that unattainable womanly ideal and reconcile their pre-marital expectations with reality.

Further evidence of Trollope’s reformist tendencies are found in the legalities surrounding the rise and fall of the Kennedy marriage, especially because they recall elements of Bodichon’s A Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women. Trollope’s presentation of the laws’ heavy toll upon the lives
of the Kennedy and Standish families suggests that he agrees with Bodichon that legal reforms like the Married Women’s Property Law are necessary to redress what she calls “over-legislation” of married women who are victims of “taxation without representation” (A Brief Summary 13). Specifically, Trollope designs Kennedy’s downward spiral into madness in order to support one portion of Bodichon’s argument in particular, where she speaks of the prevailing obstacle to the bill’s progress, that “men of good feeling” would not exercise their legal rights under the law of coverture and therefore a law rarely enforced needs no reformation (14). In Kennedy’s gradually swelling anger toward his wife and toward Phineas, Trollope demonstrates how even a religious man, who should be an instrument of God, can maliciously demand “restitution . . . of his conjugal rights” (Phineas Finn 2: 286). Kennedy, defends himself by listing Lady Laura’s sins—she “persisted in breaking the Lord’s commandment and defiling the Lord’s day” and “would not go to church,” holding “meetings of Belial” in her father’s house instead, where she continued to entertain politicians (Phineas Redux 1: 88)—yet he sends Lady Laura a letter “full of threats” supported by “quotations from the Scriptures and from the Prayer-Book” (1: 171) and tries to shoot Phineas (Phineas Redux 1: 207). As Phineas points out, the seriousness of Lady Laura’s sins are subject to “doubt” (1: 88), but Kennedy’s attempted murder is unquestionably both immoral and illegal according to the laws of church and state.

Regardless of this concession to Bodichon, Trollope renounces the conspicuously “atypical Victorian woman,” Lady Laura, just as he rejects the stereotypically submissive woman, Mary Flood Jones. Whereas in Phineas Finn Trollope emphasizes Mary’s constancy and her physical and emotional remoteness from Phineas, in Phineas Redux he
underscores Lady Laura’s inconstancy and her lack of physical and emotional restraint. Phineas ponders that Lady Laura could “calmly conceal” yet not conquer “her passion” for him, making “all her feminine delicacy subordinate to material consideration” in order to marry Kennedy (1: 176). Upon meeting with Phineas after two years’ absence, Lady Laura, still Kennedy, disregards decorum, “run[s] forward . . . put[s] her cheek to his lips and . . . take[s] both his hands” (1: 94). Perhaps most indicative of her lack of the self-control demanded of her sex, Lady Laura later reacts hysterically to the news of Phineas’s arrest for murder: she screams, falling “prostrate on the floor,” and refusing to stop “disgracing” herself by restraining her hysteria (2: 93-94). Each of these unfeminine displays of what Sarah Lewis calls a lack of “consistency and simplicity,” compounded by an “exaggeration of sentiment, to which the excitable imaginations and ardent feelings of women render them particularly prone,” demonstrate that Lady Laura is incapable of achieving happiness, especially because she cannot, as Lewis expects from women, be useful to anyone without a properly cultivated “judgment” that refines “the heart and the affections” (116). Clearly, Trollope argues that women who self-sacrificially refuse to act like Mary and those who selfishly overreact like Lady Laura are equally doomed to unhappiness, both because their motives are at times incomprehensible to others and because their lives are empty and meaningless.

In presenting Violet Effingham’s and Madame Max Goesler’s benevolence, constancy, and usefulness as part and parcel of their careful selection of suitable marital partners, Trollope reconciles Lewis’s and Ellis’s catalog of divinely ordained women’s duties with the more practicable criteria of Bodichon’s arguments for sexual equality. Despite protesting that she does not “have any special mission for saving young men”
(Phineas Finn 1: 95), Violet rejects three suitors—Phineas, Lord Fawn, and Mr. Appledom—and fulfills her childhood promise to marry Oswold Lord Chiltern but only after he concedes to meet her standards by reforming his libertine behavior. Far from assuming a submissive posture in deference to Chiltern’s masculine right to control the terms of their espousal, Violet echoes Bodichon’s assertion that “No human being has a right to be idle” (Women and Work 7) by declaring that her husband “should work;” and she avers that, in demanding he stop gambling and drinking and start honoring his father’s wishes, she says only what she “felt bound to tell” him (Phineas Finn 2: 325). Moreover, while Violet expects Chiltern to regress, she warns him, “Oswold, you must not be an ogre to me” (2. 327). Violet therefore openly enacts her particular Woman’s Mission by exerting influence over Oswold to reform his behavior as both a child and potential husband and by benevolently accepting his proposal in order to see that her mission is accomplished. Furthermore, by marrying Oswold, she also proves her usefulness to the Standish family by becoming the means of reconciling father and son, restoring the patriarchal order between the Standish men without subjecting herself to it.

Madame Max likewise simultaneously shows benevolence by preserving the Palliser’s patriarchal order and proves her constancy to Phineas by rejecting the Duke of Omnium’s proposal of marriage, with the expectation of “abandoning her freedom” in exchange for “something she might in truth prefer to it” (2: 220), namely Phineas. More importantly, however, she demonstrates her usefulness by saving Phineas from the gallows, a feat made possible through her widow’s independence, which she highly values. Madame Max is a thoroughly liberated being, transacting her own business on the continent (Phineas Finn 2: 238) and offering Phineas her hand and purse (2: 318-320),
but she does not shirk her Woman’s Mission. For two years, she serves the Duke “as a kind of upper nurse” (*Phineas Redux* 1: 150), she signs over the Duke’s substantial legacy to his niece Adelaide Palliser (2: 326), and she acts as an intermediary in settling “the Trumpeton Feud” between Lord Chiltern and Plantagenet Palliser, thereby restoring a great deal of social order within the patriarchy (1: 126, 2: 310-316). Hence Trollope argues that supremely liberated women like Madame Max—who are financially independent, conduct their own business affairs, and move about globe unchaperoned—may not be a threat to the status quo.

Trollope’s most forceful feminist statement is delivered via Madame Max’s greatest achievement, during which she publicly exerts her Woman’s Mission in order to restore social order a broader scale than she has among her aristocratic acquaintance. In her pursuit of evidence to exonerate Phineas, Madame Max appropriates the power that masculine authorities (the police) will not exercise, hires a posse, traverses England and portions of the continent, and directs a malfunctioning legal system away from an innocent man and toward a true social predator, Joseph Emilius (*Phineas Redux* 2: 144-154, 213-221). By bringing the true murderer to justice and literally *liberating* Phineas from an inapt masculine power structure, Madame Max clearly behaves like a liberated woman and proves herself superior to several misguided masculine authorities (Phineas’s lawyers, Lord Fawn, and the police). All of this she accomplishes as a woman who wryly declines to “advocate the rights of women,” admits women’s “inferiority,” and “submit[s] without a grumble” to her “masters” (1: 288). Through Madame Max’s unmistakable sarcasm, Trollope applies a comedic mask to a female character whose intrepid independence conspicuously violates his audience’s expectations of womanly behavior.
Additionally, both Violet’s and Madame Max’s reparations of dysfunctional androcentric power structures ironically unmask the fallacy of masculine supremacy.

Trollope does not, however, envision a place within conventional society for such liberated women as Violet and Madame Max. Whereas Mary never appears to be interested in such things and Lady Laura denounces “the cause of the Rights of Women” (*Phineas Finn* 1: 89) but considers herself an exception to traditional women’s boundaries, neither Violet nor Madame Max gives up those rights or submits to the inevitability of marriage, as Richard Barickman, Susan MacDonald, and Myra Stark assert (221-222). Neither do they preserve those rights by subverting the system and forming an “egalitarian marriage,” as Deborah Denenholz Morse argues (6). Rather, Violet and Madame Max hold tenaciously to the rights accorded to them as unmarried women and achieve personal liberty by marrying men who are in various ways beneath them, thereby escaping the controlling aspects of the patriarchy. Chiltern, for instance, admits that he is financially dependent upon Lord Brentford (*Phineas Finn* 1: 169-170), tells Violet that he has “nothing but hunting that [he] can call an occupation (1: 176), and refuses to take his rightful seat in Parliament (1: 293); hence Violet’s refusal to marry him until, in today’s parlance, he mans up and finds some work to occupy his time.

Phineas likewise—knowingly and to the detriment of his family—relies on his father for funds (1: 63), loses a total of three Parliamentary seats to which he gained access essentially through graft, and engages in four love affairs during the course of the narrative. Compared to the women they marry, Chiltern and Phineas are financial failures, essentially useless to society, and, in Phineas’s case, inconstant, a failing which Violet finds to be most disturbing (*Phineas Finn* 2: 310). Considering their inability to
direct the courses of their own lives, one hardly expects these men to enforce their masculine birthright of authority over their wives, like Kennedy.

Surprisingly, Trollope’s advising financially secure women to secure their independence by marrying men with inferior cash reserves and unconventional marital expectations anticipates similar suggestions toward revitalizing feminism scrutinized in Linda Hirshman’s *Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World* (2006), and comparing Hirshman’s recent proposals to today’s working women with Madame Max’s decision to marry Phineas instead of the Duke of Omnium further reveals the extent of Trollope’s feminism beneath his seeming conservatism. Hirshman argues that telling women to find “a sharing spouse by marrying younger or poorer, or someone in a dependent status, like a starving artist” is often impracticable “[b]ecause money is such a marker of status and power [that] it’s hard to persuade women to marry poorer.” She therefore offers “an easier rule: [m]arry young or marry much older,” because “[y]ounger men are potential high-status companions” and “older men are sufficiently established” not to compete with or limit their wives’ interests (57). Moreover, Hirshman proposes, “It is possible that marrying a liberal might be the better course. After all, conservatives justified the unequal family in two modes: ‘God ordained it’ and ‘biology is destiny’” while “liberal men should feel squeamish about” adhering to traditional gender roles (57). Hirshman’s optimal marital options resemble those with which Madame Max is presented while contemplating her prospects for happiness as the future Mrs. Phineas Finn or Duchess of Omnium. In rejecting the seventy-year-old, Tory Duke, who “contrived to envelope himself in something of the ancient mystery of wealth and rank” (*Phineas Finn* 2: 82), and marrying the thirty-five-year-old, ultra-Whig Phineas, who
resigns from Parliament in order to “maintain his independence” over the issue of Irish tenant rights (2: 276), Madame Max refuses to be subsumed by the British patriarchy and chooses a thoroughly liberal (and liberated) husband who is unlikely either to curtail her freedom or demand that she act according to conventional modes of aristocratic behavior.

Likewise, Violet makes a similar choice between lords Fawn and Chiltern, and is in many ways the doppelganger to Lady Laura. As the narrative begins, both Violet and Lady Laura have reached their majority and thus have complete control over vast personal fortunes. Lady Laura chooses the wrong husband (not that Phineas would have suited her either) and rebels when she can not keep her independence, while Violet selects a husband who will not—indeed, seemingly cannot—restrict her freedom.

Likewise, aspects of Violet’s story, like Lady Laura’s, can be traced to Bodichon’s *A Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women*, but Trollope uses Violet’s orphan status to point out that the laws regarding unmarried women’s property offer them only a semblance of independence while cultural expectations steer them toward marriage, at which time their persons and their funds are repossessed by the patriarchy under the law of coverture. Bodichon states, “A single woman has the same rights to property, protection from the law, and has to pay the same taxes to the State as a man” (3); and Lady Baldock, Violet’s aunt and former guardian, asks, “Why had not the law, or the executors, or the Lord Chancellor, or some power levied for the protection of the proprieties, made Violet absolutely subject to her guardian till she should be made subject to a husband?” (Phineas Finn 2: 63). Yet Violet seems not to be entirely free to dispose of herself, despite the fact that she is legally entitled to direct her own movements and has no living male relative who can claim even nominal
oversight of her autonomy, as Lord Brentford claims over Lady Laura. Violet describes herself as being “a Bohemian . . . always going about” amongst her friends’ houses, not knowing “where any of her things are” and as “heartily sick of Lady Baldock” (*Phineas Finn* 1: 93), with whom she is forced to reside in order to protect her reputation. Thus Violet might “dream” about “liv[ing] alone if she chose to be alone, that she might be independent in her life, as a man is independent” (2: 321), but she cannot do so in a society that is more concerned with her reputation than with her rights.

In Violet’s desire to own truly not just her own house but herself—to achieve complete mastery over herself—we find an instance of Trollope’s disguising a feminist concept behind what might be read as a rather minor and unremarkable bit of sarcasm and thus might be overlooked by potentially censorious readers. Moreover, because Violet’s approach to marriage in the following passage is highly pragmatic and based upon what appears to be real world experiences, if any character can be said to speak for Trollope in the Phineas novels, Violet is the best candidate. As she explains her marital ethos to Lady Laura,

> a husband is very much like a house or a horse. You don’t take your house because it’s the best house in the world, but because just then you want a house. You go and see a house, and if it’s very nasty you don’t take it. But if you think it will suit pretty well, and if you are tired of looking about for houses, you do take it. That’s the way one buys one’s horses—and one’s husbands. (*Phineas Finn* 1: 94)

Violet thus views marriage as an outright purchase—one “buys” a husband. In Victorian fiction, however, one expects to find women depicted as the commodities in the marriage
market, not men; and while Christoph Lindner reads Chiltern’s marrying Violet to pay off his financial and filial debts (“Sexual Commerce in Trollope’s Phineas Novels” 348) and Phineas’s marrying Madame Max as a “solution to his chronic poverty and to his lack of political clout” (351), I see Violet and Madame Max refusing the proposals of men who expect conventional wives (respectively, Lord Fawn and the Duke of Omnium) in order to secure their independence through matches more to their liking. By purchasing Chiltern and Phineas to provide the necessary houses or cover(ture)s to their reputations, Violet and Madame Max paradoxically free themselves to conduct their own lives as they wish.

Furthermore, as would houses, Chiltern and Phineas shield Violet and Madame Max from the prying eyes and wagging tongues of conventional society. In *Patriarchal Desire and Victorian Discourse: A Lacanian Reading of Anthony Trollope’s Palliser Novels*, Priscilla L. Walton aptly states that “the system” under which the novels’ characters operate “depends upon a subordinate Other to satiate its subjects and to maintain its social structures” (44). Presumably, as Luce Irigaray points out, when the subordinate Other is a woman, men desire not herself but her reproductive potential, the regulation of which “assures the foundation of economic, social, and cultural order” (170). In this sense, the unmarried Violet and the widow Madame Max must be kept under constant surveillance, and Madame Max admits as much, saying, “A woman who is alone in the world is ever regarded with suspicion” (*Phineas Finn* 2: 219). In order to remain desirable, the virgin Violet must protect her reputation or “pure exchange value” (Irigaray 186). The widow Madame Max must also protect her character, but as a woman whose desirability has already sated someone she bears the additional burden of
overcoming the stigma attached to one whose “use value” (Irigaray 186) has depreciated. Walton does not, however, recognize Trollope’s subtle feminist revolution of the woman-as-subordinate or woman-as-commodity paradigm, in which Violet and Madame Max actively seek marriage partners not in submission to the system, but in order to invert the system for themselves, making Phineas and Chiltern subordinate commodities through which Violet and Madame Max enact their unconventional desires for feminist autonomy, even though those desires take on conventional semblance.

Phineas’s eventual acceptance of Madame Max’s thoroughly unconventional proposal further supports Trollope’s inversion of the woman-as-subordinate/commodity paradigm. In the tellingly named chapter, “Madame Goesler’s Politics,” the narrator reports her deliberations over the Duke of Omnium’s marriage proposal:

Money she had already; position, too, she had of her own. She was free as air . . . She had never known what it was to have anything of the pleasure of love. She had grown, as she often told herself, to be a hard, cautious, selfish, successful woman, without any interference or assistance from such pleasure. Might it not be yet time left for her to try it without selfishness—with an absolute devotion of self—if only she could find the right companion? (Phineas Finn 2: 203)

Madame Max’s primary reason to reject the Duke’s offer is her desire, as we would now say, to have it all—freedom of action, worldly success, an opportunity to serve another human being, and a marriage of mutual affection—and her politics are thus shown to be somewhat feminist, despite her public concessions to women’s inferiority. Trollope’s readers may well have been shocked by Madame Max’s offering her money and herself
to Phineas, and one would expect her to be soundly punished for rejecting Ellis’s “first restriction to a woman of delicacy . . . never to entertain” thoughts of love “towards one by whom it has not been sought and solicited” (*Daughters of England* 104). Surprisingly, however, Trollope rewards Madame Max with Phineas’s final act in the narrative, a marriage proposal, because she, like Violet, finds a way to reconcile what Lewis and Ellis deem to be “Woman’s Mission” with her desire for independence.

Consequently, from such a reading, we can see that in order to highlight the importance of finding a house/husband who “suit(s) one pretty well” Trollope concedes that the limitations of houses/husbands built to the patriarchal model are unworkable for women who want to direct their own lives; therefore, he kills Mary and makes such an utter disaster of the Kennedy marriage. Mary and Parliament, Trollope says in his *Autobiography*, do not mix (263); but Mary, always portionless and stuck in Ireland, has little choice but to marry Phineas, despite their apparent unsuitability. After handing over her fortune to Chiltern, Lady Laura mistakenly marries the husband she perceives to be the best one available at the time. Violet and Madame Max, in contrast, assess the suitability of several men and settle upon the house/husband who can best preserve their autonomy. Violet, then, upholds her belief that she has “the right to expect . . . protection shall be given to [her]” upon marriage (*Phineas Finn* 1: 174), but she can preserve her dream to live in a house of her own by selecting the husband best suited to her purposes. Likewise, Madame Max, one assumes, continues to travel and conduct her own business as she pleases while enjoying an affectionate marriage. Violet and Madame Max thus ostensibly conform to the cultural norm of marriage through wholly unconventional
methods of selecting suitable houses/husbands instead of waiting to be selected, like Mary, or accepting the first available vacancy, like Lady Laura.

Specifically, with one important modification, Violet and Madame Max therefore well represent Walter E. Houghton’s estimation of the magnitude of the scientific process’s effect upon Victorian England: “the extension of scientific assumptions and methods from the physical world to the whole life of [wo]man” (The Victorian Frame of Mind 33). They base their assessments of Chiltern and Phineas both on a thorough knowledge of their own needs and desires in addition to those of their potential mates, and also on their observations of the marriages around them and their own experiences. Furthermore, Violet and Madame Max glean external perspectives on their potential mates’ strengths and weaknesses by asking their acquaintances for their opinions. Violet seeks Phineas’s impression of Chiltern (Phineas Finn 1: 116-118) and “compar[es] notes” about how to marry well with Lady Laura (2: 304-311); Madame Max discusses Phineas’s qualities with Lady Laura and Violet (2: 53-56) and with Lady Glencora Palliser (Phineas Redux 2: 122-131). Thus, Violet and Madame Max autodidactically observe and collect data from several independent sources, analyze it, and apply it to their lives, their marriages.

The relative success of Violet and Madame Max demonstrates Trollope’s belief that individual women can determine the courses of their own lives, but in the Phineas novels it appears that only those women with independent fortunes can achieve personal liberation through marriage. Such financial limitations upon his theory that adult women must learn on their own to accommodate their desires for independence with the realities of marital laws and social conventions is a bit surprising, however, since his own mother,
Frances Milton Trollope, provides proof positive that even unfortunate women can reconcile Woman’s Mission with financial and social success. In fact, the life of Fanny Trollope is one of many that belie the often mistaken notion that all British women in the Regency and Victorian periods abdicated all self-determinism and self-reliance to the men in their lives.

