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The Victorian Governess Novel
Cecilia Wadsö Lecaros



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LUND STUDIES IN ENGLISH 100

Editors: Marianne Thormählen and Beatrice Warren



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The Victorian Governess Novel

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6. Women and work – 19th century
7. Marginalisation of women – 19th century

[N]ow, that my work is done, and I can calmly look back upon the early years of that probation, and recall the heart-sinking with which I contemplated my future life – the fears I entertained that I should not succeed in my new calling, that I should not give satisfaction to my employers, that my health would fail, and I should be reduced to poverty – I feel the deepest sympathy for those who are setting out on a similar path, and an earnest hope that my experience may be useful to them.

E.W. Ellen Manners; or, the Recollections of a Governess (1875)

*In memory of my grandfather Ludvig Pruth (1899-1998)
who first introduced me to English nineteenth-century fiction*

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Lund, September 2001

Textual note

Throughout the study, parenthetical references will be used. Unless otherwise stated, dates refer to first publication, or first known date of publication.

In parenthetical references, the following abbreviations will be used:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| <i>ATYR</i> | <i>All the Year Round</i> |
| <i>CEJ</i> | <i>Chambers's Edinburgh Journal</i> |
| <i>CLM</i> | <i>The Christian Lady's Magazine</i> |
| <i>DNB</i> | <i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> |
| <i>ECJ</i> | <i>Eliza Cook's Journal</i> |
| <i>EJE</i> | <i>The English Journal of Education</i> |
| <i>EWJ</i> | <i>The English Woman's Journal</i> |
| <i>FM</i> | <i>Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country</i> |
| <i>GOP</i> | <i>The Girl's Own Paper</i> |
| <i>GRFE</i> | <i>The Governess. A Repertory of Female Education</i> |
| <i>HW</i> | <i>Household Words</i> |
| <i>NR</i> | <i>National Review</i> |
| <i>OAW</i> | <i>Once a Week</i> |
| <i>OED</i> | <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> |
| <i>QR</i> | <i>Quarterly Review</i> |
| <i>W&L</i> | <i>Work and Leisure</i> |

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1

Introduction:

The Victorian governess novel

Life as it is, has been my endeavour to portray.
(Buckley, *Emily, the Governess* 1836)

The main purpose of this study is to present and discuss the Victorian governess novel as a specific genre. The governess held a peculiar position in nineteenth-century England, as she was a wage-earning middle-class woman in a society in which middle-class femininity was defined by domesticity and non-participation in the public labour market. Furthermore, the governess was paid to perform those tasks which were said to constitute a woman's mission. Such paradoxes played important parts in the rise of the governess novel.

Although a small number of governess novels, such as Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, are still read today, most of the novels dealt with here have not come in for any critical attention in our time. On the contrary, they belong to the mass of forgotten Victorian so-called minor fiction. A probable reason why most governess novels have fallen into obscurity, although they were widely read in their own day, is their highly specialised topic. However, although they do not discuss problems that seem of immediate relevance to a modern reader, these novels can teach us much about the society in which they were created. Elisabeth Jay claims that the distinction between minor and major fiction is that in minor novels "the case they are intended to present proves more important than its imaginative embodiment" (3). That remark serves well in relation to governess novels. As this study will show, many of the novels are contributions to the ongoing debate about governesses and their condition, cast in a fictional framework.

The approach chosen for this study is based on the assumption that it is profitable to read literature in relation to the social situation that generated it.

Therefore, different kinds of contemporary, non-fictional texts will be used in the discussion of governess novels. I hope to show that although the novels may convey a dramatised or even sensational view of governess life, fictional and non-fictional texts form a dialogue, dealing with the same topics, using similar kinds of rhetoric, and presenting corresponding ideologies concerning femininity and work. This introductory chapter outlines the historical and literary context of the study. In addition, it presents the relevant material together with previous research in the field.

The governess in Victorian England

The industrial revolution and the growth of the market economy brought about great social changes in nineteenth-century England. With a rapidly growing manufacturing industry and increased business activity, the country saw an unprecedented rise in the extent, as well as in the power, of the middle classes. It is difficult to supply an exact definition of middle-class affiliation, although it is clear that the number of middle-class people multiplied during the nineteenth century (Altick 27-28). Many historians mention annual incomes in the range of some three hundred pounds as the minimum for securing a position within the ranks of the middle classes (Banks 1954, 48, Davidoff and Hall 23), while others claim that there were middle-class families with an income as low as £100 (Branca 39-45).

When productivity moved out from the home as an effect of the industrial revolution, family structures changed, and the lives of men and women were increasingly divided. Men left home for work in the active and public world of manufacturing, commerce, politics, and learning, while women were largely excluded from the public sphere of wage-earning. By being able to keep his wife and daughters outside the general labour market, the *pater familias* demonstrated his and his family's financial status.

The domestic ideology that permeated English middle-class life in the Victorian era was based on a hypothesis about the relative position of men and women. A common assumption stipulated that the separate spheres of men and women were natural phenomena. The great success and impact of books like Sarah Lewis's *Woman's Mission* (1839) and Sarah Ellis's books in the early 1840s show how the rhetoric of divided spheres caught on. The domestic middle-class ideal that evolved during the first half of the nineteenth century must be seen in relation to the Evangelical movement. Catherine Hall states that by "the 1830s and 1840s the definition of women as primarily relating to home

and family was well established [...] The new bourgeois way of life involved a recodification of ideas about women [entailing] emphasis on women as domestic beings, as primarily wives and mothers” (75).

Only those on the upper rungs of the social ladder could actually afford to live up to this domestic ideology and allow their wives and daughters to lead a leisured life. In reality, many middle-class women contributed to the family income by performing various kinds of home-based work, either directly related to a family business or, for instance, by taking in needlework. Besides, most middle-class women were fully employed running a large household. Only the richest could afford to keep servants who performed all the household chores. Still, the employment of servants was essential for the middle-class family. Nineteenth-century middle-class manuals often included charts of the number and kind of servants a certain income level could sustain, and social historians claim that servants were indeed “signs of their masters’ status” (Robbins 15; see also e.g. Banks 1954, 70-71). As Bruce Robbins puts it, “the safest way of distinguishing oneself from the laborers was to employ labor oneself” (15).

Not only financial reality prevented many families from adhering fully to the female domestic ideal. The demographic situation actually made it impossible for a large group of women to marry. In the middle of the century, there was an estimated surplus of several hundred thousand women (Banks 1964, 27-28, Hughes 31). Explanations for this surplus varied; in 1844, for instance, an article on governesses stated that marriage rates decreased “[a]s America and the Indies were filled with swarms of adventurers” (*FM* 1844, 572). It was true that a large group of middle-class men emigrated or served in the Empire. In addition, most middle-class men did not marry until well into their thirties. The losses suffered in the Napoleonic wars were also seen as a possible reason for the female surplus. Whatever the explanation, the Victorians perceived the group of women who could not marry as a social problem. One way of trying to alleviate it was the setting up of special emigration societies for women, which encouraged spinsters to travel to the Colonies where there was, on the contrary, a shortage of women. Among the unmarried women who thus left England were governesses who went, for instance, to Australia and South Africa.

Perhaps the best-known contemporary article on the subject of the female surplus was written in 1862 by a manufacturer by the name of William Rathbone Greg. He claimed that an “enormous and increasing number of single women in the nation, a number quite disproportionate and quite abnormal” were forced to “to earn their own living instead of spending and husbanding the earnings of men”. Greg’s main concern seems to have been that by entering paid employment, women were bereft of “the natural duties and labours of wives and

mothers” (*NR* 1862, 436). Such views did not escape contemporary criticism. The feminist writer and activist Jessie Boucherett, for instance, opposed Greg’s solution to the problem of redundant women, which was to ship them off to the colonies. Like other feminists and writers on employment opportunities for women, she declared that women were perfectly able to go into trade or business, and thereby to support themselves (1863, 24).

Although middle-class female employment is in focus in this study, a brief comment on the major fields of employment for working-class women is called for as background information. Female workers were found above all within the textile industry, the mines, agricultural work and domestic service. An article in 1860 stated that “[o]f the grown-up unmarried women in this country, three out of four; of the widows, two in three; of the wives, a seventh part, earn their bread by their labour” (*ATYR* 1860, 427). In 1851, some 40 per cent of wage-earning women in England were engaged in domestic service, and the proportion in the manufacturing industry was slightly higher (Tilly and Scott 68). The working conditions of factory employers and miners had been the subject of several parliamentary reforms during the 1840s. Lord Ashley’s Act in 1842, for instance, led to the regulation of women’s and children’s work in the mining industry, and the Factory Acts of 1844 and 1847 limited working hours for women and children in industries. Contemporary writers deplored the state of households and families where the wife was forced to leave her home to work. Although female wage-work was absolutely necessary for many working-class families, there seems to have been a fear that paid work somehow went against what was perceived as feminine. An article in *Household Words* in 1852 lamented that female workers did not possess domestic skills, nor could they “carry an intelligent and informed mind to their own firesides, and amuse their children with knowledge, and satisfy their husbands with sympathy” (*HW* 1852, 84).

The plight of domestic servants, although supposedly less hazardous and heavy than that of industrial workers, also received attention. In an article in 1849, the working conditions of domestic servants were criticised as “exceedingly unsatisfactory”, because “[t]heir position is such [...] that no law can be devised for their relief, as in the case of the women employed in mines and factories. No act of parliament can enter into the home, and determine the relations of employer and domestic servant there” (*ECJ* 1849, 177). In some respects, the situation of the domestic servant was similar to that of the governess, although they belonged to different social classes and performed different kinds of work. The situation of the servant did not attract as much attention as that of the governess, however (Peterson 9).

There were two other fields of female employment which are of interest in relation to the governess. These were needlework and prostitution. Many working-class, but also impoverished middle-class, women found employment as seamstresses. They usually earned considerably less than factory workers, although working hours were at least as long. Especially in London, needlework was a seasonal job with a peak during the four months of the social season, but with scant employment during the rest of the year. Needlework could range from creating fashionable dresses to making convicts' uniforms and doing simple hemming work. Prostitution flourished in Victorian England, and several reasons have been suggested. No doubt the high age of marriage among middle- and upper-class men created a market for the white slave trade, as it was sometimes called. Furthermore, women factory workers and seamstresses were so badly paid that many single mothers, for instance, were forced into part-time prostitution.

For middle-class women, public work was complicated mainly because it upset the ideology of female domesticity. As Mary Poovey puts it, work in nineteenth-century England was "gendered and classed" (160). Middle-class women were limited to certain fields of employment which did not endanger their or their fathers' or husbands' middle-class status. Although teaching was often mentioned as the only possibility for middle-class women, some other areas could furnish these women with a higher salary as well as greater personal freedom. The feminist Jessie Boucherett suggested that young women could be trained for work connected to their fathers' professions; a solicitor's daughter, for instance, could learn to copy law papers, and a surgeon's daughter could become a midwife (1863, 24).

Writing and painting were other possible occupations for middle-class women. Many nineteenth-century women novelists turned to writing from sheer financial necessity. In the 1850s, Florence Nightingale's work helped to raise the status of the paid nurse and make nursing a middle-class female profession, and during the latter part of the century the office increasingly became a suitable location for women middle-class workers. The clerical work that women performed was usually of a reproductive character, though, and thus did not threaten the notion of male productivity. Paid work was a highly class-sensitive matter, however; it seems as if many middle-class women opted for a badly paid governess situation because they feared being lowered in their social status by entering an occupation in the public eye.

The most common employment for middle-class women who had to earn their own living was some form of teaching. By many commentators, it was held up as the sole realistic option. An article in 1849 typically stated "that to be a governess is held to be *genteel*; governessing being the only genteel profession

open to young women who have received what is called ‘a fashionable education’” (*ECJ* 1849, 305). The main reason why the tasks of the teacher and governess were considered suitable was that they were so strongly related to the traditionally feminine tasks of the middle-class wife and mother. Furthermore, resident governesses could to some extent maintain their status as members of a middle-class household, although they had entered employment. This was an important aspect in a society where women did not live on their own. However, since a woman was not regarded as a professional in the same way as a man, the governess’s position could not be equated with that of educated, male middle-class wage-earners like doctors, solicitors, or even male teachers. Although there were contemporary protests regarding the low wages of male teachers (see e.g. *CEJ* 1841, 28), an article in 1844 claimed that male music masters earned twice as much as a governess performing the same work (*FM* 1844, 579). The anonymous writer raised the argument of equal pay for equal work, asking:

[I]f a man and a woman go through a similar course of instruction, and incur a like expense in attending it, if, at the end of a given period, they produce the same results, by what law of equity is the woman, because she is a woman, to receive lower wages than the man? (579)

In Victorian England the word ‘governess’ was used not only in the sense of resident teacher, but also to denote a daily governess (or day-governess), a school teacher, and a female music or dance teacher. This study will mainly concentrate on the literary depiction of the first two groups. A large majority of the governess novels are set in private homes, and, as M. Jeanne Peterson states, in the governess’s “position within the family, we may see most clearly the problems of the governess’s place in Victorian society” (4). The resident governess generally taught several pupils of various ages. She would teach both boys and girls; but the sons in the family were often sent to school at the age of about ten, whereas daughters were given all their education at home. Resident governesses were sometimes divided into nursery governesses, who taught younger children, and finishing governesses, whose task it was to ‘finish’ girls, i.e. to prepare them for their social debut.

The occupation of governess was by no means new in the nineteenth century. The *OED* gives 1587 as the first known user date of the word ‘governess’ meaning a “woman who has charge or control of a person, esp. a young one”. Before the nineteenth century, the governess was exclusively a member of upper-class households; but with the rise of the middle classes, there was a substantial increase in the supply of and demand for governesses. Newly established middle-class families wished to adopt upper-class manners, which included educational practices. Although works on education by European

writers such as Rousseau and Pestalozzi increased the interest in education in England, female education seems to have adhered to the new ideas only sporadically. Instead, middle-class girls tended to be raised according to traditional upper-class patterns. They were taught so-called accomplishments such as music, dancing and foreign languages. The problem was that most middle-class women would not live a leisured life where accomplishments were of crucial importance after they had married.

The increase in the number of governesses towards the middle of the nineteenth century coincided with a period of economic insecurity. In the economic turmoil which brought wealth to many families, others had invested all their money in businesses and banks which failed, with the result that many parents had to send their daughters out to work. Contemporary records give a unanimous picture; no woman seems to have taken up governessing unless she was forced to do so for financial reasons. In a book about governess work published in 1846, Anna Jameson stated that “the occupation of governess is sought merely through necessity, as the *only* means by which a woman not born in the servile classes *can* earn the means of subsistence” (6).

The situation of governesses generated a debate which was especially active from the 1840s until the end of the century. When the supply exceeded the demand, it became clear that many governesses were not fit for their work. Furthermore, many of them found life in their employers’ household difficult. The growing anxiety concerning governesses led to the establishment of the philanthropic Governesses’ Benevolent Institution (GBI) in 1843. Money was raised to create funds which would distribute grants to aged and unemployed governesses in temporary need of money. Homes for unemployed and old governesses were established, and different schemes for employment and savings were created.

It should be stressed, however, that the governess problem was not new in the 1840s. As early as 1815, Elizabeth Appleton claimed that the fashion of engaging private governesses “has become very prevalent within the last forty years” (*Private Education; or a Practical Plan for the Studies of Young Ladies* 1). In her discussion, Appleton used much the same arguments as later writers on the topic. For instance, she deplored the low salaries, and stated that

[w]here the market is overstocked, the commodity loses value. This is precisely the case with private governesses. So many advertisements swell the columns of the daily prints; so many names are exhibited at the principal booksellers in London; and so many are the enquiries made amongst friends, for governesses’ situations, that as many are of an inferior cast, and of the description I first gave, they attach a feeling of ridicule, and perhaps of contempt, or something bordering upon it, on the whole profession. (12-13)

Appleton not only identified the major problems that governesses faced; she also saw the reasons for the low status of the occupation.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, there were an estimated 25,000 governesses in England, which is not much compared to the 750,000 female domestic servants employed at that time (Peterson 4). It is important to note that despite their relatively small number, governesses attracted much more attention in the contemporary debate than did domestic servants or women in industry. One explanation for this may be that the unequivocal and fixed class distinction, which served to define both master and servant, was not applicable to the relation between employer and governess. Part of the governess's problem was that employers who themselves sought social advancement saw her as a status booster. A master-servant relationship between people so outwardly similar yet so differently positioned posed an obvious dilemma. Anna Jameson, who termed the relationship "a contract without equality" (8), defined the existence of resident governesses as "one of the most artificial, most anomalous" in society (4). A major difficulty of the system of governesses, as she saw it, was that

[t]he relation which exists between the governess and her employer either places a woman of education and of superior faculties in an ambiguous and inferior position, with none of the privileges of a recognized profession, or it places a vulgar half-educated woman in a situation of high responsibility, requiring superior endowments. (9)

Jameson's conclusion was that in either case, there would be difficulties that needed to be dealt with in a constructive way.

In 1848, Elizabeth Rigby stated that the governess "is a being who is our equal in birth, manners, and education, but our inferior in worldly wealth" (*QR* 1848, 176). The problem was of course that the governess was not treated as an equal. Because of her position as a middle-class woman who was also a domestic hireling, the Victorian governess was trapped in an intermediate and undefined position. Half a century later, Mary Maxse was of a similar opinion, claiming that "[t]he fault lies [...] in the position itself [...] she has no defined status in the house" (*NR* 1901, 398). Class-wise, the governess ranked above the servants, but she was as dependent as they were. She was supposedly her employers' equal, but nonetheless she was paid to work for them. As was pointed out above, she was furthermore remunerated for performing the tasks that, according to the prevalent middle-class ideal, were supposed to be the natural mission of her mistress. In 1834, an article in *The Christian Lady's Magazine* stated that the situation of governesses "is a peculiarly unhappy one; for it seems to be a point yet in dispute, what place they are to hold in society.

They are not to be considered as the friends of the family in which they live, nor yet are they servants" (*CLM* 1834, 2:42).

The present study attempts to show that the governess's intermediate and indeed marginalised position is a major theme in governess novels. The complications that could surface when a lady was employed in a household offered material for a large number of writers who, for various reasons, wished to tell the story of the governess.

Material

In the present study various kinds of texts are discussed and referred to: fiction, manuals and advice books, articles, and advertisements. They are all treated as texts in the sense that they are creations by individual writers and that they are open to interpretation by individual readers. Nonetheless it is important to stress that they are different kinds of texts. Without claiming that the non-fictional texts necessarily depict 'reality' or 'real life', it may be assumed that they to some extent reflect life and reality as it was perceived by the writer. Some articles and advice books, for instance, were written by nineteenth-century governesses who stated that they wished to share their experiences and contribute to changes that would lead to improved conditions for women working as governesses. The fictional texts, on the other hand, are of course creative inventions with specific literary characteristics, although some of them include autobiographical elements.

The relation between 'reality' and 'fiction' is far from unproblematic, and it has been a key issue in literary criticism for a long time. As the primary aim of this study is to investigate a 'lost' fictional genre, I will not enter into that discussion. However, it is vital for my project to recognise that the different kinds of texts involved here all discuss the same set of problems and also use the same kind of rhetoric and key notions. Therefore, it is my conviction that it is fruitful to study the governess novel in relation to the non-fictional contemporary texts.

Previous scholars have commented either on some of the novels or on the non-fictional material. I wish to bring the various kinds of texts together and see them as different expressions of similar circumstances. It is my assumption that all texts – fictional or non-fictional – are representations of the cultural environment in which they were created. They have all been created in response to a contemporary awareness of and concern with certain social and human conditions. Therefore, I do not see the non-fictional texts that I read together

with the governess novels only as ‘background’ material, but as an instrument geared to defining and interpreting the position and characteristics of the governess heroine.

This study is based on a comprehensive set of nineteenth-century materials, consisting of 85 works of fiction, 5 autobiographical journals or compilations of letters by governesses, some 45 manuals and conduct books, and about 35 articles dealing with governesses and women’s work. The fictional material can be divided into different categories: out of the 85 sources, 50 can be defined as proper governess novels (defined below), 8 are short stories which share the characteristics of the governess novel although they are shorter in length, 3 are plays that likewise show great similarities with the governess novel, and there is one poem. In addition to these 62 sources, another 23 novels will be referred to. They also deal with issues such as women’s work, education, or even governesses, but not to such an extent that they could be defined as governess novels. Nonetheless, they have been included in order to provide additional perspectives on the discussion and to show how prevalent the governess character was in the nineteenth-century novel.

Among the writers of governess novels, there are both canonical authors and writers that are little known today. 11 of the 51 ‘proper’ governess novels discussed in this study remain anonymous. A few writers are known by their initials or by their Christian name only; others remain altogether nameless. A few novelists – Miss Ross, Eliza Cheap, Sarah Mary Fitton, and the signature H.S. – have been identified through cross-searching the British Library catalogue. In these cases, the author was stated on the title page either as the writer of another work which could be identified (Cheap, Fitton, and H.S.), or as the daughter of a writer who could similarly be identified (Ross). In the Ross case, the identity has previously been suggested by Andrew Block and Jerome Beaty, too.

Among the writers of whom it is possible to find biographical information, a majority seem to have turned to writing from financial necessity. Although this was the case for most nineteenth-century women authors, it is worth observing that, like their heroines, many writers of governess novels were middle-class women who were forced to earn their own living. A few of the novelists had themselves worked as teachers or governesses; and it may be assumed that they, at least to some extent, expressed their own experience in their literary works. Others were known as novelists in other genres; writers of silver-fork and sensational novels, as well as publishers of social criticism in fictional form, are found among the writers of governess novels. Although they are not much read nowadays, a few of the writers have been the objects of recent biographical and, to some extent, critical attention. In no case has the topic of

governesses been much noticed, however; Maureen Keane's *Mrs S. C. Hall: A Literary Biography* (1997) focuses on Hall's Irish works, and Nancy Cunniff's *Mrs Sherwood and Her Books for Children: A Study* (1974) is mainly concerned with Sherwood's juvenile writing.

A few diaries and collections of letters by nineteenth-century governesses have been discovered and published during the twentieth century. Joanna Martin's edition of the journals and letters of Agnes Porter (1998), who was employed by two generations of an aristocratic family in Wales around the turn of the century 1800, provides useful information both on Porter's working conditions and on female education at the time. The journals of Elizabeth Ham (ed. Gillett 1945) and Ellen Weeton (ed. E. Hall 1936, 1939) present governess life in middle-class families in the 1810s and 1820s. Several autobiographical records of governess life abroad were published during the nineteenth century; the best known of them are probably Emmeline Lott's *The English Governess in Egypt: Harem Life in Egypt and Constantinople* (1865) and Anna Leonowens's *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (1870).

While the contemporary debate, the advertisements, and autobiographical journals stated the conditions of governess life as they were perceived by the writer, manuals and guidebooks offered advice on how to cope with difficulties connected with the occupation. Such books show how governesses, and sometimes their employers, were recommended to behave. However, it must be remembered that etiquette books usually presented ideal circumstances that may have been impossible to achieve. For instance, the governess was often urged to guide her charges with a firm but tender hand. Since many nineteenth-century governesses were young and without teaching experience when they entered the occupation, it is easy to imagine how difficult it was to live up to such a recommendation. Furthermore, governesses were recommended always to put on a cheerful countenance, which must have been painful for those who had been forced into governessing by the financial ruin, and perhaps even the death, of their parents. Nonetheless, the sheer number of governess manuals that were published during the nineteenth century indicates that there must have been a considerable market for them. Some of them were aimed particularly at governess readers, but quite a few offered advice to the lady of the house as well.

The great social mobility towards the middle of the century appears to have created a need for social guidance (Quinlan 139; Davidoff 1973, 18). The governess manuals were generally written by women who were or had been governesses, and who now wished to share their experience and expertise with young women entering the occupation of governess. These books of advice are

highly uniform in form and content. Recurring topics include the relation between governess and employer, terms of employment, and pedagogical issues.

Some contemporary well-known writers with a social interest published manuals on governess work. Anna Jameson, for instance, was a prolific author on subjects as diverse as travel, art, and various social topics. She was well acquainted with the contemporary literary scene and could count writers like Elizabeth Gaskell, Anna Maria Hall, Elizabeth Rigby, and Geraldine Jewsbury among her friends. Jameson started a fifteen-year on-and-off career as a governess at the age of 16, and she later published her thoughts on the question in *The Relative Position of Mothers and Governesses* (1846). Her life and work have been the topic of two modern studies by Clara Thomas (1967) and Judith Johnston (1997), respectively. Mary Maurice, whose brother was the Christian socialist and theologian F.D. Maurice, was another writer of books concerned with religious and educational matters, two of which deal specifically with governesses: *Mothers and Governesses* (1847) and *Governess Life: Its Trials, Duties, and Encouragements* (1849). The latter of these was reviewed as “one of the pleasant fruits of the institution in Harley Street [...] ‘Queen’s College for Female Education’” (*EJE* 1849, 243). Mary Maurice set up a school at Southampton and is credited with having influenced her brother’s work for the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution and Queen’s College in the 1840s (*DNB* 37:100).

Elizabeth Rigby, later Lady Eastlake, wrote a review of *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair* in 1848. Today it is remembered mainly for its harsh criticism of Brontë’s novel, but the article is also worthy of attention owing to its discussion on the conditions of governesses. Writing mainly for the *Quarterly Review*, Rigby was one of the best-known female reviewers in the nineteenth century (Shattock 142). She was a friend of Anna Jameson’s – Rigby published a book on art that was left unfinished at Jameson’s death (Johnston 182-183) – and it is possible that Rigby’s interest in governesses originated from Jameson. Yet another well-known contemporary writer who wrote about governesses was the feminist Harriet Martineau. Other feminists, such as the members of the Langham Place Group, discussed alternative female employment as a way of improvement for governesses.

In addition to publicly known writers like these, a large number of governesses and mothers felt a need to express their views on governess employment. Titles like *Thoughts on Domestic Education; The Result of Experience. By a Mother* (1826), *Hints to Governesses. By One of Themselves* (1856), and *A Word to a Young Governess. By an Old One* (1860) indicate that personal experience and knowledge of the topic were used to attract readers. Although it has not proved possible to identify the authors of two of these

books, a cross-search of the British Library catalogue has identified Maria Elizabeth Budden, a prolific writer in the field of education and children's books, as the probable writer of *Thoughts on Domestic Education*.

Elizabeth Napier, whose advice book *The Nursery Governess* was published posthumously in 1834, deserves comment, too. She had married in 1827 and died in 1833, leaving her husband Colonel Charles James Napier to care for two young daughters. Colonel Napier then went abroad, and "devoted himself to the education of his daughters" (*DNB* 40:47). To help him, he had the book that his wife compiled during her last years. Colonel Napier, who later conquered Sind in India (now Pakistan), chose to publish his late wife's work "because it may be of use to those who, like myself, are widowers, and placed by fortune in the secondary class of society" (Napier 12).

It seems as if the governess question was discussed primarily in women's magazines like *English Woman's Journal* and *Work and Leisure*; but *Punch*, for instance, also published a number of articles on governesses. This is worth noticing, since that was a magazine mainly produced by and aimed at men. Other magazines, like *The Christian Lady's Magazine* (edited by Charlotte Elizabeth Phelan, later Tonna), *Eliza Cook's Journal*, and *Fraser's Magazine* also published articles on governesses. In the 1850s, a short-lived magazine called *The Governess: A Repertory of Female Education* appeared. The British Library only holds nos. 4-7 of 1855, but Mary Poovey says it "was founded in 1854 and continued publication at least until 1856" (144, n24). Issued monthly, this magazine was a combined professional guide and leisure magazine. Readers' questions concerning professional difficulties were answered in a special column, and teachers were given pedagogical advice on subjects as diverse as algebra, Shakespeare, and foreign languages. *The Governess* also paid attention to life outside the schoolroom, publishing for example cooking recipes, pinafore patterns, and advertisements. In the early 1880s a similar, and apparently also short-lived, pedagogical magazine called *The Governess and Headmistress: A Weekly Journal for Certificated and High School Teachers* appeared.

Previous research

Nineteenth-century governesses have generated considerable interest all through the twentieth century. However, as the following outline of previous research will show, scholars have either studied the Victorian governess from a historical point of view, or dealt with the governess as a literary character in major fiction.

The kind of comparative analysis that I aim to perform has not been undertaken before on governess novels, except for Poovey's work on *Jane Eyre*. A large majority of the novels that form the primary material of my study have not previously been studied in this manner.

In Wanda Neff's *Victorian Working Women: An Historical and Literary Study of Women in British Industries and Professions 1832-1850* (1929), one chapter is devoted to the governess. Neff discusses contemporary material on the governess problem and finds fictional examples. She acknowledges the great interest that *Punch* devoted to the governess cause. Neff's early study is useful because it provides a good comparison between the plight of governesses and that of other nineteenth-century women who had to work for their living. Later relevant studies which contain sections on governess work in Victorian literature include Patricia Thomson's *The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal 1837-1873* (1956), Françoise Basch's *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel 1837-1867* (1972, trans. 1974), Helena Michie's *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies* (1987), and *Victorian Heroines: Representations of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Art* by Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble (1993).

Two fairly comprehensive studies of governesses in fiction are Katherine West's *Chapter of Governesses: A Study of the Governess in English Fiction 1800-1949* (1949) and Susan Nash's unpublished doctoral thesis "‘Wanting a Situation’: Governesses and Victorian Novels" (1980), which both deal with large numbers of novels. E.V. Clark's article "The Private Governess in Fiction" (1954) likewise discusses the governess as a typical Victorian female literary character rather than outlining a literary genre of governess novels. West herself calls her study a "portrait-gallery of governesses" (8). It is structured chronologically, starting with the representation of governesses in Edgeworth and Austen, and continuing through the nineteenth century all the way up to post-war England. The study is concluded with a chapter on distortions of the governess figure. Although West includes a few of the novels I deal with, like Blessington's *The Governess* and Sewell's *Amy Herbert*, her study primarily focuses on governess characters in canonical literature. In an appendix to her study, Susan Nash lists some 230 fictional works from 1749 to 1930 that contain governess characters or deal with education and governess work in some way. Although I do not see a majority of these works as governess novels, her list has nevertheless been useful. Nash focuses on a division in the characterisation of governesses in Victorian fiction into religious and secular heroines, and she traces a development in governess characterisation from late eighteenth-century educational tracts to sensational novels in the second half of the nineteenth century.

A few more unpublished theses should be mentioned. Celine Carrigan's "Versions of the Governess: Narrative Patterns in Ellen Weeton, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Charlotte Brontë" (1988) aims to analyse the conditions of nineteenth-century governesses through Weeton's journals, Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë, and Brontë's own *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. Neither Nash's nor Carrigan's study connects its discussions with non-fictional contemporary references as fully as the present work. Cynthia E. Huggins's MA thesis "The Brontë Governess" (1992) is a partly biographical study, connecting the Brontës' experience of education and governess work with these themes in their novels. S. Anne Hiebert Alton's "Teaching Women: Teacher and Taught in the Novels of Anne Brontë and Charlotte Brontë" (1995) investigates the relationships between teachers and pupils in the Brontë novels, incorporating some contemporary non-fictional material in her discussion.

Several critics have discussed governess fiction in relation to the Brontës. Inga-Stina Ewbank's *Their Proper Sphere: A Study of the Brontë Sisters as Early-Victorian Female Novelists* (1966) uses the term 'governess theme' and argues that *Agnes Grey* has many points in common with earlier works such as Sherwood's *Caroline Mordaunt, the Governess*, Blessington's *The Governess*, and Sewell's *Amy Herbert*. Her discussion was expanded by Jerome Beaty in his "Jane Eyre and Genre" (1977) and in *Misreading Jane Eyre: A Postformalist Paradigm* (1996). Beaty outlines a number of characteristics pertaining to the governess novel, and he includes a few more novels in his discussion than Ewbank. Millicent Bell's article "Jane Eyre: The Tale of the Governess" (1996) does not deal with Brontë's book as a governess novel; rather, it concentrates on the heroine's position versus the people she encounters in the course of the novel. Bell's essay "Class, Sex, and the Victorian Governess: James's *The Turn of the Screw*" (1993), however, discusses James's horror story in a literary and social context. Mary Poovey discusses *Jane Eyre* in relation to governesses in *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (1988). In this study, which also includes chapters on Caroline Norton and Florence Nightingale, for example, Poovey draws on both fictional and non-fictional sources in her analyses of woman's position in nineteenth-century England.

Historians have paid attention to the Victorian governess, too. Although many general books on female nineteenth-century education have sections on governesses, only specialised studies in the area will be listed here. Peterson's article "The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society" (1972) introduces the sociological concept of social incongruence to analyse the intermediate position of governesses. This article has had a great impact on later governess research. Leonore Davidoff's unpublished article "The English

Governess: A Study in Social Isolation" (1972) also discusses the precarious social position of the governess.

Harvey Pitcher's *When Miss Emmie Was in Russia: English Governesses Before, During and After the October Revolution* (1977), Patricia Clarke's *The Governesses: Letters from the Colonies 1862-1882* (1985), and Marion Amies's article "The Victorian Governess and the Colonial Ideals of Womanhood" (1988) differ from other studies of governesses in that they deal with the group of middle-class women who left England to teach abroad. Pitcher's book is based on autobiographical information and interviews with governesses in Russia. Clarke's study is based on letters written by governesses who had received assistance from the Female Middle Class Emigration Society, and Amies's article deals with pioneer governesses in Australia.

Pamela Horn's article "The Victorian Governess" (1989), which outlines the social background and economic status of governesses, is based on census figures from the second half of the nineteenth century and reports from the GBI. Her addition of an appendix, containing the case histories of governesses given annuities from the GBI in 1901, revives a nineteenth-century practice of affixing such lists to pleas for the governess cause. Anna Jameson's manual *The Relative Position of Mothers and Governesses*, Elizabeth Rigby's "*Vanity Fair and Jane Eyre*", and Anna Maria Hall's *Stories of the Governess* (1852) all quote extensively from lists of GBI annuities.

The most thorough historical research on governesses has been carried out by Kathryn Hughes. Her *The Victorian Governess* (1993) is based on contemporary works on governess employment, on demographic facts, and on the first-hand experiences of a number of nineteenth-century governesses. Hughes's book was published the year before I embarked on my project, and as will be evident, her work has been valuable for my study.

Two works that are somewhat less scholarly than the ones referred to above, but still full of interesting examples, are Bea Howe's *A Galaxy of Governesses* (1954) and Alice Renton's *Tyrant or Victim? A History of the British Governess* (1991). Although they do not offer much analysis of the socially and financially precarious situation of the Victorian governess, they cover more extensive ground than nineteenth century England. Both present the history of governess work; Howe, for instance, records the experiences of several English governesses abroad, while Renton takes her book well into the twentieth century.

The most recent contribution to the field of governess studies is *The Governess: An Anthology* (1997), edited by Trev Broughton and Ruth Symes. This abundantly illustrated anthology contains extracts from historical documents, such as articles and manuals, as well as a wide fictional selection.

Like Hughes's study, it is structured thematically, dealing with various aspects of governess life.

The genre of governess novels

Anyone who has read a fair amount of nineteenth-century fiction will know that the governess was a very common figure in novels of that period. To mention but a few, there are governesses in several of Austen's novels, in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) and *The Newcomes* (1855), and in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* (1857), as well as in *Barchester Towers* (1857) and *The Eustace Diamonds* (1873) by Trollope, and Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872). These novels are not discussed in this study, however. Although they incorporate governess characters and invest these with at least some generic features, the governess either remains a minor character or her governess position is not central to the plot as such. Nevertheless, a large group of nineteenth-century novels deal with governesses in ways that are so similar in respect of plot lines, characterisations, and scenes, as well as of aim and intention, that they can be referred to as belonging to a specific genre.

Previous scholars have been hesitant to talk about a governess-novel genre. Susan Nash claims that "the simultaneous, paradoxical centrality and marginality of governesses and governess fiction has made their sustained importance to female writers and readers evident, but hard to define [...] attempts to define a governess *genre* [...] often dissolve into a bewildering variety of Victorian narrative modes" (28). The concept of genre is notoriously difficult. For instance, genres overlap and influence each other, there are variations within a genre, and texts often incorporate traits of more than one genre. No novel attributed to a specific genre contains all the characteristics that could be stated as being typical of that genre. However, the governess novels included in the present study all share what Alistair Fowler has called "family resemblance". He states that "[r]epresentatives of a genre may [...] be regarded as making up a family whose septa and individual members are related in various ways, without necessarily having any single feature shared in common by all" (41). Fowler's definition has been criticised as being too vague (as there will be some kind of resemblance between novels that do not belong to the particular genre, too), but it may nevertheless serve to illustrate the kinds of qualities that are shared among novels within a genre. Key themes such as the heroine's loss of social status, her intermediate position, and her moral worth in relation to the people around her are treated in a variety of ways in the novels.

Introduction

It has been my intention to show both the multiplicity of the genre and the consistency in the characterisation of the governess heroine throughout the nineteenth century. The present study therefore incorporates novels that could also be defined as children's stories, silver-fork novels, domestic novels, social problem novels, novels of development, or social or religious tracts. As stated above, genres overlap and one novel may belong in more than one genre. Obviously, there are difficulties in working with such a multi-faceted set of materials as the novels that are included here. The characterisation of the governess protagonist and the way in which the theme of governessing is handled have been my principles of selecting the novels, as well as the point of departure in the discussion.

In line with the arguments of such critics as Ian Watt and Juliet Mitchell, it could be argued that new literary forms and genres arise when groups in society try to "create themselves as subjects" (J. Mitchell 289). Watt connects the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century with an increase in literacy, and thus with the establishment of new reading groups (48-49). Mitchell, who discusses the emergence of women's writing, states that by writing about their own domestic experience, women could establish themselves as a group. A major task of feminist literary criticism is therefore to study why women "write the novel, the story of their own domesticity, the story of their own seclusion within the home and the possibilities and impossibilities provided by that" (289).

In this context the governess novel is an interesting phenomenon. The peak of the genre, as an ensuing discussion will show, coincided with the intense debate about governess work in the 1840s to the 1860s. Although some of the novels are more or less straightforward accounts of governess life, many writers chose to borrow traits from other fictional genres in order to be able to express the "possibilities and impossibilities" of the governess situation. Incorporating features from other genres can also have been a way of reaching a specific group of readers. In the following comments on some neighbouring genres and their relationship with the governess novel it will be apparent how influences fluctuated during the nineteenth century, and how the development of the governess novel must be related to other contemporary genres.

It is well known that the nineteenth-century saw the development of new genres which were written predominantly by women for women and which reflected women's life (see e.g. Showalter 1982). The term domestic novel, or domestic realism, is often applied to novels that aimed at a realistic picture of private life as opposed to public life. Inga-Stina Ewbank states that the domestic novel was concerned "with the woman as an influence on others within her domestic circle. It was in this preoccupation that the typical woman novelist of

the 1840s found her proper sphere: in using the novel to demonstrate (by assumption rather than exploration of standards of womanliness) *woman's proper sphere*" (41). Vineta Colby also connects domestic realism of the first half of the nineteenth century with women's life, stating that the increase in women writers and readers, together with a general trend towards domesticity, led to a new type of novel (4).

To some extent, governess novels fit into the pattern of domestic realism. Many of them reproduce middle-class fears and feelings concerning loss of class and social mobility; and the stories are often enacted in a kind of setting that would be familiar to the reader. The main difference from mainstream domestic fiction is what appears to be the aim and intention of alleviating the precarious situation of a specific group in society. In connection with *Agnes Grey*, Maria Frawley claims that "[l]ike most authors of governess novels, Brontë used the governess to demarcate and study the boundaries between the domestic woman and the working woman" (82). This is an important observation; in the genre of governess novels the writer's aim often seems to be to discuss the relation between governess and employers. The heroine is contrasted both with her mistress and with the status she held before she had to go out as a governess.

The fictional characterisation of governesses can be traced back to the eighteenth century. Books for children – school stories, for instance –, contain characteristics that are also found in the Victorian governess novel, such as didacticism and female development. A well-known school story is Sarah Fielding's *The Governess, or, the Little Female Academy* (1749), which went through many editions. This story is not a governess novel, but it has been influential for the formation of the teacher as a literary character. In 1820, the book was adapted by Mary Martha Sherwood, whose edition was stripped of the fairy tales from the original version and instead included moral tales like "The History of Emily and Her Mother". Later published on its own, this religious tale tells the story of an orphaned girl who teaches her adopted parents what true Christianity is. As Jill Grey's introduction to the Oxford University Press edition of Fielding's book says, "Sherwood not only re-wrote the story, changing many details, but substituted dull, moral tales for Sarah's fairy-stories and also inserted the gloomiest quotations from the Bible on practically every page" (74). When Charlotte Mary Yonge reproduced Sarah Fielding's story in *A Storehouse of Stories* (1870), though, she included the original version.

Novels featuring resident governesses and their relation to employers and pupils did not appear until the turn of the century. The first examples included in this study are H.S.'s *Anecdotes of Mary; or, the Good Governess* (1795) and Maria Edgeworth's "The Good French Governess" (1801). The early

governess characters in these stories differ from the genre prototype that developed from the 1830s. In their anthology, Broughton and Symes bring up some of the differences between these early governess characters and the later ones in connection with *Ellinor, or, the Young Governess: A Moral Tale* by Eliza Kirkham Mathews (1809), stating that “[t]he contrast between the two ‘types’ tells us much about changing understandings of the role of the governess” (9). The main differences concern the changing attitude to paid work, the heroine’s position in her employer’s household, and her relation to the lady of the house.

