

THE LITERARY POSITION OF A GOVERNESS IN  
GEORGIAN AND VICTORIAN ENGLAND:  
SOCIALY IDEAL AND UNFIT

THESIS

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate my thesis to Phyllis and James Major who loved me as much as my parents and who came to every concert, competition, and ceremony I was involved in.

You made my life better.

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## INTRODUCTION

During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries in England the idea of girls' education became prominent in middle-and-upper-class households. Families factored several different ideas into the process of choosing the proper education for a young lady. The debate on girlhood education ranged from whether it was beneficial to girls to be taught at home or at school and how much they were to be taught in general. According to Kirstin Olsen's work *Daily Life in Eighteenth Century England* (1999), most educational experts wanted to teach young ladies enough to be useful and nothing more (226). For Olsen the definition of the word "useful" holds the idea that girls needed to be taught how to be proper wives and mothers with nothing else to offer society. However, Sarah Fielding and Mary Wollstonecraft, both independent-minded women and authors, felt that girls need more education and had more to offer society than being a good wife and a good mother. Fielding and Wollstonecraft wrote about one important aspect of a young lady's education, the choice of the instructor. Whether it be a school mistress, teacher, or governess these instructors of academics and accomplishments had lasting effects on a young lady's life. Instructors were expected to teach and guide an upper or middle class girl's curriculum which focused on a combination of reading, writing, sewing, knitting, drawing, etiquette, posture, dance, religion, French, singing, playing an instrument, cooking, and supervising servants (Olsen 227). In order for a pupil to master these arts it

was extremely important to have a well-educated and trained instructor who was socially appropriate.

The economic and social realities of the Eighteenth century made it imperative for women to work (Olsen 33). During the Eighteenth century families were under increasing economic stress and providing for a daughter was much more costly than providing for a son. Daughters were not allowed to inherit property and many families could provide little or no inheritance for their daughters. Inheritance was a key component to entering a marriage agreement, and if a daughter did not have anything to offer financially it would be extremely hard for her to find a husband. This type of economic strife led the way for women to enter the work place as tutors and school masters in hopes that they could provide their own financial stability in case they were unable to marry or married later in life. Economic hardships led to the rise of all girl-boarding schools and women as instructors. Selecting an educational institution outside of the home became a more prevalent decision in families and many girls' marriage opportunities depended on it. Throughout the Georgian period small private schools and "dame" schools began to show up in England. Bridget Hill mentions that during this time period a remarkable number of single women and widows could be found as school teachers (254-4). Roughly five to fifteen percent of the economically active community was made up of women, but during the Eighteenth century women's professions were limited to dressmaking, millinery, and teaching (Davidoff and Hall 312). The National Census of 1851 captures the tough economic conditions for women during this century; Great Britain had 71,966 female teachers and of these over 40,000 were school mistresses, and more than half of the 40,000 were governesses. Many families were taking advantage of making their

daughters economically independent: “Money, or lack of it, largely determined whether or not the daughters of individual families became governesses” (Broughton and Symes 14).

Between 1712 and 1804 the term “governess” was used to describe a teacher or instructress who had charge of young ones and was employed by a private household (Oxford English Dictionary). According to a 1756 entry in the Oxford English Dictionary the term “governess” was preferable for a female teacher because the word “mistress” had a vulgar connotation associated with adultery. According to historian Jeanne Peterson, Nineteenth century society modifies the term “governess” to encompass a woman that teaches school or a woman who lived with an employer or traveled to an employer’s house and taught children as well as companioned them (4). In the Victorian era there were several different types of governesses: the daily governess who switched pupils throughout the day, the finishing governess who taught young lady’s accomplishments, the holiday governess who filled in during emergencies, the small private academy governess, the specialist governess, and the residential governess.

For my purposes, the term “governess” is loosely used to categorize a woman who instructs young ladies in their education on an intimate level, either at home or at a boarding school. Teaching pupils on an intimate level involved one on one contact everyday, most likely focused on academics, accomplishments, morals, and values. This paper will primarily focus on governesses that fall under the umbrella of the finishing governess who taught at small private academies, charity schools, and residential locations. Some of the novels associated with this paper use the terms “school mistress”

or “teacher” to describe a governess. For the sake of clarity, I have located all these titles under the major term “governess.”

The Georgian and Victorian age saw a rise in the publicity of governesses: “From at least the Tudor times the governess had been a part of the household of the upper class. In the Nineteenth century, increasing numbers of governesses were employed by the English middle class” (Peterson 3). Also, the middle class was aware of the position and plight of governesses because many women writers made livings as governesses (Lecaros 18). It is these writers who understand the role of the ideal or unfit governess, these writers have experienced what it is like to have to earn a wage in a society that condemns women who work for a living; a governess had more to do with where a woman stood on the social ladder than how much education she had to offer. If a woman was widowed, poor, or without a male to take care of her, becoming a governess was an alternative to a less suitable career that society would reject. One way governesses dealt with difficult social and economic conditions was forming the Governesses’ Mutual Assurance Society and other organizations like it. Aimed at helping poor and elderly governesses, the Governesses’ Mutual Assurance Society and the Governess Benevolent Institution sought to raise awareness about governesses as a social class and to provide compensation to the poorest and most elderly governesses, those who could no longer earn their livings (Broughton and Symes 125).

In 1848, Queen’s College was established in London to provide educational standards for governesses (Peterson 3). Queen’s College was designed to define and create standards for governesses as well as elevating their self-esteem, making them better teachers, and increasing societal respect for the profession of governesses.

Interestingly, Queen's College was founded after authors like Fielding, Wollstonecraft, and Brontë had put their mark on what makes an ideal or unfit governess. According to Peterson, "Books on the subject of women as workers [were] published in growing numbers throughout the Victorian Period" and a large number of those books were devoted to governesses (3). Governesses became so popular in literature because they were a rising role in English society and because, next to parents, these women were involved in the daily lives of thousands of children. Books on governesses gave parents and children standards for education and offered categories with which to understand women daring to educate girls.

This paper will primarily focus on the role of governesses in young women's education and the representation of governesses in children's literature between 1749 and 1885. As some historical precedence has already been alluded to above, a large time span is necessary in formulating ideas of how governesses changed throughout the Georgian and Victorian years, but, also to get a broader picture of the role of governesses during the period in which they were most popular. Using Sarah Fielding's *The Governess* (1749), Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories* (1788), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Juliana Ewing's *Six to Sixteen* (1875), this paper will address several prominent representations of governesses in children's literature. The most prevalent descriptions of governesses in school stories divide these women between perfect and imperfect by means of their instruction and moral character. This paper will probe the implications of an ideal or unfit governess and the impact these women play in Georgian and Victorian literature.

I have picked these four works because each represents an entirely different portrait of what it means to be a governess in children's literature and during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. Fielding's *The Governess* (1749) is noted as the first full-length novel for children and is one of the original school stories for young ladies. Both Fielding and Wollstonecraft were well aware of the implications of writing a school story for young ladies during the Eighteenth century. These implications focused on whether or not girls should be educated past the point of household duties, being a wife, and raising children. Also, some parts of society understood that these authors were giving guidance and instruction for parents who wanted to educate their daughters. Fielding and Wollstonecraft were women who understood their time, culture, and change, which is what makes their novels so important.

The concept of being a friend/mother/teacher progresses throughout the novel as Fielding depicts her governess as someone that is good, kind, and observant throughout every situation; there is a dramatic difference between Fielding's *The Governess* and the Nineteenth century authors writing about boarding schools. Grey describes Brontë as one of the many who begin to depict Nineteenth century governesses exploiting their pupils with the utmost intensity (53) as a means of showing the unfit side of governesses as well. But before the Nineteenth century disapproval began, one other novel redefines what it means to be a governess in the Eighteenth century: Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories*.

For respected scholar Mitzi Myers, *Original Stories* "is a book about growing up female in Georgian England. It is about the options available to the mature woman, and the means by which she can gain some sense of control over her life" (38). In this respect,

*Original Stories* has close connections to Fielding's *The Governess*. Both authors provide the idyllic circumstance and behavior for what it means to be a working woman in their respective societies. The reader recognizes, through Wollstonecraft, the importance of a woman's knowledge and experience. Wollstonecraft's stories revolve around the residential governess Mrs. Mason and the two young ladies, Caroline (12 years) and Mary (14 years), who are sent to live with her and receive instruction because their mother has died and their father expects them to have a proper education.

Unlike Fielding's, this novel was published toward the end of the Eighteenth century and is on the cusp of a new century with differing ideas and oppositions to governesses. *Original Stories* finds importance in this study because a great deal of the novel is spent on formulating the exemplary role of the friend/mother/governess in Mrs. Mason, and that was crucial to women writers of the late Eighteenth century. Myers argued that Mrs. Mason is the book's center and that "she embodies the teaching heroine, the maternal persona, in her rigorous and revealing guise" (39). For Myers and this study, Mrs. Mason embodies all of that and more because she fulfills the role of the typical governess in the late Georgian period. Another difference between *Original Stories* and *The Governess* is that Wollstonecraft's novel is designed as an educational tool. According to her introduction, Wollstonecraft writes these stories to teach parents and governesses how to fulfill their duties (359). She saw this book as a tool: "these conversations are intended to assist the teacher as well as the pupil" (359) to cultivate young ladies into proper young women.

Throughout the Victorian era governesses get more and more publicity than ever before. Governesses began to play a pivotal role in popular society all throughout

England. Broughton and Symes see the governess as someone who could “regard herself as a central rather than marginal figure in well-bred society” (9). The role of the governess became such a controversial issue in the Nineteenth century in part because of Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847). *Jane Eyre* is an important novel in the study of school stories and the governesses that adorn them because it is centered on a charitable institution rather than a boarding school for upper or middle class young ladies. In part, charitable institutions were driven by social and economic struggle during the Nineteenth century; girls who were poor needed a way to provide for themselves as adults. Upper and middle class society saw charitable institutions as a way to provide education for poor girls without causing stress in the upper rungs of society; some people saw these schools as a means of fulfilling their Christian duty to the lower classes. Class distinction is important here because Victorian society saw a need for different educational institutions for “nice” young ladies from middle class families and poor girls with no family.

Although typically *Jane Eyre* is not considered children’s literature, for my purposes the novel will be examined as children’s literature under the precept that the only parts of the novel this study will focus on deal with Jane’s childhood and schooling at Lowood charitable institution. Since the novel is in part written from the perspective of a child in school, it is understandable that the beginning chapters of the book that deal with Jane’s education at Lowood can be seen as literature about children and for children. Also, this novel attracted a large following of readers who were girls and women, just as Fielding’s and Wollstonecraft’s works were intended for that same dual audience: girls appropriated *Jane Eyre* from their elders. One aspect that makes *Jane Eyre* unique in this study is that Lowood is a rather large charitable institution. With so many different

representations of governesses at Lowood, Brontë makes it apparent that there are distinct differences between ideal and unfit governesses.