Accordingly, one wonders how many women adopted a theory like Trollope’s to their own lives, quietly advancing feminism within their homes. Fanny was positively intrepid, setting off for America in 1828 “to establish [Anthony’s] brother Henry,” running a bazaar in Cincinnati, and writing the first of her “114 volumes” for which she earned “a considerable income” (Autobiography 19-20). Fanny was thus able to keep the family out of debt, despite her husband’s apparent inability to provide for them. From 1834 onwards, Trollope explains, “everything was done with money earned by my mother” (Autobiography 23). Surely, with such an example in front of him, Trollope could not have remained the staunch conservative that some consider him to be; and perhaps Fanny’s determination, regardless of conventional wisdom about women’s proper roles, to do what was necessary inspired her son to see women actively engaged with the world beyond their own doors. Very likely, Fanny’s example also taught Anthony to conform as much as possible with his publishers’ and readers’ expectations, a conformity which in turn resulted in our continued frustration in discerning just how far into society Trollope wants women to go.
Chapter 7

The Futility of Educating Working Class Feminists in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*  

A century after Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman* exposed the futility of middle-class women’s autodidacticism by demonstrating its potential for domestic chaos in a society that prohibits sexual equality, Thomas Hardy similarly asserts the futility of educating working-class women under nineteenth-century Britain’s androcentric educational systems, marital laws, gender ideologies, and sexual mores in *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Despite the fact that Sue Bridehead experiences the coeducational learning model that Wollstonecraft initially proposes in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and presents as Maria’s chief desideratum in *Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman*, Sue apparently reenacts Maria’s failure to achieve an intellectual balance between reason and sentiment, as well as her inability to reconcile an ideal of sexual equality with the real demands of convention-bound society, the result of which generates domestic chaos instead of harmony. Moreover, in presenting Sue’s attempts to live with men as their equal, Hardy retells not only Maria’s story, but Wollstonecraft’s history with Gilbert Imlay and William Godwin. Hardy appears to have read Millicent Garrett Fawcett’s 1891 introduction to her edition of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in which Fawcett deliberately desexualizes Wollstonecraft’s life and her polemic. However, Fawcett’s portrayal of Wollstonecraft’s life and oeuvre is a revision of Elizabeth R. Pennell’s biography *Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1884), in which Pennell unabashedly discloses Wollstonecraft’s sexual conduct. In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy demonstrates the impracticality of Fawcett’s desexualized model of emancipated woman, viewing it as a catalyst for destruction in a society that will not disavow androcentrism.
Corollaries between Wollstonecraft’s critiques of civil and canonical marital laws in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and similar content in *Jude the Obscure* furnish ample opportunities for scholars to debate the extent of Hardy’s feminism. Yet because *Jude the Obscure* contains direct references to John Stuart Mill’s mid-nineteenth-century works and echoes many convictions of Hardy’s contemporary Mona Caird, scholars frequently consider those texts as Hardy’s primary sources for feminist philosophy. Because a Wollstonecraft-Mill-Hardy or Wollstonecraft-Caird-Hardy continuum seemingly lacks conclusive evidence, no one has yet traced the Wollstonecraftian elements of *Jude the Obscure* back to their original source, despite the fact that, in many striking ways, the content of Mill’s and Caird’s polemics resemble portions of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Therefore, before I turn to *Jude the Obscure*, I would first like to examine the difficulties of tracing the novel’s Wollstonecraftian themes through Mill and Caird and why those difficulties exist. Apparently, few among even the most radical feminists of the nineteenth century dared acknowledge their intellectual debts to Wollstonecraft, whose reputation, they believed, was toxic to the Woman’s Movement.

Certainly *Jude the Obscure* features a direct reference to Mill’s *On Liberty* (1859), but the circuit from Hardy through Mill to Wollstonecraft proves to be non-conductive. Sue invokes Mill by name and paraphrases *On Liberty*, saying, “She or he, ‘who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, had no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation’” (*Jude the Obscure* 177, *On Liberty* 123), but Hardy makes no reference to Mill’s feminist polemic, *The Subjection of Women* (1869), which among his works most closely resembles Wollstonecraft’s *A
*Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and seems a most appropriate referent for a novel that questions the justice of marital law and convention in a Wollstonecraftian manner.

Intriguingly, however, while Cedric Watts claims that Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* “influentially revived” ideas found in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (152), he does not acknowledge that neither Wollstonecraft nor her works appear by name in *The Subjection of Women*. Nor does Watts suggest that Mill may have borrowed those ideas from Wollstonecraft. Instead, he characterizes Mill’s parliamentary efforts toward women’s rights and suffrage and the arguments presented in *The Subjection of Women* as being products of mid-nineteenth-century cultural debate. Nor, moreover, does Watts directly link Mill’s ideal of the emancipated woman to the source of Hardy’s depiction of Sue. Rather, Watts attributes Sue’s traits to an already-established “tradition of representation of the ‘New Woman,’ the proto-feminist” (152). He does not discuss, however, whether such a woman would have known or have acknowledged that Wollstonecraft contributed to the formation of that proto-feminist tradition.

Watts is probably right not to claim a relationship between the New Woman and Wollstonecraft prior to 1890, considering that access to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was limited and that the reputation of Wollstonecraft most likely discouraged nineteenth-century feminists from acknowledging their affinity with her for fear of losing the moral high ground in their attempts to equalize the rights of the sexes. Indeed, in 1890, an anonymous essayist for the *Westminster Review* seems perturbed that no one recognizes what he or she considers to be obvious parallels between Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*, declaring,
We intend to make a special point of those arguments of Mary Wollstonecraft, in which her views are identical with those of Mill, because so many persons have been pleased to assume that he was the first to introduce such ideas to the public. ("The Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft" 14)\textsuperscript{94}

Later in this discussion, I will return to this matter of Wollstonecraft’s seeming displacement from what the reviewer calls “the cathedral of original thinkers” (10). Mill makes no mention of Wollstonecraft or her works in his Parliamentary speeches, On Liberty, The Subjection of Women, or Autobiography (1873), the absence of which perhaps implies that he simply did not read A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Far more likely, however, the experienced politician, whose Benthamite education trained him to seek the most useful manner in which to present his well-reasoned arguments, chose not to associate himself or his efforts toward universal suffrage with the disparaged Wollstonecraft.

That Hardy’s connection to Wollstonecraft did not come from his reading in Mill appears in an 11 September 1895 letter Hardy wrote to Florence Henniker: “I am going to get Mill’s The Subjection of Women, which I do not remember ever reading” (2: 87). Appearing in November 1895, the revised, single-volume edition of Jude the Obscure, as Patricia Ingham explains, contains material that Hardy omitted from the serialized edition that the editors of Harper’s New Monthly Magazine, a “family periodical” considered to be inappropriate (“The Evolution of Jude the Obscure” 31-34). Most of that material concerns Sue’s verbal and sexual intercourse with both Jude and Phillotson. Ingham notes the following omissions from the serialized text that appeared in the 1895 edition:
“Sue’s return to Phillotson’s bed” after their remarriage (34); her admission of using the fact that she and Jude are cousins as “a sort of subterfuge” to introduce herself to him at a time when respectable women did not approach men whom they did not know without some intermediary presence (36); and Phillotson’s open reference to Jude as Sue’s “lover” (37). If Hardy had digested The Subjection of Women in two month’s time, quotes and paraphrases from it probably would appear in that edition. Neither do explicit references to The Subjection of Women appear in the 1912 Wessex edition, to which Ingham refers as the “authentic text,” in that it reflects Hardy’s original intentions (37) and from which most subsequent editions have since been published. Thus, if one recognizes Wollstonecraftian themes in Jude the Obscure, it is unlikely that John Stuart Mill served as the conduit for them.

Conversely, the presence of Mona Caird’s feminism in Jude the Obscure can readily be seen upon readings her essays alongside the novel. But, as with Mill, the line from Wollstonecraft through Caird to Hardy disconnects at several possible junctures. Roxanne Jurta, for example, asserts that Hardy was “so well acquainted with” Caird’s essay “Marriage” (1888) “that he incorporated some of her anti-marriage arguments into Jude” (15). Jurta then confidently declares that “Marriage” laid “the groundwork for the debate on marriage that followed in the novels of the next decade” (14), seemingly unaware that Caird was neither the first nor the sole combatant on the feminist side of the marriage debate. Likewise, Jurta credits Caird’s consideration of marriage—at best a means of social advancement, at worst a form of legalized prostitution—with inspiring Sue’s knowledge of women who marry for “considerations other than ‘true love’” (14-15). Again, such arguments did not originate with Caird; they appear, to name a few
samples, in the works of Mary Astell (1668-1731), Mary Hays (1760-1843), William Thompson (1775-1833), Charles Dickens (1812-1870), Caroline Norton (1808-1877), and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891). Additionally, of course, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft complains that “all [women] want to be ladies” and will marry in order to become such, thus transforming the sacred institution of marriage into a “common and legal prostitution” (312). Most striking is Jurta’s failure to compare her description of Sue Bridehead, whom Hardy, she argues, “constructs . . . as a submissive girl-child,” with Wollstonecraft’s portrayal of the degraded woman in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, whom she calls “the humble dependent of her husband” (74) and an “overgrown child” (76). Thus, although Wollstonecraftian feminism supports Hardy’s presentation of oppressive, androcentric marital law and convention in *Jude the Obscure*, in Jurta’s essay it lies buried under a century of unrecognized or unacknowledged debt to Wollstonecraft.

Similarly, Penny Boumelha argues that, in a manner akin to what Caird in her essay “The Future of Home” considers to be the unavoidable threat of social exclusion over anyone who dares to live unconventionally, Hardy’s “Jude and Sue experience the same sense that pre-determined social forms” are ultimately inescapable (149). But Boumelha does not recall that in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft presages the inexorability of convention by begging her readers to take measures to ensure that there be “no coercion established in society” to prevent couples from forming their relationships to their liking (24). Wollstonecraft’s italics indicate that misguided social pressures to conform had not in 1792 become ineradicable but were likely to become so if the proper steps were not taken to control them. Kathleen Blake gives
Wollstonecraft her due, associating Sue’s determination to “remain a virgin” (709) with Wollstonecraft’s condemnation of female sexual exploitation in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, calling the polemic a “classic illustration of feminist ambivalence to sex” (712). Then Blake spans the intervening century to connect Sue’s self-enforced chastity—characterizing it as “a deliberate effort at widening her opportunities” (710)—to Caird’s conviction that women’s education must enable them to “escape both” sexual exploitation and motherhood (713). Despite the apparent concord between Wollstonecraft’s and Caird’s opinions on sexual equality, neither Jurta, Boumelha, nor Blake discerns a direct connection between the two polemicists, perhaps because Caird, like Mill, does not openly affiliate herself with Wollstonecraft, unlike Caird’s contemporary Millicent Fawcett Garrett.

While the above mentioned studies sufficiently demonstrate that *Jude the Obscure* reiterates many of Mill’s and Caird’s arguments for sexual equality that echo Wollstonecraft’s, they do not adequately account for the Wollstonecraftian elements of the novel. I believe that missing link was forged in the social and literary intercourse between Thomas Hardy and Fawcett, a leading women’s rights advocate. Hardy met Fawcett for the first time in 1889 (*The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* 230), and scholars, like Boumelha (135-136), Gail Cunningham (115), and Rosemarie Morgan (113), frequently cite their intermittent and brief correspondence about women’s issues as evidence of Hardy’s feminism. Yet neither Fawcett’s direct nor indirect influence upon Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* has received sufficient attention, a surprising circumstance in light of her efforts to revive interest in Wollstonecraft’s seminal contributions to the women’s movement.
In 1891, Fawcett marked the centenary of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by republishing it with her own introduction, thereby re-popularizing Wollstonecraft’s feminist ideals despite the century-old bias against the jacobin author and her works. In order to so do, however, Fawcett evidently thought it necessary to distinguish Wollstonecraft’s progressive ideals from what most people considered to be the negative aspects of Wollstonecraft’s life as Elizabeth R. Pennell had presented them in her biography, *Mary Wollstonecraft*. Morgan briefly touches upon Fawcett’s introduction as “an apt illustration of just how deeply such attitudes had become entrenched in the culture” (123), indicating that Hardy similarly “is clearly very sensitive to this difficulty” that an “open exposition of a sexually passionate nature in Sue would . . . threaten to diminish her political ‘voice’” (124). Morgan does not suggest, however, that Hardy acquired his trepidation directly from Fawcett. Expanding upon Morgan’s allusion to Fawcett, shall demonstrate that Hardy indeed derives his pessimism about women’s rights in *Jude the Obscure*, particularly those views concerned with women’s education and marital rights, from the desexualized version of emancipated woman Fawcett presents in her introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Admittedly, Hardy’s and Fawcett’s correspondence offers little more than anecdotal evidence of their interaction. Nevertheless, the fact that scholars rely upon it to support readings of Hardy’s novels implies its significance, an excellent example of which occurs in the first exchange between Fawcett and Hardy. In April 1892, Fawcett writes to Hardy and suggests that he write a novel “cautioning working class boys and girls about the dangers of treating love lightly” (*Collected Letters* 1: 264, n.), a plot that sounds somewhat like that of *Jude the Obscure*, wherein two artisans (Jude and Sue), a
headmaster (Phillotson), and a farmer’s daughter (Arabella) engage in various morally questionable or clearly illicit sexual encounters that engender numerous tragic consequences. After thanking Fawcett for her kind opinion of *Tess of the D’urbervilles* (1891), Hardy politely rejects her plot proposal, saying, “the British reading public would not stand” for the brutally explicit manner, “with no mincing of matters and all details . . . clear and directly given,” with which he feels the topic should be dealt (*Collected Letters* 1: 264). Apparently, two years later Hardy believes his audience far enough advanced to read about the vicissitudes of sexuality when he commences *Jude the Obscure*. One wonders if Fawcett recognized her contribution to the novel, if indeed she read it, but ultimately Hardy’s initial judgment of the topic was confirmed when widespread negative reaction to *Jude the Obscure* led him to “abandon” the novel format (*Life and Works* 309). The only other extant correspondence between Fawcett and Hardy occurs in November 1906, when she asks him to write his opinion on women’s suffrage for inclusion in a pamphlet supporting the issue (329, n.). Hardy responds one week later with an unpolished summary of his views, but Fawcett reciprocates his earlier rejection of her suggestion to him by deeming his opinion of woman’s suffrage too liberal for her needs. On 4 December 1906, she thanks Hardy for his reply, but declines to print it and perhaps mimics Hardy’s earlier rejection of her literary offering by explaining that “John Bull is not ripe for it at present” (329, n.). While these letters do not, on their own, establish *Jude the Obscure*’s sole provenance with Fawcett, they do indicate that Hardy’s and Fawcett’s thoughts were running along parallel courses, albeit at different paces and at distinct levels of vigor.
Although earlier attempts to reclaim Wollstonecraft’s place in the women’s rights movement had been made, Fawcett’s centenary edition was the first to appear in Britain since 1798 (Hardt 1-5), and Fawcett is credited with reintroducing her contemporaries to the works of her eighteenth-century counterpart by republishing _A Vindication of the Rights of Woman_ in 1891. Barbara Taylor notes that Barbara Bodichon and other “influential feminists . . . began openly championing” Wollstonecraft in the 1850s but considers Fawcett’s “imprimatur” upon _A Vindication of the Rights of Woman_ to mark the earnest commencement of Wollstonecraft’s reclamation (Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, par. 42). Likewise, Fawcett’s biographer, David Rubinstein, asserts that by “giving the sanction of her prominent and widely respected name she introduced Wollstonecraft to a new audience as a pioneer feminist” (90). Although Paul Turner’s reference to Hardy’s first wife, Emma, having “bought herself or was given Mary Wollstonecraft’s _A Vindication of the Rights of Woman_” (169) in 1899 is too late a date for my purposes, the copy Emma possessed was most likely Fawcett’s edition. This suggests that Hardy himself had not likely seen the text prior to 1899. Yet I hope to show that internal evidence from _Jude the Obscure_ strongly suggests that he had read both Fawcett’s edition of _A Vindication of the Rights of Woman_ and Fawcett’s source material for her introduction, Elizabeth Pennell’s biography _The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft_ (1884).

In its own time, Wollstonecraft’s polemic failed to attract the wide audience of other works in its genre. Janet Todd asserts that, while _A Vindication of the Rights of Woman_ “deeply affected many individual women,” it “had little effect on English culture,” since “only about 1500 to 3000 copies [were sold] in its first five years,” a
number that pales next to “the eleven thousand copies” sold in the first three years after Hannah More’s considerably more conservative and lengthier treatise on women’s education, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) (*Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* 185). After Godwin followed his 1798 edition of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* with his well intentioned but scandalous *Memoirs of the Author of “The Rights of Women,”* Wollstonecraft’s works fared even worse, precipitating her nearly total disappearance from nineteenth-century cultural literacy. Godwin’s biography contained more information than the British public could stomach about Wollstonecraft’s unconventional relationships with Henry Fuseli, Gilbert Imlay, and Godwin himself—particularly regarding the illegitimate birth of Frances Imlay and the illicit conception of his own daughter Mary, who is named for her mother—as evinced by Richard Polwhele’s *The Unsex’d Females* (1798), which attacks Wollstonecraft’s ideas by vilifying her relations with Fuseli (131) and Imlay (156). Thus *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* became even less appealing than it had hitherto been and retained its ruined and ruinous reputation for nearly a century.

Consequently, when the American-born Elizabeth Robins Pennell wrote the first modern biography of Wollstonecraft in 1884, she justifiably assumed that her subject would be entirely new to most of her audience. Of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* she explains,

The book is now seldom read. Others of later date have supplanted it. Conservative readers are prejudiced against it because of its title. The majority of the liberal-minded have not the patience to master its contents
because they find its propositions expressed more satisfactorily elsewhere.

(138)

No doubt, Pennell was correct. Rosemarie Morgan claims that, while eighteenth-century or American editions of Wollstonecraft’s works probably were available for those who sought them, in Britain *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* “remained out of print for the larger portion of the nineteenth century” (Morgan 188, n. 15), was mostly unread, and its author unacknowledged for her service toward “the cause of humanity (Pennell 1).”

To repeat: even though Mill and Caird voice the same concerns and arguments as Wollstonecraft, it is highly likely that they either had not read her works or, if they had, they would not acknowledge their affinity with her.

Fawcett confirms as much in her 1891 introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, woefully claiming that Britain lags behind

the progress which has already been made in Europe and America in establishing the personal and proprietary independence of women, and also concerning Mary Wollstonecraft’s relation to the great movement of which her book was in England almost the first conscious expression. (9)

Accordingly, spurred by her American counterpart, Fawcett republishes *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in order to reestablish Wollstonecraft’s rightful place in the women’s rights movement and to spur further advances in it. By reaping the benefit of Pennell’s reintroduction of a comparatively ancient feminist heroine, Fawcett establishes historical precedent (upon which British custom and law is primarily based) for the women’s rights movement in her own time. In other words, by demonstrating the forces of history and logic behind the arguments that she and other suffragettes employed
in the 1890s, Fawcett disputes the claim that their demands constitute an irrational threat to social convention, a claim that Hardy refutes in *Jude the Obscure*.

Notwithstanding the softening influence of time that provided Fawcett with a more fortuitous opportunity to openly claim Wollstonecraft as her foremother than Bodichon had in the 1850s and 1860s, Fawcett’s social class, education, and marriage ideally suited her to sponsor a renaissance of Wollstonecraftian philosophy. Descriptions of Fawcett’s liberal upbringing found in her own memoirs and in Rubinstein’s biography appear to reflect a better organized and more intentional version of intellectual and personal development than that experienced by Anthony Trollope’s Lady Laura Standish in the Phineas novels. Fawcett and her sisters, like Lady Laura, enjoyed total parity with their brothers and were engaged in political and social reform, so much so that Rubinstein refers to reports in the popular press that the Fawcett sisters converted their father, Newson Garrett, “from Conservatism to Liberalism” (8). Until the family suffered a financial setback, the sisters attended Miss Louisa Browning’s ladies’ boarding school in Blackheath, where they met Emily Davies (*What I Remember* 38-40), co-founder with Barbara Bodichon of Girton College, the first residential college for women in England; and they benefited from a home in which “no distinction was made between the boys and the girls” by a father who “valued his daughters’ education” and encouraged them “to think for themselves and to express their views” in the presence of family and company (Rubinstein 7), at a time when children, especially girls, were conventionally expected to be seen but not heard. Still, Rubinstein indicates that they “learned a ladylike manner which tended to disarm the opposition they faced in later life and to shield their uncompromising beliefs and actions” (7). Such a manner assuredly allowed the Garrett
sisters to promulgate and practice Wollstonecraftian ideals of feminine capacity for intellectual and physical vigor without sacrificing their femininity or damaging their reputations. By proving that women indeed could be simultaneously feminine and active, the Fawcett sisters can be said to have rendered moot Lady Laura’s difficulty in reconciling her political activity with “the privileges of feminine inaction” (*Phineas Finn* 1: 89).

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, the eldest of three sisters, provides an especially forceful example of the sisters’ manner of proving women’s capacity for success in traditionally masculine professions without unsexing themselves in the process, as Polwhele in *The Unsex’d Females* insists Wollstonecraft had done (lines 63-90). According to M. A. Elston’s *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry, Elizabeth obtained her license to practice medicine from the Society of Apothecaries, thus becoming the first woman doctor in Britain in 1865, and in the following year she “established the St Mary’s Dispensary for Women and Children” (par. 52). In 1870, the University of Paris granted Elizabeth its medical degree, and she was the first woman admitted to membership of the British Medical Association. Elizabeth continued to practice medicine after her marriage and the birth of her children, despite her male colleagues’ pressuring her to quit, citing conventional wisdom regarding women’s virtues being best employed at home. Nevertheless, due in part to her “preserving women’s modesty and delicacy” by limiting herself to treating women and children, her reputation did not suffer widespread public calumny (pars. 50-55).

Millicent Garrett Fawcett likewise exhibited conventional tastes of feminine modesty and delicacy, and her ladylike deportment was an external marker of a highly
moral standard of personal and sexual behavior. Her reputation for “moral censoriousness” (Rubinstein 89)—widely popular in her day but now somewhat discomforting—and her publicly enacted service to her blind husband, liberal Member of Parliament Henry (Harry) Fawcett, further smoothed the path of social progress under her feet. Rubinstein presents a number of contemporary, highly favorable appraisals of Fawcett’s ability to retain her femininity while advancing women’s rights; in doing so, however, he seemingly and somewhat disturbingly adheres to those sources’ unenlightened standards by condoning the “attention given to [Fawcett’s] appearance,” stating but not explaining why it should be “important to a blind but ambitious politician of unorthodox views . . . that his wife should appear attractive and pleasant to the important and influential” men around him (19). Such commentary smacks of the very sexist ideology of the primacy of women’s ornamental function that Fawcett’s own example disputes. Rubinstein also quotes a letter from Elizabeth Garrett Anderson to her mother, in which she summarizes an assessment of her younger sister’s housekeeping made by Henry’s sister Maria Fawcett. Elizabeth relays information that Millicent is “filling her place” at home “most satisfactorily, managing the house well, doing all that Harry wants done, and at the same time keeping up her own interest in things independently of him” (19). These testimonies confirm Millicent’s ability to fulfill conventional domestic demands upon her time while supporting her husband’s and her own pursuits regarding public policy. Nevertheless, we must recall that Millicent’s contributions toward feminist causes was significant, no matter how cloaked they may have been in respectable garb. In What I Remember, Fawcett declares her marriage to be the “beginning” of her “political education,” whereupon she “grappled with newspapers
and blue books” in order to “convey their import” to her blind husband as well as attending “important debates in the House of Commons” (64). No doubt such studies resulted in her familiarity with the intricacies of British law, knowledge she continued to put to good use well after her husband’s death in 1884.

