

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: A STRAINING IN THE TEXT: WOMEN
WRITERS AND THE DECONSTRUCTION
OF THE SENTIMENTAL PLOT 1845-
1900

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In the nineteenth century, most sentimental marriage-plot novels by women include a female bildungsroman that terminates with the heroines containment in marriage. The tension between this bildungsroman and the expectations of the marriage-plot novel are examined as a deconstructive gap through which women interrogated the cultural and social realities of their lives under cover of the socially accepted form of the marriage-plot novel. A discussion of the historical realities of women's lives is presented and an embedded interrogation of this reality in the novels is exposed. This examination is Anglo-American in nature including

studies of Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Gaskell, Louisa May Alcott and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. At the heart of this deconstructive gap is the experimentation with female relationships, relationships that progressively emerge as the focus of these novels and the decentering force of the marriage-plot. Specifically, female mentoring relationships, which educate the heroine in the ways of the marriage market and, by implication, in the ways of survival in patriarchy, are the source of experimentation. In addition, the psycho-social underpinnings of female development are explored to facilitate an understanding of the nature of these relationships. All of the authors considered in this study have a self-consciousness about their participation in the sentimental tradition and an irony about the expectations the form contains and the reality that their characters experience. Bronte's Shirley, Gaskell's Wives and Daughters, Alcott's Little Women and Work: A Story of Experience, and Phelps's Silent Partner demonstrate the power of female relationships to facilitate private survival in a world marked by separate spheres and limited opportunity. A recurring theme in all these novels is the idleness imposed on middle-class women and the heroine's desire for

meaningful work. In a chronological progression, the resolution in marriage becomes increasingly less tolerable and/or satisfying, a progression that culminates in the deconstruction of the marriage closure in alternative communities of women (post-marriage) or single alternatives.

A STRAINING IN THE TEXT: WOMEN WRITERS AND
THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE SENTIMENTAL
PLOT 1845 - 1900

by

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my grandmother
Mildred Francis Gray

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CHAPTER ONE

Culture and the Form of Fiction

The second half of the nineteenth century was a time of dramatic literary productivity and political activity in England and America. The novel, having become increasingly popular since its beginnings in the early eighteenth-century, emerged as the dominant and most popular form of literature, and women writers the dominant producers of this literary form. Feminist literary critics have returned to this time period and reclaimed many women's texts from years of obscurity, while feminist historians have rewritten the historical accounts to include the details of the woman's movement, the cult of domesticity and the cultural implications of both. Adding to our understanding of the content and context of this literature is the work of feminist psychologists who have challenged Freudian definitions of development and posited alternative criteria for women's ways of knowing and interacting. What remain rich areas for exploration in the context of literary criticism are

"the ways in which women used the dominant ideas to obtain their own ends and the harsh fact that in order to make their ideas known women had to articulate them in a form which was acceptable to men" (Delamont and Duffin 12).

The focus of this study is the predominant form of women's fiction in this period: the sentimental novel. The term "sentimental" has been used to describe a variety of literary traditions including sensational fiction, children's literature, regional literature and a wide range of didactic fiction which dramatized and reinforced codes of acceptable female behavior in the eighteenth and more prominently in the nineteenth century. Josephine Donovan has defined the American sentimental novel plot as one in which "an orphaned girl, who is disinherited and abused by a variety of suitors and/or guardians, finally recovers her father and her patrimony and/or marries, thus establishing her economic security, which is to say, thus achieving happiness, in this bourgeois vision" (Local 13). Jane Tompkins has expanded this definition to include a domestic ideology that suggested "the story of salvation through motherly love" and the elaboration of "a myth that gave women

the central position of power and authority in the culture" (125). Most commonly the term "sentimental" has been applied to those novels that conform to a linear sequence of events culminating in the heroine's marriage, a formula that Joseph Allen Boone, Rachel Blau DuPlessis and others have identified as the marriage-plot. Donovan's definition outlines a recurring scenario in British and American sentimental fiction: the path to marriage often includes a motherless woman facing the challenges of the marriage market, including developing those virtues or attributes that define her value in the cultural economy. These novels also delineate the power of "motherly love" in their portrayal of female mentors integral to the heroine's progress.

The tension between individual freedom and marital closure is often expressed through a parallel plot of female friendship/mentoring. As the heroine's development is crucial in her progress to marriage, these novels often contain a female bildung, the resolution of which adds to the difficulty of the marriage closure. As DuPlessis has argued:

This contradiction between love and quest in plots dealing with women as a narrated group . .

. has one main mode of resolution: an ending in which one part of that contradiction, usually quest or Bildung, is set aside or repressed, whether by marriage or by death. (3)

At hand to both facilitate and underscore the limitations of this ending is the heroine's female mentor.

The concept of mentoring is a common one if we have read a Dickens novel. We understand how, in Great Expectations, Pocket and Jaggers are to serve as models for Pip so that he can make the public transformation into a "gentleman." What has remained virtually unread is the female counterpart to this act. Female mentoring, rather than an act of public furtherance, is almost always an act of private survival. As Carolyn Heilbrun has described it:

Male friendships were not entirely, or even primarily, private; they resonate in the realms of power. . . . On the other hand, whatever beauty we may find in recorded affection between women, we must call their affectionate relationships, without scorn, societies of consolation . . . for what life might force them to endure. (100)

At the center of female endurance is the inevitable closure of female quest in marriage. How a woman, especially a middle-class woman, negotiated the marriage market was her most critical transformation from infantilized girlhood to "successful" womanhood. Women writers recognized that the heroine's development was dependent on the female mentors who guided her education in the ways of surviving the demands of nineteenth-century womanhood. But as writers explore these relationships, the tension between the development of the heroine as an individual and frequently as a member of a community of women and her enclosure in marriage become increasingly difficult to reconcile.

These multi-dimensional female relationships not only alter the fictional marriage-plot construct, but also reflect the cultural reality of women's lives. As Fredric Jameson has pointed out: "All cultural artifacts may be read as symbolic resolutions of real political and social contradictions" (80). Although closure, usually in marriage, was demanded by a male dominated publishing industry and a public appetite for circumscribed happy endings, women writers were experimenting within these boundaries, developing

complex female relationships and heroines whose quests create strainings against the inevitability of marriage, strainings that, by the end of the century, have effectively deconstructed the marriage-plot.

Because these novels adhered, at least superficially, to the marriage-plot conventions, they have historically been dismissed as formulaic productions which simply (only) encode cultural expectations. In attempts at reclamation, Tompkins and others have argued that the nature of the typicality and familiarity in these fictional patterns "rather than making them bankrupt or stale, are the basis of their effectiveness as integers in a social equation" (Tompkins xvi). But as Boone has pointed out, this has led to the appearance of this tradition having an "overarching unity and authority" (9) verified by the codification of its narrative structures and plots into repeating and contained structures. I would like to suggest, and I am not the first to do so, that the marriage-plot provided women authors the opportunity both to reflect cultural domestic ideology and to use this narrative formula as cover for interrogation of that ideology. For as Sue Ellen Case has suggested, "any liberation for women in

art would come from their freedom to create in any kind of formal context" (129).

A reevaluation of the marriage-plot will, in part, entail the same sort of "rereading" that Judith Fetterley asks of us in The Resisting Reader. Just as she chooses to examine familiar texts such as The Great Gatsby and A Farewell to Arms, I have chosen relatively familiar texts, by familiar authors (C. Bronte, Gaskell, Alcott and Phelps). The novels of Alcott and Gaskell are clearly well anchored in the sentimental marriage-plot tradition and, in both cases, these authors' reputations have been surrounded by the qualified evaluations so commonly assigned to sentimental novelists. Bronte's Shirley and Phelps's The Silent Partner are of particular interest because, despite clear evidence of the marriage-plot formula, they have escaped codification in the sentimental catalogue. As the subsequent chapters demonstrate, all these novels fit the marriage-plot formula, but they simultaneously demonstrate the strain against the required closure. One form of that straining emerges as a fictional development of multi-vocal narratives, multiple heroines facing the cultural expectations of marriage and, in dialogue, disrupting the centrality

of the romance plot. As Boone has pointed out:

What an examination of the codification of form in the marriage fiction reveals is a multiplicity of results: novelists creating highly sophisticated structures within the tradition, novelists blindly following its conventions or unconsciously promulgating its ethos, novelists using its paradigms as convenient frames on which to hang loosely connected episodes, novelists actively struggling against its thematic and formal structures without breaking loose of them.

(67)

The novels considered here confirm this multiplicity of challenges and demonstrate a literary tradition more complex than a unidirectional plot structure. What emerges in a study of Shirley, Wives and Daughters, Little Women, Work, and The Silent Partner--novels that span the second half of the nineteenth century--is a progressive deconstruction of narrative closure via complex networks of female mentoring relationships. As we open the deconstructive gaps of these texts and see the sentient quality of the sentimental, marriage-plot novel, we can continue to decode the complex social negotiations subtly and

exquisitely encoded in this fictional form.

The sentimental novel, as discussed here, is a product of a predominantly white, middle-class, Anglo-American tradition. Within the nineteenth-century historical and fictional context, there were many other parallel traditions and readers, specifically that of Afro-American and Colonial literatures. Although a study of the intersections or influence of these traditions upon each other would be valuable, it is not my purpose here.

The economic and social conditions of a middle-class, white woman's literary production directly influences the nature of her fiction. Mary Jacobus urges retention of the term "women's writing" so that these "crucial determinants" are not forgotten ("Question" 39). In the (re)discovery of the power of women's writing, critics like Nina Auerbach have argued that communities of women as represented in women's literature have "a subtle, unexpected power" and form an "evolving literary myth . . . in the novel that does allow women an independent life beyond the saga of courtship and the settlement of marriage" (Communities 11). However, when a novel does end in marriage, the critical inclination to dismiss it as

somehow "less" of an achievement than one which ends in a single woman's triumph or death has historically prevailed. It is important to note here that I am not interested in evaluating women's texts on the basis of their historicity or originality of construction. I am interested in the subtle negotiations within defined plot formulas, nuances that are perhaps facilitated by political change and the economy of the time, but nuances that, in the case of these texts, ultimately disrupt the economy of this form which was socially validated and encouraged by a male dominated publishing industry. As Deirdre David points out in her introduction to Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy, "it is essential that we see these writers as both saboteurs and collaborators with the hegemony of the male-dominated middle-class culture from which they write" (x). To understand this positioning, the historical reality influencing the literary productions becomes relevant.

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed an ongoing shift in women's social positioning in both England and the United States. As early as 1821 in the United States, the first real secondary school for women was founded in Troy, New

York, and in 1841 Oberlin College became the first institution of higher learning to admit a woman. By the 1830s the "women's group" had come into its own in the United States and literally "thousands of separate women's groups holding meetings, collecting funds, discussing public issues, and variously improving themselves" were formed (O'Neill 18). Women's clubs also became forums for the exchange of ideas as well as educational opportunities--"self-culture" was the term they used to describe their ambitions (O'Neill 34). These groups provided an impetus for fictional representations of women openly discussing and questioning the culture that defined their role.

The 1830s and 1840s were not a time of overt feminist activity, but were rather a time for local reform specifically around such issues as temperance and abolition. Social welfare causes had long informed the American women's movement. As early as 1798, a Female Humane Association was founded in Baltimore to aid indigent women, and in 1800 the Boston Female Society for Missionary Purposes was focusing its energies on missions in the American West. The American woman's movement crystallized with the Seneca Falls Conference in 1848 but remained

committed to a diversity of causes including child welfare, the reformation of prostitutes, and the abolitionist movement.

English feminism, despite its public position in the 1790s (most notably the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's The Vindication of the Rights of Women), languished during this period. Although women like Elizabeth Fry began the Ladies Association of the Female Prisoners in Newgate prison in 1817, the reform movement in England did not share the diversity of social causes or organized activism of its American counterpart. English women had not yet begun to form the group associations that American women had, but England was facing the class and cultural impacts of rapid industrialization, specifically the incongruity it presented with the doctrine of "separate spheres" for men and women. As the cult of domesticity, or "angel in the house" mythology gained ground, middle-class women, denied any economic, political or social power outside the home, became critically aware of the importance of a "good" marriage. In the 1850s and 1860s, as industrialization increased the standard of living, the economic aspects of marriage for middle- and upper-class men and women outweighed other

factors. In response, "authors of advice books did an about-face . . . and began warning men and women against expecting excessive luxury and waiting too long before marrying" (Vicinus 2), thereby increasing the pressure to marry and the importance of the domestic ideology. And in contrast to the earlier years of arranged marriages, the rise of the middle-class and the nuclear family encouraged the rise of "marriage-markets," places like Bath (so prevalent in marriage-plot novels) where women went to meet perspective spouses. As Donovan points out:

In arranged marriages women were objects of exchange, but the marriage market made women more overt commodities by requiring them to sell themselves. Under the new system women increasingly had to advertise themselves in order to attract potential mates. ("Rise" 448)

Negotiating this new, yet inevitable, marriage territory contributed to the fictional straining against the marriage-plot closure. At the same time, England was faced with an overabundance of single women. These genteel spinsters could either find a marginal place in the home or church or choose one of three overcrowded professions: governess, companion,

or seamstress. The question of work for these women increasingly found its way into women's fiction. The difficulties of employment as a governess or a teacher is a recurring theme in British and American novels, and discussions about the status of women in regards to work appear in all four novels in this study. As DuPlessis suggests, for a nineteenth-century female hero there are few realistic choices of work or vocation, "so her heroism lies in her self-mastery, defining herself as a free agent, freely choosing the romance that nonetheless, in one form or another, is her fate" (14).

By mid-century, English men and women were facing the antithetical values of Victorian industrial society that encouraged social mobility and individual development (Darwinism), and the domestic ideology that demanded of women self-denial and no mobility outside the family. "An idle wife or daughter might increase a man's status, but society provided a countervailing pressure by rewarding self-improvement and the conscientious performance of philanthropic duties" (Vicinus 5). Women in the nineteenth century, however, did not suffer in silence. Since emotions and sentiment were believed to be the forte of women,

social welfare was a "natural" extension of these female gifts. In women's fiction, philanthropy became a viable alternative, especially for upper-class women, to a life of inactivity waiting for marriage. But this alternative, too, creates ruptures and disjunctions as the character may often exceed the limitations of the plot and the author's sudden need to contain or obliterate this heroine can lead to overly pat or overtly false endings. Dorthea Brooke's termination in nameless motherhood at the end of Middlemarch is an excellent example of the final discomfiture an author faces with a nineteenth-century heroine.

Political changes that directly impacted women's lives and fiction continued; in England, 1848 and 1849 saw the founding of Queen's College and Bedford College providing women an opportunity for a secondary education, and in 1851 the inaugural meeting of the Sheffield Association for Female Franchise was held. In 1855 a Married Women's Property Bill was introduced in Parliament, and although it failed, a Marriage and Divorce Bill did pass in 1857. In 1859 the Society for the Employment of Women was organized, and by the 1860s English women, too, were involved in charitable

and reformist activities. Women's suffrage was publicly debated in the 1860s and opposition to the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 became the rallying cry for British women, galvanizing them into political action and giving them the experience to take those political skills into the fight for suffrage.¹

Although there is little direct fictional attention to suffrage, these political activities made passivity in a heroine less acceptable to writer and reader.

America, too, was feeling the swell of the women's movement. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone and the Grimkes' became recognized figures. Despite gaining the vote in Wyoming, Colorado, Utah and Idaho, American women, like their British counterparts, faced limited work opportunities and no real freedom from the domestic ideologies. Although American women had greater access to education, they could, for the most part, only use that education to be teachers. And since teaching rarely required a college degree (only a two-year degree from a Normal School), these women were either overqualified for the available jobs or unemployed. Just as the British women chafed against their "redundancy," their American sisters confronted a

similar stifling fate.

The impact of these political activities can be seen in the conscious fictional representations of female oppression and resistance marking many sentimental novels. Deborah Rosenfelt has recently offered a definition of feminist texts as those that are concerned with "the indicators of power--gender, race, class, sexuality--that affect women's lives and [the] privileging of women's consciousness, women's subjectivity and, therefore, women's agency" (209). She has also suggested that the progress of the feminist novel's hero is often facilitated by a mentor and that "the narrative of female bonding constitutes the central movement of feminist novels" (274). Although Rosenfelt sees these patterns in late twentieth-century texts (post women's movement), this definition seems particularly relevant to the discussion of sentimental novels since they, like those novels produced during the women's movement of the 1970s, were framed by a time of political activism, public discussion of women's rights, legal resistance, and comparable frustrations.

These similarity in thematic trends and cultural strainings are further highlighted by this perspective

which allows us to consider the nineteenth-century sentimental novel in a much broader historical context. Rosenfelt observes that "the movement toward (or, in some instances, away from) the bonding of two female figures . . . constitutes one of the most pervasive of feminist narrative strategies" (275). DuPlessis, also referring to twentieth-century texts, has similarly suggested that:

When women as a social group question, and have the economic, political and legal power to sustain and return to questions of marriage law, divorce, the "couvert" status, and their access to vocation, then the relation of narrative middles to resolutions will destabilize culturally, and novelists will begin to "write beyond" the romantic ending. (4)

I would suggest that this pattern exists in the nineteenth-century forerunner and is at the heart of both the increasing fictional focus on the female bildung and the mentoring relationships. These relationships so enhance the heroine's character that they decenter, and in many cases delegitimize, the marriage-plot closure. As Gilbert and Gubar have pointed out, nineteenth-century women's novels are

often marked by two plots, and it is this "other" plot, "the woman's quest for self definition" (76) that emerges as the primary challenge to the marriage telos.

Within this nineteenth-century historical venue, women novelists continued to reproduce the domestic ideology in the sentimental novel, but they used woman-to-woman relationships to expose the lack of choice really constituting that goal. Many heroines of the sentimental novels don men's clothing, risk life and limb, defend the poor and the wretched, and dare to breathe a moment before the door of marriage shuts on them. It is in the clear delineation of women's worlds, (and diversity of experience is embraced), that these novels offer the greatest challenge to the domestic ideal of marriage as an adequate and fulfilling goal.

Critical discussion of women's literary traditions has provided the rich ground of feminist criticism beginning with Virginia Woolf and continuing today, "for we think back through our mothers if we are women" (Woolf, Room 79). Works such as Elaine Showalter's A Literature of Their Own, Nina Baym's Woman's Fiction, Ellen Moers Literary Women, and

Gilbert and Gubar's Madwoman in the Attic elevated discussions of women's literary traditions into the theoretical discourse. In the ongoing critical conversation about women's fictional traditions, Luce Irigaray's discussion of woman's language is particularly relevant as it underscores how women negotiate the linear (by implication phallogentric) plot structure:

Women--as the stakes of private property, of appropriation by and for discourse--have always been put in a position of mutual rivalry. So to make their own efforts more effective, they have had to constitute a place where they could be "among themselves." A place for individual and collective "consciousness-raising" concerning the specific oppression of women, a place where the desire of women by and for each other could be recognized, a place for them to regroup. (161)

This description is reminiscent of Carol Smith-Rosenberg's work on nineteenth-century women's relationships both in the sense of a separate sphere of action and interaction and in the intensity of communication that often imitated and appropriated the language of heterosexual love.

In analyzing women's relationships in sentimental novels, this separate (fictional) sphere of operation is essential to understanding how these relationships decenter the closed plot structure. When women speak together in the course of a marriage-plot novel, it is often in some separate space (a private room, a natural setting, a wild heath) where the constraints of drawing-room conversation (usually constructed to entertain men) have been left behind. Often the language used to challenge the romance plot is the language of the lover transposed into a conversation between two friends, a mother and a daughter, or some pairing of female mentor and heroine. This appropriation of love talk becomes the "wild zone" for female discourse. By using the sanctioned power of this discourse, women embedded interrogation of the conditions of women's lives within the marriage-plot novel. Recognizing this use of language, this mimicry of male-female interaction, uncovers the subversive nature of Jo March's desire to marry Meg or Shirley Keldar's impassioned plea for Caroline to refuse to even consider being a governess. In the love talk, in the power of these attachments, the need for or happiness in a marriage closure is surely strained.

Irigaray has pointed to women's use of mimesis as an attempt to recover "the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it . . . to make visible by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language" (76). The sentimental novel is an embodiment of this theory in both the use of the fictional form and the language of heterosexual love. I am not suggesting here that women writers were trying to reconstruct language, to undo the phallogentricity of acceptable fictional representation, but rather, through this mimetic displacement of language, they were exposing the reality of female limitation while presenting female consciousness complete with its patriarchal discourse and internalized codes. The inevitability of patriarchal containment of female desire and marriage closure is underscored when a strong character like Shirley Keldar, who is most often associated with male discourse and strength, speaks of her desire to find a "master" in marriage. As Nancy K. Miller has noted (following Irigaray), the woman's sentence is "an italicized version of what passes for the neutral or

standard face . . . a way of marking what has already been said" ("Plots" 38). In this sense, these women were "breaking the sentence" as Virginia Woolf suggests Mary Carmichael does (A Room of One's Own) as they express and challenge with that expression "the ridicule, the censure, the assurance of inferiority" about women's deficiencies ("Women and Fiction" 80). In some cases, women openly reiterate the cultural assumptions of their inferiority only to challenge and debunk the male theories about them. Anne Eliot's famous challenge to Captain Harville about the constancy of women in Jane Austen's Persuasion is just one example of this kind of self-conscious parody further shifting the reliability of cultural expectations. As DuPlessis has suggested:

To break the sentence rejects not grammar especially, but rhythm, pace, flow, expression: the structuring of the female voice, by the male voice, female tone and manner by male expectations, female writing by male emphasis, female writing by existing conventions of gender--in short, any way in which the dominant structures shape muted ones. (32)

In their mimetic representation of the binary

oppositions that traditionally favor patriarchal authority, (Activity/Passivity, Head/Heart, Intelligible/ Palpable, Logos/Pathos) these writers demonstrate an awareness of the dangers of such binary oppositions. As Cixous, in The Newly Born Woman, argues: binary oppositions create a battlefield where woman is always associated with passivity since all binary oppositions come back to a fundamental male/female opposition so that "either woman is passive or she does not exist" (64). The nature of the binary opposition is reflective of the cultural definition of male/female roles that are rehearsed in the marriage-plot novel, but the presentation of female relationships and discourse becomes the point of disclosure for the inconsistency and contradiction in the ideology supposedly reinforced by marriage.

Perhaps ironically, nineteenth-century women writers' access to the "discourse" of the novel was well established. The novel, without the pretensions to "high" art reserved for poetry, presented a contradiction in its requirements for happy endings while dictating little in terms of the linguistic form other than a requisite emotional appeal to its clearly defined, mostly middle- and upper-class readership.

Women were then seemingly free to create relationships like "Chloe liked Olivia" which had the power to make its nineteenth-century reader, prefiguring Virginia Woolf, no longer "feel the usual things in the usual places, about love, about death" (Woolf, Room 95). Women, despite an implied cultural exclusion from the power of language, "can be in control of language rather than controlled by it" (Homans, "Howl" 186). As many feminists recognize, the deconstructionist argument for meaning outside the binary opposition, where writing can throw open the possibility of signification, offers a way out of a sense of entrapment in patriarchal language. With the shifting of signification from the male/female topos of the marriage-plot novel to the margins of the relationships between women, the deconstruction of what Cixous calls the "prison house" of the form takes place.

In the context of this study, the combination of deconstruction and marxist feminism yields the most fruitful analysis, especially of those texts that most closely reflect patterns of cultural production (i.e. the well-defined form of the sentimental novel). But even in this context, it is necessary to recognize

that ideology, too, only presents partial truths (those upholding the dominant cultural norms), and this is most evident in the forced closure of this novel form. Catherine Belsey points out that in classic realist fiction, disorder in the plot can often come in the form of the love story.

But the story moves inevitably towards closure which is also disclosure, the dissolution of enigma through the re-establishment of order, recognizable as a reinstatement or a development of the order which is understood to have preceded the events of the story itself. (Belsey 53)

Close examination of these "constructed" endings may, in fact, uncover the challenges to the "ideological" closure and imply a new order emerging from women's texts. As DuPlessis has pointed out: "There is a disjunction between narrative discourses and resolutions, which may be felt as the 'patness' of a resolution, or as the ironic comment of the author at closure" (7). We see this clearly in the authorial irony at the end of Shirley and the editorial assumptions of marriage at the close of Wives and Daughters, both highlighting the straining in these texts. The project, then, is to use the tools of

deconstruction to locate the point at which the narrative transgresses the limits of the formula and uncovers the ideological masquerade of coherence.

Irigaray's discussion of the possibilities of women's use and reclamation of discourse through a playful mimesis in which "one must assume the role deliberately, which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it" (76), as well as her discussion of the place of woman as commodity represent powerful points at which to begin a reconsideration of the marriage-plot text. An analysis of the marriage marketplace, central to these novels, is aided by Marxist-feminist theory's essential argument that women's subordinate position is necessary for capital exchange, for it is that exchange that demands closure. As Michele Barrett, developing Jameson's analysis, points out in her essay "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender," questions raised by the classical theory of representation as a reflection of historical conditions and the place of literary texts in this theory can be valuable.

Debate has raged over whether literary texts can be understood as direct reflections, or even

distortions, of reality or should be seen as mediated in complex ways. Such texts are held, however, always to bear some relation to the social relations in which they were produced. (Barrett 69).

Indeed, these novels reflect complex social relations including the negotiation of class distinctions in friendship and marriage.

An examination of women's relationships in these novels may allow us, as readers, a choice of position beyond sexual essences, a position to read from the textual margins and as such reclaim them as central without getting caught in deconstructing the male/female opposition alone. We can continue to uncover the ways in which nineteenth-century women took back the power of the language to describe their experience within culturally appropriated and determined forms. As Nina Baym points out in her essay "The Madwoman and Her Languages: Why I Don't Do Feminist Literary Theory," "women took back from 'the other' the power of the language used to describe her and made it her own, just as the novel form was coopted by women in the nineteenth century" (49). And as Elizabeth Abel suggests, "the dynamics of female

literary influence . . . deserve a theory of influence attuned to female psychology and to women's dual position in literary history" ("*(E)merging Identities*" 434). The development of mentoring relationships may provide an additional piece in the rich puzzle of this literary influence. If we embrace Annette Kolodny's argument for a pluralist approach to literature in "*Dancing Through the Minefield*," we will discover new readings of texts that continue decoding woman-as-sign.

We must start at the old point of recognition that any woman's literary tradition is not a tradition handed down from stern literary fathers of patriarchy to all their inferiorized female descendants (Gilbert, Gubar 50), but a progression of female literary mentors (who were sometimes mothers) interrogating the system within the confines of contained forms dictated by a patriarchal system that conditionally offered them, for the first time, the position of "professional author." If we accept these writers as collaborators and saboteurs, we can examine how they deconstruct the male/female topos from the margins of female relationships and the multiplicity of expression that position represents. As Jane Marcus

points out, "an aesthetics of maternal protection, an aesthetics of sisterhood, . . . an aesthetics of woman's critique of male domination, any one of these structures of literary history would have the virtue of melting the current thinking about the virtuous subjugated woman and the eternally dominating male" (82). We need to recognize, as Nina Auerbach does in her essay "Engorging the Patriarchy," that oppression has not given us a sole self, "it has given us instead a variety of personae with which to blend into a society that threatens us" (155). These novels demonstrate both diversity and commonality in their attempts to blend into the society that defined the form and mode of their production and in their methods of deconstructing not only the form of that production but the cultural hegemony it embodied.