While most early literary portrayals of governesses have a clearly didactic purpose and present highly appreciated teachers, a noticeable shift in attitude seems to have taken place in the 1830s. From then on, the governess heroine was usually depicted as a victim of circumstances at the mercy of inhospitable or even hostile employers. As was stated above, economic and social changes in the mid-1800s affected the position of governesses, and those shifts seem to have influenced and intensified the fictional delineation of governesses. Although different in some respects, novels like Mary Martha Sherwood’s *Caroline Mordaunt, or, The Governess* (1835), Julia Buckley’s *Emily, the Governess* (1836), Miss Ross’s *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* (1836), and Marguerite Blessington’s *The Governess* (1839) all represent this new kind of governess novel. In the 1830s, issues like sudden impoverishment, paternal insufficiency, and conflicts with *nouveaux riches* employers were introduced in the plot. It is with novels like these that the genre started to take shape. Although the books were still didactic in intention, the plots of these novels revolve round the working conditions and social position of the governess heroine in a more marked way than those of earlier works.

The so-called silver-fork novel, which is often referred to as the fashionable novel, was a prolific literary genre in the 1820s to the 1840s (see e.g. Adburgham). During this time of social mobility, middle-class readers’ fascination with high life and the aristocracy created an enormous literary market. Together with writers such as Catherine Gore and Theodor Hook, Marguerite Blessington was one of the best-known writers of silver-fork novels; Sutherland even calls her “[t]he most fashionable of fashionable novelists” (72). Since the governess character could easily be made into an observer of her employers’ life, it is not surprising that some governess novels share some traits with ‘silver fork’ or fashionable novels. The typical marginalisation of the governess heroine could easily be achieved by positioning her against snobbish upper-class employers with little or no understanding of her situation.

Partly alongside the fashionable novel, existed what is sometimes referred to as the social problem novel or the ‘condition of England novel’.

Quite a few governess novels show great concern with governesses' working conditions and social position. When the governess question increasingly became an issue in the social debate of the 1840s, a more dogmatic approach to governess work was seen in governess novels. Dinah Mulock Craik's *Bread upon the Waters: A Governess's Life* (1852) was published explicitly for the benefit of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution, as was Anna Maria Hall's *Stories of the Governess* (1852), which includes two short stories ("The Daily Governess" and "The Old Governess"), the short novel *The Governess. A Tale*, and a "Working Memoranda" for the Governesses's Benevolent Institution.

Hall, who was active in various charitable schemes (Shattock 200), wrote several works on the wretched situation of governesses. Another short story of hers, "Our Governesses" (1844), is interesting as it is narrated by a man and deals with the governess problem from the employer's point of view. That story, as well as *The Governess. A Tale* (1842), was first published in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*.¹ Hall was a prolific contributor to *Chambers's* (Keane 109), which was a magazine that "laid the basis of a didactic popular literature which was widely circulated and which avoided the worst excesses of exhortation and moralizing" (Neuburg 205).

A large number of nineteenth-century novels comprising social criticism of some kind include governesses. Although these works are not strictly speaking governess novels, they employ some common traits of the genre to discuss contemporary society. Thus, Harriet Martineau's first novel *Deerbrook* (1839), which discusses female dependence, features the governess Maria Young. Although she is never actually badly treated by her employer, her isolation and marginalised position as an invalid and a governess nonetheless furnishes Martineau with reasons for setting her apart from the rest of the village community. In a similar way, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) focuses on the situation of unwed mothers, and in *The Eustace Diamonds* (1873) Anthony Trollope turns a governess into an innocent victim in an intricate game of deceit and cupidity in the cross-section between middle- and upper-class life.

When new genres like the sensational novel and the detective novel developed during the second half of the nineteenth century, some writers made use of the characteristics of the governess-novel genre, which was well established by this time. One aspect that probably attracted these authors was the

¹ The question of publication is difficult. Jerome Beatty indicates that "The Old Governess" and "The Daily Governess" also were published in *Chambers's* in 1842 (1996, 241), but I have failed to locate them in the volumes for that year. Ewbank states that "The Old Governess" was published in *La Belle Assemblée* in 1848 (6, n4). Anna Maria Hall's *The Governess. A Tale* went through several editions. My references are to the W.&R. Chambers edition of 1858; but that year it was also included in a collection of Hall's stories entitled *Tales of Woman's Trials* (which was originally published in 1835 without any governess stories, although the 1858 edition contains both *The Governess* and "The Daily Governess").

fact that a governess could easily be portrayed as a woman of whom little, or even nothing, was known. Lady Isabel Vane in Ellen Wood's bestseller *East Lynne* (1861) is thus a woman who goes out as a governess under disguise. Wood's novel is more of a governess novel than previous criticism has recognised. The characterisation of the governess protagonist in sensational novels and detective stories differs from that in more mainstream governess novels; primarily in that the governess could be made into an enigmatic character, or occasionally an evil schemer. Even so, the characterisation of the governess, and the kind of situations she faced, was consistent throughout the nineteenth century. It should be stated that a number of 'traditional' governess novels were published during the latter decades of the century, too. The anonymous *Margaret Stourton, or a Year of Governess Life* (1863), Henry Courtney Selous's *The Young Governess: A Tale for Girls* (1871), and Irene Clifton's *The Little Governess* (1900) show little difference in the handling of the governess theme from the novels of the 1830s and 1840s. Interestingly enough, these late governess novels are very similar to the early ones.

After the turn of the century, when the extent of governess employment decreased in real life, interest in the governess as a literary character seems to have diminished accordingly. Other occupational spheres opened for women, and literary representations of other kinds of working women broke the governess's near-monopoly as a professional heroine. However, the Epilogue of the present book suggests that the literary influence of the governess has not entirely vanished. Quite a few modern romances have incorporated characteristics belonging to the Victorian governess novel genre.

An important feature in the governess-novel genre is that most novels depict some kind of progress towards maturity or improvement on the part of the heroine. All through the nineteenth century, the governess character was found useful for the purpose of portraying personal development and religious insight. In 1845 Anne Brontë wrote in her diary that she had "begun the third volume of 'Passages in the Life of an Individual'" (quoted in Chitham 124). If this was indeed the working title of *Agnes Grey* (1847) – which is the general opinion among Brontë scholars – it may indicate an authorial intention to portray the development of a young woman by making her a governess. Like Anne Brontë's novel, her sister Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* (1847) also chronicles a young woman's development towards maturity and happiness. The similarities may of course be explained by the close links between the authors; however, most governess novels are to some extent "passages in the life of an individual". Writing a letter to her editor, Charlotte Brontë stated that she had known "many who were unhappy as governesses, but not one who regretted having undergone the ordeal, and scarcely one whose character was not improved" (Wise and Symington

II:220). This attitude is typical of its time; nineteenth-century didactic fiction as well as manuals on various forms of self-improvement related the beneficial effects of overcoming difficult stages in life.

The governess-novel genre could easily be compared with the *Bildungsroman* or the novel of development. The German term *Bildungsroman* is often used to denote a novel depicting an educational journey towards self-realisation. It could be argued that the governess novel corresponds well to the *Bildungsroman* because of the governess heroine's specific situation. The journey out into the world that the traditionally male protagonist makes is paralleled in the one undertaken by the governess. Unlike most middle-class heroines in the nineteenth-century novel, the governess character actually does leave her home and family sphere, and she has to brave difficulties on her way, just like the traditionally male hero of the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman*.

Susan Fraiman points out that the gender-specific framework in nineteenth-century novels dealing with female development differs from that presented in novels concerned with male heroes, as the lives of men and women were so different. In her study, wittily entitled *Unbecoming Women*, Fraiman therefore chooses to introduce conduct books as a specifically female genre concerned with education and improvement. She finds these non-fictional texts helpful to "identify an additional, widely available, and demonstrably salient set of stories about coming into womanhood" (13). Following scholars such as Joyce Hemlow and Nancy Armstrong, Fraiman points out the "continuity between these two kinds of contemporary texts, their over-lapping interest in female formation and their collaboration in producing a notion of the 'feminine' bound up with notions of the middle class" (14).

As stated above, I have chosen to introduce such non-fictional texts, too. In the case of the governess novel, however, it should be pointed out that there is an additional problem. On the one hand, conduct books such as manuals intended specifically for governesses and their employers showed an awareness of the specific situation of the governess. On the other, the domestic ideal endorsed by writers such as Hannah More and Sarah Ellis differed radically from the experience of the governess. Her position did not comply with that of the middle-class woman who married and raised her children. Therefore, the development of the governess heroine as it is described in the novels is not typically 'feminine'. Like the male hero of the *Bildungsroman*, she leaves her home and goes out into the world alone. Admittedly, the governess lives and works within a female domestic sphere, but, since it is not her family, it should be noted that she is not altogether a part of it.

The governess heroine usually goes through a personal development similar in terms of plot and themes to that experienced by the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* as presented by Jerome Buckley, for instance. In both genres, there is usually some kind of initial loss, which forces the young protagonist to leave her/his home. During the course of the novel, she/he encounters a number of trials which ultimately develop her/his mind and character into adulthood and maturity. Along the way, the protagonist meets various kinds of characters; for instance, in the traditionally male *Bildungsroman* the hero often encounters two women who represent, respectively, vice and virtue. Although not always as pronounced, a similar division can be identified in the female genre of governess novels. The protagonist's progress is often coupled to some kind of religious or spiritual crisis, too. The process towards maturity is often long and arduous but there is a final reward, consisting in the protagonist's rehabilitation into her/his legitimate place in society.

The connection between the genre of governess novels and that of the *Bildungsroman* was actually recognised by Elizabeth Rigby as early as 1848. Discussing W.M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, she wrote, "the whole course of the work may be viewed as the *Wander-Jahre* of a far cleverer *Wilhelm Meister*" (*QR* 1848, 162). This is an obvious reference to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-1796; translated as *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* in 1824), which is often seen as the prototype of the *Bildungsroman*. Becky Sharp's qualifications for comparison with Goethe's hero were justified by Rigby, as "we [follow] her in the ups-and-downs of life – among the humble, the fashionable, the great, and the pious – and [find] her ever new, yet ever the same" (162).

Vanity Fair does not really fit into the definition of a governess novel: Becky Sharp does not evince the customary characteristics of a governess heroine, nor is she a governess for the greater part of the novel. However, there are novels, such as *Caroline Mordaunt, or, The Governess*, *Agnes Grey*, and *Jane Eyre*, that both adhere to the characteristics of the governess novel and display the typical traits of the novel of development. It is not surprising that we find traits of the *Bildungsroman* in governess novels, as novels of development present a kind of narrative which "encourages sympathetic identification" from the reader, as Kate Flint puts it (296). Scholars concerned with the Brontë novels have recognised the element of development in both *Jane Eyre* (see e.g. Fraiman) and *Agnes Grey*. Priscilla H. Costello writes that *Agnes Grey* "follows a particular pattern of development; she moves from the security of her family through an increasing sense of alienation as governess to a resolution in her attachment to Mr Weston and the establishment of a family of her own" (8).

The peak of the governess-novel genre occurred in the 1840s to 1860s, but all through the nineteenth century a considerable number of governess novels were published. In the present study, a number of novels are dealt with in one or two specific contexts, while some other stories feature more regularly. As stated above, a few short stories and plays have also been included although the genre of governess novels is at issue. It is sometimes difficult to determine whether a work should be referred to as a short story or a novel, or perhaps a novella. I have italicised titles of works that have been published separately or that could be considered to be full-length novels, while the titles of shorter pieces of fiction published in collections of stories, etc., are reproduced within inverted commas. The novels that receive most of the attention, such as Sherwood's *Caroline Mordaunt*, Buckley's *Emily, the Governess*, Ross's *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*, Hall's *The Governess*, Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*, the anonymous *Chance and Choice, or the Education of Circumstances*,² and Selous's *The Young Governess* all cover most of the aspects I discuss in connection with governess novels. However, the other books, although they have received less space, likewise adhere to many of the genre conventions and characteristics. It should also be noted that when I occasionally discuss works that are not typical governess novels, but still depict governesses or education in a way that is relevant to this study, I state that this is the case.

It may be presumed that writers of governess novels to some extent read and even rehashed material from earlier novels in their own works; similarities between the novels sometimes seem to be more than coincidental. The Brontë novels apparently had great influence on subsequent writers, for instance, and in other cases it is even possible to see almost verbatim repetitions of earlier novels. However, it is difficult to know whether obvious correspondences in scenes, characterisation, or dialogues are due to direct influence, or whether they should be taken to indicate the generic properties of the governess issue.

A governess novel features a governess heroine. By heroine I do not mean a necessarily faultless or particularly splendid character, but a protagonist on whom the narrative is centred, and with whom the reader's sympathy lies. Some novels contain several governesses, whose situations are compared or juxtaposed. The heroine generally encounters a number of painful situations that are connected with her position as a governess. Usually she faces trouble in

² The anonymous novel *Chance and Choice, or, the Education of Circumstances. Tale I. The Young Governess* (1850) will be referred to as *Chance and Choice, or, the Education of Circumstances*, although I use only the first of the two stories included in that volume. The other tale is called *Claudine de Soligny* and is not a governess story.

relation to her employers or her pupils, and servants and visitors often make her miserable. In some novels the heroine stays in one post for a major part of the novel; in others she goes through a number of situations which differ from one another. That method made it possible for the author to depict “various strata of English society”, as Ewbank puts it (62). A convincing development in character could be achieved by moving the heroine from one situation to another, and the variety of pedagogical methods in vogue at the time could also be discussed and compared.

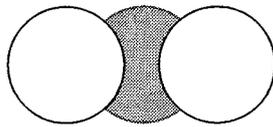
A fundamental aspect of the fictional characterisation of the governess is her relation to the other female members of the household. Her position as a wage-earning middle-class woman is always at the centre of attention in the novels. This intermediate position is what makes the governess heroine different from other female characters in nineteenth-century fiction. Peterson discusses the social incongruence of the Victorian governess, meaning the “conflicting notions about the propriety of paid employment for a ‘lady’” (11). She discusses ways in which the Victorians – governesses and employers alike – tried to bridge over these conflicts. For instance, she claims that the fact of employment was toned down, as was the governess’s womanliness (14). I will argue in this study that the opposite is the case in the novels. Since the writers of governess novels wished to put the situation of the governess under debate, conflicts concerning the heroine’s position in the household are of fundamental importance.

The governess heroine’s position in relation to her employer and to the servants of the house is crucial in the genre. As a way of introducing my argument on this issue, I will briefly comment on a tentative model by the anthropologist Edwin Ardener (1975) regarding the cultural spheres of men and women which I believe could be illustrative for the present study. Ardener’s model, which is based on his research on African tribes, illustrates the power relation between men and women in a patriarchal society. Contending that “where society is defined by men, some features of women do not fit that definition” (23), Ardener illustrates his argument with two intersecting circles, where a dominant male circle partly overlaps a female sphere. He states that the specifically male sphere (that part of the male circle which does not intersect the female circle) is not open or accessible to women. However, because society is governed by patriarchal norms, most of it will be known to them. The specifically female zone, on the other hand, is outside of male dominance and thus an area unknown to men. Ardener describes women who act outside the dominating male sphere as a ‘muted’ group, because they do not have access to the tools of power in the same way as the dominating group, which of course consists of men.

Introduction

In her discussion on women's culture in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1981), Elaine Showalter comments on Ardener's model. Since women are not a homogeneous group, the power structure is too complicated to be represented by two intersecting circles. Showalter points out that there are other muted groups besides the large group of women, and that thus one "dominant structure may determine many muted structures" (202). She supplies the example of African-American women writers, whose literary identity is defined not only by a dominant male culture, but also by a muted women's culture and by a likewise muted African-American culture. In other words, the African-American woman's cultural identity is to a large extent defined by surrounding and dominant, although muted, groups.

Returning to the Victorian governess heroine, I would suggest that a similar way of reasoning could be helpful in order to describe the situation of the governess. Her position is not only, or perhaps predominantly, determined by a middle-class patriarchal culture, but also by other muted, but to her dominant, groups of women. It is important to observe that in the novels men often come to the rescue of the heroine. The main opposition comes from women. The position of the governess in the employers' household could be illustrated by three partly over-lapping circles, in the following manner:



domestic servant

governess

leisured woman

The governess heroine is the central figure of the novels, but she is socially marginalised in her employers' household. In her dependent and wage-earning position, the governess is similar to the domestic servant; but she also resembles the mistress of the house because of her middle-class background. In the figure, the zone in between these two opposites of Victorian women (the working-class servant and the leisured middle- or upper-class woman) symbolises the marginalisation of the governess.

This central area of the figure represents the zone which is occupied exclusively by the governess. It symbolises her position, at once intermediate and isolated, which is most clearly manifested in social life. In nineteenth-century England governesses were often referred to as a group, or even as a race, of their own, separated from the rest of society. To take but one example

from the contemporary debate, an article in 1834 describes the governess as an “isolated being” who “belongs to a world different from that in which she moves” (*CLM* 1834, 2:43).

The overlapping areas of the figure represent areas of conflict between the governess and the other categories. Such aspects in the novels as the governess’s accommodation and remuneration belong in the overlapping areas. To affirm her own social position, it seems to be necessary for the mistress of the house to exclude the governess from her own sphere. Therefore, both the accommodation of the governess and the salary she receives indicate that her employers view her as a servant, rather than as their middle-class equal.

In the novels, however, these centres of conflict are expressed not only in features like accommodation, salary, and terms of employment, but also in relations with the children of the house. There are often triangular struggles of power over the children and their affection, featuring the nurse (a servant), the governess, and the mother (the leisured lady of the house). The work of the governess easily arouses feelings of jealousy both in the nurse and in the mother. An important theme in the genre is hence that of female rivalry. The governess heroine is often opposed to her mistress in a way that underlines the former’s superior moral principles and sometimes her more exalted social origin, too. The intermediate position of the governess heroine within her employers’ household makes her a convenient tool for social observation. As Ewbank says, the governess characters she discusses are “young ladies in straitened circumstances, used to better things, but forced to earn their living among people who are often socially, and nearly always morally and intellectually, inferior to themselves” (59).

The theme of reversed fortunes and sudden impoverishment is prominent in the genre. As the heroine is generally an orphan, she stands alone in life. However, most novels contain some kind of friend who helps the governess through her difficulties. It may be a maternal character, a future husband, or a fellow governess. More often than not, these helpers seem to be the author’s mouthpiece, advocating piety, adaptation to circumstances, and/or stamina, and they sometimes function as commentators on the plight of governesses.

The characteristics outlined thus far are often presented to the reader in a number of genre-typical scenes. By and large, their function appears to consist in marking the heroine’s position in relation to her employers. For instance, most heroines face problems in procuring a situation, and the journey then undertaken in order to reach the place of employment is often described as long and weary. When the heroine has entered her employers’ house, her first glimpse of her accommodation tells her whether she is regarded as a lady or a

menial. After such introductory scenes, discussions concerning terms of employment, salary, holiday and so forth are introduced.

Although a clear majority of the novels depict appalling working conditions for the heroine, there are exceptions which must not be forgotten. Some governesses meet with genuinely pleasant employers. Such elements sometimes serve as foils to the general picture of governessing; well-treated governesses are normally contrasted with colleagues who lead a miserable life. Favourable descriptions of governess life often seem to reflect a didactic intention. By showing how a governess ought to be treated, the writer could hope to ease the sufferings of real-life governesses. Such novels may be assumed to have been aimed at a readership among employers of governesses. One method of presenting the message that governesses ought to be better treated was to introduce a character who comments on the employers in the novel. In a genre so dominated by female writers, it is noteworthy that a number of such authorial mouthpieces are men. Perhaps authors felt that female readers would more easily pick up advice from a benevolent male character than from a female voice, however authoritative.

After this preliminary outline of the governess-novel genre, another question is who actually wrote these novels and who read them? Although it is not possible to give an exhaustive answer, a few remarks may be made. Some writers of governess novels made themselves known in other fictional genres as well. It seems safe to assume that to some extent, readers of domestic novels in general, as well as of silver-fork novels or sensational novels, also read governess novels. Some writers turned to the governess novel because they had first-hand knowledge of teaching and governess work. They may be assumed to have aimed at employers of governesses, and perhaps at governesses themselves, as their readers. By publishing accounts of their own experience, they might have desired to improve conditions for other governesses. That is what E.W. claims in *Ellen Manners; or, the Recollections of a Governess* (1875). The narrator, who portrays herself as having been a governess, recalls “the heart-sinking with which I contemplated my future life – the fears I entertained that I should not succeed in my new calling”. Stating her “deepest sympathy for those who are setting out on a similar path”, she expresses a hope that her “experience may be useful to them” (10).

Other writers, among them Barbara Hofland and Elizabeth Sewell, had opened schools of their own. A popular author of didactic novels, items of journalism, and children’s stories, Hofland published some 70 works altogether. Her book about a very young governess, *Ellen, the Teacher* (1814), was one of her most popular books, going through nine editions in the first 25 years (Butts 31). Sewell, in whose *Amy Herbert* (1844) an ill-treated governess plays an

essential role, first took private pupils and then opened a school. Her ideas on education were later published in *Principles of Education, Drawn from Nature and Revelation, and Applied to Female Education in the Upper Classes* (1865). Rachel M'Crindell's *The English Governess: A Tale of Real Life* (1844) indicates that the author was a teacher herself, as the volume actually ends with an advertisement for the "Kent House Establishment for Young Ladies Maismore Square, New Peckham. Conducted by Misses Sanders and M'Crindell". Mary Martha Sherwood, too, had teaching experience from her years in India.

Charlotte and Anne Brontë's experiences as governesses most certainly influenced their novels *Jane Eyre* and *Agnes Grey*, especially the latter. Shortly after the publication of her sister's novel, Charlotte Brontë wrote that *Agnes Grey* was "the mirror of the mind of the writer" (quoted in A. C. Bell 30). Nineteenth-century readers appear to have been strongly affected by the representation of governess life in Anne Brontë's novel. Some twenty years after *Agnes Grey* was published, Lady Amberley (Bertrand Russell's mother) read it. She noted in her diary that she would "like to give it to every family with a governess" and that she would "read it through again when I have a governess to remind me to be human" (quoted in P. Thomson 53). This suggests that Anne Brontë's representation of the governess's trials was felt to be true to life.

The great nineteenth-century interest in education and religion may have attracted readers to governess novels. Eliza Cheap's *The Nursery Governess* (1845), where the character of Miss Egmont offers advice to young governesses throughout the story, reads to some extent like a manual for governesses. Other novels were aimed at employers of governesses. In *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* Miss Ross declared that she wished to "call the attention of the rich and the great to a subject I cannot but consider of vital importance to the cause of education and to humanity". She added,

I might perhaps be inclined to doubt whether the rich and the great will read a book bearing the title of 'The Governess,' but that I trust to the assurance I now make, that *their* vices and follies are not forgotten; and I have ever remarked, that those novels have found easiest access to the dressing-rooms of the fine lady, which have most elaborately portrayed [*sic*] her follies [...] On this ground therefore I rest my pretensions to *their* favour; to a better feeling I am willing to attribute the suffrages of the amiable wife and mother, – to the earnest hope and humble belief that she may learn something from the story of 'The Governess.' (3)

Some novels declare a didactic intention coupled to religion. Julia Buckley, for instance, stated in her preface to *Emily, the Governess* that "[I]f as it is, has been my endeavour to portray" (ii). She employed the governess character to show her readers that happiness "will not be found in the crowded walks of

dissipation, or in the glare of fashionable life, but in the narrow path of religion” (iii).

Certain preconceived ideas of the fictional characterisation of governesses seem to have flourished already in the nineteenth century. In *Margaret Stourton, or a Year of Governess Life* the heroine, who is well treated by her employer, meets the clearly miserable Miss Edge:

Margaret found some difficulty in realizing herself to be in the same position as Miss Edge. No two people could look more unlike. ‘But,’ she thought to herself, ‘I am a governess and she is a governess, and yet, – she is precisely the kind of person I am at first inclined to shrink from; she is exactly one’s ideal of “the governess” in a novel’. Miss Edge was tall, thin, pale, melancholy, and almost morose-looking. (96)

This kind of negative description, which is not what we usually find in the novels, notably focuses on governesses as unattractive and unhappy. Such descriptions are rather found in *Punch* cartoons, for instance, and often in representations of foreign governesses. An article from 1856 refers to a governess who repudiated the depiction of governesses in fiction in the following way: “[P]eople have written books about us, and have invested us – or tried to do so – with an interest we have not got” (*HW* 1856, 138). In an article two years later, another real-life governess supplied the following picture of the fictional governess:

I confess first, that in all my course of reading, I have not met with any relation of a governess’s life that bears the slightest resemblance to my own experience. Secondly, that in those I have perused, the heroine was always beautiful or graceful, and the facts, very romantic; whereas, I am very common-place in face and figure, and all that I have to tell about myself is quite matter of fact. And thirdly, which I am sure settles at once the whole matter, I am sitting in a very old maidish little room with a very wee fire, and having tried in vain Italian exercises, Chamber’s Journal, writing letters, and casting up accounts, to divert my thoughts from my lonely condition, and that horrid street organ just below my window, I have at length determined, as a slight relief to my misery, to venture upon laying before an indulgent public some account of my past life. (*EWJ* 1858, 396)

Although there is no reason to doubt that these lines express what this governess really felt, her description of the governess heroine does not tally with the one the genre as such offers. There are certainly beautiful heroines, and some “facts” could indeed be said to be “very romantic”. However, the coldness, loneliness, and misery are also very much part of the governess novel.

An illustrated version of the governess

Alongside the fictional treatment of the nineteenth-century governess, the character became a popular object for pictorial artists. *Punch* published a number of more or less comical engravings of schoolroom scenes, or of situations that were socially embarrassing for the governess. More serious attention was paid to governesses by painters like Richard Redgrave, who early “proclaim[ed] the artist’s role as a critic of social affairs” (Casteras and Parkinson 84). His probably best-known works, “The Governess” (1844) and “The Sempstress” (1846), both depict working women. The former was painted in several versions. Redgrave had two sisters who worked as governesses and thus possessed personal knowledge of the occupation.

In 1843, a Redgrave painting entitled “The Poor Teacher” was exhibited at the Academy, receiving much critical acclaim for its realistic treatment of the governess’s plight. The original of the picture is lost, but contemporary reproductions show a young woman in mourning, sitting alone by a table with a letter in her hand. On the table are the remains of her frugal dinner and next to the plate lies a pile of papers, perhaps unmarked exercises. The following year, Redgrave was commissioned by his patron John Sheepshanks to paint a new version, but with some alterations. The artist included three young girls in the background. This painting, titled “The Governess”, is now at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Fig. 1).

Redgrave’s daughter later recorded that the girls were added to the 1844 painting because Mr Sheepshanks “objected to the terrible loneliness of the forlorn governess in the empty schoolroom” (quoted in Casteras and Parkinson 112). However, the marginalised position of the teacher becomes even more poignant as she is contrasted to the three beautifully dressed girls, two of whom are seen playing happily outside the room on a terrace, the third sitting just inside the door looking out. It has been proposed that the girl sitting down shares some of the sadness of the governess. They are both in the shade, and the young girl has a book in her lap. Whether Redgrave intended such a link we cannot know; but, the girl who was probably the model for this character actually became a governess herself later (114). There are several details in the picture which indicate the sadness of the central character; for instance, the music sheet on the piano is “Home, Sweet Home”, and the black-edged letter in her hand begins “My dear child”. While the black border does not necessarily indicate that the letter brings news of death, it indicates bereavement. This suggestion is strengthened by the kind of mourning dress that is worn by the governess. Her

white neckerchief tells us that she is not in full mourning, which would have been indicated by an all-black dress.

Redgrave's "The Governess" has become something of a pictorial symbol of the Victorian governess's plight. It is, for instance, found on the cover of such books the Penguin Classics edition of Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* and on the World's Classics edition of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*.



Fig 1. (Richard Redgrave, "The Governess" 1844, The Victoria and Albert Museum)

Outline of the present study

As I have stated, contemporary material will be used throughout the study in order to reflect various aspects of nineteenth-century life in general and governess work in particular. In order to distinguish the literary works from the non-fictional material, I use the present tense when discussing the novels and the past tense when referring to manuals, articles, etc. The first time a work is introduced, the date of publication is stated.

This study has been organised according to the chronology found in most governess novels. The purpose is not only to show how similarly the novels are structured, but also to convey a picture of governess life as it is

Introduction

portrayed within the genre. Chapter 2 deals with the family background of the governess heroine and with various reasons for going out as a governess. It also shows how the difficulties in procuring a situation assume a prominent position in governess novels. Chapter 3 discusses terms of employment, indicating the wide range of working conditions. This chapter also addresses the issues of accommodation and salaries, which repeatedly figured in the manuals as well as in the debate.

Chapter 4 brings the governess into the schoolroom. Interestingly, there are not many actual lessons in the novels; even so, education and concepts like time management and efficiency are often at issue. This chapter discusses various ideas and aspects of nineteenth-century female education, indicating such phenomena as the criticism found within the governess-novel genre of the emphasis on the so-called accomplishments. Chapters 5 and 6 deal with more ideological issues in the genre of governess novels. Chapter 5 focuses on the heroine versus the lady of the house; often depicted as a surrogate mother to her pupils, the governess character introduces the themes of woman's mission and maternity. Connected to this is the question of religion and religious instruction. Chapter 6 concentrates on the issue of marginalisation in governess novels. In words and in action, the heroine is seen as an 'other' in relation to people who had been her equals, had she not been a governess.

After a brief Conclusion, the study closes with an Epilogue which shows that although the governess novel diminished in the early twentieth century, the characteristics of the genre have to some extent been recovered by the writers of modern romances.

2

Going a-governessing

At the age of three-and-twenty, Gertrude Walcot lost her father, and was told, it was necessary she should exert her splendid talents in procuring her daily bread [...] Accustomed, from her earliest infancy, both from the precepts and example of her parents, to look on every event as it occurred, as coming from the immediate hand of infinite wisdom and mercy, she prepared to obey the unexpected mandate.

(Ross, *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* 1836)

In governess novels, the heroine's background is of importance both for the plot and for the development of the governess character. Previous scholars have been in agreement that the heroine is usually impoverished but respectable, and in most instances an orphan. Furthermore, governess characters are generally referred to as being daughters either of clergymen or of suddenly impoverished gentlemen. Bea Howe, who discusses governesses both in real life and in fiction, divides Victorian governesses into two main groups, namely clergymen's daughters and upper-class ladies suddenly impoverished, adding that "an officer's daughter was a welcome recruit always" (113). She is not quite as narrow in her definition of the governess's background as Patricia Thomson, who claims that the nineteenth-century governess was "preferably the daughter of a clergyman" (39). Howe stresses the "immense snob-value" of clergymen's daughters as they could be relied upon to possess a "humble and meek spirit" (112), while the financially ruined lady – who was "sacrificed in ever-increasing numbers on the Victorian governess-altar", as Howe drastically puts it – "had little but her blue blood and aristocratic name to offer her employer" (113).

Although simplified, such a description concerning the family circumstances points at two major aspects of the background of governesses that are significant for the present study. First, the personal humility and Christian

values of the clergyman's daughter is a topic of interest to several authors. It is often used as a way of emphasising a morally wicked atmosphere in the employers' house, demonstrating the governess's superior moral qualities compared to those around her. Both manuals and most of the novels point at the value of religious instruction, and in many novels this duty is assigned to the governess, although it was often claimed at the time that the responsibility for religious instruction should rest on the mother (see Chapter 5 below). Second, the impoverished aristocratic or upper-class governess can, through her background, reveal the upstart qualities of newly rich employers, as her own gentility is made to contrast with their manners. In other words, the background of the governess, whether predominantly pious or genteel, can be used by the author as a means of creating a distinction between the governess and her employers.

Historical records indicate some variety in the social background of governesses in nineteenth-century England. In *Private Education; or a Practical Plan for the Studies of Young Ladies* (1815), Elizabeth Appleton listed the fathers of governesses as "naval and military officers, clergymen, barristers, physicians, and merchants" (6). Thirty years later, the Governesses' Benevolent Institution conducted a survey concerning the occupations of the fathers of governesses, the result of which was similar; the fathers "were, in descending order, merchant, surgeon, military or naval officer, civil/government servant, solicitor and clergyman" (Hughes 28). Hughes does not make it clear whether the survey material consists only of applicants for support from the GBI, or of a larger group of governesses. The contemporary governess debate supplied a similar picture (see e.g. Martineau *OW* 1860), as does modern research (Horn 1989).

In the novels, too, the fathers of governesses are commonly solidly middle-class men. One possible reason for this may be that the author wished to invest the heroine with a genteel status in the eyes of the reader. It seems that however socially and economically degraded such heroines become, they always manage to keep up a ladylike appearance. The more ladylike the governess character is, the greater will her difficulties be in adjusting to her new situation, and the more she will suffer from her mortification. For instance, the formerly wealthy Clara Mordaunt in Marguerite Blessington's *The Governess* (1839) and Lucy Clifford in the anonymous *Chance and Choice, or, the Education of Circumstances* (1850), both of whom are known to the reader from the opening of the novels as daughters of wealthy men, are far more humiliated in having to go out as governesses than clergymen's daughters such as the

eponymous protagonists of Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) or Mary Martha Sherwood's *Caroline Mordaunt, or, The Governess* (1835).¹

Reversed fortunes

The manual *The Complete Servant* (1825) by Sarah and Samuel Adams stated that governesses were often “the unsettled daughters of respectable families of moderate fortune” (92), a description which seems to find support in most nineteenth-century materials concerning the family background of governesses. The anonymous *Advice to Governesses* (1827) similarly claimed that ladies “who from the misfortunes of their families have been lowered in their condition in the world” were seen as “objects of peculiar sympathy” (vi). This is explained by the fact that they had to “submit to rules and regulations by persons in whom they can at first take no interest, and to hardships, often needlessly increased, from want of good sense and proper feeling in those around them” (vi). Such references to social degradation as well as to employers' condescending attitude were often stressed in governess manuals, as was the fact that the governess was forced to exchange a happy home for life among strangers. Mary Maurice, for instance, discussed the difficult transition from being a daughter of one house to becoming the governess in another in *Governess Life: Its Trials, Duties and Encouragements* (1847). She brought up the painful “contrast of the former and present condition” which would be evident to every governess who felt confined in her dependent position (55).

In previous scholarly work on governess novels, the background of the heroine has generally been referred to only in forms of her father's profession or standing in society. I would like to add another consideration, namely in what way the governess heroine is, or has been, bereft of her wealth and connections, and the question of whether this deprivation has happened in her early infancy or more recently. In the latter case, her grief will naturally be more acute, and she often experiences a shocking awakening through her initiation as a governess. If, on the contrary, the heroine has been left an orphan as a young child, she has often been brought up for the explicit purpose of becoming a governess. Her governess identity has then come to her gradually. There is a certain difference between these two categories of fictional governesses in their

¹ The somewhat confusing fact that two governess characters are called Mordaunt, although there is no apparent connection, has been commented upon by Beaty, who claims that the name was common in fiction of the time. He finds a possible explanation for the use of the name in governess novels; “the maiden name of Mrs. Poyntz, to whom Sarah Fielding's *The Governess* is dedicated, was Anna Maria Mordaunt” (1977, 634n).

attitude to the necessity of having to go out as a governess, but their actual experiences do not vary greatly.

The background of the protagonist is often described in a manner conducive to enhancing and explaining the privations she suffers. The reader is informed of the father's profession, as well as of the reason for the daughter's having to go out as a governess. Several of the best-known governess novels, such as Sherwood's *Caroline Mordaunt*, Elizabeth Sewell's *Amy Herbert* (1844), Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*, and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) depict clergymen's daughters. Both Caroline Mordaunt and Jane Eyre have lost their parents in early infancy, and have been brought up and educated largely at boarding schools. Their natural fate is to become governesses. Emily Morton in *Amy Herbert* and Agnes Grey, on the other hand, have met adversity more recently and therefore been forced to go out as governesses at short notice.

In Barbara Hofland's *Ellen, the Teacher* (1814), Ellen Delville's father is a military man, as are the fathers of, for instance, Gertrude Walcot in Miss Ross's *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* (1836), Lucy Clifford in *Chance and Choice, or, the Education of Circumstances*, and Margaret in the anonymous *Margaret Stourton; or, a Year of Governess Life* (1863). Commonly, these fathers are no longer active in their military profession. Lucy's father Colonel Clifford, for instance, "had retired from the army on coming into possession of a handsome property" (2). As we shall see, the strength and decisiveness suggested by the military profession are conspicuously lacking in these men.

The rise of the governess novel coincided with the numerous bank failures and bankruptcies of the 1830s and 1840s. At that time, sudden ruin came upon many families when their own businesses, or the banks in which their money was invested, failed. As the historian Walter E. Houghton puts it, the Victorian era was "a period when hectic booms alternated with financial panics [...] So great was the physical and mental strain that many men, it was said, were forced to 'break off (or to break down) in mid-career, shattered, paralysed, reduced to premature inaction or senility'" (61). Jeannie M. Peterson and Mary Poovey both connect the difficulties of the Victorian governess with the economic and political turbulence of mid-nineteenth-century England. Novelists caught on to the fictional potentialities of the governess figure, which grew out of the social instability. Sudden reversal is indeed common in the genre, often linked to the unexpected death of the father. However, financial instability was also a subject brought up repeatedly in the contemporary governess debate. Voices were raised against the danger of financial speculation instigated by social ambition. For instance, it was claimed that if parents would look to their children's interests instead of their own, their daughters would not

have to go out as governesses. One article declared, “we cannot shut our eyes to the disgraceful social vanity to which so many young women are thus sacrificed” (*ECJ* 1849, 305).

Adversities quickly brought on owing to a father’s financial speculation are legion in governess novels. Disaster hits a family in Eliza Cheap’s *The Nursery Governess* (1845) when the protagonist’s father, who is a businessman, dies “just at the moment when his speculations in business were likely to be realized to advantage” (15). The military father in *Margaret Stourton; or, a Year of Governess Life* is similarly ruined when the mercantile house where he has invested his fortune fails unexpectedly; “undreamed-of liabilities started up on all sides; and the happy and prosperous family at Witham were in one moment brought to the very verge of ruin” (2). We find such examples among mild father characters, like Captain Delville in *Ellen, the Teacher*, or Agnes Grey’s clergyman father, as well as among aspiring businessmen and even reckless gamblers. A variant of the theme according to which a parent has been cheated by an employee or business partner features in E.W.’s *Ellen Manners; or, the Recollections of a Governess* (1875), as well as in “Nur Muth’s” “An English Governess in Russia” (1882). In Ellen Wood’s sensational novel *East Lynne* (1861), Lady Isabel’s social descent is symbolically predicted through her father’s bankruptcy at the opening of the novel.

Several novels describe how the unexpected ruin and death of a father reveals a far worse financial state in the family than anyone had suspected. In Harriet Martineau’s *Deerbrook* (1839), for example, it is not until after Maria Young has lost her father that his insolvency becomes known:

[W]hile he lived, no one supposed that his only child would be poor. Her youth passed gaily, and her adversity came suddenly. Her father was wont to drive her out in his gig, almost every summer day. One evening, the horse took fright, and upset the gig on a heap of stones by the road-side. Mr. Young was taken up dead, and Maria was lamed for life. (36)

The physical injuries Maria suffers in the accident can be seen as a tangible sign of her degradation. There is, however, nothing sentimental in the description of her handicap; besides, her moral strength compensates for her physical disability. This is also the case in Henry Courtney Selous’s *The Young Governess: A Tale for Girls* (1871), where Martha Smyth suffers from spinal deformity since a fall in childhood. In both these novels, the fact that the heroine is capable of overcoming difficulties in spite of her handicap is linked to great intrinsic worth.

Rapid change, despair following on hope, is often used by an author in order to start off the plot. Indisputably, the initial loss has a catalytic function in

governess novels; but there might be an inherent criticism of society in this device, too. In the light of the economic turbulence of the age, the catastrophe that befalls a fictional family might be seen as a metaphor for what might happen in and to society. It should be pointed out that the fear of failing is a common feature in nineteenth-century British fiction, and by no means unique to the governess novel. However, this genre effectively highlights the problem, as it generally portrays a young woman who has to face the consequences of financial misfortune for which her father is – at least to some extent – responsible.

Not all governess novels focus on pecuniary problems, however. Sometimes, other family difficulties linked to the ambitions for upward social mobility that were so typical of the century are at issue. For instance, a second marriage may lead to a Cinderella-like marginalisation of an elder daughter. Both Felicia Lyne in Dinah Mulock Craik's *Bread upon the Waters: A Governess's Life* (1852) and Lucy Clifford in *Chance and Choice, or, the Education of Circumstances* feel compelled to leave their father's house after his remarriage. In these novels an unhappy family situation serves to prepare the young heroine for future difficulties, but also to increase the reader's compassion for her. It is important to note that, unlike most other fictional governesses, Felicia and Lucy are not obliged to take up governessing because of their fathers' financial difficulties or death; they enter the occupation as a way of escaping from their fathers' houses, where they are not wanted. The stepmothers' characters are contrasted with those of their predecessors, and with those of the daughters. The remarriage thus creates a breach between father and daughter. In both stories, the new mistress of the house subjects her stepdaughter to apparent injustice; while Felicia is exiled from the part of the house she used to inhabit, Lucy is downplayed by her stepmother, who wishes to promote her own daughter.

Felicia Lyne leaves her father's house with her two younger brothers after he has remarried within a year of Mrs Lyne's death. In nineteenth-century England, this in itself was considered a break of social etiquette; but to make matters worse Mr Lyne marries a public singer. The stepmother, "with the paint scarce wiped off her face [...] whose name has been for years the town's talk" (8), is not surprisingly described as being the opposite of Felicia's mother in every respect. It is noticeable how Mr Lyne casts away his own children when he remarries. Felicia protests against his intention of sending her brothers to "a twenty-pound Yorkshire school, with holidays [...] only once in two years" (24), to which the father cruelly replies: "you are quite old enough to earn your own bread and theirs; and I really think, with the prospect of a new family rising up, you would be much better out of the way" (25).