These references to Millicent Garrett Fawcett’s unique ability to engage in masculine political activity and to maintain feminine domesticity (as they were considered at the time) also account for her successful rehabilitation of both Wollstonecraft’s reputation and her ideas. As a publicly recognized authority on and practitioner of domestic virtues herself, Fawcett is an exceptionally strong candidate to facilitate the reconciliation of late-eighteenth- and late-nineteenth-century feminists. Thus Morgan observes Fawcett’s attempt to divert public disgust at Wollstonecraft’s sex life to serious contemplation of “the moral seriousness of her work” in Fawcett’s introduction to Wollstonecraft’s polemic (123). But Morgan does not expand upon what we may now call Fawcett’s deliberate historical revision of Wollstonecraft’s private life, an attempt to attract a general audience to Wollstonecraft’s polemic. Fawcett’s revision may have been the result of her family’s friendship with Emily Davies, who supported Elizabeth’s pursuit of a career in medicine. In What I Remember, Fawcett admits,

I do not know how far, if at all, [Davies’s] mind had been influenced by those of her own way of thinking who had preceded her, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and the Shelleys. I think probably not at all, except in so far as those pioneers indicated to her the way not to do it. (40)

Fawcett may as well have written the same about herself. Faced in her introduction with the difficulty of handling “the curious tangle of relationships, intrigues, suicides and
attempted suicides of the remarkable group of personalities to whom Wollstonecraft belonged,” by which “one is sickened forever . . . about the subject of irregular relations” (19), Fawcett refocuses the public’s attention from the Godwin’s candid presentation of Wollstonecraft’s sexual emancipation to his avowals of her devotion to womanly and domestic virtues, pointing out that Godwin himself calls Wollstonecraft “a worshipper of domestic life” (16). Hence Fawcett hopes her readers would reason that Wollstonecraft, as a devotee of domesticity, must have had some redeeming qualities, through which she expects to redeem Wollstonecraft’s ideas.

Fawcett’s revision of Wollstonecraft’s texts conforms with similar strategies practiced by her feminist contemporaries, but she apparently diverged significantly from the norm by choosing to reinvestigate a woman’s text. Florence Boos describes “the double gradient of virulent resistance and polite indifference” that impeded the progress of the women’s rights movement and prompted leaders like Fawcett “to construct an alternative history of women’s experience” by exploring the “historical antecedents and ‘social construction’” of marital law (69). Boos argues that the “near-exclusion of women from academic establishments, of course, gave feminist reformers less access to the information needed to prepare and mount their ‘historical’ case” (72), and therefore they more often than not relied on “the works of revisionist male historiographers” for “prototypes” upon which to base their polemics (73). Boos also speaks of the “concomitant efforts” of “late-nineteenth century feminists” to “re-create women’s history” through a “revisionist history of marriage laws and women’s subordination within the family,” a strategy often “best served by the presentation of reformist and progressive histories in basically meliorist forms” (72). In retrospect, we may argue over
whether such strategies were necessary evils, but they certainly indicate the nascence of a new paradigm of Woman’s Mission, whereby women like Fawcett began to carry Woman’s Influence out from behind its domestic shield in order to openly exert its power and enact public reform. One example of this shifting paradigm is Boumelha’s assertion that “woman’s mission to overthrow the double standard becomes in the last twenty years of the century almost a crusade” (21). Thus, while some of Fawcett’s modifications to Wollstonecraft’s arguments may seem questionable or objectionable, we must remain aware of their historical context, one in which proponents of women’s rights were forced to rely on cultural precedents to establish radically new social practices.

Fawcett begins her restoration of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by characterizing it not as a revolutionary cry for women’s emancipation, but as a conservative plea to educate women to preserve the domestic peace, both in the home and in the nation: “Mary Wollstonecraft’s chief claim to the regard of posterity” lies in her “keen appreciation of the sanctity of women’s domestic duties, and she never undervalued for a moment the high importance of these duties, either to the individual, the family, or the State” (10). Additionally, Fawcett carefully edits representative passages from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in order to minimize the impact of Wollstonecraft’s somewhat passionate prose. For instance, consider Fawcett’s truncation of the following excerpt. Wollstonecraft emphatically and somewhat disjointedly pleads,

*I appeal to [men’s] understandings, and, as a fellow-creature, claim, in the name of my sex, some interest in their hearts. I entreat them to assist to emancipate their companion, to make her a help meet for them!*
Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers—in a word, better citizens. (317)

Surely fearing that her audience may yet again reject Wollstonecraft’s use of such a direct and hence unfeminine tone and indecent imagery, Fawcett reduces the first two sentences to “appeals to men” and eliminates the memorably disturbing allusion to female bondage (16). In this manner, she mitigates Wollstonecraft’s “revolution of female manners,” by which women may “reform the world” (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 105), and presents it as a rational and patriotic entreaty to educate women to better preserve British social conventions.

All the same, Fawcett goes too far in softening her subject’s rhetoric, and she perhaps deliberately omits Wollstonecraft’s rejection of artificial gender roles. Fawcett asserts that Wollstonecraft

is the essentially womanly woman, with the motherly and wifely instincts strong within her, and caring for all she claims and pleads for on behalf of her sex, because she is convinced that a concession of a large measure of women’s rights is essential to the highest possible conception and fulfillment of women’s duties. (19)

This characterization of Wollstonecraft’s essential womanhood is startlingly inconsistent with Wollstonecraft’s “den[y]ing the existence of sexual virtues” (116), and Fawcett’s depiction of Wollstonecraft’s willingness to barter away some of women’s rights so that women may fulfill all of what men declare to be feminine duties does not conform with
Wollstonecraft’s assertion that “rights and duties are inseparable” (410). Thus Fawcett tames Wollstonecraft and places her into the same traces with some rather unlikely mates, like her contemporaries Hannah More or Maria Edgeworth, whose works comply with conventional gender roles and feature more overtly patriotic reasons to educate women.

In fact, Fawcett superimposes what resembles an Edgeworthian rationale upon *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in order to amend what she calls “the faults of ‘The Vindication’ . . . the want of order and system in it” (19). While Fawcett lauds Wollstonecraft’s ingenuity and encourages her readers to acknowledge that “the greater freedom and the better education” they enjoy in 1891 first had been proposed to less privileged women in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (“Introduction” 18), she carefully presents the comparatively radical portions of Wollstonecraft’s polemic in a more orderly, systematic, and hence Edgeworthian manner, specifically more like the rational arguments toward developing the female intellect that appear in Edgeworth’s educational treatise *Practical Education* and in her novel *Belinda*.

In the former, Edgeworth agrees with Wollstonecraft about their society’s woefully inadequate system of educating women and its tendency to create domestic chaos, and she also agrees with Wollstonecraft that domestic and marital harmony depends upon women being taught to cultivate both their reason and their sympathies. Yet, whereas Wollstonecraft desires that in order to fulfill their “different . . . but human [i. e., ungendered] duties” women develop an “independence of character” based upon the same principles by which men regulate their social interactions (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 117), Edgeworth rejects these demands for total educational parity and clearly states that women must assume their naturally proscribed feminine roles as wives.
and mothers in order to revive and reform a defective patriarchy (Practical Education 168). Consequently, the eponymous protagonist of Belinda adheres to a virtuous, decorous, and above all rational construct of natural femininity, but her creator later declares “that stick or stone Belinda” to be so devoid of womanly sympathy as to be an entirely unrealistic model of femininity (Life and Letters 169). By superscripting Edgeworth’s more complicit feminism onto Wollstonecraft’s text, she refashions A Vindication of the Rights of Woman into more respectable reading material for her audience. Nevertheless, in the process of doing so, Fawcett misrepresents Wollstonecraft’s impassioned plea for “rational fellowship” (317) and overlooks the impracticality of real women adopting a Belinda-like, unsympathetic intellectualism.

Whereas Penny Boumelha argues that “Jude the Obscure offers a challenge to contemporary reformist feminism” (150) and Kathleen Blake proposes that Sue represents an amalgamation of Hardy’s responses to the feminist tendencies of his first wife Emma, his cousin Tryphena Sparks, and his friend Florence Henniker (705), I believe Hardy expresses profound skepticism of one reformer’s feminism in particular, that of Millicent Garrett Fawcett. Hardy specifically refutes Fawcett’s ideal emancipated woman as a sexually inviolable and seemingly unsympathetic being, and he specifically targets the inhumanity of Fawcett’s deliberate evasion of sexuality in her women’s rights agenda. Sue Bridehead embodies Fawcett’s superimposition of Edgeworth’s problematically unsympathetic intellectualism onto Wollstonecraft’s hypothetical rational fellowship, and her failure to emancipate herself according to Fawcett’s model denotes Hardy’s condemnation of Fawcett’s brand of feminism. Fawcett’s introduction therefore provides an appropriate point of departure from which to follow Hardy as he contests her
impractical solution to reintroducing Wollstonecraft’s ideals to working class women without reopening a debate on the morality of doing so. Thus, except rather notably when she becomes Mrs. Richard Phillotson for a second time, her social status and zeal for knowledge in many ways resemble those of Wollstonecraft; but, while Wollstonecraft was unsexed by what was construed as her aggressive (i.e., masculine) sexuality, Sue essentially unsexes herself by entirely suppressing her sexuality in order to live up to her own feminist standards and in accord with Fawcett’s ideals of women’s emancipation.

Hardy uses Fawcett’s own source material for her introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in order to launch a multi-faceted attack upon Fawcett’s unrealistic model of emancipated womanhood. First, he patterns Sue Bridehead’s relationships with the Westminster undergraduate and Jude upon Wollstonecraft’s cohabitations with Gilbert Imlay and William Godwin as they are presented in Elizabeth R. Pennell’s *The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Second, using Sue as its spokesperson, Hardy debates the propriety of adhering exclusively to Godwin’s doctrine of personal liberty as Pennell presents it in her summation of Godwin’s *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) versus, as voiced by Jude and Phillotson, the moral obligation one has toward honoring the wellbeing and desires of others, a traditionally feminine characteristic and when practiced by both sexes the philosophy behind Wollstonecraft’s polemic. Ellen Lew Sprechman accurately notes that “Clearly, Sue is never portrayed as a typical Victorian woman, nor as a typical heroine. Instead, she is associated with the traditional male role from our earliest view of her, and she is seen throughout the book as ‘unconventional’” (109). Sprechman also calls Sue the “standard-bearer of Hardy’s causes” (120), but Sue’s eventual recantation of her “free will and independence” (Sprechman 120) frustrates
attempts to proclaim women’s rights as Hardy’s cause. In my view, by pitting Sue’s
masculine and domineering egotism against Jude’s and Phillotson’s feminine and self-
sacrificing sympathy, Hardy argues that Sue’s refusal to acknowledge her own sexuality
and that of her cohabitants, along with their combined rejection of conventional gender
roles, results in domestic chaos. Third, Sue’s reading and studying alongside the
undergraduate and under Phillotson’s direction as his apprentice-pupil resemble the
coeducational interdidacticism that Wollstonecraft proposes in *A Vindication of the
Rights of Woman* and in *Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman*, but Hardy shows that they are
all equally unsuccessful pedagogies in the face of society’s insurmountable gender
constructs. Still, Hardy diverges somewhat from Wollstonecraft’s pessimistic portrayal of
women’s education in late-nineteenth-century society by casting his shadow of
despondence over members of both sexes who behave in unconventional ways—not just
over women—and he inverts the stereotypical insanity of the unconventional woman by
presenting Sue at her sanest while she lives an unconventional—and rather
Wollstonecraftian—life with Jude. When Sue recants that unconventionality and submits
to the late-nineteenth-century feminine ideal, her fellow characters declare her insane.

Despite Sue’s wielding supreme authority over her own body, her ability to
emancipate herself and to determine her own course of action is doubly hampered by her
preference for chaste yet unsanctioned co-habitation. The influence of Caird’s
“Marriage” is readily apparent in Hardy’s placing Sue at such a disadvantage, specifically
as Caird argues,

> We cannot ask every women to be a heroine and choose a hard and thorny
> path when a comparatively smooth one (as it seems) offers itself, and
when the pressure of public opinion urges strongly in that direction. A few higher natures will resist and swell the crowds of worn-out, underpaid workers, but the majority will take the voice of society for the voice of God . . . and our common respectable marriage . . . will remain, as it is . . . . (195)

In similar fashion, Hardy presents Sue’s fits and starts down the road to public ostracism until she abandons her principals and chooses the path of least resistance by remarrying Phillotson.

Caird’s avocation of “freedom marriage,” in which “each pair will enter upon their union after their own particular fashion” (“Marriage” 199), stops short of declaring the institution of legitimate marriage obsolete and worthy of total abandonment. Instead, Caird insists that a coeducational system for the middle classes, as it was practiced in many parts of America at the time, will provide women the means to improve the institution of marriage in several ways: academic and intellectual rigor will facilitate their selection of suitable marital partners and enrich their interpersonal relations and domestic skills; vocational or professional training will afford women employment and financial independence to marry according to preference and not financial exigency; and educational parity will allow those who do not marry either by choice or circumstance to support themselves (199). Caird’s allusion to the United States is especially intriguing, since she champions its practice of coeducation but not its legal recognition of common law marriage, whereby each state “enabled parties, such as the pioneers, to contract valid marriages when there was no clergyman or civil officer available to perform a ceremony” (Brandes par. 9). In England, such marriages were invalidated and criminalized by the
Hardwicke Marriage Act of 1753 (par. 8). Although Wollstonecraft, Bodichon, Fawcett, and Caird all argued for marital law reform in England, none of them openly advocated the legalization of common law marriage.

In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy presents Sue Bridehead as twice choosing to live under just those conditions in a manner resembling Pennell’s descriptions of Mary Wollstonecraft’s living arrangements with Gilbert Imlay and William Godwin. Yet, while Pennell valorizes and condones Wollstonecraft’s passionate and total disregard of law and convention, Hardy denounces Sue’s dispassionate and conditional evasions of them, especially in regard to Sue’s seeming asexuality. Pennell’s biography is rather astonishingly straightforward about Wollstonecraft’s sexuality, a quality that no doubt disconcerted Charles Kegan Paul, whose chapter on Wollstonecraft in *William Godwin: His Friend and Contemporaries* (1876) glosses over such matters. Pennell reports of Kegan Paul’s having “objected in no moderate terms” to her plans to publish her biography of Wollstonecraft, although he showed her “his Godwin and Wollstonecraft treasures, among them a lock of Mary’s hair” (*Life and Letters of Joseph Pennell* 1: 121). Pennell unabashedly justifies the fact that Wollstonecraft “gave herself” to Imlay “without waiting for a minister’s blessing or a legal permit . . . in strict adherence to her moral ideals” (*The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* 202), a decision, Pennell insists, reflecting Wollstonecraft’s belief that in an ideal marriage “the form the law demands is nothing” but “the feeling which leads those concerned to desire it, everything” (200). Pennell also explains that Mary granted Imlay’s request “to retain his name” (281), but later recanted her participation in what to her was an unnecessary fiction (330). Pennell just as candidly and un-apologetically describes the early portion of Wollstonecraft’s
more cautious relationship with Godwin, when they were “really, if not legally, man and wife,” but desirous of maintaining their separate independence, remarking, “Godwin remained in his lodgings, Mary in hers, pursuing their own “routine[s] of work” and meeting at “irregular” intervals (317). Surprisingly, considering the moral climate of 1884 as described above by Caird, Pennell rather matter-of-factly states that Wollstonecraft’s second pregnancy occasioned her proposal of marriage to Godwin (326) and speaks of “men and women of larger minds and hearts” who retained their friendship with the newlyweds, despite the public calumny Wollstonecraft brought upon herself by her “formal demonstration” that she was never truly Mrs. Imlay (330).

In *Jude the Obscure*, Sue Bridehead narrates her own remarkably similar non-conformist history. Much like Wollstonecraft and Imlay, Sue “shared a sitting room for fifteen months” in “close quarters” with her unnamed undergraduate but did not marry him (*Jude the Obscure* 118), and in order to obviate the growing suspicions of their Albrickham neighbors, Jude and Sue “let it be understood that they were legally married,” whereupon Sue “openly adopted the name” without the legal right to call herself “Mrs. Fawley” (367). Likewise, Sue’s preference for “living always [with Jude] as lovers . . . only meeting by day” (203) corresponds to Pennell’s account of Wollstonecraft’s and Godwin’s living arrangements prior to their expectation of Mary’s birth.

Furthermore, Sue’s rationale for retaining her independence closely resembles Godwin’s somewhat egotistic and anarchic, yet coolly rational, anti-marriage doctrine, as Pennell describes it in her summary of Godwin’s *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. As Pennell explains,
Men, Godwin taught, can never know the truth so long as human laws exist; because when subject to any control, good, bad, or indifferent, they are deprived of their only legitimate inspiration. Arguing from these premises, his belief in the necessity of the abolition of all forms of government, political and social . . . were perfectly logical. . . . But his objection to the marriage law seemed the most glaringly immoral part of his philosophy. He assailed theoretically an institution for which Mary Wollstonecraft had practically shown her disapprobation. (*The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* 298)

Pennell thus accounts for Godwin’s “ultra-radicalism” and his determination to be guided solely by reason, even when reason conflicts with established law. She also asserts that Godwin dealt with “abstract principles” that were “beautiful in theory, but impossible to real life until man develops into a very much higher of being” (299), an example of which—one could argue although Pennell does not—is his “disapprov[al] of marriage . . . because he thought that two people who are bound together by it are not at liberty to follow the dictates of their own minds, and hence are not acting in accordance with pure reason” (298). Pennell tells us that Godwin was a proponent of “free love or a system of voluntary divorce” that would “be less immoral” than conventional marriage because the parties involved could sever their attachment at will (298). Beyond the fact that Godwin’s anti-marriage views were widely known and thus a potential source of embarrassment should he recant, Pennell also considers Godwin’s sole reliance upon “reason as the regulator of his actions “and his disinclination to surrender “habits of a life-time” (316) as being his main objections to marrying Wollstonecraft, obstacles that she initially granted
but eventually denied by reasoning that “once they became responsible for a third life, they were no longer free agents” (326).

Sue’s anti-marriage arguments are virtually the same as Godwin’s, and she specifically references her lack of children in support of her thesis. She makes Phillotson “writhe” by suggesting that he consent to her living with Jude without first obtaining a divorce: “Why can’t we agree to free each other? We made the compact, and surely we can cancel it—not legally, of course, but we can morally, especially as no new interests, in the shape of children, have arisen to be looked after?” (Jude the Obscure 176-177). Sue also tells Jude that a marriage license constitutes an unnecessary “Government stamp” upon a union freely entered upon by two private individuals, one which infringes upon her tenet that “it is foreign to a man’s nature to go on loving a person when he is told that he must and shall be that person’s lover” (203). When Jude replies that Sue has “so little animal passion in [her] that she can act upon reason” (204), Hardy contends that, though reason may rightly conclude that any restriction upon human interaction is counterintuitive to free expression, human beings “of grosser substance,” as Jude says, “can’t resist natural forces” and “ordinary passions” without some form of external restraint (204). This attempt to warn Sue of her impractical dispassion corresponds to Wollstonecraft’s argument that she and Godwin “comp[ly] with social laws” for the sake of her second child by countering Godwin’s “ideal state” where “illegitimacy would be no disgrace” with descriptions of “the bitterness in store for [the illegitimate] Fanny” (The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft 326). Unfortunately, upon Jude’s presenting Sue with the human frailty, she does not descend from her intellectual plateau—as Godwin did when he learned that Wollstonecraft was pregnant—in order to consider “the general
question”; instead, she reasons that “it is not our business” and begs that they remain as they are “without killing their dream” (*Jude the Obscure* 226). Sue simply refuses to face reality, and the deaths of her children are consequences of keeping her ideals alive (263-264).

By simply ignoring her own human sexuality and that of the men with whom she lives, Sue behaves much as Fawcett would have her Edgeworthian woman conduct herself in order to emancipate her intellect while shielding her reputation. Separating the women’s rights movement of the late-nineteenth-century from its early association with Godwinian free love, Fawcett does not directly address Wollstonecraft’s sexuality in her introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, much as she sidestepped the issue of prostitution in her efforts toward enacting the Contagious Diseases Acts twenty years earlier (Rubinstein 46). Instead, Fawcett bluntly admits the “errors of Mary Wollstonecraft’s own life” (“Introduction” 19), redirects Wollstonecraft’s motivation, as I’ve argued, from sexual equality to patriotism, and refuses to “dwell on [Wollstonecraft’s] personal history” (22).