NOTES

¹ There has been a wealth of historical information collected about this period both in primary and secondary works. For a discussion of these events and a representative collection of primary documents see O'Neill. For further information on the history of women in Victorian England, the classic text remains J.A. and Olive Banks, Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England, (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1964); additionally, see Olive Banks, Faces of Feminism: A Study of Feminism as a Social Movement, Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981; Martha Vicinus' Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1972 and her A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women, Bloomington, Indiana UP 1977, and the Vicinus referenced in the text. For more information about the early American phase see Nancy F. Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835, New Haven: Yale UP, 1977 and Davidson.

² For a full discussion of the nature and implications of the tradition of "visiting" see Smith-Rosenberg.

CHAPTER TWO

Sentimentalism: Beyond the Tradition of Tears

Any reconsideration of nineteenth-century women's writing, or critical examination of the deconstructive gaps which female friendship and mentoring relationships offer within this writing, must begin with a redefinition of one of its most problematic categorizations: sentimentalism. This term has been used to disparage eighteenth- and nineteenth-century marriage-plot novels, predominantly by women, as angelic upholders of the cultural (male) norms; it has been used to define these writers as angry saboteurs continually undercutting that same cultural ideology; it has been "excused" as representative of popular culture; and it has been used in its most pejorative sense (although this is becoming rarer), to keep nineteenth-century women's writing from receiving the critical evaluation and attention it deserves. Dale Spender suggests, "if we want to explain the dismissal of early women novelists from the literary heritage, it is necessary to go much further than the misleading

accounts about mass audiences and sensation, sentimental 'blotterture!'" (161).

Judith Fetterley, in her introduction to Provisions, underlines one of the major problems surrounding this term:

since many of the critics who use this term [sentimental] do little more toward defining it than count the number of tears shed by Ellen Montgomery in The Wide, Wide World, one might well ask whether "sentimental" is not in fact a code word for female subject and woman's point of view and particularly for the expression of women's feelings. (25)

The hallmarks of the sentimental novel discussed in this study do, indeed, represent the female subject, the heroine whose progress towards marriage is charted, and the woman's point of view, both the perceptions of possibility and limitation within the marriage choice. The link between the cultural positioning of the sentimental tradition and the role of the female writer within it are clearly exposed in the marriage-plot of most sentimental novels. And the definition of the marriage-plot novel form provides a basis on which to build and clarify a redefinition of

the sentimental novel. Marriage-plot novels follow a linear sequence of events that culminate in the heroine's marriage. The sentimental novel includes in that linear plot sequence a heroine's bildungsroman. In these novels, as in the classical definition of bildungsroman as a novel of formation, or as Martin Swales has defined it as: "a novel form that is animated by a concern for the whole man unfolding organically in all his complexity and richness" (14), the final positioning of the hero requires compromise and social integration. For women, however, this final relationship between individual and society is particularly marked by the submerging of human potential within the restraints of social convention represented by the required marriage telos. It is this tension between the marriage-plot and the female bildungsroman that defines the sentimental novel of this study.

Further complicating the analysis of the female bildung is the fact that, for women, this process of development often involves internal changes, flashes of recognition rather than overt action associated with the male bildungsroman. This female pattern of fictional development, which Susan Rosowski has called

the "novel of awakening," is contained within the sentimental, marriage-plot formula that provided both political publishing cover for it and the source of tension that would finally make the containment of the heroine in marriage no longer feasible. I would suggest this tension led to astounding literary experimentation and production, and the product of this literary development is represented by the novels considered in this study. All of the novels here contain the elements of the sentimental marriage-plot novel. In addition, I have chosen novels that seem to underscore a chronological, progressive tension against the marriage closure that reflects the historical realities surrounding their production. These novels also share the recurring theme of the struggle for women to find "useful" and acceptable work as part of their bildung; all demonstrate the power and necessity of female friendship and female mentoring for survival in the commodification that is the marriage market, and all challenge that positioning by exploring the tension of a self-aware woman's confinement in a nineteenth-century marriage. I will argue that these novels represent stages in a fictional development from the resistance to

dependence in Shirley to the final rejection of marriage in The Silent Partner. These stages thus culminate in the deconstruction of the marriage telos as the only acceptable end for a respectable woman.

There is considerable scholarly agreement about the parallel tracks of the sentimental tradition in Britain and America; therefore, this review of the tradition and attempt to redefine the richness and depth of the sentimental novel will draw on evidence, critical and fictional, from the Anglo-American traditions. As Joseph Allen Boone points out,

genre studies of the English-language novel would benefit . . . by a wider practice of transatlantic theorization that would allow us to perceive the sometimes obscured formal and structural links rendering American fiction the legitimate (though rebellious) progeny of its English forbearers. (23)

This study will consider both the obvious influence of the British on their American sisters in the chronological development of challenges to the sentimental marriage-plot, as well as the unique elements in both arms of the novel's development.

The beginning of the sentimental, marriage-plot

novel in the English tradition is often cited as the publication of Richardson's Pamela in 1740, yet the thematics that mark this fiction: seduction, temptation, marriage, excessive feeling, were well underway in the 1720s. Women novelists like Mary Delariviere Manley and Eliza Haywood developed the seduction tale and used the plot to underscore the reality that the sentimental view of desired innocence equaled weakness, since ignorance of the nature of men and the world was dangerous for women. These heroines, like many in this form, reflect the cultural pressure for a woman to marry and fulfill the strictly defined ideals of feminine behavior. This definition of womanhood attributed "true" feeling and sentiment to women and established a realm of authority demarcated by the domestic sphere, emotions, and the moral welfare of husband and children, or what has become known as the myth of the "angel in the house."

It is important to recognize that within this private sphere women had a legitimate authority, but this authority was described in the conduct books of the day as a special feminine influence which, as Dr. James Fordyce in his two-volume Sermons to Young Women (1765) points out, is marked by obedience, modesty,

gentleness, and the acceptance of woman's place as man's companion. A woman's transgressions against this cultural norm were indicative of her lack of rationality, her vanity, and her need to be protected. More complicated was the insistence that women writers show the same sensibility as their heroines, and, by implication, write "in the spontaneous manner associated with a woman in love" (Spencer, Rise 23). The writer was also expected to follow the same rules of conduct imposed on her heroine, and this conflation of writer and character continued into the nineteenth century leading Fanny Burney to confess in a journal entry, "I would a thousand times rather forfeit my character as a writer than risk ridicule or censure as a female" (qtd. in Simons 23). Given this cultural climate, this need to uphold one's reputation would seem to far outweigh a desire to challenge the fictional form, yet even within these constraints, women writers found room for subtle protest against female subordination in the margins of their roles as moral guides.

The second half of the eighteenth century saw an incorporation of wide-ranging social and moral issues, including such feminist concerns as marriage customs,

a wife's subjugation to her husband's or parent's will, women's capacity to be educated, their rights to an education, and even a call for votes for women. The power base of the argument for these changes was often the essential purity of woman, a position that, with the rise of sentimentality in the 1760s, was to be protected at all cost. The 1740s and 1750s were also a time that saw serious encouragement of the woman's professional writing career. Earlier women like Aphra Behn had fought their way to financial independence and public recognition, but by the mid-eighteenth century men of letters were giving practical help and encouragement to their female counterparts. We see the effects of this encouragement and social change in Sarah Fielding's first work, David Simple, which is both sentimental and satirical, including open challenges to a woman's place being one of silence--speaking only when given permission by a parent or husband. Fanny Burney takes up the negotiation of gaining for her heroines social approval while retaining their sense of individuality. Starting with Evelina (1778), she creates a heroine full of a sense of self: her critical evaluations of Madame Duval, her amusement at her initial

introduction to a ball, her recounting of all the machinations of the mating game played out before her narrative closure in her marriage to Lord Orville. Through the epistolary construct, Burney qualifies Evelina's outspokenness as the effusive overflowings of a "heroine . . . young, artless and inexperienced," one to be excused as "the offspring of Nature, and of Nature in her simplest attires" (Preface). Also, with the use of Mr. Villars as the recipient of most of this correspondence, Evelina is continually guided in the ways of culturally acceptable behavior. Within the cover of this seemingly innocent narrative, Burney places subtle challenges to these expected ends for women. To the less reputable Mr. Smith she leaves the discouraging words on marriage:

There is no resolving upon such a thing as matrimony all at once; what with the loss of one's liberty, and what with the ridicule of all one's acquaintance, . . . my dear Ma'am, marriage is the devil. (209)

But Burney also recognized that courtesy and etiquette were the only currency of exchange for women in this market place. Even within the changing public atmosphere of encouragement for women writers, "these

women novelists . . . sought to keep masculine approval by disclaiming any intention to overturn the sexual hierarchy" (Spencer, Rise 98). Thus, despite Evelina's insights, her closure is in marriage, a marriage glorified by all the patriarchal powers (especially Mr. Villars) and described by Evelina as full of "fearful joy" (388). At the same time, while the very form of the novel was being codified, these authors found ways to work within the forms available to challenge the cultural ideology which bound them.

By the 1780s, a time marked by a more liberal political climate with much discussion of the individual's right to personal liberty and experience, the sentimental message begins to change. Charlotte Smith, for instance, grants the adulteress Adelina Trelawny in her novel Emmeline not only sympathy but also a happy ending reuniting her with her lover and child at the end. This kind of reclamation of the fallen woman destabilizes the cult of purity since it alters the value/exchange position women held in the cultural marketplace by challenging the value of purity--the only guarantee of patrilineal certainty. This theme is present in women's novels as early as the 1760s, and remains central in the later novels of

the eighteenth-century.¹

The final decade of this century was marked by an active, political, feminist movement reflected in works like Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792), Mary Hay's Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women (1798), and Anne Frances Randall's Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination (1799). In fiction, this clear political consciousness can be seen in such work as Mary Hay's The Victim of Prejudice (1799) where her heroine's wrongs are openly attributed to social norms including male dominance and the hypocrisy of female chastity. Despite social reintrenchment that would submerge the feminist movement for another forty years in England, the women writers of the eighteenth century helped shape the development of the sentimental novel through all its changes. The vast majority of these writers found ways to interrogate the systems of mercenary marriage, the double standard, and the enforced ignorance of female innocence within the sentimental novel structure. Even Fanny Burney, who was so concerned about her reputation, openly takes on the harsh realities of economic existence for women given the

limitations of education in her novel The Wanderer (1814). Burney's heroines no longer exist in domestic situations alone but are concerned with "problems of inheritance and questions of economics" (Simons 26).

Samuel Richardson, often described as the father of the sentimental tradition, claimed that "feminine sensibility represented the basis of the freest yet most virtuous communication" (Mullan 5). Women recognized this dichotomy of freedom and virtue and used the cultural expectations to inform female readers of the power and necessity of female friendship. As Jane Spencer points out in her introduction to Millennium Hall: "Young women, believed to form the bulk of novel-readers and always in need of good advice, were thought to be 'more agreeably instructed by members of their own sex'" (x). Indeed, women writers like Eliza Haywood predate Richardson in portraying a world where heroines are seen as "opportunities for lust and avarice" (Richetti 208), but they also were able to broaden those limited categories and are, therefore, the foremothers of the writers considered in this study. The publication of Eliza Haywood's The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless (1751) demonstrates a crucial shift from one-

dimensional heroines of perfection and coquettes of evil to the dynamics of character (specifically heroine reformation) that mark such later works as Jane Austen's Emma. And there is little doubt that Juliet's open complaint about the opportunities for employment in The Wanderer foreshadows Jane Eyre's similar, if less subtle, sense of entrapment as she paces the parapet at Thornfield.

The sentimental, marriage-plot tradition continued to focus its attention on the heroine's education and her prenuptial life. Rather than simply confirming conformity to patriarchal society, this story "required a concentration on female moral progress; an investigation of the woman's mind; and the conclusion that women are capable of moral growth" (Spencer, Rise 145). Although the qualities associated with femininity and sentimentality--tenderness, compassion, intuitive sympathy--are private rather than public entities, it is this private world that women were asked to negotiate and survive. Often this negotiation within the context of the heroine's reform revolves around the advice or mentoring of a more experienced woman. In the eighteenth-century novel, this wiser woman was often,

but not only, the heroine's mother who guided her through the maze of marital negotiations and whose obligation was to protect her purity.

As the tradition continues into the nineteenth century, this woman-to-woman mentoring for survival becomes the "wild zone" which Edwin Ardener, who coined the term, explains as a location of "a possibility of escape and adventure lying in the interstices of patriarchy, where women's communities of spirit coalesce and find freeplay in imaginative expression" (qtd. in Boone 285). I suggest that this "wild zone" is the location of women writers' experimentation with the potential of relationships between women to destabilize the acceptability of the tightly formulated plot from within while maintaining an overt loyalty to that form and the marketplace which defined and required it.

The nineteenth-century American tradition had its eighteenth-century progenitors as well. The American novel tradition really comes into its own with the second half of the eighteenth-century when a reading revolution took place. This time period saw an increase in education and literacy as well as access to books. Publishers responded to this new market,

and approximately 100 novels were published between 1789 and 1820. Like their British counterpart, the American audience embraced the sentimental novel which "recognized the restricted lives of its women readers and made fiction from the very restrictions of those lives" (Davidson ix). The increase in access to education spilled over to women, and the novels were a factor in this trend as literacy was seen as a sentimental virtue. As Davidson points out, "the female reader was also assured that writing--and writing well--was a virtue; that an unblemished prose style was as proper to a would-be heroine as a spotless reputation or a winsome smile" (73).

The seduction plot was prominent in the early national period since the focus of the novels remained the young woman's freedom prior to marriage. But, unlike the British tradition which holds onto this plot or subplot, often resurrecting the fallen woman and offering her character an alternative to moral condemnation (as a non-angel in the house), the seduction plot virtually disappears from American sentimental fiction of the nineteenth-century. As Helen Waite Papashvily points out, with the graphic exception of The Scarlet Letter, the 'fallen woman'

does not figure prominently in the design of nineteenth-century American fiction (31-32); however, when this plot does appear, the American women authors, like the British authors Smith and Haywood, were not just addressing the sexual mores but specifically the unfortunate (unjust) consequences for a seduced woman rather than for the society at large. Foster's The Coquette is not just about the fallen Eliza seduced by a married man she has the arrogance to believe she can reform, it is also a warning to female readers not to abandon one of their own who may find herself in this predicament. Eliza, speaking of her friend Miss Freeman who becomes Mrs. Sumner, says: "Marriage is the tomb of friendship" (24). Julia, who is privy to Eliza's fall, and who is established as a woman beyond reproach by the seducer, Sanford, who writes that "the dignity of her manners forbids all assaults upon her virtue" (140), is the one who offers Eliza understanding and compassion and is the one, along with Mrs. Sumner, who facilitates her final social restoration by marking her grave. Any doubt of her restoration is assuaged by the presence of "her weeping friends, to whom she endeared herself by uncommon tenderness and affection" (169). The

Coquette presents a community of women who exchange their views on friendship, marriage and economic security. Cathy Davidson calls the bulk of this novel "woman-talk." Indeed, it spoke to its readership who kept it a steady best seller (along with Susanna Rowson's Charlotte Temple [1791]) into the last half of the nineteenth century. These are the origins of female friendship and mentoring that will later more completely decenter the marriage-plot. As Davidson points out:

Many of the novels of the time are not the frothy fictions that we commonly take them to be, but evince, instead, a solid social realism that also constitutes a critique (even if sometimes covert) of the patriarchal structure of that society.

(123)

In pursuit of writing careers, the fear that their texts would compromise their own reputations is a common thread for women taking up the pen on both sides of the ocean. American novelists like Mrs. S.S.B.K. Wood and Sukey Vickery were adamant in correspondence with their publishers that their anonymity be maintained. Moreover, they felt compelled to separate themselves from their English

counterparts whom they described as day laborers rather than, as in their case, ladies of refined sentiments and correct tastes who wrote for amusement. Despite their protestations, American women embraced the opportunities of professional authorship. Although their intention may have been to reinforce the American edenic image complete with heroines who faithfully serve family and nation, like their British sisters, their stories show "heroines trying valiantly to meet the challenges of woman's role with partial success and little satisfaction" (Kelley 442).

The American version of the "angel in the house" mythology was the "cult of true womanhood," and it was uniquely linked to motherhood. As the Reverend William Lyman describes it in his A Virtuous Woman, the Bond of Domestic Union and the Source of Domestic Happiness (1802):

Mothers so, in a sense, hold the reigns of government and sway the ensigns of national prosperity and glory. Yea, they give direction to the moral sentiment of our rising hopes and contribute to form their moral state. To them, therefore, our eyes are turned in this demoralizing age, and of them we ask, that they

would appreciate their worth and dignity, and exert all their influence to drive discord, infidelity, and licentiousness from our land (22-23).

That a churchman is the one to capsulize this description is also reflective of an element of this mythology that linked women to god in a holy alliance for the good of men and society. But this ideology, that mothers were indirectly responsible for everything, rendered questions of real political power, central to any reform movement, moot. Since women were believed to be endowed with the awesome power of male character formation in the home, they could not possibly be fit to exercise authority in a public sphere and to harbor such expectations would be abhorrent behavior.

In America and in England, there was much controversy over the novel, since it was perceived as presenting a threat to social institutions, especially a residual puritanism in America and an emerging industrial class in both countries. This censure would seem to attest to the power of fiction as a vehicle for or against cultural ideology, and perhaps for the continued devaluation of women's impact upon

it. Women were, in fact, warned against reading novels which, within the guise of the marriage-plot, were more frequently showing women discussing education, law, philosophy and politics. One commentator in the Weekly Magazine raged, "Novels not only pollute the imagination of young women, novels also give women false ideas of life, which too often make them act improperly" ("Character and Effects" 185). Often this criticism was directly lifted from British periodicals which were also attacking the novel for its destabilizing of the class system. For instance, sometime novelist and commentator Mrs. Oliphant, reviewing Jane Eyre, warned that this kind of book could threaten the "orthodox system of novel making" by suggesting a fictional revolution that would challenge the "traditional hierarchy of the sexes by espousing female 'equality' in relationships" (qtd. in Boone 143). But "the sentimental plot simply would not serve the objectives which the conservative writers had drafted it to advance" (Davidson 128). Rather, it became a place for women readers to encounter women characters whose lives reflected and reinforced their own. This reality was underscored by Mary E. Bryan, who in an article entitled "How Should

Women Write" published in 1860, argues for women writers to take up important social issues under their guise as man's "helpmate." She acknowledges that although women have been allowed to write, men have not yet consented "to allow them full freedom. They may flutter out of the cage, but it must be with clipped wings" (370). She goes on, however, to urge women (and men) to transcend these boundaries and speaks of the inevitability of women doing just that:

Women are already forming higher standards for themselves. . . . The active, earnest, fearless spirit of the age, which sends the blood thrilling through the veins of women, will flow out through their pens, and give color to the pictures they delineate, to the principles they affirm. (371)

In America, the estrangement between men and women was more pronounced than in Britain since, as G.J. Barker-Benfield points out, the nature of "American" for men was a "desire for prosperity," for muscle and rational values which excluded women as sexual distractions from the quest. The American quest novel, where men can bond and fulfill multi-dimensional roles for each other, has become the

hallmark of canonized literary works from James Fenimore Cooper to Ernest Hemingway. Lillian Faderman underscores this division:

since middle and upper-class women were separated from men not only in their daily occupations, but in their spiritual and leisure interests as well; outside of the practical necessities of raising a family there was little that tied the sexes together. (159)

What this division by gender also led to, however, was the strengthening of bonds between women. These relationships were intellectually and emotionally sustaining, and as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg suggests, institutionalized in social conventions and rituals which coincided with every important event in a woman's life.

Their letters and diaries indicate that women's sphere had an essential integrity and dignity that grew out of women's shared experiences and mutual affection and that, despite the profound changes which affected American social structure and institutions between the 1760s and the 1870s, retained a constancy and predictability (Smith-Rosenberg 35-6).

DuPlessis has pointed out that one of the difficulties for women to overcome in the marriage-plot novel is the convention that "exerts particular force on a heroine: the idea that an elsewhere is impossible to find" (154). The stability, then, of this "wild zone" of female interaction made it the perfect domain for fictional experimentation in the context of the sentimental novel.

The Victorian ideal of womanhood, which marked most of the nineteenth-century response to feminism, more dramatically rested on a quintessential double standard in which women were to be kept ignorant of sexuality (therefore pure), while their male counterparts were free to educate themselves about sexuality in the arms of "fallen" women. This is most clearly delineated in one of the most influential medical books of the century, William Acton's The Function and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs (1857). Acton, a "woman's" doctor summed up the Victorian view:

A modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him and, but for the desire for maternity, would far rather be

relieved from his attentions. . . . The best mothers, wives and managers of households know little or nothing of sexual indulgences. Love of home, children and domestic duties, are the only passions they feel. (101-2)

In addition to these "medical" predilections, women were also known to have a "desirable" condition called the "vapors" stemming from their frailty and irrationality. Like its American twin, "green sickness," the most recommended cure was immediate pregnancy. In addition to the medical view, there were many guidebooks for women. One of the most influential, The New Female Instructor, or Young Woman's Guide to Domestic Happiness, Being an Epitome of all the Acquirements Necessary to Form the Female Character, went through six editions between 1811 and 1836. It clearly defines woman's role as pleasing men:

in their forms lovely, in their manners soft and engaging, they can infuse . . . a thousand nameless sweets into society, which, without them, would be insipid, and barren of sentiment and feeling. (1)

In contrast to this pure ideal was the rose or

fallen woman with whom the Victorian male was free to play. This polarization led to a defloweration mania in English brothels in the 1880s, giving rise to widespread child prostitution and a booming trade in the surgical reconstruction of the hymen. This double standard of sexual morality punished with social ostracism any woman who breached the sexual taboos while ignoring male offenses. Patricia Stubbs points out that the one obstacle which made it very difficult for women to break through this family ideology was the seductive concept of romantic love, which became a key part of Victorian mythology once it was felt (especially after Darwin, 1859) that Christianity could no longer offer a firm moral basis for human actions (22-3).

Part of the plight of the middle-class woman in both England and America was that she had virtually no economic function, unlike her working class counterpart who, although exploited, had been a part of the material (male) world all along, freeing her from or denying her access to the burden of the mythology. With industrial development and its attendant class changes affecting both American and British culture in the nineteenth century, the novel

of sentiment, as product and reflection of social developments, took up these issues and their implications especially for women by challenging the limitations of work opportunities for middle-class women and examining the plight of the working-class woman by portraying inter-class contact. Even with industrialization, there were few paid jobs for women and what did exist, millworking and teaching for instance, paid poorly. Women teachers earned approximately \$200.00 per year at mid-century and millworkers about \$39.00 per year. Literary production, on the other hand, paid well, with Godey's Ladies Book paying \$12.00 a page and some of the gift books (those annual collections of fiction and poetry, often released around Christmas time) offering as much as \$200.00 in prize money for the best piece. The era between 1830 and 1850 witnessed sixty-four new ladies' magazines begin publication in America (Papashvily 40). This explosive expansion in the publication market did not, however, gain women carte blanche in their choice of subject matter.

Marriage clearly attained a central ideological function for the rising middle-class cultures of nineteenth-century England and America, and, as Tony

Tanner suggests, "the bourgeois novelist has no choice but to engage the subject" (15). In the first half of the century, British women writers like Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen continue the sentimental tradition begun in the eighteenth-century but continue to challenge simplistic, linear plot progressions to marriage with a shift in focus to the moral formation of the heroine's character, the bildungsroman. Women emerge again in these novels as guides. In Edgeworth's Belinda, the heroine is greatly affected by her relationship with her friend and hostess Lady Delacour, while Clarence, the hero, must also be reformed before claiming Belinda, who remains his intellectual equal.

Jane Austen's influence on the British tradition that emerges with the Brontes in the 1840s has been well documented.² Even in Austen's work we see a progression from the more simplistic reformation of Elizabeth Bennet (Pride and Prejudice) in preparation for her role as Darcy's wife, to the much more complex negotiations of Fanny Price who, in Mansfield Park, serves as moral reformer for the failing patriarch and his vacillating son (corrected in marriage to Fanny). Although she gains the traditional reward of

sentimental fiction, a marriage complete with class status and economic security, Fanny's existence throughout the novel makes the reader uncomfortable with the culturally defined role she lives out. In this same novel, Mrs. Norris is:

a typical victim of the discrepancy between romantic expectations and social possibilities. Her irritating officiousness focuses this discrepancy, for it is really a woman's imaginative energy misdirected by her dependence and social uselessness. (Poovey 216)

Finally, Persuasion marks the most radical break from cultural confinement in the character of Anne Eliot. Anne is not afraid to take on Captain Harville and her lover, Wentworth, on the issue of women's constancy: "we certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We live at home, quiet, confined and our feelings prey upon us" (Austen 221). Although not an unusual comment in and of itself, it is ground-breaking because of the nature of the (mixed) company present and the courage of Anne to speak. Persuasion also presents an alternate role model in the guise of Mrs. Croft who "look[s] as intelligent and keen as any of

the officers around her" (70). She openly criticizes the life of confinement women endure, specifically suggesting this as the cause for Mary's illness since she, Mrs. Croft, had never been ill when at sea but only in the winter when left alone, at home. Despite the closure of this novel in marriage, it is clear that Wentworth has suffered for his love, too, and this couple portends a future not only of a different, less dilettante class (represented by the unmarried elder Eliot sister and the feckless father), but also of a marriage of equals in intellect and respect.

American women writers also continued the sentimental tradition but often with a muted and indirect voice on the issue of women's oppression. What they do take up with some vehemence are social issues such as the treatment of Native Americans and slavery (Catharine Maria Sedgwick's Hope Leslie (1827), Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1851), and Helen Hunt Jackson's Ramona (1881) are prime examples), themes in keeping with their cultural definitions as moral guardians. Judith Fetterley has argued that "American women writers concentrated on describing the social context that shapes the individual self, and thus they created a literature

concerned with the connection between manners, morals, social class and social value" (Provisions 9). Despite Stowe self-consciously claiming that she did not write Uncle Tom's Cabin, but was merely God's instrument, when one reads the sentimental literature of this time, one finds forceful political statements and a conscious tension with the position of "innocence" expected of them. The controversy over women writers was heated in America and perhaps the paradigmatic epithet hurled at them was Hawthorne's oft-quoted "damned mob of scribbling women." This comment, often decontextualized, was written to his publisher in 1853 about Maria Cummins' The Lamplighter which had sold 40,000 copies in its first three weeks of publication. Hawthorne's pique was no doubt heightened by a letter he had just received from the publisher George Palmer Putnam (who published Mosses from an Old Manse) that Susan Warner's The Wide, Wide World (which Palmer had also published) had earnings of \$4,500.00 for a six month period while Old Manse had earned \$144.09 (Hart 93-4). In addition to its financial triumph, The Wide, Wide World was praised for its morality. The Newark Daily Advertiser praised it "[as] capable of doing more good than any other

work, other than the Bible" (qtd. in Papashvily 3). This kind of tribute for a book that recounts the emotional and spiritual development of poor little Ellen Montgomery who is finally married off to the rather sadistic brother of her now dead best friend, represents the public's appetite for and approval of the traditional sentimental novel. But the novel rather overtly underscores that Ellen's marriage is more clearly related to her love for her friend and mentor than the still living brother/ husband. However, the social appellation that greeted this novel remains a major force on female literary production throughout the century.