At this point in the Victorian era everyone was aware of the roles of a governess and could easily write about one with little or no personal experience. Juliana Ewing did just that; she grew up with no experience with governesses and no benefits of schooling, but she gives a very convincing account of governesses and all-girls boarding schools in *Six to Sixteen* (1875). *Six to Sixteen*, unlike the other three novels in this study, probably was not read by the dual audience of women and girls, or at least not so widely. But Ewing understood it was important for girls to be aware of the dangers of bad governessing and she expected her younger audience to understand and accept her ideologies about education and values. Ewing's *Six to Sixteen* is filled with the harshest representations of unfit governesses and the harm they can cause to young ladies. For my purposes in this study, this book shows a complete change in the representation of the governess in children's literature. Most of the governesses depicted in *Six to Sixteen* are deceptive, suffocating, and unfit for their roles.

For this study, it is important to examine the representations of governesses and categorize them. It is evident that Fielding's *The Governess* sparked an awareness of women and the profession of governesses like nothing before: "Sarah Fielding's *The Governess* had appeared in seven London editions between 1749 and 1789 and in twenty-four other editions by 1804" (Marks 41). This type of publicity shed new light on the profession of the governess. "By the accession of Victoria a rapid construction of the kinds of paid work thought proper and respectable for middle-class women meant that governessing was one of the few options" for a woman of social standing (Broughton and

Symes 11). Lee Holcombe also sees the governess' role as an extension of the household duties women were in charge of: "By devoting herself to the care and education of children, even for hire, a lady could fill the role for which nature had intended her" (12). Many people during the Georgian and Victorian period still believed that a woman's place was in the home; so the role of a woman governess was controversial.

Throughout the Nineteenth century there would be several different debates and opinions voiced on whether being a governess was a positive or negative in British society. Peterson describes the governess as "caught in a cross fire of conflicting social definitions and roles" (14). Some saw the profession as a way to climb the social ladder and others felt it was something that should be left for the lower rungs of society. The Nineteenth century felt the rise of more governesses than ever before and with this new class follows the rise of institutions and laws to promote social stability.

All of these representations highlight that governesses were prominent figures in Victorian society and was a facet that needed to be dealt with; it is only fitting that the representations of governesses in children's literature help to define what it means to be a governess. The novels *The Governess*, *Original Stories*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Six to Sixteen* explore and attempt to define a role for governesses during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Children were most likely a governess' closest relationship, and their literature played an important part in shaping the representations of Georgian and Victorian governesses. Whether these representations are ideal or unfit, they are often complex and intertwined throughout the discipline of children's literature.

## CHAPTER I

### THE IDEAL GOVERNESS

#### INTRODUCTION

Chapter I will explore the role of the ideal governess in children's literature during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. This chapter will discuss Mrs. Teachum, Mrs. Mason, and Miss Temple as governesses who exceed the traditional bounds and limitations of a schoolteacher during the Georgian and Victorian period. The three characters these women embody are doing more than just teaching the basics of a formal academic education to young ladies throughout England. In fact, all three characters exhibit perfect behavior in all aspects relating to their career as a governess and in society.

In order to be a successful and ideal governess a woman had to master the art of relationships. A successful governess became a mother, teacher, and friend to all of her pupils. The role of the mother/teacher/friend governess is something that guides young ladies in all aspects of their life while they are enrolled in school. For example, if a young pupil is sent away to boarding school or charity school she must look to her governess for a mother/daughter relationship because her mother may be hundreds of miles away or even dead. For most pupils, a governess may have been the only adult in her life who could potentially fill in for a mother who was not close by to rear her daughter. The governess must also be a strong teacher whose students continue to learn and grow in

academics and accomplishments and a mother/daughter relationship would be established. The ideal governesses of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries understood that school time was crucial, and that every pupil would eventually have to take what they had learned and go out into the adult world and become a part of society. It is at this moment of adulthood that the governess and pupil can become friends in the world outside of the boarding school. The governess would have grown to appreciate her pupil as a mature young lady who is worthy of admiration and friendship. The mother/teacher relationship lends itself to friendship and girlhood growth that matures into proper adult conduct. The governess as mother/teacher/friend teaches her pupils how to be good daughters, strong students, and proper members of society.

Although it seems like the ideal governess could not add anything else to her list of accomplishments, it is important to acknowledge her role as a progressive educator of young ladies. First and foremost, a governess educating young ladies is progressive in itself, for before the Georgian and Victorian eras educational opportunities for girls were limited. An ideal governess is inherently a progressive educator if she is teaching young women, plus she must strive to give her pupils the most moral, rational, and practical education possible. The eighteenth century was a time when women were not always perceived as either capable of or needing rational abilities. Fielding's and Wollstonecraft's writings develop the idea that girls not only were capable of rationality, but needed that ability in order to play their many roles in the world. Society during these time periods had a need for women to rationally control their passions and their environment. Both Fielding and Wollstonecraft's works strive to teach young ladies how to control their passions and maintain rational thoughts. Teaching rationality to young

ladies was a concept that Wollstonecraft's Mrs. Mason focuses on throughout *Original Stories*. In addition to giving students a rational education, a governess must develop or rework pedagogical methods for teaching young girls how to be proper members of society. Because girls' education was so limited during this time period, many governesses had to adapt men's teaching methods to suit the needs of young women. A governess had to be able to teach academic subjects and accomplishments as well as be responsible for the health and welfare of pupils under her supervision.

This brief introduction has highlighted the many facets that embody the complex role of the ideal governess. To further understand the role of the ideal governess in children's literature during the Georgian and Victorian periods one must look towards the biographical aspects of each author's life and how those aspects develop the governess into the model of mother/teacher/friend and a hallmark of progressive education.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION AND THE MOTHER/TEACHER/FRIEND MODEL

To fully understand the role of Miss Teachum in Sarah Fielding's *The Governess*, first one must look into Fielding's school experiences: "*The Governess*, in fact, reveals many autobiographical details" from Fielding's own life (Grey 7). Fielding and her three sisters were sent to a Protestant boarding school run by Mrs. Mary Rookes, and they were trained in reading, writing, French, and dance, and were expected to mature into gentlewomen. Although Fielding's time in boarding school did not provide her with much intellectual stimulation, it did provide her with a safe and cozy environment in which a group of girls were able to find companionship and guidance away from home (Bree 3). All of Fielding's first hand experiences under Mrs. Rookes could have been

used for writing *The Governess*. A 1762 subscription list for Fielding's works suggests that Fielding's governess at school remained in contact with her pupil long after Fielding had finished school and become a well-known author (Bree 3).

Another book that features a governess, *Pamela*, by Samuel Richardson, had a significant impact on Fielding's literary works. In November of 1740 *Pamela* appeared in two volumes; Fielding and thousands of other young ladies during their teenage years must have read it with passionate eagerness, especially because Fielding loved to read and the topic of governesses interested her because it was one of the few ways women could be independent in society (Grey 12). Just like *Pamela*, Fielding's *The Governess* supplied a need for children's books. During this time period there was a need for books on children's behavior and children's education in and outside of boarding schools. *The Governess* was original and the title also suggested to parents that the book would help their daughter's education (Grey 81). It has been suggested that Fielding's novels were intended for both mothers and daughters because the books carefully outline ways in which girls and young women could behave and "[operate] in conjunction with educational treatises and conduct books" (Burdan 12). Indeed, this type of dual audience shifts as the development of the novel becomes more structured during the mid Nineteenth century. Brontë and Ewing's texts seem to be more realistic in portraying what opportunities are available for young girls and governesses, which is different than Fielding's purified version of how to educate young girls, mothers, and governesses.

Fielding's character, Mrs. Teachum is the first of many representations of governesses that highlight the positive attributes and qualities needed to make up an ideal role model for young ladies. As with most governesses of the Eighteenth century, Mrs.

Teachum does not choose to become a governess until she is met with some unfortunate life and financial circumstances. Within the first few pages of the story it becomes clear that Mrs. Teachum has been forced into a working way of life after the death of her husband and two children:

This gentlewoman, whose name was Teachum was the widow of a clergyman, with whom she lived nine years in all the harmony and concord which forms the only satisfactory happiness in the marriage state. Two little girls (the youngest of which was born before the second year of their marriage was expired) took up a great part of their thoughts.

(Fielding 9)

From this descriptive beginning, Mrs. Teachum is characterized as a devoted wife and mother whose family is taken away from her through the tragedy of death. This type of traumatic experience allows her to be emotionally and financially available to become a governess, especially a mother/friend/teacher governess because she has no family of her own anymore: “This short introduction establishes that Mrs. Teachum is a virtuous woman, an experienced parent substitute (she herself being a mother) and a capable teacher” (Bree 59-60).

Throughout the novel Mrs. Teachum asserts her power as a capable governess. The first example of this capability can be seen in “The Account of the Fray,” Mrs. Teachum asserts her authority as their teacher when she has discovered the pupils’ squabble over the apple. “The Account of the Fray” is the first section of *The Governess* and this section deals with the good and bad qualities that the pupils possess. All of the young girls, except Jenny Peace, the oldest, get into a physical fight over the largest apple

and who will get to eat it. This account is mimetic realism at its finest; it shows that Mrs. Teachum's pupils are not perfect and need instruction on how to behave properly. "Mrs. Teachum silenced them with a positive command; and told them, that she saw they were equally guilty, and as such would treat them" (Fielding 15). She sets up the order and control of the indoor and outdoor classroom, especially when the younger children attempt to explain their way out of the squabble so they can avoid punishment. In this passage Mrs. Teachum asserts her qualities as a surrogate mother, but more importantly shows that she "has the proper philosophy of education" and "correct techniques" to use her authority in correcting the girls after they have ruined themselves for an apple (Burdan 11).

The good and virtuous character of Jenny Peace can be seen as an example or model of Mrs. Teachum's good teaching and educational philosophies in action. Jenny is a role model of how to gracefully learn and transition into womanhood under the instruction of Mrs. Teachum: "this good girl, Jenny, persuades, one by one, all her schoolfellows to be reconciled to each with sincerity and love" (Fielding 21). At the end of "The Account of the Fray," Jenny relates to her governess all that had passed in the arbour culminating with their general reconciliation. Mrs. Teachum commends Jenny on her actions; Mrs. Teachum had plans to take the same initiative. "Mrs. Teachum gave Miss Jenny all the applause due to her goodness, saying she herself only waited a little while, to see if their anger would subside... for THAT she certainly should otherwise have done, to brought about what Miss Jenny had so happily effected" (Fielding 32). Jenny has learned from and been around Mrs. Teachum's influence enough to know how to reconcile the girls.