Mulock Craik may have modelled Felicia Lyne on a real-life case. In her non-fictional *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* (1858), she gave a presumably true account of a “young girl, an elder sister, [who] had to receive for stepmother a woman who ought never to have been any honest man's wife”. She recalled how this young woman, “[n]ot waiting to be turned out of her father's house, [...] did a most daring and ‘improper’ thing – she left it, taking with her the brothers and sisters, whom by this means only she believed she could save from harm”. Having settled herself and her younger siblings in London lodgings, this Felicia-like character “worked for them as a daily governess” (29).

Lucy Clifford in *Chance and Choice, or, the Education of Circumstances* is not actually banished from her home, but her stepmother talks her husband into sending the girl to a Protestant convent. Colonel Clifford's passivity and weakness towards his new wife is all the more noticeable considering the fact that he is a military man. When, towards the end of the novel, Lucy ponders whether her father might have been searching for her, she comes to the conclusion that “no; Madam Clifford would never let him do that, – and though he *was* a soldier, he hasn't the spirit to contradict her” (209). The Colonel's incapacity is also commented on by Lucy's fiancé Captain Falconer who comes back to England after having served in India for several years. When he realises that Lucy has long before fled from her father's house, he exclaims “I cannot conceive how her father could allow so much time to elapse without taking some vigorous measures, at least, to discover his lost child!” (211). Colonel Clifford is totally in the hands of his wife, and the only time he comes out as a man of action is when he – urged by his wife – orders Lucy to the convent, instead of letting her go out to earn her own living, which is what she herself proposes to do. To Lucy, leaving her father's house to become a governess is the last chance of escaping convent life.

The new Mrs Clifford makes her husband send Lucy away because she perceives her as a threat to her own daughter's advancement. In a Cinderella-like scene, Mrs Clifford takes her own daughter and Lucy to the milliner's to equip them for a party. While making sure that her daughter gets an “exquisite and expensive attire”, the dress she chooses for Lucy is described as homely (13). However, the French milliner – having seen the discrepancy in Mrs Clifford's treatment of the girls – acts like the good fairy and decorates Lucy's dress in a way that makes her the main attraction of the evening, much to her stepmother's resentment. In *Chance and Choice, or, the Education of Circumstances* it is worth noting how benevolent women repeatedly come to the heroine's assistance. Although Lucy recognises the injustice she is subjected to, she is not able to strike back, but needs the maternal assistance of which she has been bereaved.

Rachel M'Crindell's *The English Governess: A Tale of Real Life* (1844) also presents an evil step-parent. Here it is not the stepmother, however, but a stepfather and later an uncle who try to get rid of the heroine in various ways. Clara Neville is the daughter "of a deceased counsellor, whose career had been cut short, after a few days' illness, before he could realize that competency which his talents and brilliant prospects seemed to promise" (14). Like many other fathers in the genre, the late Mr Neville, although of "exalted character, [...] tenderness and indulgence" (5), is described as a man who is not able to cater for his family. His wife, although represented as being "in the full conviction that she was acting according to the dictates of both prudence and maternal affection" (16) in remarrying after two years, comes out as weak in character. The new husband, soon referred to as the "unprincipled stepfather" (18), turns out to be a criminal who not only squanders his wife's money and beats her to death, but also threatens to kill Clara.

In her adversities, Clara Neville's sheet anchor is her Christian faith, a circumstance which annoys her uncle, who has taken her into his house after she left her own home. He behaves much like the stepmothers in *Bread upon the Waters: A Governess's Life* and *Chance and Choice, or, the Education of Circumstances* when demanding that she adjust to his own family's way of life as long as she stays with them: "you must leave off your church-going habits, and join us in our rational pursuits, or you must find elsewhere a theatre on which to enact your follies" (42-43). This makes Clara Neville realise that

the time for decision was arrived, and, [...] she could not hesitate for one moment as to the path of duty she ought to pursue [...] The only resource open to her, indeed the only one which the present state of society leaves to an educated young person, was the instruction of youth. (43)

Characteristically, in these novels the daughter, orphaned or not, must carry the yoke of her father's mistakes unaided. Although the Victorian era saw large families, governess heroines seldom have brothers or sisters to help them. In many novels they stand completely alone, as there are usually not many friends outside of the family to trust either. Excluding the protagonist from social connections is to some extent a fictional convention serving to enhance her vulnerability. On the other hand, it is known, for example from letters and diaries, that many real-life governesses also suffered from such loneliness and social isolation. It is important to note that although paternal insufficiency may be the primary reason why a young woman has to go out as a governess, the lack of maternal support is also significant in many novels. When the mother of the governess heroine is alive, she seldom manages to be of help, herself being weakened by the degradation they both suffer. Despite the fact that most governess heroines at some point express grief at not having their mothers at

hand, many of them develop into strong women. As Joan Manheimer puts it in her discussion of mothers in Victorian fiction, “[a]ccording to standard rhetoric, the loss of a Good Mother is crippling to the child, but despite their postures of piety, nineteenth-century novels resound with the success of orphans. Jane Eyre, Emma, Dinah Morris, Becky Sharp – all have the absence of a mother to thank for their social mobility” (533). This observation also applies to governess novels.

Not all governess heroines have suffered sudden social degradation. Caroline Mordaunt, a clergyman’s daughter, was orphaned at an early age and brought up at a boarding-school under the charge of “a respectable lady [...] on condition that she would take care of me until my nineteenth year, and prepare me to obtain my own living as a private governess” (2). Between her second and third engagement, Caroline stays for a short time with her guardian, an elderly cousin. Unable to provide for her, he urges her to go out again, telling her that unless she does “[t]he talents you have acquired [will] be lost. You [will] soon become a useless being – a mere idler, and perhaps a simple village gossip” (47). The cousin fills a narrative function in the novel, as he procures situations for Caroline and gives her ‘parental’ advice. Not many nineteenth-century parents wished their daughters to go out as governesses, though. Anna Jameson was definite in her opinion that no woman entered the profession of governessing of her free will, and most Victorians seemed to have shared this belief. Harriet Martineau, for example, stated that “wherever we go among parents of the middle class, we find the one gnawing anxiety which abides in their hearts is the dread of their daughters ‘having to go out as governesses’” (*OAW* 1860, 271).

Caroline Mordaunt’s cousin’s persuading her to go out as a governess over and over again, although she is obviously ill suited for the task differs from the traditional parental role in governess novels. His warning words that Caroline would be “a mere idler” if she stayed with him explain why he is so insistent that she earn her own bread. However, there are a few other elderly men, like Mr Byfield in Cheap’s *The Nursery Governess* and Ellen’s uncle in *Ellen Manners; or, Recollections of a Governess*, who force their young relatives out into the world. Mr Byfield conducts something of a social experiment with poor Emily – neither she nor her employers know that he is her grandfather –, and he does not realise until it is too late that she is severely maltreated by her employers. Ellen Manners’s clergyman uncle readily takes care of his sister when ruin befalls the family, but he does not invite Ellen to live with them until he is old enough to need her help. Although she afterwards acknowledges that governessing eventually has made her a better person, she expresses dislike for her unyielding uncle.

A few governess heroines come from affluent backgrounds. In Julia Buckley's *Emily, a Governess. A Tale* (1836), the protagonist's forced separation from her background is instigated by the selling of her home. Emily Seymour's widowed and ailing mother tells her,

You have hitherto lived but in the sunshine of the world; you must not expect your future years to pass like the latter. You are now to embark upon a fresh and dangerous voyage, where you will often find the winds contrary, or beset by trials and temptations, which nothing but an Almighty arm can support you to go through.
(5)

Here, the bitter truth that Emily will have to face difficulties hitherto unheard of is conveyed by means of seafaring imagery, as if to emphasise the perils of what lies ahead. The lack of "domestic freedom under which life flows on in a full and easy stream", as Martineau called the privations of governesses some 25 years later (1860, 270), will be hard for Emily Seymour. To her, the imminent transition from the state of wealth to that of dependence is indeed one "beset by trials and temptations", and like many other fictional governesses, she has been poorly prepared. An additional and consequential aspect of Emily's new position is her now dead father's way of driving his family to despair. After happy early years, he "plunged headlong and deeply into the vortex of dissipation – one pleasure led to another – one vice introduced another still more heinous" until he had gambled away fortune, house, and everything else (43). Emily thus faces not only poverty, but also the humiliation brought on her by her father's misdeeds.

Emily, who is seventeen at the opening of the story, is said to resemble her father, having "the same ardour after worldly pursuits and pleasures" (32). This inheritance proves to increase her initial difficulties; not until she overcomes her pride does she come to terms with her situation and can gain happiness. It becomes gradually clear, however, that Emily has not inherited much from her depraved father; although pleasure-loving at first, when she is exposed to the rudeness of her employers she gradually comes to resemble her mother instead. Unlike many other fictional governesses, who stoically bear the humiliation of economic and social degradation, Emily is at first unwilling to see the necessity of her earning her own living. Reflecting on her sudden descent in society, she exclaims "I shall no longer be courted, or even respected [...] now that I am a beggar!". The dark prospects are so overwhelming to Emily that she even reproaches her background. "Why was I brought up in the bright sunshine of prosperity", she asks herself, when "the dark clouds of adversity came to darken every hope and to wither the flowers that blossomed around me?". She feels that had she "been born a simple cottager, [...] those privations, which now, only to think of, makes my blood chill", would have been easier to

submit to (61). Emily finds her degradation difficult indeed to bear, and she is aware of the fact that her background will serve to increase her future hardships.

In Blessington's *The Governess*, the heroine's father has also lost everything on gambling. Having been brought up in wealth, and been regarded as a rich heiress, Clara Mordaunt is abruptly brought down in social position when her merchant father's suicide reveals that he has gambled away his fortune. A later novel, Emma Raymond Pitman's *My Governess Life, or, Using My One Talent* (1883), features a criminal father who lives in exile, but comes back for his governess daughter as he wants her to join him in Baden-Baden. His daughter knows that "[t]hese card-shapers and billiard cheats often require a female accomplice, in order to carry out their nefarious plans upon unwary dupes" (178).

The moral dissipation of these fathers is contrasted in their daughters' characters. The moral worth of the governess may thus not only be contraposed to that of her employers, but also to her own family background. Clara Mordaunt is notably unlike her corrupt father in character. We do not know anything about her mother, who died young. However, after the ruin and death of her father, Clara stays with her maternal aunt, who is depicted as a moral antithesis of Clara's corrupt father. In several governess novels there is a marked difference in social origin between the parents of the governess. Agnes Grey's mother, for example, is a squire's daughter who has married "against the wishes of her friends", i.e. her family (61). The other Brontë governess, Jane Eyre, comes from similar circumstances, although she lost her parents while still a small child. Jane is informed by her aunt that her mother had been disowned by the family "when she made her low marriage" (277). In novels such as *Agnes Grey*, *Bread upon the Waters: A Governess's Life*, and Harriet Maria Gordon Smythies's *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence* (1861), the mothers of governesses are described as having higher principles than their husbands. The governess's relation to her own mother often has a bearing on the emotional struggle between mistress, governess, and children.

In both Blessington's and Buckley's novels it is obvious that the fathers have brought about the downfall of their families through their reckless behaviour. The consequences of their ruin, however, will have to be borne by the daughters who thus have to atone for their fathers' misdeeds. In a number of governess novels, fathers are described as either incompetent or vicious, which may point at some kind of criticism of male capacity. This is by no means unique for governess novels, however. In late eighteenth-century fiction, for example in novels by Ann Radcliffe, we repeatedly come across male figures who are "either good but utterly incapable of doing anything for the heroine, or evil and actually plotting to destroy her" (Berglund 27).

In many governess novels, it seems clear that daughters cannot trust their fathers to support them. The motif of the father who for some reason fails to support his family could be seen as an expression of a general anxiety concerning family stability. Elizabeth Rigby commented on paternal insufficiency in her famous review of *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair*; “We need the imprudencies, extravagancies, mistakes, or crimes of a certain number of fathers, to sow the seed from which we reap the harvest of governesses” (*QR* 1848, 176). This phrase was one of the passages from the review that Charlotte Brontë later reproduced in *Shirley* (1849). Mrs Pryor of that novel tries to dissuade young Caroline Helstone from going out as a governess by relating her own experiences. Rigby’s words are put into the mouths of the mistress and the eldest daughter of the house in which Mrs Pryor worked as a governess (Ewbank 34, 60n2).

In *Principles of Education* (1865) Elizabeth Sewell likewise attacked “fathers who neglect to provide for their daughters, when it is in their power”, stating that “[m]any of the most crying evils of our luxurious age arise from the pressure of poverty upon those who are unprepared to meet it. The sins of the fathers are, by the working of natural laws, visited on the children” (247-248). In a society of rapid changes, many people were unprepared for adversity, and their aspirations for riches or social advancement made them neglect taking precautions that would have saved their family.

Although young, often in a state of acute distress and not used to exertion, the governess heroine is generally depicted as mature and quite able to cope with her work. Her status as an orphan without siblings often forces her to stand alone wherever she goes. However, this pattern is reversed in *Agnes Grey*. Inga-Stina Ewbank points out that contrary to most other governess heroines, Agnes “at least for the best part of the novel, [has] both her parents alive” (59). Like no other heroine, Agnes is looked upon as a mere child by her elder sister Mary and her parents. This is especially evident before she leaves her family. Asking her mother for some useful employment at home, Agnes is told to assist her sister with the household work, or go for a walk, and when approaching Mary, she is encouraged to “practise [her] music, or play with the kitten” (67). While portraying Mary as a younger version of their efficient and hard-working mother, Brontë lets Agnes describe herself as idle and unskilled. Although well educated, Agnes lives the life of a ‘time-killer’ to some extent, and not until she becomes a governess does she embark on the road of hard work. She admittedly shares this initial situation with several other governess heroines, but she differs in that her loving family regard her as too young and incompetent for exertion.

Agnes Grey is also different from many other governess heroines in that she actually wishes to become a governess. When she first states her intention,

her mother “utter[s] an exclamation of surprise, and laugh[s]” and her father, “in spite of his dejection”, also laughs it off. After this initial surprise, the parents become serious. Mr Grey, “a tear glisten[ing] in his eye”, is quite decided on the matter: “No, no! afflicted as we are, surely we are not brought to that pass yet” (68). Allowing for her youth and lack of experience, it may seem surprising that Agnes proclaims her wish to become a governess. However, she tells her mother: “I am above eighteen, and quite able to take care of myself, and others too. You do not know half the wisdom and prudence I possess, because I have never been tried” (68). This is quite the opposite of the case in many other governess novels, where the young heroine has indeed been put to trial before going out. Generally she has lost one or both of her parents, and the economic failure of her family is often described as humiliating.

Agnes does not seem to feel disgraced by the economic distress that her family suffers. Therefore, it is not surprising that her urge to go out as a governess consists not solely of a desire to be of financial help at home; she also harbours a yearning to leave home. Like many male characters within the *Bildungsroman* genre, she wishes to create a life for herself:

How delightful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world; to enter upon a new life; to act for myself; to exercise my unused faculties; to try my unknown powers; to earn my own maintenance [...] to show papa what his little Agnes could do; to convince mamma and Mary that I was not quite the helpless, thoughtless being they supposed. And then, how charming to be intrusted with the care and education of children! (69)

Full of expectations before leaving her family, Agnes finds the last weeks at home “long [and] tedious”, although “full of bright hopes and ardent expectations” (70). Angeline Goreau points out that Agnes Grey’s longing to go out as a governess is “crucial to the structure of the book” (43). Although Agnes’s experiences are no less distressing than those of other fictional governesses, the effect of her hardships is actually intensified by her initial desire to become a governess. A recurring feature in the novel is the striking way in which Agnes’s first opinions are contradicted when she encounters reality.

Another initially enthusiastic girl is found in Hofland’s *Ellen, the Teacher*. In the very opening of the novel, the young Ellen tells her mother “I should like very much to be a teacher, mamma” (3). Hofland’s novel might have been read by Anne Brontë; it was available to the Brontës in the Keighley Mechanics’ Institute (Ewbank 20). Although not noted in connection with *Agnes Grey*, the novel has been seen as a possible influence on *Jane Eyre* (Ewbank 21 and Beaty 621-622). Pitman’s *My Governess Life, or, Using My One Talent*,

which deals with governesses working at a school, likewise features a heroine who expresses her longing to become a governess; “I think I found my true vocation when I entered the career of a governess” (10). Such examples are interesting, as they point at a romanticised picture of governess work. As will be remembered, Anna Jameson stated that no one became a governess of her own free will. Although Hofland’s Ellen Delville and Effie Northcroft in *My Governess Life* do fairly well as governesses, Agnes Grey’s optimism is soon turned into dejection.

Most protagonists are not so optimistic or self-confident before leaving home, however. Matilda Meadows in Cheap’s *The Nursery Governess*, for instance, differs radically from Agnes Grey and Ellen Delville in her attitude. After having talked to a well-informed woman about teaching, she sighs, “What shall I do? O how ignorant I am! Undertake to teach *others!* – Impossible” (22). Her low self-esteem renders her much more nervous than Agnes when she enters her employment. Like Brontë’s Mrs Grey, Mrs Seymour in *Emily, the Governess* shrinks from the idea of sending her daughter out as a governess. When the decision is made, she asks, “[d]o you think, my Emily, your mother’s heart does not ache at the thoughts of parting from her child” (6). Although Clara Mordaunt’s aunt in Blessington’s *The Governess* tries to accept that her niece wishes to support herself, her protests are seen in her comments concerning the advertisements Clara reads, and in the way the young woman is treated on her arrival at her first employer’s house. It is through the aunt’s remarks that the reader learns about the humiliation Clara faces. Loving and caring parents and relatives try to prevent these heroines from entering the occupation of governessing, and when they come to realise that it is the only possibility, their sorrow in itself voices a kind of criticism of the plight of the governess. Those who love and cherish the governess heroine seem to be the hardest critics of the governess system in the novels.

There are a number of fictional governesses who have entered the profession as a way of escape, often under disguise. Although not all of these stories are typical governess novels, the circumstance requires some comment. Louise Silver in Mulock Craik’s *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), for example, has been forced to leave France for political reasons. She is really one Louise d’Argent, the daughter of a French Jacobin. Being poor and in distress, she feels that her only chance of creating a new life is to conceal her French descent and pose as a governess. When, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the governess novel genre developed along the lines of new genres – such as the sensation novel – the escape motif featured repeatedly. For example, Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s tragic heroine Lucy Graham in *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), the protagonist of Dora Russell’s *The Vicar’s Governess* (1874), and the

governess in Rosa Nouchette Carey's *Only the Governess* (1888) all escape unhappy marriages and become governesses as a way of concealing themselves. Similarly, Martha Smyth in Selous's *The Young Governess* is really an aristocratic woman named Dorothea Stanhope. These governesses enter their situations without their employers' knowing much, if anything, about them. Braddon explicitly states that "[n]o one knew anything about her except that she came in answer to an advertisement" (5). In Louisa M. Alcott's story "Behind a Mask, or, A Woman's Power" (1866), the protagonist Jean Muir is an actress who stops at nothing to gain a rich titled husband.

The veiled background circumstances of such governesses serve to increase the dramatic tension of the story. This is also the case in some late governess characterisations. For instance, in Neville's *Only the Governess* (n.d.) Lady Patricia Holme assumes the identity of governess to escape an arranged marriage. Meeting a woman who is going to Cornwall as a governess on the train, she is lured into swapping identities with her. However, Lady Patricia does not know that Dora, an impostor who has run away from her husband, sees the possibility of blackmailing her. A similar tension – although with a comical twist – is achieved in Layard's *Dolly's Governess: Being the Strange Adventures of a Splendid Liar* (1904), where a young man is taken for the new governess. This story features young Rupert Pomfret who is on his way to a dress rehearsal of a play where he is to appear in the role of a woman. Sitting in a train carriage, he is – by mistake – given a letter addressed to a governess on her way to a new situation. A series of improbable confusions lead up to Pomfret's embarking on the mission of serving as a governess for a lovely girl. Another case of cross-dressing occurs in J.F. Vallings's play *The New Governess. A Farcical Comedietta for the Drawing Room or School Room* (1896). There, the true identity of the governess is also unknown to the employer. In the rather spectacular denouement of the play, however, the governess in disguise turns out to be a male burglar.

Some governess novels such as Wood's *East Lynne* and the anonymous *Charlotte's Governess* (1902) feature protagonists who turn out to be long-missing persons. Like Alcott's criminal Miss Muir, both Lady Isabel Vane and Miss Mannering literally disguise their faces. Although Lady Isabel's once beautiful face is disfigured by a railway accident, she takes to wearing a wig and blue spectacles when returning to her own house as a governess. Miss Mannering tries to sit in the shadow when interviewed for her position. Indeed, she has every reason to keep a low profile; she looks very much like her mother, who turns out to be the employer's estranged wife.

The initial misfortune in governess novels – be it solely financial or also of an emotional kind – generally has a catalytic effect, as it sets off the story, as

well as sets its tone. The fact that the heroine in most novels comes from a fairly stable middle- or upper-class background is vital in connection to the aspect of social criticism. As pointed out, real-life anxieties, such as economic instability and aspects of class mobility are echoed in the genre. Whether the protagonist is a gentle heroine-like character, or a woman using governessing as a disguise, her taking up work is linked to social factors. The same is true when it comes to the educational background of the governess heroine. In an era which paid such an interest in edification, the schooling and learning of the protagonist becomes important in the genre.

The educational background of the governess

The educational background of the governess heroine is important, because of the elements of contradiction that it entails. In her discussion of the “status incongruence” of the Victorian governess, Peterson claims that because the governess had herself received the kind of education she was hired to bestow on her pupils, “her employment became a prostitution of her education, of the values underlying it, and of her family’s intentions in providing it” (11). This paradox is significant within the governess-novel genre, where the educational background of the heroine is used as a way to position her vis-à-vis the employers. Generally depicted as less educated than the governess, they buy from her the kind of education they deem essential for their daughters’ advancement.

This paradox is a central issue in the novels. In Blessington’s *The Governess*, the Williamson children inform Clara Mordaunt that their mother has told them that “governesses were *never* ladies, but were merely useful to teach young people how to behave as ladies” (31). For newly-rich people like the Williamsons, the main use of a governess is not to impart knowledge to their daughters, but to initiate them into the society of which the family aspires to be a part. Clara’s upper-class background has equipped her with qualities to which the Williamsons need access in order to climb the social ladder. However, although they realise that she is suitable because of her background, they are not prepared to give her any credit for it, since that would endanger their own social status.

There are various forms of educational background among the governess heroines, but three types seem to dominate. One group consists of those who have spent at least a part of their childhood at a school, in some cases being trained specifically for governessing. The plot of Cheap’s *The Nursery*

Governess centres round such a school. It is run by the competent Miss Egmont, whose instructions to her young charges read like a manual. Most protagonists cannot rely on such a mentor, however. In several novels, the years spent at school are either little referred to or characterised by loneliness and afflictions. Ellen Delville in *Ellen, the Teacher*, Caroline Mordaunt, Ruth in "*French Clogs*", or *the Happy Experience of a Governess*, and Lucy Clifford in *Chance and Choice, or, the Education of Circumstances*, for instance, spend part of their youth in a school. These women are usually orphans, or, like Lucy, banished from home by an evil step-parent.

The schools are described as cold and inhospitable establishments housing forsaken children and stern teachers. However, it should be pointed out that in many nineteenth-century fictional descriptions of schools, it is the institution as such which is under attack – not the education given there. In her discussion of education in Charlotte Brontë's novels, Thormählen points this out, stating that Jane Eyre, for instance, devotes herself with ardour and delight to her studies at Lowood (484). It was presumably also common among real-life governesses to have spent some time at a school, as did the Brontës. Sarah Bennett was sent to school in 1804 at the age of seven, upon the death of her father. The school was run by her godfather's sister, and "she remained [there] to receive an accomplished education" until she went out as a governess (Bennett 12). Special schools like the one in Cheap's *The Nursery Governess*, aimed at educating girls for the governess occupation, were set up in nineteenth-century England (see Hughes 39-40).

As I have indicated, governess heroines educated at school often experience an unhappy upbringing – Ellen Delville's schoolmates, for instance, torment her for being a brilliant student – but this does not seem to harm them in their future life as governesses. On the contrary, their childhood deprivation serves to strengthen them and make them caring and loving towards their own pupils. Jane Eyre, Ellen Delville, and Ruth in "*French Clogs*", or *the Happy Experience of a Governess* also gain teaching experience while at school, which makes them more attractive on the labour-market and less at a loss when entering private employment. Governess protagonists who have been brought up and educated at schools are often portrayed as fairly well-educated but having a limited outlook on life, which may be explained by an isolated school milieu. Jane Eyre comes across as an able teacher of Adèle, and she speaks French well. However, the refinements that should attend the 'accomplishments' are lacking; she is painfully shy, and Mr Rochester quickly perceives that she is no great pianist.

Although Jane Eyre is not a brilliant musician, her employer is nevertheless taken with her water-colours. She does not seem to have received

any training, but nonetheless has a streak of artistic talent. Rochester tells her that the pictures have “not enough of the artist’s skill and science to give [them] full being”; but he finds them “peculiar”, and they form part of his fascination with her (146). In *The English Governess*, M’Crindell depicted Clara Neville’s artistic skills in a way similar to the corresponding element in *Jane Eyre*. We learn that Clara

was fond of drawing [...] but [had] neither the skill nor the confidence of an artist. She had also a decided taste for music [but] she could not play [the piano] with the brilliancy or execution of many whose performances she had often admired, but utterly despaired of ever equalling. (44)

Clara has not been brought up at a school, and as her education has been conducted entirely by her mother, she has not benefited from music masters either. Although he does not discuss the protagonists’ education, Jerome Beaty argues convincingly for M’Crindell’s book as a possible source for *Jane Eyre*. Apart from certain similarities in plot and structure, Beaty states that *The English Governess* “may well have been known to the Brontës: it was published by Aylott in 1844; the Brontë poems, by Aylott and Jones early in 1846” (1996, 52 n3).²

Some governess heroines, like Clara Neville and Agnes Grey, have been brought up and furnished with a good education at home, by their parents. Although no great artist or musician, Clara Neville is undoubtedly well-educated; her “education had been rather a refined than scientific one [...] and the object constantly kept in view had been that of cultivating and elevating the *mind*, not of making her shine in external accomplishments” (43-44). One would think that Clara Neville’s background would make her a more appropriate governess than the accomplished upper-class girl; but M’Crindell’s heroine faces major difficulties in acquiring a situation because her attainments are not what is sought by employers. On several occasions she misses the chance of employment owing to her lack of ability to finish girls in music. By opposing Clara Neville’s qualities to those requested by prospective employers, M’Crindell conveys the impression that the heroine has a higher intellectual standard than the prospective employers she encounters. It is common for the heroine’s educational background not to correspond to what employers want. When Effie Northcroft in Pitnan’s *My Governess Life, or, Using My One Talent*

² Andrew Block likewise states Aylott as the publisher of the M’Crindell novel; however, the British Library copy was published by W. H. Dalton in 1844. I have not been able to establish whether there were indeed several editions by different publishers of M’Crindell’s novel in that first year. At any rate, it is interesting to note that M’Crindell’s novel was published in America the same year, by Herman Hooker (Beaty 1977, 641 n25).

informs the headmistress that she has studied Latin and Euclid, she is told that she “would have done better to have studied French, and music” (26).

Real-life governesses also found that inadequacy in one specific subject could greatly diminish their chances of employment. The anonymous writer of *The Mother the Best Governess: A Practical System for the Education of Young Ladies* (1839) deplored “the foolish *fashion* afloat just now to study German” (33n). In *Guide to Service: The Governess* (1844), George Stephen recorded the painful experience of an accomplished instructress, who lost the opportunity of an engagement as she was not able to teach German. Although this governess was perfectly able to teach all other languages and subjects, it was to no avail as the employer expressly wished for German. It is interesting that the language desired should be German. Queen Victoria married the Prince Albert in 1840, which may explain a German ‘craze’ at the time.

The third group of governesses with respect to educational background is the one that perhaps serves the genre characteristics best. The heroine who has been given an expensive and ‘accomplished’ education, with no thought of her ever having to use it other than for the purposes of shining in society and making a favourable match, will face the greatest difficulties when embarking on a governess employment. In addition to her social degradation, she often suffers from a total lack of preparation for the work she is to undertake. Such heroines are found in early governess novels, like Blessington’s *The Governess* and Buckley’s *Emily the Governess*, as well as in later ones, such as W.E.’s *Ellen Manners; or, Recollections of a Governess* and the Hunts’ *The Governess* (1912).

Miss Mannering in *Charlotte’s Governess* has received a fine education on the Continent. A first glimpse of her social degradation – in this novel, the adoption of a disguise which is part of her ingenious plan to vindicate her mother – is supplied in a scene where she meets Hertha Wilmington, who is a cousin of her pupil Charlotte. This young woman thinks she recognises the governess, and when she learns her name, she asks “[y]ou were at school with Miss Beauchamp, in Germany, were you not? I must have seen your photograph among her things”. The governess acknowledges knowing this Miss Beauchamp, and Hertha exclaims in surprise: “But the school was considered one of the best in Germany! I had no idea –”. Miss Mannering interrupts her by calmly replying “That such a person as a governess could have been at it?” (47). This example illustrates not only the importance of choosing the right school on the Continent, but also Hertha’s discomfort when she thus realises the transitory quality of social position.

In *Emily, the Governess* the dissimilar attitudes towards education held by the heroine's parents are stressed. Emily's mother, a clergyman's daughter, has to yield to her husband's wish for an accomplished education:

Mrs Seymour adopted the same plan which her own parents had done, in educating her child herself; but the very great taste, and excellent ear she evinced at an early age for music, induced her to agree to her husband's proposal in having a music and singing master to attend her. (31)

Actually, Emily's love and talent for music lead to problems in her employers' house, when it is revealed that she is an accomplished musician. Fictional governesses who play or paint brilliantly often come in for criticism and envy, as they then encroach on the territory of other young and unmarried women. The governess was expected not only to be able to teach her pupils how to play, but also to amuse her employers and their guests. When she does so in novels, however, she often comes in for an unwanted attention, for instance from male guests. This aspect will be addressed in Chapter 6 below.

As I stated earlier, Blessington's Clara Mordaunt belongs to the category of well-educated upper-class girls who are suddenly impoverished; "Brought up in affluence, large sums had been expended in her education, and being gifted with great natural abilities, her proficiency satisfied not only her doting father, but surprised the professors who instructed her" (4). Throughout the novel, Clara's education serves to emphasise her superiority by birth and to elevate her in comparison with the various employers she encounters. However, although her talents were greatly appreciated before her father's death, they later function as a cause of mistrust. For some of her employers, her lady-like manners pose a threat. When employed by the pretentious Mrs Vincent Robinson, who hosts a literary salon, Clara is urged to put music to her mistress's high-flown texts. Apart from her ability to carry out this request, Clara's embarrassment at the whole situation, and indeed her surprise at the peculiar set of people present, emphasise her superiority.

It should be noted that some novels from the latter part of the century feature governesses who are not ladies by birth, and consequently do not possess any education of value. Peterson points out that in Victorian fiction, "the governesses who were figures of evil or immorality were women of humble origins" (7). She brings up Thackeray's Becky Sharp and Miss Gwilt in Wilkie Collins' *Armadale*. A few other notable examples, like Lizzie Scroop in Brook's play *Our New Governess* (1845) and Miss Myers in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), could be mentioned here. In the novel *Christian's Mistake* (1865), Mulock Craik called women who chose governess work as a means of bettering themselves the "dead-weight which drags down their whole

class” (148). As a contrast to the protagonist Christian, who works as a governess prior to her marriage to the widowed Mr Gray, Mulock Craik introduces the character of Miss Bennet,

one of those governesses whom one meets in hopeless numbers among middle-class families; girls, daughters of clerks or petty shopkeepers, above domestic service, and ashamed or afraid of any other occupation, which indeed is only too difficult to be found, whereby half-educated or not particularly clever young women may earn their bread. They, therefore, take to teaching as ‘genteel,’ and as being rather an elevation than not from the class in which they were born. (148)

Such governesses always did harm, according to Mulock Craik, since they neither had the “working faculty of a common servant, nor the tastes or feelings of a lady” (148). The idea of the unlady-like governess also embodies another characteristic commonly associated with low class in nineteenth-century fiction, namely a lack of moral principle. The Miss Bennet referred to above is employed in the Gray household without Christian being informed. This forms part of a power struggle between Christian, now Mrs Grey, and her sisters-in-law. Apart from that, Miss Bennet is interesting because she so blatantly transgresses the social code of governesses by seeing a man in secret. Characters like Miss Jessel, whose relationship with the man-servant Quint is so central in Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), are thus not common in the genre of governess novels.

Especially in early novels, an authorial attempt at elevating the intellectual and scholarly level of the governess, regardless of her educational background, is often present. This is especially apparent when she is compared to her employers, who are consequently depicted as grossly ignorant. The lack of education among employers in novels from the mid-nineteenth century is likewise used to satirise middle-class pretentiousness. In Hall’s *The Governess*, for instance, a woman is determined to find a governess who can teach all languages to her children, but she is herself at loss when formulating the advertisement; “G-r-, there are two ‘ees’ in Greek?” she asks her friend (4). Here, there is a noted difference between fact and fiction. Non-fictional sources repeatedly pointed out that a great number of governesses were in fact poorly prepared for the occupation. This discrepancy may be explained by the fact that many novels were written as sympathetic pleas concerning the bad working situation of governesses. Thus, authors might have wished to portray the governess as an innocent victim of circumstances, rather than supporting the – probably justified – contemporary claim that governesses would have to be better educated in order to gain more respect.

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the low salaries of governesses could to some extent be explained by their low level of education. Another of Hall’s

governess characters realises this, knowing “that if she had been taught a little more of all, or of one, of the accomplishments she is obliged to teach, she might command a higher salary” (“The Daily Governess” 1852, 110). In this case, however, that is not conceivable, as the widowed mother cannot afford to have her governess daughter further educated. Joan N. Burstyn states that nineteenth-century employers became increasingly aware of the difficulty of finding good governesses towards the middle of the century, but she writes that it is not easy to gauge whether this was due to “a decline in standards among governesses in the 1830s and 1840s, or whether the established middle classes, to advance their own claims to hegemony, were merely demanding greater sophistication from them” (23). Whichever was the case – and it was probably a combination of the two – the educational background of governesses was a topic that gained increasing attention. Although many fictional governesses are described as possessing great skills in various subjects, it is clear that they have seldom been educated in such a way as to actually prepare them for their work. This is of course connected to the core problems of the social degradation involved; the heroine’s initial shock when taking up paid employment is emphasised by her lack of preparation.

It was increasingly felt that if governesses were to be more respected, they would have to be better qualified. The Governesses’ Benevolent Institution (GBI) was established in 1843. Five years later their activities were expanded, and the first college of education for women in England – Queen’s College in London – was set up (for a history of Queen’s, see Grylls). While daytime pupils paid a tuition fee, evening classes for working governesses were free of charge as a means of raising the standards of governesses already employed. The GBI claimed that in order to increase wages for governesses, it was not enough to raise their academic standards; a way of measuring these had to be created, too. Queen’s College therefore granted certificates to students passing examinations held twice every year. This was not altogether unproblematic, however. Examination of women was something new, and the matter of men examining women was sensitive. Even in the Victorian schoolroom, the subject of examination caused problems. As Hughes writes, “[t]here was a feeling that the competitive element made [girl pupils] intrinsically unladylike” (76). However, as one fundamental idea behind Queen’s College was that the education given there should provide governesses with tangible proof of their academic standard, governessing was slowly moving from the impoverished lady’s last resort towards a more professional status.

The growing desire to raise the academic standards of governesses must not be seen as an isolated phenomenon. Other measures to improve education were taken at that time: for instance, the Committee of Council on Education achieved regulations concerning the training for elementary school teachers in

1846 (Horn 339). The wish to create a college for governesses should also be linked to “the efforts of a wide range of male middle-class occupations to win professional status during the middle decades of the century by tightening entrance and training practices” (Hughes 184). Among the founders of Queen’s College was the influential Frederick Denison Maurice. He had been Professor of English history and literature at King’s College, and now held its chair in theology (Crow 152). Together with Charles Kingsley, Maurice was one of the men behind the Christian Socialist Movement, and he had been involved in several projects concerned with charitable education. He had personally come into contact with the problems of governesses; several of his sisters had experience of teaching and governess work. As mentioned in Chapter 1 above, one of them was the manual writer Mary Maurice, who is said to have focused his attention on the work of the GBI.

Queen’s College differed from other institutions of female education in its stress on academic subjects. Teachers delivering lectures in as various topics as Latin, mechanics and theology were recruited from King’s College. Although Queen’s had opened with a view to improving the standard of governesses, the college was detached from the GBI as early as in 1853 and continued to develop as an institution for the higher education of women. In the wake of Queen’s, other female educational institutions were set up, some of them especially directed at governesses. While there were no female lecturers at Queen’s, institutions such as Ladies’ College in Bedford Square and Cheltenham’s Ladies’ College were run by women (see Kamm, Barnard). The educational level of governesses did improve during the second half of the nineteenth century, as did the number of schools preparing young women for the occupation. However, only a minority of all governesses actually held college certificates. As Kathryn Hughes points out, “college was accessible only to those who lived in central London and had the motivation and confidence to attend regularly and submit to the rigours of examination” (186).

Although the contemporary debate as well as the establishment of bodies of education like Queen’s College clearly suggested the need for improving governesses’ education, it should be pointed out that some of the writers who were engaged in the debate were not in favour of higher education for women. Anna Jameson, for instance, although she praised the initiative taken by Queen’s, was hesitant as to the actual value of specific training for governess work:

[L]et it never be forgotten, that no teaching can give the essentials - that a woman is a good governess through her qualities, not through her acquirements; and for myself, I should not much like to take into my family a woman educated expressly for a teacher. I should expect to meet with something of a machine... (16-17)

Jameson believed that “the same education which would form the good mother, would form the good governess” (19), and she stressed the personal qualities of the governess rather than intellectual attainments. Such an attitude is not often found among the employers in the novels; nor does it seem to have been generally prevalent in nineteenth-century England. On the contrary, many parents preferred a governess who would ‘finish’ their daughters for the social scene, rather than one who could educate them properly for the maternal duties that lay ahead of them.

One explanation of the relative absence of formal training in the novels may be that mistresses are generally depicted as caring only about superficial qualities, thus favouring brilliancy in languages and piano playing more than intellectual or personal qualities. As will be claimed in Chapter 5, mistresses are also afraid of being put in a disadvantageous position vis-à-vis a governess who embodies feminine and maternal characteristics. In general, governess novels try to convey a picture of the superior qualities of the heroine. This may be an explanation why so few fictional governess heroines possess college certificates. The kind of feminine traits that were cherished by novelists, and by most manual writers too, were not attainable through college or lectures; they were supposed to come naturally to the governess. Only one of the novels included in the present study – Sydney Grier’s *His Excellency’s English Governess* (1896) – features a protagonist with more formal education.

In this novel, Cecil Antruther graduates from the South Central High School in London.³ She obtains “the prize for French in the B.A. Final, and the second place in Honours for Mental and Moral Science”. As she is the first woman to gain such awards, “the friends of female education were jubilant” (2). Her successful educational background secures for her the prestigious post as governess of a young potentate in Baghdad. It is explicitly stated that her modern education makes her the choice of His Excellency’s advisers who have come to London for the purpose of finding a suitable governess for his favourite son. It is worth noticing that they find her especially attractive as she is so thoroughly English. As will be shown in Chapter 6 below, education was an English export product in the nineteenth century.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, governess advertisements in the press increasingly contained references to college diplomas and pedagogical merits, which indicates toughening competition. In 1887, for example, a twenty-two-year-old woman who advertised in *Work and Leisure* specified her qualifications as “Good English (certificate), Music

³ The epithet ‘High School’ probably refers to the schools established and managed by the Girls’ Public Day-School Company, which was founded in 1874 (*OED*).

(certificate), French, and Drawing” (*W&L* May 1887). The year before, another governess had pronounced that her teaching was “thoroughly experienced, Modern Style and Kindergarten”, supposedly indicating that she possessed skills in Fröbel’s pedagogics (*W&L* September 1886).

It is not altogether easy to define what level of education the nineteenth-century governess was supposed to have reached. Miss C. Stevens’s manual *Guide for Governesses (English and Foreign) Nursery and Finishing* (1875) stated that the governess “ought to be a good reader aloud, a good speller, and write a good hand, besides having knowledge of the first rules of arithmetic” (6). Half a century earlier, the anonymous *The Complete Governess: A Course of Mental Instruction for Ladies* (1826) had demanded similar skills in the governess, stressing “the power of being able to write a letter in a graceful and accurate style” (92). Such qualifications do not seem particularly advanced, but the very fact that they were voiced presumably points at a relatively low level of education among women going into governessing. Discussing female employment, Jessie Boucherett likewise referred to a woman who had “passed two years as teacher in a school intended to prepare girls for governesses, who yet could not be trusted to write an ordinary business letter, on account of the frequent grammatical errors she committed” (*EWJ* Feb 1860, repr. in Lacy 228).