A discussion of women's literary innovations in the second half of the nineteenth century must be framed by the rise of a women's movement that would not abate until well into the twentieth century. As discussed in chapter one, this was a period of rapid political developments in England and America. Most women authors in America were aware of the meeting at Seneca Falls (1848) and the Anti-Slavery Conventions which gave women political power due to the "moral" nature of the issue of slavery. Abolition was the first step for American feminism as it gave women a

rallying cry around which to organize, a skill they took with them into the arena of women's rights. In England, the rallying cry came in response to the Communicable Diseases Act. This law allowed male policemen to stop, and male doctors to examine for Venereal disease, **any** woman walking down the street whom they suspected of prostitution. In 1856 the first bill that granted married women the right to own their own property was introduced into Parliament and the 1860s saw the rise of an organized suffrage movement. Many British and American women authors eschewed open affiliation with any of these causes. But we must remember that the literary marketplace still upheld the eighteenth-century identification of author and text, and, by implication, political affiliation could equal loss of income. Even Sarah Josepha Hale, the influential publisher and editor of Godey's, admonished women writers to stay within their domestic spheres of knowledge. Speaking of poetry, she said:

The path of poetry, like every other path in life, is to the tread of woman, exceedingly circumscribed. She may not revel in the luxuriance of fancies, images and thoughts, or

indulge in the license of choosing themes at will, like the Lords of creation. (qtd. in Douglas, "Scribbling Women" 5)

Any breach of this decorum could lead to financial loss, and, lest we forget, in most cases needed income was the reason for these women taking up the pen in the first place. Even Louisa May Alcott, who was one of the first members of the New England Woman Suffrage Association (she joined in 1868), was aware of the publishing realities. After publication of her Emersonian novel Moods (1864) drew criticism because of its frank representation of marriage and divorce, Alcott noted: "My next book shall have no ideas in it, only facts, and the people shall be as ordinary as possible; then critics will say it is all right" (qtd. in Cheney 166).

The centrality of these questions and debates about women's rights, along with the author's own experiences as a woman, would inevitably have direct effects on the work. The decade 1840-1850 saw almost a thousand titles published (Hart 90) and led to the decade which has become known as "The Feminine Fifties" (F. L. Pattee) with authors like E.D.E.N. Southworth who published more than fifty novels in her

career.³ By the second half of the nineteenth-century the seams of experimentation--alternate endings without marriage of the heroine, mentoring relationships between women that challenge class and familial lines, and self-sustaining communities of women--were pushing the marriage-plot further and further from the center of the cultural ideology played out in these texts.

This is not to undermine the economic realities of a publishing industry that continued to call for the superficial reinforcement of the marriage-plot and its attendant maxims. But "to read women's literature is to see and hear a chafing against the 'unsatisfactory reality' contained in the maxim" (Miller 357). Writers such as Southworth created spirited and self-sustaining heroines such as Capitola in Hidden Hand (1859). Although she does not hesitate to don men's clothing to rescue another woman in danger, Capitola, too, is married off at the end of the novel. Even Charlotte Bronte had to marry off Shirley and Jane Eyre, while Elizabeth Gaskell wrote almost 700 pages of Molly's development in Wives and Daughters before outlining her final marriage. (Ironically, Gaskell died before completing this last

closure on one of her most interesting heroines.) Despite Alcott's claims that her future work would be devoid of ideas, she went on to write her most feminist novel Work: A Story of Experience, as well as raising issues about women's education, dress reform, physical education and women's work in such unlikely places as Eight Cousins (1875) and Rose in Bloom (1876). This "political" consciousness did not displace marriage as the dominant goal. But as Barbara Bellow Watson has suggested, "the most essential form of accommodation for the weak is to conceal what power they do have" (113). Their use of the sentimental tradition can not be seen as a simple reification of nineteenth-century ideology, nor can the changes in this tradition that these writers mark be oversimplified or overlooked.

In many ways the critical attention to and controversies over this tradition have contributed to the undervaluation or misinterpretation of the literary complexity of the sentimental novel. Two early critics to take up the issue of sentimental fiction (and in these cases it was American fiction), Alexander Cowie (1942) and Helen Waite Papashvily (1956), come to very different conclusions. Cowie

argues that the sentimentalists were extremely conservative, functioning "as a sort of benign moral police, whose regulations were principally comprised under the heads of religion and morality" (420). He sees these writers as undeviating in their support of the cultural norms that held "that women have intuition but not reason, that they may lose feminine graces in the pursuit of rights, and that men will deteriorate too if the need for chivalry is removed" (420-21). Papashvily, in contrast, argues that these writers showed considerable distaste for the cultural norms and that the fiction "encouraged a pattern of feminine behavior so quietly ruthless, so subtly vicious that by comparison the ladies at Seneca appear Angels of innocence" (xvii). She goes so far as to suggest that these writers believed "female superiority had to be established and maintained" (95). The controversy continues with Dee Garrison (1976) who, like Papashvily, suggests that "common to all these best sellers is a rejection of traditional authority, particularly in domestic life, in religious faith, and among class-ordered mankind" (78). Ann Douglas suggests in both "The 'Scribbling Women' and Fanny Fern: Why Women Wrote" and in her influential

The Feminization of American Culture, that women, in fact, wanted to protect the pedestals which, she claims, mark a middle-class life of leisure. Finally, Nina Baym argues in Women's Fiction (1978), that these novels are really about the triumph of the feminine will. This multiplicity of view suggests the complexity of this tradition despite its formulaic camouflage. Understanding that many of these novels contain and support many of these critical observations may be a better starting place for a critical redefinition of the sentimental tradition and any assessment of its value.

The potential depth of diversity within the tradition has begun to emerge in the work of Auerbach, Baym, Boone, Davidson, and DuPlessis. Although early critics showed a critical selectivity for those novels which most clearly broke with the marriage-plot form by focusing either on the lives of single women, or communities of women, examination of those novels adopting a structural shift reflected in multi-vocal narratives or a formal irresolution that disrupts the sense of closure mandated in the marriage-plot formula, discloses the straining against and experimentation within the form. Most detrimental to

the evaluation of nineteenth-century fiction has been that criticism which suggests these novels cannot stand up to "modernist demands for psychological complexity, moral ambiguity, epistemological sophistication, stylistic density [or] formal economy" (Tompkins xvii). And, although these same texts have been called a "blueprint for survival" in the economic and political exigencies of women's existence, they continue to be condemned for not overcoming the submission demanded by the culture (Tompkins xviii, 160). It is clear that these women chose to speak in a voice "grounded in the real, the observable, the daily, the sane" (Fetterley, Provisions 31). This, however, is not a weak or invisible literary voice. Virginia Woolf felt the residual power and cunning of that angel in the house who dared to write:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. . . . She never had a mind or wish of her own. . . . And when I came to write I encountered her with the very first words . . . she slipped behind me and whispered: "My dear, you are a young woman. . . .

Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of your sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own."

(Woolf, "Professions" 59)

The deception of feminine wiles is a source of power for the innovations that emerge in nineteenth-century women's fiction, and these innovations are clearly grounded in the resistance to conventional narratives and endings seen in the earlier novels. As the power of the female bildung becomes more clearly defined, the resistance to the closure in marriage is also more apparent. It is this expression of power and subsequent discontent that leads to the obvious disjunction between the use of wiles and the fulfillment of self in the nineteenth-century novel.

The source of the nineteenth-century innovation is a heightened conscious attention to the roles women play in each other's lives, how they form minds of their own by interacting with other women, and how those mentoring relationships are the real signposts of negotiation and survival in a patriarchal culture. It is not that these relationships have gone unnoticed. Jane Tompkins states that "women in these novels teach one another how to 'command' themselves,

they bind themselves to one another and to God in a holy alliance against men who control their material destinies" (163). Despite acknowledgement of this system of solidarity by feminist critics on both sides of the Atlantic, the vision that emerges is often bereft of the stylistic intrusions these relationships represent. When the romance plot is decentered by such techniques as "the methodic undermining, reversal, or withholding of the threshold moments and narrative climaxes associated with the phases of courtship, marriage, and domestic life in conventional [sentimental] fiction" (Boone 148), "such a conception of dialogical form can open our reading to the multiplicity and instability of decentered structure" (Garrett 11).

The straining in the text these shifts demarcate is the root of the modernist sense of the open-ended text, an ending that becomes more pervasive as women's texts continue to break through the marriage ideology of the sentimental novel. As Ellen Moers observed, "where heroinism is concerned, the by-products of the struggle--changes in literary form and language, in tone, imagery, setting--are often more interesting and more important than the particular heroines it has

produced" (124). To fully appreciate the depth of the challenge women's writing represents, we need to begin to understand how the complex nature of women's relationships under patriarchy functions. We must examine how these relationships were transformed into a fictional "wild zone," and how they serve as feminist interrogators of the system that confined and rewarded nineteenth-century women writers.

Women's Nature/Women's Roles

Since the 1970s, the work of feminist psychologists and education theorists such as Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan, Jean Baker Miller, Jessica Benjamin and Gisela Labouvie-Vief has focused on women's psychological and moral development and the impact of culture on women's sense of self and their relationships with others. This work, for the first time, has provided a clinical assessment of women's psychological negotiations within the patriarchal system and facilitated further historical and literary reevaluation. It has provided an important step in understanding the "wild zone" of female interaction that Gerda Lerner has called "women's culture," a

phrase that implies not a subculture but an assertion of equality and an awareness of sisterhood in the communality of women's values, institutions, relationships, and methods of communication.

The results of these studies indicate that "women's judgments are tied to feelings of empathy and compassion" (Gilligan 284). Chodorow further explains, "in any given society, feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does" since dependency for women is not problematic, whereas for men dependency is the cultural antithesis to masculinity (41). As to female gender identity, she goes on to say that:

femininity and female role activities are immediately apprehensible in the world of her daily life. Her final role identification is with her mother and women, that is, with the person or people with whom she also has her earliest relationship of infantile dependence. The development of her gender identity does not involve rejection. . . . A girl's gender and gender role identification are mediated by and depend upon real affective relations. . . .

Feminine identification is based not on fantasied or externally defined characteristics and negative identification [as is male], but on the gradual learning of a way of being familiar in everyday life, and exemplified by the person (or kind of people--women) with whom she has been most involved (51).

Both Gilligan and Chodorow acknowledge that due to cultural prescription, women have traditionally deferred to the judgement of men. But both have found that in favorable circumstances, and a community of women would be considered favorable, women emerge with a sensibility of their own, a psychological security and a firm sense of worth and importance. Chodorow even concludes that women's social "embeddedness" provides them with a kind of security men lack (62). She argues that "mothers who are supported by a network of women kin and friends . . . produce daughters with capacities for nurturance and a strong sense of self" (213), an observation with particular relevance to the nineteenth-century novel where mother-mentors are prominent. Jean Baker Miller extends this observation when she argues that "women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being

able to make and then to maintain affiliations and relationships" (83). And Jessica Benjamin has concluded that a loving connection with one's mother (or mother substitute mentor) fosters "a balance of separation and connectedness, of the capacities for agency and relatedness" (82). These observations that legitimate women's ability to use culturally prescribed separate spheres as a source of self-identification and a base of power underscore the psychological importance of the relationships between women that decenter the marriage-plot.

The implication of this work for literary and historical analysis is a shift from the problems of female identity and gender definition to the difficulties of women learning how to respond to social rules for what being female means in our culture. For, if as Luce Irigaray has argued, woman is traditionally a use value for man, an exchange value among men, in other words, a commodity (173), it is important for women to join together "in order to love each other, even though men have organized a de facto rivalry among women and in order to discover a form of 'social existence' other than the one that has always been imposed upon them" (Irigaray 164). It is

important here not to over-simplify the nature of women's relationships. All women's communities are not nurturing and supportive, nor do they have to be, for women to emerge from them equipped to handle the negotiations patriarchy requires.

In the context of traditional (male) literary analysis, there has been a predisposition to dismiss the "domestic" or female daily life as terminally undramatic, even static, and therefore of no great interest. But in keeping with the psycho-social male/female differences that have been exposed, this subject, as Boone has pointed out, "does not invite male participation. . . . Such texts arouse men's worst fears of exclusion, on the one hand, and of engulfment in difference, on the other; here are novels with no place, as it were, for men to occupy" (321). Equally alienating as the domestic sphere are those sensational novels which end in the heroine's death. Although condemned as mechanical, cliched or overdone, the social reality of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century female reader was one which included no birth control, high birth rates, and a substantial chance of death at an early age, auguring no better future for her than her fictional sisters.

Given the fact that "the concomitant unstated premise of sentimental fiction is that the woman must take greater control of her life and must make shrewd judgments of the men who come into her life" (Davidson 113), it does not seem surprising that the female education implied in this process has been misread, simply overlooked or consciously suppressed. As Carolyn Heilbrun has argued:

We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. . . . They may be read . . . or come to us like murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives. (37)

The political implications of female relationships and communities was also an issue in the mid 1800s as the value of female friendship and community was hotly debated. The debate in England focused on the destructive possibilities of these relationships given women's inherent moral and intellectual weakness and the potential communities of women offered for single women to channel their natural caring instincts into helping each other and

bettering themselves. These two positions were fought out in the British Saturday Review and Victoria Magazine of the time. The former granted some possibility of friendship to middle-aged women who were neither mothers nor wives but, in an article entitled "The Exclusiveness of Women" (Feb. 19, 1870), described women as possessive, competitive and untrusting, concluding there could be no true sense of community among women. The association of young women in such settings as boarding schools and colleges was seen as an outright contagion.

The flip side of this debate is represented by Florence Nightingale, who was a vocal supporter for activity and community for women. These issues were tied together as communities of single women formed around the study of nursing and other newly accessible professional activities. Even Dinah Mulock Craik, whose writing consistently re-empowered the Victorian ideals of womanhood wrote:

But to see two women whom providence has denied nearer ties, by a wise substitution making the best of fate, loving, sustaining, and comforting one another, with a tenderness often closer than that of sisters, because it has all the novelty

of election which belongs to the conjugal tie
itself--this . . . is an honorable and lovely
sight. (174)

The qualification of this alternative only being viable in the absence of marriage underscores the subversive potential of these relationships. It is important to reiterate that women's friendship in conjunction with marriage was not controversial because these women would theoretically have the benefit of the husband's stabilizing influence and the emotional attachment to children. Despite the controversies, the power of female friendship was strengthened by the rise in numbers of single middle-class women in England and the exaggerated separation of male/female spheres in America. This was a female world in which "hostility and criticism of other women were discouraged and thus a milieu in which women could develop a sense of inner security and self-esteem" (Smith-Rosenberg 40), the very developmental pattern leading to a sense of security described by twentieth-century psychologists.

The debate over the effects of female mentoring and friendship are topics of fiction by mid-eighteenth century. By 1771, in Sarah Fielding's The History of

Lady Barton, Lady Barton's husband, Sir William, calls female friendship a jest and claims women should be "debarred the use of pen and ink," yet the novel is told through letters between two women (Lady Barton and Fanny Cleaveland) who amply demonstrate their worth and mutual love. Pauline Nestor claims in her study, Female Friendships and Communities, that Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Bronte were both influenced by the ongoing debate over the impact of female friendship and depict women united by circumstance and by choice, by political and natural bonds (4, 45). Clearly, Louisa May Alcott's community of women at the end of Work reflects the positive power that Nightingale envisioned.

Often these relationships have been interpreted as "maternal," which is consistent with Chodorow's conclusion that the basis for female relationships is the mother-daughter paradigm. But this, too, has become a limit which restricts our ability to see, in this fiction, the power of female relationships to challenge class, race and cultural taboos. In attempting to reflect the reality of women's lives and their relationships, the formal narrative structure is often derailed on its way to the marriage terminus.

As Irigaray has described, women's libidinal economy "upsets the linearity of a project, undermines the goal-object of a desire, diffuses the polarization toward a single pleasure, disconcerts fidelity to a single discourse" (30). The rich and varied ways this economy is displayed on the fictional screen of nineteenth-century women's texts represent much more than a tradition of heroines reduced to tears and marriage. The ways in which Bronte, Gaskell, Alcott and Phelps interrogated and altered the marriage-plot form and the nature of sentimental literature are the focus of the rest of this study.

NOTES

¹ Sarah Scott's Millennium Hall (1762), (New York: Viking Penguin, 1986), although a novel with a utopian female community as its theme, has a similar subplot, and Hannah Webster Foster's The Coquette (1797) Ed. Cathy N. Davidson, (New York: Oxford UP, 1986), as discussed later in this chapter, on the American side also deals with the exploits of a fallen woman Eliza who is, at least, morally resurrected by the testimony of her pure friend Julia at the end of the novel.

² Discussions of Austen's influence have been extensive. The most relevant work includes Mary Poovey's The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer, (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1984); Nina Auerbach's Romantic Imprisonments, (NY: Columbia UP, 1986) and Communities of Women, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984), and Jane Kirkham's Feminism and Jane Austen (NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1985).

³ For a further discussion of these best-selling authors see Frank Luther Mott's Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States, (NY: Macmillan, 1947), and his A History of American

Magazines, 5 volumes, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1938-1968). Also, Fred Lewis Pattee's The Feminine Fifties, (NY: Appleton-Century Co., 1940).

CHAPTER THREE

**Mothers, Mentoring and Marriage: Cracking the Code in
Charlotte Bronte's Shirley and Elizabeth Gaskell's
Wives and Daughters**

The fictional focus and narrative shifts that disrupt the marriage-plot tradition were evident long before marriage became a popular topic for public debate in the 1870s and 1880s. Charlotte Bronte's Shirley (1849) and Elizabeth Gaskell's Wives and Daughters (1866) show a straining against the formulaic narrative line and sentimental depiction of the married state that mark the prototypical Anglo-American love-plot. This is not to suggest that these authors abandoned the marriage telos. On the contrary, "both perspectival and developmental facets of the novel's form are governed by a univocal goal" (Boone 97): that the heroine finds a full identity, as well as narrative and thematic synthesis, in marriage. But in the case of these two authors, and specifically these two texts, the focus on marriage is often displaced by a self-reflexive irony about sentimental

expectations as well as a narrative concern with a female bildung and female desire crafted in opposition to the marriage terminus. As Penny Boumelha has noted, "Bildung and romance are played off against one another in such a way as to suggest the inadequacy of either and the apparent narrative incompatibility of the two" (Bronte 35).

The classic Bildungsroman, as discussed in Chapter Two, includes a linear or chronological progression of the protagonist's development toward the emergence of a total personality in adulthood. This growth is the result of an educational process (academic or experiential) always leading toward a definition of self in relation to society. When the social forces are antagonistic, and for women in patriarchy they, by definition, must be, the heroine's accommodation to society implies a reformation of one or both to achieve this end, and an implied desirability in the outcome. Although the Bildung plot is also teleological, the goal of social or personal reformation is, at the least uncomfortable, at the most impossible when the only accommodation possible for a nineteenth-century sentimental heroine is marriage. Despite such difficulties, these authors

show us their heroines' development, and with this investment comes a clear straining against the dictates of fictional closure in marriage.

The developmental process for these heroines is framed by a course in social survival taught by, for the most part, other women who have already learned to contain their desire. These female mentors take many forms. The character of the mother, whether literal or figurative, is a key element in heroine formation, but just as important are the communities of women of which these heroines are a part. Both Bronte and Gaskell choose to explore the path to the marriage telos with pairs of heroines, Shirley Keeldar and Caroline Helstone in Shirley and Molly Gibson and Cynthia Kirkpatrick in Wives and Daughters. These heroines, within the context of the pairing, in many ways opposite in nature, travel the Victorian path of womanhood and negotiate, from different perspectives, the same code of behavior social integration demands. Both novels demonstrate the critical nature of female mentoring relationships in the process of self-development that allows a heroine to survive the cultural closure of marriage. But within the constraints of this fictional tradition, these

relationships mark a narrative shift in focus from the marriage telos to portraits of female desire and quest, elements that strain against the unromantic reality of limitation that the form and culture prescribed.

Shirley, in addition to being a marriage-plot novel, is a novel of ironic reflection upon its own form, an irony that, when added to the anger at the position of women within these very definitions, works to decenter the plot. Bronte opens her novel with an admonishment to the reader:

If you think . . . that anything like a romance is preparing for you, reader, you never were more mistaken. Do you anticipate sentiment, and poetry, and reveries? Do you expect passion, and stimulus and melodrama? Calm your expectations.

(39)

This overt attention to and refutation of sentimental expectations is continued throughout the novel, and the venue for this attack on emotionalism is often a discussion about marriage. Mr. Malone, the curate who is so despicable that his fate is not even mentioned in the summing up at the end of the novel, is one of the first to put forth his views on the subject.

Although a minor player in this drama, his view is interesting because it reflects a position normally held by women: he hates marriage in the "vulgar weak sense, as a mere matter of sentiment: . . . But an advantageous connection, such as can be formed in consonance with dignity of views . . . is not so bad" (56). Malone, like Robert Moore later in the novel, assesses the marriage market as a place of gain and not emotion. These financial realities are more commonly (historically and fictionally) the concerns of young women, but in Shirley, it is the women who ignore the financial situations of the men they love.

The attack on marriage continues with Reverend Helstone's frequent tirades on the subject. His own marriage to Mary Cave is emblematic of the dangers and inconsistencies of the institution:

Mary Cave was perfect, because somehow, for some reason--no doubt he had a reason--he loved her. She was beautiful as a monumental angel; but the clergyman was preferred for his office's sake: that office probably investing him with some of the illusions necessary to allure to the commission of matrimony. . . . He was more master of her and himself. She accepted him at

the first offer. (81-2)

This passage is particularly disturbing because it is the language of mastery that Shirley invokes when describing her ideal mate: "nothing ever charms me more than when I meet my superior--one who makes me sincerely feel he is my superior" (226). Given this similarity in language, if we are to see Shirley and Mary Cave as parallel figures, we understand that Shirley's delay in setting a date for her wedding to Louis is a delay in her death warrant. Mary Cave dies from neglect: "his wife, after a year or two, was of no great importance to him in any shape" (82). Helstone is adamantly against marriage; as he tells Caroline: "it is decidedly the wisest plan to remain single, especially for women. . . . Millions of marriages are unhappy. . . . They tire of each other in a month. A yokefellow is not a companion; he or she is a fellow-sufferer" (124). Completing this negative picture of marriage are Caroline's own parents: her mother abandons her because her father is a drunken madman. As Penny Boumelha has observed: "The unsatisfactory nature of the marital telos is clear, however, in the striking discontinuity between what is said and represented of marriage in the novel

and its final invocation as closure" (Bronte 30).

These marital realities underscore the separation of male and female spheres that mark most of this novel. Pauline Nestor has argued "this simple antagonism and division between spheres is gradually revealed to be both artificial and harmful. The opposing spheres are the constructions of a society working with false dichotomies, creating characters who while functioning within conventional sex roles are actually denying a part of themselves" (74). This self-denial is articulated by Caroline in her contemplation of old maid status:

Is there not a terrible hollowness, mockery, want, craving, in that existence which is given away to others, for want of something of your own to bestow it on? I suspect there is. Does virtue lie in abnegation of self? I do not believe it. Undue humility makes tyranny; weak concession creates selfishness. (190)

These sentiments are a response to the demands of Victorian womanhood, a life of self-sacrifice that Molly Gibson will also rail against. Bronte's anger at this positioning breaks through when the narrator's voice becomes the reader's mentor, expressing the

harshest view of women's lot:

Take the matter as you find it: ask no questions;
utter no remonstrances: it is your best wisdom.
You expected bread, and you have got a stone;
break your teeth on it, and don't shriek because
the nerves are martyred: do not doubt that your
mental stomach . . . is strong as an ostrich's--
the stone will digest . . . bitterness is
strength--it is a tonic. (128)

In contrast to this bleak view is the community of women that form the various stages in both heroines' development. The primacy of the mother-daughter relationship is explored in Shirley at "the levels of mythology (Eve as first mother, Mother Nature) and of individuals (Mrs. Yorke and Mrs. Pryor). . . . It is partly a search for predecessors that will bestow and confirm identity and worth" (Boumelha, Bronte 92). This search for identity is particularly critical for Caroline whom we are told has a "deep, secret, anxious yearning to discover and know her mother" (200). Although Caroline will eventually get her mother back with the disclosure of Mrs. Pryor's identity, she has already experienced a strong community of women that, when left to

themselves, engage in what Irigaray will, more than a century later, identify as "womanspeak."

Hortense Moore becomes Caroline's first mother-mentor figure when Caroline, concerned with her uncle's neglect of her education, asks "for a little attention, and for the means of acquiring such amount of knowledge as could not be dispensed with" (103). Hortense claims she will form Caroline: "with my forming hand and almost motherly care, she may improve" (95). Hortense's complaints about Caroline are her lack of girlish submissiveness and reserve, but she will correct this by giving her a "system, a method of thought, a set of opinions; I will give her the perfect control and guidance of her feelings" (96) because, for women in a marriage-plot, the only power they have is over their emotions (a theme reiterated in all of the novels in this study). Hortense also teaches the blinding work of sewing and darning, work at which even the patient Caroline chafes. Mentors do not have to be positive to be effective. Hortense believes that "praise is inconsistent with a teacher's dignity" (105), but she is no less loved by her pupil.

Although Hortense is short on praise, she cannot compare with the antagonistic lessons provided by the

powerful mother figure of Mrs. Yorke and her sphinx-like child Rose. The encounter between the Yorke women and Caroline over tea is an example of "womanspeak" in this novel. Here the traditional boundaries of patriarchal propriety are put aside, and honest exchange provides benefits for all parties in unexpected ways. It falls to young Rose Yorke, who withdraws from most of the conversation to read a book, to voice the stifling conditions of women's lives. Rose, too, becomes an antagonist when her perception of life points to the lack in Caroline's. Rose wants to travel and when Caroline suggests that perhaps as a woman she will, she responds:

I mean to make a way to do so, if one is not made for me. . . . I am resolved that my life shall be a life: not a black trance like the toad's, buried in marble; nor a long, slow death like yours in Briarfield Rectory. . . . Better to try all things and find them empty, than to try nothing and leave your life a blank. . . . Not in the dust of household drawers shall the coin be interred. . . . I will not commit it to your work-table to be smothered in piles of woolen hose. I will not prison it in the linen-press to

find shrouds among the sheets: and least of all .

. . will I hide it in a tureen of cold potatoes.

(384-5)

Mrs. Yorke interprets this tirade as one against all "womanly and domestic employment," but Rose is quick to correct her: "I will do that, and then I will do more" (386). Many critics have argued that Rose's fate as a settler in Canada is the result of her views which cannot be accommodated within the community. But given the power of her sense of self, expressed in her annual oracle respecting her own "instruction and management" (386), I would suggest that her future represents wish-fulfillment rather than exile.

Mrs. Yorke is a cruel mentor, pushing the women of this circle to confrontation because she couldn't help going after someone she sensed to be a shrinking, sensitive character. Mrs. Yorke accuses Caroline of adopting an expression "better suited to a novel heroine than to a woman who is to make her way in the real world, by dint of common sense," and when Caroline defends the value of feelings, Mrs. Yorke urges "don't waste your dramatic effects . . . it is lost on two women" (387). She also takes a swipe at Hortense's self-satisfaction by telling her that she

is not of "the class the world calls sharp-witted" (388) because she fails to understand Mrs. Yorke's allusions to Caroline's interest in Robert. This verbal exchange forces Caroline to abandon her passive, lady-like demeanor and respond with her most spirited outburst. For the first time, Caroline's internal emotional life is made external:

I shall defend myself without apology. . . .

That I happen to be pale, and sometimes look diffident, is no business of yours. That I am fond of books, and indisposed for common gossip, is still less your business. That I am a "romancing chit of a girl," is a mere conjecture on your part . . . keep the expression of your aversion to yourself. (389)

Rather than with anger, Mrs. Yorke greets this retort with good spirit and approbation: "always speak as honestly as you have done just now . . . and you'll do" (390). Caroline rejects this advice, but the experience of speaking her mind is an important step in her self-development. She has voiced desire and found conviction in her own sensibility.