As a mother must do, Mrs. Teachum learns her time and influence with the girls is sometimes a hindrance in their learning experience. A mother must know when to let the children play and learn alone, and when there is a time for parent/child instruction. One example of Mrs. Teachum leaving the girls to teach each other can be found in their daily afternoon reading and confession time in the arbour. Unannounced to the girls, Mrs. Teachum keeps an eye on their lessons and behavior through the daily reports from Jenny. After hearing and instructing Jenny and the girls on fairy tales, Mrs. Teachum is pleased that girls are relating their past histories and asks Jenny to write down each one's tale: "Mrs. Teachum had a great inclination to hear the history of the lives of all her scholars: but she thought, that being present at those relations might be a balk to the narration" (Fielding 55). Mrs. Teachum understands that the girls may not want to relate all of the past lives to someone that is an authority figure and be ridiculed or misunderstood. Many of the girls are telling stories of "mishandled parenting" and "neglect or indulgence" which are two serious failings of improper domestic management that the girls would not want to relate to the governess because of parental loyalty (Burdan 10): "During play time, she keeps away from the girls so as not to stiffen the atmosphere since her presence makes the girls feel constraint" (Suzuki 328).

It is for the same reasons of domestic mismanagement that Mrs. Teachum decides to take only nine pupils in her educational establishment. "Mrs. Teachum's school is no larger than a large family presided over by a compassionate and interested mother-figure" (Burdan 10). The young ladies want to mind their manners even when their governess is not with them: "our good governess' instructions are of more force with us, than to lose all their effect when we are out of her presence" (Fielding 127). The girls look up to Mrs.

Teachum as a mother and teacher and do not wish to displease her even outside of her presence. In the chapter, "The Ninth Day," Mrs. Teachum fulfils the mother role for the right pupils who are upset by Jenny leaving to return to her aunt. "My dear children, said Mrs. Teachum, I am not at all surprised at your being so much concerned to part with Miss Jenny. I love her myself with motherly affection (as I do all of you, and shall ever continue to do so while you so well deserve it)" (Fielding 139). Mrs. Teachum loves all the girls with motherly affection and wants to console their sadness at Jenny's departure. Mrs. Teachum confesses her affections to the girls to convey her role as not only their teacher, but also their mother since most of the young ladies are without mother or far away from home. Reciprocating, Jenny thanks Mrs. Teachum for being a "wise and kind instructor" and a "fond and indulgent mother" while she has been at school and away from her aunt (Fielding 140).

In addition to being the nine pupils' mother and teacher, Mrs. Teachum slowly becomes their companion and friend. At the end of the chapter, "The Fifth Day," Mrs. Teachum asks the girls to "throw off that reserve before her" and wants the girls to spend time playing outdoors with her: "for such was the understanding of this good woman, that she could keep up the authority of the governess in her school, yet at times become the companion of her scholars" (92). It is possible for Mrs. Teachum to become friends with the girls because they have had a major moral correction in their attitudes since the fight over the apple. Just a few days later Mrs. Teachum allows Jenny to read the girls a play and asks the girls to share their opinions on the moral play. In particular, she addresses Miss Sukey Jennet, "Come, my dear, throw off all fear and reserve. Imagine me one of

your companions, and tell me the story of the play you have been reading” (Fielding 117). Mrs. Teachum wants the girls to be comfortable and have companionship with her.

In becoming a mother/friend/teacher type of governess, Mrs. Teachum is filling a void that all her pupils have. All nine children have a void that Mrs. Teachum can fill; she is seen as the person who can embody all of the necessary characteristics to help the young ladies reach adulthood and become gentlewomen: “*The Governess*, however, supplied up and coming middle class parents with a model of upbringing for their daughters” (Grey 44). This type of story had wide appeal because Mrs. Teachum is everything a girl would need in a governess. Just like Mrs. Teachum, “writers like Sarah Fielding were inclined to be present themselves as friends while constructing themselves as authors/instructors” (Suzuki 335). Fielding most likely intended Mrs. Teachum to represent all the important role models that young girls would need, primarily mothers, friends, and teachers. The fictional character Mrs. Mason, another governess in the late Georgian period, created by Wollstonecraft, exemplifies the same ideal traits that Mrs. Teachum does.

Wollstonecraft’s early adult life was full of educational experiences that played a role in her writings on young ladies and education. There are three major experiences that developed her mindset on the educational system and the education of girls: her teaching experiences in Islington and Newington Green, and her time as governess for the Kingsborough family. At this time in Georgian society there was no set qualifications for teachers and governesses. For a woman, becoming a teacher was seen as a way of advancement in the social hierarchy; therefore, anyone who had even the most remote educational experience could become a teacher. In this community there were too many

would-be teachers and none of them had any type of qualifications (Tomalin 30). For Wollstonecraft, teaching was appealing because it had no prerequisites and had become the traditional last resort of the poor (Tomalin 30).

Wollstonecraft soon realized that being a teacher in Islington was going to fail and she left the community after hearing of a better possibility not far away at Newington Green (a community north of London). In this community there was a large house with a few pupils guaranteed (Tomalin 31), so Wollstonecraft moved there with her sister Eliza and Fanny Blood (Johnson xvi). Like Islington, Wollstonecraft's school at Newington Green did not last long; two years later, Wollstonecraft closed her school. Like many other educators of her time, faced with financial problems due to an increase in the number of boarding schools and a small amount of growth in the pupil populations and faced with a tremendous amount of debt, Wollstonecraft helped her sisters find positions as teachers and agreed to become a governess to the Kingsborough family of Ireland (Johnson xvii).

It was during this time that Wollstonecraft began to develop her ideas and theories on the profession. Wollstonecraft had never been a governess before, and seemed to find the position isolating and lonely. Some of her loneliness may have caused problems with Mrs. Caroline Kingsborough towards the end of her stay. Tomalin states, "both needed to establish ascendancy over their companions in order to be happy" (47). Mary's career as a governess ended in 1787 when the Kingsborough family dismissed her for two reasons: Wollstonecraft's strong relationships with the daughter which transgressed social boundaries (Johnson xvii) and second, her pretending to be a woman of the leisure class

(Tomalin 58). Wollstonecraft's strong needs for both affection and independence had cost her a job with an affluent family.

After leaving the Kingsborough household, Wollstonecraft turned to reflecting upon and writing about her experiences with education in *Original Stories*: "Two recent experiences left a profound mark on *Original Stories*: Wollstonecraft's stint as a governess to the daughters of Lord and Lady Kingsborough in Ireland... and her enthusiastic reading of Rousseau's *Emile* during the same period" (Johnson 28). Just like her character, Mrs. Mason, in *Original Stories*, Wollstonecraft strove to reform her "spoiled, aristocratic charges, through a program based on personal example, rational conversation, and affectionate bonding" (Johnson 28). Myers states, "The portrayal of Mason is tied to the actual facts of Wollstonecraft's governessing" (43); thus, it makes sense that Mrs. Mason's character would be the most upstanding ideal that Wollstonecraft could design, since she is writing in part about herself.

An important part of Wollstonecraft's writing in *Original Stories* centers on Mrs. Mason who the reader sees much more than Mrs. Teachum in *The Governess*. Mrs. Mason represents the harsh rationality of the Eighteenth century. Although Mrs. Mason is never once referred to as Mary and Caroline's governess, every quality she portrays and every action she takes proves that she is indeed the girls' educator and functions as their governess: "Because children's tales perform a variety of cultural functions, they are crammed with clues to change in attitude, values, and behavior" (Myers 33). One such clue in *Original Stories* is Mrs. Mason's role as a mother/friend/teacher. At times, Mrs. Mason can be perceived as being cruel and harsh, but when looked at more closely, Mrs. Mason's ideas on rationality give her the appearance of a "tough love" type of

mother/teacher/friend governess. It is Mrs. Mason's duty to teach Mary and Caroline how to overcome their passions and create a rational environment to function in. At the end of the Georgian era, Wollstonecraft is one of many woman writers who use "childrearing advice manuals for parents to address broader educational and social issues with a sense of confidence in their power to affect change" (Myers 34). *Original Stories* is written to instruct, through the examples Mrs. Mason provides, parents who are not fulfilling their duties.

Mrs. Mason is a much stronger presence in the daily lives of the girls than Mrs. Teachum was in *The Governess*. From the first few pages of the book, the reader learns that Mary and Caroline desperately need Mrs. Mason's instruction and motherly guidance: "Their mother died suddenly, and their father who found them very troublesome at home, placed them under the tuition of a woman of tenderness and discernment, a near relation, who was induced to take on herself the important charge through motives of compassion" (Wollstonecraft 361). These two girls have no one in the world to teach them how to become proper young women, and out of the kindness in her heart and motherly compassion Mrs. Mason takes them in as her own children. The girls live with her and their lives revolve around her rational instruction day in and day out. Myers calls her the book's vital center: "*Original Stories* is, above all, her story. She embodies the teaching heroine, the maternal persona" (39).

Another example of Mrs. Mason as a mother/friend/teacher can be found in Chapter V, when she teaches the girls a lesson on truth and trust. Mrs. Mason states, "It is impossible to form a friendship without making truth the basis, it is indeed the essence of devotion, the employment of understanding and the support of every duty"

(Wollstonecraft 383). Mrs. Mason uses truth based in rationality to teach the girls, by telling them their faults and weaknesses, and she is always forthright with them on whether or not they have exhibited proper behavior. Mrs. Mason's truth speech shows the girls that being honest is important in every human relationship whether it be work, friendship, family, servant, or master. Mrs. Mason also relays through her own examples that she governs her servants and the girls by adhering strictly to the truth which "keeps her hands clean and her heart pure" (Wollstonecraft 384). Mrs. Mason's "truthful" teaching is part of her rationality; she is different from the other governesses in this study because she expects rational thought in all of their interactions with other people

By the end of the novel Mrs. Mason has become Caroline and Mary's friend if they can prove to her that they are going to be have as rational young ladies in society. Mrs. Mason is sad to see her pupils go back to the city and become adults on their own. These girls are daughters to her, and she leaves them with important advice: "For you must now practice by yourselves some of the virtues which I have been endeavoring to inculcate" (Wollstonecraft 449). The girls are on their own now and they must practice everything good and proper that Mrs. Mason has tried to instill in them, because she will no longer be with them for every decision: "You are now candidates for my friendship, and on your advancement in virtue my regard will in future depend" (Wollstonecraft 449). Mary and Caroline have grown into fine young ladies and as long as they maintain control over their passions, Mrs. Mason will be their mother/friend/teacher. As the girls finally leave, Mrs. Mason reminds them to "think of your friend, observe her precepts" in all that they do (Wollstonecraft 450). Myers sees *Original Stories* as a book about "growing up female in Georgian England. It is about the options available to the mature

woman, and the means by which she can gain some sense of control and rationality over her life (and perhaps the lives of others)” (38). By the end of *Original Stories*, Mrs. Mason has demonstrated that one way to maintain a rational life is to let Mary and Caroline go back to the city, in hopes that all she has done as a mother/friend/teacher will secure them as proper young ladies in society. She gains control through letting her pupils return to the city with the personal knowledge that she has made Caroline and Mary into the best women they can be.