Ignoring sexuality may once have been a viable strategy, if one were, like Maria Edgeworth’s Belinda, the fortunate beneficiary of upper-class patriarchal protection, its financial security, and its largely unquestioned rules of social and sexual intercourse. As the guest of Lord and Lady Delacour, Belinda is assured a means of living without contributions of her own. Likewise, the physical presence of the Delacours and their servants provide Belinda with a means of intervention between herself and her suitors, Clarence Hervey and Mr. Vincent, and so Belinda can limit her contact with them and avoid attending to or ignore their needs and desires. Moreover, were Belinda willing to
sacrifice the pleasures of high society to preserve her honor, she could simply return to her own home and elude Hervey and Vincent altogether. Sue’s experiences as a working class orphan without any intermediaries for support places her in a radically more precarious position. Sue must earn her own living in a society still dominated by the patriarchy, a situation which makes her entirely dependent upon men, like the Westminster undergraduate, from whom she gains access to masculine knowledge (117-118), and Phillotson, who wields “the influence” to advance her teaching career (106). Therefore, Sue can not entirely avoid men or their desires. While Belinda and Sue equally depend upon patriarchy to exist, Sue’s lack of family and inferior social position restrict her ability to pursue her goals. Hence, for women like Sue, Fawcett’s desexualized model of femininity is simply unrealistic.

In *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy demonstrates the impracticality of Fawcett’s bourgeois concessions to respectability and refuses to dismiss human sexuality from the discourse of women’s rights, which for him would be more precisely named human rights. Hardy argues that equal access to intellectual and professional knowledge provides only a portion of the necessary skills women need to gain complete equality with men, and he argues that human rights should center on both men’s and women’s capacity to express freely both their intellectuality and their sexuality in relationships that honor the intellectual and sexual desires of both parties. Thus, when Sue speaks of “Venus Urania” as representing the “wide field of strong attachment where desire plays, at least, only a secondary part,” whom society, preoccupied with “relations based on animal desires,” ignores (134), she does not recognize her own error in ignoring Venus Pandemos.
Using the original Greek “Aphrodite” for “Venus” in Classical Mythology, Mark P. O. Morphord and Robert J. Lenardon speak of Aphrodite Uranus (or the Celestial Goddess of Love) being associated with “sacred love,” while “profane love” falls under the purview of Aphrodite Pandemos (or Love Goddess of the Common People). Completely on his own, the god Uranus begot Aphrodite Uranus, who is “ethereal and sublime” and “stronger, more intelligent, and spiritual” than Aphrodite Pandemos, who is “more base, and aimed primarily at physical satisfaction” and is the child of the wholly divine Zeus (Uranus’s son) and the fully human Dione (114-115). Because others have written on the dichotomy of Sue the spiritual woman versus Arabella the earthy woman (e. g., Heilman 307, Ingham Thomas Hardy 74, Sprechman 106) and on Sue’s bi-gendered or cross-gendered qualities (e.g., Mickelson 139, Sprechman 109), we need not dwell on Hardy’s symbolic use of Venus Uranus to represent Sue versus the earthy Arabella, except to point out, as others do not, that the nativity narrative of Venus Uranus attributes her genesis solely to Greek mythology’s divine patriarch, while Venus Pandemos is born of a human woman impregnated with divine seed.

This distinction is important in light of the femininity and fecundity of these goddesses, both of which qualities were considered essential to domestic harmony in the late-nineteenth century and upon which Hardy bases his critique of the desexualized emancipated woman. Aphrodite Uranus “becomes for philosophy and religion the celestial goddess of pure and spiritual love,” but as “the antithesis” of Aphrodite Pandemos (115) she remains childless. Aphrodite Pandemos gives birth to Cupid (127), whose procreative function ensures the continuation of mankind (135). Additionally, Hardy has Sue refer to “Venus Urania,” replacing the masculine suffix “-us” with the
feminine “-ia.” In both Greek and Roman mythology, Urania is the female muse of astronomy. Thus, when Hardy associates Sue with “Venus Urania,” he signifies her confused sexuality, a woman incapable of expressing sexuality and equally incapable of procreation. By the same token, he may also deliberately conflate the goddess and the muse to show Sue placing herself among the stars, beyond the reach of men.\textsuperscript{101} Lest the reader miss this clue, the narrator later describes the essence of Sue’s aberration, calling her “the ethereal, fine-nerved, sensitive girl, quite unfitted by temperament and instinct to fulfill the conditions of the matrimonial relation . . . with scarce any man” (173). Sue’s aversion to sexuality, then, is endemic.

Accordingly, Hardy demonstrates that Sue’s inability to achieve an \textit{aurea mediocritas} between sexuality and intellectuality and her anarchic rejection of social standards result in social chaos and personal destruction. As I’ve shown previously in this study, novelistic precedent maintains that unfeminine women are incapable of creating domestic harmony; and while men may be prone to degenerative behavior because they lack the guidance of virtuous women, few of them die or suffer grievous harm as a direct result of their unfeminine lovers’ or wives’ emancipatory acts.\textsuperscript{102} Hardy builds upon that precedent and argues that, as a direct consequence of the combined refusal of each couple to conform with traditional moral and legal standards, men who attach themselves to unsympathetic and unfeminine women will either self-destruct or be destroyed, along with the livelihoods and households they share with such women.

Hardy presents Sue’s aversion to granting Phillotson his conjugal rights and her desire to live chastely first with the Westminster undergraduate and then with Jude as vexingly unsympathetic forms of domination that is antithetical to conventional
femininity, one which destroys instead of creates domestic harmony. In her thoroughly unconventional manner, Sue consistently demands concessions from her suitors but refuses to accede to their desires. In telling her history to Jude, she calmly and somewhat unfeelingly describes the result of her first experiment with cohabitation, wherein she refused to become the Westminster undergraduate’s mistress but remains in his London lodgings until the young man’s pent-up, unreleased sexual energy sickened and eventually killed him. Sue reports that she coerced the undergraduate into living with her according, she emphasizes, to “my plan,” but she refuses to accept responsibility for harming him, saying, “He said I was breaking his heart by holding out on him so long” (118). Likewise, Sue admits feeling “terrible remorse” for her “cruelty” but immediately deflects blame away from herself, saying, “I hope he died of consumption and not of me entirely” (118). Sue even manages to erase the undergraduate’s legacy to her, which she characterizes as a reward of sorts for “breaking his heart,” by losing “the poor fellow[‘s]” money in a “bubble scheme” (118). In this manner, Hardy portrays Sue as species of succubus that, instead of fulfilling men’s desires, merely saps the energy from individual members of the patriarchy, thereby negating their financial, sexual, and social authority over her.

Similarly, Hardy characterizes Phillotson’s granting Sue separation first from his bed and then from his board as a sacrificial act of sympathy on his part, whereby he loses his reputation, his occupation, his home, and his health. As in her living arrangements with the undergraduate, Sue focuses on her own suffering and ignores Phillotson’s, again refusing to accept responsibility for her actions. From her hiding place under the stairs, where she seeks refuge from their bridal bed, Sue claims that she “is not altogether to
blame” for being “wrong and wicked” in avoiding her conjugal duties and deflects blame for her actions onto “the universe” (175). She admits that she married Phillotson because she “could do nothing else” (175) after losing her place at the training school, whereupon her “theoretical unconventionality broke down” and the reality of her situation forced her to decide between “hurt[ing his] feelings once” by rejecting his proposal and “hurt[ing] them all my life after” by marrying him (176). In other words, Phillotson presented Sue with a means of securing a living, and Sue took it after deciding to disregard his wellbeing altogether, since by her own admission her marital vow essentially was to hurt him as long they both shall live. Even after this admission of fault, Sue still refuses to consider the full consequences of her immoral marital decision, asking, “why should I suffer for what I was born to be, if it doesn’t hurt other people?” and compounds her error by trivializing Phillotson’s response, “But it does—it hurts me!,” by comparing their marital vows to a promise “always to like a particular food and drink” (176). In this exchange, Hardy again aligns Sue with Godwinian egotism: she insists upon directing her own actions and rejects external oversight of them, but her utter unconcern for Phillotson’s wellbeing signifies selfish motives behind her anarchy. Reacting to Sue’s egotistical demands, Phillotson attempts to reason with Sue, arguing—as Wollstonecraft had reasoned with Godwin—that the consequences of her actions indeed affect others and not just herself.

Hardy then demonstrates the tendency of self-centered anarchy, like Sue’s, to create chaos in a society ruled by androcentric customs and laws and bent on enforcing conventional gender codes instead of embracing what Phillotson terms “natural, straightforward humanity” (196), a concept that echoes Wollstonecraft’s “den[y]ing the
existence of sexual virtues” (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 116). Upon abdicating his marital rights and releasing Sue from marital bondage and after a tragi-comic moment of social chaos, perpetrated by, one could say, followers of Venus Pandemos, who respond positively to Phillotson’s characterization of his non-conformity as “an act of natural charity” (196) by staging a revolt of their own, Phillotson is dismissed from Shaston National School and evicted from its attached residence. However, witnessing the chaos and the resulting “blood running down the rector’s face,” Phillotson falls dangerously ill, surmises that “his life, intellectual and domestic, is tending to failure and gloom,” and concedes the error of his non-conformity (197). He concludes that he should have heeded his own warning to Sue by considering the wellbeing of others before insisting upon exercising his personal liberty in liberating her.

While Hardy thus discredits Fawcett’s desexualized path to women’s emancipation, he does not suggest that sexual license presents a viable option. So long as Sue insists upon flouting conventional sexual standards by dictating the terms of her legal and illegal relationships with men, she remains a destructive force, damned whether she expresses her sexuality or not. Both her protracted avoidance of sexual intercourse with Jude and her refusal to marry him after they engage in sex are also presented as selfishly anarchic acts. After she leaves Phillotson for Jude and despite her anticipation of the “risk to come” living “as man with woman,” she announces her intention “not to be other than a little rigid” and declares that she does not want to “risk” her “supremely delicate” “delight in being with” Jude, whom she “trust[s] to set [her] wishes above his gratification” (190). Sue is therefore aware that she wounds Jude’s feelings and denies their very humanity by refusing to consummate their elopement, just as she had denied
Phillotson his conjugal rights. Further illustrating her awareness of wrongdoing, Sue’s conscience sometimes sparks confessions of wrongdoing. For instance, before “recover[ing] her equanimity,” she exclaims, “I fear I am doing you [Jude] a lot of harm. Ruining your prospects . . . your progress in your trade” and “I seem so bad—upsetting men’s courses like this!” (188). Likewise, when she dissuades Jude from formalizing their relationship in either a civil or church service by arguing that such “an irrevocable oath is risky,” Sue praises Jude for “giv[ing] way to her whims”(226). Even after she and Jude consummate their relationship without first obtaining the banns or license, Little Father Time points to Sue’s responsibility for forcing the entire blended family to suffer for her determination to remain an unwed mother. After berating Sue for being “so wicked and cruel” as to having “a-sent [sic] for another” child when she and Jude have no means of supporting the existent family, he admits, “It does seem as if I had done it on purpose” (262). Additionally, Father Time reminds Sue that “nobody would interfere with us . . . unless you agreed” (262), echoing her earlier claim that “no man short of a savage . . . will molest a woman . . . unless she invites him” (118). Had Sue conformed and married Jude according to his wishes, neither of them would have been barred from practicing their trades or securing lodgings.

In all three of Sue’s attempts to preserve her own personal liberty at the cost of another’s, she emancipates herself and retains absolute control over the men in her life. She succeeds at reversing the androcentric social order at the personal level, but her personal liberation infects and eventually destroys those men and their combined households, mostly because society will not follow her dictates and bend to her will. In effect, the liberated Sue destroys men just as she disassembles their lexicons—the Bible,
in particular—the *corpora* of which she cuts up into “separate brochures and rearrang[es]” (121) to her liking. Nevertheless, the Judeo-Christian Bible survives Sue’s reorganization, just as the British *lex* and *ordo* upon which it is based goes on unperturbed by Sue’s anarchy, while she repels her compliant cohabitants or they waste away for failing to heed the entirety of that lexicon. Similarly, when church authorities discover Sue helping her adulterous lover to amend a stone inscription of the Ten Commandments mounted above the altar bearing “utensils of Christian grace”—her second rewriting of Judeo-Christian law—she and Jude are literally excommunicated from the still-standing ancient church (237). Therefore, Hardy discredits Fawcett’s theory that women’s rights advocates can discount sexuality in their legal challenges and succeed in their efforts. Instead, Hardy posits that such women are literally *femmes fatale* because acting entirely in their own self-interest can not exist as a productive force in the world.

Such being the case, Sue’s Wollstonecraftian education apparently fails to match Wollstonecraft’s expectations for the coeducational “schools of morality” presented in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (358), the lack of which Maria believes to be the source of her degradation in *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*. In her chapter “On National Education” in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (333-377), Wollstonecraft proposes coeducation in both private and public settings as a means of properly developing the intellects and morals of both sexes and declares that “marriage will never be held sacred until women, by being brought up with men, are prepared to be their companions rather than their mistresses” (171). In *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*—an
unfinished fictionalization of the core doctrines laid out in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*—Maria complains about

the misery peculiar to [her sex] . . . those laws . . . which forge adamantine fetters to bind minds together that can never mingle in social communion!

What indeed can equal the wretchedness of that state, in which there is no alternative, but to extinguish the affections or encounter infamy? (98)

As I have argued in this study, Wollstonecraft situates Maria’s misguided, autodidactic, auto-erotic, and romantic education primarily within a madhouse, representing the insanity of late-eighteenth century sexual mores that force women to submit to masculine control over their procreative agency. Under such pressure, women who are not permitted to make their own marital decisions must repress their erotic desires for their chosen mate and sublimate those desires in order to please the mate chosen for them. The result of such a system presents women with a Damoclean choice over their more favored form of madness: compliant women may go mad under the strain of fulfilling their conjugal duties, and rebellious women may be deemed mad if they refuse to surrender to the inevitability of patriarchal control. Through Maria’s madhouse memoirs, written after Venables confines Maria to a madhouse because she will not submit to his venal demand that she prostitute herself in order to enrich him, Wollstonecraft points out the very insanity inherit in forcing women to make such choices in the first place.

Sue seems to have been educated in the manner described in Wollstonecraft’s model in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and she should thus be free of romantic delusions and capable of making a rational choice of a suitable mate with whom she can engage in the rational fellowship Wollstonecraft describes. In particular, Sue’s co-
educational and interdidactic experiences with the Christminster undergraduate very much resemble what Wollstonecraft presents as the ideal learning environment. When Jude calls Sue “very philosophical” and notes that she doesn’t “talk quite like . . . a girl who has had no advantages,” she catalogs her peculiarly masculine knowledge of Latin and Greek grammar, classical and Renaissance foreign literature, British literature from the early modern period through the Enlightenment, and the Bible, crediting her unconventional life with the undergraduate, who “taught [her] a great deal and lent [her] books which [she] never should have got hold of otherwise” and with whom she enjoyed “walking tours [and] reading tours, during which they went about “like two men almost” (117-118). Such a curriculum replicates that of Wollstonecraft’s proposed national schools, where the “elements of religion, history, the history of man, and politics” are “taught by conversations in the Socratic form” (356). Hardy’s careful phrasing of Sue’s means of gaining access to the company of “one or two men” and “their books” (117), to which she “never should have”—as opposed to “never could have”—had access and his qualification of the gender equality Sue shared with the undergraduate—they are “almost” “like two men”—indicate the long life of the irrational precedent behind sexually segregated learning that Wollstonecraft deplored a century earlier. Try as she might, Sue’s “strange ways” hinder her attempts to liberate herself from social conventions so long as she exhibits her seeming “unconsciousness of gender” (119) in a world that forbids women to escape their gendered constraints. Therefore, Sue never attains a relationship resembling Wollstonecraft’s ideal of “rational fellowship” between the sexes, in which “the virtues of both sexes are founded on reason” and “the affections
common to both are allowed to gain their due strength by the discharge of mutual duties”
\((A \textit{Vindication of the Rights of Woman} 350)\).

Similarly, Sue’s pupil-teacher apprenticeship under Richard Phillotson mimics
Wollstonecraft’s depiction of the intellectual intercourse between Maria and Henry
Darnford, under the watchful gaze of Jemima (\textit{Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman} 34). As
part of Sue’s training, it was Phillotson’s “duty to give her private lessons in the evening”
under the surveillance of an “elderly woman” as proscribed in “some article of the Code”
for the pupil-teacher system. Miriam E. David dates the system to 1846, when the Privy
Council standardized gendered curricula for the single-sex, working-class National
Schools and instituted this system, whereby students were “apprenticed to their head
teachers” and permitted to instruct their younger classmates in some course content (106-
107).\(^{103}\) This system was frequently denounced, however, for the undue influence
headmasters possibly could exercise over their beholden pupils, for instance in Charles
Dickens’s \textit{Our Mutual Friend} (1864-1865), wherein Bradley Headstone presses his suit
upon Lizzie Hexam, whose brother is apprenticed to Headstone. Hardy voices similar
apprehension of the potentially tyrannical power that National School headmasters might
hold over their pupil-apprentices, particularly regarding those cases where the system
operated as another layer of men’s legally sanctioned authority over their wives. With
respect to Sue, the pupil-teacher system forces her to weigh the need to earn her own
living against aversion to Phillotson. When she becomes the pupil-teacher-wife,
Phillotson gains legal control over her career at school and her personal life at home, in
effect doubling her contractual obligations to fulfill his needs and desires and further
compounding her desire to overthrow masculine control.
Regardless of this somewhat sympathetic handling of Sue’s failure to evade the full force of what Hardy perceived to be ubiquitous injustices of late-Victorian androcentric society, we cannot overlook the fact that Sue’s deliberate and persistent unconventionality forms the root of nearly all of the personal and professional devastation in the text. Hardy does not, however, attribute Sue’s destructive powers to innate selfishness or obstinacy. Rather, he contends that Sue’s education, in which she draws her line at sexuality—just as Fawcett advises women who seek their liberation to do—is an incomplete and hence insufficient version of Wollstonecraftian coeducation, just as Fawcett’s revision of Wollstonecraft’s life and polemic is incomplete. In other words, Hardy contends that man’s knowledge is incomplete without knowledge of man himself. Because Sue limits her coeducation to wholly intellectual subjects and refuses to learn the entirety of masculine knowledge, she is only “half-wiser than [her] fellow-women [and] not entirely wiser,” competent enough to pass on “only half realities” to those around her (266) but incompetent to encounter the world as men’s equal.

Accordingly, her incompetence leads to the Christminster undergraduate’s death, Phillotson’s occupational and residential losses, as well as to Jude’s professional and personal ruin and her own. Moreover, Sue’s ineptitude begets a second ruined generation, wherein she destroys the financial and human legacies left in her care after her illicit relationships with the undergraduate and Jude. Sue mishandles and loses the undergraduate’s legacy “in a bubble scheme”(118), and her self-professed “want of self-control” “incite[s]” Old Father Time’s triple-murder of Sue’s and Jude’s children and his own suicide (265-266). Therefore, after a full century of progress in women’s rights and despite Sue’s being guided by men through the intellectual content of their books—the
lack of which Maria implies precludes her equity with men (*Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* 62)—Sue fails to untie the same Gordian knot that inextricably ensnared Maria in a maddening androcentric society. Her education turns out to be as incomplete as Maria’s.

Nevertheless, in order to demonstrate his overall agreement with Wollstonecraft that, as a basis for interaction between the sexes, androcentrism presents a danger to healthy women’s minds and bodies, Hardy inverts the stereotypical characterization of the unconventional woman as a mad woman by presenting Sue at her sanest and happiest while she lives an unconventional (and rather Wollstonecraftian) life with Jude. The narrator reports, “that the twain were happy . . . was indubitable” (227), and Arabella’s comment that Sue and Jude are “like two children” at the agricultural fair, along with Sue’s admission that they “have returned to a Greek joyousness and have blinded [them]selves to sickness and sorrow” (234) indicates their temporary fulfillment of Sue’s desire to return to “a life of my infancy and its freedom” (111). Conversely, when Sue recants that unconventionality, submits to the late-nineteenth-century ideal of feminine submission, and remarries Phillotson, her fellow characters declare her insane. When she cries out “We must conform!” and proclaims herself “still [Phillotson’s wife],” Jude calls her thoughts, “a sick fancy, without reason or meaning” (270); when Sue rends her “nightgown, tastefully embroidered” because it “signifies” an “adulterous” and “accursed thing” and reminds her of what she did “to please Jude,” Mrs. Edlin calls her “too strict . . . us[ing] such words” (287) and warns Phillotson against marrying a woman so obviously “compelling herself to [marry] against her instincts” (289). Furthermore, the final words of the text, spoken by Arabella, declare that Sue, “never found peace since she left
[Jude’s] arms, and never will again” before she ends her tenure as Mrs. Phillotson in the traditional manner of marital separation—i.e. through death (320). Thus Sprechman’s declaring that Sue “remains a symbol of the early feminist who retains . . . her free will and independence despite the difficulties it causes her” (120) seems inconsistent with the fact that Sue ultimately subjects herself to masculine control at the cost of her mental health.