In addition to Hortense and the Yorkes, Caroline's secret desire for her mother is fulfilled

when she becomes ill and is saved from the brink of death by Mrs. Pryor's disclosure that she is not just Shirley's governess and companion but also Caroline's mother. Prior to this disclosure, Mrs. Pryor has offered to mentor Caroline: "Should you chance to require help in your studies . . . you may command me . . . I wish to be of use to you" (228). Her attachment, like that of the Miss Brownings to Molly in Wives and Daughters, includes the desire to "guard all her steps" and "yield her aid," so that Caroline "delight[s] in depending on her" (229). Once the maternal tie is established, however, Mrs. Pryor immediately relinquishes the mentoring role: "you must not depend on me to check you: you must keep guard over yourself" (413). This revelation underscores that, in this instance, the nature of mentoring is not one of a sentimental unconditional love and support, but one of enough critical distance to allow honest evaluation and guidance.

The mother-daughter moments that follow the maternal disclosure serve as a further opportunity for anti-romantic sentiment when Mrs. Pryor tells of her harrowing marriage and her difficult decision to leave Caroline with her uncle. In a discussion about love

in which Caroline asserts that the only bright destiny for a woman is marriage, Mrs. Pryor responds that love "is very bitter . . . it tortures through time into its deepest night" (366). In addition, Mrs. Pryor warns Caroline against reading romance novels because instead of reality, "they show you only the green tempting surface of the marsh, and give not one faithful or truthful hint of the slough underneath" (366). This attack on the false nature of romantic literature is extended to its impact on men when Shirley reflects on men's false view of women. She argues that given the idealization of women in poems, novels and drama,

men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light: they misapprehend them, both for good and evil: their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend.

(366)

This misreading of women by men is seen throughout the novel: Robert's misunderstanding of Shirley's friendship as romantic interest, Louis' misreading of Shirley's lack of interest in him, Reverend Helstone's inability to understand women that is evidenced by

Caroline's need to "interpret" her mother's words for him.

Caroline's illness, a classic heroine's feverish decline which strikes when she believes that Robert is in love with Shirley, also provides an opportunity for Bronte to attack the romantic sensibility (echoed in medical texts) that saw weakness as an attribute for women. Upon Mrs. Pryor's entrance, Caroline speaks wistfully, distractedly about the honeysuckles. The narrator interrupts to tell us the "strange words" may "sound romantic, perhaps, in books: in real life, they are harrowing" (405). This illness, the result of a totally internalized emotional life, also strikes Louis who is in the feminized position of inaction as he must wait for a sign from Shirley. The inaction that marks the intersection of male and female spheres is countered by the progress of the heroines' bildung that continues within the female community.

When Caroline makes her dark observance about the single life being one equivalent to non-existence, she seeks out the old maids of her community to try to understand the life she believes she is destined to lead. After talking with Miss Mann, she realizes that Miss Mann did not normally speak of herself because no

one cared to listen. She tells Caroline her tale of "cruel, slow-wasting, obstinate sufferings," and with this knowledge Caroline concludes that "Miss Mann was rather to be admired for fortitude than blamed for moroseness" (195). Miss Ainley, too, presents a picture of generosity and self-sacrifice, value, we are told, appreciated by the female neighborhood who recognized "the benevolence of the heart which beat under that starched kerchief" (197), but misunderstood in the male realm: "no one spoke against Miss Ainley except lively young gentlemen and inconsiderate old ones, who declared her hideous" (197). Their evaluation of her seems to reflect her total lack of exchange value in the marriage market, whereas the lesson Caroline gains from their exchange--to be wise if not good--is valuable in the market of survival skills that Caroline must acquire.

Shirley emerges as the co-heroine and the mentor of action. Even the Reverend Helstone sees Shirley's mentoring potential for Caroline: "She will teach you what it is to have a sprightly spirit: nothing lackadaisical about her" (207). Shirley's strength is a product of her class and independent wealth and is obvious in remarks such as: "I consider myself not

unworthy to be the associate of the best . . .
gentlemen: . . . though that is saying a great deal"
(222). Shirley, christened with a boy's name, dons
the persona of Captain Keeldar, accepting Helstone's
pistols, in order to protect Caroline the night the
mill is attacked. Shirley's role as Caroline's
protector is expanded at the Whitsuntide festival.
Caroline trembles at the thought of having to serve
tea publicly at the festival "without the countenance
of mother, aunt, or other chaperon. . . . But this
year Shirley was to be with her" (291). It is in the
context of the festival that Shirley and Caroline
decide not to attend church services and discover the
mythic mother in the natural world, a pre-lapsarian
Eve whose gift to her female progeny is "the daring
that could contend with Omnipotence: the strength
which could bear a thousand years of bondage" (315).
Shirley, in this sense, frees Caroline from her
stultified religious life in which she is the teacher
of patriarchal doctrine in the Sunday school, and
opens the possibility of "the unexhausted life and
uncorrupted excellence" (315) of sisterhood.

Shirley and Caroline's relationship transcends
class lines; the real financial and social inequality

between the very rich heiress and the dependent niece of the clergyman is elided by the commonality of their womanhood and their mutual need for friendship. Bronte, always pointing a finger at the very task she has taken in hand, uses the opening explorations of friendship to her advantage: "They held many aversions in common, and could have the comfort of laughing together over works of false sentimentality and pompous pretension" (231). The equality of this friendship is defined by an intellectual compatibility that includes discussions of Rousseau and the exclusion of women from any fulfilling labor. This latter topic remains a central concern for Caroline who wishes "fifty times a-day" that she had a profession that would give her purpose and fill her head and hands; it is work that can save a woman from the "master-torture" upon which women break their hearts (235). When Caroline considers the only legitimate professional option, to be a governess, Shirley is adamant in her response "better be a slave at once" (245). The "womanspeak" between these mutual friends is such that in trying to convince Caroline that being a governess would be a painful step, Shirley personalizes the loss and, using the language

of a lover, again makes public the internal world of female exchange:

it is my daily pleasure . . . to know my quiet, shrewd, thoughtful companion and mistress is coming back to me: that I shall have her sitting in the room to look at, to talk to, or to let alone, as she and I please. This may be a selfish sort of language--I know it is; but it is the language which naturally rises to my lips; therefore I utter it. (246)

The veracity of this speech stands in stark contrast to the silence imposed on as strong a character as Shirley's by her entrance into the romantic marketplace. Caroline's observation that the bond of their friendship is one which no "passion can ultimately outrival" (265), is the idealistic view from the female world and will be tempered when the plot demands a romance, a romance Caroline believes to be destined for Robert and Shirley.

Joseph Boone has pointed out that, although Caroline and Shirley are the emotional center of the plot of this novel, the intrusion of the romance plot causes this core to be broken (16). It is also the marriage-plot that curtails the forward movement of

the bildung and signals the containment of female desire. Shirley has the keen acuity to know that Robert can come between her and Caroline. As Caroline withdraws from the woman she believes to be her rival, Shirley responds by wishing she could call Robert out for a duel: "He keeps intruding between you and me: without him we would be good friends . . . ever and anon he renders me to you a mere bore and nuisance" (264). Shirley's "love talk" forms an interesting contrast to Robert's own warnings to Caroline about her romantic fantasies: "Men, in general, are a sort of scum, very different to anything of which you have an idea; I make no pretensions to be better than my fellows" (111). Although Caroline must "step down from her pedestal" (593) to accept Robert's long-awaited offer of marriage, the closure of her self-discovery in marriage has been telegraphed from her first visit to the cottage and her romanticization of Robert. Her language remains that of the conventional sentimental heroine, and, like the ecosystem of the hollow that Caroline is constantly associated with, she has been incorporated into Robert's dream of the mechanical future without regard to cost.

Shirley's fate at the hands of the sentimental

conventions has been much more hotly debated. The difficulties lie in the profile of Shirley as Captain Keeldar and Shirley Keeldar, Esquire. She is not afraid to take a stand on the issue of marriage and insist "I will do just as I please" (512), refusing Sir Philip, despite her uncle's protestations, because he is "not [her] master" (513). But when Shirley does find "her master" in Louis Moore, "she [finds] lovely excitement in the pleasure of making his language her own" (463) and is silenced. There is no room for "womanspeak" in a romance plot. The fact that Louis tells the last part of their story has led some critics to claim that Bronte did not have the heart to write Shirley's fate in Shirley's voice. Although a "romantic" explanation, it overlooks the fact that Louis has been associated with romantic sensibility all along via the fever, the small hide-and-seek games, and the saving of Shirley's early composition books. We must then read his observations that he has "tamed his lioness and am her keeper" (568) and that "she must be scared to be won" (577), keeping in mind his own reflection that "I . . . sometimes forget Common Sense and believe in Romance. A strange, secret ecstasy steals through my veins" (473). The

reality of Louis' view is tempered by Shirley's actual acceptance of his proposal: "Die without me, if you will. Live for me if you dare" (578). She poses the challenge, "are you equal at last?" (579), but Louis never answers the question.

There is no doubt that Shirley resists the final step of marriage; Bronte negotiated this open resistance to marriage by putting it in Louis' words and recollections. If this final tale was told by Shirley, and we saw the terror of her mind, the condemnation of the institution would be too great for this form and its requisite closure. It is only in "The Winding-Up" chapter that the narrator steps in to uncover the truth of Shirley's position after she finally sets a date:

but there she was at last, fettered to a fixed day: there she lay, conquered by love, and bound with a vow. Thus vanquished and restricted, she pined, like any other chained denizen of the deserts. Her captor alone could cheer her; his society only could make amends for the lost privilege of liberty: in his absence, she sat or wandered alone; spoke little, and ate less.
(592)

The self-consciousness of this final chapter is underscored by the narrator's claim that "whenever you present the actual, simple truth, it is, somehow, always denounced as a lie . . . whereas the sheer fiction, is adopted, petted, termed pretty, proper, sweetly natural" (587). The irony is rampant in the "varnish put on nicely" in the marrying off of Mr. Sweeting and the ample Dora Sykes, as it is in the final address to the reader: "it would be an insult to his sagacity to offer directions" to the moral (599). The containment of Shirley's desire for freedom and equality in the institution that fetters and starves her seems an unsatisfactory accommodation of self to society. As Nestor points out:

Happy marriage is no more a fundamental answer for women's oppression than improved economic conditions are for worker's oppression. Each ameliorates the symptoms but leaves the root cause untouched. . . . Bronte seems aware that there is still cause for protest. The somber uneasiness of the conclusion reads like a tacit recognition of the inadequacy of the novel's compromises. (Bronte 82)

Bronte invokes the school of Experience as the most

"humbling, crushing, grinding" mentor; for women writers, that school included the public expectation of marriage as fictional closure which indeed forced the lesson "with authority . . . resistless to its acquirement" (122).

The self-conscious rhetoric about sentimentalism and the overt narrative anger that mark Shirley are, for the most part, absent from the works of Elizabeth Gaskell. Gaskell's work is often categorized and critiqued as representative of the "industrial novel," and her vision is compared with the critical social eye of Dickens. Although critics have analyzed and praised the gritty settings of Manchester and the difficulties of the labor class exposed in Mary Barton and North and South, the moral rigidity of the countryside exposed in Ruth, and the female world of aged amazons in Cranford, there seems to be a conscious critical oversight of the intersection of the political content with the romantic or marriage-plot. Critics have complained about Gaskell's lack of "proportion and correctness" (Spender, Man Made 208); "confusion of different issues" (Wright 142); and the inclusion of "adventitious, unnecessary and irrelevant material" (McVeagh 275); all seem to be irritated at

the author for fulfilling the readers' expectations: three of Gaskell's best-known novels, Mary Barton, North and South and Wives and Daughters, end with marriage. She has also been criticized, despite her "industrial" focus, for being an upholder of the Victorian codes of behavior and belief. Yet, as Patsy Stoneman has pointed out, "most of her plots are constructed to highlight the abuse or fallibility of authority" (14). Those critics who do see beyond the maxims that, as Nancy K. Miller has pointed out, encode the organizations of the dominant culture, have concluded that "it was her lack of sentimentality in the study of human relationships that set Elizabeth Gaskell apart from so many of her contemporaries" (Lansbury, Novel 9). But it is not a lack of sentimentality, as I have described that term in the context of the form of the novel and its requisite closure, that is missing from Gaskell's work. As Anna Walters has argued:

it would be false to suggest that Gaskell disapproved of matrimony; so many of her letters reveal the opposite. What is evident is her determination not to collude with the myths of happy ever after, and her concern to show how

social and economic realities are inextricably linked with a potential for human happiness. (8)

The discrepancy between the challenge to the marital myth and required closure of marriage has been overlooked, perhaps because "the authorial voice in Elizabeth Gaskell's work parades no rage and rebellion but exposes injustice in a tone of mild reason" (Stoneman 15).

There is a distinct progress in Gaskell's works from the rather optimistic paternalism of Mary Barton (1848), through the interrogation of gender-linked ideologies that ultimately exclude Margaret Hale from the real settlement of worker-management disputes in North and South (1855) (much like Shirley, class issues are elided and resolved in the reconciliation of gender issues through marriage), to a much more complete focus on the specific negotiations facing the middle-class Victorian woman in her final novel, Wives and Daughters (1866). A woman's choice, or lack thereof, is not a new subject for Gaskell. Early on she challenged the fictional closure of marriage in novels such as Ruth (1853) and Cranford (1853) where the "unreliability of sexual love and the durability of female friendship" is stressed (Stoneman 47).

Throughout her career, her short stories demonstrate a willingness to break the sentimental form with such endings as Libbie and Margaret agreeing to live together in "The Three Eras of Libbie Marsh" (1847). Her most unconventional ending is found in the short story "The Grey Woman" (1861) in which a female servant dons a male disguise and lives with her former mistress as her husband.

Beneath this apparent unconventionality, each of Gaskell's heroines struggles to acquire strength and knowledge to cope with adult life but always at some cost. The nature of that cost may be obscured in the overtly "industrial" novels by the back-breaking poverty sustained by the labor class, but in novels such as Ruth, where the entire novel is an account of the heroine's self-negation and self-sacrifice in her attempt to reestablish herself as a good woman after an early seduction by a man of a higher class, the price is painfully clear.

In her final days, concerned with securing a financial nestegg for her two unmarried daughters, Gaskell wrote, what on the surface would appear, her most sentimental marriage-plot novel Wives and Daughters. Devoid of the gritty industrial reality or

social causes of many of her earlier novels, Wives and Daughters seems to fulfill sentimental expectations with the heroine's linear progression to marriage. Since Gaskell died before completing the last chapter of the novel, her publisher completed the work from her notes, and his commentary remains the last chapter of the book. It is not surprising that the publisher would feel it only natural to begin by telling the readers that "we know Roger Hamley will marry Molly, and that is what we are most concerned about" (706). That a marriage telos was the goal seems in little doubt. Coral Lansbury has reiterated the sentiments of Gaskell's publisher that "Molly Gibson's marriage is the natural fulfillment hoped for in the first chapter" (Elizabeth Gaskell 116). Although Molly's marriage is the inevitable conclusion of the novel, it is curious that at the close of the last section written by Gaskell, Roger was once again leaving for eighteen months in Africa to complete his scientific project. Since we have been told earlier that this trip is dangerous, the final outcome of Molly and Roger would seem more in doubt than the publisher or the critic might have suspected.

Why did this otherwise unconventional author

return to this most conventional form in the last days of her writing career and her life? One obvious reason is that the public and the publishing industry were still hungry for the sentimental novel, and Elizabeth Gaskell knew how to satisfy this hunger. Although contemporary critics have tried to elevate the political novelist of the industrial age at the expense of the sentimental one, her own contemporaries saw her as a Victorian angel with her own brood of four daughters (her son William died at age two), running the household of her husband, the minister, receiving the imprimatur of Dickens with frequent publication of her work in his Household Words, and ultimately well deserving of her publisher's final commentary at the end of Wives and Daughters:

It is unnecessary to demonstrate to those who know what is and is not true literature that Mrs. Gaskell was gifted with some of the choicest faculties bestowed upon mankind; . . . and that she has gifted us with some of the truest, purest works of fiction in the language. And she was herself what her works show her to have been--a wise, good woman. (710)

What the "wise, good woman" left as her final legacy

is the complex negotiations of Molly Gibson and Cynthia Kirkpatrick in their transition from daughters to wives in the equally complex world of class-conscious and gender-divided Victorian England.

The title of the novel reflects the limitations of choice this society holds for women. For the middle-class woman at mid-century, given the realities and limitations of viable work alternatives, the only desirable and socially comfortable roles were daughter and wife. These roles, defined by a separate women's sphere, allow Gaskell not only the opportunity to demonstrate how women teach each other to survive in these narrow margins, but it also gives her the opportunity to turn her authorial light on the men who play fathers and sons, a light that harshly reveals the male investment in the marriage market, and, specifically, with the transformation into wives, "the way one wife can come to substitute for another in the symbolic order's economy of desire" (Homans, Bearing 251). She uses her new man of science, Roger Hamley, as well as the older version, Dr. Gibson, to demonstrate this reality. Gaskell's novel continually underscores the difficulties of the Victorian code without overtly challenging it, but the subtleties in

the fictional actualization of Cynthia Kirkpatrick, Clare Gibson, Mrs. Hamley, the Miss Brownings and Molly demonstrate the rapier eye of the social commentator who is fully aware of the magnitude of the problems that code engenders. As Anna Walters has suggested, "we are made to realize that chasm which separates male and female in terms of their potential for determining the course of their lives" (18).

Molly Gibson and Cynthia Kirkpatrick appear to represent two diametrically different paths to the ideal Victorian marriage. Although we might expect Gaskell to be clearly supportive of Molly's path, one marked by the generosity of spirit and self-sacrifice for others that the Victorian code mandated, what emerges is a recognition that Molly and Cynthia each must learn something of the other's ways for either to win at the game.

The common denominator in both Molly's and Cynthia's lives is the "mother," Clare Kirkpatrick Gibson. Clare is an unnatural mother in a Victorian context, but she is a woman who clearly understands the exchange value of beauty. In planning her wedding to Dr. Gibson, she is all too aware "how disagreeable it would be to have her young daughter flashing out

her beauty by the side of the faded bride, her mother" (156). When Dr. Gibson first proposes to her, Clare's hysterical outburst is not the result of romantic love but from her reflection on financial reality: "it was such a wonderful relief to feel that she need not struggle any more for a livelihood" (140). Yet despite this insight, Clare consistently shows tints of "pink sentimentalism" (167).

Molly's first impression of Clare comes when she is eight years old and visiting the Towers for the first time. Her initial impression is that Clare "was the most beautiful person she had ever seen" (46), but within two pages, Clare leaves Molly feeling "very guilty and very unhappy" (48). Because Clare forgets the sleeping Molly on this occasion, Molly is forced to enter the formal dining room with the Cumnor grandchildren, something Clare sees as an honor and Molly as a horror. The limitations of their future relationship is quickly delineated when Molly enters the room and, unlike the other children who run to an adult, "Molly had no one to go to" (53). Clare does, however, give Molly something she has not previously thought possible: the sense that she is pretty. When Clare insists that Molly have an elegant dress for the

wedding, Molly looks in the mirror and is "startled . . . [when she sees] the improvement of her appearance. 'I wonder if I'm pretty'" (187). If Molly is to have any semblance of success in the marriage market, she must be able to estimate her own worth clearly; Clare introduces her to that concept.

At this time, Clare has disposed of Cynthia in a French boarding school. It is because of Clare's careless mothering that Cynthia finds herself in a compromising position with Mr. Preston, a situation that generates a great deal of the future action of the novel. Clare leaves Cynthia at home with no money while she goes off for a weekend. Cynthia has been invited to go for a day trip with a local family but is penniless to do so. Mr. Preston, the Cumnor's landkeeper for the Ashton estate, offers to lend her twenty pounds, and subsequently offers to forget the debt if she will agree to marry him. Cynthia, unaware of the complexities of these negotiations, agrees. As Margaret Homans has observed, "Cynthia's promise to marry him, words with determinate meanings, she sees instead as negotiable currency because the promise was originally extracted in exchange for twenty pounds" (264). Cynthia believes that repayment will cancel

the vow, but while language is a medium of exchange for her, it is not for him.

Gaskell's sentimental irony is most poignant in her depiction of Clare Gibson. Mr. Gibson has decided to marry to insure Molly's protection from stray suitors, but the guardian he chooses, Clare, is the most likely to let the wolves in at the front door. Mrs. Gibson's motherhood translates into a mother showing her love for her child by turning "accidental circumstances to her advantage" (429), and this implies little effort beyond opportunity. Clare continually plots a variety of possible marriages for both Cynthia and Molly, the very action that Dr. Gibson most despises. For all her negative attributes, and they are relentlessly displayed throughout the novel, Clare Kirkpatrick Gibson is a survivor. She has escaped the drudgery of running a school for country girls; she has maintained social contact with the Cumnors (even if they use her as an errand girl in the exchange); she has secured a certain social position in Hollingford by visiting and establishing a level of elegance in her home that sets her apart from her countrywomen. In many ways she is an antagonistic mentor to Molly, just as Mrs. Yorke is

to Caroline. But Clare's impact on Cynthia has been more potent as Cynthia explains to Molly:

We won't speak of mamma, for your sake as much as mine or hers; but you must see she isn't one to help a girl with much good advice or good--Oh, Molly, you don't know how I was neglected just at a time when I wanted friends most. (486)

In looking at the importance of mother-daughter relationships, Phyllis Chesler has argued that as a result of mothers' anxiety for their daughters' social success, they "must be harsh in training their daughters to be 'feminine' in order that they learn how to serve in order to survive" (19). In contrast, we are told that Cynthia refuses to attend to her mother's language and this complete indifference makes "Mrs. Gibson hold her rather in awe" (255). In addition, Clare's motivations seem to always reflect an all consuming selfishness. When Lady Cumnor chastises Clare for the mess Cynthia had gotten herself into with Preston, Clare is only concerned with her own loss of favor at the great house and never gains a real sense of the danger Cynthia faced. Clare's continued jealousy of her daughter demonstrates how women are set in competition with

each other by the nature of the marketplace, and, for women on the fringes of the middle-class, how winning a good (financially secure) husband equals survival. But if mothers are the ultimate mentors in the skills necessary for the marriage market, Clare remains an enigmatic choice.

Both Molly and Cynthia are daughters and products of the communities from which they come. The mentoring relationships that mark those communities are central to both heroines' development. Many critics have argued, Pauline Nestor among them, that Gaskell depicts women united by circumstance, by choice, by political and natural bonds, but that these bonds are primarily maternal either in the guise of shared maternal feelings or motherhood itself. This is specifically applied to Molly Gibson, whose loss of her natural mother is described as "a jar to the whole tenour of her life" (36).

Despite her father's feeble attempt at a mother substitute in the figure of Clare, Molly has long had the support of more reliable replacements. The most obvious mother substitutes are the Miss Brownings who would "fain have taken a quasi-motherly interest in [Molly]" since they were her dead mother's friends,

"had she not been guarded by a watchful dragon in the shape of Betty, her nurse, who was jealous of any interference between her and her charge" (63).

Betty's role is supplemented by the presence of Molly's governess, Miss Jane Eyre.¹ Miss Eyre's influence, however, is contained by the dictates of Molly's father, who, like the Reverend Helstone's misunderstanding of Caroline's needs, sees Molly's educational requirements as limited:

Don't teach Molly too much; she must sew, and read, and write, and do her sums; but I want to keep her a child, and if I find more learning desirable for her, I'll see about giving it to her myself. After all, I'm not sure reading and writing is necessary. Many a good woman gets married with only a cross instead of her name; it's rather a diluting of mother-wit, to my fancy; but, however, we must yield to the prejudices of society. (65)

Like Caroline, Molly is able "by fighting and struggling hard . . . [to persuade] her father to let her have French and drawing lessons" (65).

Although the dragon Betty may be Molly's early protector, danger erupts for Molly when her father

realizes, in light of Mr. Coxe's intercepted love letter, that she is growing fast "into a woman, and already the passive object of some of the strong interests that affect a woman's life; and he . . . could not guard her as he would have wished" (87). The elder Miss Browning's importance becomes clear as Molly emerges into the marketplace of male/female relationships. She is the one who first notices the amount of time Molly spends with Roger Hamley, and hints at the meaning of this situation. Although Molly, blushing profusely, denies any of Miss Browning's "fancy," Miss Browning makes her point that Molly is "too young to let her mind be running on lovers" (184). The lesson the elder Miss Browning conveys is a warning to withdraw from the very market she fears Molly has already entered. In this context, the Miss Brownings become supporters of the patriarch, Dr. Gibson, who wishes above all to keep Molly a child. This does not, however, imply any disloyalty to Molly's good on their part.

When the rumors are flying about Molly and Mr. Preston, the Miss Brownings defend her to all who challenge her reputation. When Miss Phoebe dares to voice a doubt about Molly to her sister, she is roused

"with a good box on the ear" and the threat "if I ever hear you say such things again, I'll turn you out of the house" (579). In fact, Miss Phoebe has already publicly defended Molly to Mrs. Dawes. The power of the sisters' loyalty to Molly is obvious in their reflections about Preston. As Miss Browning ruminates on the possibility of their relationship, she vows "he must not, and he shall not, have Molly, if I go into church and forbid the banns myself; . . . we must keep on the lookout Phoebe. I'll be her guardian angel, in spite of herself" (502). These mother-mentors, although single themselves, have a keen sense of the high stakes a young woman's reputation represents in the marriage market and community as a whole. If there was any doubt, Mrs. Goodenough keeps her daughter away from Molly when the town is in the throws of believing she has been compromised by Mr. Preston because even association with someone whose reputation has been impugned can be damaging. The loyalty of the Miss Brownings during this time, again, underscores the power of the community they provide for Molly, even when she is not fully aware of the magnitude of that commitment.

The Miss Brownings do not present a model of

mentors as loving or indulgent, qualities we might expect a supportive community to entail. Rather, they provide Molly with guidance and the challenge to prove herself worthy of them. When Lady Harriet makes fun of the Miss Brownings, Molly must decide whether it is more important to observe the decorum of class distinctions and leave Lady Harriet's comments unchallenged, or to defend her friends. Molly challenges class proprieties in the name of friendship when she tells Lady Harriet not to come to visit her "because I think I ought not to have any one coming to see me who laughs at the friends I am staying with, and calls them names" (199). With this action, Molly adds Lady Harriet, who is impressed by this loyalty, to her community.

Rather than the Miss Brownings, Pauline Nestor has argued that Molly's attraction to Mrs. Hamley is emblematic of her need to satisfy her "mother-want" (45), but this diminishes the multi-dimensional nature of this relationship. Mrs. Hamley is the embodiment of a conduct-book model of an angel in the house. She is "gentle and sentimental; tender and good" (74), and having sacrificed most of her interests and friends for the sake of her husband's sense of inadequacy, she

sinks "into the condition of a chronic invalid" (73). Mrs. Hamley is a woman in a world of men, and this lack of female community seems an integral part of her decline since we are told she would have done better had she had a daughter. Given this wife without a daughter, it is not surprising that she welcomes Molly with the "open arms of her heart" (77). Mrs. Hamley's passivity and her "heated and scented life" (76) are clearly not acceptable models for Molly, thus Molly's response to it is not imitative but counter-active: Molly finds it "far easier to be active than passive during this process . . . and willingly kisses the sweet pale face held up to her" (94-5). Mrs. Hamley's influence on Molly is one of opportunity and observance. When Mrs. Hamley offers to comfort Molly after the marriage of her father to Clare, Molly declines, feeling it would be improper to disclose such family secrets even to this close friend. Mrs. Hamley's response: "Good girl! You are stronger than I am, and can do without sympathy" (227), underscores the counter-model purpose she serves in Molly's life. It is, of course, because of Mrs. Hamley that Molly becomes involved with Osborne's secret and Roger's science, and more importantly, after Mrs. Hamley's

death, Molly goes to the Hall and tries to fill her place--the peacemaker between son and father--and becomes physically ill herself as a result. As Patsy Stoneman has pointed out:

In Elizabeth Gaskell's novels, caring for others requires not subservience and conformity but courage and independence. Her heroines may not differ in institutional terms from other dutiful daughters, wives and mothers, but they achieve that sense of self-worth which is the prerequisite for political action; they express and take responsibility for judgment. (206)

Molly's observation of Mrs. Hamley's sacrifice and endurance through her long and, we are told, painful illness, as well as her ascendance, despite her illness and her husband's ignorance of her needs, to the position of "ruling spirit of the house" (285) are the lessons Mrs. Hamley offers. Molly is able through observation to evaluate this position of self-sacrifice. When Roger Hamley, a self-identified mentor, finds Molly in the garden hysterical after her father's revelation about his impending marriage, he offers advice quite in keeping with his mother's mode of life--to think of other's happiness first.