When it came to finishing governesses, who taught older girls, *Guide for Governesses* stated that the proper training would be

to be educated at a good school in the south of England, remaining there a year or two as governess pupil, and from there, going (if possible as pupil, but if not, as governess pupil,) to Paris for a year to acquire fluency in speaking French; from France she should proceed to Hanover for a year, to perfect her German and music.
(11)

The cost of educating a governess in accordance with the recommendations quoted above was estimated at £175 to £225. It is questionable whether that was an affordable sum for prospective governesses. *Guide for Governesses* seems to be assured of the rewards awaiting those who invested in a good education, however, and the volume ends with a list of illustrative examples from real life. Some of the governesses listed had secured good situations, while others had managed to marry into the employer’s family. This last statement is somewhat surprising, as manuals otherwise tended to point out that governessing was not to be seen as a stepping-stone to an advantageous marriage, but that gratification was to be found in the work itself.

To increase their value on the labour market, many real-life governesses tried to invest in language studies abroad. In the 1820s Anna Jameson, while working as a governess in Florence, considered taking lessons from an Italian

master but decided against it in order to be able to lay by money to finance a younger sister's studies in Paris instead (Thomas 13-14). Twenty years later, the Brontë sisters went to Brussels to improve their French. Rachel M'Crindell, the author of *The English Governess*, had apparently also been trained abroad. At the end of her novel, she printed an advertisement for the school she conducted with another woman, claiming that they had both been educated in France and could therefore "ensure to their pupils advantages which are often unattainable in England". Some women had received their education abroad long before it became necessary for them to work as governesses. For instance, it seems as if Agnes Porter, who worked around 1800, spent some time at Boulogne in her youth. Martin states that she may have gone there expressly to learn French, as she seems to have been fairly fluent in that language (11). Furthermore, Porter read books both in German and Italian all her life to keep up her skills.

Some governess stories include foreign education, too. The story "An English Governess in Russia", which purports to be a true account, is set in the early 1860s. The narrator relates how, after her father's unexpected death, she comes to realise that her skills are not deemed good enough to secure her a position as a governess. She thus decides to "go abroad at once, learn German, and keep up my French and music" (*W&L* 1882, 78). When in Germany, she manages to find an advantageous position with a family in Livonia.

A European education did not always guarantee a satisfactory employment, however. A governess signing herself as "Myra" advertised in *Work and Leisure* in the 1880s, asking only for "Board, Lodging, and Laundress" as a resident teacher. This comes as a surprise, as she had in fact been thoroughly educated on the Continent; she offered to teach "French and German, acquired in France and North Germany" (*W&L* 1886 Advertisement supplement). It is unknown, however, whether she had studied languages abroad for the purpose of obtaining a situation as a governess, or if she, like Lucy Blair in Harriet Gordon Smythies's *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence*, had spent all her life abroad, only having come back to England as financial misfortune forced her to seek employment. Lucy Blair's excellence as a linguist is demonstrated when she applies for a post as a governess and is asked by a prospective employer to translate some French sentences he has put together. Instead, Lucy has to correct his French and the outcome of the interview is that the man asks Lucy to teach him instead – an offer which she refuses. The linguistic proficiencies of Emily Dawson in Hall's *The Governess*, of Martha Smyth in Selous's *The Young Governess: A Tale for Girls*, and of Miss Mannerling in *Charlotte's Governess* are likewise explained by their having been brought up abroad.

Sara Mary Fitton's *How I Became a Governess* (1861) centres round the heroine's experience of a school in France. As it is set in a school and not in a private family, this novel is disqualified from being a pure governess novel; but its depiction of a young woman's educational path towards a good position as a governess is nonetheless of interest for this study. The protagonist, Margaret, is a clergyman's daughter who is first educated by her elder sister at home, then spends some years at a school in England and, after the unexpected death of her father and sister, goes to Paris in order to obtain "a tolerable knowledge of French, acquired in France, [which] was considered indispensable for an English governess" (24). Teaching English in return for French lessons, Margaret is dismayed by the low standard of her pupils and indeed by the school as such. Fitton apparently wished to convey the impression that this was not unique, as she had Margaret state that the "slight knowledge of French to be acquired by a short residence in a French school is more than counterbalanced by the possible destruction of health [and] by the un-English habits likely to result from living in a state of false independence amongst foreigners" (58).

Although the contemporary debate repeatedly stressed the necessity of better education and training for governesses, not many governess heroines admit to their own incompetence. Some do, however; among them is Lucy Clifford in *Chance and Choice, or, the Education of Circumstances*. She repeatedly fears that her educational background will not suffice. Just after she has met her spoiled and unruly Russian pupils, she laments her "utter want of experience" (34). After some time in that dreadful situation, she again doubts her capacity, asking herself "[w]hat if my frail temper be unable to stand the trials which I see in my path – if I fail in the profession I have chosen for myself" (45). Lucy's lack of confidence can be linked to her having defied her father. While most heroines have lost their parents, Lucy herself breaks off contact with her father, and although she feels she has done the right thing, doubt besets her. Notwithstanding being poorly treated by her Russian employers, she states her inexperience as a reason for giving notice. She tells her employer she does not wish to leave "from any feelings of rancour at what has passed, but from a sense, which has long been pressing upon me, of my being utterly unfit, from my youth and inexperience, to contend with the difficulties attendant on my situation" (70). Although this may be an easy way of escaping from her Russian employers, Lucy chooses an unusual approach.

Sherwood's Caroline Mordaunt has passed through six positions when she draws the conclusion that "I had been sent forth from the school in which I had been educated, in total ignorance of every Christian doctrine; I knew no more of the God I pretended to worship, than a Mohammedan knows of the Redeemer" (104-105). Having got this far in the novel, the reader realises that

Caroline is deficient not only in her religious training, but in virtually everything of importance for a teacher. Unlike many other writers within the genre, Sherwood does not seem to have aimed at elevating the situation of governesses; rather, she employed the governess character as a way of depicting a woman's development from ignorance to humility and knowledge. Therefore, Caroline recognises her ignorance herself. For example, she realises that the French pronunciation she has acquired at school is not good enough for the aristocratic family she first comes to. Her pupil "abruptly told me that she could not talk French with me, for she did not understand my French" (12). Before this embarrassing situation, Caroline herself had described her old school as an

ordinary place of education, and the characters formed therein were of the most ordinary description; though with regard to accomplishments, we certainly had many advantages, for we had a teacher from Paris, who spoke French perfectly well, and knew how to perform on the harp in a superior style. (3)

Caroline Mordaunt's bad pronunciation was probably not unusual. Sherwood sets her story in the late eighteenth century, and there are other stories featuring governesses educated at that time or in the early decades of the nineteenth century with a poor command of French.

Generally speaking, when governesses in novels are said to be insufficiently educated, this functions as a means of illustrating employers' lack of concern over their children's education and welfare, or, as a device used to move readers to compassion for the governess. The former is clearly the case in *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*, where three aristocratic sisters are contrasted through their respective governesses. The cold-hearted Lady Oakley leaves her two daughters in the total care of

Miss Mason [who] was the ignorant tyrant of her real domain, the school-room; – her pupils were looked upon as the ills necessary to her situation in life, as spies on her conduct, and that of her only associate, the waitingwoman: she was recommended [by Lady Oakley's mother and her own old governess] as 'accommodating, low-born, and cheap'. (83)

The reader feels no pity for this woman, who seems to be as devoid of any interest in pedagogical matters, and indeed of maternal feelings, as her employer.

Harriet Martineau's short story "The Old Governess" from 1850, on the other hand, is a moving portrait of the ageing Miss Smith, who stays behind when her employers emigrate to America. In her fifties, she realises that her old-fashioned style will not obtain any new situation for her. She knows that

her French, learned during the war, when nobody in England could pronounce French, would not do in these days, nor that her trilling, old-fashioned style of playing on the piano, which they [her employers] thought so beautiful, would be laughed at now in any boarding school; and that her elegant needleworks were quite out of fashion; and that there were new ways of teaching even reading, spelling, and writing. (43)

Here Martineau, who was active in the governess debate both as a fictional writer and as a social critic, wished to point out the lack of a safety-net for governesses in their old age. Miss Smith's accomplishments are painfully out of date, and she sees herself driven out of competition by a new and better educated generation.

A few years before Martineau published her story of the old governess, the playwright Charles William Brooks employed a badly educated governess as a comic device. Contrary to Martineau's story, *Our New Governess* creates a satirical effect by letting the governess, the vulgar and unladylike Lizzie Scroop, be strikingly uneducated. She succeeds in procuring a situation in a newly-rich family foolish enough not to recognise her impropriety. Since her employers are unable to discern that her language is that of a servant girl rather than of a lady, the true character of their children's governess is not revealed until a middle-class friend of theirs arrives.

The educational background of the governess heroine is naturally of great importance for her success in the classroom. At one level, the recurring complaint in Victorian England that governesses were inadequately trained for their occupation is contradicted in the novels. An authorial wish to elevate the educational level of the heroine is visible in a number of novels where the governess is described as an accomplished lady who has received an excellent education. When it comes to actual performance in the schoolroom, however, her scanty preparation becomes visible.

In connection with the abilities of governess heroines, it should be noticed that a few characters try – albeit without success – to make a living through other means than teaching. Lucy Blair in Harriet Maria Gordon Smythies's *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence* unsuccessfully tries writing (the novel even 'reproduces' her stories) and painting; in Emma Raymond Pitman's *My Governess Life: or, Using My One Talent*, Effie Northcroft similarly tries to earn money through writing, embroidery, and painting. As artistic skills such as these were considered important social assets, many nineteenth-century women were no doubt skilled artists. Anne Brontë depicted two women who tried to make a living through their painting – not only Helen Huntingdon in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, but also Mary Grey in *Agnes Grey*.

Procuring a situation

Once the decision to go out as a governess had been made, the young woman concerned often faced difficulties in finding a situation. The anonymous article “Going a Governessing” from 1858 recorded a painful list of difficulties encountered by a young woman who was forced to take up work. The prospective employers she encountered were almost without exception devoid of pity for the young woman. One lady told her “[y]ou do not look strong [...] you look weighed down with trouble” (*EWJ* 1858, 397). Lack of enthusiasm was of course a problem for many women seeking employment. Forced out into the world at a moment of crisis, many governesses must have made an unfavourable impression.

In November 1840, Charlotte Brontë told her friend Ellen Nussey that she had corresponded with a Mrs Brooke who was in want of a governess, having frankly stated that if the Brookes “wanted a showy, elegant, fashionable personage” she was not the right person. Although Mrs Brooke “expressed herself pleased with the style of [Brontë’s] application” (*Letters* 231) it all came to nothing, because the Brookes wished for music and singing, which Charlotte Brontë could not teach. Some months later, Charlotte Brontë again wrote to Ellen Nussey, saying,

I told you some time since, that I meant to get a situation, and when I said so my resolution was quite fixed. I felt that however often I was disappointed, I had no intention of relinquishing my efforts. After being severely baffled two or three times, – after a world of trouble in the way of correspondence and interviews, – I have at length succeeded, and am fairly well established in my new place. (*Letters* 246)

No information is given as to how she gained this situation. However, Elizabeth Gaskell stated in her biography that once the decision to go out as a governess was made, Brontë “set to advertising and inquiring with fresh vigour” (136). Whether or not Gaskell was correct in assuming that Charlotte Brontë’s efforts to obtain a situation were vigorous, a certain enterprise was needed in order to find employment. However, while Charlotte Brontë, in Gaskell’s words, felt it “her duty to relieve her father of the burden of her support” (136), most fictional governesses are desperately in need not only of a situation, but also of somewhere to live.

Strictly speaking, there were three methods of obtaining a place as a governess: through contacts, through advertising, or through a register office. It was common during the first half of the nineteenth century to find suitable employments through contacts, either directly or by way of an influential friend. In the 1840s, Anna Jameson stated that “[i]t used to be only the titled and the

rich who required governesses for their daughters [and the need] was generally fulfilled by the poorer relatives of the family” (7). In her account of various ways of finding a situation, Kathryn Hughes states that there were advantages for the governess in becoming employed within the social network of her own family, as she could then “preserve the fiction that she was a volunteer” (43) and thus did not have to subject herself to the humiliation of advertising.

In the novels, employment within the family network is not always an assurance of being well treated, however. Agnes Grey comes in contact with the odious Bloomfields through relatives, and Emily Seymour obtains a situation with acquaintances of her late father’s to whom Mrs Seymour applies for help. The employer, Lady Ashbury, informs Emily’s mother that the girl will be treated as one of the family. Instead, she is openly humiliated and used as a way of showing off her mistress’s charitable pretensions. In this case, the links between the families make the humiliation worse than if Emily had been employed by people unknown to her and her family. It also points at the importance of financial status; once that is gone, the governess cannot count on being respectfully treated by those who have hitherto been friends of her family.

When the number of women seeking employment as governesses rose, and ultimately exceeded the demand, governess advertisements became a stock issue in the daily papers. While a handful of governess advertisements were to be found each day in *The Times* in the 1840s, this number was greatly increased towards the end of the century (Hughes 44). *The Times*, which was the paper preferred by middle- and upper-class families for announcing births, marriages, and deaths (Davidoff 1973, 62), also seems to have been an important medium for governess advertisements. There are also quite a few governess heroines who advertise or answer advertisements in the press. In several novels, such as *Lady Audley’s Secret*, Rosina Bulwer Lytton’s *Very Successful* (1856), Georgiana M. Craik’s *Riverston* (1857), Florence Warden’s *The House on the Marsh* (1883), and “Ruth’s” “*French Clogs*” or *the Happy Experiences of the Life of a Governess* (1893), the advertisements are specifically stated as having appeared in *The Times*, too.

It seems that some nineteenth-century employers refrained from advertising because of the occurrence of forged letters of reference among servants (Peterson 7). Because of the heroine-like qualities of most protagonists in the novels, such deceit is rare, but a criminal character like Alcott’s Jean Muir has given false credentials as a way of wheedling herself into her employers’ house. W.M. Thackeray’s Becky Sharp has also doctored up her background in order to get a situation in *Vanity Fair* (1847). In her autobiographical *Period Piece: A Cambridge Childhood* (1952), Gwen Raverat – a granddaughter of Charles Darwin – described a holiday governess by name of Miss Z. Neither the

children nor their mother liked her, as they thought she was vulgar and slapdash in her manners. After Miss Z. had left, they learnt that she was not a real governess: "Apparently she had been in the habit of taking temporary jobs, sometimes as governess, sometimes as parlourmaid. The gulf between a servant and a governess was then unbridgeable; it was as if a shrimp had tried to turn into a tiger" (67). Although Raverat does not state whether Miss Z. found employment through advertising or not, she is an example of how little families often knew about the woman that they employed to educate their children.

When the matter of advertising is commented on in the novels, it often concerns the painful experience of publishing the necessity of having to take up employment. Therefore, it is not surprising that when advertisement was resorted to, it seems to have been a common practice, both for governess and employer, to advertise under a pseudonym. Charlotte Brontë told her friend Ellen Nussey that "[y]ou may answer an advertisement without mentioning your name giving only initials. Some people however require the name" (*Letters* 209).

When Clara Neville in *The English Governess* has decided to go out as a governess, she considers advertising. However, the friends she has sought refuge with "entertained a decided objection to this method" (49). After a chance of getting a situation through contacts comes to nothing because Clara's strong religious principles are irreconcilable with those of the prospective employer, and as her friends still object to advertising, she decides to answer an advertisement instead. This was apparently not considered to be as demeaning as advertising oneself.

Agnes Grey decides to advertise for her second position, because her first situation, procured through personal contacts, has not been successful. In her biography of Anne Brontë, Gérin points out that these circumstances are similar to those of the author herself, who gained her first situation through her teacher Miss Wooler and then had to advertise for her second one (120, 151). For Jane Eyre, on the other hand, who is entirely without connections, the only possibility of obtaining a situation is to put in an advertisement in the local newspaper. Charlotte Brontë imitates the standard formula of nineteenth-century governess advertisements in letting Jane state her qualifications in the following way:

A young lady accustomed to tuition [...] is desirous of meeting with a situation in a private family where the children are under fourteen [...] She is qualified to teach the usual branches of a good English education, together with French, Drawing, and Music. (99)

Similar wordings are found in other novels like Anna Maria Hall's *The Governess. A Tale* (1842). In both content and tone, the fictional examples are

strongly reminiscent of advertisements in the press at the time. In 1855, in the advertisement section of the magazine *The Governess*, for instance, a woman stated that a “LADY is desirous of RE-ENGAGEMENT in a family. She teaches English, French, Italian, German, Music, the Rudiments of Singing and Drawing”. This governess was apparently better qualified than for example Jane Eyre, as well as more experienced.

On an increasing scale, agencies listing both governesses who sought employment and situations available appeared. The Governesses’ Benevolent Institution kept a registry in London at 66, Harley Street, which was free of charge, unlike the privately run agencies. Unscrupulous agencies charged fees that were in some cases as high as five per cent of what the governess might hope to earn in one year (Hughes 46). The anonymous, allegedly autobiographical, article “Going a governessing” discusses such agencies. Although the one in Harley Street is described as serious, the author warns young women not to apply to other “Scholastic Agents” as “these people realise large fortunes [...] by the silver pieces wrung from the orphan’s scanty purse; by the greedy per centage on the teacher’s hard-earned salary” (EWJ 1858, 401).

In the genre, the registry as a way of obtaining a situation is not common, but it appears in some stories from the second half of the nineteenth century. Lucy Blair in Gordon Smythies’s *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence* pays to have her name inserted in agents’ books. Amy Williams in Dora Russell’s *The Vicar’s Governess* also goes to a registry office when forced to seek employment. She says that her father has died after failing in business; towards the end of the novel, however, it is revealed that she has gone out as a governess in order to hide from her bigamous husband. Going to the agency is an unpleasant experience for the young woman; she is scrutinised by a manager who tells her she is too shy, too pretty and too well dressed. This interview is similar to first interviews between governesses and their prospective employers, but the difference is, of course, that it is not the future mistress who examines the governess, but a supposedly neutral agent. The poor governess sighs, “[h]ow little people know – how little girls know, when they first think of it – the difficulty there is in obtaining a situation, or, indeed, making a livelihood at all” (6).

Ellen Manners, in the novel of that name, also decides to try an agency when she has spent two long months in advertising “in various papers [...] but to no purpose” (33). Thus, she makes up her mind to “go to London, directly Christmas was over, and try [her] fortune at one of the offices [she] had heard of for governesses” (34). Happily enough, Ellen learns about a lady who wishes to engage a governess before she has to go to an agency. “*French Clogs*”, or *the Happy Experience of a Governess* is set in the middle of the century. The

orphaned protagonist applies to an agency, obviously the one run by the Governesses' Benevolent Institution: "June, 1855, finds her on the doorstep of 66, Harley Street. How weary that faithful butler and door-keeper must be. Never did man more deserve a goodly pension than he" (71-72). The idea of many women applying to the registry is thus conveyed through the hard work of the servant who admits them to the house. Huldah Rossiter in Rosa Nouchette Carey's *Only the Governess* (1888) also enters her name in the books at "the Governesses' Registry in Harley Street" (195).

In the novels, the governess heroine's first contact with her future employer – whether in the form of a letter or at an interview – gives a glimpse of what will befall her later in the novel. This seems to have been the case in real life as well. Not seldom, nineteenth-century governesses were subjected to minute investigations of their families and characters. In some cases, the governess would be asked to show her skills. In 1827 when Sarah Bennett was seeking a governess situation with General O—, who turned out to be a most benevolent employer, she was put through a trying interview. Her brother and biographer writes that Bennett's "timidity and humble estimate of herself created some nervous feeling" when she was asked to sit down "at the pianoforte, in the presence of the General and Sir George Smart, the organist at the Chapel Royal, to make her trial performance" (Bennett 19). As Miss Bennett was employed, however, the General was apparently fully satisfied with what he heard. Such interrogations were understandable, as parents ought to wish the best for their children; but the way in which they are presented in fiction, and indeed in contemporary non-fictional material, they appear rather as demonstrations of power on the part of the employer towards the governess.

In 1849 *The Times* quoted a letter which a young woman had received after having applied for a governess situation. The future governess was asked to answer a long list of questions "intended to prevent unnecessary trouble". These questions referred to previous experience and to the governess's education and attainments as well as to her family background. For example, she was not only asked to supply the names and address of her own parents, but to "[s]tate the names, addresses, occupations of any other of your near relations, or intimate friends" and to disclose whether she had had "any matrimonial engagement" (16 April, 8). This article seems to have attracted some attention; W. H. Bainbrige, for instance, quoted it when he delivered his "Lecture [...] for the Purpose of Promoted the Establishment of a Governesses' Institution in Liverpool" (1849, 18). It should be pointed out, however, that the numerous questions asked regarding character and personal circumstances were not unique for governesses. In 1844, *Punch* parodied the usage of such interrogations, formulating letters from both a mistress and a maid, with their respective list of

questions concerning the other regarding character, usefulness, and regularity (1844, 7:13-14). Interestingly enough, however, these letters are not directed directly to the mistress and the servant, but to the servant living next door and to the maid's former employer, respectively.

Such interrogations occur in the novels, too. The questions asked create an impression of an inquest rather than of a conversation between equals. A somewhat unusual detail occurs in *The House on the Marsh*, where the governess answers an advertisement in *The Times*. The employer has explicitly asked for a young governess, which Miss Christie appreciates, as she has been repeatedly turned down by employers owing to her being only eighteen years old. She answers the advertisement, "enclosing [her] photograph and the list of [her] qualifications" (5). The reference to her having sent her picture is both unique and significant for the continuation of the story, as the employer turns out to be a man of extremely low morals.

No matter how the heroine procures her situation, it seems as if most novelists within the genre make the search for work into a humiliating trial for the governess and for those who care about her. Especially in cases where the governess character is employed by families known to her and her family, her disgrace is conspicuous. Her social fall becomes even more prominent when she actually arrives at her employers' to take up work.

Leaving home and arriving at the employer's

When the decision to go out as a governess had been taken, and a post had been procured, the young woman's passage from the state of being the daughter of one house to becoming the governess among strangers in another followed. This important transition is of consequence in the governess novel genre; symbolic or dramatic language is frequently used to mark the heroine's passing from the one social station to the other. The intended effect seems to be to bring out the element of a rite of passage in the alteration of the heroine's status.

Unfavourable weather conditions reflect the mood of several governess heroines when they set out for their engagements. It is on "a coldish mornin'"(72) that Agnes Grey takes farewell of her family for the first time; the eponymous heroine of *Margaret Stourton, or a Year of Governess Life* leaves home on "a rainy, misty morning" (19), and Ellen Manners in the novel of that name arrives at her first place of employment "on a cold, wet evening in January" (37). Agnes Grey's journey to the Bloomfields' is described as autumn-like; "though it was not far past the middle of September, the heavy clouds and strong north-easterly wind combined to render the day extremely

cold and dreary, and the journey seemed a very long one" (73). The impression of cold lingers with Agnes even after she has entered Wellwood. Her first impression of Mrs Bloomfield is that this lady is "somewhat chilly in her manners", with "cold grey eyes" (74). The physical description of the mistress offers a strong contrast to the picture we get of Agnes when she sees herself in the mirror. Unlike Mrs Bloomfield's "thick black hair", Agnes's hair has been "uncurled and entangled" by the wind; and in contrast to the mistress's "extremely sallow complexion", the harsh weather has "dyed" that of the governess "of a pale purple". When Agnes later tries to eat the tough beefsteak and "half-cold potatoes" she is being served, her hands are so numbed by the cold weather that she cannot handle knife and fork correctly. Agnes likens herself to an infant, in describing her grasping the cutlery "like a child of two years old" (75), thus expressing her feeling of inferiority.

The metaphorical use of coldness was used a decade earlier by Sherwood and Buckley. In *Caroline Mordaunt* the young governess describes her first employers as "in nowise remarkable, excepting for the excessive coldness of their manner; had their features been of marble, there could not have been less expression than these great people chose to throw into their countenances" (9). Similarly, in *Emily, the Governess* Lady Ashbury receives the young governess "with that cold formality so chilling to the young heart just parted from all it loves; but to poor Emily Seymour it was worse than chilling, for she felt a deeper pang at that moment than she had ever before experienced – it was the pang of wounded pride!" (74).

It is noteworthy that just like Agnes Grey, Emily Seymour knows her new mistress by hearsay as a good person. Not until the very moment when these young heroines meet their mistresses do they realise that their position in life has been severely lowered. Such a cold reception serves as a foreboding of the emotional distance between employer and governess, as well as of the former's aversion to treating the governess as a lady. Agnes Grey is tired after the long journey, and after Mrs Bloomfield has given her a "polite salutation", she "[w]ith due politeness" shows Agnes to her room (74). The repetitive use of the word 'polite' is surprising, as Mrs Bloomfield is singularly arrogant. As E.V. Clark has pointed out, the cold reception that Agnes receives from Mrs Bloomfield is in stark contrast to the description of this lady that Agnes's aunt has previously supplied. Likewise, there is a lack of consistency between the way Mrs Bloomfield describes her children and the way Agnes perceives them (Clark 167). Anne Brontë's use of contrasts and reversals in the scenes of arrival is striking, emphasising departure from the security of home without implying any sense of welcome in the new employers' house. On both her arrivals, Agnes's hopes for a kindly reception are crudely, and for the genre typically, crushed by the employers' insensitivity to her situation.

Just as inclement weather serves to prepare the reader for the heroine's future trials as a governess, distance is sometimes given a similar meaning. Several fictional governesses travel far to reach their destination. Emily Seymour in *Emily, the Governess* finds her progress from home to employment slow. Feeling "agitated by the extremes of hope and fear", "[s]he was five hours on the road, which appeared to her more like five days" (72). This impression of prolongation suggests the young woman's fear of what lies ahead. Having arrived at the Ashbury estate, Emily "endeavoured to rally her remaining spirits, and fortify her mind to encounter the formidable introduction which she so much dreaded" (73).

Jane Eyre's journey is indeed a long one; starting out from Lowood at four o'clock in the morning, she arrives at Millcote sixteen hours later, cold from "the rawness of [the] October day" (107). Unlike most governesses, however, Jane is warmly greeted on her arrival. Mrs Fairfax, who anxiously declares "you must be cold" (110), immediately invites her up to the fire. Whereas Agnes Grey is left to feel embarrassment because of her cold hands, Jane is kindly helped with her bonnet by Mrs Fairfax. "I daresay your own hands are almost numbed with cold", the benevolent housekeeper remarks, and then orders hot negus for Jane (110). The strong juxtaposition between the weather and the warm welcome might to some extent be seen as a first sign that appearances are deceptive at Thornfield. In this context it is interesting that Jane mistakes Mrs Fairfax for the mistress of the house. It should also be noted that Jane's journey to Lowood School is described in terms similar to those used of her trip to Thornfield; it is on a "[r]aw and chill" winter morning that the little girl sets out from Gateshead on her fifty-mile journey to the chilly deprivations of Lowood (42). The potent force of the weather and other natural elements are important all through the novel; this has been pointed out by a number of Brontë scholars.

A scene similar to the sympathetic welcome Jane Eyre receives is found in *Caroline Mordaunt*. The heroine's second position is with a wealthy merchant. Her new mistress being out when Caroline arrives, she is kindly asked by a female servant to sit down by the fireside. This woman tells Caroline that she is a poor relative of the mistress: "[m]y father was unfortunate, but I have a comfortable home under this roof, and every respect is paid to me; so I employ myself with my needle" (36). Having owed her first dismissal to too close an association with a slanderous lady's maid, Caroline now believes it is essential to keep aloof from the domestics. However, it seems clear to the reader that this servant's fate is very like that of a governess. Especially in the early nineteenth century – the time of Sherwood's novel – housekeepers and governesses were often drawn from the lower echelons of the family circle; Mrs Fairfax, for

instance, is also a distant relative of Mr Rochester's. Caroline Mordaunt is blind to the corresponding situations of the kind servant and herself, however, and immediately thinks she has to keep her distance.

Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that Caroline learns to appreciate kindness in the course of the novel. Entering upon her sixth engagement, she arrives late in the evening at her employer's house, where she is received by "a respectable elderly servant" (92). As in the later *Jane Eyre*, the governess is treated to hot wine and then seen to her bedroom. This elderly servant in *Caroline Mordaunt* is genuine in her care for the new governess, and at this stage of the novel Caroline has learned to recognise true benevolence when she sees it. Such faithful servants function as stand-ins for the governess's employer on the evening of arrival. A similar method of introducing the heroine to her new station is employed in *Margaret Stourton, or a Year of Governess Life*, where the young woman stays for a few days with a friend of her employer's before taking up actual work. Arriving in London on a cold evening, Margaret's temporary hostess welcomes her with tea, saying "[y]ou must be cold, pray come nearer the fire" (22).

The previous examples show 'new' governesses facing harsh weather. This is by far the most common type of weather imagery in the genre, but Blessington reverses the use of weather in *The Governess*. When Clara Mordaunt leaves her aunt's lodgings to go to her first position,

The sun shone bright and joyously [...] The flowers in the little balcony never looked so fresh and gaily tinted as now that she was bidding them farewell; and the birds, to which she had been accustomed to throw the crumbs of bread after breakfast, hopped fearlessly amongst them sending forth their cheerful carols. (10)

Clara's situation is opposite to that of the little birds; she has every reason to fear what lies ahead of her. Her grief at having to leave this humble but blissful place is made increasingly clear by the haughty reception she receives at the Williamsons' house. This scene could be compared with Anne Brontë's picture of Agnes Grey leaving for her first situation. She looks back at her village and sees "a slanting beam of sunshine" over the parsonage:

it was but a sickly ray, but the village and surrounding hills were all in sombre shade, and I hailed the wandering beam as a propitious omen to my home. With clasped hands, I fervently implored a blessing on its inhabitants, and hastily turned away, for I saw the sunshine was departing; and I carefully avoided another glance, lest I should see it in gloomy shade, like the rest of the landscape. (72)

Like Clara Mordaunt, Agnes leaves sunshine behind her when leaving her family to take up her situation. Significantly enough, however, Brontë's tone is much more ominous. Where the sun in Blessington's novel is bright and joyous,

it is here “a sickly ray” that is quickly “departing”, leaving the village in a “gloomy shade”.

While a resident governess would encounter problems primarily within the household where she was employed, the daily governess faced her main struggles going to and from her employers. In the novels, bitter weather often accompanies the daily governess heroine on her walks between engagements. Howe writes about the daily governess hurrying between appointments as “one of London’s saddest sights. With her umbrella neatly furled, her long cloak, muddy at the hem, and a bundle of books carried under one arm, she was out from seven in the morning to seven or eight at night” (125). Indeed, this seems to have been the generic description of the daily governess. In Hall’s short story entitled “The Daily Governess” the protagonist is described in analogous terms. Hall states that the daily governess’s approach in wintertime could be told “by the plashing of her clogs”, and she would be seen carrying “a heavy brown cotton umbrella, whose weight her thin white wrist seemed hardly able to sustain [...] and she generally rests a roll of music, or one or two books, in the bend of the arm, the hand of which carries the parasol” (109-110). The long daily walks are also part of Hall’s picture, as is the lack of protection from “impertinent fellows attempt[ing] to peep under her bonnet” (113). A few years later, in her novel *The Governess*, Hall once again drew a portrait of daily governesses, commenting upon “their early hours, cotton umbrellas, and the cowed, dejected air with which they raise the knocker, uncertain how to let it fall [...] the roll of new music clasped in the thinly-gloved hand [...] the small portfolio, pallid cheeks, haggard eyes” (22).

Dinah Mulock Craik’s *Bread upon the Waters: A Governess’s Life* and Smythies’ *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence* are two novels in which the heroine spends long hours in getting to and from her work. Although the journey – whether on foot or by omnibus – is made every day, it nonetheless serves to mark the painful social transition of the heroine, as outlined above. To avoid having to show her degradation to old friends and acquaintances, Felicia Lyne in *Bread upon the Waters* takes lodgings as far away as possible from her father’s house, and thereby encounters a completely new world within London. She acknowledges in her diary that her new location implies “a rather long walk into town to my pupil; but exercise is good for me” (28). One spring day while wandering through the streets of London between her engagements, Felicia thinks back on the life she has left behind:

[I]t seems so strange to walk in our old neighbourhood, and see the same shops, and signs, and turnings [...] if I did meet any one – I in my unneat winter wrappings, and a bundle of books under my arm! If any one saw me, spoke to me; – *would* they

speak? I – that was a young lady in her father’s house, and am – only a daily governess! (35)

Felicia Lyne is characterised by a profound Christian humility coupled with irrepressible optimism; therefore it is not surprising that she initially sees the long walks as good exercise. After some time she states that she has ceased going into those streets where she might meet friends she once knew. Instead, she “walk[s] along back streets now”, indicating that it “is nearest, and I ought to save time if possible” (36). Some years later, however, when Felicia procures a situation with an aristocratic family, she can afford to take better lodgings nearer town. “I cannot walk so well as I used to do” (57), she then states, perhaps indicating that the years of long walks back and forth through London have affected her health.

Smythies’s *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence* tells the story of Lucy Blair, who is forced to go out to work in order to provide for herself and her widowed mother. The novel opens on a stormy March morning:

There was scarcely a woman, still a lady, to be seen, when a young girl issued from a dingy house in Arundel Street, Strand, armed with a Mrs. Gamp-like umbrella, which, so far from sheltering her from the pitiless storm, seemed very likely to increase her discomfort, and add to the miseries of a walk very few men would have liked to undertake on such a morning [...] she had to run along the wet and muddy streets, almost flooded by the rain, her teeth chattering with the cold, her little feet ill-shod, soaked, and muddy, and her bonnet blown awry. (1:2-3)

As in the Brontë novels, the relentless weather is part of the discomfort experienced by the young governess. Although the weather certainly seems to be stormy and wet in most governess novels, the description of Lucy fighting the elements in order to arrive at her employer’s may be seen as a condensed picture of the life of the daily governess. The precarious situation of the governess is here expressed by her being out in weather “scarcely a woman, still a lady” and “very few men” would venture out into. By thus placing her heroine in a rainy and cold London setting, Smythies manages to exclude her from domestic warmth; like the lower-class worker, she is forced out to earn her bread.⁴

When Harriet Martineau discussed various types of governesses in an article in 1860, she stated that “the daily-governess is subjected to the evils of our climate, like any outdoor worker” (*OAW* 1860, 268). Like Smythies, she stated that the harsh weather was a major problem for daily governesses.

⁴ The “Mrs Gamp” mentioned is a character in Charles Dickens’s *Martin Chuzzlewit*, whose “large cotton umbrella has given rise to the expression ‘a gamp’ for an umbrella, especially an untidy one” (Drabble 378).

Martineau advised the daily governess to dress “prudently”; “Rain-proof coverings and stout shoes, put off on entering the house; a bonnet that covers the head; and under-garments that may defy keen winds, may make the worst weather as safe as the best”. This was apparently wishful thinking, though, as low pay prevented many daily governesses from dressing that well. Martineau further pointed out that although “the omnibus is an admirable invention [... it] is no longer to be depended upon for speed or regularity” (268), which indicates that many governesses had to resort to walking. Furthermore, the fare was too high for many daily governesses. A real-life governess who suffered long journeys between engagements was Claire Clairmont, the mother of Lord Byron’s daughter Allegra. Working as a daily governess in London in the 1840s, she complained to Mary Shelley about her long working days, four hours of which she spent traversing London in an omnibus (Gittings and Manton 177).

When governessing is taken up as a way of escape, it is natural that the journey will cover some distance. The heroine’s initial attitude will then be that work is liberation from some far worse destiny. In *Chance and Choice, or, the Education of Circumstances*, Lucy Clifford steals away from the Paris hotel one early morning, only leaving a letter to her father in which she states her determination to earn her own bread rather than being banished to the convent he has in mind for her. Lucy’s first position is in the family of a Russian prince then staying in the French capital. Immediately after having joined them, Lucy accompanies her employers on a long journey eastward. Her experience differs from those of most other fictional governesses, though, as she actually describes the trip in cheerful terms. In a letter to a friend she writes:

So now for the journey. To me, who had never been beyond Paris, nor had ever seen a mountain or a forest, it was very delightful; far more than I could have expected. I find that I must reserve the description of it, and of our steamboat voyage up the Rhine, for another letter [...]. We arrived here yesterday, and I am pleased with what I have seen of Tœplitz. (35)

The European spas and towns that Lucy visits have names that would sound exotic to English readers. The escape theme is prominent all through the story because of the hurried departures the heroine is forced into on several occasions. The author furthermore employs various ways of describing Lucy’s arrivals at her different employers’. For instance, the Russian Prince and Princess are in such a hurry to leave Paris that they hardly have time to welcome the new governess, while Lucy’s second mistress, a benevolent Polish Countess, on receiving her exclaims “Welcome! – a thousand times welcome, my dearest child! [...] Ah! How pale you look, – poor little one, sit down on this sofa and rest yourself, while I call my little Ida and introduce her to you” (76). The

Countess is one of the maternal characters who assist the motherless Lucy Clifford through the story, a matter to which I will return in Chapter 5.

Another governess heroine who enters governessing as a way of escape is Clara Neville in M'Crindell's *The English Governess*. Her chief reason for going out to work is her desire to get away from her murderous stepfather. Meeting him by chance on a December evening while "hurrying on through the brilliantly lighted city" during her search for a governess situation, she feels how "a hand was roughly laid on her shoulder, and, at the same moment, both her arms were seized, with no very gentle grasp". Looking up in terror, Clara recognises "her unprincipled step-father, – the cruel author of her mother's death":

'Clara Neville!' he said, in a low deep voice of concentrated fury, 'do not flatter yourself that you can escape me. I will follow you wherever you go; I will watch my opportunity; you have thwarted and disgraced me, and it shall not be long before you feel my vengeance'. (62)

Thus threatened, Clara soon afterwards joins her sister and brother-in-law on their voyage to Gibraltar. This journey is not dramatic as such, but the cause of it certainly hurries the heroine away towards governessing. Soon after her arrival at Gibraltar, Clara obtains a situation in the "well-disposed and amiable, though not decidedly pious" family of a Lieutenant-Colonel (86). Clara meets with a warm welcome upon entering this family; she feels secure and is met with kindness from both employers and pupils. As Clara now believes herself to be out of her tormentor's reach, the governess position functions as a sanctuary for her. Another expression of escape in this story is religion, which also offers a kind of solace and retreat from the harshness of reality.

When the heroine arrives at her employers' house, she first encounters their servants. Odious footmen feature in several governess novels, and as they would regularly be the ones to answer the door, the governess often encounters them first. Daniel Pool states that "popular writings joked incessantly about [footmen's] humourless self-importance" (221). Even if the function of male servants in livery – whether footmen or of other status – was not intentionally comical in governess novels, such men are generally furnished with negative characteristics. This can be linked to what Mary Maurice wrote concerning the relation between the governess and the servants, being "generally decided by the treatment she receives from the master and mistress, [as] their tone is copied in the kitchen" (1849, 52).

When Buckley's Emily Seymor arrives at the Ashburys' estate, she is first conducted through the park by the porter. Then,

a consequential livery servant was [...] in readiness to attend her to the drawing-room. [Emily's] heart almost failed her as she followed him up the wide staircase; for though the house she had so lately inhabited was not much inferior in magnificence to this [...] there was something in the couched sneer of the servant which now annoyed her; for it seemed to say to her throbbing heart, we are now upon a footing, or you are only a step above. (73)

This passage emphasises both the self-important manner of the servant and his wish to mark his scorn for governesses. Ascending the stairs of Lord Ashbury's house, Emily learns that she is no longer regarded as a lady.

Accompanied by her aunt, Blessington's Clara Mordaunt experiences a similar arrival at her first employers' home. As she enters the house for an interview, the footman immediately warns her that the children are wicked and malicious, and that the previous governess was more tormented than a rat could be by a cat. When Clara returns soon afterwards to take up her engagement, the coachman has to knock several times on the door before someone opens it, and he is then severely rebuked by the footman for not ringing the bell instead: "a *single* knock, or a ring at the bell, would have been more *properer* for sich [*sic*] like folk" (10). This servant then refuses to carry Clara's box up the stairs until her aunt has bribed him. In Selous's *The Young Governess: A Tale for Girls*, Martha Smyth faces a similar ordeal when a servant exclaims "'Tant my place to be carrying governesses' boxes, I reckon" (7). The daunting proportions of the heroines' degradation are quite apparent in such opening scenes.

Clara and Martha are not the only impoverished Victorian heroines who face initial difficulties with servants. In Anne Marsh Caldwell's *Lettice Arnold* (1850) the protagonist Lettice goes to one Mrs Melwyn as a lady's companion. On her arrival, Lettice witnesses her mistress's embarrassment at the servants' unwillingness to carry up her bags. The position of the lady's companion – like that of the governess – is ambiguous and no one knows how to handle the situation. Mrs Melwyn is not sure which of the servants should take Lettice's box, and her lack of authority is experienced by Lettice as painful: "Had the momentous question arisen about a visitor's trunk, the matter would have been easily settled – the onerous task of carrying it between them upstairs would have been discharged, as a matter of course by the two footmen – but this was a new case – an anomaly" (189).

The detail of knocking or ringing at the door requires some further comment. A number of governess heroines face difficulties in knowing how to approach the door of their employers. Victorian etiquette connected to visiting and entering houses was intricate. The bell, which would be heard in the kitchen area of the house, announced deliveries or servants, while knocking seems to have been the privilege of gentleness. The question of how the governess should

enter thus became a matter connected to her status. When this surfaces in the novels, the heroine's position is not usually questioned by her employers, but – more significantly – by the domestics of the house. The question at issue is whether the governess is a lady who should be admitted as a guest, or whether she is to enter as a servant. The problem is the subject of a Victorian illustration which shows a daily governess standing at an impressive-looking gate in foul weather (Fig. 2). There are two bells, one marked 'visitors' and the other 'servants', and the down-trodden governess presses the second one.