Oddly enough, however, where typically in nineteenth-century fiction the unconventional woman is considered unmarriageable and figuratively dies to society in a self-imposed exile or literally expires, Hardy extends the unhealthy consequences of breaking androcentric laws to Jude and his children, who in fact die. Sue, however, lives on as Phillotson’s wife, doomed by her own volition to endure a loveless marriage and, in order to “make her conscience right on [her] duty to Richard—by doing a penance,” consenting to what might be considered, in Sue’s case, as spousal rape—”the ultimate thing” (310). Ironically, although Sue’s ultimate submission to Phillotson signals the defeat of Fawcett’s Edgeworthian ideal, Sue becomes a different type of stick or stone, “clenching her teeth” and “uttering no cry” as Phillotson “lift[s] her bodily” and “kisse[s] her (313). Thus Hardy concludes that despite the efforts of women like Mary Wollstonecraft, Barbara Bodichon, Mona Caird, and Millicent Garret Fawcett to enact legislation like the Divorce Act of 1857, by which Sue and Jude were able to dissolve their first marriages, late nineteenth-century society would continue to operate largely oblivious to the legal ramifications of such marital dissolutions for those who chose or were forced to remain in society.
Conclusion

Revolutions in Women’s Education in the Twenty-first Century

When an art product once attains classical status, it somehow becomes isolated from the human conditions under which it was brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual experience.

(Dewey)

While researching and writing this dissertation, I was asked by my family, friends, acquaintances, and intrigued librarians if I would expand my subject either forward in time or jump continents and discuss the topic of women’s education and the novel in the United States. I usually answered their queries by saying that my dissertation committee had already applauded my decision to reduce the size of the original period I had wanted to examine, and that mutiny would surely result if I re-enlarged their workload. Privately, I really did fear that members of my committee would curse me for broadening horizons that I recently had truncated, and I also feared that, had I added more content, I would have ceased to exist before I would earn my terminal degree. Indeed, I have been tempted many times to delve wider and further in my topic, primarily because today many academics, parents, policymakers, scientists, and conservative and radical ideologues seem increasingly interested in resolving the pedagogical debates initiated by seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke, who suggested that children learn best not by rote memorization but by observing the world around them, reflecting upon their observations, and internalizing the information gleaned in the process.
Moreover, in the past few decades, magazines and self-help books have replaced conduct books, and television and movies have superseded novels in popularity, but the messages in these newer media recycle the same ebb and flow of cultural discourse about sexual equality that I’ve traced in the long nineteenth century. Liberal appeals for sexual equality across the social and political spectrum (e.g., legislation regarding gay marriage, hate crimes, equal opportunity in the workplace, and family leave) are followed by conservative demands to maintain the status quo.

Then, too, since I began researching my topic in the late 1990s, many non-fiction authors, the majority of whom specifically address women readers, have published their advice on finding and marrying one’s most suitable partner, and many television and film productions continue to present women who struggle to maintain their independence without surrendering their feminist convictions or their right to self-determinism. Complicating the situation even further is the fact that we have yet to agree on what the terms “feminism” or “feminist” mean. Neither have we agreed upon which of the convictions of first- and second-wave feminists from the twentieth century remain valid, nor upon which of their goals remain viable in our current social system. Our media echo the conservative or radical advice found in long nineteenth-century conduct books and novels without adding anything truly new to the discourse, thereby demonstrating that we have far to go before we indeed “have it all”—veritable educational, legal, professional, and social equality between the sexes, as well as personal fulfillment—be we women or men.

Regarding the continuing debate over pedagogical matters, we need only recall the recent spate of legal and moral arguments for and against renewing President George
W. Bush’s 2001 “No Child Left Behind Act” (NCLB) to see that Locke’s view on how children learn remains contestable. The most frequent critics of NCLB believe that the policy “forces teachers to teach to a test” instead of finding ways to develop each student’s unique cognitive powers. Many parents, educators, policymakers, and private and public institutions perceive NCLB to require teachers to devote the greatest amount of class time to drilling facts and figures into their students’ heads in Gradgrindian fashion. While I will leave this particularly politicized debate to others, new research suggests that its outcome may be moot.

In positing a new theory about the development of human cognition, neuroscientists may soon eliminate much of the guesswork currently involved in improving the nation’s public school system. Intriguingly, the work of cognitive neuroscientist Vilayanur S. Ramachandran does not, in fact, introduce original ideas about how we learn; rather, his experiments with “mirror neurons” and “empathy wiring” in the brain seem scientifically to validate ancient pedagogical models. Just as characters like Sue Bridehead seemed to define “New Woman” to their 1890s audience but actually reflect late-eighteenth-century feminist theory and praxis, so the results of Ramachandran’s and his colleagues’ experiments confirm Locke’s theory of experiential learning. More importantly, however, these experiments also validate Mary Hays’s and Mary Wollstonecraft’s claims that interdidactic pedagogy best facilitates the balanced development of an individual’s emotional and intellectual faculties, as well as affirming their shared conviction that autodidacts are doomed to failure, since they cannot reconcile their incomplete and idealized expectations of their culture with their culture’s real demands on them. Even more importantly, because Ramachandran insists that empathy
and sympathy—those conventionally feminine characteristics that so frequently surface in this discussion—provide the foundation for all intellectual development, his theories may invalidate deeply embedded misogynist constructs about the weaker sex that we seem unable to dispel from our own culture. If women indeed hold a greater capacity for empathy and sympathy, as each of the authors in this study claims and as many cultural pundits reiterate today, then Ramachandran’s theories may well prove that women truly constitute the intellectually stronger sex.

In comparing what cognitive neuroscientists like Ramachandran refer to as “imitation learning” (“Mirror Neurons and Imitation Learning” 1) with Locke’s theory of experiential learning, it is entirely fitting that neuroscientists term the brain cells involved in learning “mirror neurons” (*The Emerging Mind* 43): both theories consider the human impulse to reflect others’ behavior to be a foundational element upon which human cognition is built. In *The Emerging Mind*, Ramachandran extrapolates his theory of human cognition from Giaccomo Rizzollati’s discovery of the form and function of mirror neurons in monkeys. As Ramachandran reports, Rizzollati found that parts of the frontal lobes which are concerned with motor commands contain cells which fire when a monkey performs certain specific movements. One cell will fire when a monkey reaches out and grabs a peanut, another cell will fire when the monkey pulls something . . . These are motor command neurons. *Rizzollati found that some of these neurons will also fire when the monkey watches another monkey grab a peanut . . .* Rizzollati calls these mirror neurons. (43, emphasis mine)
Ramachandran, along with Eric Altschuller and Jamie Piñeda, sought mirror neurons in the human brain and achieved the same results as those in Rizzolli’s study of monkeys’ brains: similar neurons fire in the human brain “when a person watches someone else moving his hand” (“Mirror Neurons and Imitation Learning” par. 14).

The physical evidence of neural chemistry found by Ramachandran and his colleagues supports Locke’s claim that children learn best by observing the behavior of positive and negative role models. Compare the following passage from Locke’s *An Essay on Human Understanding*—a passage cited in the chapter on Edgeworth’s *Belinda*—with an excerpt from Ramachandran’s *The Emerging Mind*, paying particular attention to the sentences I have emphasized in each. Locke presents the primary assumption supporting his pedagogy:

> [a]ll ideas come from sensation or reflection. Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas: how comes it to be furnished? . . . To this I answer, in one word, from EXPERIENCE. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. *Our observation employed, either about external sensible objects or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking*. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring. (75, emphasis mine)

Likewise, Ramachandran explains mirror neurons in this way:
Our brains are essentially model-making machines to construct useful, virtual reality simulations of the world that we can act on. Within the simulation, we need also to construct models of other people’s minds because we primates are intensely social creatures. (This is called “a theory of other minds.”) We need to do this so that we can predict their behavior. (124, emphasis mine)

Ramachandran further postulates that mirror neurons played a vital role in the emergence of another important capacity of our minds—namely, learning through imitation—and therefore the transmission of culture . . . Our brains are inextricably bound to the cultural milieu they are immersed in . . . just as a simple cell cannot exist without its symbiotic mitochondria. (126-127, emphasis mine)

Based on the findings of twenty-first century neuroscience, Locke seems to have been precisely right in advising parents that “of all the ways whereby children are to be instructed and their manners formed the plainest, easiest, and most efficacious is to set before their eyes the examples [Locke’s emphasis] of those things you would have them do or avoid” and in warning parents that “[v]irtues and vices can by no words be so plainly set before [children’s] understandings as the actions of other men will show them when you direct their observation and bid them view this or that good or bad quality in their practice” (Some Thoughts Concerning Education 182).

Additionally, Ramachandran’s findings suggest that in order to formulate a valid judgment of what they observe and to interact effectively and safely with their environs, children instinctually reflect the behavior of their role models and analyze the
effectiveness of adopting that behavior for future use by observing their role model’s approval or disapproval of their own mimicry. He argues that for this internal simulation to be complete it needs to contain not only models of other people’s minds but also a model of itself, of its own stable attributes, its personality traits and the limits of its abilities—what it can and cannot do. (The Emerging Mind 124)

In other words, merely witnessing the behavior of others and mimicking it insufficiently prepares one to encounter new situations; the pupil must herself attempt the behavior in front of others in order to gauge their reaction, and thus its utility for future use.

Hays, Wollstonecraft, and Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth all attest that effective learning must involve both active experimentation and observation. Hays’s Emma Courtney declares, “we must be content to arrive at truth through many painful mistakes and consequent sufferings” (Memoirs of Emma Courtney 43), and Wollstonecraft’s Maria advises her daughter, “[g]ain experience—ah! gain it!—while experience is worth having . . . it includes your utility by a direct path” (Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman 58). Nonetheless, Hays and Wollstonecraft are merely speculating about implementing a pedagogy that foreshadows Ramachandran’s future findings, and they remain pessimistic about women’s ability to prosper in an androcentric society. Conversely, in Practical Education the Edgeworths devise just such a pedagogy that anticipates Ramachandran’s conclusions, complete with experiments designed for children to carry out with adult interaction and supervision, but they warn against permitting girls’ education to match, point for point, that of boys. Bearing the function of mirror neurons in mind, we now know that the ideal women of Hays, Wollstonecraft, and
the Edgeworths, each of whose cultural and intellectual experiences are limited in some way, can neither attain self-actualization while under patriarchal rule nor liberate themselves from it.

Such failures are particularly deplorable, given that Ramachandran’s theory suggests that women should be more capable students than men, if indeed women are “naturally” more sympathetic beings than men. In Western cultures, especially as we have seen in a century’s worth of women’s reading from Great Britain, women have been encouraged to rely upon and strengthen their natural propensity for sympathy, sometimes to the exclusion of honing their intellects. Such advice continues to be promulgated today, albeit to a lesser extent, when we speak of women relying on “women’s intuition” or “mother wit”—both paradoxically and most often described as the consequence of spontaneous “feeling” and not meditated “logic,” as the terms “intuition” and “wit” connote—to determine their courses of action. Ramachandran posits that mirror neurons “are at least partly involved in generating our sense of ‘embodied’ self-awareness as well as our ‘empathy’ for others” (The Emerging Mind 125). The Oxford English Dictionary defines “empathy” as the “power of projecting one’s personality into (and so fully comprehending) the object of contemplation” (def. 1). It may be more accurate, however, to speak of this capacity as sympathy, particularly because sympathy is described as “a feeling or frame of mind evoked by and responsive to some external influence” (def. 3b), such as that of a child watching its mother stick out her tongue and responding by sticking out its own tongue, the example with which Ramachandran illustrates the firing of mirror neurons (125). A personal experience of empathy can grow into sympathy for others—defined as the “quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with
a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other” (def. 3b); while empathy allows us to place ourselves temporarily in another’s shoes, sympathy allows us to recall that momentary experience when next we are presented with a similar situation.

Cognitive neuroscience also provides a possible explanation for the Rousseauan, Fordycean feminine ideal, the blushing beauty, whose embarrassment signals her suitability as a mate. Ramachandran supposes that

Without a “theory of other mind” an organism (or person) would also be incapable of blushing . . . an involuntary “flag” of violation of a sexual taboo [that] may have evolved in humans as a “marker” of reliability. When courting a man, a blushing woman is saying (in effect): “I can’t lie to you about my affair or cuckold you without my blush giving me away—I’m reliable, so come disseminate your genes through me.” (The Emerging Mind 126)

Because a blush can be elicited only from someone who thoroughly understands what she can and cannot do (and in some cases even think about) in her particular culture’s standards, Ramachandran’s findings lends credence to Judith Butler’s contention that gender roles continually evolve to reflect the dominant ideologies of the particular time and culture in which they are constructed. Women who also know the cultural reward of such blushes and can approximate that response on demand may indeed draw the attention of a bevy of potential suitors, as Jean Jacques Rousseau and James Fordyce profess.

Yet where Rousseau and Fordyce would sacrifice women’s intellects in order to heighten their sympathies, Ramachandran’s findings support the tenet maintained by the
majority of the authors whose works form the subject of this dissertation, namely that women are best educated in a manner that develops their intellectual and emotional faculties in equal measure. As Ramachandran notes, logic and empathy must be employed simultaneously in order for individuals to function well in society, chiefly because mirror neurons fire in our brains when someone communicates with us, establishing a congruence between (1) the highly specific volitional motor command sequence sent to muscles of phonation and articulation; (2) felt lip and tongue position (proprioception) from sensors in [our] oral muscles; (3) the seen image of someone else’s lips and tongue; and (4) the heard phoneme. (The Emerging Mind 94)

Ramachandran also notes that mirror neurons reside in the brain’s temporal lobe, very near the angular gyrus and Wernicke’s area, parts of the brain that process “much of language—especially semantics,” and the amygdala, “that gauges emotional significance” (119). Thus, lacking empathy, even if we command the most thorough knowledge of grammar accompanied by the most extensive vocabulary, we would insufficiently decode a speaker’s attempt to communicate with us: in order to piece together an entire message we must combine the speaker’s use of language with her facial expressions. Additionally, we must also decipher the speaker’s body language, gestures, and tone of voice. Failure to decode the entire message results in miscommunication and social disorder, just as we have seen in many of the novels featured in this dissertation, wherein some vicious women refuse or seem unable to balance intellect and emotion.

In order to provide an example of how disadvantageous an unbalanced intellect can be in a society dependent upon effective intercommunication, Jon Hamilton, in a
National Public Radio production entitled, “Exploring Language: Autism Reveals Social Roots of Language,” interviews Ramachandran, who notes that individuals with autism display “difficulty with social interaction, manifest both in spoken language and in just lack of empathy” (par. 15). Hamilton then asks the well-known animal-behavior scientist, Temple Grandin, who is autistic, to describe her empathic deficiencies. In many ways, Grandin’s difficulties seem analogous to Hays’s description of the floundering Emma and Wollstonecraft’s depiction of the victimized Maria: each of them suffers from an inability to decode men’s intentions correctly. In the online article, “My Mind is a Web Browser: How People with Autism Think,” Grandin explains,

Non-autistic people seem to have a whole upper layer of verbal thinking that is merged with their emotions. By contrast, unless I panic, I use logic to make all decisions; my thinking can be done independently of emotion. In fact, I seem to lack a higher consciousness composed of abstract verbal thoughts that are merged with emotion. Researchers have learned that people with autism have a decreased metabolism in the area in the frontal cortex that connects the brain’s emotional centers with higher thinking. . . . Brain scans indicate that people with autism use problem-solving circuits in social situations. Unlike non-autistic people, the emotion center in their amygdala is not activated, for example, when they judge expressions in another person’s eyes. (par. 5, emphasis mine)

I have emphasized the portions above that bear upon the necessity of one’s achieving an aurea mediocritas between intellectual and emotional development (i. e., between sense and sensibility), a balance that neuroscientists like Ramachandran now know depends just
as much upon one’s capacity to empathize and sympathize with others as on one’s facility with language, facts, and figures.

Lacking empathy, Grandin must make deliberate and conscious efforts to interpret others’ complete messages, unlike, as she calls them, non-autistic people, who “register automatically” the “emotional cues” of body language, eye contact, and tone of voice (Hamilton par. 32). Grandin must “always keep learning . . . every day. . . . It’s all through logic, trial and error, intellect” (par. 33). Notably, “certain kinds of conversation” are beyond Grandin’s ken, especially those she believes to be “absolutely totally social” in function and devoid of “informational content,” in which the participants use “language as a way of bonding with one another—not a way of sharing information” (par. 35). Grandin concedes that she “will never fully understand the social aspects of language, including other people’s intentions” (par. 43), a precarious position that could prove fatal in dangerous situations. At the very least, Grandin has difficulty assessing her client’s and students’ moods (par. 33-35), which impedes her relationships with them and hampers her ability to meet their expectations. Likewise, Emma Courtney, after having been “brought up in retirement . . . conversing only with books” is “at a loss to understand the distinction between theory and practice which everyone seems eager to inculcate” (Memoirs of Emma Courtney 79-80). In addition, Grandin’s dependence upon logic often proves insufficient to facilitate her interrelations, like Edgeworth’s Belinda Portman, whose otherwise excellent observational skills fail to discover Vincent’s “unfortunate propensity” for excessive gambling (Belinda 423).

In being “characterized by severe deficits and pervasive impairment in multiple areas of development,” including “impairment in reciprocal social interaction,
impairment in communication” (“Disorders Usually Diagnosed in Infancy, Childhood, or Adolescence” par. 4), autism itself is classified as a developmental disorder (DSM-IV-TR 299.00). It makes sense, then, that our own media continue to portray as disordered—or, perhaps less generously, as mentally ill—individuals who repress their empathic and sympathetic powers in order to act on their aggressions, as well as those who reject (or defy) logic in order to “follow their hearts.” Yet when the media depict women who are trying to achieve that balance, masculine authority figures often attempt to stop them from doing so. Like Hays’s Emma Courtney, Wollstonecraft’s Maria, Edgeworth’s Lady Delacour, Ferrier’s Lady Emily Courtland, Dickens’s Edith Granger, Brontë’s Lucy Snowe, Trollope’s Lady Laura Standish, and Hardy’s Sue Bridehead, all of whom desire masculine knowledge or activity, women who transgress traditional gender boundaries are eventually either forcibly re-feminized, banished, or destroyed.107 Thus, despite new advances in neuroscience, we seem to be little closer to realizing Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s dream of a non-gendered society in which both sexes contribute equally to each other’s development.

This disheartening lack of progress can be seen in our popular culture’s equivalents of long nineteenth-century novels, movies, and television. As a recent example among many, the feature film X-Men III: The Last Stand (2006) contains examples of women who are damned for being too feminine, punished for being too masculine, and prohibited from achieving a balance between the two. For desiring a cure for her mutation, the somewhat vampiric Rogue—who involuntarily sucks the life force out of anyone she touches, a deadly form of hyper-sympathy—barely receives pity from her largely unsympathetic, mutant boyfriend—who, intriguingly, can control his ability to
freeze anything he touches. The shape-shifter Mystique pays the stereotypical price for appropriating and wielding masculine appearances and powers: a policeman shoots her with a serum-filled syringe that “cures” her mutation and re-feminizes her, leaving her nude at the feet of her former lover, Magneto, who literally walks over her and remarks, “Pity. She used to be so beautiful.” Jean Grey/The Phoenix, whose mutation gives her the creative power to reorder the universe at the molecular level, first endures Charles Xavier’s mind control and ultimately dies when Wolverine declares his love for her and penetrates her body with his adamantine blades.

On the small screen, the first addition in thirteen years to Sesame Street’s cast of intentionally didactic role models, the hyper-feminine Muppet monster Abby Cadabby recalls aspects of Emma Courtney’s and Lucy Snowe’s narratives. Like Emma, Abby apparently lives within a magic circle as a “fairy in training” to her mother, a fairy godmother (Barrientos A1). Whereas Emma believes that early and equable access to traditionally masculine fields of knowledge would have dispelled her overly romantic delusions of proper feminine behavior, Abby “is astounded by the ‘magic’ . . . of the alphabet, numbers, spelling and reading.” Like Lucy in her robe rose, Abby’s fur is “carnation pink,” and at times she “gets so nervous that she disappears,” mimicking Lucy’s chosen coping strategy, where from the shadows she assumes power over herself while observing and judging the behavior of others. According to the show’s vice president for education and research, Rosemarie Truglio, Abby “model[s] how to make friends and how to fit into a new environment.” How Abby will accomplish this goal as a periodically invisible girl remains to be seen. Clearly, the twenty-first century media
continues to present girls and women with fantastically unrealistic and self-effacing feminine role models.

Likewise, in encouraging women to balance their intellectual or career goals with their own emotional and physical needs and those of their partners, today’s self-help books about marital preparations and relations continue to endorse a Victorian feminine ideal that places nearly the entire burden of creating and maintaining the domestic peace on women. In *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* (2004), Dr. Laura Schlessinger rejects the notion that women represent the inferior sex but bases her own method for a supreme domestic matriarchy on the ideology of Woman’s Mission found in mid-nineteenth-century conduct books, particularly those of Sarah Lewis and Sarah Stickney Ellis. But Schlessinger presents a method for wielding Woman’s Influence in a manner that seems more strikingly duplicitous than the clandestine sparking of men’s consciences that Lewis suggested and that directly controverts Ellis’s dicta regarding womanly self-sacrifice. Schlessinger concurs with Lewis and Ellis, stating, “I do believe that it’s to the betterment of men and society that women temper and civilize . . . masculine characteristics” (6) and “[w]omen need to better appreciate the magnitude of their power and influence over men” (10). Yet because “men are simple” (xx) creatures—like children, perhaps—Schlessinger declares, “the truth is that when it comes to home and relationships, women rule” (64), thus implying that an equal spousal relationship between members of the two sexes cannot exist.