However, Molly's response, echoing Caroline's assessment of old maidhood, indicates that she has already internalized the meaning of that message and rejects it:

did it mean giving up her individuality, quenching all the warm love, the true desires, that made her herself? . . . It will be very dull when I shall have killed myself, as it were, and live only in trying to do, and to be, as other people like. I don't see any end to it. I might as well never have lived. (169-70)

In her relationship with Mrs. Hamley, Molly has seen the cost of being an "angel in the house" and, in contrast, has gained a better sense of her self. This step in her self-actualization is imperative if she is to be able to accept Cynthia's much more astute evaluation of marriage and relationships later in the novel.

One of the most interesting mentoring relationships in the novel is that of Lady Harriet to Molly. Lady Harriet is the single daughter of Lord and Lady Cumnor, the local nobility. She is a rebel in her own right and proves herself the most astute member of the whole family when it comes to self-

evaluation and interaction with the local community. Lady Harriet's "few democratic sentiments are personal, not general in nature. Only to Molly, who has the courage and common sense to question the inconsistencies of her attitude, does Lady Harriet extend friendship" (Lansbury, Novel 190). Lady Harriet gives Molly her first insight into the thinking processes of the upper-class. During their conversation at her father's wedding, Molly says, "your ladyship keeps speaking of the sort of--the class of people to which I belong as if it was a kind of strange animal you were talking about; yet you talk so openly to me" (196). Although Molly goes on to admit that she thinks Lady Harriet impertinent, Lady Harriet acknowledges:

I talk after my kind, just as you talk after your kind. It's only the surface with both of us. . . .
. Somehow I separate you from all these Hollingford people. . . . You at least are simple and truthful, and that's why I . . . talked to you . . . as I would to my equal.
(197)

The impact of this exchange is seen in Molly's interactions with her stepmother who claims to have

the insider's view of the Cumnor household for which she was a governess, but Molly has seen this class stripped of the attractive veneer Clare always puts upon it, and Molly is not impressed.

Lady Harriet and Molly both admit having been influenced by novels. When Molly first overhears Osborne's secret, she thinks "she had always wished to come into direct contact with a love story: here she had, and she only found it very uncomfortable; there was a sense of concealment and uncertainty about it" (249). Lady Harriet recommends she read Maria Edgeworth since she is "vastly improving and moral, and yet quite sufficiently interesting" (196). She also admits to being "well versed in the tender passions thanks to novels" (131). When Lady Cumnor tries to remonstrate her for her flippant attitude towards love, Lady Harriet responds: "My dear Mamma, your exhortations are just eighteen years too late. I've talked all the freshness off love, and that's the reason I'm tired of the subject" (126). Here, as elsewhere in the novel, Lady Harriet confounds every generalization made about women, and thanks to the privilege of her class, much like Shirley before her engagement, she rules the local society as Miss

Deborah Jenkyns had ruled the community of Cranford. She shows her political acumen at the harvest dance at which the Duchess arrives in peasant dress instead of her famed diamonds, disappointing all the local people who had come to see her. Lady Harriet immediately realizes the affront the Duchess and, by extension, her family have committed. She urges her brother to dance with Molly, and she seeks out a young farmer and does the same. She reminds her resistant brother that an election is coming up, and here, too, shows her political insight is greater than the brother who will actually hold the seat.

Lady Harriet's most important act in the context of Molly's community and development is an act of which Molly herself is unaware. When Molly's reputation is tarnished by the rumored liaison with Mr. Preston, Lady Harriet, who warned Molly against Preston at their first meeting, immediately senses that the facts don't fit the Molly she has come to know. Lady Harriet restores Molly's reputation by walking around the town twice with her so that all can see them together. She knows her influence over the town's people; as she wryly observes: "Hollingford is not the place I take it to be, if it doesn't veer

round in Miss Gibson's favor after my today's trotting of that child about" (585). She even enlists Miss Phoebe as an ally in this venture, "you and I against the world, in defence of a distressed damsel" (581). Lady Harriet, like Miss Browning earlier, claims she will go to the church and deny the banns if she has to, and proves the depth of her feelings for Molly by her attention and visits when Molly is ill.

The friendship with Lady Harriet provides Molly with a different kind of social entry than her other relationships. It is because of Lady Harriet's interest that she is invited to stay at the Towers and there is reunited with Roger Hamley. Molly gains social status by association, a reward for her sincerity and intrinsic lack of interest in gaining that status. In this way, Molly's sense of self-approval, the product of this diverse and strong community of women, is underscored. If Molly is the product of a community of mentoring women, Cynthia's experience stands in dramatic contrast, and, yet, without Cynthia, Molly could not accomplish the one goal that will culminate her search for self-definition--marriage to Roger.

Gaskell's publisher felt it necessary to state in

that last chapter that "Cynthia is one of the most difficult characters which has ever been attempted in our time" (708). Unlike many nineteenth-century women who, when orphaned, are thrown back on their own resources and gain sympathy out of the very nature of their struggle, Cynthia is not an orphan, but she is bereft of community at least until she meets Molly. "Raised by a vain and unloving mother, [Cynthia] lacks Molly's moral sense; she is fully within the economy of desire when Molly meets her" (Homans 258). Cynthia learns to please as a way of negotiating her treacherously unprotected path, but this strategy leaves her constantly dependent on the opinions of others; any conflict in that image, any doubt in the unconditional admiration of the viewer, leaves her with a sense of "mental fever," a "brilliance like the glitter of the pieces of a broken mirror, which confuses and bewilders" (389). After Cynthia confides her story about Preston to Molly, Molly becomes a knowing witness, and even with Molly, whom Cynthia acknowledges she loves "better than anyone" (257), Cynthia cannot bear the altered reflection and thrusts her aside.

Unlike her mother, who is content to bask in the reflection of her own platitudes and self-esteem, Cynthia is too intelligent for this level of self-delusion. She recognizes that there is a difference between being a heroine and being a good woman, acknowledging the possibility for the former but not the latter. She offers this evaluation for Molly's edification: "don't you see I have grown up outside the pale of duty and 'oughts.' Love me as I am, sweet one, for I shall never be better" (261). Loving Cynthia is a foregone conclusion since she has an "unconscious power of fascination," a power that may attract fellow schoolgirls and other susceptible persons not because of her virtues, her beauty, her sweetness, her cleverness, "but by something that can charm, not only men but . . . her own sex; it cannot be defined, or rather it is so delicate a mixture of many gifts and qualities that it is impossible to decide on the proportions of each" (254). The difference between Clare and Cynthia is that Cynthia recognizes this power and "has learned to gamble with more verve and greater success" than her mother (Lansbury, Novel 203).

Although Cynthia claims, "a good number of people love me, I believe, or at least they think they do; but I never seem to care much for anyone" (257), she exhibits a generosity of heart in her friendship with Molly. It is Cynthia's comforting touch after the death of Mrs. Hamley that "thawed the tears that had been gathering heavily at Molly's Heart" (256), and during Molly's illness it is with the appearance of Cynthia (who gives up her pleasure and returns from London immediately when Lady Harriet informs her of Molly's condition) that "Molly's health and spirits improved rapidly" (641). Perhaps because she is secure in her own beauty, Cynthia does not hesitate to demolish her own bonnets and gowns to enhance those of Molly. She refuses to be "sentimental" about the nosegays from the Hamleys: "I never would allow sentiment to interfere with my choice of colours" (319). Cynthia, even more than Clare, teaches Molly to believe in her own prettiness: "French girls would tell you, to believe that you were pretty would make you so" (320).

Cynthia's most powerful lessons for Molly come from her ability to collect and dispose of suitors, and her unsentimental perceptions of marriage in

general. This mentoring experience is both passive and active. When it becomes clear that Cynthia has captured Roger's heart, despite the fact that "Cynthia was not capable of returning such feelings [as Roger's]; she had had too little true love in her life, and perhaps too much admiration to do so" (375), Molly falls into a classic heroine's physical decline, much like that experienced by both Caroline and Louis Moore. "Her heart beat more feebly and slower; the vivifying stimulant of hope--even unacknowledged hope--was gone out of her life" (458). Rather than invoking sympathy, Molly's emotionalism is continually contrasted with Cynthia's control and the power it implies. When Osborne comes to congratulate Cynthia on her engagement to his brother, Cynthia's non-conformity to tradition surfaces. He expects to witness the emotional unburdening of a love-sick girl, but "the more she suspected that she was called upon for a display of emotion, the less would she show; and her emotions were generally under control of her will" (483).

Molly's loyalty to Cynthia creates the most powerful learning situation she experiences in the novel: the encounter with Preston in an attempt to

retrieve the compromising letters the young Cynthia had written. The nature of this intrigue goes against everything Molly has been raised to value, but it offers her the opportunity to know power beyond the scope of a "woman's" experience and feminine weakness, strengthening her own perceptions of right and wrong. When Molly meets Preston in the woods, it is not only her intelligence that arouses his unwilling admiration but the fact that "he perceived that Molly was . . . unconscious that he was a young man, and she a young woman" (533); she is an individual in her own right. Molly aptly reads the nature of Preston's character and knows that only an economic interest larger than the value of Cynthia as a wife will prompt him to return the letters. Here, too, Molly's association with Lady Harriet gives her the trump card: she threatens to expose Preston to his employers. His acceptance of these terms exposes the fact that "his interest in Cynthia remains ultimately at the level of her exchange value" (Homans 267), and offers Molly a chance to recognize the unromantic side of the marriage bargain. It is ironic, too, that Cynthia is not rescued by Prince Charming but by Molly, underscoring the positive power of female friendship

in contrast to the mercenary world of male/female interactions. This experience tempers Molly, regardless of her initial rejection, to accept her position as a substitute for Cynthia in Roger's economy of desire.

It is important to note that, even within the strict codes of sentimental plotting, Gaskell does not write Cynthia out of that plot. Miss Browning tries to mentor Cynthia by taking her to task for her "quips and cranks" and advises her not to let "her spirits carry her away" (276), but Cynthia has been too well rewarded for her "power on strangers" to give up the bargaining chips she understands. The implication that Cynthia could have been much better had she had the advantage of community that Molly does is evident in her admissions that Molly is worth twenty of her and that she knows she could have been better but for circumstance. Gaskell does not condemn Cynthia out of hand; rather, Cynthia is rewarded with a marriage to Mr. Henderson that provides wealth and position, a classic sentimental ending.

Molly's status as an object of exchange in a male economy of desire is confirmed by her father's statement to Roger--"I'd rather give my child . . . to

you, than to any man in the world" (701)--a position which the sentimental plot has predetermined for her from chapter one. Molly, however, is not about to become Mrs. Hamley or Clare Gibson. She reads scientific journals; she has a strong community of support that now includes Cynthia and Lady Harriet. In the last scene, "Mrs. Gibson is irritated with Molly's refusal to learn her kind of selfish altruism" (Stoneman 176), but we know that Molly's moral principles have been well formed.

Gaskell leaves us with a passing nod of her head to the conventions of marriage with Lady Cumnor's advice to Cynthia:

But you must conduct yourself with discretion in whatever state of life it pleases God to place you, whether married or single. You must reverence your husband, and conform to his opinion in all things. (662)

But the "wise, good" author also points out that this philosophy would surprise Lord Cumnor given its lack of application in his own marriage. In addition, Lady Cumnor's wedding present, a set of household books, is most unromantic but true to the financial realities that underpin the marriage closure. Both Gaskell and

Bronte created fictions of female desire and the quest for self-actualization with a level of psychological realism that strains the boundaries and credibility of marriage as the final stroke of self-definition for their nineteenth-century heroines. Through the use of fictional mentoring relationships both authors explore the intricacies of the marriage market, the complexity of female survival in that context, and open the edges of the female bildung to include a sense of self-definition that transcends the title of "wife." Although marriage remained the dominant mode of fictional closure, the strain exhibited in these texts would continue to be felt through the end of the century.

NOTES

¹ Gaskell's use of the name of Charlotte Bronte's most famous character, Jane Eyre, as the name for Molly's governess is a clear tribute to her friend and fellow author. Gaskell is the author of The Life of Charlotte Bronte (1857), a biography still considered one of the finest available.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conflicted Desire: Closure and Community in Alcott's Little Women and Work: A Story of Experience

In 1868, Louisa May Alcott published Little Women, and with this event, her reputation, more than any other American writer of the latter part of the nineteenth century, came to be associated with sentimentality. Contemporary critics and readers have become increasingly interested in the "serious" Alcott, author of adult fiction such as Work: A Story of Experience and Moods, and the Alcott who published under the pseudonym: A.M. Bernard--author of sensational stories. Regardless of the venue, Louisa May Alcott is emerging as an author who struggled seriously with the questions of women's position in patriarchal society, with the lack of opportunities for independent women, and the power of the pen to raise these issues.

Alcott's life has often been the most familiar lens through which to read her novels. Her own admission of the autobiographical nature of Little

Women, such stories as "Transcendental Wild Oats," and the actual work experiences of Christie Devon in Work has often overshadowed the potentially subversive and destabilizing plot elements of her novels. Alcott, who spent most of her life supporting her family, was painfully aware of her financial responsibilities and the income potential from feeding the public's taste for sentimental novels. This life did not come without cost. After playing with her sister Anna's children, Alcott writes in her journal: "She is a happy woman! I sell my children, and though they feed me, they don't love me as hers do" (195). Alcott did invest herself in the Women's Movement, signing the Seneca Fall's Principles and becoming a member of the New England Women's Suffrage Association. Her own transcendental upbringing at the hands of her father, Bronson Alcott, would surely have crystallized for Louisa that the ideal of transcendental thought in America was problematic for women in that it required experience and self-reliance, opportunities denied most women in the nineteenth century. Alcott's intellectual sensibility could not be disguised in or by the sentimental or sensational plot lines that she wrote. Her tale of Bunyan's pilgrim in Little Women

"emphasizes self-suppression without an ultimate self-actualization" (Langland 119), a bildungsroman terminated within a marriage plot. Although Christie's journey in Work, which has many similarities to the overt references to Bunyan's Christian in Little Women, ends with a sense of obedience, gentleness and the virtues of Motherhood typical of the sentimental marriage-plot and little womanhood, the community of women it offers provides a radical departure from the simple containment of the heroine in marriage. As Jean Fagan Yellin has pointed out, Alcott "endorses the domestic values which she opposes to those of the marketplace. She does not, however, inevitably locate these within the framework of conventional marriage" (531). These novels, then, delineate both the radical elements possible within the most overt sentimental treatment of Little Women, and the social capitulation necessary for the introduction of a useful existence for women beyond marriage in Work--a major development towards the deconstruction of the marriage-plot novel.

Irony is rife in Alcott's writings about her literary career. She wryly refers to the alter ego behind the "little woman" sensibility that brought her

success with such texts as Good Wives, Little Men, Jo's Boys, Old Fashioned Girl, Rose in Bloom, etc., as a "literary nursemaid who provides moral pap for the young" (qtd. in Kaledin 251). She also referred to herself as "the golden goose who can sell her eggs for a good price if she isn't killed by too much driving" (qtd. in Elbert xviii). But Alcott was much more than the purveyor of children's literature or sentimental golden eggs, the reputation with which she has most often been categorized.

Under the pseudonym A. M. Bernard, she wrote many lurid, gothic tales often focusing on female revenge for male wrong-doing. In "Pauline's Passion," the angry, jilted governess, Pauline Valary, marries the young heir who worships her, and together they act out her carefully scripted revenge. In "Behind the Mask," a sweet woman, Jean Muir, enters the master's house as the despised and powerless governess but marries the patriarch and gains power over those who had controlled her. In each case, however, the patriarchal hierarchy of power is not challenged, just reassigned to the woman through the agency of a man. As Ann Murphy has argued: "The pattern of these thrillers makes clear that Alcott had difficulty

visualizing a new form of power" (580). Although she was unable to envision an alternative to male power in the early stages of her career, with the publication of Little Women, Alcott began to stretch her vision and risk exposing both the richness of female experience and the anger social and cultural limitation generates in a thinking woman. It is interesting to note that with the publication of Little Women she stopped writing sensational fiction.

If we can see Little Women as the beginning of Alcott's attempts at radical representation of female experience, a shift in focus that exposes the importance of female mentoring in dealing with the marketplaces of marriage and employment, her novel Work: A Story of Experience is her most feminist attempt to challenge this positioning and to offer a radical alternative in the form of a community of women whose sole purpose is to benefit other women's lots. As Langland has suggested, Little Women is Alcott's social romance, Work, her feminist romance (113). If Little Women tries to offer a reconciliation between autonomy and community through the facilitation of female mentors, most notably the radical presence of Marmee, Work attempts to use the

community of women to contradict the expected validation of female passivity and self-suppression in marriage. Despite the radical elements of Work, the novel that Harper's New Monthly Magazine's reviewer called, "Miss Alcott's first real novel" ("Review" 618), Alcott could not escape the inevitable balance for radicalism--marriage of the heroine. As Sarah Elbert outlines in her introduction to Work:

The principles of loving service, compassion, and sisterhood were surely threatened by the impersonal atmosphere of the marketplace. But it was in the contradictions between the promise of individual fulfillment and the awareness of domestic social relationships as both limiting and fulfilling of human beings' deepest needs that Alcott struggled to define nineteenth-century womanhood for her readers. (xxiv)

For Alcott, the search for a resolution between these two conflicting forces in a culture that defined male and female spheres as totally separate, is evident in both Little Women and Work.

Alcott's intrinsic hostility to the hand that proverbially fed her, the sentimental novel, is clear when we note that "sentimentality is what she and her

characters most dread" (Brophy 93). That little women can be social interrogators is delineated through the obvious suffering, dutifulness, self-sacrifice and, above all, self-control that role demands of Alcott's heroines. In fact, Little Women, the original book which ends with Meg's engagement and which is the focus of this study, is a female bildungsroman which delineates the "clashes of unique human possibility with the restraints of social convention" (Abel et al. 6). "The themes of work, money, and social position, and the relation of female autonomy, are integral to the narrative" (Bedell 147); Little Women is about the complex negotiations female power requires in a male-dominated society and the importance of female community in dealing with the internal conflict or "civil war" these negotiations generate.

Despite the implied radicalism of Little Women, the final product demonstrates the power of public approval for Louisa May Alcott. The novel is marked by alternating scenes of attempted or attained freedom and the immediate comeuppance such behavior generates. Thus, the girls' week of freedom from household cares is mitigated by the consequence: the death of Beth's bird and a general malaise that only a reaffirmation

of the positive virtues of domestic chores will relieve. As Murphy has pointed out, "It preaches domestic containment and Bunyanesque self-denial while it explores the infinity of inward female space and suggests unending rage against the cultural limitations imposed on female development" (565). But it also accepts and reenforces cultural normative expectations by ending with a marriage. Even in this cultural capitulation, Alcott plays with expectation. As Eve Kornfield and Susan Jackson have discovered in several nineteenth-century novels by women: "The marriages in the novels reveal certain patterns: either the couple has to wait for a few years, or else the marriage does not separate the heroine from her family" (72). This pattern is certainly obvious in Meg's response to John's statement that it will be three years before he will be financially stable enough to marry her: "I've got so much to learn before I shall be ready, it seems a short time to me" (LW 301).

This "sentimental tract" (Janeway 98), "dreadful masterpiece" (Brophy 96), and "American female myth" of the passage from childhood to womanhood (Bedell 146) is concerned with more than love and romance or

self-discipline. As Elaine Showalter has argued in her introduction to Alternative Alcott: "If women are trapped within feminine scripts of childishness and victimization, Alcott suggests, they can unmask these roles only by deliberately overacting them" (xxx). The uncovering of this mimesis, as Irigaray has suggested, reveals the secrets of feminine and literary pretense and shows Little Women to be a book that is not sweetness and light, as Hemingway once suggested, but rather "stalwart proof of his definition of courage: grace under pressure" (Russ 102). Underscoring its subversive nature, Little Women has been seen in a variety of unflattering lights. Some feminist critics echo the sentiments of Elizabeth Vincent who condemned Little Women in The New Republic in 1924 as inconsistent with the "age of equality and economic independence" and so pernicious an influence that it required censorship (204). Stephanie Harrington has argued that it upholds the feminine mystique that keeps women in their place by glorifying such sentiments as the virtues of patience, tempered willfulness and understanding (111). But the fact remains that Little Women has survived American feminism and anti-feminism and is able "in some

mysterious way to assume a protective coloration which blends with the prevailing ideological winds, emerging fresh, whole--and different--for the next generation of women" (Bedell 146).

The continued attraction of this novel, at least partially, lies in the tension between the protagonists' alignment with the ideology of separate male and female spheres and the simultaneous interrogation of that position, a contrast that undermines and even militates against the very institutions Alcott would seem, on the surface, to be recommending. Jo March's battle to control her anger and her continual discomfort with her own gender and its social implications underscore the tensions that shape female development and lead to the disjunction between surface plot and encoded rebellion. The unresolved nature of this dichotomy is clear since this work ends in an engagement not of the heroine, Jo, but of her sister Meg whose little womanhood has never really been in question. Even in the sequel, Good Wives, (usually published as part of Little Women in contemporary editions) Jo's marriage to Professor Bhaer is very complicated since it circumvents the romantic model of erotic, heterosexual love (the

reward for little womanhood), yet it secures her a place of her own. The cost of this place, however, is Bhaer's overseeing of the burning of her writing. Carolyn Heilbrun has argued that "Alcott betrayed Jo" and suggests that Jo is a positive model only if we overlook her marriage ("Influence" 23). The closure of Little Women, then, is, at best, tenuous and reiterates the strain in this novel of sentiment. As Judith Fetterley has noted, the imaginative experience of Little Women is built on a paradox: the figure who most resists the pressure to become a little woman, Jo, is the most attractive, and the figure who most succumbs to it, Beth, dies ("Civil War" 379). And as Elizabeth Keyser has discovered:

What at first reading appears to be a sermon on the need for cheerful resignation becomes, on closer reading, a protest against the woman's ignorance, passivity, vulnerability and dependence. (447)

The battle line for little women is the transition into the world of womanhood and the implied marriage which is its reward, and the battleground is defined by the parameters of middle-class female society--its freedoms, its constraints and its

contradictions. The pre-nuptial freedom that fosters the bildung within the marriage-plot novel is evident in the female world of the March household that allows each sister's personality to emerge. But, as in other sentimental novels, the lessons to be learned in this period are ones of accommodation to society and, in Jo's case, that means constraint of spirit, specifically, control over her temper and suppression of her "masculine" dreams. These lessons of accommodation are not simply examples of interior colonization; they also demonstrate the dangers of patriarchal hierarchies and the necessity for equality in the female community which continues to provide some sense of autonomy to the heroine. This power is most clearly seen in Work, but in both novels, as in the British counterparts, these lessons are learned at the hands of other women.

The inherent discomfort of the female bildung in a sentimental context is examined through Jo's discomfort with her gender. Jo's struggle with the constraints of "little womanhood" is a recurring theme and is often tied to her desire to remain a child. The freedom that girlhood implies is not enough to satisfy Jo's desire to go to war with her father. As

Jo complains: "I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy. . . . I'm dying to go and fight with papa, and I can only stay at home and knit, like a poky old woman!" (13-14). But girlhood does allow her "boyish ways," including whistling, playing male parts in her plays, and befriending the Laurence boy as if she were one herself (30, 77). Jo's repeated wishes that she remain the same age, that she have an iron upon her head to keep her from growing up, like her reference to herself as "the man of the family now papa is away" (16), points to "her sense of deviance from what is conventionally expected of her" (Pauly 124). Alcott ties this resistance to the attributes Jo equates with womanhood: long gowns, becoming "Miss March" and hairpins (13). The discomfort of the woman's role is highlighted in Jo's physical description; she had "the appearance of a girl who was rapidly shooting up into a woman, and didn't like it" (15). It falls to Meg, the most successful little woman, to try to mentor Jo into acceptance of the female role. She is the one who berates Jo for the scorch mark on her dress, and she is the one who makes the sacrifice of one glove so that Jo may not appear socially unacceptable at the Gardiners' party.

Meg's example, however, is not enough to curb or assuage Jo's gender discomfort because at the heart of that discomfort is an anger whose tempering will require a more mature mentor than Meg. Although the literal civil war is not to be Jo's, she must meet her "Apollyon", her anger, on the domestic battlefield. As Jo observes, "keeping her temper at home was a much harder task than facing a rebel or two down South" (22), a reminder that, for women, the war is to be fought at home. As Heilbrun observes in Writing a Woman's Life, "above all other prohibitions, what has been forbidden to women is anger, together with the open admission of the desire for power and control over one's life" (13). But this war, for Jo, is fought with the help of her female community.

In the sisters' metaphoric reenactment of Pilgrim's Progress recommended by Marmee, Marmee is compared to "Help" who sets them on their path with their appropriate bundles. This is an apt description of the role she plays as mother-mentor, readying them for survival in the marriage market. Marmee is endowed with mythic stature: Beth can only stitch "Mother" on the Christmas handkerchiefs giving no thought to any other identity such as M.M. or M.

March, and it is clear during Beth's illness that, for Jo and Meg, Marmee and God are equal in recuperative powers. Despite the fact that Marmee initiates the Pilgrims' quest, one taken up by the girls as a game, their success is to be evaluated by the absent patriarch, Mr. March, upon his return. Marmee is not, however, simply an allegorical mouthpiece for the father's doctrine of "conquer yourself." It is in her attempt to guide Jo through the minefield of her strong will that Marmee's own burden is disclosed.

When Amy burns Jo's treasured manuscript of stories, Jo's anger leads to Amy's near drowning, a fact that Fetterley suggests has as its moral that "female anger is so unacceptable that there are no degrees to it: all anger leads to murder" ("Civil War" 380). Jo's anger is so intense and so powerful that Jo fears her own ability to "hurt anyone, and enjoy it" (109). This combination of fear and joy in the power of anger, and, by implication, the self-expression contained in acting upon it, is set in contrast to the lesson of self-control Marmee must teach.

Marmee explains that she has fought the temptation of anger first with the help of her mother

(establishing a tradition of mother-mentors), then with Mr. March's vigilant eye helping her control her temper by folding her lips tight and walking away from the situation, a gesture whose silence cannot be overlooked. But the ultimate need for control comes with the children: "the love, respect, and confidence of my children was the sweetest reward I could receive for my efforts to be the woman I would have them copy" (111). Self-control in these circumstances points to the infantilization of women in marriage--her discipline at the hands of Mr. March is no different than that of the children. In addition, Alcott allows Marmee to explain that her anger has erupted from its tight confines when she finds herself poor and surrounded by her four daughters, (the result of Mr. March's "trying to help an unfortunate friend" (55) and losing all his property). As readers, we have the sense that Marmee has good reason to be angry at the father who volunteers to go to war when he is "too old to be drafted, and not strong enough for a soldier" (19). But as Murphy has pointed out: "The institution of motherhood in a patriarchal culture achieves not only the reproduction of mothering but the perpetuation of patriarchy" (574). So, again, in a

critical moment of interrogation, Alcott undermines the subversiveness with Jo's learning a powerful lesson: "in that sad yet happy hour, she had learned not only the bitterness of remorse and despair, but the sweetness of self-denial and self-control" (113). The nature of that despair seems to remain in the father's directive to "conquer oneself and live for others" (20).