Like the two authors who have come before her in this study, Charlotte Brontë, the author of *Jane Eyre*, was familiar with the roles of the governess, for she had grown up in boarding schools and had become a governess herself. Although *Jane Eyre* is not a book on how to raise children, it still contains many educational examples. Similar to Jane, Brontë was a girl of slender means who attended Cowan Bridge School, a school for orphaned and unprovided for girls of good relations (Bell 264). After attending Cowan, Brontë moved on to Miss Wooler’s school at Roe Head where she finished her education and became a teacher at nineteen; teaching for Brontë was a “drudging, confining occupation which she hated but which gave her the idea that she and her sister might themselves establish a school of their own” (264). Broughton and Symes believe that: “by the accession of Victoria a rapid construction of the kinds of paid work thought proper and respectable for middle-class women meant that governessing was one of the few options left open” (11). In the years after her education at Roe Head, Brontë was a governess in private households, but was not considered very good at her trade and was known for not liking children: “At a time when few other means of livelihood were open to a gentlewoman, she could not choose but be a governess, however much she might

dread the constant companionship of children (West 70). Brontë's issues with being a governess were the same issues for many other Victorian women, because during the beginning of the Victorian period "the poor genteel woman had one possible source of independence if she did not marry: the profession of governess" (Rich 144). Marxist critic Terry Eagleton notes, "The governess is a servant, trapped within a rigid social function which demands industriousness, subservience, and self-sacrifice" (51). Brontë must have found the profession of a governess very restricting in everyday life, but through her novels she could depict the different aspects of what a governess's life could be.

Brontë seems to have felt trapped, just as all the governesses are trapped in *Jane Eyre*. Penelope Corfield writes that Brontë reproduces herself in *Jane Eyre* (62). Also, others see the close connection between Brontë and her writing: "Nobody ever put so much of themselves in their work.... All the minor characters, with scarcely an exception, are simply portraits, and the more successful in proportion to their fidelity" (Stephens 20). This portion of the study only deals with the chapters of *Jane Eyre* that involve Jane's stay at Lowood Charitable Institution and Jane's interactions with the governesses there.

The governess Jane has the most interaction at Lowood with is Miss Temple, who is characterized as the only compassionate governess at Lowood: she is "not simply sheltering and protective, but encouraging of intellectual growth" as a mother/teacher/friend should be (Stephens 20). The first example of Miss Temple embodying the model of mother/teacher/friend comes in the breakfast scene in which the pupils are being forced to eat burnt porridge. Miss Temple tried the morning porridge and

declared, "Abominable stuff! How shameful!" (Brontë 39). Diplomatically, she tells the girls that: "You had this morning a breakfast which you could not eat; you must be hungry: I ordered that a lunch of bread and cheese shall be served to all" (Brontë 41). Although Miss Temple is not financially in charge of the charitable institution, she takes it upon herself, like a mother would, to make sure that her children are fed. Miss Temple raises the moods of the girls and during Jane's first days at Lowood; she has bread and cheese served twice during the fortnight (Brontë 55). Miss Temple understands that the young girls will learn nothing in class if they are starving till evening.

Another way that Miss Temple fits the role of mother/teacher/friend can be found in the hierarchy of Lowood. Helen explains to Jane: "It is partly a charity school: you and I, and all the rest of us, are charity children" (Brontë 43). This type of hierarchy makes Miss Temple's position conducive to being an ideal mother/teacher/friend because the girls have no one else to look to for this type of companionship. Helen explains: "Well, all the girls here have lost either one or both parents, and this is called an institution for educating orphans" (Brontë 43). As Helen describes the pupil's place at school, Jane begins to understand that the girls' only hope for an ideal role model lies in the conduct of Miss Temple. Stephens describes Miss Temple as having "no power in the world at large, or against Mr. Brocklehurst's edicts; but she has a great personal attractiveness, mental and spiritual charm and strength" (20). All of the teachers are under Mr. Brocklehurst's commands because he is the owner of the school and is in charge of the institution financially, but it is this mental and spiritual strength that Jane finds most attractive in Miss Temple because Miss Temple becomes Jane's role model and most admired teacher, she is a model for Jane, and eventually Jane bases her whole career

around the teachings of Miss Temple (Bell 264). In *Jane Eyre*, Miss Temple is the best teacher at the Lowood Charitable Institution: “Miss Temple is very good and very clever: she is above the rest, because she knows far more than they do” (Brontë 44).

One aspect of Miss Temple’s mother/teacher/friend persona lies in her beliefs on punishment and pupil misbehavior. Miss Temple punishes completely differently than the other governesses at Lowood, because she thinks of her students as pupils and as her own personal children: “Miss Temple is full of goodness; it pains her to be so severe to anyone, even the worst in school: she sees my errors and tells me them gently” (Brontë 49). Miss Temple refuses to punish the girls with severe mental or physical abuse because she has compassion and understanding for her students; she understands that sometimes mistakes in behavior are made and only a verbal correction is needed to make a large impact.

Another example of Miss Temple’s motherly judgement in pupil behavior comes after Jane’s incident with Mr. Brocklehurst in Chapter 7. When Jane accidentally drops her slate in front of Mr. Brocklehurst, he ridicules her before the entire school. In addition to embarrassing Jane about breaking the slate, Mr. Brocklehurst tells the students about Jane’s misbehavior at Gateshead. Miss Temple takes Jane and Helen into her room and treats them as old friends, even though Mr. Brocklehurst has shamed Jane in front of the entire school. Miss Temple wipes away the humiliation by serving them tea, toast, and cake and they have a merry time together: “We feasted that evening as on nectar and ambrosia; and not the least delight of the entertainment was the smile of gratification with which our hostess regarded us” (Brontë 64). Miss Temple not only mothers the girls’ bodies and minds, but she also becomes their friend, who is delighted to spend time with

them. At the end of their “friendly” evening together Miss Temple “embraced” both girls and drew them “to her heart” (Brontë 65). Not only are they her pupils, they are also her companions and friends; she finds a connection with Helen and Jane. Her “God bless you my children” (Brontë 65), indicates that she is indeed the mother/teacher/friend type of governess they need as a role model.

At the end of Jane’s stay at Lowood, Brontë describes the monumental impact Miss Temple has had in Jane's life as a mother/teacher/friend: “Miss Temple, through all changes, had thus far continued superintendent of the seminary: to her instruction I owed the best part of my acquirements; her friendship and society had been my continual solace; she stood me in stead of mother, governess, and latterly companion” (Brontë 75).

#### PROGRESSIVE EDUCATORS

As a governess able to fulfill the role of mother/friend/teacher it becomes clear that Mrs. Teachum is one of the premier examples of a progressive educator for young ladies during the Eighteenth century; she is a nurturing teacher who plants the seed of moral and rational education. Fielding’s description of Mrs. Teachum and her stories in *The Governess* are progressive because they are “about ordinary girls at school with their governesses, and their humdrum existence” (Grey 42). Never before had such a realistic depiction of young ladies’ education been developed in fiction, but this type of story is in its early form as a novel. One important aspect of Mrs. Teachum’s progressive educational ideas focuses on the student as an individual that needs room for personal expression. At the beginning of the novel, Mrs. Teachum leaves Jenny alone with the girls in the arbor quite a lot. She gives the children room to change and gives Jenny, the

oldest, room to establish her place at the top of the student hierarchy. Mrs. Teachum allows Jenny to be a role model for the other girls and to “persuade them to be led by her good example in the paths of goodness” (Fielding 23). “Mrs. Teachum’s method of instruction was by persuasion rather than force” (Grey 53). This type of instruction lends to a group of students that respect their teacher and one another. In the same manner, Jenny persuades the girls to prove they can be civil young ladies. Jenny gives the girls apples and lets them right the wrongs they committed at the beginning of the story.

Mrs. Teachum goes on to use her technique of persuasion rather than force to help the girls learn the priorities and responsibilities of womanhood. One example of this can be found in the chapter, “Wednesday,” when the writing teacher arrives early to the school. Mrs. Teachum asks the girls persuasively to take leave of their own amusements and meet for lessons with the writing teacher. She uses flattery to persuade the girls when she calls them, “My little dears” (Fielding 59). All the girls comply with her wishes because they want to be seen as good and obedient in her eyes. Mrs. Teachum rewards them for their excellent behavior by allowing them to leave their lessons an hour early.

Another aspect of Mrs. Teachum’s progressive educational style is found in her willingness to maintain control of the young ladies from afar. It is Mrs. Teachum’s role to “cultivate an early inclination to benevolence, and a love of virtue in the minds of young women.” To do this, she must teach and then let the girls practice such acts with one another (Grey 39). Interestingly, Mrs. Teachum understands that too much time apart from her pupils would be a bad idea, so on some level she is a bit duplicitous in having Jenny spy for her. Mrs. Teachum directs Jenny to give “an exact account from her of this their first day’s amusements that she might judge from thence how far they might be

trusted with the liberty she had given them” (Fielding 49). Once Mrs. Teachum learns that the pupils are trustworthy, she is open to them learning from each other’s histories and examples under the arbor everyday. Fielding is using re-telling as a literary device with multiple functions: Jenny’s re-telling of the girls’ activities and conversations allows the reader to be privy to the girls’ actions.

Another way that Mrs. Teachum is a progressive educator is that she values not just morals, but the body as well. Mrs. Teachum understands the importance of a healthy body as a means of keeping the educated mind ready for learning. Mrs. Teachum’s progressive philosophy takes some resonance from the philosopher John Locke, whose work Fielding was very familiar with:

Locke’s tutor and Fenelon’s mother/governess have much in common and Mrs. Teachum can be seen to be following them in such ideas as teaching by example, studying the individual needs of children, training them in good physical habits, and supervising their social experience. (Grey 47)

Therefore she understands that in order for the girls to grow into healthy women that behave well in society they must be educated even on a physical level: “Mrs. Teachum, as soon as they dined, told them, that she thought it proper they would use some bodily exercise, that they might not, by sitting constantly still, impair their health” (Fielding 74). Mrs. Teachum knows that “the faculties of the mind grow languid and useless, when the health of the body is lost” (Fielding 74), and on Monday and Tuesday the pupils walk in the garden and the fields surrounding the school.

Another prominent factor in Mrs. Teachum’s progressive way of educating young ladies is derived from the novel *Pamela*. Fielding’s *The Governess* “endorses Pamela’s

opinion that a good boarding school may prove a more reliable source of moral education than an unsuitable home” (Briggs 79). And it is true, many of Mrs. Teachum’s pupils need the stability of a moral education, and that is why they have been sent to her care. Many of the educational problems discussed in *The Governess* are mostly that of behavior, which is useful in preparing the girls for the different aspects of the social world because the girls will encounter issues such as conduct and responsibilities within the family, conduct with the poor, and manners in society. At the very end of the novel, Fielding makes it clear that Mrs. Teachum’s progressive teaching methods make her school a success: “In short, Mrs. Teachum’s school was always mentioned throughout the country, as an example of peace and harmony; and also by the daily improvement of all her girls” (Fielding 141). Mrs. Teachum’s educational philosophy of educating the mind and body seem successful because “never did any young lady leave Mrs. Teachum, but that her parents and friends were greatly delighted with her behavior” (Fielding 141). Mrs. Teachum has a reputation for using her role as mother/friend/teacher and revolutionary educational techniques to improve the behavior of all her young pupils so they may grow up into well-behaved and respected women in society.