Schlessinger, however, does not advocate a just and transparent matriarchy; instead, she promotes what amounts to a deceitful stroking of the male ego that is designed to “make him [one’s husband] feel that he is strong and the head of the
household” (76) while his spouse orders the household to her liking. Some of Schlessinger’s advice initially reads much like common sense, like Ellis’s call for women to practice the art of conversation to soothe their world weary husbands (Women of England 50). While this appears, if not entirely useful, at least innocuous, Schlessinger seems chiefly concerned with women’s happiness, not with the lasting comfort of the entire family, as Ellis would have it. Schlessinger affirms the Victorian ideal of a working man’s spousal expectations, who

needs his wife to show some interest in his interests . . . to greet him after work with love and enthusiasm . . . to care about the day he’s had . . . a man needs his wife’s encouragement in order to be a man. (77)

But, because “[m]en live to make their women happy” (64), wives who follow Schlessinger’s advice—“[w]hen he walks through the door, give him hugs and kisses and a chocolate brownie if he has a sweet tooth. Tell him how much you appreciate the fact that he has been out all night busting his butt so that you could stay home with the kids” (86)—will reap the following, self-serving rewards: “[w]atch what this man will perk up and do for you . . . ANYTHING YOU WANT! That includes sex, a great relaxer, a foot rub, a bubble bath, playing with the kids—anything” (86). Thus, Schlessinger disguises a selfish, albeit womanly despot beneath a consciously fabricated veil of domestic benevolence. In such manner, Schlessinger’s ideal marriage remains as much an unequal partnership as it was under the law of coverture, the only difference being the transfer of marital power from masculine to feminine hands.

Intriguingly, Richard Kirshenbaum and Daniel Rosenberg offer very similar advice to women about controlling their marital prospects (i. e., deciding whom, how,
and when to marry, as well as the terms and form of their relationships and their joint lifestyle) before and after the wedding, portions of which echo Trollope’s views in the Phineas novels. Like Trollope, Kirshenbaum and Rosenberg argue that women must accurately assess their marital expectations, because “unrealistic expectations . . . [are] not good for your ego or your sanity” (6). Yet whereas Trollope encourages women to behave like consumers in the marriage market, taking extreme care in selecting husbands who will accommodate their wives’ needs and desires, in Closing the Deal: Two Married Guys Take You from Single Miss to Wedded Bliss (2005), Kirshenbaum and Rosenberg invite readers to develop a “marriage marketing plan” in order to “grasp the essential marriage motivators that will cause your number one consumer—your man—to shift into marriage momentum” (21). Kirshenbaum and Rosenberg deny that their “use of the word maneuvering indicates that [they] advocat[e] subterfuge,” but they admit that “Marriage Maneuvering does consist of some artful and graceful shifting” (27), including presenting one’s self and one’s assets in as flattering a light as possible by providing companionship, safe and consistent sex, and the chance to procreate; by offering the “respectability” that married status imbues; and by employing the “so-called dowry principle,” in which the marketer “encourages [the consumer to make] acquisitions” with such “perk[s]” as “the best barbecue sauce from Mom, the finest free legal work from Dad, or stock tips from your sis” (30-32). These “marriage motivators,” however, should not “be rattl[ed] off or even talk[ed] about” with one’s potential spouse; instead, they should be used in terms that seem inherently antithetical: “genuinely and subtly” (28). Considering that Kirshenbaum and Rosenberg claim to expose the hidden knowledge of their gender in order to teach women how to fulfill men’s desires, that they caution women against
acknowledging that they possess that knowledge, indicates how far we are from Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s ideal of a sexually equitable society. Apparently, in women’s marital bargains with men, “cunning as opposed to wisdom” (A Vindication to the Rights of Woman 69) continues to be the prevailing modus operandi, and women are still encouraged to practice “a system of dissimulation,” in which they “are always to seem to be” (101) more unknowing than they are. Like Schlessinger, Kirshenbaum and Rosenberg evince pessimism over the feasibility of sexual equality in the social microcosm that a marital union represents. They maintain that “[m]ost men want to feel like they’re the king of the castle. Really” (39), but they admit that most men refuse to exert authority over their wives or their households. Accordingly, they straightforwardly warn women:

[b]eing independent, powerful, and an equal partner in a relationship is wonderful, but that’s not what we’re talking about here. We think you should be demonstrative and partnering in creating a pleasurable home life . . . Hopefully, he’ll be doing the same for you. (39, emphasis mine)

I’ve emphasized what I believe to be a peculiarly cryptic phrase in the above passage, in which Kirshenbaum and Rosenberg clearly believe that wives should demonstrate their ability and willingness to foster domestic harmony, but then seemingly suggest that husbands should not be expected to do the same. I am more perplexed, however, by Kirshenbaum and Rosenberg’s enjoining wives “to partner” with husbands who apparently are unwilling and not expected to contribute to the domestic peace. How, exactly, does one partner with such an uncooperative being? How, in fact, is such an inequitable division of labor a marital partnership at all? Since they present such blatant
examples of bothersome inconsistencies and illogical prevarications, and because they support an obviously inequitable double standard, Kirshenbaum, Rosenberg, and Schlessinger proffer advise that displays the current schizophrenic disorder in which we find the Feminist Movement (if indeed we can still speak of such a thing as a distinct entity).

Sheryl Nissinen’s *The Conscious Bride: Women Unveil Their True Feelings about Getting Hitched* (2000) also reflects the disappointing reality that twenty-first-century women still encounter deeply entrenched, ideologically gendered hurdles in their attempts to pursue intellectual goals or career aspirations while maintaining an emotionally fulfilling marriage. Nissinen argues that “women today are trying to achieve a balance between domesticity and career, nurturer and achiever, being and doing, feminine and masculine” (184-185, my emphasis). Although the phrasing of the final dichotomy in this list may not accurately reflect Nissinen’s own stance on the subject, it tellingly belies the lasting power of the Victorian ideology of separate spheres in our supposedly gender-neutral culture.108 One cannot fail to note that “domesticity,” “nurturer,” and “being” parallel “feminine,” while “career,” “achiever,” and “doing” parallel “masculine,” much as they do in Lewis’s and Ellis’s works.

Nonetheless, Nissinen’s language also echoes that of Hays and Wollstonecraft, particularly their depictions of women’s inadequate marital preparation and consequently unrealistic marital expectations. Hays writes in 1797, for example, that the “greater proportion of young women are trained up by thoughtless parents . . . with no other dependence for their future support than the precarious chance of establishing themselves by marriage,” which frequently results in “misery, disgust, or infidelity” (“Letter to the
Editor” 276-277). Nissinen, more than two hundred years later, maintains that soon after their weddings, many women suffer “transitional depression,” the result of “social displacement,” in which their marital expectations are “frustrat[ed]” when “the reality of the adjustment required by [their] new li[ves] set[s] in” (174). Accordingly, Nissinen concedes, that while women today find themselves “on a new frontier . . . we find that it takes effort, consciousness, and daily commitment to maintain the ‘I’ within the ‘we’” (188). But in speaking of the “art of achieving interdependence” (185), she offers a much more hopeful picture of women enjoining a true marital partnership with their spouses than do Hays, Wollstonecraft, Kirshenbaum, Rosenberg, or Schlessinger.

Indeed, the best that Kirshenbaum and Rosenberg offer is codependence (23), a term that fittingly belies the disorder of their mercantile marital model, one that represents another lamentable remnant of the long nineteenth-century marriage market. Even Linda R. Hirshman in _Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World_ (2006), as the title suggests, applies a pragmatically Marxist approach to creating a gender-equitable marriage. She good-naturedly endures a venomous backlash of her own for her call to “restart the revolution” that Betty Friedan initiates in _The Feminine Mystique_ (1964), one that as I’ve argued earlier Trollope avoided by cloaking in satire advice very similar to what Hirshman presents, and pairing seeming complicity with patriarchal marriage-market domination. Relying on statistics gathered by economists, political scientists, sociologists, government agencies, and professional organizations like the American Bar Association, Hirshman details the economic realities of today’s marriage market and denounces the Feminist Movement’s failure to provide reliable and practical methods of transforming feminist theory into praxis. Specifically targeting what she refers to as
“choice feminism” (1), which she pronounces “a false one” (25), Hirshman warns working women to “be aware of their bargaining power in courtship” (56) if they wish to avoid “separate spheres or [a] non-cooperative marriage” (55), like those proposed by Schlessinger, Kirshenbaum, and Rosenberg. To be sure, as with all of the authors discussed in these pages, Hirshman also offers “moderation and balance” as a “solution to the ambition/aptitude problem,” but her means of fostering an equitable marriage forbids either partner from abdicating or subverting what ideally should be joint household responsibilities.

Hirshman further contends that education is vital in strengthening women’s marital bargaining positions—“[e]ducated, gainfully employed women are a valuable commodity” (56). Education also improves the quality of their potential existence as wives and mothers, supporting the core doctrine of the pedagogues and novelists discussed in the preceding chapters. Yet Hirshman advises women to forgo centuries of conventional wisdom that women’s work must be altruistic and to abandon traditionally feminine degrees in the liberal arts, social services, and the recently feminized law, all of which she believes have become the stuff of dream jobs, “the kinds of intellectual, prestigious, socially meaningful, politics-free jobs worth the dreamer’s incalculably valuable presence” (48). Instead, Hirshman counsels that “idealism on the career trail usually leads to volunteer work or indentured servitude in social-service jobs, which is nice but doesn’t get to money” (50), the true “marker of success in a market economy” (49). Thus, she hopes to overcome yet another remnant of Woman’s Mission, that women’s work outside the home must reflect the proper exertion of Woman’s Influence
upon her family in fostering, promoting, and maintaining values and the general health of our culture.

Hence, the ethos behind Get to Work echoes the ideal, non-gendered workplace envisioned by the anonymous reviewer of Woman’s Mission, complete with its focus on enabling women to liberate themselves from marital dependence in order to enjoy marital interdependence, as Nissinen would phrase it. As such, one century after Hardy confirms Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s century-old pessimistic view of women’s education, I believe that we have cause for optimism: a positive shift toward Haysian and Wollstonecraftian notions of a true union of traditionally feminine and masculine ways of being and doing may finally be attained, despite the fact that only twenty years ago that goal seemed out of reach. With palpable enthusiasm, Hirshman tells women, “pay no attention to Newsweek magazine’s suggestion” (56), made in 1986, that “college-educated women who failed to marry in their twenties faced abysmal odds of ever tying the knot” (McGinn 42), a claim that Newsweek graciously retracts in the cover story of its 5 June 2006 edition. Newsweek also includes an article by Stephanie Coontz entitled “Three ‘Rules’ That Don’t Apply,” in which she confirms Hirshman’s claims that highly educated, working women are empowered—not, as had hitherto been conventional wisdom, hampered—in the marriage market. While they postpone marriage until after completing their degrees and entering the workforce, such “more savvy women,” with “more ability to change the terms of marriage to make them more satisfying,” are “more likely to marry than women with low levels of education” and “to marry more egalitarian men” (49). More importantly, Coontz’s statistics vindicate Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s argument that educating women in the same manner as men makes women better marital
partners: for reasons Coontz does not specify, since 1986 the divorce rate among women who do not earn a college degree has increased while that among “college-educated women” it has decreased (49). Thus we finally must acknowledge that ignorance does not prove conducive to marital bliss but a gender-equitable educational system does.

Declaring victory in this one aspect of the resurgent feminist revolution does not mean, however, that we should pay our last respects to the less enlightened feminisms of the past, especially since many of them are still very much part of our present, as women continue their efforts to thwart sexual objectification, surmount gender barriers, escape sex roles, break the glass ceiling, trade in their pink collars for white or blue ones, and struggle to have it all without sacrificing some part of themselves in the process. In bringing to light a few lesser known novels and many infrequently read conduct books, educational treatises, polemics, and biographical details, I encourage others to revisit the past in order to enrich the current feminist discourse. We cannot continue, like Millicent Garrett Fawcett, to ignore troublesome biological issues surrounding our reproductive realities; neither can we, as bell hooks points out, force silence upon those whose feminism deviates from a core set of values drafted by a select committee; nor can we remain content with, as Hirshman phrases it, “choosing a choice” that masks a concession to a gender ideology seemingly ineradicable and androcentric. At the very least, we can act in belief that, in recalling the errors of the past, we will not duplicate them. Rather, in the process of examining the past, we may glean insights about the *aurea mediocritas* without forcing all women to fit one standard model of femininity.
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Notes

1 Wherever possible, I derive my citations from critical editions of the texts herein examined. For ease of reading, I have regularized spelling and punctuation in accordance with current usage. Unless otherwise indicated, however, italics reflect the author’s emphasis.

2 This information is the result of a subject search of WorldCat on 29 August 2006 and does not represent a complete publication history of the text.

3 The series includes *The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (1838); *The Daughters of England: Their Position in Society, Character and Responsibilities* (1842); *The Mothers of England: Their Influence and Responsibility* (1843); and *The Wives of England: Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence, and Social Obligations* (1843). In the number of her works Ellis quantitatively rivals Trollope and in the breadth of her subjects and genres surpasses him. She also wrote *The Education of Character: With Hints on Moral Training* (1856), *The Education of the Heart: Woman’s Best Work* (1869), pamphlets and articles on domestic economy, a manual of cookery and domestic economy, as well as poetry and domestic novels. Ellis also compiled readers suitable for young ladies and edited family and juvenile scrapbooks, one of which, *Morning Book: A Table Book of Literature and Art* (1849), contained favorable critiques of Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* (1847) and *Jane Eyre* (1849).

4 Intriguingly, Wollstonecraft assigns no patronymic to Maria until she marries. Because Wollstonecraft died before completing the novel, we can only speculate if such an omission was deliberate or if she would have eventually given Maria a surname. If
Wollstonecraft purposefully neglected to give Maria a surname, perhaps the omission is a subtle jibe at her society for refusing to accredit women any value before marriage.

5 Ellen Dubois credits American abolitionists Sarah and Angelina Grimke with coincidentally popularizing the phrase “the woman question” and for “generating nineteenth-century feminism” through their efforts to participate fully with men in the abolitionist movement (par. 5).

6 According to the *Online Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “New Woman” was introduced into English in 1893 by George Gissing in *The Odd Women* (def. I.1.i.), in which Everard Barfoot refers to Rhoda Nunn as “one of the new women” and his cousin Mary responds by describing Nunn’s “zeal for womanhood militant” (106), the chief characteristic of the New Woman as she was thereafter depicted in British periodicals and novels.

7 As indicated by the authors of *The Dictionary of Sensibility*, a collaborative and interactive hypertext project, the term “sensibility” is notoriously difficult to define due to its “multiple possibilities of meaning” and “multivalent connotations” that “took on meanings unique to the period” in which individual “sensibilious” texts originated (“Introduction” par. 1). The hypertext’s entry under “sympathy” most closely fits my purposes in speaking of sensibility, particularly since Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Heloise* appears among the examples of texts in which “sensibility” connotes sympathy excited by one’s imagination. The authors explain, “[i]n the tradition of sensibility, to be without sympathy is to be without humanity. The capacity to sympathize is an indispensable quality in the person of sensibility” (“Sympathy” par. 1) and “[m]any writers attempt to explicate the workings of sympathy by dwelling on, for example, the role of the
imagination in exciting sympathy; the imagination connection also inspires considerations of fiction’s potential role in creating sympathetic relations” (par. 3). All of the works discussed in this dissertation equate women’s sensibilities with their sympathies, and each of the novelists intends his or her fiction to encourage women to be sympathetic without allowing their imaginations to overcome their reason.

8 Judeo-Christian tradition maintains that since God created nature, the natural state of the universe reflects God’s will. Thus in many of the texts herein examined the terms “Nature” and “God” appear to have been interchangeable or to have been conflated into a single supreme entity. Walter E. Houghton encapsulates the evolution of this conflation of God and Nature in *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*, beginning with the Hobbesian notion that “nature had been thought of as the manifestation of a good and beneficent God,” which prevailed until the construct of “Natural Theology . . . emphasized the order and design of a creative intelligence,” which in turn evolved into the Victorian desire to seek God “in nature and in history” after the Bible had been “reduced to a human document full of superstition and the Church [was] no longer a divine temple” (315).

9 For more information on these women and their works, see *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group*, ed. Candida Ann Lacey, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, in which appear reprints of their works, brief biographies, and a very useful introduction.

10 I purposefully use the term “betrothed” because at the time it connoted that the relationship of an intended groom and bride was very intimate, perhaps indeed physical. Prior to the codification of marriage rituals in the Hardwicke Marriage Act of 1753,
betrothals made *in verba de presenti* or *per verba de futuro* were viewed as legitimate marriage contracts (Blackstone 438), and conventional wisdom imbued such unions with all of the rights associated with such a contract, including exclusive connubial rights and privileges. This concept of betrothal did not entirely disappear with the Hardwicke Act. It survived in diluted form well into the nineteenth century as the taboo against women breaking an engagement. Hence, Walker can safely claim that Hays and Eccles may have had carnal knowledge of one another, which could have prompted Hays to claim a widow’s independence.

11 In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft attacks the feminine ideals in Rousseau’s *Émile* and *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1759), Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* (1765), and Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters* (1774).

12 *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Heloise*, by Jean Jacques Rousseau, to which Hays repeatedly refers throughout the novel. Both Hays’s Emma and Wollstonecraft’s Maria consider their lovers to personify Rousseau’s hero St. Preux.

13 Well into the nineteenth century, it was taboo for a woman to carry on an unsanctioned correspondence with an unrelated member of the opposite sex who had not openly declared his intent to marry her.

14 The biographical elements behind the relationship of Emma and Augustus have been well covered by Anjan, Binhammer, Brooks, Kelly, Ferguson and Todd, and others. There is perhaps no need for additional comment here other than to recall the fact that Emma’s behavior toward and letters to Augustus are based upon her failed relationship with William Frend, who rejected her equally open protestations of love.
A similar pseudo-sibling pairing of eventual lovers appears in Bernardin de Saint Pierre’s *Paul et Virgine* (1788), a text that Maria Edgeworth takes to task in *Belinda* (1801) for its overly unrealistic romanticism. Unfortunately, novelists in later periods fail to heed Hays’s and Edgeworth’s warnings about the moral ambiguity inherent in such pseudo-incestuous relationships. Such couplings also appear and, more importantly, often succeed in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), Charles Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* (1846-1848) and *David Copperfield* (1849-1850), and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *The Mill on the Floss* (1860).

Even in the highest levels of eighteenth-century society, wives were expected to conform to mannerisms and codes of conduct of their husbands’ families. A rather memorable example of this tradition appears in Amanda Foreman’s biography *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* (1988), wherein Foreman reports that the duchess adopted her in-laws’ “peculiar drawl” in order to please them, including their mispronunciation of her own name. Foreman writes, “George-i-ahna” became “‘George-aина’ (as in rain-a)” (29). Incidentally, Foreman also reports that the “Devonshire House Drawl” was eventually adopted by nearly the entire Whig party, in which both the Duke and the Duchess were heavily involved, thus “transforming a family tradition into a symbol of political allegiance” (42).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “mingle” as “To have sexual intercourse with another” (6b).

Brooks reprints contemporary reviews in her Broadview edition of *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. That which appeared in the *Monthly Review* directs the reader to this
letter as an example of Emma’s “obstinacy of bigotry” (294) and Hays’s “sentiments which are open to attack” (295).

There is more to be said here about the equestrian ineptitude of both Augustus and Montague, whose horses are beyond their control. In the first instance, Montague fails to “rein in his quick and irascible spirit” as well as that of his horses, and Augustus is struck forcefully by the “pole of the chaise” against which the “restive animals” strain for freedom (95). When Augustus is later “thrown from his horse” and rendered “senseless” (198), he again demonstrates his inability to master a force of nature.

Considering the many equestrian references made before Hays’s time to the unbridled passion of women who cannot control their reason—the earliest of which may be that which appears in the *Aeneid*, when the Sybil of Delphi bucks against the god Apollo, “master of horses,” who possesses her senses (4:153-154)—Hays is no doubt commenting on the utter inability of Emma’s two suitors to master and fulfill her desires.

Typically, discussions of the propriety of women’s education appeared in epistolary conduct books addressed to female, not male, relatives as in Hester Chapone’s *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind Addressed to a Lady* (1773) for her niece, John Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters* (1774), The Marquis of Halifax’s *The Lady’s New-year’s Gift; or, Advice to a Daughter* (1688), and Lady Sarah Pennington’s *An Unfortunate Mother’s Advice to her Absent Daughters; In a Letter to Miss Pennington* (1761).

An alternate source for this unnamed uncle may be Henry Fuseli, for whom, according to Godwin, Wollstonecraft reportedly “conceived a personal and ardent affection” (*Memoirs of Emma Courtney* 234). Some scholarly attention has been paid to
the presence of Godwin in Hays’s and Wollstonecraft’s novels, but the matter certainly
deserves a more extensive treatment than can be attempted in these pages.