Although these lessons of little womanhood at the hands of Marmee may sway Jo emotionally, it is the harsher mentoring of Aunt March that gives them intellectual scope. Jo notes that:

Her quick temper, sharp tongue, and restless spirit were always getting her into scrapes, and her life was a series of ups and downs, which were both comic and pathetic. But the training she received at Aunt March's was just what she needed. (57)

Aunt March's lesson may appear to be patience with an irascible old woman, but she also offers access to books, and, perhaps more subtly, an example of the power of a woman of independent means. Jo's future as a writer is thus tempered at this fireside, and it is clear that she has absorbed the lesson of the power of

money when she chooses to cut and sell her hair to help Marmee rather than depend on the whims of Aunt March. Aunt March, finally, teaches Jo that intelligence and independence are not rewardable virtues in a young woman by offering Amy, who is willing to please, not Jo, the trip to Europe.

Jo is not the only March sister to struggle with the role of "little woman." Amy, in the context of this first volume, has remained the least discussed member of the March family; yet Amy, like Cynthia Kirkpatrick before her, demonstrates an ability to manipulate the system to her advantage at every encounter. While Marmee's presence inspires the other girls to activity, it provides Amy an opportunity to give directions and sit with her hands folded. Her ego seems endless whether it be her delight at giving Marmee the "best" Christmas present or indulging in self-pity at her exile when Beth is ill, a situation she manages to turn to her advantage by eliciting Laurie's promise to visit (and entertain) her. Amy's callous evaluation of Aunt March's jewelry, items she feels would be better suited to distribution now than after the old lady's death, is a troubling counterpoint to the selfless, suffering Beth left at

home. Amy gets her pickled limes, her fun with Laurie and the unconditional support of the community of women when she is called to task by her teacher. Perhaps Alcott felt safer using this least likeable of the sisters to push the sentimental expectations furthest, but there is the underlying recognition that the handsome young man is dangerous in his ability to contain a little woman in romance. Thus, Amy, who is in many ways most adept at dealing with her own commodification, gets Laurie in the sequel, Good Wives. But we should not be surprised; Amy, we are told frequently, is beautiful. And in the marriage market, as we have seen in the earlier novels, beauty is a powerful form of currency.

If Amy emerges as the most materially successful sister, despite her lack of self-effacing qualities, the portrait of Beth, "the little cricket on the hearth" who will stop chirping before anyone notices (59), offers a painful irony in the rewards for Beth's lack of selfishness. While Amy has acquired the much more valuable and marketable skill of the "happy art of pleasing without effort" (59), Beth has learned to be malleable so as to fill everyone's needs. Beth may gain a piano because she is able to fill Mr.

Laurence's needs for a granddaughter, but she also acquires scarlet fever because she is overlooked by her sisters when she takes on the care of the Hummels. Marmee may lecture Amy about modesty: "You have a good many gifts and virtues, but there is no need in parading them . . . real talent or goodness will not be overlooked long" (98), but, the lesson of little womanhood, self-sacrifice, is undercut by Beth's example of it in action.

Beth's lack of self-identity excludes her from any sense of *bildung*, a process that Alcott seems to suggest, even if it ends in marriage, is necessary for female survival. Beth can not enter the marriage market because she is totally unprepared to come to terms with the proscribed adult role of woman. She has not learned the art of pleasing without a loss of self, and it is a lesson that the self-absorbed Amy cannot teach her in the world of little women. As Kornfield and Jackson conclude: "the heroines of these female bildungsromans who marry do so only after they have established their own independence" (72).

Alcott uses the sisters' instruction in and struggle against the rules of the marriage marketplace as a source of interrogation of these very rules that

so control a middle-class woman's options. Marmee's plan for her girls reflects her understanding of female valuation and limitation. She wants them to embody the socially validated accomplishments of women to be:

beautiful, accomplished, and good; to be admired, loved and respected; to have a happy youth, to be well and wisely married, and to lead useful, pleasant lives . . . to be loved and chosen by a good man is the best and sweetest thing which can happen to a woman. (132)

This sentimental view of true womanhood is tempered, however, by Marmee's attention to the financial realities of women's lives:

I am ambitious for you, but not to have you make a dash in the world--marry rich men merely because they are rich, or have splendid houses. . . . Money is a needful and precious thing . . . but I never want you to think of it as the first or only prize to strive for. (133)

Although Marmee claims she would rather the girls be poor men's wives if beloved and contented rather than queens "without self-respect and peace" (133), the message remains: the only thing that can really happen

to little women is that they can be chosen. As Patricia Meyer Spacks points out: "Like Molly in Wives and Daughters, Miss Alcott's heroines learn that they must sit at home and wait" (98). Despite Marmee's directive: "better be happy old maids than unhappy wives or unmaidenly girls, running about to find husbands" (133), the alternative to marriage offered is not freedom and adventure, but old maidhood, and as Fetterley has pointed out, "old maidhood obliterates little womanhood and the fear of being an old maid is a motivating force in becoming a little woman" ("Civil War" 377). Marmee's first graduate from her school of little womanhood is Meg.

Meg, the eldest, is most ready and willing to make the transition into womanhood. She mentors her younger sisters in Marmee's absence both at the opening of the book and when Marmee is called to Washington to nurse Mr. March. (She even sits in her place at the head of the table.) Meg embraces the world of the long gowns and elegances that Jo so eschews, and Alcott ironically displays the price paid for this attention to propriety. Meg's insistence on gloves and high-heeled slippers which were "very tight, and hurt her" lead Jo to exclaim "let us be

elegant or die!" (41). This level of discomfort must be borne when Meg and Jo leave the safety of the community of women and home and venture into the male world of the Gardiners' party. The irony that a good woman is known by her handkerchief and her gloves, combined with Meg's sprained ankle, speaks volumes for the value of women's dress on the market, but also the price such fashion exacts.

Meg's visit to Annie Moffat's (or "Vanity Fair" as the chapter title calls it) gives her experience as a sexual object, a lesson she will use in her final encounter with Brooke. Meg is "laced into a sky-blue dress which was so tight she could hardly breathe, so low in the neck that modest Meg blushed at herself in the mirror" (123). Everyone who sees her is startled by her beauty, but when she meets Laurie's glance which makes her aware of her sexuality, she feels "ill at ease with him, for the first time" (126). Although this scene would seem to undercut Meg's transition, especially since the immediate result is the impugning of Marmee as a clever matchmaker, the covert sensibility here is satisfaction in Meg's triumph over the condescending Annie Moffat. Upon her return home, Meg vows to give up being "sentimental or

dissatisfied" even though she can't help but enjoy being "praised and admired" (131), an observation that further adds to the sense of the duplicity of thhis message. Marmee acknowledges the pleasure of such feelings as long as they don't become a passion, but it falls to Jo to be perplexed at Meg's new interest in "admiration, lovers, and things of that sort" (132), things that will permanently remove her from the family circle.

The bildungsroman of the sisters within what Auerbach calls "the primacy of the female family [as] moral-emotional magnet" (Communities 61) is conflicted, less direct: "separation tugs against the longing for fusion and the heroine[s] encounter the conviction that identity resides in intimate relationships, especially those of early childhood" (Abel et al. 11). Jo, who has thrived on the freedom of being the man of the house, has the greatest difficulty negotiating this conflict. When Laurie tells her of Brooke's crush on Meg, Jo is "disgusted" (199), and when Marmee confirms John's interest in Meg, Jo wishes she could marry Meg herself "and keep the family together" (263). Unlike Meg, who has experienced sexualization, Jo ascertains that Meg is

in love because "in novels, the girls show it by starting and blushing, fainting away, growing thin and acting like fools" (262). Jo's world includes fantasies of stables of Arabian steeds and libraries full of books, while Meg's is to have the perfect house, with a good husband and angelic children (188). Meg can leave the March household and fulfill her fantasy; Jo can only entertain these dreams while she remains "a girl" at home.

Jo's "masculine" dreams include making a fortune as a writer so that she can provide for her sisters; she wants to make a mark in a sentimental world where women's legitimate function is limited to a life of cheerful service to others. Both Jo and Meg "work" in traditional occupations available to middle-class women--companion and governess, but when Jo must find a way to raise money for Marmee's trip and her father's care, she can only cut and sell her hair. Fetterley convincingly argues: "selling one's hair is a form of selling one's body and well buried within this minor detail is the perception that women's capital is their flesh and that they had better get the best price for it" ("Civil War" 377). Confirming this sensibility is Mr. March's decree that he will

never use the money Jo has earned by such a sacrifice, underscoring the limited value of such currency except in emotional terms. When Jo does enter the world of work with publication of her first story, she is optimistic about her future independence. But Alcott tells us that not only did she not get paid for the story, but that Laurie must intercede to insure payment in the future. As Meg bitterly observes, "men have to work, and women to marry for money" (205). This continual reiteration of limitation adds to the tension of supposed fulfillment in marriage and womanhood. As DuPlessis, speaking of Bronte's Villette, has observed: "equating vocation and deprivation makes a textual undertow to the pilgrim's progress" (11), an undertow that little women continually confront.

Meg is the sister who will fulfill the marriage-plot expectations with her engagement to John Brooke, and this closure shows the same kinds of resistance seen in the works of Bronte and Gaskell. When Brooke proposes, Meg, like her predecessors, senses her prenuptial power and uses this last opportunity to express it:

he wore the satisfied smile of one who had no

doubt of his success. This nettled her; . . . and the love of power, which sleeps in the bosoms of the best of little women, woke up all of a sudden and took possession of her. She felt excited and strange, and . . . followed a capricious impulse, and, withdrawing her hands, said petulantly, "I don't choose. Please go away and let me be!" (293)

Meg takes pleasure in trying her lover's patience, and the power she feels at this point of transition from girlhood to womanhood is demonstrated when Meg confronts her Aunt March and declares "I shall marry whom I please" (296). Aunt March, who earlier teaches Jo patience, here espouses the anti-sentimental view of the necessities of making a good marriage to help the family. With a sense of reality consistent with her own financial and social position, she suggests the possibility that when Meg has tried marriage in a cottage and found it a failure, she will be sorry (296). Although in her defense of John, Meg feels "so brave and independent," once she accepts the proposal, it is clear that her power is gone forever. As Jo observes, Meg has become the: "strong-minded sister enthroned upon [John's] knee, and wearing an

expression of the most abject submission" (299). Alcott, like Bronte, undercuts this closure with Meg's sudden recognition that three years wait was indeed a "short time," a recognition made with an expression of gravity on her face "never seen there before" (301).

If Meg satisfies the demands for marital closure, we also become aware that Jo has learned Marmee's lessons, too. When she is angry at Fred for cheating at cricket, she keeps her temper under control by "biting her lips" (166); Marmee, too, continues to fight the battle as we see her preparing for her trip to Washington with "her lips folded tightly" (210). That the battle against female anger is an ongoing struggle and may require acts of self-mutilation to contain, underscores the conflict between the female bildung and the marriage closure. Marmee's struggle is particularly radical since it not only challenges the social expectation of female fulfillment in marriage and motherhood but also seems to cast stones at the concept of "ideal family" in which the wife is the bread-maker and the husband the bread-winner.

In the final scenes of the novel, Laurie proposes an adventure to Jo, to go to Washington. Although she

longs for the liberty, the sight of the old house brings her back to the reality of little womanhood. "If I was a boy, we'd run away together, and have a capital time; but as I'm a miserable girl, I must be proper, and stop at home" (274). Mr. March gives his patriarchal seal of approval in his evaluation that he no longer sees his "son" Jo, and, although he misses his "wild girl", he is glad to gain a "strong, helpful, tender-hearted woman in her place" (286). Jo's rejection of Laurie, a fact that has tormented readers for generations, is inevitable since sexual love for women marks the cessation of equality, and that is the cornerstone of their relationship. Jo's sensibility at the end of this first novel, that she has lost her best friend, Meg, and that things will never be the same again, marks a discomfort with the expected closure of heroines in marriage although the alternative in Little Women remains undefined.

Alcott struggled with the pressure of publishers and readers to marry off the remaining sisters. As she noted in her journal: "Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that was the only end and aim of a woman's life. I won't marry Jo to Laurie to please any one" (qtd. in Wagenknecht 91). Eventually

she did give in, but the strain of a happy ending is seen in the remaining series of books. As Murphy, writing about the sequel Good Wives, has argued:

The novel's closure does not deny the freedoms of Alcott's much-affirmed spinsterhood but, rather, offers a fictional rendering of female choice that demands that we question its trade-offs and protest its price. (569)

Jo's marriage to the father/professor seems "tacked on" and the plot of female development derailed by the conventional marriage ending, what Alcott herself called being "married off in a very stupid style" (qtd in Langland 125). By the time she concludes the series with Jo's Boys, she includes her own sense of frustration in the fiction with her wish for an "earthquake which should engulf Plumfield and its environs so deeply in the bowels of the earth that no youthful Schliemann could ever find a vestige of it" (369). If frustration marked the completion of this series, Alcott, using the now established power of her reputation, made another attempt to address these controversial issues in her novel Work: A Story of Experience.

Unlike Little Women which was received with

critical praise for its blessed upholding of the "standard of home and happiness" ("Review of Little Women" 83), the response to Work was considerably less unanimous and positive. The Athenaeum berated Alcott for her harsh treatment of Christie, stating:

Poor Christie Devon, after turning her hand to everything that a woman's hand can find to do . . . has just attained a comfortable haven, and married a good man whom she loves, when the authoress swoops down . . . and heaps upon her more sorrow. . . . The reader feels that a little bit of happiness would have been much better for everybody. ("Review" 185).

And the reviewer from the Lakeside Monthly went so far as to say the whole undertaking "is a questionable one" (187). This same reviewer points to the major objections:

Of numerous and variegated, rather than contrasted characters, there is not one whose make-up includes the ingredient--thought to be so necessary somewhere in every novel--of sentiment. . . . Nothing ideal, poetical, or even finely meditative is suffered to expose the writer to the suspicion of sentimentalism. (188)

This tirade concludes with:

This book is the story of a female who was not a woman, married to her choice who was not a man. . . . This book has not a heart. We trust the author has. (191)

The underlying theme of this criticism was clearly that the novel refused to fulfill sentimental expectations of a happy ending, but just as problematic for these contemporary critics was a heroine whose path of self-development in the work market would not simply be subsumed in a marriage. It is this critical element that decenters Alcott's apparent capitulation to sentimental expectation in the marriage of Christie and David, and it is this element that provides the basis for Christie's existence beyond marriage in an alternative life as a member and orchestrator of a community of women. Despite Christie's embodiment of maternal reward at the end of the novel, the community of which she is a part represents an alternative that marks a break in the sentimental marriage-plot novel.

If the conflict between individual fulfillment and cultural constraint is evident in Little Women through the alternating scenes of freedom and

consequences, the conflict in Work between individual and society is established in the novel's opening sentence: "Aunt Betsy, there's going to be a new Declaration of Independence" (1). Aunt Betsy's response is a demonstration of female encoding in language. James Wallace has noted that her response is a "peculiarly apt juxtaposition of worldly advice to the particulars of 'women's sphere'" (265). In her use of the recipe as interjection, Aunt Betsy offers a view of the life open to Christie if she stays--a blending of yolks and whites--a loss of identity, and she offers her a warning about her uncle (souring her plans), and a blessing blended with advice:

I ain't no right to keep you, dear, ef you choose to take (a pinch of salt). I'm sorry you ain't happy, and think you might be ef you'd only (beat six eggs, yolks and whites together). But ef you can't, and feel that you need (two cups of sugar), only speak to Uncle, and ef he says (a squeeze of lemon), go, my dear, and take my blessin' with you (not forgettin' to cover with a piece of paper). (3-4)

Just as the little women are able to articulate their dreams in the safety of Marmee's community, Christie

finds her voice while still in the care of Aunt Betsy. Christie's dreams, before her sojourn, are not unlike Jo March's and Caroline Helstone's in their desire for a sense of purpose and activity: "I'll get rich; found a home for girls like myself; or better still, be a Mrs. Fry, a Florence Nightingale, or--" (6), a dream interrupted by Aunt Betsy's practical inquiry into the state of her stockings. Christie never exceeds the bounds of appropriate female activity with the exception of her stage career. In this case, Alcott takes special care to point out to the reader that, indeed, Christie had come close but was retrieved, making the moral lessons (and cover for the more subversive elements) of Christie's adventures clear.

Articulating the sentiments of all the other women in this study, Christie states: "I only ask for a chance to be a useful, happy woman, and I don't think that is a bad ambition" (9). Echoing the laments of her fictional predecessors, Christie recognizes the alternatives open to her and the death of spirit they represent:

Christie saw plainly that one of three things would surely happen if she lived on there with no

vent for her full heart and busy mind. She would either marry Joe Butterfield in sheer desperation, and become a farmer's drudge; settle down into a spinster, content to make butter, gossip, and lay up money all her days; or do what poor Matty Stone had done, try to crush and curb her needs and aspirations till the struggle grew too hard, and then in a fit of despair end her life, and leave a tragic story to haunt their quiet river. (12)

Christie, then, articulates a level of desperation not previously articulated. But, as in Little Women, Alcott ensures that the reader does not just dismiss Christie as unnatural by qualifying her desire for independence and establishing her ability to respond to love: "I hate dependence where there isn't any love to make it bearable" (9).

As Christie confronts each new stage in her development, she often loses a central sense of self. These moments of despair allow Alcott to highlight the importance of relational connections and demonstrate how the lack of them can be the real danger for a woman seeking independence. Although Christie leaves the shelter of her girlhood home, a non-parental home,

her path is marked by a series of encounters with female mentors, good and bad, from whom she learns the essential lessons that afford her survival not just in marriage, but in the world at large.

Christie's first idea is to be a governess, "that being the usual refuge for respectable girls who have a living to get" (16). But she soon discovers that this profession requires skills she does not have, and she is forced to accept the only alternative--domestic labor. It is in the house of Mrs. Stuart, who desires to change her name to Jane because it is simpler, that Christie learns the value of honesty. Christie is initially attracted to the wealth and display that the Stuarts embody, but she becomes disillusioned watching the Stuarts using their dinner parties to try to move up the social ladder. It is Hepsey, the former slave, who gives her "glimpses into another sort of life so bitterly real that she never could forget it" (28). This dose of reality, and Christie's response to it, leads to her first important relationship. "Friendship had prospered in the lower regions, for Hepsey had a motherly heart, and Christie soon won her confidence by bestowing her own" (28). In this relationship, Alcott crosses class and racial lines to

establish a friendship based on mutual respect that will survive through the end of the novel. As Sarah Elbert has noted: "Hepsey is the first link in the chain of sisterhood that Christie Devon . . . forges as she discovers that jobs do not fulfill the promise of independence for women" (xxvii).

Christie's next mentor, Lucy, is her initiator into the world of the theater: "She had never seen a play till Lucy led her into what seemed an enchanted world" (35). Foreshadowing her final role as the center of a community of women, Christie's first acting job, a performance that secures her future stage success, is as an Amazon who rescues a princess. Both Lucy's mother, Mrs. Black, and Lucy give Christie support and encouragement, but Lucy gives her the advice necessary for survival:

We'll stand by you, Kit; so keep up your courage, and do your best. Be clever to every one in general, old Sharp in particular, and when a chance comes, have your wits about you and grab it. That's the way to get on. (44)

Christie faces her first real moral challenge in this world of the theater, and the challenge, a question of ego, is a result of a breach in the community of

women, particularly with her mentor, Lucy. Lucy becomes jealous when she believes Christie is trying to win the heart of a man she loves. As the support of Lucy is withdrawn, Christie begins to change: "She had no thought now beyond her art, no desire beyond the commendation of those whose opinion was serviceable, no care for any one but herself" (49). This change is reminiscent of the changes in Jo March when, in Good Wives, she returns to the writing of thrillers to help pay for Beth's care; Alcott warns: "Unconsciously she was beginning to desecrate some of the womanliest attributes of a woman's character . . . she was feeding heart and fancy on dangerous and unsubstantial food" (321). In Work, this dramatic (and fictionally unacceptable) change is mitigated by Christie's act of generosity in saving Lucy from the falling piece of scenery and her own subsequent injury. This literal taking down of Christie allows the women to regather around her and Christie to reflect: "A fine actress perhaps, but how good a woman?" (51) As Nina Auerbach has noted: "Though her quest brings strength and independence, it shuns ambition; when she begins to receive acclaim as an actress, . . . Christie abandons the triumphs that are

ravaging her innocence" ("Feminist" 264).

Throughout this part of the story, Alcott constantly reminds the reader that Christie is still a good/pure woman and, I would argue, suggests that her future marriageability is not endangered: "behind the actress the public always saw a woman who never 'forgot the modesty of nature'" (48). During her recovery from the accident, Christie discovers "dependence might be made endurable by the sympathy of unsuspected friends" (56), confirming, again, the power of the community of women to restore Christie both physically and emotionally.

Perhaps to confirm Christie's restoration to "good womanhood," her next employment is as a governess where she discovers the recuperative powers of the care of children. She not only recovers her physical health romping and playing with them, she restores her spiritual balance, witnessed by the return to her voice of "a new undertone of that subtle music, called sympathy, which steals into the heart and nestles there" (67). Alcott uses Mrs. Saltonstall, for whom Christie works, to undercut social expectations that all women respond alike to the domestic sphere, and, thus, to continue to

challenge the sentimental expectations begun in Little Women. For instance, Mrs. Saltonstall has "a husband somewhere abroad, who so happily combined business with pleasure that he never found time to come home" (65). But this missing patriarch does not have a Marmee at home to keep order. As mother, too, this woman falls short of sentimental expectations: "Her children were inconvenient blessings, but she loved them with the love of a shallow heart, and took such good care of their little bodies, that there was none left for their little souls" (65). Christie is able to fill this gap, and the image of children as comfort returns when Christie arrives at Cynthia Wilkins and, again, when her own child is born.

In working for Mrs. Saltonstall, Christie has her first encounter with the machinations of the marriage market through the agency of Philip Fletcher, Mrs. Saltonstall's brother. Christie, unlike the little women before her, is aware of the attractions of the "alternative career"--marriage. What makes Christie more than a stick figure of moral fortitude facing one challenge after another is her very human recognition that, "I'll try not to be worldly-minded and marry without love, but it does look tempting to a poor soul

like me" (79). This challenge to the sentimental tradition of good woman rewarded with wealthy man is clearly articulated in Alcott's reference to fictional expectations: "Not possessing the sweet unconsciousness of those heroines who can live through three volumes with a burning passion before their eyes, and never see it til the proper moment comes, and Eugene goes down upon his knees" (74), Christie acknowledges Philip's interest and admits to being flattered. This recognition also underscores that Christie is not a coquette.

In fact this interlude with Philip Fletcher is, in many ways, a traditional sentimental, marriage-plot chapter. Women are drawn to this summer bathing spot to try to attract a husband. This is a female marketplace where, despite the fact that women are obsessed with discussing the possible romantic attachment of the most eligible bachelor (Fletcher), they have no power or influence to change the outcome of his (to them) perverse choice of the governess. The moral impact on women of a single life goal-- marriage--is played out in the unsentimental conversations of the young women at the beach:

"You can do anything you like with a husband a

good deal older than yourself. He's happy with his business, his club, and his dinner, and leaves you to do what you please; just keep him comfortable and he'll pay your bills without much fuss," said one young thing who had seen life at twenty. (77)

Alcott does not reserve this materialist sentiment for women alone. Philip, too, is used to expose the limitations of male perceptions of women in a society defined by separate spheres:

He wanted her as he had wanted many other things in his life, and had little doubt that he could have her for the asking. Even if love was not abounding, surely his fortune, which hitherto had procured him all he wished (except health and happiness) could buy him a wife, when his friends made better bargains every day. (80)

To fully play out the discordance of romantic expectations between men and women, Alcott has Christie reading Jane Eyre when Philip approaches her on the beach with the intention of proposing. Philip seizes the opportunity to cast himself as the sinner Rochester, but Christie is quick to respond: "I like Jane, but never can forgive her marrying that man, as

I haven't much faith in the saints such sinners make" (80). In this examination of social expectations, which takes place not in the safety of a community of women, but in direct dialogue between a man and a woman, Christie suggests a flaw in the cultural concept that women can or should "correct" men's faults because of women's innate virtue. Again, Christie takes a realistic swipe at this ideology when she responds: "it always seemed to me that a man should have energy enough to save himself, and not expect the 'weaker vessel,' as he calls her, to do it for him" (81).

Yet, like so many scenes in Little Women where the most radical moments of anger against expectation are followed by moments of retribution or acceptance of the domestic sphere, so too, must Christie's anti-romantic speech to Philip be balanced by her internal reflections that reestablish romantic expectation for the reader and assure that a marriage is still possible as the story unfolds:

This was not the lover she had dreamed of, the brave, true man who gave her all, and felt it could not half repay the treasure of her innocent, first love. This was not the happiness

she had hoped for, the perfect faith, the glad surrender, the sweet content that made all things possible, and changed this work-a-day world into a heaven while the joy lasted. (83)

Particularly interesting here is Christie's recognition that her value as a commodity is tied to her virginity, although this is cloaked in its most romantic garb of true love. Once Christie has been reestablished as a believer in romantic love (or fantasy), she is authorized to "correct" Philip. When he refers to his offer as a "sacrifice," Christie points out that the sacrifice would not just be his:

for it is what we are, not what we have, that makes one human being superior to another. I am as well-born as you in spite of my poverty; my life, I think, has been a better one than yours; my heart, I know, is fresher, and my memory has fewer faults and follies to reproach me with.

(87)

Although Philip is indeed richer than Christie, she establishes that she is not of a lower class, eliding any doubt as to the validity of her observations, as well as keeping marriage across class lines from becoming an issue. Christie's final response to

Philip's good-bye, "two great tears," and the sense that "he has got a heart after all" (91), allows the reader a level of sympathy for Philip necessary for his reappearance in the second half of the novel.

Any doubt about the correctness of Christie's choice for the reader who longed for Christie to say "yes" to Philip is answered in Christie's experiences in the Carrol household. Christie's care of Helen Carrol is the most sensationally, sentimental chapter in the novel. Here, the very choice of marriage is held up as the cause of the problem. Mrs. Carrol marries her husband despite the risk of inherited madness because he could offer her a comfortable, prominent home and remove her from genteel poverty. Alcott shows us the cost of such a union, confirming the correctness of Christie's evaluations of a union with Philip.

Christie's woman's sympathy and her own recollections of physical suffering after her accident on the stage allow her a connection with the distracted Helen that no one else has been able to establish. But the relationship with Helen and her family sweeps Christie into an odd emotional paradox. It is clear that, through the auspices of Christie,

Helen achieves some sense of peace (the reconciliation with her mother being most emblematic). Even after Helen's suicide, when it falls to Christie to warn Bella, Helen's younger sister, of the family illness, and in so doing facilitate the survival of both Bella and Harry, she never really bridges the emotional gap between employer and employee. Even in these intimate circumstances, she is alone. But if Christie's sense of satisfaction at the end of this chapter is not enough reward for this emotionally challenging experience, the return of Bella to the circle of women at the end of the novel would seem to be final compensation for Christie's dedication.