Fig. 2 The Daily Governess (Howe *A Galaxy of Governesses*, 1954)

Coming to her first position, Caroline Mordaunt is accompanied by her elder cousin, who proposes that they should not go into the house through the main entrance, as there seems to be company at the aristocratic house. Caroline absolutely refuses to acquiesce: “I will not enter the house through the offices. I don’t count myself as a servant, and I will not be treated as such” (7). The cousin clearly thinks it more appropriate for Caroline to enter through the servants’ part of the establishment. Having thought the situation over, however, he says,

[p]erhaps I judged wrong in offering to lead you by the back way; but mind my advice, – do not take too much upon you; though you are not to be counted as a servant, yet you must not reckon yourself to be equal with my lady, and you must

endeavour to find your place, which is a sort of middle one; neither carry yourself too high nor too low. (8)

This comment embodies the quintessence of the problem. The governess's intermediate position between servants and gentlefolk generates her difficulties connected with entering the house of the employer. When, some time later, Caroline arrives at her second situation, she asks the coachman to "go up to the house and knock or ring". Here, she apparently lets the driver choose, and from the succeeding sentence we learn that he knocked on the door. This seems to have been a good choice, as the domestics opening the door ask Caroline if she is "the young lady expected from the country" (33).

For daily governesses, the matter of knocking on the door was of course an everyday problem. Hall wrote about the "dejected air with which they raise the knocker, uncertain of how to let it fall" (1842, 22). In Gordon Smythies's *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence*, Lucy Blair thinks back to a former employer's house "where there [was] not one face on which [she had] not seen a scowl and a sneer, always ready to answer the timid and often thrice-repeated knock of the daily governess" (III:107). This is clearly contradictory to the advice supplied by Isabella Beeton on the topic of answering doors: "the servant charged with the duty of opening the door will open it promptly" (970). A girl asks Lucy whether a daily governess gives "a single knock or a ring", upon which the governess answers "[a] Daily Governess is a lady, my dear [...] and she gives a double knock" (II:189). Patricia Thomson comments on this passage, acknowledging it to feature "a point of etiquette, which must have been only one of many cruxes that arose and by which the modern reader finds himself continually surprised" (55).

When the governess heroine has arrived at her employers' house, most novels pay some attention to her reception. While she is promptly admitted in some novels, others depict her having to wait to be received by those who have hired her. When Agnes Grey arrives at Horton Lodge, the home of the Murrays, for instance, she does not see her mistress

till eleven o'clock on the morning after my arrival, when she honoured me with a visit, just as my mother might step into the kitchen to see a new servant girl – yet not so, either, for my mother would have seen her immediately after her arrival, and not waited till the next day. (119)

By thus contrasting the mistress to Agnes's own mother, whom the reader knows to be a high-principled woman, Anne Brontë manages to introduce Mrs Murray as a strikingly incompetent employer. The governess's family background here functions as a kind of resonance box for what happens in the novel. The reference to how Mrs Grey would have acted on the employment of a

new servant girl further underlines the difference between the Greys and the Murrays.

Presumably, the contemporary reader would also immediately have recognised this late welcome as a premonition of Mrs Murray's insufficiencies. Manuals of the age stressed the virtue of early rising; in Isabella Beeton's *Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1861) it is even called "one of the most essential qualities which enter into good household management" (2). The reader's suspicions would have been strengthened by the fact that Mrs Murray apparently delays telling the new governess what is expected of her for several days. This defies another of Beeton's rules. She points out "an error – and a great one it is – into which some mistresses fall. They do not, when engaging a servant, expressly tell her all the duties which she will be expected to perform" (7). The early editions of this manual admittedly do not talk about governesses but about domestic servants; still, a comparison is warranted, as many fictional employers do treat their governesses as servants. Comparing herself with "a new servant girl", Agnes also indicates the degradation she experiences by not being introduced to her employer upon her arrival.

When Caroline Mordaunt has entered the house of her first employer, she describes how she is left in a small parlour for more than an hour "trying to amuse myself with a book, but continually returning to a painful sense of my situation, and wishing, oh! how earnestly, that I were back at school again" (9). Similarly, when Caroline enters the house where she is to take up her fourth position, she is left for "probably more than an hour before any of the family appeared". Again, the young governess suffers from suspense; "during the delay I felt my spirits gradually sinking". Although the elegant drawing room is full of "every species of article which could contribute to amusement", Caroline is unable to pick up a book or touch any of the musical instruments (66). Both Agnes Grey and Caroline Mordaunt feel discouraged by the wait, and their employers immediately come across as careless. In the much later *Ellen Manners; or, the Recollections of a Governess*, the heroine also finds that the lady of the house is absent on her arrival. Although this mistress does not belong to the group of unpleasant mistresses, her nonchalant attitude to the woman who is to take care of her children's education is pointed out in her failure to receive the new governess.

Blessington's Clara Mordaunt faces quite an exceptional reception when she first meets her fourth set of employers, the upstart Manwarrings. She meets them at a hotel in London, and as they devour one dish after another, the poor governess is left watching them. When the Manwarrings have at last finished eating, Clara succeeds in gaining their attention. After a humiliating form of bargaining, she manages to come to an agreement regarding the terms of her

employment, and it is decided that she is to accompany them to their country estate the following morning. The last thing she is told by her new employers, however, is that she is expected at ten o'clock the following morning "that is, *after* you have breakfasted" (204). As starving is a general feature in this novel (see Chapter 6 below), this scene is only one of several which illustrate how greedy employers maltreat Clara. Here, she is not only denied food; nor do the Manwarrings show the slightest awareness of their inconsiderateness in making her wait.

Earlier in the novel, when Clara Mordaunt arrives at the aristocratic Axminsters' house, she is met by the marquis, who sends a message to his wife. He is informed that the mistress is occupied with singing with a male friend, and that the visitor – the new governess, that is – will have to wait. This embarrassing opening scene sets off a complicated plot of misunderstandings concerning Lady Axminster's virtue. These end in Clara's dismissal from the house, but at a later stage in the novel she is rehabilitated by the now happily reunited couple. A similarly negative first impression is given in *The Governess; or Politics in Private Life*. When Gertrude Walcot arrives at Elphinstone, she learns that her new mistress cannot see her that evening as she is going out for dinner. The day after, when Mrs Elphinstone is going to see the governess, she has to consult the letter of recommendation to find out Gertrude's name. This first-hand impression of the mistress does not seem intended to condemn her, however. Rather, it serves as a kind of preparation for the remarkable change Mrs Elphinstone goes through thanks to her governess. While the scene of arrival can thus serve different purposes, it always paves the way for what is to come.

In more than one novel the children voice their animosity as soon as they see the new governess. Clara Mordaunt and her aunt, for instance, hear a child screaming "I hate governesses, and won't see her!". When the children appear, one of them rudely asks Clara's aunt if she is the new governess and upon hearing that this is not the case, the child exclaims "Oh! I am so glad [...] for I hate ugly old women!". At this point the reader learns that Clara's aunt had been something of a beauty in her youth, "and if she had a weakness, it was that of wishing to be still considered to retain the remains of her good looks" (12). Thus, the children's impudence to Clara's aunt becomes part of the governess's initial humiliation. When Buckley's Emily Seymour first enters the drawing room, the Ashburys hardly notice her. Only the youngest child acknowledges her presence, but in a way that increases the heroine's feeling of mortification; the girl's

little inquisitive eyes kept examining minutely both [Emily's] countenance and her apparel; then, with that rude familiarity, which is so often characteristic of spoiled children, she inquired if she were the new governess. Poor Emily thought her

mortifications would never end: she merely answered that she was, and gladly availed herself of the opportunity of quitting the room. (75)

Yet another scene illustrating how the children's resentment makes the newly arrived governess feel dejected is found in Cheap's *The Nursery Governess*. Here it is important to note that Mrs Melville, the mistress of the house, feels reluctant to admit a governess into her house, but realises she needs help with her children. When little Olivia learns that she is to have a governess, she protests vigorously, upon which her mother replies "[i]f you had been a good girl [...] I never would have given you up to any other" (61). The governess is thus presented to the child as a punishment, and Olivia's subsequent reaction upon seeing her governess is not surprising:

Olivia immediately screamed; and the timid, modest Mary, had the mortification to hear, 'I won't then, Mamma, I won't have Miss Manners!' just as she was ushered into the room, where she no sooner appeared, than the child sprung to her Mamma, and hiding her face in her lap, continued the same unpleasant declaration, 'I won't have Miss Manners!' (61-62).

When the children voice such hostility, the governess heroine soon realises that her pupils only echo the true sentiments of their parents. As will be shown in the following chapters, although parents in most governess novels do not actually encourage their children's bad behaviour, they seem to find it easier to accept the governess's being despised than her being loved. In many cases, the governess gains the affection of her charges after some time, and they become increasingly pleasant towards her.

In the governess-novel genre, the rite-of-passage-like qualities of the heroine's introduction into the house of her employers are relevant in that the mortification she suffers is something she will have to cope with in order to develop. As will be discussed further in the following chapters, novels within the genre are structured around a series of escalating and more or less humiliating episodes and circumstances, which serve to reflect the heroine's moral superiority over her employers.

The social identity of employers

When Agnes Grey is looking for her second position, her mother rejects all proposals, since she thinks they indicate "low people, [...] too exacting in their demands, [...] too niggardly in their remuneration". After the Bloomfield experience, Mrs Grey urges her to try her "fortune in a somewhat higher family - in that of some genuine, thorough-bred gentleman, for such are far more likely

to treat you with proper respect and consideration, than those purseproud trades-people and arrogant upstarts” (112). She apparently means people like Agnes’s first employers, where the master is a retired tradesman, who has “realized a very comfortable fortune” (70). Criticism against the newly rich middle class was common in texts dealing with governesses. One article warned young governesses not to “take service in the family of some *nouveau riche*, [as there she] will meet with a thousand things to wither her heart - to mortify and gall her” (*ECJ* 1849, 306). According to the anonymous writer, the source of the problem was the social status of the employer compared to that of the governess. In many novels, it is clear that employers see the governess as a confirmation of their own social status.

Should the governess strive for an upper-class situation, then, or was employment among the middle classes to be preferred? Anna Jameson claimed that as a rule, “the higher the rank the greater will be the *courtesy* with which you are treated; such courtesy being ever in proportion to the wideness and impassability of the distance which society has placed between you and your employer” (35-36). In an upper-class family, the governess would thus experience “more solitude, but more independence”, and she would be “shielded [...] from petty affronts”, but would have “neither companionship nor sympathy” (36). On the other hand, Jameson argued, the governess might face a far less clear-cut position in a middle-class household. Although a middle-class situation could be preferable for a young and inexperienced governess, it might also prove difficult; in a middle-class family “even where the people are well-bred, you will be in a more ambiguous and a more difficult position”, (36). There, she said, “the discomforts inseparable from your position will come nearer to you, and in a form more disagreeable” (36). These discomforts concern the governess’s social position within the family, as her own middle-class origin might be felt as a threat there. On the other hand, belonging to a certain class was no guarantee for a specific type of behaviour. Anne Brontë was apparently only too aware of this, having Mrs Grey – herself the daughter of a squire – tell Agnes that “I have known several among the higher ranks, who treated their governesses quite as one of the family; though some, I allow, are as insolent and exacting as anyone else can be: for there are bad and good in all classes” (112).

Novelists seized upon such class-related difficulties when portraying the heroine as socially and morally superior to her employers. The marginalisation of the governess functions as the employer’s strategy to exercise power over an equal. In the light of this, it is interesting to look at the social class of some employers in the novels. Chapter 6 will focus on the social implications of the relative position of the governess heroine vis-à-vis her employer. Here, however, the social background of the employer will be at issue.

Non-fictional accounts of governess life give a varied picture of the social and professional status of those who employed a governess. Pamela Horn's review of the 1871 census of Winchester shows that

out of seven randomly selected families with resident governesses, one was the household of a large grocer and wine merchant, another that of the widow of an Indian army officer, two were coachbuilders, two were clergymen, and one was the proprietor of a classical and commercial school, who may have utilized the governess's services in his school as well as for his children. (333)

First-hand accounts also provide evidence of such variety in the professional status of employers. In the 1820s, Sarah Bennett, for instance, worked in families where the masters' occupations were listed as surgeon, gentleman, clergyman, and General, respectively. Her contemporary Elizabeth Ham was first employed by a family where the master was apparently a retired tradesman. In her journal, she recorded the manner in which she had realised how he had come into money. When she asked her pupils about some pieces of nice silk, one of them blushing replied that they came from the shop when the father left his business. Ham noted, "[o]f course, I took no notice, and then as now, thought no less of them for the fact, but only for the foolish vanity of concealment" (Gillett 204). Ham's second employer, who was a Unitarian poet, supposedly belonged to a higher educational and social stratum.

In the light of the strong social upward mobility of the Victorian age, it is interesting that the fiction of the time, juvenile fiction in particular, commonly attacked newly rich tradesmen, often making them the villains (Avery 195). In this context, it is worth noticing that several of the mean, unsophisticated, or vulgar employers in governess novels are in fact tradesmen; Mr Bloomfield in *Agnes Grey*, Mr Manwarring in Blessington's *The Governess*, and Mr Bradbury in *Ellen Manners, or the Recollections of a Governess* have all made their money in trade or manufacturing. In *Ellen Manners*'s case, her situation with the merchant's family proves difficult. She is admittedly herself a merchant's daughter, although it is stressed that one of her grandfathers was an Archdeacon and the other was an MP. Ellen's first position is with an aristocratic family, but when her pupils are old enough to be sent to a finishing school, Ellen takes up employment with the Bradburys. When the uncle of her pupils in this second employment proposes, Ellen feels hurt. Although he is presented as an honest and hard-working man, the governess feels offended that he should even ask her. Such an example shows the ambiguous relation between governess and employer. Upstart employers offered a market for employment, but the heroine feels superior and thus stands less chance of fitting in. To the *nouveaux riches*, an educated and lady-like governess was an important asset. As Davidoff states,

some newly rich people would hire well-trained upper servants to teach them the right etiquette (1973, 88). Several novels indicate that, at least in fiction, governesses also taught employers good, decent behaviour.

Aristocratic employers are seldom portrayed in a favourable light in the novels. Emily Seymor, Gertrud Walcot, and Lucy Clifford are all examples of lady-like, but not titled governesses facing difficulties with snobbish and cold-hearted aristocratic employers. In *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* this is actually a major theme. All through the story, the author contrasts Gertrude Walcot with countesses and baronesses who evince a parsimonious attitude similar to that which many heroines encounter in middle-class employment. The arrogant Lady Lyster, for instance, has fixed opinions on governesses, believing that the ideal is a woman who can be used for much more than merely teaching the children. To her youngest daughter, she praises a governess who doubled as a secretary and a lady's maid.

In the nineteenth century, it was popular to engage French servants as lady's maids because it was generally assumed that the French were superior when it came to fashion and elegance. As French governesses were also popular, in order to furnish children with a good French pronunciation, the idea of combining the two in one person probably occurred to more employers than Lady Lyster. It is important to note, however, that Lady Lyster's proposal would not only involve an extremely heavy workload for the governess, but would also imply that her employer did not demand that she be a lady, or particularly well-educated.

As Mrs Grey in *Agnes Grey* says, "there are bad and good in all classes" (112). Lady North in *Margaret Stourton, or a Year of Governess Life* is presented as a genuinely generous and benevolent employer, and Lucy Blair in *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence* finds one of her employers, the widowed shopkeeper Mrs Barton, considerate and well-meaning. As I hope to make clear in the following chapters, a majority of the employers in the genre are portrayed in a manner geared to enhancing the development of the heroine, or to underlining the difficulties she faces in her lowered position.

3

Terms of employment

‘From the first rising in the morning, then, to the last at night, they will be my sole charge?’

‘Certainly; and sleeping in the same room with them, you will also feel them under your watchful care for the night.’

(Cheap, *The Nursery Governess* 1845)

The duties of the Victorian governess would vary depending on the grandeur of the household. In a large establishment with a full army of highly specialised domestics, the governess’s assignments were likely to be limited to teaching according to a fixed schedule. In families of restricted means, however, the governess might have to fill in as a nurse and assume a greater responsibility for the children. The question whether the governess should only teach, or whether her duties were also to include other chores, seems to have been dependent on the financial situation of the employers. In governess novels, on the other hand, prosperity does not appear to be the decisive factor. Rather, it is the employers’ attitude and degree of benevolence that determine the governess’s terms of employment and her remuneration.

In spite of the large number of governess manuals published in the nineteenth century, it is difficult to define the tasks and position of a governess exactly. Was she exclusively a teacher, or was it her duty to manage the children from morning to night? Was she a lady living in the house, or should she be regarded as a kind of superior servant? In the hierarchical Victorian household order, the intermediate and undefined position of the governess was conspicuous. If the mother of a family chose not to teach her children herself, a governess was in many cases the obvious alternative. Who should look after the children outside school-hours seems to have been a matter of argument, however. Some parents saw the governess as a teacher only; others regarded her as a complement, or even as an alternative both to the nurse-maid and, to some extent, even to the mother herself. In *Governess Life, Its Trials, Duties, and Encouragements* (1849), Mary Maurice criticised such delegation of maternal

responsibilities. She urged the governess employer to understand that “[s]he has a helper but she cannot have a substitute. What God has given her to do, she can never devolve on any other” (105). The ambiguous position of the governess vis-à-vis the mistress will only be touched upon here, and dealt with more extensively in Chapter 5.

In the contemporary governess debate, two opposite camps were discernible regarding the terms of employment for governesses. One group pleaded for an adaptation to circumstances, in the sense that the governess was recommended to do everything within her power to adjust to her dependent situation, and hence to accept the tasks imposed on her. Among those urging acclimatisation was Anna Jameson, who advised the governess not to “form unreasonable expectations” in *The Relative Social Position of Mothers and Governesses* (1846). Although she urged employers to make life easy for the governess, she stated that the young woman must accept that “time must be given to fit in” (37). Those who urged governesses to keep up class appearances, although that may cause inconvenience, formed an opposite group. The anonymous writer of *Advice to Governesses* (1827), for instance, stated that since overstraining was a common problem, governesses should do only what they were employed for. Therefore, she recommended them not to accept being accompanied by younger children of the family when walking with their pupils (51). Such refusal to stretch the sphere of activities could be considered rude by employers who could not understand why governesses were unwilling to double as nurses or maids.

As this chapter will show, many fictional mistresses refuse to see the governess as a teacher only. Because governessing was an undefined area of work, the issue of assignments becomes a field of conflict between governess and employer. Owing to her weak position, the heroine is seldom in a position to fight openly for her right to be treated as a lady. Such a conflict is referred to in Miss Ross’s *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* (1836). A woman tells her friends how she recently dismissed a governess who had refused to carry her pupil’s bonnet. She claims that “a governess may surely be a lady, and yet not refuse to perform an office of kindness for her pupils. She is well paid for all she does” (166). A gentleman present reacts against this way of reasoning. He asserts that

It is the miserable fact that she is paid, which ought to induce her firmly, but respectfully, to withstand any attempt on the part of her employers to enforce on her any office not absolutely connected with those superior acquirements for which they engaged her; and that same fact will ever operate on a liberal mind in producing the most delicate consideration. (166)

In thus criticising the exploitation of the governess by using her for non-teaching tasks, his views find support in several manuals. Anna Jameson, for instance, stated that a good employer would feel “that it is a great mistake, – if it be not a grievous sin, – to regard the human being who dwells under [her] roof, and in the shadow of [her] protection, merely as an instrument to be used for [her] own purposes” (25).

To avoid overwork and dispute, *Advice to Governesses* stated the importance of well-defined working conditions, and Mary Maurice even suggested that the governess and her employer sign a written contract regulating what is expected of the governess (1849, 115). She admitted that such an arrangement could have drawbacks, however, if “[l]ittle arrangements as to the hours of rest, and vacations, because stipulated for at first, are enforced to the letter [by the governess], when the comfort of all parties would have been promoted by yielding a little” (16). Maurice believed it to be the other way round, too; “[a] fixed plan of lessons, though all important as a general rule, is not infrequently adhered to as a mere manifestation of self importance” (16). Nevertheless, she acknowledged that “[f]rom morning till night, day after day, and week after week, to be almost confined to the society of children, is very wearisome, and especially if they look upon instruction as a penance” (55).

Governesses appear to have been in a disadvantageous bargaining position from the 1840s and onwards. Advertisements from the second half of the century show that when it became increasingly difficult to obtain situations, applicants had to be open to negotiation concerning the terms, and employers could more easily impose non-teaching tasks on the governess. In the 1880s, a Miss Jollye in Suffolk was in search of a situation and advertised in *Work and Leisure*, stating not only that she had “had peculiar advantages in the Physical and Mental Training of Children” (*W&L* 1886, Advertisement supplement), but that she possessed similar qualifications in housekeeping as well. Miss Jollye probably found competition for a governess situation so hard that she was willing to accept an engagement as a housekeeper if she failed to procure employment as a governess.

Assignments

The fact that many governesses were overstrained was a cause for concern in nineteenth-century England. It was also something that novelists seized upon, probably because it was a useful way of conveying the social degradation of the heroine. When the governess heroine arrives at a new situation she is not always

immediately informed what her duties actually are (see Chapter 2 above). For instance, Mrs Murray in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) does not tell the newly arrived governess what she is expected to do until the day after her arrival, and Eliza Cheap's slightly earlier *The Nursery Governess* (1845) features a similar lack of information. After having arrived at the Melvilles', Mary Manners remains uncertain for several days as to what her duties are; "there was a kind of uncertainty in Mary's feelings as to her actual position"(68). Such a delay warns the reader of the shortcomings of the mistress. Insecurity regarding the nature of the employment does not only seem to have been a fictional tool to enhance the hardships suffered by the heroine, however.

Ellen Weeton's early nineteenth-century journal records her uncertainty when she arrived to take up a situation with the Pedders in December, 1809. Writing to her brother on Christmas Day, she stated,

The novelty of my situation begins to wear off a little. I begin to feel more at home, to grow more collected, and more and more pleased with those about me. For some days I knew not exactly what was required of me, or what degree of authority it would be proper for me to assume. (E. Hall I:211)

Weeton's editor Edward Hall explains that Mr Pedder, "[h]aving lost his first wife [...] made a Gretna Green marriage in August 1809 with his own dairy-maid [...]He] advertised for a Governess to undertake the joint education of his wife and the child by the former marriage" (I:210). Thus, the Pedder household lacked a powerful mistress to inform the governess of her duties.

When *Agnes Grey* arrives at her first situation, she is told that there will be three pupils: a boy of seven, one girl of almost six and one of four years of age. Agnes will be in total charge of Mary Ann, the six-year-old. Mrs Bloomfield explicitly wishes Agnes to "overlook her washing and dressing, and take charge of her clothes [so] she need have nothing further to do with the nursery-maid" (75). For the young and inexperienced Agnes, the tasks seem daunting. Mary Manners's situation in *The Nursery Governess* is similar. In the opening of that novel, Mrs Melville is very hesitant to employ a governess for her children, because she fears she will lose their love if she admits a governess for them into the house.

Nonetheless, when she has accepted that she needs help with her children, she tells Mary, surprisingly enough, that she wishes the children to be solely under governess care, whereupon the following little scene unfolds:

'From the first rising in the morning, then, to the last at night, they will be my sole charge?'

'Certainly; and sleeping in the same room with them, you will also feel them under your watchful care for the night.' [...]

‘Their wardrobe will require attention?’

‘Yes; and if you are handy with your needle to keep all in repair and due order, when anything material occurs, we can have a little assistance. Neatness, care, and economy are necessary...’ (72)

Although Mrs Melville hands over total responsibility for her children to the governess, she tells Mary that she has “one *anxious* desire, which is, that [the governess does] not make any attempt to *supersede me* in the children’s affection” (73). By such a comment Cheap brings home the intermediate position Mary finds herself in, and we are told that she does find her present situation “perplexing”. A few years after *The Nursery Governess* was first published, Mary Maurice warned employers against letting the total charge of children rest on the governess, stating that it would “be sinful” (1849, 105). For her own sake, the mother ought not to see the governess as a substitute, as that would harm her own influence over her children and relations with them. This is an important matter in the genre of governess novel; see further Chapter 5 below.

The first interview between employer and governess must have been, as Mary Maurice put it, “very embarrassing to both parties” (1849, 72). Because of long distances and transport difficulties in nineteenth-century England, discussions regarding terms of employment often did not take place until the governess was installed with her employer. Contact was generally restricted to correspondence by letter, or through the agency of a common friend. In fiction, this manner of seeking and accepting employment is often used to emphasise the disadvantageous position of the governess. It is virtually impossible for Agnes Grey or Mary Manners to refuse the terms set by their mistresses after they have accepted the post.

To let the governess assume total responsibility for the children was obviously economical for the employer, but it disclosed a lack of respect for the real assignment of the governess. The care of the children’s clothes, for example, was customarily a task for the nursery-maid. According to Isabella Beeton, it was the responsibility of the nursemaid to wash and dress the children, and this servant “ought also to be acquainted with the art of ironing and trimming little caps, and be handy with her needle” (1013). However, Miss C. Stevens, the “Ladies’ Agent for Schools and Governesses” behind *Guide for Governesses (English and Foreign): Nursery and Finishing* (1875), declared that the nursery governess must be a “neat plain sewer” (3) and that the knowledge of “cutting out children’s garments is a great advantage” (4). Interestingly enough, this writer stated financial reasons for this demand; “many families cannot keep sewing maids or nurses, as well as nursery governesses, and when they cannot afford to do so, the washing and dressing of the children,

as well as the care and education of them, fall to the lot of the nursery governess” (4).

Agnes Grey is far from the only governess heroine to have such chores imposed on her, however. Sewing recurs in several governess accounts, both from real life and in fiction. The advertisement Clara Mordaunt answers to in the opening of Marguerite Blessington’s *The Governess* (1839) explicitly states that apart from proficiency in teaching a number of subjects, the governess must be able to cut out and make the children’s clothes (3).

In the same year that saw the publication of Blessington’s novel, Charlotte Brontë took up her first governess situation. Apparently annoyed at having to do a lot of needlework, she wrote to her sister Emily that Mrs Sidgwick was only interested in squeezing “the greatest possible quantity of labour” out of her, “and to that end she overwhelms me with oceans of needlework, yards of cambric to hem, muslin nightcaps to make, and, above all things, dolls to dress” (*Letters* 191). For a woman who seems neither to have been much interested in household work, nor especially fond of children, this must have been taxing. In her employment with the Whites two years later, Charlotte Brontë also faced much needlework. She then wrote to her friend Ellen Nussey that

You must excuse a very short answer to your most welcome letter; for my time is entirely occupied. Mrs White expects a good deal of sewing from me. I cannot sew much during the day, on account of the children, who require the utmost attention. I am obliged, therefore, to devote the evenings to this business. (*Letters* 248)

Brontë’s experience seems to have been typical; Kathryn Hughes quotes from the autobiography of a governess named Mary Smith how she was often “[s]itting closely at sewing, making all manner of things for the children, from frocks and tippets for common wear, to almost everything else that was needed, till nine o’clock in the evening” (151).

In one of her many situations, the protagonist of Mary Martha Sherwood’s *Caroline Mordaunt, or, The Governess* (1835) actually volunteers to do needlework. Pleasure-seeking as she is at this stage of the novel, she suggests that she help her pupils prepare for a “race ball in the neighbouring town” since she is not “without hopes, that [she thereby] might also be permitted to partake of this pleasure” (116). Two maids are called in to help, and Caroline exhibits her “skill in making caps, trimming dresses, and furbishing up old bonnets to make them look like new ones of the first ton” (117). Having proved skilful with her needle, the governess gains the immediate approval of her employers, no mention being made of how she teaches her pupils. Caroline has

been hired to ‘finish’ the girls, to prepare them for social success, rather than to impart solid knowledge to them.

It should be noted that the occupation of sewing held distinctive connotations in the nineteenth century. Mary Poovey connects the plight of the needlewoman to that of the governess, stating that they “were two of the three figures that symbolized working women for the early and mid-Victorian public; the third was the factory girl” (131). The virtue of needlewomen, she points out, came to be an object of interest to middle-class commentators, such as Henry Mayhew. Wanda Neff likewise points out that in fictional treatment, the virtue of textile workers and needlewomen – such as Elizabeth Gaskell’s Ruth and Mary Barton – is often under threat (147-148). As pointed out in Chapter 1, it was a well-known fact in Victorian England that the lot of the seamstress was an uncommonly hard one, with extremely long working hours and poor remuneration. An article titled “The Point of the Needle”, claimed that needlewomen laboured “in the busy season of the year continuously for fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, or eighteen hours a day”, often under deplorable conditions (*ATYR* 1863, 36). The article even indicated that seamstresses were given drugs in order to make them stay awake during their long work-shifts.

Charlotte Brontë’s and Mary Smith’s complaints about long evening hours with the needle might be seen in relation to the conditions of professional seamstresses of the age. Although a governess was presumably better situated, indications that the governess heroine’s tasks involved needlework often imply that she was given plenty of work. Patricia Thomson goes so far as to state that “in point of pathos even distressed needlewomen had to yield place to indigent governesses” (39). That this was the case in fiction is not surprising in view of the real-life predicaments of the two groups of wage-earning women. Governess novels were, after all, written to promote the cause of governesses; therefore it is understandable if difficulties pertaining to other professions were either played down or incorporated into the plight of the governess.

Still, as fine needlework was also a task to which ladies were supposed to devote themselves, it cannot have been easy for a governess to decline to do sewing if that was required of her. Some heroines are expected to finish the needlework of her pupils after they have tired of it, and Anna Maria Hall gives the matter a twist in *The Governess. A Tale* (1842) by letting a disagreeable woman mention that her governess would be permitted to “amuse herself with my embroidery” (7-8) in the evenings. A reversal of the topic is met with in Maurice’s *Governess Life*, where it is claimed that many governesses, being “fond of needlework infringe their duty by carrying on this employment during the hours of lessons, when the whole attention should be given to their charge”

(111). Here it is most certainly fine needlework as a lady's occupation during leisure hours that is being attacked.

There were other non-teaching tasks than sewing that could be added to the governess's assignment. While working for the Whites, Charlotte Brontë wrote,

During the last three weeks that hideous operation called A Thorough Clean has been going on in the house – it is now nearly completed for which I thank my stars – as during its progress I have fulfilled the twofold character of Nurse and Governess – while the nurse has been transmuted into Cook & housemaid. (*Letters* 252)

That all hands were needed at such times is not surprising, but it is nonetheless understandable that Brontë felt it cumbersome to add the two-year-old boy to her charges who already comprised a girl and a boy, aged eight and six, respectively. In *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charlotte Brontë made her heroine engage in chores which are hardly commensurate with her governess station. The tone is rather different, however. Mrs Fairfax obtains Jane's help to get Thornfield in order for the great house party, for example. Performing a maid's tasks, Jane is symbolically distanced from the arriving guests. For three days prior to the arrival of Mr Rochester and his party, everyone at Thornfield is busy with the preparations:

From school duties [Adèle] was exonerated: Mrs Fairfax had pressed me into her service, and I was all day in the storeroom, helping (or hindering) her and the cook; learning to make custards and cheese-cakes and French pastry, to truss game and garnish dessert-dishes. (193)

Unlike Brontë, Jane never complains of the additional work that is imposed on her. Much later in the novel Mr Rochester even reminds her of her willingness to help the housekeeper; “[y]ou ran downstairs and demanded of Mrs. Fairfax some occupation: the weekly house accounts to make up, or something of that sort, I think it was” (377).

Mr Rochester himself twice employs Jane in delicate situations where discretion is of importance. Jane is the one who first notices the fire in her master's bedroom and helps him to put it out, and she likewise helps him after Bertha Mason's attack on her brother. Apparently feeling that he cannot trust the servants, he prefers the governess even to his long-time help Mrs Fairfax. In both these episodes Jane is contrasted to Bertha, and this is forcefully stressed by the fact that she first saves the life of Bertha's husband and later that of her brother from the mad woman's wrath. The second episode takes place during the houseparty, which makes the matter even more delicate.

A few fictional governesses volunteer to do extra work as a way to gain power in their employer's house. Thackeray's Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* (1847), for instance, "found many different ways of being useful to [her employer]. She read over, with indefatigable patience, all those law papers [...] She volunteered to copy many of his letters, and adroitly altered the spelling of them so as to suit the usages of the present day" (128). Soon showing an interest in "everything appertaining to the estate, to the farm, the park, the garden, and the stables", she freely gives advice on various topics of which she does not have the slightest knowledge: "the trees which were to be lopped in the shrubberies, the garden-beds to be up, the crops which were to be cut, the horses which were to go to cart or plough" (128). The result of this intrusion is that in less than a year the governess has completely replaced the butler as Sir Pitt's partner in conversation at the dinner table. It is clear that Becky Sharp is no downtrodden governess. Instead, she embarks on her governessing career as a way of advancing her social position.

Sherwood's Caroline Mordaunt assumes control in one of the many households in which she is employed in an analogous way. Halfway through the novel, Caroline teaches the daughters – "three pieces of still life" (83) – of a widow called Mrs Elverton. When the lady's maid leaves to marry, Caroline is left "to step at once into her place as prime minister" (85). Not much is said about Caroline's teaching; but at one point she expresses her opinion of her duties as follows:

I carried the purse, settled the accounts, paid the bills – talked to the medical man – gave my opinion where it differed with his – and became so generally useful, that Mrs. Elverton used to call me her dear Caroline, and to say to me, 'How could I ever have done without you? Really I cannot describe the comfort I find in you;' [...] I did a thousand things which the servants would have done better than I did [...] I instituted reforms without end in the offices, and offended the washerwoman, and got the cook dismissed, and hired another, &c. &c., and was vastly pleased with my own exploits. (85-86)

As Caroline tells her story from hindsight, her self-irony is clearly detectable in this passage. She recognises that she was too young to command other people, and her pretentious reign in Mrs Elverton's family finally causes her dismissal.

Both somewhat satiric versions of the typical governess heroine, Becky Sharp and Caroline Mordaunt clearly transgress the limits of governess work. They act not on order, but as a way of wheedling themselves into the confidence of their employers. A more sympathetic version of this theme is found in the anonymous *Chance and Choice, or The Education of Circumstances: The Governess* (1850). Lucy Clifford's last situation is as governess to Thérèse, the

niece of a German Baroness who has become very attached to her. As the Baroness's health is delicate, she is glad

to yield up many of her household cares into [Lucy's] hands; so that Lucy [...] besides her duties towards Thérèse had to regulate many domestic affairs, and she bore about with her, as insignia of her office, a large bunch of keys, suspended to her belt by a silver clasp. (176)

The Baroness, who is one of several maternal figures for Lucy in the course of the novel, later turns out to be a relative of Captain Falconer, Lucy's future husband. The training in household affairs that the older lady gives Lucy may thus be seen as a fit training for her future life as a married woman. In *Chance and Choice, or The Education of Circumstances* the surrendering of housekeeping responsibilities, symbolically expressed by the keys, marks the Baroness's respect for Lucy. Usually, however, such tasks would be seen rather as lack of respect for the governess's occupation. The article "Going a governessing", for instance, records the presumably true account of a governess who, besides a rigorous workload of teaching, was expected "to take charge of the wine cellar, and always keep the key" (*EWJ* 1858, 399).

One detail in the terms of employment that surfaces both in manuals and in the novels is the question of holidays. Except for letters and occasional visits, one annual vacation was the only contact the governess could expect to have with friends and family. The anonymous manual *Hints to Governesses* (1856) took up the subject of holidays, recommending the governess to "ascertain the time of the year most convenient to have your holidays" (15) when negotiating with the employers. The reader was told that "[f]or your pupils, as well as for yourself, it is necessary to have relaxation" (15). Mary Maurice, who recommended governess and employer to sign a written agreement as to the terms of employment, likewise thought that such a document should include provision for holidays. However, she stated that the "precise time at which such holidays should be given must be left to the convenience of the mother, whose family circumstances may often oblige her to vary the period at which they should take place" (1849, 115).

That the issue of holidays could cause inconvenience for both the governess and her family is shown by the case of Edith Gates, who, in the 1870s, wished to visit her family in London. She was not able to fix a date with her family, however, because her employer could not decide when she "would next be taking the carriage up to town" (Hughes 153). While Charlotte Brontë was working with the White family in 1841, she wished to go for a short visit to Ellen Nussey, who offered to send her brother's gig to fetch her. Brontë told her friend that when she had asked for leave, Mrs White after some hesitation had

replied “in a reluctant cold tone [...] You’d better go on Saturday afternoon then – when the children have holiday – & if you return in time for them to have all their lessons Monday morning – I don’t see that much will be lost” (*Letters* 249).

The same kind of reluctance is echoed in *Agnes Grey*. Agnes’ wish to go home becomes an inconvenience to her employers. She starts her employment with the Bloomfields in mid-September, and by Christmas she is allowed to go home for a two-week visit. Agnes would have liked to stay with her family for a longer period, but her mistress thinks that a fortnight is enough, telling her “I thought, as you had seen your friends so lately, you would not care for a longer stay” (91). Agnes ponders this and realises that Mrs Bloomfield simply does not understand how she could wish to go and see her family:

[Mrs Bloomfield] little knew how long, how wearisome those fourteen weeks of absence had been to me, how intensely I had longed for my holidays, how greatly I was disappointed at their curtailment. Yet she was not to blame in this; I had never told her my feelings, and she could not be expected to divine them; I had not been with her a full term, and she was justified in not allowing me a full vacation. (91-92)

In her second position, Agnes Grey is urged by the eighteen-year-old Rosalie Murray to put off her Christmas holidays because of the latter’s coming-out ball which is to take place in early January. In the nineteenth century, the coming-out was of immense social importance. In their late teens, middle- and upper-class girls were presented at Court or its local counterpart, depending on their social status. That Rosalie’s debut is to take place on the local social scene, as “her papa could not be persuaded to leave his rural pleasures and pursuits [*sic*], even for a few weeks’ residence in town”(130), probably says more about Mr Murray’s indifference to his children than about their social standing, however. Leonore Davidoff describes the procedure of coming out in the following terms: “On the day itself, when she was finally dressed and ready, the girl was admired by the whole household circle of relatives and servants whose deferential approval added to her feeling of importance” (1973, 52). Such approval from her governess is of consequence for Rosalie Murray, knowing as she does that Agnes is the only one who is totally forthright with her. However, she has to do without her governess’s admiration.

Some governess heroines are readily given holidays, however. The benevolent employer in the anonymous *Margaret Stourton, or, a Year of Governess Life* (1863) even lets the governess receive her family in the house, and Ursula in Holme Lee’s *Warp and Woof: or, the Reminiscences of Doris Fletcher* (1861) is also allowed to receive her sisters for a day visit. Julia

Buckley's Emily Seymor in *Emily, the Governess* (1836) is twice granted a holiday by her employers, and both instances turn out to be of major importance for her. The first time, Emily goes home to her mother to celebrate her own eighteenth birthday and Christmas, but finds that she comes just in time to care for her dying mother. This journey proves to be a turning-point in Emily's life; she not only loses her only relative, but also goes through a religious conversion. The second holiday never actually takes place. Emily has been offered a holiday, and plans to visit the lady with whom her late mother lodged. When she tells the clergyman Mr Hansard of her plans, he proposes to her, thus relieving her of having to work as a governess altogether. Effie Northcroft in Emma Raymond Pitman's *My Governess Life, or, Using My One Talent* (1883) is employed as a governess at a school. This might explain her liberal holiday; six weeks in the summer and a month at Christmas. On the other hand, her remuneration of £18 per annum is considerably less generous.

A room of her own?

The principal points in the Victorian governess debate were the workload and the socially intermediate position of the governess. The matter of her accommodation in her employer's house does not seem to have been felt to be as crucial. The novels, on the other hand, often assign metaphorical significance to the actual residential quarters of the governess, with a bearing on the question of the position of the governess within the household. If she was seen as a lady, the governess was given the right to a private sphere. If, on the contrary, she was regarded as one of the domestics, there was no reason to treat her differently from the maid. The governess's room, whether it is her private sphere, or she shares it with her pupils, is part of the setting in many governess novels. Often, but not always, the room can be seen as a reflection of the status which the employers accord the governess in their house, as well as an indication of the nature of her employment. In many cases the accommodation of the governess bears a greater resemblance to that of the servants than to the room to which she has been accustomed before leaving her home.

The Victorian house, whether a town house or a large country estate, became increasingly socially divided during the nineteenth century. The main bedrooms were generally located on the first or second floor, and the children – either in the nursery or in rooms of their own – usually slept above their parents' rooms (Pool 191). The schoolroom would also be situated in the upper regions of the house, and the top floor characteristically consisted of servants' quarters.

In historical records as well as in fictional accounts, the Victorian schoolroom is often described as cold and dark, as if facing north, and the governess's room generally seems to be connected to the schoolroom, thus not situated in a particularly attractive part of the house.

Hughes states that in large houses, the room of the governess "was likely to be near that of her pupils and she might even have her own sitting-room for relaxing during off-duty hours" (153). This was the case for Agnes Porter, who worked as a governess in a nobleman's family in Wales in the late eighteenth century. During the family's visits to London, for instance, Porter "expected to have a bedroom to herself, with the use of a parlour where she could entertain friends" (Martin 43). Most governesses were not as fortunate as Agnes Porter, however. Hughes writes that "in cramped households the governess might even be deprived of her own space altogether", having to share rooms with her pupils (153). Elizabeth Ham, who worked as a governess around 1820, noted in her journal that one of her employers apologised for lodging her in the attic, saying that she could not otherwise have given her a room of her own. The attic room turned out to be agreeable, "commanding a good view of the river and the Crescents" (Gillett 203); but the fact that Ham was disturbed by early-morning ringing outside her room, serving to wake up the maidservants, indicates that the room was in the servants' quarters.