22 Private madhouses should not be conflated with lunatic or insane asylums, not
even the notoriously unsanitary (in all senses of the word) Bethlehem Royal Hospital in
London, more popularly known as Bedlam. Stone explains that most private madhouses
were “squalid private prisons which, as long as the fees were paid, would accept anyone
and keep them indefinitely behind bars, regardless of their mental condition or the
motives of the person who ordered their confinement” (Road to Divorce 167).

23 While Darnford’s behavior at times more closely reflects Godwin’s presence in
Wollstonecraft’s life, his scheduled abandonment of Maria echoes the behavior of Gilbert
Imlay, who deserted Wollstonecraft and their child for another woman. Wollstonecraft
twice attempted suicide in response to Imlay’s refusals to return to her, and those
circumstances are also recast in the plans for the completion of the novel (146-147).

24 Blackstone defines property in much the same way:

The objects of dominion or property are things, as contra-distinguished
from persons. Things are by the law of England distributed into two kinds:
things real, and things personal. Things real are such as are permanent,
fixed, and immovable, which cannot be carried out of their place, as lands
and tenements; things personal are goods, money, and all other movables,
which may attend the owner’s person wherever he thinks proper to go.

(2: 2)

The use of the pronoun “he” is deliberate, since practically, if not absolutely, men had
sole control of property throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The custom
of primogeniture transferred property from fathers to sons, not daughters, and many women could not inherit property unless they were the only surviving child of a marriage. Further, most women were married before age twenty-one, the age of majority, and their titles to property would be immediately transferred from paternal to marital trust—in other words, from one man’s control into another’s. While women could legally possess property, they would have to outlive their childless brothers and remain spinsters or outlive their husbands and their own progeny in order to claim their property rights.

25 A popular conjecture is that the “lovely maniac” is based on Wollstonecraft’s sister, Eliza, who suffered from what Flexner calls “an acute postpartum breakdown” that included moments of frenzied delirium (40).

26 The early debates over who wrote which portions of Practical Education devalued Maria’s contribution to literature. The “insidious legend,” as Butler refers to it, of his “tamper[ing]” with all of the literary productions of his daughter written during his lifetime (3) denied Maria her place in the literary canon. It is time that we enlightened scholars of the post-feminist era allow Maria to have a brain and talent of her own, as Butler suggests. In this dissertation, then, Maria is given credit for those texts that list her as an author. Edgeworth’s first novel, Castle Rackrent (1800), was published anonymously, and thus did not constitute a threat to her reputation as a pedagogue.

27 I refer to this character as Virginia St. Pierre only when speaking of her in her unnatural state, i.e., when she is in the custody of Clarence Hervey and before the return of her father, Mr. Hartley.

28 The use of the feminine pronoun here is not meant to imply that Edgeworth wrote exclusively for women, nor that I believe that only women read the text.
The full title is Practical Education; by Maria Edgeworth, Author of Letters for Literary Ladies and The Parent’s Assistant, and by Richard Lovell Edgeworth, F.R.S. and M.R.I.A. The title page also seems to be constructed in order to attract buyers who were already familiar with Maria’s earlier works. It is difficult to reckon the prominent position of Maria’s name and credentials on the title page of such an authoritative text in relation to both the public’s supposed incredulity concerning the intellectual prowess of women authors and to Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s reputed egotism. Continued efforts to reexamine the literary canon may further dispel many inaccurate assessments about women writers that are extrapolated from a culturally biased literary tradition. For more information on the division of labor on Practical Education, see its preface (ix-x), where credit is given where it is due.

In the six volumes of Tales of Fashionable Life (1809-1812), Edgeworth returned to the short story format for her older readers.

The Edgeworths speak of an “unbroken course of experience, which is necessary for the success of a regular plan of education,” like that presented in Practical Education (137).

Teresa Michals makes a similar claim in “Commerce and Character in Maria Edgeworth,” where she focuses on “family’s corporate personality” in Belinda, which is “underwritten by the market value of its members’ good character” (1-2). I am indebted to Michals for leading me to The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-century England, and for providing a basis for further investigation of commercial metaphors in Edgeworth’s works.
Eris crashes the Olympian wedding of Peleus and Thetis, where she adds to the feast a golden apple inscribed, “For the most beautiful.” Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite all reached for the apple and decide that the most beautiful man on earth should settle their individual claims to it. In exchange for his vote, Hera promises Paris “royal power,” Athena promises him victory in warfare, and Aphrodite promises him the love of the most beautiful woman on earth, Helen, the wife the Menelaus (Morford and Lenardon 326-327). Eris destroys several marriages and households by her single disruptive act: Helen elopes with Paris, enraging Menelaus, whose brother Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphegenia for good sailing weather to launch their assault of Troy; Clytemnestra revenges the death of her daughter Iphegenia by hacking Agamemnon to death upon his return from the Trojan War in order to secure the throne for her wartime lover, Aegisthus; and Odysseus returns home to find his house filled with suitors for his supposed widow.

In his preface to Émile, Rousseau cautions readers not to expect his pedagogy to succeed in every case in the real world, since the exact conditions in the book cannot be duplicated. He says,

It is enough for me that, wherever men are born into the world, my suggestions with regard to them may be carried out, and when you have made them what I would have made them be, you have done what is best for them and for other people. If I fail to fulfill this promise, no doubt I am to blame; but if I fulfill my promise, it is your own fault if you ask more of me, for I have promised you nothing more. (3)

Further, in his introduction to the translated text, J. M. Dent argues that Rousseau saw Émile not as pedagogy but as “primarily as a work of moral philosophy,” citing
Rousseau’s reply to an undisclosed correspondent, where he says, “You are quite right to say that it is impossible to form an Émile, but I cannot believe that you take the book which bears this name for a true treatise on education” (xxi).

35 Butler notes that Angelina of Edgeworth’s *Moral Tales* “is supposed to have modeled herself on such romantic heroines as Mary Hays’s Emma Courtney” (164n.), and that Edgeworth was familiar with Elizabeth Hamilton’s *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800), in which Hamilton “used the character of Bridgetina to satirize philosophical novels of the school of Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft” (199).

36 In Rousseau’s *Émile*, both the title character and Sophy are “[b]rought up . . . by Nature” (446). Émile is purposefully removed from his home to the country by his tutor, Jean Jacques; Sophy’s parents are forced by bankruptcy to leave the city for the country, where they could live more cheaply. Thus both avoid the corruptive influences of Paris, and Rousseau characterizes them as being in their natural state, which for him is the best of human conditions.

37 Leslie P. Pierce deserves accolades for correcting mistaken notions of the Ottoman Sultanate, which continue to frustrate efforts to bridge the philosophical gaps between western and middle-eastern societies. Pierce explains, “the term *harem* did not connote a space defined exclusively by sexuality. . . . A harem is by definition a sanctuary or a sacred precinct,” and the term more accurately describes “the imperial residence” of the sultan (4-5). The unbroken sanctity of such private places resulted in misconceptions of its inhabitants and their occupations. The valide sultan, or sultan’s mother, was the highest ranking woman in a *harem*, and she was responsible for its daily operations, for educating and protecting her son, and for selecting and training his wives
and concubines. She delegated her duties among her female *ustas*, or mistresses, who also acted as personal servants both for herself and for the sultan (132-136). Pierce cites Giovanni Maria “Angiolello, a page in the palace during the reign of Mehmed II (1444-1446),” who “described the training of the women in the sultan’s *harem*: [T]he most senior [women] . . . teach the new and unrefined to speak and read and instruct them in the Muhammadan law, and also teach them to sew and embroider, and to play the harp and to sing, and instruct them in all their ceremonies and customs, to the degree that [these girls] have the inclination to learn” [Pierce’s brackets] (140-141). Pierce also quotes Paul Rycaut, an embassy secretary for Restoration England, who reports that the valide sultan hand-selected the “*Kadun Kahia*, or Mother of the Maids,” who taught her pupils “all the rules and orders of the court” (142). Wollstonecraft and her contemporaries erroneously condemn the female members of a *harem* for their misconstrued sensuality and supposed intellectual vacancy. In fact, many of these women were highly trained artisans and administrators, and a lucky few held substantial political power. The birth of a son under the “one mother-one son practice” of dynastic regeneration fulfilled the procreative duties of the sultan’s wives or concubines, whereby, more often than not, they were free to concentrate on raising their children for similar service to the sultanate (41-42). Thus, the female inhabitants of a *harem* were more deserving of high praise from Wollstonecraft, since they were active participants in both their private and public societies, albeit from the seclusion of the women’s quarters. Pierce also insists that the political, social, and sexual restrictions on the *harem’s* men, even the sultan himself, were just as strenuously enforced and secretive.
Dr. John Gregory, wrote the conduct book *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters* (1774), and Lord George Lyttelton, wrote the poem “Advice to a Lady” (1773), which is addressed to a woman named Belinda. The reference to Lyttelton’s poem in *Letters for Literary Ladies*, which I have shown to resonate throughout *Belinda*, suggests “Advice to a Lady” is a stronger candidate for Belinda’s namesake than Alexander Pope’s “The Rape of the Lock,” as literary tradition would have it.

Ferrier and Clavering had initially planned to write *Marriage* in tandem via post. After contributing the germ of the story, “the sudden transition of a high-bred English beauty, who thinks she can sacrifice all for love, to an uncomfortable solitary highland dwelling among tall red-haired sisters and grim-faced aunts” (*Memoir and Correspondence* 76), and what John Ferrier calls the “so depressingly conventional . . . History of Mrs. Douglas’” (48), Clavering quickly admitted that she lacked talent as a novelist but proved to be a capable editor, especially regarding matters of aristocratic deportment and conversation.

Ferrier’s grand-nephew, John Ferrier, relates an admittedly second-hand story of James Ferrier’s blessing of his daughter’s literary efforts. John says that James harbored “a great contempt for female authors, according to the fashion of his day” (45). When Susan read her manuscript of *Marriage* to her father while he was bedridden, James enjoyed the work so much that he “hardly gave her time to take her meals” and at the conclusion of the novel asked Susan to find another book by the same author. When she replied that there was none, James expressed regret and called it “the best book” she had ever read to him. When told that it was the work of a woman, James replied “Nonsense, no woman could ever write a book like that,” and when Susan produced the
While John offers no further comment, one infers that James admits his error regarding women authors and that Ferrier no longer wrote entirely secret.

Marion Lochhead suggests that Scottish linen and needlework had become somewhat of a national treasure in Ferrier’s era. “Literature . . . [and] linen,” Lochhead states, “were the supreme achievements of eighteenth-century Scotland” (10), and even “little ladies of long pedigree” were “to be adept in all manner of fancywork” (240). One can speculate that Ferrier’s admonition to leave such work to the poor was partially motivated by her desire to separate the classes, but it may also have been an attempt to bolster a burgeoning market for ready-made cloth and apparel. Women of the laboring classes could openly sell their wares on the market, while middle class women could not do so without forfeiting their respectability. Further, poor women could benefit more by selling their wares to women of the upper classes who no longer produced their own handiwork.

Ferrier also satirizes the similar reliance upon cookbooks like Dr. Redgill’s *Manuel des Amphitryons* (1808), which he studies like a gourmand’s Bible. Dr. Redgill assures Emily and Mary that his cookbook contains “more good sense and useful information” than that found in poetry and that unless a bride “gives her husband good dinners, he’ll care not twopence for her in a week’s time” (393). Like Fordyce’s sermons, cookbooks like *The Female Instructor; or, Young Woman’s Companion: Being a Guide to All the Accomplishments which Adorn the Female Character, Either as a Useful Member of Society, a Pleasing and Instructive Companion, or a Respectable Mother of a Family, with Many Pleasing Examples of Illustrious Females, to which are Added Useful*
Medicinal Receipts, and a Concise System of Cookery, with Other Valuable Information in the Different Branches of Domestic Economy (1811) were also often handed to young ladies for use as self-paced instruction manuals.

43 Béatrice Fontanel speaks of such devices as being initially “worn only by women with physical deformities” in the fifteenth century (27), but Lawrence Stone argues that, in the seventeenth century, “girls were encased in bodices and corsets reinforced with iron and whalebone to ensure that their bodies were molded to the prevailing adult fashion” (162). In either case, whether the Douglas women endured the “Giramphgwol collar” to correct perceived deformities or to be fashionable, their insistence upon its benefits to the female form indicates that they are anachronistic creatures in the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century setting. Regarding setting, internal evidence, like descriptions of clothing (49) and dates of letters (101), suggests that the action of the first volume occurs in the 1790s, and the novel ends in 1815 as Colonel Lennox returns from the Battle of Waterloo to claim his bride, Mary (445). Furthermore, Mary returns to her natural mother at age eighteen (183), and when Adelaide protests that even “the Prince” gave more balls than her husband allowed her to give or attend, Kirkpatrick’s notes identify this royal person as the “Prince Regent” (492), a title that George IV assumed in 1811. Adelaide is presumably nineteen when she uses this excuse to justify her elopement, and that would place the twins’ birth around 1792.

44 Marriage was published nearly a half-century before Francis Galton’s Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences (1869) appeared, and I am not suggesting that Ferrier was a pioneer in the “nature vs. nurture” debate. She
seems, however, to be convinced of an intellectually gifted individual’s capacity to direct his or her own destiny.

45 The Edgeworths co-authored *Practical Education* (1798), More composed *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), and Wakefield wrote *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798).

46 It is worth noting that this passage contains the only reference in the text to Juliana’s mother, to whom Juliana’s lack of character is partially attributed. While Ferrier evidently chose not to develop the stories of another generation of the Courtland family, this brief mention is in keeping with Ferrier’s general theme of maternal responsibility for child rearing and character formation.

47 To this list of ineptitudes, one could add that Juliana cannot dress herself (19), but reading this with a twenty-first-century eye would be somewhat unfair. Dressing the hair and body of a fine lady of the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries was no simple matter, and the wherewithal to fashion daily rearrangements of sleeves, kerchiefs, bows, ribbons, artificial flowers and hairpieces often required specialized expertise, as the poorly dressed Douglas sisters discover when their new corsets do not fit under their two-year-old gowns (49). Ferrier is probably concerned with showing the absurdity of a fine lady’s costume in the rustic Scottish Highlands rather than highlighting Juliana’s inability to select and put on her clothes.

48 For example, the Edgeworths caution mothers to be extremely careful of allowing outsiders to have free access to their daughters, beginning their chapter on “Female Accomplishments, Masters, and Governesses” in *Practical Education* with an anecdote of a French dancer who wants to become a governess for an English family.
When discouraged from doing so on the grounds that dancers had bad reputations in England, she shrugs off the difficulty by offering to change her name to avoid suspicion (519). Wakefield is particularly averse to French governesses as well (45-46).

49 Clavering, for instance, recognized the original of Lady McLaughlin (Grant 69), and Juliana’s menagerie may have been patterned upon Lady Charlotte’s “lap-dogs, monkeys, parrots, and cockatoos,” which required their own carriage and footman (Cullinan 87), and/or upon Clavering’s “dogs, and cats, and owls, and mawkins,” which Ferrier playfully suggests are “very seemly appendages to elderly gentlewomen” but not as “constant companions to beautiful young ladies” (Memoir and Correspondence 49).

50 Ferrier writes to Clavering about her meeting with John Curran, who was sixty years old at the time,

I am going to tell you that I’m deeply and desperately in love! And what makes my case particularly deplorable is that there’s not the least prospect of the dear man lending so much as a little finger to pull me out of the mire into which he has plunged me! Were I possessed of the same mean spirit of bartering as you, I’d have you to guess his degree; but you’d as [soon] {sic} bethink you of the great Cham of Tartary as the Right Honorable John Philpot Curran, Master of the Rolls, Ireland!! I wish I could give you any idea of his charms, but, alas! my pen does not, like Rousseau’s, “brûle sur le papier”; and none but a pen of fire could trace his character or record the charms of his conversation. Don’t set me down for mad, for I assure you I’m only bewitched, and perhaps time and absence may dissolve the magic spells. He had the cruelty to tell me he
liked me, and then he left me. Had my eyes been worth a button they’d
soon have settled the matter; but there’s the misery of being sent into the
world with such mussel shells!! I (a modest maiden) said nothing, and it
seems they were silent; and so we parted, never to meet again!! (*Memoir
and Correspondence* 63-64)

51 Incidentally, although Ferrier’s literary career is roughly contemporaneous with
the Romantic period, its authors seem to have made no significant impact upon *Marriage.*
Only Sir Walter Scott and George Gordon Lord Byron receive mentions, merely
providing grist for Mrs. Bluemits’s literary mill (414-425). However, the Romantic poets’
predecessors, Jean Jacques Rousseau and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe are vilified for
their literature’s role in Adelaide’s and Lord Lindore’s justification of their elopement
(432).

52 Earlier, I presented evidence of Rousseau’s own contention that *Émile* was not
meant to be a practical guide for instructing children.

53 The narrator informs us that the only available wet nurse refused to suckle both
of the twins, so Mary was raised by hand, meaning she was bottle fed with what Alicia
terms “improper food and loathsome drugs . . . bandied about from one person to
another” (119) until Alicia took charge of Mary.

54 Catharine Macaulay believes the Bible can become a source of “infidelity and
fanaticism” when improperly interpreted and that it is seldom “understood by the
unlearned” (92-93). She advises instructors to restrict children’s Bible studies to some of
the Psalms until they turn twenty-one, the age of legal maturity. Wakefield implicitly
warns against allowing girls to read the Bible itself, since only the “practical parts of
Instead, she recommends Sarah Kirby Trimmer’s Bible lessons (143), branded in 1783 for mass appeal as *Sacred History, Selected from the Scriptures; with Annotations and Reflections Particularly Calculated to Facilitate the Study of the Holy Scriptures in Schools and Families*. Hannah More, on the other hand, warns against relying solely on abridgments of any type at any age (162), and Charles Howard Ford reports that More and her sisters taught directly from the Bible in their Bristol school (7). The Edgeworths purposefully remain silent on religious instruction, claiming they “have no ambition to gain partisans, or to make proselytes,” nor to align themselves with the tenets of “any sect or any party” (vii-viii).

Cullinan states that Ferrier was personally acquainted with Mackenzie and very familiar with his *A Man of Feeling* (20-21). Harley, the Man of Feeling, is repeatedly and extremely overwhelmed by every instance of human suffering he witnesses, to which he responds with little more than tears. Ferrier writes somewhat disparagingly of *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife* (1808), calling its hero, Charles, “insupportable” (*Memoir and Correspondence* 65). The reference to reading one’s Bible probably refers to a passage from *Cœlebs in Search of a Wife*, in which Charles surprises Lucilla in her ministrations to a poor, ailing woman. Kneeling at the sick woman’s bedside, Lucilla reads aloud from the Bible. Upon being discovered by Charles, Lucilla attempts to “conceal the Bible, by drawing her hat over it,” an act which one supposes indicates her extreme Christian humility (215-216). Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace describes Hannah More’s school, where children were taught to read the Bible but were not taught to write, as an effort less concerned with educating the lower classes and more concerned with evangelizing her students and their parents (64).
There is no evidence to suggest that Ferrier read *Memoirs of Emma Courtney,* but she praises Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801) in a letter to Clavering (*Memoir and Correspondence* 65).

While in public it was customary for married couples to refer to each other by their titles and mutual surname, there is little reason for Dombey to refer to his wife as Mrs. Dombey in the privacy of their (or her) own bedroom. The presence of the nurse, Mrs. Blockitt, may account for Dombey’s formality and Dickens may have intended the reader to see some comedy in Dombey’s demeanor. However, the narrator tells us that Dombey, despite being inspired by the “softening influence” of proclaiming the reconstitution of the family firm, adds “with hesitation” “a term of endearment to Mrs. Dombey’s name . . . being a man but little used” to displaying affection. The most affectionate he can muster for his wife is the appellation “Mrs. Dombey, my—my dear,” and that little elicits her “flush of faint surprise” (49-50). Dickens’s works, perhaps more so than in any of his contemporaries, bear close reading, since seemingly insignificant details often expose nuances of character that illustrate his chosen theme.

Margaret Wiley offers another explanation, arguing that the Toodle Family tableau represents Dickens foray into the Victorian debate over whether women should nurse their own children or employ wet nurses, whereby he attempts “to conceal the anxiety he felt regarding the ethically reprehensible position he was placed in by his wife’s inability to nurse their children” (223).

Much can also be said about Dickens’s presentation of Rob Toodle’s dehumanized schooling and Paul III’s proto-Gradgrindian education, both initiated by Dombey. As a student of the “Charitable Grinders” school Young Rob loses his natural
identity, like his mother, and becomes a calculable entity: teachers refer to him as “number one hundred and forty-seven” and he wears the school’s uniform (117). Paul is slightly better off at Dr. Blimber’s school, “a great hot-house, in which there was a forcing apparatus incessantly at work” wherein “there is nothing but learning going on from morning to night” (206). The school receives the Dombey’s approval for being “very expensive,” which Dombey considers to be “one of its leading merits” (204).

The concept of “disinterestedness” was not a purely Victorian invention, though the frequency of its appearance in the Victorian novel seems to coincide with the perceived increase of the “mercenary marriages” that feature prominently in nineteenth-century courtship and marriage literature. Like the one Edith Granger enters into with Dombey, a mercenary marriage is based on financial considerations. The term can be used to describe someone who is motivated to perform any service or action without expecting a monetary, social, or personal reward. Most often the term is associated with financial gain, or “interest.”