Out of all the governesses in this study Mrs. Mason exhibits the most progressive methods in educating girls because she teaches new rationality (controlling passion) in addition to providing them with tangible examples of good and bad behavior; in *Original Stories*, Wollstonecraft had a “keen and vital concern with education, especially of girls and women” (Johnson 24). From the very beginning of the book, Wollstonecraft uses Mrs. Mason to portray her concerns with the rational education of young ladies: “Mrs. Mason never suffered them to be out of her sight. They were allowed to ask questions on

all occasions” (Wollstonecraft 361). Mrs. Mason keeps a watchful eye on the girls to steer them in the direction of rationality and so she may use their misconduct as an opportunity to correct their bad behavior: “As Mrs. Mason shapes the girls’ minds and experiences, the values she stands for and her own character gradually clarifies.... She crisply defines goodness and virtue, she despises irresolution, gluttony, idleness, lying, and anger” (Myers 47). Mrs. Mason uses her own moral character as one technique of many on how to teach “rational thought and moral discrimination” (Myers 46).

One technique Mrs. Mason employs is a sense of restraint with the girls’ irrational behavior. Since Mrs. Mason is constantly supervising Mary and Caroline, she is a witness to all their indiscretions: “Throughout the book Mrs. Mason urges the children (and, by implication, the book’s young readers) to view themselves as objects of constant surveillance, accountable for all their actions, however seemingly trivial” (Myers 31). Thus Mrs. Mason does not have to correct the girls on every single childish mistake; she waits for the right opportunity with the most impact to address the behavior: “[Wollstonecraft] steers her wards through carefully selected tales and experiences...” allowing for complete control over what the girls learn and internalize educationally (Myers 39).

One example of this type of restraint can be found with Mrs. Mason’s concern over Mary’s untidiness: “Mrs. Mason had often observed it, and hinted her dislike; but, unwilling to burden her with precepts, she waited for a glaring example” (Wollstonecraft 409). Eventually that example appears in the arrival of Mrs. Dowdy, who also has a habit of uncleanness: “A lady, who was remarkable for her negligence in this respect, spent a week with them; and, during that time, very frequently disconcerted the economy of the

family. She was seldom fit to be seen, and if any company came by chance to dinner, she would make them wait” (Wollstonecraft 409). Mrs. Mason lets Mrs. Dowdy and her bad example stay in the house to prove to Mary that being unclean and unprepared for the day does nothing but waste the time of others and cause social difficulties, because not everyone is willing to wait on someone to dress. After Mrs. Dowdy has left the household, Mrs. Mason explains to Mary: “I continually caution Caroline not to spend much time in adorning her person, but I never desired you to neglect yours” (Wollstonecraft 409). Mrs. Mason gives Mary and Caroline the tools to take the lessons they have learned and apply them to other situations in their lives. “Mary and Caroline learn to be accountable for themselves and take themselves seriously as young ladies in the world (Myers 44). Eventually, the girls learn that they no longer require Mrs. Mason’s constant presence because they have learned how to monitor themselves.

Mrs. Mason uses her own example and the examples of other women to teach the girls about how important relationships are to a social community:

They encounter a series of exemplary women, who (along with Mrs. Mason) provide them with models of female virtue, rationality, and autonomy. The village school mistress, Anna Lofty, maintains her valued independence through minimizing her desire and devoting her time to the improvement of others. (Myers 30)

Mrs. Mason uses Anna’s history and past to teach the girls about strong character and independence. Anna has independence and exercises it after her father’s death. “She had her father’s spirit of independence, and determined to shake off the galling yoke which she had long struggled with, and try to earn her own subsistence” (Wollstonecraft 428).

Anna gives up high society living and relations to better herself and find her own way in life. The girls see her as a woman who gains independence through helping others. Mrs. Mason describes her: “She was formed to be a part of a much higher society, but she gave it up to patiently improve the children assigned to her management” (Wollstonecraft 429).

Mary and Caroline see Anna’s love of virtue and truth and Mrs. Mason hopes they will learn these concepts through Anna’s good example: “Not only in Mason, but other central characters, the stories offer affirming images of womanly experience and achievement” (Myers 44). This technique of surrounding the young ladies with good examples of womanly behavior is progressive for the Georgian period. Mrs. Mason and Anna are similar in that they both have a desire to educate children and cultivate them into upstanding human beings: “Guided by the living examples of Mrs. Mason through a series of dialogue and revelatory experiences and encounters, the girls shed their vulgarities and, assisted by the reemergence of their innately good qualities, peruse a rationally independent future” (Myers 30). After all, Mrs. Mason is trying to improve their minds and “cultivate a good capacity” for being a proper young lady in Georgian society (Wollstonecraft 432).

At the end of *Original Stories* Mrs. Mason realizes that she has taught Mary and Caroline everything she is capable of bestowing on them, and now it is up to the girls to monitor their behavior and maintain rationality in life. Mrs. Mason gives the girls a book in which she has recorded their experiences together, so that in times of indecision and questioning the girls can read their book (the very book that the audience reads) to find answers: “I now, as my last present, give you a book in which I have written the subjects

that we have discussed. Recur frequently to it for the stories illustrating the instruction it contains, you will not feel in such a great degree the want of my personal advice”.

(Wollstonecraft 449). This book is the final stage of Mary and Caroline’s progressive education: the girls can survive now without Mrs. Mason, and, eventually, even without the book to guide them. Mrs. Mason has taught them how to be rational and moral young women guided by her progressive instruction.

In *Jane Eyre* it is Miss Temple’s love and compassion for her pupils that makes her a progressive educator of young women: she values her students as people, rather than as objects sent to school to obey the rules. Miss Temple strives to keep the mind and body healthy and works to teach and guide the young girls of Lowood without harsh discipline, for she understands that harsh discipline gets in the way of education: “She sees my errors, and tells me them gently; and if I do anything worthy of praise, she gives me my mead liberally” (Brontë 49). It is this method that makes it possible for Helen to learn and excel in Miss Temple’s class. Unlike Helen’s other classes, she never had a problem paying attention to Miss Temple and her mind never wanders during Miss Temple’s lessons, because Helen wants to learn from her: “Miss Temple had generally something to say which is newer than my own reflections; her language is singularly agreeable to me, and the information she communicates is often just what I wish to gain” (Brontë 49). Because Miss Temple is kind to Helen and does not beat her, Helen learns what Miss Temple has to offer. Helen gains knowledge that “Life appears too short to be spent in nursing animosity of registering wrongs” which helps her cope with the other teachers who mistreat her (Brontë 51).

On the day that Jane breaks her slate in front of Mr. Brocklehurst, Miss Temple does not stand by and let the institution punish Jane for the rest of her stay at Lowood. Miss Temple shows Jane and all the other students that she values their lives and character over the rules that Mr. Brocklehurst has put in place at Lowood. She states, “Don’t be afraid Jane, I saw it was an accident; you shall not be punished” (Brontë 57). Miss Temple cannot stop Jane from being punished and ridiculed by Mr. Brocklehurst, but her words leave an impression on Jane and show that Miss Temple prizes the welfare of her students over the rules of the establishment. Miss Temple understands that Jane must be able to clear her tarnished reputation in order to be a successful student at Lowood, and promises Jane that she will rectify the situation: “Miss Temple having assembled the whole school, announced that inquiry had been made into the charges alleged against Jane Eyre, and that she was most happy to be able to pronounce her cleared from every imputation” (Brontë 66).

Miss Temple’s actions in the incident prompt a change in Jane’s perception of school: she soon excels in school and wants to be a part of Lowood: “I would not now have exchanged Lowood with all its privations for Gateshead and its daily luxuries” (Brontë 67). Miss Temple and her progressive qualities as a teacher become the best part of Jane’s education at Lowood. At the end of Jane’s time at the institution Jane describes her experience: “I had the means of an excellent education placed within my reach; a fondness for some of my studies, and a desire to excel in all, together with a great delight in pleasing my teachers, especially such as I loved, urged me on” (Brontë 75). Miss Temple’s choice to prize her pupils over the rules of Lowood benefits Jane and countless

other pupils, because it gives them the opportunity to be successful in school, to enjoy learning, and moral adulthood.

At this point in my study it is important to address the rise and change novels over the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. Starting with Mrs. Teachum and the *The Governess*, the art of writing school stories has transformed from its embryonic stages. In *The Governess* Fielding is exploring the nurturing governess who teaches morality through example, but Mrs. Teachum and her classroom seem purified and do not have much room for rationality and realistic examples of what typically went on in a schoolroom. Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories* portrays the changing ideas surrounding girls' education. Her story of Mrs. Mason is more detailed and Mrs. Mason's educational pedagogies are extremely different from Mrs. Teachum because she is teaching Mary and Caroline to become rational young ladies, who can be independent in the outside world of society. *Jane Eyre* was written mid-nineteenth century and gives an example of the more detailed and thorough version of the novel form. The story of the governess makes a shift in the Victorian era because children are not always moral and teachers are no longer supremely good. By the time Ewing's novel has arrived, the governess novel is no longer just for girls, mothers, and teachers. *Six to Sixteen* brings in a new audience because it is one of the more realistic texts of the Nineteenth century; the young ladies are being taught intellectual pursuits to help their quality of life. Also, Ewing's novel is different from *Jane Eyre* because it is truly a book just for children. *Six to Sixteen* described what it meant for a young lady to be a part of society and it gave its audience a solid picture of life and society during the Nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER II

### THE UNFIT GOVERNESS

#### INTRODUCTION AND BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

As Chapter I focused on the need for appropriate and progressive educators of young women, Chapter II focuses on those governesses who are not up to the ideal standards of Fielding's Mrs. Teachum, Wollstonecraft's Mrs. Mason, and Brontë's Miss Temple. It was important for children's authors during the Georgian and Victorian periods to depict both fit and unfit governesses because there seem to be a void in society on who should and how to educate girls. Many children's authors such as Fielding and Wollstonecraft led the way for other authors to depict unfit governesses and what they embodied. Unfit governesses were set up as foils for the "real" models of what governesses should be. The use of the unfit governess as a foil reflects and dramatizes the need for governesses with high morals and strong educational values. Both Fielding and Wollstonecraft set the precedent for what ideal behavior should be, and continuing this trend, both Brontë and Ewing characterize and describe what a bad governess embodies. Ewing's novel is about the intellectual pursuits and training for girls and women, therefore, the characterization of unfit governesses seems to be used to dissuade parents from involving their children with teachers who are not pragmatic educators. Chapter II will discuss that Brontë's Miss Scatcherd and Ewing's Miss Perry and Madame, who all embody unfit governesses with deplorable qualities. Some of the qualities used to

establish these governesses as tainted teachers include corporal punishment, neglect of student health, immoral behavior, and suffocation through supervision.