Dedication to other women plays a large part in Christie's most formative friendship with Rachel Sterling. Here, as in other novels, we see the language of love invoked between these two women as emblematic of the intensity and need for this friendship. And it is with the dedication of a lover that Christie defends Rachel in the face of Rachel's disgrace. When they first meet, we are told that Christie's "life was brightened for her by the finding of a friend. . . . She wooed this shy, cold girl as patiently and as gently as a lover might, determined

to win her confidence, because all the others had failed to do it" (130). And Rachel finds it impossible to resist Christie's direct overtures:

Why can't we be friends? I want one sadly, and so do you unless your looks deceive me. We both seem to be alone in the world, to have had trouble, and to like one another. I won't annoy you by any impertinent curiosity, nor burden you with uninteresting confidences; I only want to feel that you like me a little and don't mind my liking you a great deal. Will you be my friend, and let me be yours? (131)

With Rachel's agreement, Christie, as if acting out the very definitions of female relationships and articulating the power they represent, reflects on the importance of this relationship in language that highlights the moral and spiritual balance such a relationship represents, especially to a single woman:

I'm tired of thinking only of myself. It makes me selfish and low-spirited; for I'm not a bit interesting. I must love somebody, and 'love them hard' as children say; so why can't you come and stay with me? . . . We could be so cosy evenings with our books and work. . . . I love

dearly to take care of people. (133)

Christie uses the language of a lover and the sensibilities of a mother, first offering her need to love and then aligning herself with the female world of caring. The learning experience of this relationship, a lesson that Christie will return to throughout the rest of the novel, comes when her love for Rachel is tested by the cultural definitions assigned to someone with Rachel's past.

When Mrs. King is told of Rachel's past by the "spiteful" Miss Cotton, and Rachel is fired, it is not surprising that Christie, after a moment's hesitation, rises to save Rachel from despair and defends her. In the moment of Christie's hesitation, Rachel believes all is lost and begins to steel herself against emotion, a state that we have already seen, in Christie's stage career, is a dangerous thing: "As she [Rachel] looked, her whole manner changed; her tears ceased to fall, her face grew hard, and a reckless mood seemed to take possession of her, as if finding herself deserted by womankind, she would desert her own womanhood" (138).

Alcott uses Christie's defense of Rachel to challenge the true christian charity of women, a

scathing portrait of the power of social taboos to undermine supposed feminine sentiment. As Elbert has noted, Rachel's firing demonstrates that "private, personalized solutions to the injustices of developing industrialism are now presented as impossible" (xxxiii); it is also an opportunity to demonstrate the lack of power of women's charity in the face of cultural prescriptions. Since Rachel represents a dangerous and corrupting influence for her co-workers, this episode underscores the discrepancy between a women's sphere that fosters "true womanhood" and the realities of the world of work where such values seem to have little place. Alcott seems to be suggesting this discrepancy is a critical stumbling block for any real change in the position of women.

Although Christie begs Mrs. King to give Rachel another chance and keep her safe within the bosom of the shop, Mrs. King can only forgive and pity Rachel, but send her on to an "institution" for such as she is. In this controversial moment, Rachel, who will come to be associated with real christian charity later in the novel, speaks out against these false women:

Your piety isn't worth much, for though you read

in your Bible how the Lord treated a poor soul like me, yet when I stretch out my hand to you for help, not one of all you virtuous, Christian women dare take it and keep me from a life that's worse than hell. (139)

This pitiful outcry is answered with Christie's hand, and, immediately, Rachel is restored to her womanhood. Christie's gesture is given weight by her action of leaving Mrs. King's employ. Recognizing the social damage her presence represents for Christie, Rachel leaves her friend, and the despair that follows Rachel's departure again destabilizes Christie's world.

Christie takes to sewing in her home, but we are told, "day after day she sat there sewing health of mind and body into the long seams or dainty stitching that passed through her busy hands, and while she sewed she thought sad, bitter, often times rebellious thoughts" (148). Like Jo March before her, Christie must learn the danger of such thoughts. Although Alcott uses this section to again discuss the lack of fit work or opportunity for a girl like Christie, she also uses it to point out that when driven to the point of despair, it is the lack of relational

connections that poses the real danger for a single woman. As Christie reflects:

It is not always want, insanity, or sin that drives women to desperate deaths; often it is a dreadful loneliness of heart, a hunger for home and friends, worse than starvation, a bitter sense of wrong in being denied the tender ties, the pleasant duties, the sweet rewards than can make the humblest life happy. (150)

This sense of isolation and despair, rather than moving Christie to seek the help of others, evokes her most aberrant outburst: "I'll paddle my own canoe as long as I can . . . and when I must ask for help I'll turn to strangers for it, or scuttle my boat and go down without troubling any one" (153). It is this sense of independence which is subsequently thwarted by Christie's recognition of her own loneliness and culminates not in her scuttling her boat, but her being rescued by Rachel.

Christie's descent into this final despair is hastened by her confrontation with the servant of the woman who won't pay for her work (a servant who feels sympathy for Christie but knows all too well the reality of her employer's character), and the glimpse

of a wedding. Yellin has suggested that in any other nineteenth-century novel, "we would understand that the cause of Christie's distress had been figured in [this] scene in which she contrasted a bride with herself," but in Work, it is the domestic values of this scene, rather than the conventional marriage, that stimulates Christie's reflections (531):

she peered in wistfully from the dreary world without, catching glimpses of home-love and happiness that made her heart ache for very pity of its own loneliness. . . . It was the sharpness of the contrast between that other woman's fate and her own that made her wring her hands together, and cry out, bitterly: . . .
"What have I ever done to be so desolate and miserable, and never to find any happiness, however hard I try to do what seems my duty?"
(156)

It is clear that Alcott's sense of the sensational novel was present in the death of Helen Carrol, but despite the lurid, suicidal sense of Christie's attraction to the flowing river and the almost uncontrollable force that pulls her ever closer to her own destruction, Alcott is quick to rescue her

from any sense of conscious intent as Christie speaks of waking from a dream after her rescue by Rachel. Again, the reader's sensibility about Christie is restored, and her potential as a sentimental heroine left intact. As further testimony to Christie's intrinsic nature, Rachel tells her that it was her kindness that has given other women hope when Rachel has told their story: "They did not feel so outcast and forlorn when I told them you had taken me into your innocent arms, and loved me like a sister" (161).

Rachel's appearance, rescue, and disappearance seems the kind of deus ex machina involving a woman to woman interaction common to the other novels in this study: Caroline's mother's sudden appearance and curative powers, Marmee's arrival and Beth's recovery, Molly's restoration to respectability through the acts of Lady Harriet. Thus, through the agency of Rachel, Christie's search for independence in the marketplace of work ends in the arms of the ultimate emblem of domestic ideology, Mrs. Wilkins, who will refresh Christie with "woman's three best comforters,--kind words, a baby, and a cup of tea" (168).

The process of recovery at the Wilkins house is marked by Mrs. Wilkins's mentoring Christie back into

the domestic fold. It is at the domestic hearth of Cynthy Wilkins that Christie will begin to learn the nature of true self-control, the quintessential lesson of all mentors involved in preparing the heroine for the complexities of the institution of marriage. Critics have noted that this shift in focus from Christie's work to her "moral" development is a transition not only in the focus of the plot, but in the very quality of the writing. Yellin has suggested that this shift in focus "parallels and underscores a change in style. The writing becomes muddied and vague" (533). This contrast in style, or at least focus, underscores Alcott's own resistance to or struggle with the requisite marriage closure. And in this second half of the novel, we have a more traditional marriage-plot with Christie assuming what appears to be a more conventional feminine role concerned with self-denial. But what appears on the surface as conventional sentimentality is undercut by both the presentation of the courtship and Christie's ability to retain a sense of self strong enough to go beyond a closure in marriage.

Christie's first lessons in marriage come at the hands of Mrs. Wilkins, who regales Christie with her

own story of self-absorption, and the dangers such sentiments can represent. She begins with her sense of captivity after marriage, a seemingly inevitable sentiment: "Afterwards the children come along pretty fast, there was sights of work to do, and no time for pleasin', so I got wore out, and used to hanker after old times in a dreadful wicked way" (187). Indeed, it takes the fear that Lisha has been drowned in a flood to bring her to her senses. Although Mrs. Wilkins will remain a primary marriage mentor, the Wilkins marriage is clearly not perfect. Like Marmee, Cynthia "kept up the fiction so dear to her wifely soul by endowing him [Lisha] with her own virtues, and giving him the credit of her own intelligence" (200). Christie learns the lesson that marriage and its requisite service is noble, even if it is to Lisha Wilkins who seems to Christie non-communicative and much less worthy of his wife's attentions.

Christie's restoration to balance by this "domestic" mentor is confirmed in her response to Mrs. Wilkins' tale: "That story has done me ever so much good, and I shall not forget it" (195). In light of this conversion, Alcott confirms Mrs. Wilkins's role as mentor, as well as reiterating the power of this

role enacted by many such women:

It was a very humble little sermon that Mrs. Wilkins had preached to her, but she took it to heart and profited by it; for she was a pupil in the great charity school where the best teachers are often unknown, unhonored here, but who surely will receive commendation and reward from the head master when their long vacation comes.

(196)

The mentoring of women remains a private matter in a separate sphere, one which God alone seems able to see and reward.

Christie's spiritual health is entrusted to the care of the Reverend Mr. Power. Although this would seem to break with the tradition of female mentors, Mr. Power's own radical position outside the mainstream of religious practice keeps him from being a simple representative of patriarchal religion. In fact, when Christie listens to Mr. Power speak in his non-traditional church, she finds a sense of religion akin to Shirley and Caroline's sense of the goddess when they turn from the confines of Reverend Helstone's church. Christie experiences, "for the first time in her life religion [as] a visible and

vital thing; a power that she could grasp and feel, take into her life and make her daily bread" (213). Mr. Power transfers the care of Christie from the Wilkins to the Sterlings, David and his Quaker mother, and with this gesture, Christie's path to marriage seems inevitable.

Christie's initial response to David is reminiscent of Shirley's response to Lewis. This comparison is particularly salient given the strong characters of both heroines at the outset of their stories. Christie initially assesses David's character as "melancholy, learned, and sentimental" (225) and, using the language of Shirley, "set[s] out to find her 'master,' as she had a fancy to call this unknown David" (225). As if to justify this transition in her heroine, Alcott tells us that "romance dies hard in a woman, and, in spite of her experiences, Christie still indulged in dreams and fancies" (225). Her response to David's softness, a combination paternalism/fraternalism which "annoyed her" is again like Shirley's desire to be mastered: "I'd rather he'd be masterful, and order me about" (236). But such simple fantasies will not serve Christie or the marriage plot. It falls to Mr. Power

to point out the dangers of Christie's romantic ideals: "You are a hero-worshipper, my dear; and if people don't come up to the mark you are so disappointed that you fail to see the fine reality which remains when the pretty romance ends" (253-4). But Christie must suffer under these assumptions, confront another proposal from the now faithful Philip, and suffer jealousy, before Mr. Power's lesson will be fulfilled with her marriage to David. In fact, when Christie falls in love with her ideal brother-lover, David, she immediately becomes the expected feminine heroine of the sentimental novel: "David's room was her especial care. . . . She also-- alas, for romance!--cooked the dishes David loved, and liked to see him enjoy them with the appetite which once had shocked her so" (286). This domestic vigilance over the love object extends to the buttons on his clothing and her new concern with her own complexion. When Christie is torn with jealousy over her suspicions that David, in fact, loves Kitty, Alcott, like Bronte before her, takes the opportunity for a little fictional self-consciousness and underscores her own discomfort with the tradition she is writing within:

If she had been a regular novel heroine at this crisis, she would have grown gray in a single night, had a dangerous illness, gone mad, or at least taken to pervading the house at unseasonable hours with her back hair down and much wringing of the hands. Being only a commonplace woman she did nothing so romantic, but instinctively tried to sustain and comfort herself with the humble, wholesome duties and affections which seldom fail to keep heads sane and hearts safe. (310)

But even with this disclaimer, Alcott cannot resist telling us that sometimes Christie's eyes were heavy and her "pillow wet with tears" (310).

Despite this concession, Alcott is not content to simply reiterate sentimental romantic ideology. David and Christie discuss relationships through the code of flowers. David argues for the double ones, but Christie with "feminine perversity" responds "I like the single ones best: double-carnations are so untidy, all bursting out of the calyx as if the petals had quarrelled and could not live together." But David responds that, "the single ones are seldom perfect, and look poor and incomplete with little scent or

beauty" (255). He expresses his confidence that her taste will change. This apparent confrontation of male/female perception would suggest, at this stage, even enlightened David believes Christie will eventually come to love her place as part of two rather than as a single individual. The change in Christie is a gradual one, but after some time with the Sterlings, Christie confides to David "I'd rather be a woman than act a queen" (267), making her transition to marriage more believable.

In the midst of the marriage plot with David, Alcott brings Philip Fletcher back to expose, again, the state of marriage and, perhaps, to make Christie's choice of David more palatable. However, as critics in 1873 noted, no real woman would turn down Philip for David. Alcott tries to convince us otherwise with this observation of Christie's:

In spite of the great improvement in her faithful Philip, Christie could not blind herself to the fact that her head, rather than her heart advised the match; she could not conquer a suspicion that, however much Mr. Fletcher might love his wife, he would be something of a tyrant, and she was very sure she never would make a good slave.

In her cooler moments she remembered that men are not puppets, to be moved as a woman's will commands, and the uncertainty of being able to carry out her charitable plans made her pause to consider whether she would not be selling her liberty too cheaply, if in return she got only a home. (324)

What this interlude also underscores is the shift away from Christie's desire to be mastered. She wants control to pursue her philanthropic goals, and that is why David is the better choice.

When David finally speaks the truth of his burden, his rejection of his sister Rachel, and admits his love for Christie, he reflects back on his feelings for her and says: "after the birthday you were like an angel in the house" (351), confirming for himself, Christie, and the reader her readiness to take up the domestic role the second half of the book has been forming her for. And her subsequent admission that: "he has convinced me that 'double flowers' are the loveliest and best" (354) would seem to seal her domestic fate.

But Alcott departs from the conventions of the sentimental one more time with her portrayal of the

marriage itself. Rather than a concluding moment, Alcott uses the marriage as a time for Christie to "assert that her new status as wife will not impinge upon her individuality and freedom" (Yellin 532). Christie and David march "shoulder to shoulder, as if already mustered in . . . planning their campaign" (364); they even marry in their uniforms (those symbols of martial equality).

Although, as Langland has suggested, "marriage is only a brief step in her education," Christie is still tied to the romantic ideals of the sentimental tradition. In the midst of battle, we are told: "Christie liked romance, and now she had it, with a very somber reality to give it an added charm. No Juliet ever welcomed her Romeo more joyfully than she welcomed David when he paid her a flying visit unexpectedly" (387). As Wallace has argued:

Rather than refusing to speculate on marital relations, Alcott used the happy intervention of the Civil War to remove or to curb the dominating masculine presences that threatened to return Christie to Aunt Betsy's parenthetical condition. (268)

David's final words free Christie, to some

extent, from the stultifying limitations of motherhood and widowhood. The radical nature of this relationship and David's final words are mitigated by the sense that, in fact, David's blessing is necessary for Christie to continue with her work: "Don't mourn, dear heart, but work; and by and by you will be comforted" (406). Christie does succumb to depression after David's death, a depression that can be alleviated by only one force--her baby:

"Don't let me die: I must live for baby now," and she gathered David's little daughter to her breast, as if the soft touch of the fumbling hands had healed every wound and brightened all the world. (413)

Christie's final valuation of her experience is voiced to Uncle Enos, and does not concern her success as a nurse or worker, but as a mother: "But though I have gone through a good deal, I don't regret my attempt, and when I look at Pansy I feel as if I'd made a grand success" (418).

Perhaps because Christie has emerged, in many ways, as an embodiment of feminine ideals, Alcott can allow her a life after marriage and motherhood. Christie is different than any heroine we have seen so

far--she gets old--forty to be exact--by the end of the novel, and her life continues beyond the marriage ending. Christie's work experiences are rejoined to her current life when she is asked to speak at the rally of working women. Christie stays on the steps between the podium of the wealthy women and the floor of the working class and states: "I am better here, thank you; for I have been and mean to be a working-woman all my life" (428). And when she speaks, the other women respond because:

They saw and felt a genuine woman stood down there amongst them like a sister, ready with head, heart, and hand to help them help themselves; not offering pity as an alms, but justice as a right. Hardship and sorrow, long effort and late-won reward had been hers they knew; wifhood, motherhood, and widowhood brought her very near them. (429)

It is disappointing that Alcott could not give full voice to Christie's ability to surmount difference and forge this audience into her community of women; we never actually hear Christie speak. In this denial, we perhaps see Alcott's own inability to write such a scene, but more likely, we see a resistance to so

completely destabilizing the marriage-plot and the importance of Pansy by shifting the focus back to the political arena. But perhaps the nineteenth-century reader saw all that too.

As a final nod to faithful Philip, and to end any hope of another romance, Alcott tells us that Christie was able to keep Philip because "she was a woman who could change a lover to a friend, and keep him all her life" (440). And so when we see the "loving league of sisters" who portend "the coming of the happy end" (442), we must recognize that the elements of a truly alternative ending has become visible in fiction. Although the marriage-plot may have obscured the early Christie's attempts at independence, and the language and the emotions of sentimentalism may dominate women's lives still, Alcott refuses to have all the ends tied up neatly in a marriage-plot. Here it is the community of women who hold the strings (purse and otherwise). Alcott's portrayal of this community of women is indeed radical given the diversity of class and race representation in this sisterhood: "old and young, black and white, rich and poor, each ready to do her part" (442). It would seem that with this representation, Alcott felt pressured to write one

more justification for this activity of women outside the bounds of domestic ideology; and the ultimate justification for such radicalism was God: "that the greatest of God's gifts to us is the privilege of sharing His great work" (443).

Alcott used Christie's experiences and her final achievements in both the domestic and public spheres to voice a direct challenge to the world of separate spheres. Christie states:

Women who stand alone in the world, and have their own way to make, have a better chance to know men truly than those who sit safe at home and only see one side of mankind. We lose something; but I think we gain a great deal that is more valuable than admiration, flattery, and the superficial service most men give to our sex. . . . We who are compelled to be fellow-workers with men understand and value them more truly than many a belle who has a dozen lovers sighing at her feet. I see their faults and follies; but I also see so much to honor, love and trust, that I feel as if the world was full of brothers.

(269)

As Elbert has concluded: "Work . . . was a substantial

attempt to break through conventional plot lines to inform her audience that the real lives of women were more complex and more deserving of attention than the idealization of women as the spiritual helpmate of man could portray" (x1). Although neither Little Women nor Work: A Story of Experience dismantles the sentimental marriage-plot, Alcott's quest for female actualization is no longer answered simply by marriage. DuPlessis has noted that in the twentieth-century novel: "the female hero fuses with a complex and contradictory group; her power is articulated in and continued through a community that is formed in direct answer to the claims of love and romance. (142) This pattern is clear in these two nineteenth-century progenitors, suggesting that from the marriage-plot tradition, and in resistance to it, a more modern sensibility was created. Louisa May Alcott deserves a place in that tradition and a reevaluation as more than the children's author of domestic idylls. We should recognize, as the Indianapolis Public Library did in 1885, that her books are indeed "adult fiction" (Stern, "Writer's Progress" 241).

CHAPTER FIVE

Single Alternatives: Industrialized Independence in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's The Silent Partner

As industrialization of both America and England dominated nineteenth-century economic realities, women writers took on the challenge of social reformation and wrote about the horrors of factory life, the degradation of poverty, and the hopelessness of such a life. Gaskell took on her Manchester society in Mary Barton (1848) and North and South (1855), and America had its counterparts in such works as Rebecca Harding Davis's Life in the Iron Mills (1861) and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's The Silent Partner (1871). Despite the power of such portraits of suffering, fictional challenges to the morality of the world of commerce, all these stories are anchored by (or disguised with) a love plot. For Gaskell, Margaret Hale's skill as a labor negotiator in North and South must be contained within a marriage to the factory owner, John Thornton, and Mary Barton's interrogation of worker conditions is framed by Mary's misplaced affections for Henry

Carson, the son of the mill owner. For Davis, the plot which uncovers the powerful force of Hugh Wolfe's struggle for art, for beauty, in the midst of the black dust of the steel mill is activated by Deborah's desperate love for Hugh. Marriage is only displaced as telos by the death of one of the lovers. And finally, for Phelps, it is Perley's relationships with Maverick Hayle, mill owner, and Stephen Garrick, mill manager, which make this novel a critique of the industrial world of the New England mill town, the position of women in the world of commerce, and a challenge to the sentimental marriage-plot tradition.

As in the other novels in this study, the point of fictional marriage-plot deconstruction lies in the unique mentoring relationship of two women: Perley Kelso and Sip Garth. In this relationship that challenges both the limits of domesticity and the boundaries of class separation, Phelps's own sense of a woman's place is clear. As she noted in her autobiography, Chapters in a Life, "I am proud to say that I have always been a working woman, and always had to be" (79). Thus, as class lines are elided and marriage proposals denied, Phelps's most radical work marks a departure from the inevitability of marriage

or death as an acceptable closure in the sentimental novel. Perley is not a widow in a community of women as Christie is at the end of Work. She is a single alternative with a fulfilling career which incorporates acceptable female philanthropic goals and the power to influence and initiate other women into this productive realm. Historian Walter Fuller Taylor has claimed Phelps to be the "first American novelist to treat the social problems of the Machine Age seriously and at length" (58). More, however, than an effective industrial novel, The Silent Partner is the culmination of the deconstruction of the marriage-plot by a relationship between women. It is clear by the end of this novel that the main point of interest, notwithstanding Stephen Garrick's faithful watching, is the personal progress that Sip and Perley have achieved through the experiences they have shared, experiences that progress from initial wariness resulting from class separation, through genuine sympathy and compassion, to a final realization of separate worlds unalterably changed by this friendship.

Perley Kelso is not only the inheritor of a literary tradition of ground-breaking female

characters and challenges to the limited spheres of domesticity and marriage, but she is also the product of Phelps's own development as a writer and a woman. Many of Phelps's own ideas about economic independence and women's rights, ideas developed throughout her literary career, are the backbone of Perley Kelso's entrance into the world of commerce and human rights.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's, however, did not begin her career with this radical text. In fact, her career shares many similarities with her contemporary, Louisa May Alcott. Like Alcott, Phelps was clearly conscious of the financial requirements of independence and saw herself as a "professional" writer from an early age. Upon the sale of her first story to Harper's Monthly Magazine, she experienced:

a throb of pleasure greater than I supposed then that life could hold, that I could take care of myself. . . . It is impossible to forget the sense of dignity which marks the hour when one becomes a wage earner. . . . I felt that I had suddenly acquired value to myself, to my family and to the world. (Chapters 79)

This recognition of value in professional achievement, which echoes Christie's desires in Work and Ruth's

hopes in Fanny Fern's Ruth Hall, not only underscores the personal desires of the professional writer Phelps, but also points to the recurring theme in the sentimental novel: how does a woman reconcile her desires for work with the cultural requirements of domesticity? Perley Kelso and Sip Garth both share this sensibility, and their outcomes mirror Phelps's own sense of acceptable accomplishment.

Phelps, like Alcott, was greatly influenced by her mother of whom she writes in her autobiography, Chapters in a Life:

Her last book and her last baby came together, and killed her. She lived one of those rich and piteous lives such as gifted women know; torn by the civil war of the dual nature which can be given to women only. (12)

Despite this insight, Phelps, like Gaskell's publishers, felt the need to sanctify her mother's memory not as an artist alone, but also as a mother:

It was as natural for her daughter to write as to breathe; but it was impossible for her daughter to forget that a woman of intellectual power could be the most successful of mothers.

(Chapters 12)

This clear recognition of the essential struggle of women in the nineteenth century was gained through her observation of her mother's struggle to juggle her life as a minister's wife, a mother, and an author, and Phelps's own experiences growing up as a woman of intellectual power. Upon her mother's death in 1852, Phelps, christened Mary Gray, took her mother's name, underscoring the matrilineal inheritance of the pen.

In response to this recognition of the cost of cultural expectation, Phelps developed a strong commitment to the women's movement. In a letter to John Greenleaf Whittier she wrote: "I am, as perhaps you may suppose, almost invested in the 'Woman Cause.' It grows upon my conscience, as well as my enthusiasm, every day" (qtd. in Bennett 57). But, unlike Alcott, who had the benefit of Bronson Alcott's educational experimentation, Phelps was not the product of a transcendental upbringing where women's education was the rule. In her father's house in Andover, Austin Phelps "taught the old ideas of womanhood, in the old way" (Phelps, Chapters 99). These old ways included her father's outspoken criticism of the women's movement. Yet despite Austen's adherence to the old order, Elizabeth received an unusually complex

education at Abott Academy in Andover, which included the study of Shakespeare, English Literature, mental philosophy, physiology, astronomy, mathematics, Latin, Racine and Schiller. In addition to this education, Phelps met many of the luminaries of her day in her father's living room. Among these were the Reverend Edward Park, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe (whose home she frequently visited), and Whittier, with whom she remained friends until his death.

Despite these intellectual influences, Phelps's early work followed the formulas of female guidebooks, especially in the early juvenile fiction which she was quick to admit, like Alcott, she wrote for money. What also emerges in this early fiction is her belief that a girl, to fully realize her potential, needed the support of a strong woman. In the Gypsy Breynton series, a group of children's books, Phelps's heroine, Gypsy, is much like Alcott's tomboyish Jo. The series ends with Gypsy's conviction that she is a "hopeless case" and will "never learn to be proper" (Crescent 261). As Carol Farley Kessler has noted, Gypsy is one of Phelps's earliest victims of society's expectations (25). But Phelps had come a long way from these early

stories by the time she wrote The Silent Partner. By 1866, with the publication in the Atlantic Monthly of her story "What Did She See With?" the theme shifts to one of two women who are united through the psychic power of a third. The reuniting of the two sisters, Marie and Alice, ends with the two lying in each other's arms, observed by the psychic servant Selphar, a sight that she is "glad" to have seen. As Kessler has noted: "Where her early characterizations in Sunday school stories reflect public expectations, later, more complex characters begin to reveal her inner needs and suggest the theme of self-fulfillment for women" (20).

1868 was the turning point in Phelps's career. In the same year that Alcott published Little Women and became the "child's" author, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps published The Gates Ajar. The Gates Ajar, a utopian novel about the afterlife where those lost in the Civil War are reunited with their loved ones, sold 81,000 copies in the United States by 1897 and 100,000 in England by 1900 (Kessler 28), and, like Little Women, was translated into foreign languages including French, Dutch, German and Italian. While Little Women was embraced by young and old, The Gates Ajar was a

much more controversial book, whose reception was more in line with that of Uncle Tom's Cabin. That comparison is particularly salient given the fact that Phelps, like Stowe before her, claims in her autobiography that with The Gates Ajar: "The angel said unto me "Write!" and I wrote. . . . There are times when it seems to me as if I had no more to do with the writing of it than the bough through which the wind cries, or the wave by means of which the tide rises" (95).

The controversy swarmed around this book because of its view of the afterlife and, I suspect, because it was a young woman putting it forth. The religious papers' responded to The Gates Ajar and its author as if "an evil spirit [had been] let loose upon accepted theology for the destruction of the world" (Chapters 118). Phelps equated the overall response to the term used in the Spanish Inquisition--the young author was "put to the question." It was seen as irreverent, devout, weak, religious, immoral, good and bad. Most interesting, however, are her reasons for writing it. She said:

I do not think I thought so much about the suffering of men--the fathers, the brothers, the

sons, bereft; but the women, . . . they whom war trampled down, without a choice or protest; the patient, limited, domestic women, who thought little, but loved much, and, loving, had lost all--to them I would have spoken. (Chapters 98)

The book did indeed speak to its audience, becoming so popular that a Tippet, a paper, even a cigar and a floral funeral arrangement were named after it. There followed three more texts in the "Gates" series, Beyond the Gates (1883), The Gates Between (1887), and Within the Gates (1901), but it was The Gates Ajar that provided Phelps with economic independence at the age of twenty-four.