Here we find a difference between fact and fiction. In the novels, restricted space is not given as a reason for the governess's having to sleep in her pupils' bedroom. Rather, the explanation is that she is expected to take total responsibility for her charges, as in *Agnes Grey* and *The Nursery Governess*. Difficulties experienced by real-life governesses owing to practical circumstances – such as small houses – thus take on symbolic implications when addressed by fictional writers. Although the accommodation of governesses was not given much consideration in the contemporary governess debate, a few notable exceptions show a certain correlation between fact and fiction. The unidentified writer of "Hints on the modern governess system" argues that

Wherever a governess has not a separate suite of rooms, &c. she must feel every hour of the day the bitter conviction that half the people in the house wish her at the world's end. Those who can afford to allow her a sitting-room and a table of her own, if they doom her to solitude within the very walls of a home, save her the daily wretchedness of 'greetings where no kindness is.' (*FM* 1844, 582)

It is clear from this quotation that the physical marginalisation of the governess has to be connected to her social status within the household. Anna Jameson was also quite explicit on the issue of lodging for the governess. Acknowledging that the kind of rooms which could be offered to the resident

governess depended partly on the family's financial circumstances, Jameson nonetheless urged the mistress to "[l]et them be the best you *can* give" (29). Some years after Anna Jameson wrote this, the architect William Butterfield was adamant in a letter to his sister who was about to employ a governess: "And you must not make her the inferior of the nurses and infants *by putting her in the attics!!* I really shall never be able to look her in the face without shame for you, if you were to do so" (quoted in Davidoff 1972, 32).

In fiction, accommodation for the governess is rarely the best the employer can offer. Several characteristics recur in descriptions of governess accommodation. Situated on one of the top floors of the house, the heroine's room seldom has the advantage of a view of the surrounding park or landscape. Rather, the location of the chamber emphasises her feeling of being confined within a house where she does not belong. The room is generally scantily furnished and sometimes without a fire. Such lack of comfort serves to underline the precarious situation of the heroine, especially if it is contrasted to her life before going out as a governess. When she is left in total charge of her pupils, the heroine's isolation becomes even more painful than if she is given a room of her own, as the constant company of the children effectively distances the governess heroine from any adult company. Cheap's Mary Manners and Agnes Grey both find it arduous to have to share bedrooms with their pupils. Lady Isabel in Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), however, reacts in an opposite way when told that she will have the entire charge of the little girl, that she will be her constant companion. Lady Isabel answers, "her heart fluttering" (416), that she is quite willing to accept these terms. In this story, the situation is of course very different; for Lady Isabel, returning in disguise to her old home as governess to her own children, is her only chance of being with them, even if she realises painfully that she can never reveal her identity to them.

A chamber without a fire was a sign that the room was not one that the family residing in the house would choose for themselves. The governess's cold room may be seen as a parallel to cold journeys and likewise cold receptions, as discussed in Chapter 2. In Henry Courtney Selous's *The Young Governess, a Tale for Girls* (1871), Martha Smyth is shown to a cold attic room with a fire "plainly not intended to be used" (6) when she arrives at the Cleres' house. Because of a fall in childhood, she has a back problem, which makes the "steep flight of corkscrew stairs" (6) an additional burden in her predicament. There is no doubt that the turret room in which Martha is accommodated is on the top floor at the back of the house. The spiral stairs indicate that her room is part of the servants' quarters; large Victorian houses had back stairs for servants. Furthermore, Martha's room is very scantily furnished. When she arrives, there are neither curtains nor a carpet; but a good-natured maidservant does her best to

supply the room with these articles in order to lend it some domestic comfort. When the lady's maid hears about this, she resolutely strips the chamber of all snugness again. Martha's room expresses the level of comfort she is granted by her employers. It also becomes a battleground for the struggle for power between the maidservant and the lady's maid. In this context, it should be pointed out that in Victorian households, the governess's room was normally the maids' domain, while the lady's maid presided over the mistress's chamber.

Martha Smyth is far from the only governess heroine to be accommodated in an attic. Felicia Lyne in Dinah Mulock Craik's *Bread upon the Waters: A Governess's Life* (1852) faces degradation in this respect already in her father's house. Felicia is made to give up her bedchamber, as her stepmother wants it for her maid. She is "sent to a room at the top of the house" (18), a fact which prepares the reader for the future adversities of the heroine. Felicia does not altogether regret this physical marginalisation in her father's house, however, seeing it rather as a refuge from the new order of life in the house. Nonetheless, her accommodation bears a strong resemblance to that of servants. Agnes Grey's servant-like status with the Murrays is made clear by "the back stairs, a long, steep, double flight" she has to climb to get to her room (116). Already with the Bloomfields, Agnes is accommodated at the top of the house. After having been shown to her room upon her arrival at Wellwood, she "clomped down the two flights of stairs"(74), having some difficulties in finding Mrs Bloomfield again.

As was shown in Chapter 2 in connection with scenes of arrival, fireplaces and the lack of them assume a symbolical function in *Caroline Mordaunt*. On taking up her second position, Caroline has been warned by her cousin not to be too friendly with the servants. When she is shown to her room, she therefore seizes the first opportunity to make the servant respect her. Asked whether she would like a fire, Caroline's determined answer is "[c]ertainly: I must desire you to light one every morning as soon as you are up" (37). When she comes to her next position, we are told that "a fire already blazed" when Caroline enters her room – a circumstance that prompts the governess to exclaim "this will do. Mrs. Dalaney knows how to treat a young lady in my situation" (52-53). When a much later employer, Mrs Fenton, insists that "large fires should be avoided" (170) in the schoolroom for pedagogical reasons, Caroline does not protest, although she groans inwardly.

Arriving at a school in France to improve her French, Margaret in Sarah Mary Fitton's *How I Became a Governess* (1861) is given a room without a fire. The winter is so cold that the water freezes in her water jug and she develops chilblains, and Margaret puts newspapers under her bed in an attempt to stop the draft from the floor. In the evenings, she and the other young women at the

school sit together by a fire, for which they share the costs. Barbara Wynne's social degradation in the Hunts' *The Governess* (1912) is also expressed by her cold and forbidding lodgings; her room is "small and cheerless, and there was no fire. [Barbara] had always had a fire in her room at home" (7).

There are other ways of signalling the low status of the governess's accommodation. When Agnes Grey arrives at Horton Lodge, she is shown to her room after having met her new pupils. As the trunks had not been brought up, she "instituted a search for the bell; [but failed] to discover any signs of such convenience in any corner of the room" (117). A room without a bell, like one lacking a fireplace, was obviously not a room for a lady, but rather one for servants.

Julia Buckley employs the description of the governess's room in a slightly different way, letting it make the heroine feel nostalgia for the past. When Emily Seymour first enters her room at Ashbury Hall, she is not dismayed by any shabbiness. On the contrary, although "the comfort and elegance commanded her attention; yet so desultory a mood was she in, that even the richness of the furniture annoyed her". The reason for this irrational reaction is of course that the room reminds Emily of her "once beloved home, where never care or trouble had oppressed her" (75). Although the room is described as elegant, later in the novel the heroine sits "in her chamber gazing on the flickering light, which long unsnuffed, emits a ray so feeble, as scarcely to distinguish aught of her fair form save the full bright orbs which are fixed on it" (101). The fact that the candle is unsnuffed indicates that Emily's room is not well attended to by the servants. Leaving candles unsnuffed is yet another of those small, but significant, details employed by authors to depict the social degradation of governess heroines. An article entitled "Hints on the Modern Governess System" actually referred to a family that gave their governess tallow-candles, while they themselves kept more expensive and less odorous wax candles (*FM* 1844, 575-576; see also Neff 167, Hughes 154).

Another novel which uses accommodation to bring out the contrast between the heroine's past and present circumstances is *East Lynne*. As this novel depicts a woman who returns to her former home as a governess, accommodation becomes heavily symbolical. Upon re-entering East Lynne, Lady Isabel Vane is conveyed upstairs:

On she followed, her heart palpitating: past the rooms that used to be hers, along the corridor, towards the second staircase. The doors of her old bed and dressing-rooms stood open, and she glanced in with a yearning look. No, never more, never more could they be hers: she had put them from her by her own free act and deed. Not less comfortable did they look, than in former days: but they had passed into another's

occupancy. The fire threw its blaze on the furniture [...] No: these rooms were not for her now: and she followed Joyce [the servant] up the other staircase. (409)

In this passage Wood conveys the enormous distress felt by Lady Isabel. Although she is treated with consideration and kindness by everyone, her degradation is made clear as she is no longer to be accommodated on the bedroom floor, but higher up in the house. The chamber allotted to her is not a bad room, but it certainly appears less comfortable than Lady Isabel's former quarters within these walls. Interestingly, her new room used to be that of Miss Carlyle, Lady Isabel's former husband's spinster sister. Although not a particularly appealing character, this woman had held an intermediate position, reminiscent of that of a housekeeper, during Lady Isabel's reign in the house. Now Lady Isabel takes over both the room and, as the governess, the intermediate position.

One fictional employer who clearly sees the governess as being on a par with the upper servants is the snobbish Mrs Ryal in Hall's *The Governess*. She absolutely refuses to "take a governess into [her] house again to reside", as she thinks "they are all *exigeant*". Telling her friends about the obstinacy she has experienced from former governesses, Mrs Ryal relates how one of them "would have a bedroom to herself, though, I am sure, no one could object to sleep in the same room with my own maid" (5). The idea of the governess sharing a room with other members of the domestic staff does not appear in the other novels included in this study. However, there are real-life examples of servants taking precedence before governesses concerning accommodation. This was not necessarily because the employers actually preferred the domestics to the governess, though. Kathryn Hughes declares that "[g]ood servants were in such short supply from the 1860s onwards that desperate employers frequently placed their parlourmaid's comfort and contentment above that of a two-a-penny governess" (154). She records the case of the governess Mary Bazlington, whose diary reveals her disappointment at a visit she made with her employer to France in the 1850s. Bazlington's frustration was not only the outcome of her having been given a dismal room, but also of the fact that a better room had been appointed to the nurse (154). Bearing in mind real-life examples like this one, it is noteworthy that in governess novels employers often treat the governess with less respect than the servants. This is not explained simply by a shortage of good servants, however; good relations between mistresses and, for example, lady's maids seem to be accounted for by both an unequivocal hierarchical order between the two, and by a matter of their uniting forces against the governess. She is often seen as a threat both to mistress and maid as a result of her intermediate position.

Not all governess heroines experience dismal lodgings. In Anna Maria Hall's short story "Our Governesses" (1844), the male narrator jokes about how the house is turned upside down in order to prepare for the new governess. When Miss Mannering in the anonymous *Charlotte's Governess* (1902) arrives at Woodlands, she is given a room of her own. This chamber, as well as the schoolroom and a sitting-room for her and her pupil Charlotte, are at the front of the house. Surprisingly enough, "Charlotte's room however was at the back, reached by a rather gloomy corridor" (8). Charlotte, who is maltreated by her aunt who wishes to promote another relative for an expected inheritance, is thus subjected to the marginalised position generally held by the governess in the novels.

In the governess-novel genre, unpleasant accommodation seems to have been such a stock ingredient that the opposite functions as a warning to the governess – and to the reader – that appearances are deceptive in households that grant the governess a pleasant room. Indeed, in such families it is not the governess, but a family member, who is marginalised. Several governess novels incorporate features characteristic of the Gothic novel, which saw a revival during the second half of the nineteenth century. Discussing *Jane Eyre*, Beaty mentions possible Gothic sources of inspiration for Brontë (1996, 65-76). It seems that *Jane Eyre* likewise inspired later novelists to combine the motif of the "deserted wing", housing an imprisoned spouse, with an account of the fortunes of a governess.

This is the case both in *Charlotte's Governess* and in Margaret Oliphant's *Janet* (1891), where the protagonist finds herself surprisingly well received and well accommodated. Janet's pleasure at the warm welcome she receives from her mistress soon changes into alarm when she finds out that her pupils' father is imprisoned by his wife. It is not only the name of the protagonist that makes Oliphant's novel resemble *Jane Eyre*. Gothic-like mysteries, including an enigmatic servant carrying food to an unknown person wailing at night somewhere in the house, also brings Charlotte Brontë's novel to mind. Scenery reminiscent of *Jane Eyre* can also be found in *Charlotte's Governess*. The Gothic section of Woodlands, which is inhabited by Charlotte, resembles Thornfield. Florence Warden's *The House on the Marsh* (1883) also features confinement. After some time Miss Christie realises that her depressed mistress is locked up at night in a damp and dismal room by her criminal husband – who, furthermore, takes a fancy to the young governess.

Jane Eyre is pleasantly surprised when she sees her room at Thornfield. She describes it as "a bright little place [...] as the sun shone in between the gay blue chintz window curtains, showing papered walls and a carpeted floor" (113). Not only is the room light, it also has the aspect of being well furnished. In

many novels, the house itself is described as elegant, while the governess's room is poor. In *Jane Eyre* we rather meet the opposite, as her room at Thornfield appears to be much brighter than the rest of this house. There are two rooms that are depicted in light colours: the room in which Mrs Fairfax welcomes Jane and Jane's own room. As her experience as a governess differs greatly from that of most other fictional governesses, the description of Jane's chamber might be seen as a prelude to later developments at Thornfield. It is noticeable too that Jane sees her room as her "safe haven", although it proves not to be so, since Bertha Mason enters the room later on in the novel.

The position of Jane's accommodation within the house warrants some attention. Apparently, her chamber is not situated at the top of the house, where, of course, another woman resides, but rather on the same floor as the other bedrooms of the house. When Jane goes down for breakfast the morning after her arrival, she "descend[s] the slippery steps of oak; then [...] gain[s] the hall" (114). This is no flight of back stairs used by servants, but clearly the main staircase. Another, and quite remarkable, sign that Jane's room is not part of the servants' quarters is its proximity to Mr Rochester's room. On the night of the first fire, Jane wakes up and hears some mysterious sound. After having thought that it might be the dog trying to get to his master – "I had seen him lying [outside Mr Rochester's door] myself in the mornings" – Jane opens her door and almost immediately realises that the smoke comes from her employer's bedroom (175).

As I have already mentioned, not all real-life or fictional governesses even had a humble room of their own. The matter of whether the governess should share a bedroom with her pupils or not was referred to by Anna Jameson, who advised against this kind of arrangement, as it would be "a cruel invasion of *her* privacy in her only place of refuge" (31). She stated,

An experienced governess, who has the manners and habits of a lady, and who is in a position to stipulate for any thing, will always stipulate for her own room. It ought to be a matter of course, as most advisable on both sides; by want of thought on this point, I have known much mischief done, which could not afterwards be undone. (30-31)

Exactly what kind of "mischief" Jameson hinted at is not explained, but governess novels in which this sort of settlement occurs leave no room for doubt concerning the misery that the governess heroine suffers when she never enjoys any privacy. In real life, such enforced cohabitation was felt as tormenting. Hughes cites how a governess in the 1840s, who had to sleep in the same room as her pupils, felt compelled to creep "fully dressed behind the curtains of the four-poster at night, to emerge next morning in the same genteel condition"

(154). The “emotional claustrophobia”, as Hughes calls it, caused by such arrangements is subtly employed by writers of governess novels.

When Agnes Grey talks to Mrs Bloomfield for the first time, she is told that Mary Ann, being now almost six years old, must be kept out of the nursery as much as possible. The lady of the house has therefore ordered her crib to be placed in Agnes’s room. Clara Mordaunt in Blessington’s *The Governess* is likewise denied a room of her own. When she arrives at the Williamsons, she is shown the dark schoolroom, and next to it she finds what is to be her place to sleep: “A large bed-room with four beds, opened into the sitting-room, and Clara found with regret that even the comfort and privacy of a sleeping-apartment to herself was denied her” (11). When seeing this room, Clara’s aunt cannot but compare it both with the elegant room the young heroine had occupied in her father’s house and with the small but neat chamber she lately had with her. Emma Raymond Pitman’s Effie Northcroft voices the misery which governess heroines experience when finding that they are not given a room of their own: “I felt somewhat dismayed, it is true, at thinking that I was to have no little *sanctum* of my own” (25).

Accompanying her employers to their country estate, Clara Mordaunt is given a room to herself; but far from feeling relief at being alone, she is merely depressed by its gloomy aspect:

On arriving at her chamber, which was an attic, the windows of which opened into the stable-yard, a feeling of depression stole over Clara, for she had hoped that in so large a mansion an apartment might be assigned to her commanding a view of the green fields and majestic trees, to the sight of which she had been so long a stranger that her eyes had dwelt on them with the delight expressed on meeting old friends after a lengthened separation. (58)

Mark Girouard notes that servants’ rooms did not usually offer a view of the garden (186); thus, the lack of a view over the park is an important detail marking Clara’s low ranking with the Williamsons. Clearly, her lack of comfort is also combined with a longing for a beautiful view. The “green fields and the majestic trees” serve as a metaphor for the freedom Clara misses. When Bessie, the maid, enters Clara’s chamber, she bursts out: “Ah! Miss, I thought as how you wouldn’t much like being mewed up here; the governess before the last used to sigh every time she looked towards the window, because she could not see the park” (59). Clara’s mistress, Mrs Williamson, is fully occupied with trying to establish herself as a lady – even renaming the country house after herself – and has no thought of the inconveniences of the governess. The country estate is described as an architectural concoction, placed in a garden so beautiful that not even Mrs Williamson’s bad taste expressed through “all the

incongruous buildings, in the shape of temple, hermitage, tower, and ruin” can destroy it. The loveliness of this park reminds Clara of her happy past, when she “wandered through a beautiful park, unspoilt by bad taste, leaning on the arm of a doting father” (57). The soiled wallpaper in her scantily furnished room also makes Clara feel intensely the miseries it has harboured, and her personal melancholy is transformed into a general pity for her predecessors: “the chamber assumed a sanctity in her mind, as having been the scene of human suffering – of meek resignation. Blessed power of commiseration! that can steal us from the sense of our own trials to sympathize with those of others” (59).

This passage might be seen as a parallel to Charlotte Brontë’s feelings while working for the Sidgwicks. As mentioned above, Brontë felt overstrained by her employers. To her sister Emily she wrote that although the “country, the house, and the grounds” were “divine”, she could not enjoy these delights; “alack-a-day! there is such a thing as seeing all beautiful around you – pleasant woods, winding white paths, green lawns, and blue sunshiny sky – and not having a free moment or free thought left to enjoy them in” (*Letters* 191). Whether the governess can see the delights of the surroundings or not, she seems to be denied the opportunity to enjoy them.

Sherwood’s Caroline Mordaunt is never actually badly accommodated. However, while her initial haughtiness is perceptible in her ways of addressing servants, she becomes increasingly humble and appreciative of what has been assigned to her later on in the novel. In one of her later positions, Caroline teaches Emily Selburn, who is such a lovely little girl that Caroline acknowledges that none of her own children has been dearer to her. The emotional attachment is noticeable in the description of the room Caroline is given at the Selburns. Although apparently sharing rooms with her pupil, the governess finds herself

most delightfully settled in a small suite of apartments, which formed the first floor of one wing of the house, with no other companion in my hours of retirement, than that sweet creature, the extraordinary consistency of whose beautiful character was at that time an enigma which no wisdom of mine could solve. (150)

After her dear Emily has died, Caroline is employed by the Fentons, where she is at first asked to share her bed with one of her pupils. In her new mistress, Mrs Fenton, she encounters a woman who has embraced the educational ideas of the French late-eighteenth-century educator Madame de Genlis. It seems as if Mrs Fenton has over-interpreted the level of strictness recommended by Madame de Genlis, however. The Fenton girls thus sleep on “only a mattress, a hard pillow, and a thin blanket” (170). Although she has taken these precautions, Mrs Fenton complains that her youngest daughter

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is the worst sleeper I ever knew of her age [she] is always complaining of shivering [...] But as she is nervous, I think it right for her to have a bedfellow, and one who will know how to manage her. You will not object, of course, to sleep with her?
(170)

Having been humbled by her many earlier mistakes, Caroline – although “groan[ing] inwardly” – feels she has to acquiesce in this suggestion. At this stage she is actually willing to accept having to share a bed with the child, something which would have been impossible earlier in her career. However, soon Mr Fenton comes into the room complaining to his wife of the excessive cold there. When hearing that the new governess will be deprived of her own bed, he reacts strongly:

‘No such thing,’ replied the husband, ‘Miss Mordaunt has not been accustomed to your hard-mattress system; and I do not see why she should be subjected to it. Our children suffer enough from it. I will not have the evil carried any further.’
[...]
What a reprieve was this! I was to have a room to myself, and a warm bed; but wherefore the poor children were to suffer what was not proper for me, I could not understand. (172)

Mr Fenton’s behaviour towards Caroline does not only show intended benevolence towards the newly arrived governess; it also discloses a clear antagonism between him and his wife. Although there are other well-meaning husbands of disagreeable mistresses within the genre, Mr Fenton even goes as far as accusing his wife of abusing the children. He employs the governess as a tool in his criticism of his wife’s educational methods. It is made clear that the Fentons’ former governess had had her own room in the house, which may indicate that the hard regime is a fairly new invention. After some time in the family, Caroline succeeds in persuading her mistress to make some concessions.

Although daily governesses are not residents in their employers’ houses, their abode should not be omitted from a discussion of the room of the governess heroine. Mulock Craik’s description in *Bread upon the Waters* of the small shabby lodgings Felicia Lyne shares with her brothers illustrates the degradation the siblings experience, especially as they rent rooms from an old servant of the family who now takes in lodgers. This indication of reversed fortunes is also found in Felicia’s recurring comments on her new situation and lodgings, comparing them with what she and her brothers were used to before leaving home. Still, it is important to remember that she feels that they are better off on their own than they would have been if they had stayed in their father’s house. Although they face poverty and difficulties, Felicia expresses a certain pride in being able to take care of her young brothers.

In the governess-novel genre, the fact that the heroine is forced to leave the traditional private sphere in which she has been brought up because some kind of catalytic disaster forces her to seek employment is emphasised by the lodgings she receives in her employers' house. Although residing in a private house, the governess's cold and inhospitable accommodation becomes a tangible sign of the lack of concern she is met with by her employers. As will be discussed below, the question of payment is given a similar symbolic value in the genre.



Fig. 3 (Hall, *The Governess: A Tale* (1842) in *Tales of a Woman's Trials* edition, 1858)

The paltry remuneration of governesses

Governess salaries were notoriously low in Victorian England. In an increasingly competitive labour market, many governesses were not in a position to set the financial terms of their employment. The overcrowding of the profession led to uneven quality, and consequently to an increase in the difference between wages. Several writers were critical of the way in which lower-middle-class fathers wished their daughters to enter the governess profession. In *Hints on Self-Help; A Book for Young Women* (1863), Jessie Boucherett stated that if a “second-rate education only can be afforded, then uncomfortable situations and a low salary are sure to fall to the daughters' lot, and the policy of the proceeding becomes more than doubtful” (24).

Fifteen years earlier, Elizabeth Rigby had also connected the level of remuneration with the standard of governesses. She claimed that there was an

“unfair demand” for governesses owing to the fact that middle-class mothers chose not to educate their daughters themselves. Therefore, she wrote, “a number of underbred young women have crept into the profession who have brought down the value of salaries and interfered with the rights of those whose birth and misfortunes leave them no other refuge” (*QR* 1848, 180). By calling the governess “a needy *lady*, whose services are of far too precious a kind to have any stated market value”, Elizabeth Rigby also identified another reason for the poor salaries (179). This was a crucial point. In the 1850s, Rosina Bulwer Lytton depicted her governess heroine in *Very Successful* (1856) thus: “thanks to that anti-commercial argil, of which all real ladies and gentlemen are, unfortunately, composed; wherever driving a bargain was concerned, she invariably underrated her own pretensions” (10). Such low self-esteem and the lack of a stated market value only served the employers. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, the employment of a governess to some extent indicated that the lady of the house for some reason chose not to fulfil her traditional maternal duties. This aspect must not be overlooked in relation to the low level of salaries. Since the governess was brought into the household to perform work that the mother would otherwise have done unpaid, it was difficult to assess the value of her work.

In 1846, a lady called Henrietta Stanley wrote to her husband to ask him to pay the governess:

Do you think you could give Miss White £20, we owe her a quarter. She did not ask for it, but I saw she was in distress & Alice told me that her brother wanted £20 & could not get it from some people that owed it to him. If you could send it her she would I am sure be thankful. (Mitford 134)

Miss White thus earned £80 a year in the mid-1840s, which was quite a handsome salary compared with what many other governesses at that time received. Her situation of having to assist family members financially was not unusual. In 1843, for example, the annual report of the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution listed among those who had received financial assistance one woman who had “saved a little money but lent it to a brother who failed” (14). The fact that Miss White had not asked her employers directly points at her embarrassment in the situation. If the Stanleys had read Maurice’s *Governess Life*, they would have known that the “salary should always be paid regularly and quarterly”, and that “many ladies are put to great inconvenience for want of punctuality in this respect on the part of their employers” (115). Anna Jameson was also firm concerning regularity in payment, advising the governess to “be content to give all, and to ask nothing, beyond punctuality in the payment of your salary” (44).

In 1844, an advertisement in the *Evangelical Magazine* stirred up a debate concerning low governess salaries in England. In an article titled “Liberality. – ‘Wanted a Governess’”, *The Times* quoted the advertisement as follows:

Wanted, a young person of decided piety, about 22 years of age, to take charge of and educate three children under twelve years. She must be capable of imparting a sound English education, with French and music. Anyone who would feel anxious for the welfare of the children will be treated as one of the family, and may realise the comforts of a home. Salary 8 l. per annum. (*The Times* 21 June, 1844, 6)

The Times referred to *The Patriot* newspaper, which “after quoting this tempting offer, animadverts in a strain of bitter irony on the qualifications required, and remuneration promised [...] Surely there must be some error here [...] an error of the press in accidentally omitting the 0 after the 8?” (6). Not long after, the signature Q in *Punch* also entered into the debate. Opening his article in an mocking tone, Q inquires what the prospective employer might “give the boy who cleans the knives and forks”, and then worked himself up into questioning what kind of Christianity an employer who offers such low wages might possibly possess. Towards the end of the article the signature Q has drawn the conclusion that an employer offering 8 l. a year for a governess

is of the set of men who, believing they believe in the Bible [...] have every respect for religion in a fine large type, but for the daily religion between man and man – for that sense of justice which abhors oppressive chaffering with the needy – that refuses to drive its hard, relentless, Shylock bargain, with female dependence, – oh, that is a feeling out of their creed, a something for the scribblers of romance and the writers of profane verse to rave about! (*Punch* 1844, 7:11)

Punch magazine was active in the governess debate; Wanda Neff notes another example from 1848 where the magazine “constructed ironic replies” to “some of the most ridiculous” advertisements (159). The interest in governess salaries that came out in *Punch* was referred to as early as 1844 by *Fraser’s Magazine* (573) and by *The English Woman’s Journal* in 1860 (165). It should be noted that articles like the ones mentioned here were not exclusively concerned with governesses; in 1841, for instance, *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal* used much the same rhetoric in deploring the low pay of male schoolteachers (*CEJ* 1841, 28).

Several governess novels include passages reminiscent of the infelicitous advertisement published in the *Evangelical Magazine* in 1844. Two years earlier, Hall had made the male mouthpiece in *The Governess* criticise a would-be governess employer for stating that “[a]s the lady will be treated as one of the family, a high salary will not be given” (4) in an advertisement she proposes to

insert in the newspaper. He indignantly asks the ladies present whether they do not blush at such a formulation:

You ask for the fruits of an education that, if it be half of what you demand, must have cost the governess the labour of a life, and her friends many hundred pounds. It is your DUTY to treat the person who is capable of bestowing upon your children the greatest of earthly blessings, as one of your family; and yet you make the reason for doing so a reason for abridging a stipend which, if stretched to the utmost of what governesses receive, pays a wretched interest for both time and money. Shame, ladies! shame! (12)

The unfortunate advertisement in the *Evangelical Magazine* was not easily forgotten. In 1849, five years after its first appearance, the advertisement was brought up again, this time in *Eliza Cook's Journal*. Quoting it among several advertisements, an anonymous writer condemned the practice of offering such "paltry remuneration [...] generally below that of the cook and butler, and not above that of the housekeeper, footman, and lady's maid" (*ECJ* 1849, 306). As governesses' salaries varied greatly, it is difficult to verify these statements, and to compare these salaries with the wages given to domestic servants. Many contemporary comments indicate that cooks, especially, were better paid. When Charles Dickens was a guest speaker at the Governesses' Benevolent Institution's first annual dinner in 1844, for instance, he commented on the low salaries of governesses in his talk, like so many others claiming them to be lower than those of cooks (Beatty 22).

It is difficult to determine an average salary for a governess. One article in 1844 gave 35*l.* per annum as the mean (*FM* 1844, 577), while Kathryn Hughes states that although there were great differences, a majority of governesses were earning between 35 and 80 pounds per annum (155). In 1841 Anne Brontë earned £10 per quarter, which was twice as much as her sister Charlotte's salary (Barker 351, n7). On her meagre income, the governess "was expected to supply the accoutrements essential to the appearance and habits of a lady", as Hughes puts it (159). While lady's maids could count on their mistresses' cast-off dresses, and nurses and servant girls would be dressed in uniforms provided by the employer, governesses had to maintain their middle-class gentility in dress out of their own scant funds. Clothes being expensive to buy, those who could not make their own dresses often had to spend about half of their yearly salary on clothes. When Elizabeth Ham, in the 1820s, found it difficult to find a new situation, she partly connected it to her shabby dress: "I had put on a Pelisse that was a little *passé*, indeed of a cut and colour that dated three years back in fashion. I have often thought that I owed some of my failures to this old Pelisse" (Gillett 207).

When the Governesses' Benevolent Institution was founded in the 1840s, special grants were made for clothes, which shows the extent of the problem. Bearing this in mind, a detail in the late *The Governess* by the Hunts is interesting. While the lady of the house on the one hand wants a well-dressed and lady-like governess, on the other hand she condemns Barbara Wynne for extravagance, saying it is no wonder she has had to go out as a governess since she wears such exclusive dresses. Amy Williams in Dora Russell's *The Vicar's Governess* (1874) also faces the problem of being too well dressed. Talking to the manager of a Governesses' Registry Office, she acknowledges that all her dresses "are too – too fine [...] but I've only those I used to wear, and I cannot afford just now to buy plainer ones" (I:8). The manager in this interview tells Amy that her prettiness and elegance are probably the reason why she has difficulties in getting a situation.

The treatment of the governess's salary in the contemporary debate, as well as in several novels, suggests that the chief criticism was directed against the salary in comparison to what other domestics received. Like the participants in the debate related above, Augusta M. Wicks in *Education; or, the Governesses' Advocate* (1847) compared the salaries of governesses to the wages given to cooks. After quoting some advertisements, she declared that the cook

is to receive TWENTY GUINEAS for the gratification of the gustative organ to please the *bons vivans* [*sic*] and the palate of the rich, who at the same time expect from the Governess to teach the minds and to cultivate the hearts of their dear children for only *sixteen guineas!!* (20)

In *Hints to Governesses by One of Themselves* (1856), governesses were recommended to lay by some savings. In reality, this would often be impossible.

In fiction, employers' unwillingness to pay for their children's education is often seen in relation to the readiness with which they spend money on things more immediately beneficial to themselves. Thus, in the anonymous *Gogmagog-Hall, or, The Philosophical Lord and the Governess* (1819), a governess-employing lady is angry with other people who, besides a deplorable lack of interest in their children's upbringing, "will haggle, too, about an odd fifty pounds a-year in such a case, and pay one hundred and fifty guineas for a set of teeth, or two hundred guineas for an opera-box!" (III:28). A few decades later, Anthony Trollope made the Archdeacon's wife in *Barchester Towers* (1857) give the governess £60 a year, while the cook got £70. "She valued her husband's stomach at ten pounds a year more than her daughters' education, and knew that indifferent governesses were easier to come by than good cooks" (146), Katharine West laconically comments, pointing out that the lady in

question probably did not think of the governess's having had to spend "on her own education those years in which the cook had been earning wages as a kitchen-maid; nor that the governess had no clothes provided for her" (146).

In Miss Ross's *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*, the governess's champion Dr Jameson is indignant about the low salaries of governesses, stating that it is common "for a man to object to a high salary for the lady who is to take on herself the charge of his three children's temporal and eternal welfare, and to give three hundred a-year to his cook, or a similar sum for a hunter" (168). This novel was published as early as 1836, i.e. before the intense governess debate of the 1840s. However, Ross repeatedly commented on the fact that governesses were held in low esteem. As was pointed out above, the early-nineteenth-century governess was treated with more respect than her mid-century colleagues. Therefore, it is interesting to note that low pay linked to a lack of esteem aroused attention as early as the thirties. The aristocratic Countess of Oakley in *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* chooses not to spend more money on her children's education than what it costs to employ the forbidding Miss Mason, who comes across as totally unfit for her position.

In 1848 Sarah Lewis, who had been a governess herself, made a statement similar to that of Dr Jameson when she compared the employment of the governess with that of a seamstress:

Is it not monstrous, that while a lady will not give her dress to be made to any one but the first-rate dress-maker, she will give her children to be educated by a second or third-rate governess? That she will commit their training for this world and the next to a woman whose only qualification is, that she has had a twelvemonth's apprenticeship in an inferior boarding-school, or – that her father failed last week? (*FM* 1848, 413)

As the number of governesses increased, their quality varied, and Lewis was far from alone in seeing a danger in this. Dinah Mulock Craik also criticised people "lavishing expense on their house, dress, and entertainments – everything but the education of their children; sending their boys to cheap boarding-schools, and engaging for their daughters governesses at 20*l.* a year, or daily tuition at sixpence an hour" (1858, 45-46). Elizabeth Sewell similarly suggested that "an additional five pounds, denied to a mother's own expenditure (perhaps in dress), would enable the governess to put five pounds into the savings bank" (1865, 246). Then the governess would be able to save a little for her old age, and not see all her money disappear into necessities like clothes and travel money.

That many people were unwilling to pay for good education for their children is made clear in an article with the telling title "Two-Pence an Hour", where the writer exclaims, "[p]eople demand everything for pay that is next to

nothing” (*HW* 1856, 139). In Anna Maria Hall’s novel *The Governess* Mrs Ryal, who “gives her servants better wages than her teachers”, tells her friends that she has employed a shopkeeper’s daughter as governess for her children (48). It is “a *young person*, who comes daily for *three*, and sometimes I get *four* hours out of her; and she is very reasonable – two guineas a month, and dines with the children”, the contented employer states (6). However, Mrs Ryal turns out to be penny-wise and pound-foolish in employing this girl; further on we learn that “that underbred daily governess [...] ran off with her own father’s shopman” (48).

Hughes claims that “nursery governesses often worked for nothing beyond board and lodging” (155). This was also the case among those who professed to teach older children, which is shown by an advertisement from 1886, where the young governess Myra was so desperately in need of a situation that she offered to teach “English in all its branches; French and German [...] Music and Drawing; for Board, Lodging, and Laundress” (*W&L* 1886 Advertisement supplement). Myra had acquired foreign languages on the Continent (see Chapter 2 above), which presumably indicates that she was better educated than the ordinary nursery governess. She would accept “1/.5s. a-week” for a daily engagement, were she unable to procure a situation as a resident governess.

While the resident governess received her salary on a quarterly basis, the daily governess was often paid by the week or even by the lesson. In Hall’s story “The Daily Governess” (1852), the protagonist “walks half a mile farther to give an eighteen-penny music lesson” (112); and Lucy Blair in Harriet Maria Gordon Smythies’s *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence* (1861) works “3 hours a day, at thirty shillings a week” (I:11). Their pay being so low, many daily governesses could not afford to travel by omnibus between their engagements.

Like the Stanleys’ governess Miss White, referred to above, Lucy Clifford in *Chance and Choice* feels humiliated when she has to ask her first mistress, a Russian princess, for money; “for having left home with a very scanty wardrobe, and a nearly empty purse, she felt that it was quite necessary that she should procure a few essentials” (65). The employer’s reaction is exactly as stern as Lucy dreads, because the Princess informs her that it is “not convenient to pay her at present”. The truth is that she “had managed, somehow or other, during her stay at Tœplitz, to outrun her finances rather, and did not feel exactly in a humour to disburse at present” (65). It is not meanness, but rather negligence on the part of the employer, that creates the uneasy situation. Right afterwards, the matter takes an unexpected turn, when a box of jewels is found in Lucy’s room. The Princess exclaims, “I really am surprised at your

effrontery in daring to approach me after the insulting manner in which you have deceived me" (67). When it is discovered that the jewellery has been placed there by the Princess's brother-in-law, her apology to Lucy is a feeble one. The whole episode depicts the employers as wilful and despotic, and the matter of pay is given a special dimension here, as the employers surround themselves with Russian serfs beside the foreign governesses.

Some governess novels do not state the exact amount of the salary for the governess. Instead, the insufficiency of her remuneration is conveyed to the reader through the governess's poor dress, or simply by allusions to her lack of money. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester pays Jane £30 a year, which was a normal salary at the time of the novel's publication. Since the novel takes place in the first decade of the nineteenth century, however, it must even be regarded as quite a handsome salary. It is clear that Jane Eyre is not paid regularly. When she asks leave to go and see her dying aunt, Rochester is reminded that he has not paid her wages yet. Unlike most governess heroines, Jane is not treated in a niggardly fashion by her employer. Rochester claims not to have the fifteen pounds he owes her, but tries to give her fifty instead. When she declines as she has no change, her employer answers "[r]ight, right! Better not give you all now; you would, perhaps, stay away three months if you had fifty pounds. There are ten; is it not plenty?" upon which Jane's reply is "[y]es, sir, but now you owe me five" (268). Charlotte Brontë does not employ the question of pay as a way of showing the humiliation of the governess, but rather as a means of creating tension in this scene of farewell. Rochester's trying to give Jane far more money than is due to her can also be seen as a kind of flippancy on his part, or as a sign that at this stage, he does not really view her as an employee any more.

Agnes Grey's situation is far more realistic, however. While the Bloomfields "could not be prevailed upon to give a greater salary than twenty-five pounds"(70), she is given twice as much in her second situation. With the Murrays, however, she has to face some expenses:

I must, it seemed, put out my washing, and also pay for my four annual journeys between Horton Lodge and home; but with strict attention to economy, surely twenty pounds, or a little more, would cover those expenses, and then there would be thirty for the bank, or little less; what a valuable addition to our stock! (114)

Agnes is not alone in having part of her salary deducted for laundry, since that, and also clothing, was comparatively expensive in the nineteenth century. The parsimonious Mrs Hylie in Hall's *The Governess* thinks the governess "must pay her own washing, unless there was some great inducement" (8). Likewise, poor Miss Myra, whose advertisement was mentioned earlier, asked for no salary beyond "Board, Lodging, and Laundress". Another real-life governess

who experienced the economic value of laundry was Charlotte Brontë. In her second position in 1841 she received a “salary [...] not really more than £16 per annum, though it is nominally £20, but the expense of washing will be deducted therefrom” (*Letters* 246).

In Lady Blessington’s *The Governess*, Clara Mordaunt is given 25 guineas by her first employers, the Williamsons. Clara’s aunt is dismayed at the low salary, since the employers demand so much of her; “[h]ow much money and time must have been spent to acquire even half such accomplishments, and yet for all these, the wages of a lady’s maid are offered. Oh! My poor Clara, this will never do” (3). On hearing what Mr and Mrs Williamson pay the governess, their Creole guest Mrs Marsden later exclaims that that is what she gives her maid, while her nuisance of a son retorts that this sum is “what [he has] agreed to pay [his] tiger” (41). Beaty points out that ‘tiger’ here means ‘groom’ or ‘footman’ (1996, 55). Several positions later and with much more experience behind her, Clara discusses terms with the upstart Manwarrings. She asks for 50 guineas a year, which is far too much for Mrs Manwarring, who claims that a friend of hers has a French governess, “who not only educates the children, but makes all her ladyship’s dresses, and washes her lace, and she has only thirty pounds a-year, and finds her own tea” (203-204). These remarks echo terms used for a lady’s maid rather than for a governess. Clara and Mrs Manwarring reach an agreement at last, however, where the governess accepts helping with needlework, but declines to pay for her laundry. Other novels touching on the apparently common topic of laundry expenses include “Ruth’s” *French Clogs*, or *the Happy Experience of a Governess* (1893), where it is stated that “[t]his is always a contested point, for it invariably reduced one’s hardly-earned income five pounds per annum, be the governess ever so careful of her collars!” (59-60).

The matter of currency should be briefly addressed. Daniel Pool states that the guinea

was a unit of physical currency that *also* became an abstract measure of value as well; that is, long after the actual guinea coin stopped being minted in the early 1800s, prices for luxury items like good horses and expensive clothes continued to be quoted in guineas as if it were some independent unit of value like the pound. (19)

The guinea, which was worth £1-1s-0d (£1.05), seems to have been considered a more gentlemanly currency unit than the pound. Thus, tradesmen were paid in pounds and gentlemen in guineas. In this context, it is interesting that Mrs Manwarring’s friend pays her governess in pounds, not in guineas, while Clara Mordaunt’s other employers actually remunerate their governesses in guineas.

A reversal of the common treatment of governess salaries is found in *Margaret Stourton, or a Year of Governess Life*, where the heroine is surprised when she is offered a handsome salary: “A hundred pounds! It seemed immense to Margaret, far beyond her deserts” (18). However, she is told that as she is to be much alone with the children because the mother has to go abroad with an invalid child, this lady wishes to make sure that the governess feels appreciated. Margaret Stourton is treated uncommonly well by her first employer. This is manifested not only through Margaret’s own experiences, but also in the way in which she is contrasted to another governess, Miss Edge.