In *Jane Eyre* and *Six to Sixteen*, governesses who prize rules of the established school over the health and welfare of their students are constantly questioned and ridiculed for being unfit governesses. During the Victorian period there seems to be a contrast against the role of the governess as a mother/teacher/friend. Instead, unfit governesses maintain emotional distance from their pupils and tend to look at them as objects rather than young ladies with feelings and experiences. For unfit governesses there is no excuse for a pupil who does not follow the rules of the school and a pupil will be punished severely if they cannot obey the rules of the governess and the educational institution.

Those governesses who do not place the health and welfare of young ladies as a first priority are often the governesses who look toward corporal punishment as the best means of solving behavioral problems. Many of the unfit governesses do not care if the pupils are already emaciated and sickly, these women continue to beat and abuse young ladies in their care to teach them proper behavior. Most of the examples of corporal punishment involve physical beatings or some type of improper physical treatment such as starvation, uncomfortable attire, or standing for long periods of time.

In *Six to Sixteen* one of the characteristics of an unfit governess is immorality. Immoral governesses exhibit inappropriate behavior in front of young ladies instead of exhibiting positive behavior which young ladies should emulate. Immoral governesses have behavior that ranges from deceitful to vain, superficial, and selfish. For parents during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, it was important to recognize an immoral

governess before a daughter starts lying, flattering, and becoming selfish. *Six to Sixteen* shows that once immoral behavior is taught, it leaves a bad effect on the child and is something that takes an extremely long time to correct. Because the effects of an unfit governess are lasting, it is important to look for explanations and motivations for the literary descriptions of tainted governesses. One key place to examine is biographical aspects of Brontë's and Ewing's encounters with governesses because these women wrote such unfit governesses into children's stories. Brontë had bad experiences being a governess herself and Ewing's mother would not allow her daughters to be taught by governesses due to bad teaching practices.

To examine the atmosphere and characteristics of Lowood and Miss Scatcherd one must understand Brontë and her sister Maria's educational experiences. According to Carol Block, "[i]n 1824, when she was eight years old, Charlotte and Emily joined their older sisters at the newly opened Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge in the parish of Tunstall." Charlotte and her sisters found life at boarding school harsh and while there Maria developed consumption (Block). According to Brontë, Maria was harshly treated during her illness, and it is this treatment that "Brontë drew upon in portraying Helen Burns' martyrdom at the hands of Miss Scatcherd in *Jane Eyre*" (Block).

These biographical sketches play an important role in Brontë's descriptions of Lowood and its adult characters; Brontë's best friend, Elizabeth Gaskell, reported: "Miss Brontë more than once said to me, that she should not have written what she did of Lowood in *Jane Eyre*, if she had thought the place would have been so immediately identified with Cowan Bridge" (Benton 53). Several places and people in Brontë's biographical and fictional lives are connected: "The sites and surroundings of Cowan's

Bridge/Lowood, the cooks and the pupils' diet, the portrayal of Miss Andrews and Maria Brontë/Miss Scatcherd and Helen Burns, and the portrayal of Mr. Carus Wilson/Mr. Brocklehurst" (Benton 53). Parana Roy suggests that: "We know, for instance, that the character of Helen was largely, if not wholly, drawn from that of Brontë's sister Maria, who perished (like Helen) at the Cowan Bridge School" (716). Although Miss Temple stands as an ideal governess throughout Jane's time at Lowood it is necessary to acknowledge that Brontë was attempting to create a realistic character in Helen.

Unlike the authors in the study before her, Ewing had experiences neither as nor with governesses or boarding schools. She was one of the most well known writers in the mid-Victorian schoolroom (Avery online). Even Rudyard Kipling was inspired by Ewing's realistic writings. Ewing's books have an organic approach that emphasizes the idea that girls are capable of intellectual pursuits. Ewing, who was born to Margaret Gatty, a famous author and qualified to educate, grew up in Yorkshire, England, which is part of the setting for *Six to Sixteen*. The parish of Ecclesfield, in Yorkshire, was a location that all the Gatty children loved with fierce devotion, and was a featured background of many of Ewing's books: "The life of the Ecclesfield vicarage, with its High Church principles, family loyalties, and middle class prejudices, was the first one of the most prevailing influences on [Ewing's] work" (Avery online).

Ewing and her mother were very close because Gatty was the primary source of education of all her daughters. According to Christabel Maxwell, "All their lessons were given to them by their mother. Mrs. Gatty teaches them Latin and awards them paintboxes when they had learned the five declensions" (85). Mrs. Gatty began educating

the girls at an early age, and they did endure a rigorous education. But, Maxwell goes on to mention that there were problems:

With such a multiplicity of interest, the education of the girls could not have been anything but spasmodic. Occasionally, a governess lived in the house; but the two eldest girls owed the greater part of their education to their mother; and they in their turn seem to have passed on their instruction to the younger ones. (Maxwell 5)

Ewing, as the second oldest sister, would have had some experience with education in teaching her younger sisters what she had learned from her mother, tutors, books, and her elder sister. Also, Mrs. Gatty, like many other mothers of the time, thought it was appropriate to send a daughter to “ladies seminary” or school to be “trimmed up in deportment, dancing, music, and French for a couple of months (Maxwell 6). While the four Gatty girls were being educated in random ways,

[n]one of the four girls appeared to think there was anything wrong with the fact that most of the families’ meager resources were spent of the education and multifarious needs of their brothers, while everyone else went without. The girls muddled along with lessons from their mother or an elder sister. (Avery online)

In an effort to help her family, which was barely surviving on her parents’ income, Ewing began writing short stories. Avery records that “Ewing’s first stories were published in the *Monthly Packet*, Charlotte Yonge’s journal for young ladies, to which her mother’s name gave her an entrée. (The serious, some would say forbidding, periodical devoted itself to the improvement of the upper-middle class girl)” (online).

Already concerned with the education of young ladies, Ewing continued her writing career by becoming a joint editor of *Aunt Judy's Magazine*, which was also concerned with education. Ewing took on the magazine in 1866 in hopes that it would bring home a small income for her family (Avery online). During the years that Ewing worked on *Aunt Judy's Magazine*, she had married a military man and had moved to Aldershot: "The soldier's wife had replaced the clergyman's daughter, and Julie became profoundly interested in soldiers, in the uncertain fate of their wives, in the haphazard education of their children" (Maxwell 198). All of these concerns contributed to Ewing's writings in the magazine, and, in January 1872, *Six to Sixteen* appeared in *Aunt Judy's Magazine* (Maxwell 189). This story held aspects of "reminiscences of the life at Aldershot, aspects of Mrs. Ewing's life in her Yorkshire home, and her views on the education of girls" (Maxwell 189). All of these scenes and pieces of Ewing's life contribute to her stories which eventually become known as some of the best accounts of girlhood during the Victorian period. It is this type of accuracy that makes Ewing's characters Miss Perry and Madame so convincingly "unfit" in *Six to Sixteen*. Governesses who acted like Miss Perry and Madame widely worked as educators of young women, and Ewing found this type of education appalling and deplorable for young girls who deserved a better learning environment with stronger governesses.

#### CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

In the Eighteenth and Nineteenth century corporal punishment was still being used in schools. It is by comparison this section examines Miss Scatcherd's deplorable qualities as a governess who employs corporal punishment. At the beginning of Jane's

account at Lowood the teachers are described in hard terms: “over worked,” “harsh,” “grotesque,” and “weather beaten” (Brontë 39-40). From these descriptions it looks as though none of the teachers have comfortable lives at Lowood. Also, Brontë mentions that “eighty girls sat motionless and erect” which means that there are about twenty girls per teacher. This number of girls is alarming for the Nineteenth century, because typically a governess should only have as many children as she can manage; twenty seems too large a number for one governess to watch at all times, as the governesses do at Lowood.

In the beginning of Chapter 6, Jane witnesses, for the first time, Miss Scatcherd administer corporal punishment to Helen. For the reader, this incident sets up the dynamic of Miss Scatcherd’s and Helen’s relationship. Helen fumbled her reading in front the class and is moved to the bottom of the class. It is here that the reader learns that Miss Scatcherd constantly ridicules Helen; Miss Scatcherd points out every flaw that she can find: “Burns, you are standing on the side of your shoe; turn your toe out immediately. Burns, you poke out your chin most unpleasantly; draw it in. Burns I insist on your holding your head up; I will not have you before me in that attitude” (Brontë 46). One after another Miss Scatcherd lists Helen’s flaws, not to help Helen be a better student, but just because the flaws seem to annoy Miss Scatcherd. Even though Helen retains the entire lesson and answers on command, she is still punished. Jane states, “I kept expecting that Miss Scatcherd would praise her attention: but, instead of that she suddenly cried out – ‘you dirty, disagreeable girl! You have never cleaned your nails this morning’” (Brontë 46). Even though Helen is one of the few competent pupils at Lowood, she is beaten for being on the surface “unclean” and more deeply for being the

opposite of what Miss Scatcherd thinks Helen should be. It seems that Helen's meekness feeds Miss Scatcherd's rage, because the more Helen stays quiet the more Miss Scatcherd berates and ridicules her (Roy 717).

The incident leads to corporal punishment because Helen refuses to cry. Not only is Helen beaten, but also she must pick out the twigs she beaten with (46). While Miss Scatcherd beats Helen she screams, "Hardened girl! Nothing can correct you of your slatternly habits: carry the rod away" (Brontë 46). Here the reader learns that Helen expects corporal punishment from Miss Scatcherd and that this form of punishment has been going on for some time at Lowood. Since this is a pattern between Miss Scatcherd and Helen, the description shows that Helen knows exactly how to behave and what to do: "This ominous tool she presented to Miss Scatcherd with a respectful curtsy; then she quietly, and without being told, unloosed her pinafore, and the teacher instantly and sharply inflicted on her neck a dozen strokes with a bunch of twigs" (Brontë 46). The tone of this quote seems to indicate that corporal punishment is a serious matter that should not be used for minor problems such as uncleanliness, especially when none of the pupils can wash because the water was frozen. Helen is singled out; she is smart, yet she is punished for not following the strict hygiene rules at Lowood.

Early in Jane's stay at Lowood, Helen is dismissed from History class and sent to stand in the middle of the large schoolroom. Jane describes the scene: "[t]he punishment seemed to me in a high degree ignominious, especially for so a great a girl- she looked thirteen or upward" (Brontë 44). Even Jane, a young girl who at this point does not even know Helen, finds Miss Scatcherd's punishment cruel and unfit.

Throughout the novel, Miss Scatcherd finds many ways to physically punish Helen. According to Arnold Shapiro, "Here the individual is reduced to the most common denominator: the girls at the school are de-sexed by being called by their last names. Mr. Brocklehurst's hardness predominates, and is, in fact contagious" (686-7). Miss Scatcherd uses Mr. Brocklehurst's methods of ridicule, torment, and mortification to "teach" Helen lessons. For example, Miss Scatcherd has taken it upon herself to examine Helen's drawers, which are not up to Miss Scatcherd's standards, Jane observes that "to-morrow she should have half a dozen of untidy folded articles pinned to her shoulder" (Brontë 65). Under normal circumstances this punishment might seem reasonable, but Miss Scatcherd does not hold true her word and escalates the situation even more in the morning: "Miss Scatcherd wrote in conspicuous characters on a piece of pasteboard the word 'slattern' and bound it like a phylactery round Helen's large, mild, intelligent, and benign-looking forehead" (65).