Dickens’s novels often present ideals that were not realized in his own life, and critics often struggle with his seeming hypocrisy. For example, Michael Slater reports that Dickens’s daughters, Kate and Mary, received an “almost ostentatiously conventional upper-middle-class ‘education,’” including French, music, and drawing lessons followed by “‘polishing’ in Paris” (181). However, Kate also attended Bedford College, where she began her career as an artist.

Ellis published *The Education of the Heart: Woman’s Best Work* in 1869.

The Judeo-Christian mythos of Lilith, supposedly the first wife of Adam, contains another association between women’s unbound hair and profligacy. In *The Book
of Lilith, Barbara Black Koltuv explains, “Brides of Christ, Vestal Virgins, and Orthodox Jewish Brides have been made to sacrifice their long seductive and ensnaring hair. Woman’s hair has been cut and bound and covered in an effort to separate her from this goddess-given sexually seductive power of Lilith’s” (59). Lilith figures in John Keats’s “Lamia” (1819) and “La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad” (1820), and in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s painting Lady Lilith (1863-1873) and a poem bearing the same title, which her later republished under the title “Body’s Beauty” (1870).

64 According to William Blackstone’s 1832 edition of Commentaries on the Laws of England, twelve was the legal age of mental competence and sexual consent (164). No doubt for decency’s sake, Dickens does not give exact details of Alice’s career as a prostitute, but he places much emphasis on the fact that Alice is a “girl” when she is deported, placing her age at trial somewhere below twenty-one (the age of maturity). When she returns from transportation, Alice reports that she is “some thirty years of age” (563). She believes she has been out of England for “Ten or a dozen years,” but she cannot be certain since she “had no almanack” to consult while serving her sentence (565). This seems to place her interactions with Carker somewhere during her late teens. Her prostitution more than likely began much earlier.

65 The penal code defined any kind of theft as a punishable “offense against property” (Mayhew 30), but prostitution, as morally reprehensible as it was considered to be at the time, did not fall under the penal code in the Victorian era. As Trevor Fisher asserts, “Acts were passed in 1824, 1839, and 1849 to tighten the legal code, but none infringed the right of women to sell their bodies, or their clients to buy. . . . This was the high season of laissez-faire economics, and neither government nor magistrates were
prepared to restrict the market in sexual favors” (x). Prostitutes were usually arrested for being “disorderly,” a vague offense that could include such conduct as “drunkenness . . . assaulting the police . . . or an offense of a felonious nature” (Hemyng 263) and considered to be a minor misdemeanor subject to a fine or local incarceration. Depending on the amount of funds involved, robbery, on the other hand, could result in transportation, second only to the death penalty in severity. Under the social code, however, the loss of a woman’s reputation, real or imagined, was considered to be a virtually capital offense.

66 Forster recognizes Edith’s miseducation forms her tragic flaw, but he does not see her as being a commodity for male consumption. Instead, he views her as a fitting mate for Dombey. Both Edith and Dombey, for Forster, are hubristic figures in the classical sense and are doomed to experience tragic consequences to their prideful rejection of domestic virtues. Forster overlooks that Dombey eventually experiences spiritual redemption, while Edith remains in exile, unreclaimed.

67 Bagstock’s use of hunting terminology indicates the more harmful position men have in the marriage market: Mrs. Skewton seeks to hide behind nature; Bagstock and his like seek to destroy it.

68 Michael Steig and Jane R. Cohen attest to Dickens’s direct involvement in the illustrations for his novels, which in his relationship with Browne was especially collaborative. Cohen reports that Dickens would, when possible, visit Browne in order to “indicate what passages should be illustrated, and discuss the points to be stressed” (64). Cohen also asserts that Dickens was “unvarying in his insistence that he approve the artist’s preliminary sketches” (64), many of which often underwent revision if they were
inconsistent with Dickens’s vision. *Dombey and Son* was written, and for the most part published, while Dickens and his family toured parts of Europe, and although he could not visit Browne as frequently as he had done before, Dickens nevertheless carried on his usual supervision of the illustrations via correspondence with Browne and Forster. An example of Dickens’s insistence on getting the illustrations right concerns the lengthy discussions about Dombey’s image. Forster describes the difficult nature of the correspondence, complete with pages full of Browne’s sample sketches and Dickens’s directions to seek out a specific man for a model. Even when he was out of the country, then, Dickens would not willingly leave his illustrator with the final word on any image.

69 According to Paul Atterbury, the 1840s witnessed the first boom in railway expansion projects in British history, “with promoters planning lines the length and breadth of Britain,” including by 1845 “2441 miles of railway” (par. 5). Atterbury attributes the boom partially to Prime Minister William Gladstone’s legislation that standardized train travel and made it affordable for the entire British public (par. 6). The railroads, of course, quickened the pace and ease of transporting goods and people across the nation, and telegraph lines soon ran alongside the rail lines, all of which contributed to improving the nation’s economy, productivity, and standards of living.

70 Edith’s reference to a “woman with a halter round her neck” refers to the rural practice of “wife-sale,” an effectual, if illegal, form of divorce among the lower classes. Lawrence Stone describes the practice in *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*: “This procedure was based closely on that of the sale of cattle. It took place frequently in a cattle-market like Smithfield and was accompanied by the use of a symbolic halter, by which the wife was led to market by the seller, and led away again by
the buyer” (40). Stone cites “the last recorded case [as] being in 1887” (41). Dickens may have witnessed or at least heard of such occurrences. The practice was so widespread that Thomas Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge* opens with a wife-sale.

Again, Dickens presages similar scenes in Thomas Hardy’s works. *Jude the Obscure* contains a similar comparison. Upon Sue Bridehead’s second marriage to Richard Phillotson, the widow Edlin declares, “Weddings be funerals ‘a b’lieve nowadays” (314).

Similar subject searches in Google likewise reveal exponentially increasing numbers of hits, leading one to literary clubs and societies, scholarly web sites for students and professionals, “fanzines,” audio and video recordings, and web sites that hawk books, travelogues, vacation packages, memorabilia, and Brontë-branded commodities, like the biscuits sold in the environs of Haworth Parsonage Museum that Lucasta Miller discovered while researching *The Brontë Myth* (2004).

The deaths of her sisters later necessitated Charlotte’s submission to duty.

The unidentified author does not in fact review Lewis’s conduct book, opting instead to expound upon his or her own opinions on the topic. *Woman’s Mission* itself need not concern us here, although I will delve more deeply into its role in the Woman Question in my section on Anthony Trollope’s Phineas novels. No evidence exists that Brontë read it, even among the many references to the trunkloads of books sent to her by her publishers, William S. and George Williams. Brontë’s letters often contain critiques of her reading, and the fact that only the review of *Woman’s Mission* appears in Brontë’s correspondence is telling, although it is possible that references to the book itself have disappeared.
Incidentally, Brontë admits to having made it only halfway through *In Memoriam*, explaining, “It is beautiful; it is mournful; it is monotonous” (*Letters of Charlotte Brontë* 457).

In her endnotes to Gaskell’s *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Elisabeth Jay provides only the bracketed surname “Adams” towards identifying the reviewer (485, n. 11).

*The Etiquette of Courtship and Matrimony: A Complete Guide to the Forms of a Wedding* (1852) describes the “recent fashionable wedding” mode of newly married couples who “do not attend the [traditional] wedding breakfast,” opting instead for “slight refreshment in a private apartment” away from their guests (80).

*The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “brownie” as “A benevolent spirit or goblin, of shaggy appearance, supposed to haunt old houses, *esp.* farmhouses, in Scotland, and sometimes to perform useful household work while the family were asleep” (def. 1).

We must bear in mind that the traditional English hunting jacket is often referred to as one’s “pink” (*OED* def. A6a.), so M. Paul’s exaggeration may not be as egregious as we might think.

“La vie d’une femme” fits Aaron Greene’s description of Biedermeier “art and architecture” as being “centered on the family and private life” (par. 1).

In addition to working for the British Postal Service for 33 years, Trollope produced forty-seven novels, nearly the same number of short stories, sixteen works of non-fiction, several plays, and numerous articles and reviews for several periodicals, all written between 1847 and 1882 when he died.
This system was frequently denounced for the undue influence headmasters could potentially exercise over their beholden pupils. Characters and their circumstances in Charles Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-1865) are in part drawn from such concerns. Charlie Hexam berates his sister Lizzie for refusing the attentions of schoolmaster Bradley Headstone, to whom Charlie is apprenticed. In *Jude the Obscure* (1896), Thomas Hardy likewise voices apprehension of the pupil-teacher system, especially when men hold direct supervisory power over women’s career paths. Despite her violent aversion to Richard Phillotson, Sue Bridehead accepts his proposal of marriage, bartering herself in exchange for his securing her entry into a women’s teacher-training school and then making her his assistant-teacher upon their marriage, whereupon she will complete her training as his pupil (186). Phillotson thus gains control over Sue’s professional and personal life. I will return to this subject in the next chapter.

My 16 September 2006 search in WorldCat showed seventeen London editions of *Woman’s Mission*, the latest of which was republished five times by J. W. Bradley of Philadelphia as late as 1860; Ellis’s *Women of England* was republished as late as 1893, apparently to coincide with the release of *The Home Life and Letters of Mrs. Ellis*, a biography compiled by her nieces.

By “upper classes,” Sewell refers to the highest levels of what we now call the middle classes. Sewell’s text is especially singular not only for her stridently evangelical tone but also for her direct appeal to fathers, not mothers, to oversee their daughters’ learning. Sewell tells fathers to prepare for the possibility that their daughters may not marry by educating them in such a manner that they can become teachers without sinking to the dependent status of a governess (409). Certainly, this is not advice one would give
to an aristocrat. Later, Sewell apparently got over her aversion to girls’ schools. June Purvis reports that Sewell, along with “her sisters Ellen and Emma, opened a small boarding school in 1886” on the Isle of Wight (72). Sewell probably thought it prudent to reform the boarding school from within.

In order to counter claims that Trollope is “non-symbolic,” an accusation which James R. Kincaid indicates has been made (9), I had hoped to cover the horse and hunting imagery that Trollope employs throughout the Phineas novels. Much as similar scenes featuring horsemanship function in Hays’s Memoirs of Emma Courtney to point out Augustus Harley’s and Montague’s mismanagement of forces of nature, the many hunting scenes in the Phineas novels indicate that the way a man handles his horse is analogous to the manner in which he handles his potential bride. During a fox hunt in Phineas Finn, for example, after relating Violet’s rejection of his third marriage proposal to her and being told he mishandled her, Chiltern is repeatedly warned to give his horse its own lead and refuses to listen to reason. Chiltern forces the horse to leap a brook at a point of where the horse prefers another route. The horse falls, traps Chiltern against the bank, and breaks its own bones as well as a few of its rider’s. Chiltern eventually recovers; the horse is shot (213-225). Much can be made of the symbolism in this passage, and in several similar instances in Phineas Redux.

There is a Darwinian aspect to Trollope’s presentation of the lives of these women that would undoubtedly reward further investigation: those who adapt prove to be fittest for survival.

Morse also provides a concise summary of Trollope scholarship before the publication of her book in 1987. There is no need to replicate it here.
Both works were written prior to Bodichon’s marriage, when she published under her maiden name Barbara Leigh Smith, but in order to prevent confusion and because it most often appears in bibliographic references to her, I will refer to her by her married name. This usage is in no way to be interpreted as a feminist betrayal on my part.

Because Dickens and Trollope were very near contemporaries, were members of The Garrick Club, and shared many acquaintances (e.g., John Forster, William Makepeace Thackeray, Edward George Bulwer Lytton) and causes (e.g., international copyright, the Royal Literary Fund), I follow the scholarly tradition of comparing their works.

Incidentally, Bodichon quotes Trollope’s view of universal male suffrage in her Reasons for the Enfranchisement of Women, the use of which suggests that further inquiries into the interconnectedness of their works is necessary. She says,

Mr. Anthony Trollope, speaking in reference to restrictions on voting in some departments in the Civil Service, says: ‘A clerk in the Customhouse, over whom no political ascendancy from his official superior could by any chance be used, is debarred from voting. I once urged a Cabinet minister that this was a stigma on the service, and though he was a Whig, he laughed at me. He could not conceive that men would care about voting. But men do care; and those who do not, ought to be made to care.’ The case is very similar as regards women. Many people, besides Cabinet Ministers, are unable to conceive that women can care about voting. That some women do care has been proved by the Petition presented to
Parliament last session. I shall try to show why some care—and why those who do not ought to be made to care. (par. 2).

91 Lawrence Stone credits Bodichon for organizing “a group of impeccably respectable upper-middle-class women” to petition Parliament to consider the bill. The petition was presented in 1856 but full rights for married women were not legally backed until 1882 (373).

92 One might substitute the term “properties” for “proprieties” to get nearer the truth of Violet’s situation.

93 Wollstonecraft began *Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman* in 1796 but did not finish the novel in her lifetime. It was posthumously published in 1798 by William Godwin. *Jude the Obscure* was initially serialized by *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* beginning in December 1894. Hardy republished the novel in 1895 as a single volume, but the book bore a copyright date of 1896.

94 Although I strongly suspect that Millicent Garrett Fawcett wrote this article, my efforts to track down the identity of this anonymous author have been unsuccessful.

95 Specifically, those texts are Astell, Mary, *Some Reflections upon Marriage, with Additions* (1730); Hays, Mary, *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of the Women* (1798); Thompson, William, *Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions Of the Other Half, Men, to Restrain Them in Political and Thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery* (1825); Dickens, Charles, *Dombey and Son* (1846-1848); Norton, Caroline, *English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1854); and Bodichon, Barbara Leigh Smith, *A Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women; Together with a Few Observations Thereon* (1854).
96 Fawcett’s letters have yet to be collected and published. Her share of the correspondence with Hardy is footnoted in *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, for which I am indebted to its editors, Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate.

97 Elizabeth Robins Pennell, a freelance writer, and her husband Joseph Pennell, sketch artist and magazine illustrator, were acquainted with Thomas Hardy. Three years after their first collaboration on an article in *Century Magazine* in 1881 (*Life and Letters of Joseph Pennell* 1: 48), Elizabeth and Joseph were married immediately before embarking for London, where they took up residence and where Joseph practiced his craft while Elizabeth became an art critic (1: 115). The Pennells quickly befriended many of the most unconventional personages in the London art world, including Ford Madox Brown, Mr. and Mrs. William Michael Rossetti, and William Sharp, members of “the perishing flock of Pre-Raphaelites” (1: 118), and James McNeill Whistler, whom Joseph considered “his master” (1: 122). Joseph also renewed his acquaintance with Edmund Gosse, through whom the couple met Hardy (1: 155), Gosse’s “close friend” (Turner 66). Joseph and Hardy shared an interest in cycling, and in 1904, after reading Joseph’s article “In the Alps on a Motor Cycle,” Hardy hosted the Pennells in his Dorchester drawing room (*Life and Letters of Joseph Pennell* 1: 340). After Whistler’s death in 1903, Joseph dedicated himself to preparing an international memorial exhibit of Whistler’s works and commissioned Rodin to create a memorial statue of the artist, tasks that involved “endless letter-writing and endless talk,” in which he solicited cash donations and “facts” for a biography that was co-authored by the Pennells and published in 1908 (2: 37-46). Hardy replied favorably to one such solicitation in a 15 Jan 1907 note (*Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy* 3: 244).
At least one American edition from 1833 is available via Google Book Search. This book is undoubtedly a piracy, thus its contents are not entirely reliable. In fact, I believe this edition’s biographical sketch is inaccurately attributed to Godwin, particularly since it contains no reference to Frances Imlay and implies that the younger Mary’s earliest form of existence began well within the bonds of wedlock. Such unauthorized American editions of British works were widely available, since in 1790 the United States Congress passed its first public act on copyright, expressly sanctioning the “importation, vending, reprinting, and publishing in the states of any book written or published abroad by any person not being a citizen,” while granting copyright only to those authors “being citizens of these United States, or residents therein” (Nowell-Smith 18-19). Under this law, many American publishers of books, magazines, journals, and keepsakes merely “re-published” foreign works, which were in high demand. This practice spawned decades of continual vituperation between American publishers and British writers. Both Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope were unsuccessful in their attempts to correct the situation.

William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765) describes the primacy of precedent in British custom and law as follows:

For it is an established rule to abide by former precedents, where the same points come again in litigation; as well to keep the scale of justice even and steady, and not liable to waver with every new judge’s opinion; as also because the law in that case being solemnly declared and determined, what before was uncertain, and perhaps indifferent, is now become a permanent rule, which it is not in the breast of any subsequent judge to alter or vary from, according to his private sentiments: he being sworn to determine, not according to his own private judgment, but according to the known laws and customs of the land; not delegated to pronounce a new law, but to maintain and expound the old one. Yet this rule admits of exception, where the former determination is most evidently contrary to reason; much more if it be dearly contrary to the divine law. But even in such cases the subsequent judges do not pretend to make a new law, but to vindicate [hence Wollstonecraft’s title, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*] the old one from misrepresentation. For if it be found that the former decision is manifestly absurd or unjust, it is declared, not that such a sentence was bad law, but that it was not law; that is, that it is not the established custom of the realm, as has been erroneously determined.

(“Introduction,” Section III)

The footnote in the critical edition defines “Venus Urania” simply as “intellectual as opposed to physical love” (134, n.).
For example, in Mary Hays’s *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, Emma’s first love, Augustus Harley, dies as a result of injuries incurred after falling off a horse. Also, her husband, Montague, seduces and impregnates their maid, aborts the unborn child, and, unable to bear his sins, commits suicide, partially due to Emma’s inability to give up her first love. In the extant portion of Wollstonecraft’s *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*, Maria’s husband George Venables lives quite well after consigning her to the madhouse: Wollstonecraft’s outline for the unfinished portion indicates that Maria attempts suicide after her lover Henry Darnford abandons her. In Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, before Lady Delacour recovers her senses and redirects her love and attention to her husband, Lord Delacour entertains himself with drink and men’s company. In Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage*, it would be difficult to argue that Henry Douglas’s death in India was a direct consequence of Juliana’s refusal to accompany him there, where he eventually succumbs to disease. In Charles Dickens’s *Dombey and Son*, Paul Dombey, Jr. is ruined by Carker’s embezzlement, not by Edith’s departure. Finally, in Anthony Trollope’s *Phineas Redux*, Lady Laura Standish is only partially responsible for the death of Robert Kennedy, who allows his insistence upon his religious and legal rights to disorder his mind and body.

Established in 1811, the National School System was the result of an overhaul of the Church of England’s charity schools by the National Society, two of whose three founders, Joshua Watson and Henry Norris, were also members of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (*Enterprise in Education* 21). The name of the society and the schools are misnomers of sorts, since each was operated and managed by private individuals (9) and was “established entirely under local control” (10). A uniform plan for the National Schools appeared in 1815, but its emphasis was more on the edifices in
which learning should occur and not on curricular development (39). Likewise, we must not conflate Wollstonecraft’s proposed schemes under the same title with the National School System because each local parish devised its own curriculum, the content of which varied widely and, most importantly, was ordinarily opposed to sexual equality. Thus, the Privy Council was tasked with visiting each of the schools and with proposing regulations to standardize them, one result of which was the formalization of pupil-teacher system.

come by, especially those not published by government agencies or Republican-based private entities.

105 In truth, Locke’s concept did not originate, *in toto*, with him, either. He merely revived “that ancient, yet self-renewing tradition across the centuries from its home in classical Greece” (Axtell 58).


107 The same probably can be said for depictions of men who transgress our culture’s predominant gender codes, but such is outside the scope of my current subject.

108 In *Manliness* (2006), Harvey C. Mansfield claims that feminists have all but attained the goal of a gender neutral society. He asserts,

A gender-neutral language implies a gender-neutral society, marking a pervasive change in the way we live our lives. Our society has adopted, quite without realizing the magnitude of the change, a practice of equality between the sexes that has never been known before in all human history. The principle of equality, born in modern times, is several centuries old, but as its application to the sexes is very new, we can see that even
democratic peoples were long content to ignore very obvious inequality between the sexes. That inconsistency is no longer accepted. Much more has occurred, and is yet under way, than a mere adjustment of law to ensure equal access of women to jobs. Some women want a law of affirmative action to give them an advantage in competitive situations from which they have been so long excluded, and for which they may not be prepared. But that adjustment—not accepted by all women—is considered temporary and transitional even by its advocates. New attitudes are recommended, new behavior is required, if only to sustain such a law and make it work. The long-term goal, however far in the future, is gender neutrality. (1)

Thus, gender equity lacks only ratification to formalize what has already become a social reality. I truly regret that I have not the time to debate this claim myself in these pages.

109 Perhaps Stan Lee and the other creators of *The X-Men* deliberately chose the name of their evil shape-shifter Mystique as a critique of Friedan’s philosophy.

110 In “The Influx of Women into Legal Professions: An Economic Analysis” (2002), Joe G. Baker says,

The year 2001 was a watershed year in legal education. For the first time, female law school entrants outnumbered men. This event is the culmination of a trend over the last half-century which saw the legal profession experience rapid increases in the number and percent of women receiving law degrees. (14)