For many governesses, in fact and fiction, laundry and clothes were not their only expenses. The question of salaries becomes important in view of the fact that many governesses were actually breadwinners for family members. Some nineteenth-century daily governesses chose to work on a visiting basis in order to be able to care for their families. In 1840, Claire Clairmont, for instance, gave up a resident situation for daily governessing, in order to look after her mother (Gittings and Manton 177). Twenty years later, Harriet Martineau wrote that in fact most daily governesses had to care for “some broken-down parent, some young brothers needing education, or means to start in life; some sick sister, or some graceless member of the family” (*OW* 1860, 268). This is also the case in the fictional treatment of daily governesses; Felicia Lyne in *Bread upon the Waters: A Governess’s Life* supports her two younger brothers, while Mrs Blair in Gordon Smythies’s *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence* is dependent on her daughter Lucy as a breadwinner. Likewise, in *The Governess Hall* wrote about a “daily governess, whose mother was ill, [and who asked if she] might go a few minutes before her time was up, and [who] had more than once [been] caught shaking the hour-glass” (20). Some resident governesses also had to send money to their impoverished families. Real-life examples include the woman strongly reminiscent of Felicia Lyne in Mulock Craik’s *A Woman’s Thoughts about Women*, (see Chapter 2 above), who catered for “brothers and sisters-in-law, nephews and nieces, down to the slenderest tie of blood, or even mere strangers” (30). In the novels, examples include the minor character Lydia Beaumont in Cheap’s *The Nursery Governess* who pays her parents’ rent and bills, and Irene Clifton’s *The Little Governess* (1900), where Agnes Williams goes out as a governess to be able to help her widowed mother care for a young invalid brother.

Some heroines use their meagre income for charity towards the poor in the neighbourhood. Agnes Grey and Emily Seymour in *Emily, the Governess* are obvious examples, who both come to know their future husbands through their compassion with those that are even worse off. Emily feels “truly thankful” for being able to help those who are in great need; “for though slender the stipend

she yearly received, she was enabled, by her provident management of it, frequently to bestow on her poorer fellow-creatures many little comforts” (160). The topic of charity often seems to be introduced as a means of depicting a religious conversion, or some other spiritual experience, on the heroine’s part. Emily, for instance, has developed this benevolence to others as a result of having embraced her dead mother’s Christian faith. Consequently, she gains even more happiness by instructing the poor “in the way of everlasting life” (160). Similarly, the eponymous heroine of E.W.’s *Ellen Manners, or the Recollections of a Governess* (1875) accompanies Florence, the grown-up daughter of her employer, to a dying poor woman called Ruth. This woman is described as a sinner, but Florence calms her wretched mind and sits by her at her deathbed. The unselfish and pious actions of the aristocratic Florence make a great impression on Ellen’s mind; Ruth’s sad story is only one of several factors, which eventually transform the governess into a Christian woman.

Partly as a result of the impact of the Evangelical movement, charity work for various causes was a popular and suitable activity for women (see e.g. Prochaska). The commendable Mrs Stanley in Hannah More’s didactic novel *Celebs in Search of a Wife: Comprehending Observations on Domestic Habits and Manners, Religion and Morals* (1808) says, “I have often heard it regretted that ladies have no stated employment, no profession. It is a mistake. *Charity is the calling of a lady; the care of the poor is her profession*” (II:65). It seems, however, that this calling often was expressed through work on private committees that were themselves important social factors; bazaars, garden parties, and other forms of fund-raising activities were common, whereas “[a]ctual charitable work with the poor was often considered too arduous, contaminating and degrading for young girls to undertake” (Davidoff 1973, 57). Therefore, it was perhaps hardly strange that governesses went on charity rounds. Agnes Porter, for instance, recorded in her journal how she – apart from helping her ageing mother and a sister – also gave a poor woman in the neighbourhood both fire-wood and a pair of spectacles (Martin 29, 136).

The charitable work undertaken by fictional governesses in their spare time is often seen as significant for their own position and, indeed, character. While it may have been an authorial way of portraying the heroine as a noble woman, we can also see that by expressing empathy with those who do not have anyone else to care for them, the governess seems to come to terms with her own situation. Although Elizabeth Langland states that charity in the nineteenth century was a “strategy to mediate class differences” (296), in the novels it is the governess who takes on this female middle-class mission, since it is often she, and not her mistress, who performs acts of charity.

Compassion with the poor was of course “a favourite theme of the moral writers” at the time, as Avery points out (37). Especially in stories aimed for children, we meet rich boys and girls who after having spent their money on pleasures instead of helping the poor are struck with remorse. In some novels, like *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*, the governess makes her spoilt pupils realise the inner reward that awaits them if they show generosity towards the poor. Gertrude Walcot teaches her charges how to make clothes for the poor, as does Madame Frémont in the anonymous *The Kind Governess, or, How to Make Home Happy* (1869) and the narrator of the signature “Nur Muth’s” “An English Governess in Russia. A True History” (1882). In the latter case, the governess and her pupils prepare a “stock of clothing for the poor” (147) as a Christmas surprise for the lady of the house, supposedly for her to present to the needy. In some stories, like *Agnes Grey*, the pupils seem to be unimpressionable, however. Rosalie Murray does accompany her governess on her charity rounds, but solely to gain an opportunity to flirt with the clergyman.

A matter closely connected to the poor remuneration of governesses was their fear of not being able to support themselves when they would be too old to work. In many households, pensions were paid to faithful old servants after they had stopped being of active use. Early manuals mentioned the matter. In *Private Education; or a Practical Plan for the Studies of Young Ladies* (1815), Elizabeth Appleton said that employers should give pensions to their governesses, although she admitted to knowing only one employer – an Irish bishop – who had in fact done this (11). Samuel and Sarah Adams’s *The Complete Servant* (1825) claimed that if the employers’ “moral feelings are not blunted, [the governess] may calculate on their gratitude in her old age, or, if she survive them, in their last will” (94). Agnes Porter was actually granted a pension from her first employer in the 1790s, but then lost it at his death owing to his heavy debts. Being a strong-minded woman, and also being worried about what would happen to her when she was not able to work any more, she fought to get it back (Martin 37, 191).

Often, however, pensions were not granted to governesses; it seems as if many nineteenth-century governesses had every reason to worry about their old age. As Elizabeth Rigby put it,

when she has lived in the family for perhaps fifteen years, and finished the sixth daughter, [the employer] dismisses her with every recommendation as ‘a treasure,’ but without a fragment of help in the shape of a pension or provision to ease her further labours or approaching incapacity. In nine cases out of ten, the old servant is far more cared for than the old governess. (180)

When the governess thus had to look for a new situation, she faced not only practical but also emotional troubles. The situation for old governesses was difficult. Debaters repeatedly urged employers to pay their governesses more and to support charity organisations for governesses. Elizabeth Sewell claimed that there are people who

would willingly give their twenty pounds a year to the support of charitable institutions which are to assist governesses [...] but who would think themselves likely to be ruined if a [governess] were to ask for an additional sum of ten pounds, in order that she might never be reduced to such aid. (1865, 245)

This observation points at a paradox which must surely be connected with the inherent tensions between governesses and their employers. Another aspect of the low remuneration, which may be bound up with the fear of not being able to provide for old age, is the recurring anxiety concerning the mental health of governesses. The lack of a safety net for old governesses was commented upon repeatedly in the contemporary debate.

The Governesses' Benevolent Institution's annual reports, for instance, listed large numbers of aged governesses applying for financial aid. As this seems to have been a matter of great interest to those active in the governess cause, it is surprising that the fear of old age plays such a minor part within the governess-novel genre. However, as the genre often serves a romanticising purpose, the governess heroine, if she is old, left the occupation long ago and is commenting on her ordeals in retrospect. Protagonists such as Sherwood's Caroline Mordaunt and Craik's Felicia Lyne both share experiences from their youth with the reader, Caroline by retelling her life from hindsight, and Felicia by presenting her diary to the reader.

A few old governess characters should come in for special notice, though. In Holme Lee's *Kathie Brande; A Fire Side History of a Quiet Life* (1856), poor old Miss Bootle lives on as a companion in the household where she has formerly been a governess. She is very attached to a kitten and explains to Kathie, "You see, my dear, something loves me [...] He is *my own*" (I:65). The portrayal of Miss Bootle is indeed heart-rending; being rudely treated by her mistress of 39 years, she remains in the house simply because she has nowhere else to go. Miss Bootle's only comfort is the little cat Charlie, for whom she cares just as if he was a baby. The old governess tells the young girl, "[m]y dear, don't laugh at me. If you live you may become as lonely and as unlovely as I am [...] One must love something, so I am content to love Charlie, who does not despise me because I am old, plain, poor, and dependent" (I:73).

In "The Old Governess" (1852), Hall noted that it was "the habit of many young ladies to set aside their governess with their school books, and

never refer to either”, thus indicating a casual attitude not only to education, but also to the person who had been so instrumental in their upbringing (7). There were exceptions, however. When Sarah Bennett died in the early 1860s, her pupil of some forty years before, expressed her deep grief; “I loved her as a sister, and shall never know her like again” (Bennett 16).

Among the works included in this study there are actually only two short stories – both incidentally entitled “The Old Governess” and published in the 1850s by Harriet Martineau and Anna Maria Hall, respectively – that deal explicitly with the problem of aged governesses. This is worth observing, as the question takes such a prominent place within the contemporary debate. In Martineau’s story (1850), a middle-aged governess is left behind when her employers emigrate. In this case, the employer is clearly poor and not to be blamed for the destitute situation Miss Smith finds herself in. This governess ends her days in the workhouse, where she finds that she can be of use to her brothers and sisters in misfortune. Today this short story is predominantly appreciated for its realistic account of life in a mid-nineteenth-century workhouse; but Martineau’s pronounced aim was to bring out the miserable lot of aged governesses.

Anna Maria Hall’s identically titled story features Miss Maunsell, a governess who has become insolvent after her last employer has gone bankrupt. She has repeatedly tried to contact two pupils from an earlier position, but her letters – having been thrown away by an aunt of the girls who believes they think far too highly of their old governess – never reach them. When they finally meet their old governess again, she tells them “I am now in my fifty-second year – penniless!” (39). As Hall wrote her story in a crusading spirit, she lets her Miss Maunsell expatiate upon the difficulties of ageing governesses. She tells the girls that there are multitudes of former governesses who have

crept into the country to hide a poverty which the world treats as disgrace; there are many living through starvation on four shillings a week, unable to do anything from want of sight, – many with the various illnesses that great anxiety, uncheered by social ties, must inevitably produce – homeless – friendless – helpless old women. I ask you, if those who have been even in a degree accustomed to the refinements of life – if those who have laboured in the great vineyard of education, should not be provided with a refuge to keep them from the workhouse and the madhouse, and lay them decently in their graves? (39)

Hall’s “The Old Governess” was included in her *Stories of the Governess* which was printed for the benefit of the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution in 1852 (see Chapter 1 above). In that volume there is a section describing the work of the GBI, where extracts from their annual reports show the great need for financial assistance to aged governesses. It is asked:

Terms of employment

Shall she who has 'provided' for the comfort in old age of her widowed mother, or her father, paralytic, imbecile, insane – shall she who has by self-sacrifice placed her sisters and brothers in the path of independence, and thus 'provided' for their future prosperity – shall she be told, that she ought first to have provided for *herself*? It is the peculiar character of Christianity to care for others rather than ourselves: – shall it be a fault in the governess, that this is usually the very character of her life? (117)

Anna Maria Hall had a reputation as a writer of moral tales and as an indefatigable philanthropist, working for the governess cause as well as for other worthy undertakings. In her novel *The Governess*, she mentions the problem of old governesses, too; the dying governess Emily Dawson reminds her repenting grandfather of the alms-houses for old governesses that he has promised to build in her honour (93). Mulock Craik's *Bread Upon the Waters* was republished in the 1850s for the benefit of the GBI. In an appendix the author outlines the important work of the organisation, stating that “[a]fter nine years’ devotion to the cause [...] the name GOVERNESS has become to us a claim at once on our esteem, our respect, and our sympathy” (88). She applauds the initiative to build a home for aged governesses: “the last earthly resting-place of the tired travellers in a rugged journey; the Asylum in Kentish Town, built expressly for the Aged [...] the calm haven, where no tempest may reach them” (94).

*

Whereas practical circumstances, such as restricted space or difficulties in recruiting certain kinds of domestic servants, may have been the reason for real-life governesses’ having felt slighted, their fictional counterparts are frequently depicted as suffering from their employers’ animosity. Predicaments that surface in real-life records are accented in fictional treatment in order to create a particular effect on the reader. The next chapter focuses on the governess as a teacher, showing how the socially stigmatised position of the nineteenth-century governess follows her into the schoolroom. Several of the points made in this chapter will be relevant to the ensuing discussion as well.

4

Order, method, and punctuality

Teach – what is necessary, first; what is useful, next; what is ornamental, last. Do all you can by influence. Expect not, as you exhibit not, perfection. And surely you shall see a reward to your labour.

(A Word to a Young Governess: By an Old One 1860)

This chapter will investigate the fictional characterisation of the governess in her role as a teacher. There are occasional references to actual lessons in most governess novels; and in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) and Eliza Cheap's *The Nursery Governess* (1845), for instance, the element of teaching is comparatively prominent. Generally, however, schoolroom activities do not take up much space in governess novels compared to what goes on outside school hours. This is worth noticing, as real-life governesses spent long hours in the schoolroom, the school week usually being five and a half days long. One plausible reason for the discrepancy between fact and fiction in this respect is the objective of the writers of governess novels, which was not primarily to depict the governess as a teacher, but to put her life outside the schoolroom before the readers. Her social position therefore becomes more interesting than her educational skills, and education is generally related to social issues. Schoolroom scenes address matters like employers' expectations of the governess, and their attitude to children's education, rather than indicating the author's interest in pedagogy. This is all the more significant, as several of the writers within the genre in fact had first-hand experience of the profession.

From the point of view of marketability, social issues would probably be of greater interest to a novel-reader than an explication of how the heroine tackles teaching geometry or French. Another explanation of the relative scarcity of schoolroom scenes in the novels is the fact that the intended readers

were sometimes employers of governesses. Miss Ross, for example, in the preface to *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* (1836) specifically stated her hope that the rich would read her novel and afterwards treat their governesses better. Thus the role of the employers needs to be central to the plot, which is more easily achieved outside the schoolroom and outside school-hours. The contemporary debate also devoted more interest to the non-teaching aspects of the governess question, concentrating on general working conditions and conflicts linked to the governess's intermediate position. Furthermore, some novelists may have realised that governesses would need to be better prepared for their work in order to gain more respect from their employers. Concentration on matters not directly connected with the actual work of the governess may thus have been an authorial way of avoiding what was a recognised problem.

The fact that schoolroom activities seem to be linked to the social situation of the governess character deserves attention. In the novels, the contact between the heroine and her employer is characteristically limited to very few topics. When the protagonist is informed about her duties on her arrival, she is sometimes – far from always, though – informed about how and what her employers wish their children to be taught. To influence the children and form their characters is often seen as the main duty of the governess. When she is at work in the schoolroom, the issues raised repeatedly concern certain specific questions: interruptions of lessons, the constitution of the children, or discipline. Manual writers treated these problems too, and they appeared in the contemporary debate. In this respect, the novels deal with problems that real-life governesses also faced, although they seem to paint an even bleaker view of governess life than some non-fiction sources do. This is not surprising, however, as the genre so clearly aimed to promote the cause of governesses.

There is an important difference in the function of educational matters in the novels compared with the non-fictional material, however. While manuals strove to give advice to governesses and their employers, the novels tend to employ scenes involving education to create a framework for specific social matters. For instance, the heroine's educational background is usually similar – or even superior – to that of her mistress. Her fate, however, is to educate girls for the kind of life of which she herself has been deprived. This positional irony is furthermore underlined by the fact that since she has seldom been trained for work, the refined kind of education that the heroine possesses sometimes leaves her quite stranded in the schoolroom.

When it comes to contemporary educational ideals, governess novels do not vary much from the ones that prevailed in real life among the middle classes. Many nineteenth-century parents wished their daughters to display signs of an appropriate class-identity. The tendency to concentrate on and favour so-called

accomplishments before more intellectual attainments, or indeed topics that would be more useful for girls in their future roles as wives and mothers, is relevant in connection with the governess novel. In the educational debate, critical voices were repeatedly raised against the craze for accomplishments. Similarly, writers of governess novels often paint crude portraits of parvenu bourgeois employers who prefer to see their daughters excel at the piano to having them adequately prepared for adult life.

A sound education or the accomplishments?

The general interest in self-help and improvement in nineteenth-century England is noticeable in the immense output of educational and didactic literature intended for the middle classes. This kind of literature was not a new phenomenon, however; there had been a great interest in education during the second half of the eighteenth century as well. The expansion of the middle classes during the first half of the nineteenth century, however, created another and much larger reading market. The necessity of a suitable education became increasingly evident to members of the aspiring middle classes, and schooling came to be a mark of social status. The lively middle-class interest in education must be seen in the light of social mobility. Judith Rowbotham, for instance, claims that “[t]he middle classes believed that education of the young was a significant focus for change, and that therefore, training of English youth was one way in which they could ensure that their supremacy remained” (2).

Middle-class education was gendered in the sense that while boys were taught ways geared to preparing them for university, or at least for a successful life in the public sphere, girls’ education aimed at a domestic ideal. In a society where education so clearly marked class affiliation, it is noteworthy that limitations in learning were not primarily connected with class but with gender. Education in the classical languages, for example, was generally reserved for boys. While they were taught Latin and Greek from an early age, girls were often kept away from such ‘masculine’ subjects. Discussing this, Elaine Showalter calls the classical education an “intellectual dividing line between men and women” (1982, 42). She points at the frustration felt by fictional characters like George Eliot’s Dorothea Casaubon and Maggie Tulliver when deprived of the full education they yearned for.

Such distraction was also felt by the early-nineteenth-century governess Ellen Weeton, who as a child “burned to learn Latin” and other subjects denied to her (E. Hall I:14). Her journal records how she would always beat her

younger brother in games of letter writing, riddles and enigmas. When it came to classical languages, however, the gender division became apparent: “[m]y brother would spout a little Latin, which of course was always too much for me” (15). A more self-confident attitude was expressed by Agnes Porter in the 1790s. Her pupils’ brother received Latin tuition from a clergyman, and Porter wrote in her diary that she, by attending these lessons, “got all the declensions pretty perfect” (Martin 155). As has been mentioned earlier, Porter was an avid language student who would, for instance, often spend an hour or two in the evening reading Italian. It might have been common for the governess thus to improve herself during her pupils’ lessons; Elizabeth Ham also described how she endeavoured to pick up some French from a visiting master (Gillett 204). One fictional governess who likewise realises the value of classical languages is Ursula in Holme Lee’s *Warp and Woof: or, the Reminiscences of Doris Fletcher* (1861). She spends her vacations improving her Latin, thereby hoping to increase her chances of an advantageous situation.

The study of classical languages does not seem to have been altogether banned from curricula for girls. A governess working in a London family in the late 1820s wrote in a letter that she found her little charge “rather advanced for her age, being only 9. She reads & understands French very well, knows a little Latin, & plays pretty well” (Chisholm 330). Such a statement of course also reveals the linguistic capacities of the governess herself. The woman in question was Elizabeth Coxen, who later married the famous zoologist John Gould, with whom she collaborated on several books on Australian birds. According to Broughton and Symes, “there were educational commentators who also saw merits for females in the discipline of learning Latin and Greek” (61). They quote Anthony F. Thomson, whose *The English Schoolroom; or Thoughts on Private Tuition, Practical and Suggestive* (1865) advocated “a moderate amount of Latin but *much* Greek” (273). The reason for this was mainly that he thought Greek easier to learn, and more useful in its closeness to Modern Greek, a living language. A decade later Charlotte M. Yonge argued that Latin should be studied before German, for example, as it could serve as a foundation for the study of other languages. According to her, “Latin, and at least enough Greek to read the words and find them in the lexicon, are real powers” (1876, 41). Knowledge of classical languages was appreciated in governesses in nineteenth-century England, as they could then help boys home from school on holidays. Anne Brontë, for instance, knew some Latin, and in 1843 she bought a Latin textbook, presumably to be used when teaching the Robinson boy (Barker 147).

An employer’s wish for classical languages features in some of the novels, too. In the Hunts’ *The Governess* (1912) it is explicitly stated that the heroine’s “knowledge of Latin had gained her the place. She was to help to

prepare the boy for school” (5). Putting together an advertisement for a governess, Mrs Gresham in Anna Maria Hall’s *The Governess. A Tale* (1842) expects her to have acquaintance “with the rudiments of Latin”, as her young son will then be able to join his three sisters in the schoolroom. Mrs Gresham thereby intends to save the expense of engaging a tutor for the boy. Hearing that, a friend suggests that she “add also Greek. If the governess is anything of a classic, you’ll get both for the same money” (3). In details like this, which occur throughout the novel, Hall managed to convey the stinginess of employers. In Gabriel Alexander’s *Adelaide, or the Trials of a Governess* (1865) the protagonist answers an advertisement which, besides demanding “a thorough English education”, various foreign languages and the usual accomplishments, states that “[a]s there is a fine, spirited, and inquisitive boy in the family, the governess must have considerable familiarity with both Latin and Greek grammar” (143). Adelaide’s initial reaction to such demands is that the employer must be looking for someone who has “graduated at Oxford or Cambridge”(143), which was of course an impossibility for a woman at the time. Both Hall and Alexander employ the issue of classical languages to point at unreasonably high demands among employers, while other stories display a genuine wish on the part of parents that their children should learn Latin and perhaps Greek.

Agnes Strickland’s juvenile story “Le Bas Bleu” in *Tales of the School-Room* (1835) features a young girl called Evelina who is taught classical languages together with her brother, because their father explicitly wishes them to receive an equal education. Strickland, who is best known for her historical works, had herself been taught Greek, Latin, and mathematics by her father (Shattock 411). When a governess is introduced into the household, Evelina faces problems, however; “From having been accustomed almost exclusively to read Latin and Greek, I found it difficult to catch the pronunciation and idiom of modern languages; and my blunders were made a source of amusement in the schoolroom, till I almost hated the sight of the books” (170). In Juliana Horatia Ewing’s *Six to Sixteen. A Story for Girls* (1875), the children are taught Latin by the father of the house after their incompetent governess has been dismissed. Most governess novels delineate far more traditional female education for girls, however.

Female middle-class education was well defined in Victorian England. A glance at a number of contemporary advertisements for governess situations reveals the pattern. Typically, governesses professed to teach “the usual branches of an English education, French, Drawing, and the elements of Italian and German” (*GRFE* July 1855). Female education was divided into two components, the one consisting of what was known as ‘a sound English

education’, the other of the so-called ‘accomplishments’. The sound education primarily included English in all its branches – that is, reading, writing, spelling, and grammar –, history, geography, and arithmetic. Sometimes science, in the form of botany and geology, was also included. Thormählen points out that, after English, the subjects considered most important were history and geography (485). Therefore, it is not surprising that at schools it was often the head teacher who took care of these subjects; in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853) Madame Beck teaches geography, and in *Jane Eyre* (1847) Miss Temple is in charge of that subject (486). A possible reason for the promotion of these specific subjects is their strong ideological values for a country like England.

The importance of history and geography was stressed in several books on education from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the 1860s Anthony Thomson claimed that the point of geography was to make the child realise his “*relation to the universe around him*” (229). Some sixty years earlier, the bluestocking and Evangelical writer Hannah More had included a separate chapter titled “On the religious and moral use of history and geography” in her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education; With a View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent Among Women of Rank and Fortune* (1799). There she recommended that children be taught what is right and wrong through history, since this subject “may serve to give a clearer insight into the corruption of human nature” (143). In a similar way, geography and natural history were recommended as tools to instil the Christian faith in children’s minds.

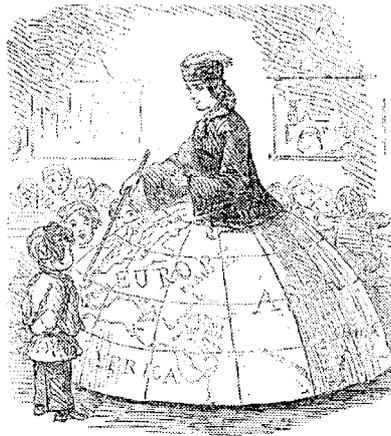


Fig. 4 “The modern governess” (*Punch* 1861, 40:52)

The great interest in geography and the use of globes in girls' education was repeatedly parodied by *Punch*. In 1846, for example, an article suggested that as "young ladies, generally, are not destined to emulate MUNGO PARK, Geography, as it is taught them, is of little use to them" (1846, 10:178). What young ladies would really need was "a Metropolitan Geography", which the writer suggested should be termed "Shopography". Fifteen years later, *Punch* published an engraving illustrating the "modern governess" who employs her crinoline as a globe (Fig. 4).

Among the natural sciences, entomology and botany were very popular. Broughton and Symes state that these subjects "were deemed more ladylike than the study of the behaviour of animals (presumably because the latter was more likely to engender awkward questions about reproduction)" (65). The collection and study of plants and insects could also form a natural part of the daily outdoor exercise. A *Punch* cartoon from 1870 entitled "The girl of the period butterfly (*Puella rapidula*)" (Fig. 5) shows to the left three plain pig-tailed girls in a typical schoolroom situation and to the right a young lady with what seems to be a butterfly's body.

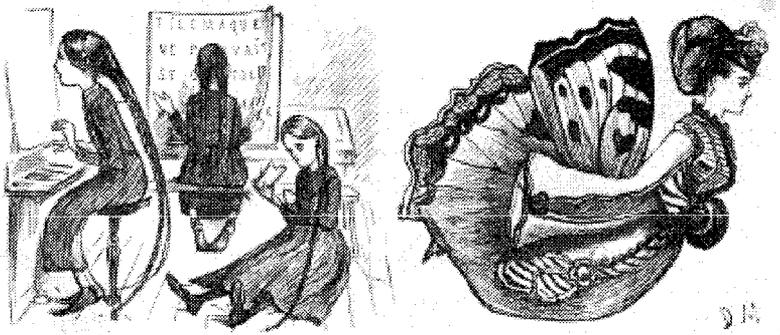


Fig. 5 "Entomological studies" (detail) (*Punch* 1870, 58:107)

Broughton and Symes see the cartoon as a comment on the "contemporary obsession with entomology in the schoolroom" (66). In line with the common Victorian metaphor of young girls emerging from a chrysalis in connection with the socially important step of coming out (Davidoff 1973, 52), it could be argued that the *Punch* image refers to such a transformation too. The illustration actually constitutes one third of a large engraving entitled "Entomological studies", where the other two parts represent male development (into a city snob and a military man, respectively).

The Victorian emphasis on so-called accomplishments, which consisted of French and other foreign languages, drawing, music, dancing, and fine needlework, was striking. As Anne Brontë's Agnes Grey says, it seems as if many parents wanted their daughters "as superficially attractive and showily accomplished as they could possibly be made" (120). The main reason why accomplishments were regarded as more important than intellectual training was their high social value. The education of middle-class girls must therefore be seen in connection to the development of nineteenth-century society. As was pointed out above, one way for middle-class men to verify their position and to distinguish themselves from the lower classes was to show that they could afford to keep their wives and daughters at leisure. Many critics saw this leisure as pernicious, however, and equalled it with a female decline in utility. In *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, Hannah More criticised the stress on accomplishments in girls' education, stating,

as far as this epidemical mania has spread, this very valuable part of society [i.e. women] is declining in usefulness, as it rises in its ill-founded pretensions to elegance, till this rapid revolution of the manners of the middle class has so far altered the character of the age, as to be in danger of rendering obsolete the heretofore common saying, 'that most worth and virtue are to found in the middle station?' (48)

In her piece "The White Slave Trade" (*Poems* 1816), More compared ballrooms with slave markets, arguing that women were slaves under the tyrant Fashion. This use of the expression 'white slave trade' or 'white slavery' is both early and interesting. Handbooks (e.g. S. Mitchell 1988) usually state that this expression was used from the 1830s onwards, especially in connection with prostitution. The *OED* supplies several alternative meanings, but none of them is as early as the title of More's poem. The expression 'white slavery' was used in connection with governesses in the 1850s, for instance by the feminist Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (Poovey 131, n16).

The idea that middle-class women were seen as "declining in usefulness" due to their faulty education was brought up throughout the nineteenth-century. In the 1840s, for instance, an anonymous writer in *Fraser's Magazine* criticised the superficial nature of girls' education by deploring how "[e]very miss must grind a waltz, daub a piece of paper, and chatter bad French" (*FM* 1844, 582). Dinah Mulock Craik put it even more harshly in *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* (1858), where she asserted that the "lovely uselessness, fascinating frivolity, [and] delicious helplessness" (5) evinced by many middle-class daughters were damaging to their character (see also S. Mitchell 1983).

Those directly affected by the accomplishment craze also protested against the superficiality of female education. In 1825, when Claire Clairmont was engaged as a governess in Moscow, she vented her frustration that her ideas did not conform to those of her Russian employers in a letter to Mary Shelley:

[T]hey pull one way, and I another – they educate a child by making the external work upon the internal, which is, in fact, nothing but an education fit for monkeys, and is a mere system of imitation – I want the internal to work upon the external; that is to say, that my pupil should be left at liberty as much as possible, and that her own reason should be the prompter of her actions. (Stocking 298)

Some girls likewise felt stifled because intellectual studies had to give way to incessant training in the accomplishments. Frances Power Cobbe, to take but one example, recorded in her autobiography how she spent two years at a fashionable boarding school at Brighton in the 1830s, where everything “was taught us in the inverse ratio of its true importance. At the bottom of the scales were Morals and Religion, and at the top were Music and Dancing” (64). With its lively descriptions, Power Cobbe’s autobiography yields interesting information about an apparently typical fashionable school at the time.

Among the favoured accomplishments, French held a distinguished place. Middle-class girls were taught several foreign languages, and fluency in French seems to have been taken almost for granted. English governesses often conversed in French with their pupils. In many cases, however, the value of such linguistic proficiency could be questioned. As early as in the late eighteenth century, Hannah More found the emphasis on foreign languages indefensible as most women did not travel abroad or have much time for reading (1799, 49). When it came to music, her contemporaries Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth were likewise critical in their influential *Practical Education* (1798):

Out of the prodigious number of young women who learn music and drawing, for instance, how many of these, who, after they become mistresses of their own time, and after they have the choice of their own amusements, continue to practise these accomplishments for the pure pleasure of the occupation? As soon as a young woman is married, does not she frequently discover that ‘she really has not leisure to cultivate talents which take up so much time.’ (523)

Musical proficiency was indeed of importance for women, as a beautiful voice and brilliance at an instrument were highly esteemed social talents. Both real-life and fictional governesses with little or no musical talent faced difficulties in procuring a situation. On the other hand, some families deemed music so essential that they employed special music masters, thus relieving the governess of that subject.

The shallowness of female education became evident as middle-class parents strove to embrace upper-class ideals without having the means to furnish their daughters with the same degree of leisure as their aristocratic sisters would have enjoyed. Maria Abdy's poem "A Governess Wanted" (1838) satirises such pretensions. Although not only the so-called accomplishments are mentioned in the list of topics that the employer craves, it is clear that they are deemed most important:

“With ease and modest decision,
She ever must move, act, and speak;
She must understand French with precision,
Italian, Latin, and Greek;
She must play the piano divinely,
Excel on the harp and the lute,
Do all sorts of needle-work finely,
And make feather-flowers, and wax-fruit.

“She must answer all queries directly,
And all sciences well understand,
Paint in oils, sketch from nature correctly,
And write German text, and short-hand:
She must sing with power, science, and sweetness,
Yet for concerts must sigh not at all,
She must dance with ethereal fleetness;
Yet never must go to a ball. (21-22)

The speaker of this poem is a lady who asks her brother to help her advertise for a new governess, as the last one left “[I]ast night, in a strange fit of pique” (21). When the bachelor brother hears the long list of attainments that the governess must possess, he states that he will not head the advertisement “A Governess Wanted”, but “Wanted a Wife” (23). This joke seems to have figured in several variants. As early as in 1834, *The Christian Lady's Magazine* recorded an anecdote about a lady in search of an “all-accomplished and superior person” who had asked her brother for help. He was said to have replied “I have never yet met with such a woman as you describe; but when I do, I shall make her my wife, and not your governess” (*CLM* 1834, 2:45; see also Neff 160). The story was also picked up by a writer in *Eliza Cook's Journal*, who drew the conclusion that the “young man was right; for, wives such as the governesses who are so often advertised for in the newspapers, are not very often to be met with” (*ECJ* 1849, 306). It was, however, not common for gentlemen to marry governesses at that time, although this is a common ending of governess novels. Chapter 6 below will return to this discrepancy between fact and fiction.

Abdy was not alone in using the contemporary educational ideals for satiric purposes. In *Vanity Fair* (1847), Thackeray lists the qualifications of two

young pupils, Miss Tuffin and Miss Hawky, at Miss Pinkerton's academy, stating that they are

perfectly qualified to instruct in Greek, Latin, and the rudiments of Hebrew; in mathematics and history; in Spanish, French, Italian, and geography; in music, vocal and instrumental; in dancing, without the aid of a master; and in the elements of natural sciences. In the use of the globes both are proficient. (135)

In addition to this impressive list, the eighteen-year-old Miss Tuffin "can instruct in the Syriac language, and the elements in Constitutional law". As she is also beautiful, though, Miss Pinkerton hesitates to recommend her and suggests that Mrs Bute Crawley hire Miss Hawky instead, who is both an invalid and pitted by smallpox.

Rosina Bulwer Lytton sarcastically commented on female education in *Very Successful* (1856), suggesting that the low wages generally paid to governesses were "sufficient for teaching young ladies ignorance, bad English, and husband-hunting" (10). However, Mrs Pemble of this novel is lucky enough to meet with an employer who actually looks for an educated and experienced woman. It is repeatedly pointed out that the heroine is a "strong-minded woman" (see also P. Thomson 45), and Mrs Pemble methodically strips her pupils of the superficiality they have acquired from their last governess. Not many fictional governesses are as fortunate as Mrs Pemble when it comes to employers. As we have seen, parents in the novels often put superficial skills before intellectual training as a way of trying to promote their children in society. The disastrous effect is visible in cases like that of Rosalie Murray in *Agnes Grey*, whose only aim in life is to catch the attention of a local aristocratic bachelor. Although Agnes endeavours to make her see the drawbacks of a life of mere material splendour, Rosalie marries the good-for-nothing Sir Thomas Ashby and is consequently doomed to an existence dominated by boredom and dissatisfaction.

In the anonymous *Charlotte's Governess* (1902), the value attached to accomplishments forms an important part of the plot. Although the orphaned Charlotte seems to be considered ineducable by her aristocratic relatives, a governess is employed to make her a bit more sociable. However, it soon becomes clear that Charlotte's aunt wishes to keep her unnoticed in order to promote another relative to an expected inheritance. The girl is not allowed to learn music or other accomplishments that may make her attractive, as the aunt has learnt that the one of her two nieces Charlotte and Hertha who marries first will come into a large fortune. Since Hertha is her favourite, the aunt is not at all in favour of Charlotte's musicality being discovered, let alone developed. The social powers of a beautiful voice and skilful piano hands are shown by the

dramatic threat of dismissal of the governess when, after having discovered that Charlotte has a keen love of music, she wishes to procure a piano for the girl.

Another employer who wishes to downplay the abilities of pupils is Lady Ashbury in Julia Buckley's *Emily, the Governess* (1836). At first she sees no reason to employ a governess for her invalid daughter, "it being quite immaterial whether Elizabeth was clever or ignorant, as she could never be introduced into the world" (80). It is a crude picture of the nineteenth-century woman's possibilities in life that is presented here. Although most governess novels do not actively promote equality between the sexes, specific references to the subject of girls' education nonetheless indicate strong criticisms of calculated actions like these. Thus, in both *Charlotte's Governess* and in *Emily, the Governess*, the governess characters personify righteousness by taking the initiative to teach their pupils.

The characteristics most cherished by nineteenth-century middle-class parents clearly did not include their daughters' intellectual capacity. Rather, their interest was focused on those daughters' value on the marriage market. As was repeatedly pointed out in the educational debate throughout the nineteenth century, girls were not trained for their future lives as wives and mothers, but for the brief season in which they were supposed to catch a husband. Around 1800, the Edgeworths argued that "[n]ext to beauty, [accomplishments] are the best tickets of admission into society [...] and every body knows, that on the company she keeps depends the chance of a young woman's settling advantageously in the world" (525-526). In many social circles this was the bitter truth, and also the reason why so many parents kept educating their daughters "for the mere effect of husband-hunting" instead of teaching them "the art of husband-keeping" (109), as Robert Henry Mair put it in *The Educator's Guide, or, Hand Book for Principals of Schools, Parents, Guardians, Governesses and Tutors* (1866).

In 1826, the anonymous *The Complete Governess: A Course of Mental Instruction for Ladies* stated that female education consisted of "mere externals and of show" and that only "the fingers, the ears, the tongue, and the feet are schooled in all those little arts and elegancies that are calculated for momentary and external effect" (2). The writer thought that the problem was that girls were not educated "as if they were one day to be women, but as if they were always to remain girls" (9). She claimed that while an educated man differed widely from a peasant in learning, a lady differed from her maid only in elegance. Similarly, in her widely popular *Woman's Mission* (1839; adapted from Louis-Aimé Martin's *De l'éducation des mères de famille* 1834), Sarah Lewis asked if any steps were taken to prepare young women for their duties as housewives. She emphatically answered the question "No! but she is a linguist, a pianist,

graceful, admired” (63). Similar sentiments were voiced all through the nineteenth century, and not only by feminists. Lewis herself, often considered to be conservative, came under much attack from more radical writers for some of her standpoints (Horowitz Murray 22, 212, see also Helsinger et al. I:3-20).

A century after Hannah More’s *Strictures on Female Education* had been published, Alice Zimmern complained that things had not changed much: “[a]s we read her *Strictures on Female Education* we rub our eyes and look at the date once more. Is this, indeed, Hannah More writing a hundred years ago, or have we stumbled upon a stray extract from Mr. Bryce’s report to the School’s Inquiry Commission in 1867?” (12). Zimmern was right; the problems, as well as the arguments, seem to have remained very much the same all through the nineteenth century.

Just like Mrs Murray in *Agnes Grey*, the employer in E.W.’s *Ellen Manners; or, Recollections of a Governess* (1875) explicitly states that she wishes the governess to pay particular attention to her daughters’ manners and accomplishments. The bad effect of such an ‘accomplished’ education can be studied in *The Governess; or Politics in Private Life*, where Mrs Elphinstone angrily imparts her views on her own education to one of her sisters:

[What] delightful specimens we are of the time and care, and the eleven years of Madame Gautier’s [their old governess] superintendence! We have, however, answered the end, I suppose, for which we were educated: we have all married men of rank and fortune; – that we are weak, vain, and unamiable, is a very secondary consideration in the school in which we were brought up. (86)

These women have clearly been educated “exclusively for the transient period of youth”, as Hannah More put it (1799, 46). In several novels, the lady of the house is depicted as, if not useless, at least as a passive and weak woman, in comparison with the governess character. This is especially the case in moments of crisis, when the governess manages things rationally. In some novels, the mistress is utterly incapable even of managing her household and leaves the total responsibility to the instructor of her children (see Chapter 3 above).

As was stated above, science was not usually considered as an accomplishment. In the anonymous *Margaret Stourton, or a Year of Governess Life* (1863), however, the affected Miss Baring tries to impress Margaret’s commendable employer by boasting of her great interest in science. It is notable that this novel was published when Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859) was still very much a novelty. Miss Baring talks about some new neighbours who, to her delight, have joined the local book club

and have ordered most scientific works; one is on geology, another is a treatise on botany, and, if I remember right, the third is something about the progress of the human intellect. I find geology a most fascinating study, and I intend at once taking up botany. I feel so much encouraged to do so by hearing how scientific our new neighbours are; one so seldom meets with intellectual people. (95)

Complaining that accomplishments “may do well enough in the butterfly world of fashion”, Miss Baring declares her intention to acquire an intellectual education (95). Since she is sixteen years old and has now left the schoolroom to be finished by masters, her interest in modern science comes across as just another fashionable accomplishment.

In quite a few early nineteenth-century novels and stories that are to some extent concerned with education, intellectual women are satirised as ‘bluestockings’. These ladies are well read, but unable to use their knowledge in any useful way. Invariably described as unfeminine, they are often slovenly and sometimes devoid social talents.