Her political consciousness was present even in these texts. In addition to the goal of comforting women with the first "Gates" book, the subsequent texts show that each sex would and must learn the strengths of the other because only thus might humankind fully experience their humanity. Where two gender roles had existed, Phelps implies one--that of realizing full human potential, regardless of sex. These texts addressed the issues of male and female separate spheres and presented specific characters who challenge these categories, expose their limitations,

or actually switch social gender roles all in the name of utopian reconciliation and harmony.

Phelps's political concerns often found their way into male-female relationships in her fiction and nowhere is the strain against a marriage plot ending between hero and heroine more overt than in her 1871 novel, The Silent Partner. Josephine Donovan calls The Silent Partner, along with Phelps's Hedged In (1870), her "most powerful works of social protest" (94). Where Hedged In takes on the injustices of a sexual double standard, The Silent Partner takes on the issues of class and women's individuality in an industrialized society. In both texts, the recurrent theme of women's self-fulfillment in satisfying work as a right and possibility, which marks much of Phelps's work, emerges. As Kessler has argued:

Phelps had the courage to say the unsayable--not covertly, as her mother had often done by implication, or as Louisa May Alcott was doing over a pseudonym, but overtly, in the actions and characters of a signed novel. (87)

This is not to suggest that Phelps used her fiction simply for didactic or soapbox purposes. In Chapters, echoing Bronte's sentiments at the end of Shirley, she

states clearly that "helplessly to point to the moral is the last thing needful or artistic. The moral will take care of itself. Life is moral struggle, and you need write no tract" (264).

The Silent Partner builds on the historical and literary traditions of communities of women to explore the impact of industry on women divided by class but joined by a common economic dependence on men. As Buhle and Howe point out in their afterward, Phelps sketches "the rudiments of a materialist perspective on sex roles" (371), and that portrait would not be complete without the institution of marriage. But for Phelps, the marriage-plot represents more of a threat than a salvation for the heroine, a perspective that shifts the traditional closure in the safe harbor of marriage to closure in a sense of the heroine's self-control. As Susan Albertine has suggested: "In the course of the novel, Perley learns about social responsibility and defines for herself an arena of action both within and beyond the domestic sphere" (242). Perley Kelso must come to fully understand her valuation in the marriage market before she can escape, and her means of education comes at the hands of a working-class woman named Sip Garth.

The life Perley lives at the outset of The Silent Partner is the life of luxury that Alcott's Meg March longed for in Little Women, a life of pampered luxury where the greatest concern is having the scent in her carriage cushions replaced, but Phelps shows us the sterility of such an existence: "isolation in elegance is not apt to be productive of thought" (12). Perley's object status is confirmed by her fiancée Maverick's folding of her hands like sheets of rice paper and the fact that she is so enervated by her life of scented cushions that "slippers were the solution of the problem of life" (13). Perley has no mother to mentor her; her mother is dead and she cannot recall the memory of her sufficiently to even feign grief, just as she cannot remember crying at the funeral. Unlike other heroines who have had mother substitutes, Perley has only Mrs. Silver's "mild motherly manner" which extends as far as noting that "Perley never made a mistake in a perfume" (15). Within this cocoon existence provided by her father, Perley believes that the working class is happy, that they receive prompt pay and have healthy working conditions, but they are also nameless and faceless. When she first sees Sip in the cold, wet street from

the comfort of her carriage, she refers to her as "it" and notices that "it had such a taste in colors, such disregard of clean linen, and was always in a hurry" (18). It is this last condition that is the most perplexing since Perley had never hurried in her life. It is through Sip that she will learn to find a reason to step out of her silence into speech.

Sip's reality not only educates Perley, but allows Phelps the opportunity to expose working conditions in the mills and the toll such conditions take on men, women and children. In contrast to Perley's protective and indulgent parent, Sip's father beat her and her sister Catty, but, more critically, he took their wages and spent them on drink. There were once six children in the Garth family, but four, mostly babies, are dead "of drink and abuse" (50). To Perley's rhetoric about the wonders of the working class's life, Sip laughs the "unmistakable, incorrigible, suppressed laugh of discontented labor" (51), but says nothing. She does, however, explain that Catty's disabilities (deafness among others) are the result of her mother having worked fourteen-hour shifts at the looms while pregnant. Although Perley continues to defend the quality of "our New England

factories" (52), Sip suggests that she "better find out for [herself]" the conditions at "her" mills (53). At this goading, Perley feels the urge to thank Sip, "but she was sure that she did not know for what" (53). The impact of this challenge leads to Perley's first real step outside her sheltered world and her self. With her realizations about the state of her "hands," the awakening process that will form Perley into a productive and independent woman begins.

The results of this initial awakening are obvious in Perley's encounter with the Hayles and her attempt to demand her rights as a partner in the mill. This first sortie into the world of Maverick and his father shows her that she is still naive when it comes to sexual politics, especially in regards to women's work and power. "Perley comes to understand how the intersection of sexism, marriage (or betrothal), and marketplace attitudes prevents her active partnership in business" (Albertine 245). The interchange with the Hayles leaves her feeling:

for the first time in her life . . . inclined to feel ashamed of being a woman . . . a faint sense of degradation at being so ignorant that she could not command the respect of two men

sufficiently to the bare discussion of [a partnership] possessed her. . . . One need not be a child because one is a woman! (Silent Partner 59)

The power struggle is played out upon a chess board. Maverick draws pictures on Perley's fingers; she wipes them off with a handkerchief. He offers her a silent partnership; she uncovers the reality that "silent partner" is a title only meant to abate her "fancy" of having real influence. Perley's concern for "my people" may seem sudden, but Phelps points out that "it may be better to remember a thing suddenly than never to remember at all" (64). Through Sip, Perley must confront her aversions, overcome her taste for a pretty life, be sure that her interest in "the hands" is more than a fancy or "an idle moment's curiosity" (88) because there is no romance, no comforting factor to be found in the laboring world. Once committed, Perley cannot deceive herself that Catty, the deaf-mute product of the laboring world, is anything but an ugly girl. There are no romantic endings or rescues to be found in this world of harsh realities.

What makes the relationship between Sip and Perley so important an addition to the sentimental

literary tradition is the class separation that Phelps overcomes. Although class lines had been crossed in earlier novels by women, including Elizabeth Gaskell's Wives and Daughters and Charlotte Bronte's Shirley, the class line had always been between upper- and middle-class women, a separation far less dramatic than that of the working-class. Middle- and upper-class women were contained within the same cultural ideology in which their value was solely defined by their leisure and their marriageability. For the working class woman, survival is the primary issue. Sip delineates this life which includes eleven and a half hours standing in the mill, followed by:

"Washing. Ironing. Baking. Sweeping. Dusting. Sewing. Marketing. Pumping. Scrubbing. Scouring" (90). And it is Perley's recognition that she would like to express how sorry she is that allows Sip to say: "I'll take that. I like that. I like you. Look here! I never said that to one of your kind of folks before" (94). Alcott's Christie Devon, as I have argued in Chapter Four, does breach certain lines of decorum, but refuses to work with Irish girls, a group more in keeping with the level of Sip Garth. Perley Kelso, clearly upper-class, is the first to reach

beyond the safety of the middle-class and form a friendship with a working class woman of no education or promise. This is not just a philanthropic relationship of benefactor and recipient. In fact, Perley seems to gain more in this mentoring relationship than the already enlightened Sip.

Sip is the first to cross the class lines when she confronts Perley at the Opera and tells her she's old enough and should be wise enough to know that there is no real difference between the entertainment she has seen and that which the working class takes in at the Plum, the local bar that Perley condemns in an earlier scene. Perley accepts the challenge of this knowledge by visiting Sip and building a friendship based on mutual understanding and sympathy because, as Sip explains, class hatred "ain't because they don't care, it's because they don't know; nor they don't care to know" (95). After this encounter, Perley is once again aware of a change: "She felt like a stranger setting foot in a strange land. Old, home-like boundary lines of things to which her smooth young life had rounded, wavered before her" (98). Angry at her own isolation and ignorance, Perley, at home, strikes the chess table, symbolically breaking

her engagement ring and ending the first round in the expected marriage-plot.

The presence of another strong woman, in this case Sip, is the impetus for Perley to awaken from the sentimental dream of marriage as solution to a woman's life. Ironically, "for both rich and poor women alike, marriage is held up as the natural end, the natural sphere of female activity" (Kelly 83), but Phelps's treatment of marriage is designed "to shatter romantic illusions and the sentimental myths that had grown up around it" (Kelly 95). Perley's dismissal of Maverick is not that of an upper-class coquette who has simply changed her mind or accepted a better offer. Phelps realistically shows us the difficulty and pain in gaining this freedom. Maverick says, "I had thought we should have had such a pleasant life!" "A miserable life, Maverick; a most miserable life" she replies. Perley continues:

I promised to be your wife. I do not think I could ever say that to another man. The power to say it has gone with the growing-away. There was the love and the losing, and now there's only the sorrow. I gave you all I had to give. You used it up, . . . I do not love you. (161-2)

The power of Perley's honesty comes from her recognition that she is now old enough and wise enough to understand that there is a part of her that still loves Maverick, but her essential, newly discovered self does not. Phelps reverses the traditional sentimental roles and points to the mutuality of male and female experience, underscoring the falsity of separate spheres: "he thinks himself to be the beach against which she frets herself; he is the wreck that she has drowned" (163).

Despite Perley's rejection of Maverick, Phelps pushes her challenge to the marriage closure even further with Stephen Garrick's love for Perley. In any other novel, Stephen's recognition upon their first meeting that Perley is frustrated at being asked, as the silent partner, to pick the molding for the factory building when in fact she would rather be a brick-maker would guarantee his successful courtship. In working together to help alleviate the suffering of the mill workers and later to keep them from rioting, it is Stephen who convinces the Hayles that only Perley can command the workers' trust. Phelps plays with reader expectation of romance by having Perley observe that there is "always something

noteworthy about Stephen Garrick's smile" (182).

It is, however, the very work that they share-- work that causes Perley to confront a range of worker horrors from Catty's going blind because of the lint fibers to young Bud's death as he is caught by his handkerchief and pulled into a machine--that keeps Stephen Garrick from being a viable alternative to her new found activity. Garrick's declaration speaks to their experiences: "I have had no way to love you. We have done such awful work together. In it, through it, by, because of it, I loved you" (258). He has been changed by Perley: "the salvation of the world troubled him yesterday. To-day there was only this woman in it" (259). This shift in vision by Stephen, who has previously so clearly prioritized the workers' cause, also underscores the dangers of romance for both sexes and its power to decenter the productivity of one's life. Although Stephen feels she "ought to" love him, Perley, clearly articulating the danger and addressing romantic expectations, is clear about her choices:

The fact is . . . that I have no time to think of love and marriage . . . that is a business, a trade, by itself to women, I have too much else

to do. As nearly as I can understand myself,
that is the state of the case. I cannot spare
the time for it. (260)

This radical denial is compounded by Perley's analysis
of why women do marry and why it becomes ever clearer
to her that she will not: "possible wifedom was no
longer an alluring dream. Only its prosaic and
undesirable aspects presented themselves." She did
not think of marriage as rest or happiness, but only
as unreasonable and unwise. She explains to Stephen:

Women talk of loneliness. I am not lonely. They
are sick and homeless. I am neither. They are
miserable, I am happy. They grow old. I am not
afraid of growing old. They have nothing to do.
If I had ten lives, I could fill them! No, I do
not need you Stephen Garrick. . . . I believe I
have been a silent partner long enough. If I
married you, sir, I would invest in life, and you
would conduct it. I suspect that I have a
preference for a business of my own. (261-2)

Perley's class provides her with some of these
advantages, but it is also clear that leading a
productive life, the opportunity for meaningful work,
the one thing longed for in many of the novels by

women writers of this period, has been the impetus for Perley to escape the debilitating definitions of the cult of true womanhood. The marginal hope left at the end of Book One of Little Women, that Jo will find her success and fortune, is realized in Perley's recognition that her life is her business and that she will hold the sole partnership in that concern. Stephen, like Maverick, is left in the sentimental position of claiming he will wait for her as he brushes the raindrops from her hands as if they were (his) tears. Perley's bildung, then, has not just prepared her to contain her anger or voice in preparation for the validation of marriage; her experiences, gained mostly at the hands of Sip Garth, have led her to redefine her sphere as more than hearth and home. Perley discovers a new feminine ethos which requires moral and spiritual accountability within a new economic order. As Albertine has pointed out: "Phelps plainly understood the bonds of gender. As a businesswoman Perley does not accomplish much, but her will and desire suggest real possibilities" (247).

With Perley's dramatic denial of two proposals, sentimental expectations would require Phelps to

provide an alternative to the heroine's marriage. Here, too, Phelps strains against the closure of marriage but uses this opportunity to expose the challenges of marriage for a working class girl--a set of circumstances rarely discussed in sentimental fiction. Sip's reasons for refusing marriage are very different from Perley's, yet the sense of entrapment for Sip is clearly linked to what, for the middle-class, has previously been so idealized--motherhood:

I'll not marry you . . . I'll not marry anybody. Maybe it isn't the way a girl ought to feel when she likes a young fellow . . . but we don't live here so's to make girls grow up like girls should, . . . I'll never bring a child into the world to work in the mills. . . . I won't be the mother of a child to go and live my life over again. I'll never marry anybody. . . . It hurts me. (287-88)

This rejection is not simple or self-serving. Sip is compelled by the reality of her world; she is not "a heroine, nor a saint, nor a fanatic" (290). She bemoans the fact that she can't at least have had the solace of marriage: "I haven't ever had much else" (290). But it is painfully clear to her why she must

not accept this answer since it is not a way out, but a way in to the ultimate trap for a factory girl: motherhood. Sip will use this insight in her work as a preacher. Although Dirk, her suitor, protests his loyalty, claiming he will marry no one else, we see that his "way" offers no alternatives, and he marries Nynee, a woman lacking Sip's consciousness.

In a letter to James Ripley Osgood, Phelps stated that she believed she had refused marriage proposals to be among the book's strengths (Kessler 50). However, of comparable strength to this overt challenge to the masculine cultural and marriage hegemony is the breaking of the silence between the Perleys and the Sips. "Their encounters are unsentimentally portrayed: Sip and Perley are not afraid to say what they think" (Buhle and Howe 380). In fact, Sip's challenge to Perley to get to know her mills, lets Phelps explore the industry of marriage, Perley's expected "profession", and the availability of a satisfying alternative.

Just as Perley's eyes are opened by Sip and the reality of the mill workers's lives, Sip learns to see across class lines and build a sisterhood that will help her find her way in her world. It is the

suffering of Catty that breaks down any vestige of reserve in their friendship. Here Phelps is able to use the cultural stereotypes of woman's higher feeling, a sensibility that requires women to protect the less fortunate, as a means of breaching this greater taboo of class. When Perley and Sip are told that Catty is going blind because the "wool-picking" disease has spread from her hands to her eyes, Perley offers her help.

Sip held out her hands and her brown face. "Do you suppose," she said, "that you could--kiss me?"

Perley sat down in the wooden rocking chair and held out her beautiful arms. Sip crept in like a baby, and there she began to cry. She cried and cried. "My dear!" said Perley, crying too. "Let me be," sobbed Sip, "--let me be for a minute. I'll bear it in a minute. I only wanted some women-folks to cry to! I hadn't anybody." (190)

Rather than the discourse of lovers seen in the earlier novels discussed, when class is introduced as a barrier, the language becomes more a maternal discourse. Phelps, like her predecessors, uses a form of "female" discourse to make this relationship

acceptable. This posture allows Perley to respond to Sip, and this moment of mutual support sets the stage for Perley's attempts at reeducating Sip to get her out of the mills. Perley's attempts at helping become an opportunity to highlight the limited options open to working-class women and how, at twenty-one, a girl like Sip has already "lost the caring for such things" (200).

Sip went out as somebody's cook, and burned all the soup and made sour bread. She drew a baby's carriage for a day and a half, and left because the baby cried and she was afraid that she should shake it. She undertook to be a hotel table-girl, and was saucy to the housekeeper before night. She took a specimen of her sewing to a dressmaker, and was told that the establishment did not find itself in need of another seamstress. She stood behind a dry-goods counter, but it worried her to measure off calico for the old ladies. Finally, Perley put her at the printer's trade, and Sip got a headache and got inky for a fortnight. (199)

This attempt is particularly important as it plays out Perley's attempts at being a benefactor to Sip and

with its failure, in addition to Perley's clearer understanding of Sip, keeps the relationship and Sip from becoming stereotypes of American fortitude. Sip's is not the story of Alger's Ragged Dick who succeeds with a simple hand up, a story challenged much earlier with works like Life in the Iron Mills. Sip feels too old to be reeducated and recognizes she cannot find her answers Perley's way. And it is here that the novel is particularly unsentimental. As Buhle and Howe point out, "Sip will not go to school and live happily ever after in another trade. . . . She becomes at the end of the novel . . . the community caretaker, especially with respect to vulnerable young women" (377). Sip, as preacher, does not have answers, but she tells the workers to look into their own hearts and find Christ's way. Here the invocation of religion as cover for a non-traditional ending is much like Christie's final words in Work. Although Sip's bildung is perhaps less conscious than Perley's or Christie's, reflecting her more limited education and opportunity, it is no less liberating or powerful. In the final scene of Sip preaching, Perley is critically aware that Sip is of the people and can help them in a way that she cannot. In this

recognition comes one of Perley's most important lessons.

As Sip will help her fellow workers find their way, so must Perley help her society find theirs. When Perley invites the workers to her house along with her upper-class friends, Mrs. Silver is so startled that she states Perley "ought to have been a literary character . . . that excuses so much always" (227). As Perley's only mother-substitute, Mrs. Silver comes to speak for the society Perley is trying to reform: "Society has rights which every lady is bound to respect; poor Perley forgets her duties to Society. Where we used to meet her in our circle three times, we meet her once now" (239). Perley points out that she feels she has just begun to go into "society," and Fly, Mrs. Silver's daughter, supports Perley's choices by stating that "once of Perley is equal to three times of most people" (239). Although the women quip that Perley's theories will lead to having "our cooks up stairs playing whist with us" (241), Perley serves as mentor forcing them to question why that idea is not desirable. By the end of the novel, Perley has become the teacher and Fly the student. Fly admits, "I don't know much about the

world" echoing Perley's own self-perceptions at the beginning of the novel, but we have seen Perley change from a woman concerned with scented cushions and her own comforts to one who makes those who work for a living respect her: "The people parted for her right and left. She stood in the mud, in the rain, among them" (250).

The end of the novel is an omen for future mentoring that will lead women to educate each other, not just in the survival skills demanded by the marriage market, but in ways to make changes in the world beyond the domestic hearth. Much like Christie's sense of well-being at the end of Work, Perley Kelso's face is a "womanly, wonderful face. . . . It begged for nothing. It was opulent and warm. Life brimmed over at it" (302). But, unlike Work, where David's portrait overhangs the scene and serves as cultural overseer for the future work of Christie and their daughter, Pansy, Perley's fulfilled womanhood is independent of Stephen Garrick's faithful watching from across the street and underscored by his understanding in the "unreal light of dying leaves" that there is still no place for him. The radical departure from the marriage-plot is somewhat

ameliorated by this tacit head-nodding to Stephen's faithful watching, but Phelps sowed the seeds to be harvested by other women who recognized the power of women's relationships not only to change their lives, but their worlds.

Phelps's novel's incorporation of the issue of work as primary marks a shift in the nature of the mentoring relationships found in the romantic plotting of the marriage-plot. Here the mentoring relationship causes a greater intersection and confrontation between the separate spheres of men and women. Here, the Hayles become less enforcers of cultural hegemony and more mere representations of patriarchal authority that must be tested to discover who will allow this new businesswoman her autonomy. This tradition, as James D. Wallace has suggested,

culminates in the feminist separatism of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Sarah Orne Jewett and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who entered into an imaginative analysis of what today would be called 'patriarchy,' who concluded that male-female relations were simply too tainted to be saved, and who created imaginative utopias purified of the presence of men. (261)

Although Phelps began her career as a writer of utopian novels where equality between men and women was required for reconciliation, she came to realize, as many of her colleagues did, that the public's appetite for marriage-plots continued long after the beginnings of the women's movement. In The Silent Partner, she clearly underscores that the separate sphere could not contain both career and marriage for women. Her radical refusal to marry Perley or Sip to an appropriate patriarchal representative, who could contain their words, underscores the imminent failure of the sentimental marriage-plot novel to contain the female bildung of such women. Although marriage-plot novels are still popular today (Harlequin romances certainly reproduce a formulaic romance/marriage novel), Phelps's work remains a hallmark of fictional challenge to and deconstruction of the sentimental marriage-plot.

AFTERWARD

A study of the female bildungsroman, as Kornfield and Jackson have noted, "illuminates the social expectations of female life as well as the secret hopes and dreams which might not be revealed in another format" (69). But to encode social expectation, women writers reached back through their literary history, and, as Josephine Donovan has suggested, discovered in writers like Eliza Haywood, Charlotte Smith and Hannah Webster Foster, a narrative irony that fractured the "authoritative, monologic modes of earlier forms, such as epic and romance, and established dialogic, ironic modes characteristic of the novel" ("Women and the Rise" 462). These nineteenth-century writers discovered a safe form within which they could present covert challenges to the social prescriptions for female behavior, and articulate a state of frustration and anger while seemingly upholding the very cultural norms that generate this state. This multi-level portrayal of the state of women is contained within the sentimental

marriage-plot novel.

As the novel developed in England from its origins in the eighteenth century through Austen, Edgeworth, the Brontes, Gaskell and lesser known writers like Mrs. Oliphant, it has been argued that with the establishment of George Eliot as a major literary figure, the age of sentimentalism was replaced by realism. Vineta Colby posits that with the self-reflexive chapter seventeen of Adam Bede, Eliot "swept away the last lingering prejudices against the novel as romance" (14). But as we have seen in the previous chapters, sentimentalism was often the safest haven for the realistic investigation and interrogation of women's cultural position in the nineteenth century. Eliot, in fact, was never really free from the inheritance of the sentimental marriage-plot novel as it has been discussed in this study. It is not difficult to see the union of Adam Bede with the ultimate Victorian "angel," Dinah, as a clear inheritor of the sentimental tradition. Dinah, who has proven herself capable of self-sacrifice (she has given up her career as a preacher and has taken on the care of Adam's family), ascends to the place of wife to the moral and truly worthy man.

Similarly, Dorothea's marriage at the end of Middlemarch, a move which consigns her to the divine obscurity of motherhood, certainly reflects the cultural demands and expectations of novel closure. Even Mill on the Floss, with the dynamic Maggie Tulliver, ends in closure because, as Boone has pointed out, "death as the final 'end,' no less than marriage, simultaneously enforces a closural pattern of transcendence, of an end to human desire, that works to reinforce both cultural standards of morality and literary ideals of poetic justice. . . . The tragic love-plot writes the problematic heroine of fiction out of existence" (99).

What, in fact, does happen to the British woman's novel in the 1880s and 1890s is a fictional embracing of the "new woman" philosophy surfacing at the time. As more and more women entered the work place and formed independent communities, and the public discussions of divorce, sex and remarriage raged (including the Wilde trial and the final revocation of the Communicable Diseases Act), women, who were themselves breaking out of the confines of marriage as their only choice and finding independence in work, wanted to see these experiences reflected in fiction.

Sarah Grand's The Beth Book (1897) coined the term "New Woman" that has come to represent this fiction that demonstrated both the frustration and restrictions placed on middle-class Victorian women (Beth marries a corrupt and dissolute man), as well as the possibility of escape to a room of one's own, a career, and a man who can appreciate the heroine for her new found independence. Even these "non-traditional" texts rarely broke out of the Victorian definitions of feminine self-sacrifice and masculine power. As Penny Boumelha has pointed out, "the contemporary ideology of marriage (loving, lasting, monogamous)" is exposed in the "female role of loving self-sacrifice" in which the New Woman heroine masochistically embraces martyrdom in the name of the cause (Thomas Hardy 84).

Although the idea of the "new woman" predominated in English women's fiction of the 1880s and 1890s, American women writers remained more concerned with the individual and her development within cultural constraints. As if in recognition of women's roles in facilitating patriarchy by encouraging separate spheres, this historical period was marked by an increasing distaste for emotional ties between women.

Even women from the so-called upper-middle-class "feminist" group turned away from "intense emotional, sensual commitment between women to have a more ambivalent, less committed form of relationship" (Sahli 21). There was also a growing sense of political frustration over the non-movement of women's suffrage, a frustration Josephine Donovan sees in Phelps' later work as well as such works as Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (Local 5). What is clear in the novels from both sides of the Atlantic is that the more overt the political agenda of the fiction, the more clearly the dominant ideology must be reinforced by some acknowledgement of the power and "naturalness" of marriage.

Despite this shift in women's public response to female friendship, the American women's work continued to decenter the domestic ideology and marriage telos by keeping its focus on the heroine's internal development. Less concerned with the overt feminist rhetoric of the New Woman novel which, despite its facade of political activism, continued to reinforce the cultural ideology, authors like Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin and Mary Wilkins [Freeman] built on the Alcott and Phelps tradition exploring personal

relationships between women with a continuing focal shift away from marriage. In keeping with this increasing focus on women's relationships and, by implication, the communities they form,

A less direct but equally subversive challenge to courtship and wedlock plotting issued from novelists choosing to depict a wholly different story--that of the single or unattached protagonist existing outside the boundaries of matrimonial definition or familial expectation. (Boone 226)

One of the most familiar examples is the narrator of Jewett's Country of the Pointed Firs. This is a woman of clearly independent means, a writer, without familial attachment, who enters the predominantly female community of Dunnet Landing. Overseen by matriarchal Mrs. Todd, an independent woman of mythic proportions in her own right, Dunnet provides the narrator with the opportunity to engage in a variety of perspectives on life including those of Mrs. Green and Johanna. These seemingly polar perspectives of survival and capitulation respectively reveal, on closer inspection by the narrator, a sense of female endurance shared by the members of this community.

The experiences of the narrator are such that she can leave the Landing at the end of the summer, and, as she watches the vista of the town disappear around the bend, she knows that she can always return and find a place for herself. The nature of this community is one which accommodates female choice. When Johanna chooses exile on Shell-Heap Island, she does so to protect the community from her depression. Yet, this is not a selfless martyrdom, but rather a place of safety which is still open to the visits of Mrs. Green and the preacher. Johanna's isolation and the narrator's mobility remain integral parts of the community mythology which effectively work to obscure any marriage expectations on the part of the reader.

There are many women writers whose contributions to the sentimental tradition were considerable but have not been discussed here. Women like E.D.E.N. Southworth, Alice Cary, Susan Warner, Fanny Fern and Harriet Beecher Stowe pushed the sentimental form far beyond its accepted or expected limitations. The very communities of women these authors created to provide support for their heroines' bildung reflected the community of creative production of which they were a part. As Kornfield and Jackson observe: "The creators

of the female bildungsroman in America lived extraordinary lives, and, consciously or not, their lives affected their fiction" (74). Only with a continued investigation into the realities of production and a careful examination of embedded radicalism within domestic formulas can a full appreciation of the nineteenth-century women writers' contribution to our literary heritage be fully understood.

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