Miss Scatcherd uses Helen's punishment to make herself feel better; this type of psychological punishment highlights the superiority Miss Scatcherd feels over Helen. Scholar Heather Julien writes, "Throughout the Victorian period, the widely held perception of motherhood as intensely moral, intensely selfless, and above all intensely pure dominated women's involvement in the world outside the home" (118), but Miss Scatcherd has none of these qualities; she is neither "pure" nor motherly when she beats and ridicules Helen. Miss Scatcherd punishes Helen because she can, not because she is being "selfless" or "intensely moral." Miss Scatcherd punishes Helen because she is not intelligent or compassionate enough to think of another way to teach Helen how to obey the rules.

Throughout all the different punishments as with the pasteboard, Helen bears the torture as best as she can: “[s]he wore it till evening, patient, unresentful, regarding it as deserved punishment” (Brontë 66). The only effect Miss Scatcherd’s punishment seems to have on Helen, is to convince her that she is exactly who Miss Scatcherd ridicules her for being. Helen states,

I am, as Miss Scatcherd said, slatternly: I seldom put, and never keep, things in order: I am careless; I forget my rules; I read when I should learn my lessons; I have no method; and sometimes I say, like you, I cannot bear to be subjected to systematic arrangements. This is all provoking to Miss Scatcherd, who is naturally neat, punctual, and particular. (Brontë 48)

Yes, Helen does admit that she, a thirteen-year-old girl, has lapses in behavior and cleanliness, but those qualities do not excuse Miss Scatcherd’s harsh behavior and punishments, especially because Miss Scatcherd has convinced Helen that she is indeed a horrible student. Basically, Helen states that Miss Scatcherd is punishing her because Helen’s behavior is completely the opposite of Miss Scatcherd’s, and that makes Helen wrong: “eyes like Miss Scatcherd’s can only see those minute defects” instead of noticing how smart Helen is at academic subjects (Brontë 60).

#### NEGLECT OF HEALTH

Miss Scatcherd is a good example of a governess who neglects the health of pupils under her care. One can deduce that Helen’s constant beatings and punishments from Miss Scatcherd are partially to blame for her consumption. Helen is being

physically and emotionally tortured to the point that her body will break down. Helen does not cry in front of Miss Scatcherd, she waits “and the trace of tear glistened on her thin cheek” (Brontë 47). Helen’s tears show that she is traumatized by the beatings. It is this type of punishment that contributes to her diminished health, and most likely makes her tuberculosis more severe.

One specific example of Miss Scatcherd endangering Helen’s health happens in Chapter 7. Helen has been punished by Miss Scatcherd again and is greatly affected by the punishment of starvation (Brontë 57). Jane describes: “Helen Burns wore on her arm the untidy badge; scarcely an hour ago I had heard her condemned by Miss Scatcherd to a dinner of bread and water on the morrow because she had blotted an exercise in copying it out” (Brontë 59). So this time, instead of beating her, Miss Scatcherd takes away Helen’s dinner. From the passage above it is clear that Miss Scatcherd’s previous physical punishment for uncleanness has not had an effect on Helen, for Helen is still singled out for her hygiene. Like corporal punishment, undernourishing a child is clearly unfit punishment because the pupils are already starving. Jane gives a clear picture of the food situation at Lowood when she states:

Many times I have shared between two claimants the precious morsel of brown bread distributed at tea time; and after relinquishing to a third half the contents of my mug of coffee, I have swallowed the remainder with an accompaniment of secret tears, forced from me by the exigency of hunger. (Brontë 52)

Here, Brontë is attacking the minuscule portions, student bullying, and Miss Scatcherd's sadistic nature for taking away Helen's food source. Taking away starving Helen's food is not a reasonable punishment for bad form on handwriting and copy exercises.

Lowood becomes a den of infection during the month of May because Miss Scatcherd and other governesses have neglected the health of the young ladies in their charge. Brontë states, "Semi-starvation and neglected colds had predisposed most of the pupils to receive infection: forty-five out of the eighty girls lay ill at one time" (68). During this time, Miss Scatcherd is never mentioned as helping the sick and dying girls. Miss Temple is uses all of her time to take care of the "hospital portion of the house with the fever patients" where Helen Burns is being held, because Helen has consumption (Brontë 70). Miss Scatcherd's absence from the text could point to her being a part of the reason why so many pupils are sick at Lowood; her punishments inflicted weakened girls with malnutrition and sickness. Also, Miss Scatcherd lacks the love or morality that makes Miss Temple such a good governess.

Ewing's first example of a realistic governess, Miss Perry, exhibits poor judgment in her inattention to Matilda's health. Miss Perry is selfish and keeps the school room too hot. The atmosphere of the room is described as "fever-heat" and "stuffy," and the girls cannot learn in this type of an environment (Ewing 101). The school room's "stuffy" conditions cause Matilda to get severe headaches and occasionally Matilda is released early from study. During these situations Miss Perry states, "But not a word to your Mamma" (Ewing 101). These words show that Miss Perry is aware she is neglecting her pupil's health and education because she is encouraging Matilda to lie to her mother. Eventually, Miss Perry's negative qualities rise to the surface and Mr. Bullier, Matilda's

father, fires her. At the point where Mr. Bullier sees and hears what Miss Perry is really up to, Mrs. Minchin a prominent lady in the Bullier's society, who recommends Miss Perry, admits that she knows that Miss Perry was the wrong person to be the girls' governess.

Even away at school Matilda and Margery are faced with a governess who does not show ample concern or care for the health and welfare of her pupils. At Bush House, Matilda feels Madame's wrath the most out of all the pupils, for Madame is known for showing no mercy to "slow, stupid, or lazy girls" (Ewing 143). Since Matilda is sickly, and Madame does not take the time to notice, Madame characterizes Matilda as slow, stupid, or lazy: "The unhealthy atmosphere of Bush House takes on a life-and-death aspect when Matilda has a frightening brush with consumption, worsened by the school's strictures against exercise and fresh air" (Mills). Matilda seems to be getting sicker and sicker; her headaches "seemed to stupefy her, and make her quite incapable of work" (Ewing 165). Madame ignores Matilda's health and constantly complains that Matilda looks "sulky" when she is actually sick (Ewing 165). Matilda cannot articulate lessons and she is subject to Madame's wrath. Then, Matilda gains a cough, which "exasperates Madame as much as her stupidity" (Ewing 166). Passages like this show that Madame does not seem concerned about Matilda's health or welfare, because she fails to address Matilda's cough or headaches until it is too late and Matilda almost dies. Madame is too wrapped up in teaching to notice that Matilda is gravely ill from consumption: "Matilda's ill-health came to a crisis" and it becomes clear that Matilda will have to leave school (Ewing 169). It is not until this point that Madame finally realizes that she has been treating Matilda badly and tries to make amends by nursing her.

## IMMORAL BEHAVIOR

Ewing's Bullier family has not taken on a governess just for the education of their daughter's, in fact, during the Victorian period, taking on a governess was seen as acceptable behavior in society, perhaps a sign of social status. This causes a problem in the Bullier household, because Miss Perry turns out to be inexperienced and of bad moral character. The reader notices that it is partially Mrs. Bullier's failing as a parent and guardian that lead to Miss Perry's "miseducation" of Matilda and Margery. Throughout the chapter, Ewing gives a glimpse into Miss Perry's character and background. It becomes clear that Miss Perry is not a governess who is interested in educating or helping children; she has no desire to be a progressive educator. In fact, the only reason she is a governess is because she is a protegee of Mrs. Minchin. Mrs. Minchin persuades Mrs. Bullier to take Miss Perry as the girls' governess even though "she was quite unfit for the position" (Ewing 99). Miss Perry is not educated on how to be a proper governess and does not exhibit any good qualities for the girls to learn from. According to Patricia Demers, Ewing paints Mrs. Minchin as "a notorious gossip" enabled by Mrs. Bullier, "whose foolish gadding as Minchin's protegee leads to the neglect of her own daughter."

From the beginning of the chapter the reader gets a review of Miss Perry's character. At first Matilda gives a glowing review of Miss Perry and her methods of teaching. Matilda states that she is "so good-natured," but immediately after Matilda's review the reader learns that Miss Perry is "very romantic" (Ewing 98). A sentimentally romantic governess is not usually seen as the best type of governess to have. It is a governess's role to teach young girls how to be proper women, and a governess caught up in romantic novels and foolish gossip is not focused on rational education or character

building. Fielding and Wollstonecraft, Ewing's precedents, would shun this type of romantic behavior in a governess, which makes Miss Perry a good foil to ideal governesses.

Miss Perry is far from being a role model for her pupils because she seems inexperienced and she is characterized through her love for romantic novels. Ewing describes Miss Perry's love of romantic gossip in more detailed terms: "She was a great novel reader.... For she was one of those strange characters who indulged in egotism and exaggeration, till they seem positively to lose the sense of what is fact and what is fiction" (Ewing 100). Miss Perry is characterized as a liar who fills her pupils' heads with nonsense as Margery observes, "She filled our poor empty little heads with a great deal of folly" (Ewing 100). The girls have plenty of room for knowledge, yet Miss Perry insists on teaching them, by example, how to be romantic and untruthful.

Immediately after Miss Perry has been characterized as a romantic, Matilda informs Margery that Miss Perry is deceitful. According to Matilda, she's "got lots of secrets, and she's told me several already" (Ewing 98). Governesses should not cross the line into confidante; it teaches young ladies how to keep secrets from their parents and their teacher. Already Miss Perry has stepped over the boundary into behavior that is immoral and full of deceit and gossip. Margery is aware that Miss Perry is keeping secrets from the Bulliers: "Miss Perry was clever enough not to display her romantic side to Mrs. Bullier," (Ewing 103) because she throws needlework over her novels. Miss Perry realizes that reading romantic novels while the girls are "learning" is bad behavior. The girls do pick up on their governess's unfit behavior and Matilda exhibits the same type of secret keeping--"The detestable trick of small concealments which Miss Perry had

taught us” (Ewing 120). Romanticism and secret keeping become major issues later on in the novel when Matilda starts getting sick under Miss Perry’s watch.

Throughout the first portion of the chapter, Margery makes several statements about Miss Perry’s unfit character: “To do our new governess justice, she did her best to impart her own superficial acquirements to us” (Ewing 99). This type of statement shows that Miss Perry is an unfit governess because she has so little to offer Margery and Matilda. From Margery, the reader learns that Miss Perry does several things to show her inexperience and bad habits as a governess. She teaches French exercises from a key, which means she does not know the language she is teaching. Neither does she pay attention and listen while the girls are reading out loud or are “learning;” she is too busy “roasting her petticoats over the fire” (Ewing 99-100).

One true marker that Miss Perry is an unfit governess is that she does not enjoy educating Margery and Matilda. Miss Perry is glad to be done with lessons and educating, she would rather play and be a gossip with the girls: “But when the lessons were over Miss Perry was quite as glad as we were, and the subjects of our studies had little to do with our holiday hours and a Sunday sermon with the rest of the week” (Ewing 100). Miss Perry does not take pride or enjoyment in teaching the girls; she is not teaching them to use their studies in real life. She seems to exhibit no morals or values towards education and refining her young pupils, instead she is teaching them how to be little versions of herself.

Later on in the novel, it is Miss Perry’s fault that Matilda has grown sick and quiet and Mrs. Bullier admits, “For her unsociability, I think Miss Perry’s evil influence is partly to blame” (Ewing 117). The word “partly” is important in this statement,

because Mrs. Bullier recognizes that she must take some part of the blame for failing her daughter in hiring such an unfit governess. Miss Perry is one of the many unfit governesses that Mrs. Bullier and her friends discuss; it is in their conversation that Ewing's true feelings about unfit governesses arise. Ewing states, "Aunt Theresa and her friends preached to each other against governesses in general, and the governess each had suffered from in particular" (117). All of these examples show that Miss Perry is unfit to be a governess, she lacks the experience, the selflessness to truly teach Matilda and Margery something worthwhile. Miss Perry seems to be extremely absorbed in herself, as Margery describes: "I found Miss Perry was fond of talking about herself, and a suitable audience was quite a secondary consideration with her" (Ewing 99). Miss Perry is being paid to teach the girls, yet is too busy with herself. Miss Perry is not the only unfit governess in Victorian England; it is clear from the women's discussion that there are many unfit governesses and parents of young girls must choose a governess wisely.

#### SUPERVISION THAT SUFFOCATES

Ewing uses the character of Madame as the second representation of a realistically unfit governess in *Six to Sixteen*. Unlike, Miss Perry, Madame is situated at a prominent middle to upper class girls' boarding school. Ewing gives an "entirely convincing account of a girls' boarding school" according to Avery (v-vi). Margery and Matilda go to school at Bush House and at first, both the school and Madame seem like good representations of women's education at its finest, because the girls are taking walks, learning French, and interacting with the poor, but it becomes clear that the school is bound by a strict schedule and Madame never varies from the rules and schedule.

One of the most important aspects of Madame's unfitness is that she is constantly supervising the pupils. One must acknowledge that Madame has an obligation to the girls' parents to supervise their children, but at the same time, Madame is spoiling their innocence. The girls never seem to be up to inappropriate behavior even though Madame is convinced they might be. Madame's constant supervision is contrasted with one pupil's experiences at Miss Martin's School, where the school changed its schedule to accommodate the health of the pupil. This young lady states, "I would rather send a growing girl to Miss Martin's and let her start in life with a sound healthy constitution, and a reasonable set of nerves, than have her head crammed and her health neglected" (Ewing 137-38). While this statement sounds mature for a young lady in boarding school, the heart of the matter is that Madame and Bush House are not willing to sacrifice academics for the health of the pupils, which makes Madame an unfit governess: "Margery's experience at a girls' boarding school highlight her health being neglected as well as her true education" (Mills).

After the young lady's contrasting description of Bush House and Miss Martin's, the reader learns that the pupils at Bush House are under constant supervision by the "eye and ear of Madame" (Ewing 142). The girls are allowed fifteen minutes of unsupervised "recreation" a day and Madame always interrupts it. According to Margery, "this inestimable privilege was always marred by the fact that Madame invariably came for us before the quarter of an hour expired" (Ewing 142). The girls are disappointed that their free time is so short, and feel trapped with Madame always watching and listening to them. The pupils are never left to their own devices: "the nag of never being free from supervision was both irritating and depressing" (Ewing 142). Margery makes a statement

that Miss Mulberry, the supervisor of the school, would have felt she “neglected her duty if we had ever been left to our own devices for an hour” (Ewing 142). It seems that Miss Mulberry thinks the right way to govern the pupils is to have Madame watch them carefully all the time, but in actuality, the constant supervision does nothing but suffocate and bother all the girls. According to Margery, “It was a weak point of the arrangement of Bush House that Miss Mulberry left us so much in the care of Madame” (Ewing 142). Miss Mulberry’s good intentions for the education of the girls is tainted by Madame’s watchful eye.

Additionally, Madame is characterized as a woman with questionable morals and values. Ewing states, “But Madame was not just, and she was not truthful. She had – either no sense at all, or – a quite different sense from ours of honour and uprightness.... She had no belief whatever in the trust worthiness of her pupils” (Ewing 142-43). Madame breaks promises, tells lies, opens letters, pries in drawers, and spies on her pupils. She teaches her pupils that they cannot be trusted, and that in fact no one, including herself, is to be trusted. She creates an atmosphere of deceit because she interferes and supervises too much. “The instruction there is empty and superficial; the drawing Master has little knowledge of either art or nature, and Madame, who rules over the girls’ moral development and oversees their instruction in French is a woman of questionable moral integrity and the narrowest of intellectual outlooks” states Mills.

Madame is described as a “clever woman, and a good teacher. She was sharp-witted, ready of tongue, and indefatigably industrious herself” (Ewing 143) though she “appeared to enjoy her bit of malice” (Ewing 154). One example of Madame’s over interference and conniving nature appear in the episode between Madame, Eleanor, and

the art teacher, Mr. Henley. Madame tells Mr. Henley that Eleanor thinks his paintings are boring and inadequate, stating, "Miss Arkwright says your trees are all one, Mr. Henley" (Ewing 153). This type of behavior from a governess is selfish and mean-spirited. Madame's comment embarrasses both Mr. Henley and Eleanor, who turns "scarlet" (Ewing 154). Although the drawing teacher's "style" of art is bad, he is teaching the girls to please their parents and to become "accomplished" whether or not they really draw, in some sense he is fostering intellectual pursuit through art. Madame has not taught Eleanor a good lesson here, she has taught what it means to be mean and vindictive. All Eleanor learns is to keep secrets from Madame: "I ought not to have said anything, and I never thought Madame would repeat it" (Ewing 154).

Even after the girls leave Bush House and Madame they are left with nightmares about their time there. Margery states, "Both Eleanor and I were visited that night by dreams of terrible complications with the authorities at Bush House. It was a curious relief to us to wake to clear consciences and the absolute control of our own conduct for the day" (Ewing 195). According to Mills, "Fashion, society, and pseudo-intellectual schooling bear the brunt of criticism: health, exercise, nature, and learning for its own sake are endorsed heartily." Ewing, indeed, criticizes Madame's style as a governess as her inattention to her pupils' needs as intellectual young ladies. Even later in the novel, Ewing refers to Madame and Bush House as "the least wisely managed of respectable schools" showing that Madame indeed is unfit for the position of governess (202).

Whether it is through constant suffocation, immoral behavior, health neglect, or corporal punishment Brontë and Ewing show the harmful effects of unfit governesses. Through their bad examples, Miss Scatterd, Miss Perry, and Madame set up an

oppositional framework for what it means to be a purely moral and rational governess that would be appropriate during the Eighteenth century in England. The Nineteenth century saw the rise of the novel and the progression of literature from a more realistic standpoint. Ewing's novel is the most developed because it portrays what real life would have been like for girls that were educated and the governesses who were in charge of them. Fielding, Wollstonecraft, Brontë, and Ewing all had their opinions and concerns for the education of young ladies, and each author brought the role of the governess and girls education to the forefront of their society with their writing.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the Georgian and Victorian periods girls' education became an important aspect of English society. Authors such as Fielding, Wollstonecraft, Brontë, and Ewing used children's literature to express their opinions on transforming girls' education and female upbringing. Broughton and Symes agree that "From the late eighteenth century onwards girls' education has been the subject of a fierce debate as philosophers and educationalists strove to define the best way of transforming young females into worthy helpmates and rational companions" (5). This statement is one of the reasons I found it important to investigate and explore the role of the governess in children's literature. There have been many studies done on the historical role of the governess, but few of those types of studies look to literature, especially children's literature, to find a definition or explanation for why the governess seemed to be a crucial role for women. In transforming the education of young women it is fitting to judge and question the educators in charge of such an important task. This study has helped me understand that girls' education during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries was not initially "meant to challenge women's minds. Middle class families educated their daughters to become worthy wives and mothers" (Lonoff de Cuevas 462). It took at least two centuries filled with examples of moral, rational, and intellectual education to form the idea that girls and women were worthy of education beyond the domestic sphere.

As the role of the governess evolved, the publications of *The Governess* and *Original Stories* remained in circulation for several years; this type of recognition can be attributed to their progressive ideologies on teaching. Fielding, as the earliest example in this study, opened up the discussion of the importance of the role of the governess in children's literature. What Fielding says about the girls in the school room and the orchard and through Mrs. Teachum, has an impact: "*The Governess* is one of the most popular and most frequently imitated children's book at the time" (Grey I). This book is one of the earliest examples of the "governess story" and one could not do a study on the literary importance of governesses without delving into the ideologies that make up Mrs. Teachum and her classroom. Although there is a large contrast between Mrs. Mason's and Mrs. Teachum's views on rationality, Mrs. Mason is one of the first children's literary governesses to have a strong sense of independence and maintain rational thought. She is a good example of how the value of girls' education shifts throughout the Eighteenth century; she is not the sweet and nurturing Mrs. Teachum. Wollstonecraft understood the importance of teaching women how to provide education for young girls. Wollstonecraft, like the other authors in this study, understood that reading was a tool of education and used *Original Stories* to promote how to be a proper governess and how to educate young ladies effectively. In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, Wollstonecraft states, "A relish for reading, or any of the fine arts should be cultivated very early in life" (20). For her, young women are impressionable, and reading is a tool for the young to learn from.

Between the Georgian and Victorian eras there was a dramatic shift that accompanies the rise of the novel. More people began to read and write stories which

deal with realistic situations and are relatable to a multitude of people. Brontë's depiction of Nineteenth century life and governesses helped *Jane Eyre* become one of the most popular books read in American high school curriculum. In addition to Brontë, Ewing must be given special attention because her work in *Six to Sixteen* transforms the past representations of governesses with her realistic examples of women in education. Her novel is the most progressive of all four texts because she does not completely ignore the hardships and realities of what it means to be a young lady in English society. At the close of the Victorian era, Ewing had become a premier children's writer in England. Like the women who wrote about governesses before her, she became "[a] major contributor to the expansion of Victorian children's literature...writing and appealing to both boys and girls" (Demers).

All four of these texts provide models for young girls to learn from and an example that girls' education had more room to grow. Certainly authors like Fielding, Wollstonecraft, and Brontë had an opinion of what a governess was and opened the door for future children's writers to explore the role and impact of the female educator in young people's lives. No matter how a governess can be classified in Georgian and Victorian children's literature, these authors brought the role and position of educator of young women to the forefront of society and made the job noticeable and important. *The Governess*, *Original Stories*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Six to Sixteen* helped pave the way for a surplus of modern day women educators and an increase in books about governessing, teaching, tutoring, and babysitting throughout children's literature.

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