In the early and anonymous *Gogmagog-Hall, or the Philosophical Lord and the Governess* (1819), a set of peculiar characters is introduced to the reader. One of them is Lady Louisa Caloric, an enthusiastic chemist who almost succeeds in blowing up Gogmagog-Hall, where the novel is set. One of the men present at the great house party exclaims, “Heaven shield this country from a race of female philosophers, artists, and scientific blue stockings!” (I:107). The governess in this novel is not at all associated with Lady Caloric or the other women in the novel; on the contrary her decorous shyness is hailed as proper female conduct by the author.¹

Agnes Strickland’s short story “Le Bas Bleu” borrowed its name from an appellation given to the original Bluestocking circle (see Myers 262) and used by Hannah More in her poem “The Bas Bleu: or, Conversation” (1786). Strickland’s story treats the commonly felt hazards of educating women wrongly. The protagonist Evelina – mockingly called “the learned lady” by her governess, who wishes to stress the accomplishments – feels ashamed that at the age of thirteen she is not able to make a shirt or keep her room tidy. To be improved, she is sent to her clergyman uncle, whose daughter Emily is “a good classic, ha[s] superior literary knowledge, wr[ites] well, and [is] in short, what is

¹ It could be added that this novel seems to be something of a *roman à clef*; not only do we meet presumably identifiable bluestocking women, but also the “celebrated, eccentric, and literary” (I:72) Lord Gondola who has obvious Byronic traits. He is described as never having had a friend “except a four-footed one in the shape of a Newfoundland Dog, whose surname was Boatswain; not being a Christian, his name was single” (I:92). This description is strikingly similar to Byron’s epitaph (1808) over his Newfoundland dog who was also called Boatswain. The poet described his dog as “in life the firmest friend [...] I never knew but one”, and he also commented on the fact that the dog was not considered to be a Christian: “Denied in heaven the soul he held on earth” (224-225).

termed ‘very blue’”(176). However, at the same time she is a neat and feminine girl. Evelina meets one of her cousin’s bluestocking friends, a shabby, irreligious woman who intends to take up studies in Chinese. Unlike Emily, however, this lady resembles the mock picture of intellectual women, as exemplified above in Lady Caloric. Evelina’s aunt explains that book-learning is good for women only as long as it is combined with subjects necessary for future housewives. Therefore, Emily’s brother says,

our good mamma was so careful that Emily should not be injured by learning, that when she had finished her Latin and Greek lessons, the housekeeper used to be her instructress in pies and puddings; and if we returned from the most interesting chemical lectures, and she longed to try the experiments over again with me, she went first like a good girl, to help her mamma to finish clothes for the benevolent society. (185-186)

It might be noted that no such charity activity seems to have been necessary for the boy if he wished to continue his science studies at home.

The point of Strickland’s story was to stress the necessity of adherence to religion and duty, not to attack book learning in women as such. However, in 1835, when her “Le Bas Bleu” was published, the balance between intellectual and more superficial attainments in female education was much debated. In the contemporary Mary Martha Sherwood’s *Caroline Mordaunt, or, The Governess* (1835) and in *The Governess* (1839) by Marguerite Blessington, there are employers who seem to be satirical portraits of bluestocking women. Both Mrs Vincent Robinson in Blessington’s novel and Mrs Delaney in *Caroline Mordaunt* host quasi-intellectual literary salons. The improbable characters of both Mrs Vincent Robinson and Mrs Delaney serve to accentuate the good and sober qualities of the governess. Sherwood actually commented on her portrait of a bluestocking lady in her diary. In 1801, she had been invited to Elizabeth Hamilton, the educational writer, and later described this encounter:

Miss Hamilton was then at the height of her celebrity as an authoress, having not long before published her ‘Modern Philosophers’; she was, in fact, at that period at the head of the ‘bas bleus’ of Bath. She had a literary party one evening every week at her house, and although then unknown as an authoress, I was honoured with an invitation. I have given a description of that evening under feigned names in a chapter of ‘Caroline Mordaunt.’ (Darton 203)

The name that Sherwood used for the literary hostess in *Caroline Mordaunt* – Mrs Delaney – is strikingly similar to that of another of the bluestocking ladies, namely Mary Delany. Delany, who belonged to the first generation of bluestockings, was interested in botany, and is best known today for the exquisite paper flower collages she started making at the age of 72. In this

context, it could be added that Sherwood in her youth met not only Hamilton, but also Hannah More (Darton 198).

Pedagogy in the Victorian schoolroom

To understand female education as it is presented in governess novels, it has to be seen in the light of the pedagogical ideas in vogue at the time. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries produced educational treatises that were in some ways surprisingly modern. The following brief survey of pedagogical ideas that were fashionable in England in the heyday of the governess novel is intended as a background for the discussion on how the matter of education is treated in the novels. Although purely educational matters are not at the centre of attention in the novels, the professional success of the heroine can be measured by her way of teaching, inside and outside the schoolroom. While some governess manuals openly refer to specific pedagogues or ideas, this is not often the case in the novels. There, any didactic awareness on the part of the governess is conveyed through practical examples of how she manages her pupils.

The ideas of several European educationalists, such as Rousseau, Fénelon, and the now perhaps less known Felicité de Genlis, were introduced in England during the latter decades of the eighteenth century. Like her countryman Rousseau, de Genlis had spent some years in England. Agnes Porter, whose pupils actually met the authoress at a ball in 1791, herself owned several of Genlis's books on education and presumably used them in her work. Porter noted in her journal that to her delight, Madame de Genlis had complimented one of her pupils on her French (Martin 128).

The Swiss educationalist Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi came to influence European and English education greatly. His main idea was that development should come from within, and his theory of education therefore centred round the possibilities of the child rather than the activity of the teacher. Pestalozzi reasoned that when a child confronted something unknown, he or she would try to discover it according to the three notions of "counting, measuring, and naming, or, as he expressed it, by means of the three concepts of Number, Form, and Language" (Stewart and McCann 140). Thus, children were trained to use their senses, and teaching was seen as a progression from the simple to the more complex. Pestalozzi's educational principles were presented to the public in several works, *Lienhard und Gertrud* (1781-1787; translated as *Leonard & Gertrude* 1800) and *Wie Gertrud ihre Kinder lehrt* (1801; translated as *How Gertrude Teaches her Children* in same year) being perhaps the best-known.

Educationalists from all over Europe came to learn from Pestalozzi at his experimental school at Yverdon, Switzerland, where he taught poor children. A German disciple of his was Friedrich Fröbel, the originator of the 'kindergarten' system. Fröbel's ideas, the foundations of which are to be found in Rousseau's and Pestalozzi's notions of child-centred education, were based on the assumption that understanding develops through an active engagement with the world, through play and stimulating games. Therefore, he argued in favour of learning through activity as a means of developing children's intelligence. Fröbel advocated so-called 'object-lessons'; children were supposed to learn through practical experiments.

Pestalozzi's ideas were brought to the British Isles by British followers and through the translation of his works. Dr Charles Mayo, for instance, was very active in introducing Pestalozzi's ideas in England. Having worked as an assistant at Yverdon, he set up a school at Cheam upon his return to England in the early 1820s, where he elaborated the Pestalozzian concepts together with his sister Elizabeth. The Mayos and other 'Pestalozzians' were apparently ahead of their time. Stewart and McCann indicate that the lack of competence among many teachers at the time made the idea of object-teaching almost destined "to degenerate into the very verbalism that the Mayos had hoped to overcome" (152). Elizabeth Mayo published several books on education, for instance *Model Lessons for Infant School Teachers and Nursery Governesses* (1848). There she criticised the prevalent rote-learning system, asking what ideas an infant would achieve, "in repeating the names of the Old and New Testaments? How is its knowledge of the Deity increased by committing to memory a list of attributes it cannot comprehend?" (I:iv). Instead, Elizabeth Mayo wished to "quicken the children's powers of observation, and to accustom them to a precise and accurate manner of expressing themselves upon subjects falling under their own daily cognisance" (I:v). These ideas were very similar to those of Pestalozzi himself; in a letter to an English correspondent he urged mothers to teach their children "always by THINGS, rather than by WORDS" (*Letters on Early Education* 1827, 122).

However, the low level of educational ability among teachers ensured that the much-criticised rote-learning system was hard to drive out. Much of the educational material used consisted of collections of set questions and answers on suitable topics. Perhaps the best known educational book in the nineteenth century in England was Richmal Mangnall's *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions for the Use of Young People* (1798), which to some extent consisted of such set questions and answers exemplifying a certain issue. The problem with Mangnall's book was that while presumably intended as a guide for teachers on how to approach a subject, it came to be used as fixed dialogues to

be learned by heart (Burns 12). Mangnall's work went through a large number of editions, and alterations and modifications were made, perhaps in order to adapt to an increasing fixation with ornamental education for girls.²

The range of subjects taken up in Mangnall's *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions* is broad, running from history and geography to botany and even physics. The first part of the book consists of chronologically structured chapters on English and European history. The succeeding sections include law and the constitution, Latin and Greek terms, the elements of astronomy, and heathen mythology. *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions* is a small but dense volume crammed with facts and comments compiled by an experienced teacher. The wide range of topics discussed is interesting as it to some extent counteracts prevailing ideas of what girls were supposed to learn in the nineteenth century. For instance, Mangnall taught her pupils both that opium is a "narcotic juice, extracted from the white poppy, thickened and made up into cakes; it is bought chiefly from Turkey, Egypt, and the Indies; and is useful both in medicine and surgery" (216), and that coffee is the "berry of a tree whose leaves resemble the laurel" and that "the Turks are passionately fond of this liquor" (214-215).

In a more scientific section, Mangnall discusses the topic of mineralogy:

What is mineralogy? A science which teaches the best method of discovering mines, and forming a judgement of their various properties. Which are the principal metals? Gold, silver, quicksilver, (or mercury), copper, iron, lead, and tin; of these, gold is the heaviest; tin, the lightest; and iron, the most useful. Whence have we gold? From New Mexico, in North America; some parts of South America; and many places in the East-Indies. Where is silver found? Chiefly in the mines of Potosi, in South America; but there are some good mines in Norway and Sweden. (211)

Although Mangnall probably did not intend her book to be studied page by page and learned by heart, it nonetheless offers a non-imaginative kind of knowledge, leaving little room for the child's intellectual development. Burns makes an effort to defend *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions*, although acknowledging that it is "curiously disordered and inconsequential" (12). Perhaps, he suggests, there is "cultivated randomness" (13) in the seeming disorder. It may well be argued that facts are presented in a striking way which may have facilitated memorisation. For instance, there often seems to be a sense of rhythm in the enumeration of the localities of certain plants, metals, etc.

Mangnall's book was much criticised already in the nineteenth century. In *Principles of Education Practicably Considered; With an Especial Reference*

² Mangnall's book seems to have gone through changes in appearance too. The strict dialogic question-and-answer layout of the book which is reproduced by e.g. Percival and Renton is not identical with the 1800 edition, which is the earliest one that is available at the British Library.

to the Present State of Female Education in England (1844), M. A. Stodart thought it was “a marvel” (242) that a book such as *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions* could have gained such popularity. Seeing it as a “striking proof of the low state of information in female seminaries” (242), Stodart claimed that if teachers and governesses were better trained, they should be able to develop the minds of their pupils instead of making them repeat useless facts. In an article in 1855, the signature W.M. likewise attacked education where lessons were “committed to the memory, and learned page by page, after the manner of Mangnall’s ‘Questions’” (*GRFE* 1855, 188). The main point of the criticism voiced in this article concerned the inferior education of governesses, and the fact that many of them had themselves been “brought up under the most pernicious of all systems which we call the ‘verbal system’, in which words are taught and not things, and phrases of no meaning are substituted for the facts and ideas of real knowledge” (188).

Books adopting various degrees of the question-and-answer technique were published in virtually every subject. William Pinnock, for instance, published a series of catechisms on a number of subjects in the 1820s. His works were so successful that a total number of 83 volumes was issued (Cruse 85). From the 1840s, he edited new editions of Mangnall’s *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions*, some of which were explicitly adapted for school use. Some books structured according to the question-and-answer technique explicitly professed to help inexperienced teachers and governesses, and the sheer number of such books confirms the need for pedagogical help. At least to some extent, they probably give a fair picture of how subjects were taught in the Victorian schoolroom, too. C. A. Johns, a schoolmaster of twenty years’ experience, published *The Governess: A First Lesson Book for Children Who Have Learned to Read* (1854), where concepts such as time, place, numbers, “vegetable substances”, and “animal substances” are discussed and explained through questions and answers. Mary Bristow Wood’s *The Anxious Researcher; or, Dialogues Between a Governess and her Pupil* (1849) uses a variant of the question-and-answer method. In that book, a child learns why the ground is flat while the earth is round, how diving-bells work, and about the sagaciousness of elephants, by putting humble questions to a benevolent and learned governess. Wood wrote similar dialogue books on entomology and botany too.

A pertinent fictional example of a question-and-answer lesson is found in Cheap’s *The Nursery Governess*. Trying to come to terms with the fact that she will need a governess for her children, Mrs Melville takes the opportunity of auditing a schoolroom lesson while visiting a friend. The young governess discusses the parable of the sower sowing the seed with her pupil. She teaches

the girl the importance of understanding what she reads, and then tests her by posing a number of questions on the topic discussed:

‘What is the seed?’

‘The word of the kingdom.’

‘Whose kingdom?’

‘The kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ and his grace.’

‘Who makes your heart like good ground?’

‘The Lord himself, by the Holy Spirit.’

‘What is the proof of good ground?’

‘When the seed brings forth fruit.’

‘Yes, dear child; and remember that faith, and love, and obedience, are the spiritual fruits, in the heart that understands the word of the kingdom.’ (11-12)

Although the girl’s answers seem memorised rather than spontaneous, the governess, by her concluding comment, stresses the importance of comprehension. Mrs Melville is impressed by the way the governess manages to “condescend to the minds of little children, and to interest them in these important truths” (12).

The necessity of approaching a topic at the right level is again stressed later in the novel, when the same governess advises a colleague to “lay aside your own superior pleasures of high attainments, in order to dig and lay a foundation in [the children’s] young and neglected minds” (95). Eliza Cheap is unrivalled among governess novel writers in her active pedagogical discussion that permeates the book. The last chapter of the novel to a large extent consists of what may be presumed to be the authorial voice – in the shape of the schoolmistress Miss Egmont – discussing how nursery education ought to be carried out. Subject by subject is reviewed and suitable methods explained.

The Pestalozzi-inspired ideas that children should learn through observation and experience instead of from repetition are interesting in relation to governess novels. Such pedagogy assumed that the teacher was fairly experienced, which seldom is the case in the novels. Being suddenly impoverished and forced into governessing, the young heroines often do not have what it takes to make good teachers. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of those who are portrayed as well-qualified for their task, like Madame Frémont in the anonymous *The Kind Governess, or How to Make Home Happy* (1869) and Mrs Halford in *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*, are middle-aged and experienced teachers. Maria Edgeworth’s story “The Good French Governess” (1801), which Beaty calls “fictionalized educational theory” (1977, 632), also presents such a professional. In that story, Madame de Rosier, a French refugee, teaches her pupils the importance of useful knowledge. Her philosophy is to discourage the “vain desire to load [her pupils’] memory with

historical and chronological facts” (59). Dates and names are of no significance, she says, as long as they do not mean anything. Her charges are therefore encouraged to read “books of reasoning [and] to cultivate [their] imagination” (59). A similar view was put forward by Elizabeth Appleton in her *Private Education; or a Practical Plan for the Studies of Young Ladies* (1815), where she discussed the importance of causes and connections, not only dates, in history. Edgeworth appears to have had another follower in a father advising his daughter, who was about to go out as a governess in 1849. In an article which purports to be a letter to her, he recommended her to “attend more to the causes and consequences of actions than to persons, names, and dates; for the use of history, like nautical charts, is to lay before us the experience of others, that we may profit thereby.” (*EJE* 1849, 137).

Edgeworth’s Madame de Rosier takes her pupils to a toyshop where they may choose various ‘do-it-yourself’ kits instead of ready-made toys. The children are delighted with what they find in the shop, and they buy radish seeds and gardening tools, a dry printing press, as well as a small loom for weaving. The idea of such a shop had evidently been discussed by Maria Edgeworth and her brother-in-law, Dr Thomas Beddoes, who had plans to back a toy manufacturer in Bristol in the 1790s; unfortunately the plans were never realised (Butler 170-171). In “The Good French Governess”, the importance of motivation for learning is repeatedly stressed. To no avail, the nurse of the family has been trying to teach one of the children to read. Although Madame de Rosier calms her employer by saying that it is “of little consequence [...] whether the boy read[s] a year sooner or later” (46), his mother is both worried and frustrated. The pedagogical idea of the governess is that the child will learn to read when he is motivated enough; and that moment comes sooner than expected. When the boy has got his little printing press, he realises that he will not be able to use it unless he knows how to read and write.

Although most governess heroines are not as explicit in their pedagogical awareness, the general ideas of contemporary pedagogues are perceptible in the governess’s way of handling the children. Often knowing them far better than the parents, for instance, she will know how to develop their minds, and the tasks she sets before them are normally commensurate with their capacities.

From the nursery into the schoolroom

During their first years, children were supervised by a nurse or nursery-maid. Large establishments could host several nurses of varying distinction, while households of more moderate means would perhaps keep one nurse, usually assisted by an under-maid. Apart from dressing and feeding the children, the task of the nurse was to rear them to the approximate age of five, when she would hand them over to the governess. According to Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, it was also often the nurse who taught the children to read and write well into the eighteenth century (21). From the early decades of the nineteenth century, however, when resident governesses were introduced on a larger scale, the status of the nurse seems to have been reduced to that of a childminder, while the educational aspects of childrearing were assigned to governesses. Letting the nurse teach became a sign of the low importance attributed to education. It is thus not surprising that the aristocratic Ashburys in *Emily, the Governess* think it adequate that their invalid daughter be “instructed to read by the head nurse” (80).

If there were younger siblings still in the nursery, the elder children remained under nursery jurisdiction outside school-hours (Hughes 63). Such an arrangement of divided responsibility for the children called for co-operation between nurse and governess; this, however, appears to have been lacking in many households. Both historical records and fictional accounts paint a picture of emotional competition between the two categories. The governess in Elizabeth Grey’s *Sybil Lennard* (1846) typically states that she believes that nurses “have an innate antipathy to governesses” (14). The class-difference between the nurse and the governess was probably a fundamental reason for disputes between the two. Gathorne-Hardy states that nurses were always working class and recruited locally like other domestic servants in the countryside (72). As a result they often found allies in fellow underlings, while the governess, being an outsider both as regards class and geographical origin, stood alone.

The division of labour between the governess and the nurse was a delicate problem, and governess manuals are somewhat ambivalent on the matter. For example, they stress that the governess must refuse to take charge of children not old enough for the schoolroom. This was probably a common problem; the early-nineteenth-century governess Elizabeth Ham recorded her irritation that children who were “too young to be my pupils were not thought too young to be turned into the schoolroom to play” (Gillett 206), and her contemporary Mary Cowdon Clarke was frustrated when the youngest child of

her employers “was oftener sent to the schoolroom than kept in the nursery” (*My Long Life*, quoted in Broughton and Symes 36). It was to avoid such infringement that the anonymous manual *Advice to Governesses* (1827) recommended the governess to refuse to allow younger children of the family to accompany her and her pupils on walks (51). However, as several manuals actually urged the governess to agree to take charge of her pupils’ clothes, the division of labour between the nurse and the governess was not definite. Governesses to young children, referred to as nursery governesses, were usually young and inexperienced themselves. Employers could therefore more easily compel them to take complete responsibility for the pupils than they could a governess of long practice with older charges.

Some critics wished to lessen the hostility between governesses and nurses. An anonymous writer urged governesses to try to work well with the nurse, as they were dependent on each other:

I do not mean cringe and weakly give in when things are going wrong, but respect the nurse’s feelings and rights as you would wish her to consider yours; don’t send a small child back to the nursery because he came five minutes too soon. I heard of a governess who did this the other day, and, by a trifle act of thoughtless inconsideration, so wounded the feelings of the nurse that she never quite forgave her. (*W&L* 1882, 219)

Although historical records seem to suggest that children were generally under the care of a nurse outside school-hours, it is worth noticing that in governess novels the governess is often in complete charge of the children, and the nurse is seldom visible. Such an arrangement increases the distance between employers and heroine, isolating the latter from social contacts.

In some novels, an explicit desire to separate the children from working-class domestics is the reason why the governess is to take full charge of her pupils. When Mrs Bloomfield tells Agnes Grey that Mary Ann must be kept out of the nursery and not further influenced by the nurses, the reason is that the girl “might acquire bad habits from the nurses” (75). This attitude was by no means unusual. Although the nurse was seen as an appropriate companion for small children, it was felt that her lower-class origin made her unsuitable for close contact with older children. In Marguerite Blessington’s silver-fork novel *The Confessions of an Elderly Lady* (1838), this attitude is made clear when the widowed father of the then eight-year-old protagonist is told by his doctor and friend that he should employ a governess; “your daughter is now of an age to stand in need of a more intellectual person than Mrs. Mary [the head nurse]; one who can control her temper and direct her pursuits, as well as attend to her health” (28).

The anonymous *The Management of Servants: A Practical Guide to the Routine of Domestic Service* (1880) claimed that the diction of a nurse was “of serious importance to the children under her care; if she is an uneducated woman, she mispronounces and miscalls almost every word [...] and the children [...] contract habits of speech which are subsequently difficult to overcome” (179). Parents were encouraged to be observant and not to believe that a governess would be able to correct faulty pronunciation that the children had acquired from the nurse. Earlier, Maria Edgeworth and her father had argued that children should be separated from domestics because of the “striking and disgraceful” evils of bad manners and foul language that they may pick up from them (1798, 122). In her *Letters on Education* (1801), Elizabeth Hamilton referred to the Edgeworths, claiming that since it might be impossible to separate children and servants entirely, certain measures would have to be taken to avoid detrimental influence. For instance, parents should observe that some nursery maids were cunning and given to vain flattery (88).



Lord Reginald. “Ain’t yer goin’ to have some puddin’, Miss Richards? It’s so jolly!”
The Governess. “There again, Reginald! ‘Puddin’ – ‘Goin’ – ‘Ain’t yer’!!! That’s the way Jim Bates and Dolly Maple speak – and Jim’s a *stable-boy*, and Dolly’s a *laundry-maid*!”

Lord Reginald. “Ah! But that’s the way Father and Mother speak, *too* – and Father’s a *Duke*, and Mother’s a *Duchess*!! So *there!*”

Fig. 6 “Evil communications, &c.” (*Punch* 1873, 65:99)

As one of the governess’s main tasks was to form the character of her pupils, it was deemed that through her class background she would be more suitable for this than the nurse. The stock characterisation of servants as being

irrational and ignorant in comparison with the governess seems to be based on a wish to emphasise the latter's superior position by birth. The idea of the ignorant working classes served the purpose of elevating the status of the class-conscious middle classes. Thus servants, besides doing the kind of work that their employers wished to be relieved of, also functioned as status boosters.

A few novels feature children imitating the servants' idiom; in H.S.'s *Anecdotes of Mary; or, the Good Governess* (1795), for instance, the eight-year-old Mary uses unlady-like expressions like "I'll be hanged" prior to the arrival of her governess. Likewise, Agnes Grey's pupil Matilda Murray's foul language is seen as a result of her being a frequent visitor to the stables. One of the prospective employers in Hall's *The Governess* states the necessity of having a lady-like governess, as "children so easily imbibe vulgar habits" (6). Nothing is said about what the mother herself could possibly do to hinder her children from adopting such undesirable habits. The slack manners and lack of parental responsibility of the upper classes and the nobility was satirised in a *Punch* engraving from 1873, where a governess encounters difficulties when trying to correct her pupil's speech (Fig. 6).

In governess novels, the transition from nurse to governess often marks a shift from ignorance to reason, and nurses are consequently described as ignorant or even detrimental to children's development. In the introduction to *The Nursery Governess*, Cheap claimed that the mind by nature is prone to evil, and that a nursery governess, by "cultivating and opening [the] intellect from its first dawning", may be able to lead children into the right path from an early age (xiii). Cheap made clear that a nursery-maid would not be suitable for such a task; "[h]er duties and training [belong to] an *inferior*, though a materially necessary department, chiefly confined to bodily cares; and whatever good influences *might* be hoped for, are merely accidental, and always limited" (xii).

More than forty years earlier, Edgeworth's "The French Good Governess" painted a portrait of an irrational nurse-cum-servant, who is unable to accept her loss of status with the children and their mother on the introduction of Madame de Rosier into the household. Edgeworth used the opposition between nurse and governess as a way of emphasising the rationality and sensibility of the governess. The clear-cut distinction between nurses and governesses remained a typical feature of governess novels all through the nineteenth century. In Henry Courtney Selous's *The Young Governess: A Tale for Girls* (1871), for instance, the handicap of the heroine Martha Smyth is the subject of differing comments from a nurse and from a neighbouring governess. While the nurse is reported to have said "that deformed persons were always sour, – that their afflictions made them so" (2-3), the comment of the governess

– “that deformity is generally accompanied by bodily suffering” (58) – seems to be of a more sympathetic and insightful kind.

Not all nurses are depicted as useless or ignorant, however. In *Margaret Stourton, or a Year of Governess Life*, the employer recommends the governess to consult the nurse “in any difficulty”, adding “[y]ou will find her unusually sensible and clear-judged [...] and her mind is much above what you would expect to find in persons in her station” (49-50). Indeed, this nurse is helpful, offering good advice to the governess and doing everything to make sure the children are happy. Bessie in *Jane Eyre* is another example of a nurse painted in favourable colours. However, her evening stories of fairies would, presumably, have been condemned by educationalists who feared the “depraving effect on children’s minds of fairyland adventures”, since they might make the child’s mind stray from the correct path of simple pleasures and Christian duty (Avery 121).

In Agnes Strickland’s “Nursery Discipline” (*Tales of the Schoolroom* 1835), the rivalry between nurse and governess is vividly remembered by a girl called Fanny. We learn that “[she] heard much said in the nursery what a shame it was, for governesses to interfere with children, before they were given to their care”, and if Fanny had been disobedient, the nurse would ask “[i]s that what you learn in the school-room, miss?” (30). In this story, the nurse and governess are constantly opposed. Miss Watson teaches the children about flowers, insects and birds when taking them out for walks. Fanny recalls that

[a]s to the frogs, and lizards, and beetles, that I used to be so afraid of before, I began to see how pretty they were, when Miss Watson used to take them in her hand, instead of teaching us to run screaming away, as the maids did. Even the toad, that they told me would spit fire if I touched it, never did me the least harm when I stooped down to admire its eyes, and the pretty spots on its back. (31)

Here the governess is depicted not only as an educated person, but also as a far more sensible one than the servants. The dividing line between nurse and governess is often related to matters like rationality and common sense. Gathorne-Hardy lists a number of authentic “nanny sayings”, several of which confirm the fictional picture of nurses. Advice given by nurses includes “[i]f you want your hair to curl you must eat fried bread behind the door”, and a child who looked cross was warned “[y]ou know what’ll happen if the wind changes while you’re making that face” (335-336). Davidoff likewise mentions that nurses, apart from governesses, could resort to the use of “superstitious beliefs, for example, bogey men to frighten their charges in order” (1972, 31). In fiction, governesses are usually depicted as having a far more enlightened approach to

child-rearing than nurses. As Davidoff states, the governess would lose “her credibility as a teacher if she turned to such expedients” (31).

As a way of securing ‘her’ children’s affection, the nurse sometimes tried to threaten them with the arrival of the governess. An article from 1902 stated that “the idea of a coming governess was held up to children as a terror, a sort of judgement about to fall upon them” (“Resident Governesses” by Mrs R.L. Devonshire, quoted in Hughes 63). Similar statements are found in several novels, but there they serve mainly to prepare the reader for the unjust treatment which the heroine will be exposed to. In *Anecdotes of Mary, or the Good Governess*, for example, the nurse has threatened little Mary with the arrival of the governess, saying, “she would be cross – horrid creature” (4). This so frightens Mary that she “hastily cried, ‘For God’s sake put me to bed, that I may not see her till morning!’” (3-4). Likewise, in *The Kind Governess, or How to Make Home Happy*, the children have been scared by the prospect of having a governess. Matilda writes to an elder brother that the nurse has told her “that a governess is much more severe than a nurse” and the maid has threatened her, saying “just wait till *she* comes, and you will catch it!”. However, Matilda claims not to pay much attention to the domestics, as she thinks they contradict themselves “every ten minutes” (8). Such threats concerning the horror awaiting the children were not always uttered by servants, however. In Irene Clifton’s *The Little Governess* (1900), the aunt of the motherless children feels her position in her widowed brother’s household threatened by the arrival of a governess. Therefore, she has frightened her nieces by telling them that the governess would be old and “sure to be cross” (16). Whether it is the nurse or a relative who presents the governess in a negative way, the reason seems to be a fear of losing control over the children.

A version of the strife between servant and governess is found in Annie Macgregor’s *John Ward’s Governess* (1868). In this novel, which is set in America, Mr Ward marries a beautiful but deceitful Italian singer. When two children are born, the servant Marietta, likewise of Italian origin, doubles as their nurse. Mrs Ward betrays and deserts her husband, but Marietta remains her confidante, doing “all she could to make [the children] lose their respect and affection for their father” (33). The sinful mother dies, but it is not until the nurse has been discharged and a governess is employed that the father can start to gain influence over his own children. The rational character of the governess as opposed to that of Marietta becomes apparent in connection with the name of the little boy of the story. He has been christened John after his father, but the nurse, and the little boy too, insists on his being called by the Italian diminutive Giovannino. This is painful for Mr Ward, who wishes to efface the memory of his wife. However, the diplomatic governess manages to make him see that he

cannot suddenly impose a name on the child which the little boy does not own himself, and, similarly, she manages to make the son see that his father wishes him to be called John. The erratic and evil influence of the nurse in this novel is not primarily explained by her belonging to a lower class, however, but by her Italian blood. The all-American governess checks the haughtiness of the children, thereby managing to re-establish order and harmony in the family.

When Victorian middle-class children had reached the approximate age of five, they were transferred from the nursery to the schoolroom. Fixed hours and set tasks supplanted the play of the nursery. In governess novels, the schoolroom often seems to be situated far away from the quarters where adult social activities take place. It is generally cold and cheerless, thus resembling the governess's own room. A bleak schoolroom might reveal the parents' standpoint concerning their children's education; it certainly indicated their attitude to the governess as a professional. The comfortless schoolroom must also be seen as a reflection of Victorian house-planning, however. Unlike Georgian houses, which were open and less divided, nineteenth-century homes were planned in order to confirm the residents' social position. Therefore, houses were constructed as to ensure social division (Girouard 31, Davidoff 1973, 87). In Charlotte Mary Yonge's *Hopes and Fears, or, Scenes from the Life of a Spinster* (1860), the schoolroom is symbolically cut off from the house itself by a red baize door, creating a schoolroom world totally separated from the lives of the grown-ups. It should be pointed out, though, that architects and writers do not seem to have advocated such physical marginalisation of children and governess. In Robert Kerr's plan, for instance, published in *The Gentleman's House* (1864), it is clear that he planned to place the governess not in a nursery corridor, but close to the family bedrooms on the first floor. Her private chamber would be placed next to the large schoolroom.

In *Anecdotes of Mary, or the Good Governess*, the playroom is transformed into a schoolroom on the expected arrival of the governess, by being "furnished with a book-case, writing-table, drawing-desk, globes and harpsichord" (3). These were the paraphernalia usually recommended for the schoolroom. Margaret Thornley, for example, argued that "[g]lobes, good large maps, both blank and filled, [and] a black board [...] are indispensable" (10) in *The True End of Education and the Means Adapted to It* (1846).

The frontispiece to Eliza Kirkham Mathews's *Ellinor: The Young Governess* (1809) also displays a favourable setting for studies (Fig. 7). Broughton and Symes comment on the self-assured look of this early nineteenth-century governess heroine: "[u]nabashed by the opulent surroundings in which she finds herself [...] Ellinor sits reading aloud to her charges, the embodiment of dignity and authority" (6). As they point out, the iconography of

the picture resembles that of contemporary family portraits, with the governess taking a central maternal position. The representation of both governess and schoolroom in this early nineteenth-century picture could be compared with an engraving from 1882 where the schoolroom no longer has the aspect of an elegant drawing-room, but rather seems like a dark and cold room on an upper floor (Fig. 8). To some extent, education is depicted as more regulated in the later picture; the globe, a wall chart and geometrical figures on the blackboard inform the viewer that this is a schoolroom. The depiction of the governess herself is very different as well; she is not portrayed as a maternal figure but rather as a strict supervisor of the writing girls.



Fig. 7 Frontispiece (Kirkham Mathews, *Ellinor: The Young Governess* 1809)



Fig. 8 (Mary Evans Picture Library)

The schoolroom seems to have become a less agreeable place as the century progressed, in real life as well as in the novels. Often it harboured leftovers from the rest of the house, and the schoolroom was moved away out of sight of the social life going on in the rest of the house. When the schoolroom turns out to be a nice room in the novels, this is often expressed as a surprise. In Rosa Nouchette Carey's *Only the Governess* (1888), a little girl is overwhelmed by the schoolroom at her aunt's house: "Schoolrooms were always ugly, but this looked like a drawing-room!" (95). The pleasant aspect of the schoolroom is coupled to the fact that the mistress of the house genuinely cares for her children. Neither in real life, nor in the novels, this was always the case, however. In the 1840s, Anna Jameson recorded her impressions of a house she once visited:

I recollect an instance in the family of a nobleman, as celebrated for his lavished expenditure as his wife for her airs and extravagance, and whose house was one of the finest in London. You went up a back stair-case to a small set of rooms, with a confined gloomy aspect; – the study was barely furnished – a carpet faded and mended – stiff-backed chairs, as if invented for penance – in the middle of the room a large table – against the wall the map of Europe, and the Stream of Time – a look of meanness, coldness, bareness. (29-30)

Jameson's point was of course that parents ought to pay more attention to their children's welfare and education than this particular family did. The gloomy aspect is starkly contrasted with the extravagance of the parents, and this pattern recurs in fiction. The back-stairs are reminiscent of what was discussed concerning the location of the governess' own chamber in Chapter 3, and the bad condition of the carpet implies that the room has not been redecorated for many years. Anthony Thomson also deplored the kind of room usually set apart as the schoolroom as "in most instances, the very worst [...] They are mostly the dullest, the dampest, the poorest, or the most useless chambers in the whole building" (98). He would probably not have been surprised to see the schoolroom described by Louisa, Countess of Antrim. In an autobiographical essay she describes her schoolroom in Windsor Castle in the 1860s as situated in what "had once upon a time been a State prison" (*Little Innocents* 80). Although an extreme location for the schoolroom, it says something of how parents viewed education.

The "stiff-backed chairs, as if invented for penance" mentioned by Anna Jameson are suggestive of the habit of straight-lacing girls and equipping them with backboards to prevent curvature of the spine. In *Anecdotes of Mary, or the Good Governess*, the eight-year-old pupil is equipped with such a back-board against her will. A man comes to take her measurements at the time of the arrival of the governess. Thus, physical constraint becomes coupled with the introduction of a governess in the child's life. This link was apparently not uncommon. Mary Martha Sherwood, who was born in 1775, recorded her experiences of a back-board:

It was the fashion then for children to wear iron collars round the neck, with back-boards strapped over the shoulders. To one of these I was subjected from my sixth to my thirteenth year. I generally did all my lessons standing in stocks, with this same collar round my neck; it was put on in the morning, and seldom taken off till late in the evening; and it was Latin which I had to study! (Darton 34)

Many children of the upper classes lived a life separated from that of their parents, seeing them only at pre-fixed appointments. When they left the schoolroom in their late teens they would join the life of their parents, including late evenings, dining downstairs, and in some cases having their own maid or manservant. In the light of this, the dismal aspects of the schoolroom could be seen as part of the strict regime used to foster children. Still, contemporary critics condemned cheerless schoolrooms, both for the sake of the governess and for that of the children. Although the bleak aspects of the schoolroom were condemned, the detail of coldness was not undisputed. Mary Maurice, for example, stated that if the schoolroom was too warm, "the pupils become

enervated" (1849, 110). According to her, "[t]he right ventilation of the school-room may greatly facilitate progress" (109-110). Anthony Thomson was to some extent of the same opinion, claiming that the schoolroom should be light, warm and well ventilated (99). There was indeed a great interest in ventilation in Victorian England, and houses were built so as to allow a certain flow of air. Late-nineteenth-century experts estimated that "fifty cubic feet of fresh air per minute per person was needed to properly ventilate a room" (Rybczynski 134). This rather extreme figure was based on the assumption that bad health was spread through stale air.

Personal records reveal that although nineteenth-century pedagogical manuals encouraged parents to make the schoolroom as pleasant as possible, it remained a dark dungeon in many families. Elizabeth Ham, although in general pleased with her situation, nonetheless complained about schoolroom practices. The schoolroom in itself was a "nice room enough, looking into the garden", but she was annoyed by the use of the nursery guard before the fire: "Every morning this was covered with reeking Towels. The children had been taught to bring, each her own, to dry it here. Oh, the misery of coming to such a fireside on a cold damp morning" (203). Emily Peart's *A Book for Governesses* (1868) reasoned that order was of major importance in the schoolroom. She stated that it "must be in perfect order; no matter what kind of a room it is, gloomy or pleasant, small or large, dingy or cheerful, have it in perfect order" (28). The pedagogical motives were made clear, as Peart also repeatedly stressed the necessity of order in connection with education, but she also urged the governess to make the most of her place of work. "There are few [mistresses]", she asserted, "who could object to plain walls being relieved by pleasant prints, or the mantle-shelf being enlivened by simple adornments, or the windows brightened by flowers" (28). Stressing the virtues of order and efficiency, Peart, who was a governess herself, joined ranks with the many nineteenth-century writers who were concerned with educational matters.

The secret springs on which education should move

Leonore Davidoff states that for the Victorian middle classes, one of the most effective ways of upholding control over children and servants was "the strict ordering of time; diurnal, weekly and seasonal" (1973, 34). Strict timekeeping, she writes, had earlier been "connected with commercial and mercantile occupations" (34), but gradually it came to be a way of life for the middle and upper classes. Naturally, the introduction of such aids to time-keeping as

individual watches and schedules for coaches, and later also trains, helped to create a new way of life that was more dependent on time measurement. The urge towards efficiency must also be coupled to what is generally referred to as the Protestant ethic, which of course was a concept long before the nineteenth century. During that era, however, the Evangelical revival and ideas of self-help and self-improvement were influential. Elizabeth Napier, for instance, typically dedicated her advice book *The Nursery Governess* (1834) as follows:

The following little book was written expressly for you: it was written in sickness, and sufferings, which have terminated by death! It shall be my guide in educating you, while you are children, when you grow up. I hope it will be yours in educating yourselves; for be assured, that, unless we continue the cultivation of our minds by our own efforts, all that we learn in youth passes away, and is lost. (3-4)

In most nineteenth-century books of a didactic character, the concept of time management and usefulness figures, and in the genre of governess novels it is striking. The element of control that Davidoff talks about is interesting in connection with this genre. Time management was used as a method of keeping up discipline in the nineteenth century, and in the novels, as well as in manuals, the issue figures in connection with pedagogy and discipline, but also regarding the characterisation of the governess.

Mary Maurice declared that “[o]rder, method, and punctuality, are the three secret springs on which education should move” (1849, 44). As early as 1815, Elizabeth Appleton had similarly stressed that the best method of rendering schoolroom duties “as pleasant as possible” would be “the establishment and the maintenance of regularity, method and order” (59). Anna Jameson, too, stated the beneficial result of the “methodological arrangement and conscientious discharge” of the daily duties (47). That governesses stressed such advice is clear from Agnes Porter’s advice in 1798 to one of her pupils to be “economical of *time, health, money*”, also asking whether “the *bloom* of early hours paint[ed her] cheek” (Martin 196, 199). As will be shown presently, this kind of exhortation figures repeatedly both in the novels and in the non-fictional material.

How, then, was “order, method, and punctuality” to be implemented? For one thing, manual writers seem to have been in agreement as to the importance of early rising and the utilisation of morning hours. Elizabeth Napier, for instance, recommended “early rising and regular habits [and] orderly ways” (16), since “early morning lessons make most impression” (18). A decade later, Mary Maurice similarly wrote that “[t]he morning hours, whilst the mind is freshest, are generally the best for subjects which require continuous thought, and towards the close of the day, lighter employment and accomplishments can

be taken up” (1849, 63). Early rising was also advocated by the writer of *The Mother the Best Governess; A Practical System for the Education of Young Ladies* (1839, 37) and by the governess behind *Hints to Governesses* (1856, 29). In *Observations on the Most Important Subjects of Education: Containing Many Useful Hints to Mothers, But Chiefly Intended for Private Governesses* (1818), R.C. Dallaway included a whole section on early rising, where the “innumerable” advantages of “the constant habit of early rising”, such as “neatness, health, and good temper” (149) were discussed.

Early mornings were not enough, however. Every moment of the day was to be used well. Dallaway stated that

[o]f all the talents committed to our care, time is the most precious, since upon the use we make of it, depends not only our present comfort, but our eternal happiness. Children should be early led to consider, that they are accountable to their Maker for every mispent [sic] hour; and that time which in youth is lost in slothful indulgence, or trifled away in frivolous and useless pursuits, will certainly in ripper years, become a source of unavailing sorrow and regret. (152)

Peart’s *A Book for Governesses* likewise stressed the importance of time management, suggesting that children who did not succeed in finishing a task in the allotted time should be told that “[t]he time has gone away, and can never return, you have idled it away for ever” (33).

In the novels, the importance of time management is exemplified by the behaviour of the governess heroine and often contrasted with the behaviour of her employers and pupils. Lucy Clifford in the anonymous *Chance and Choice, or, the Education of Circumstances* (1850), who characterises herself as an early riser, finds it a hard task to make her Russian pupils conform to early morning habits. In this novel, the detail of early rising is made explicit already at Lucy’s escape from her father’s house. She leaves “long indeed before either Mrs. Clifford or Caroline [Lucy’s stepsister] were moving – long before even the weary maid had unclosed her eyes” (32). In both *Ellen Manners; or, Recollections of a Governess* and in Selous’s *The Young Governess: A Tale for Girls* the heroines feel compelled to regulate their pupils’ late hours and improper diet in order to improve their performance in the schoolroom.

As was discussed in Chapter 3, Mrs Murray in *Agnes Grey* fails to see the newly-arrived governess until eleven o’clock the day after her arrival, and Agnes’s immense frustration is manifested through her comments on the unstructured days and the total lack of routine that pervades her work at Horton Lodge. Agnes’s pupils rule in the schoolroom, dictating hours of lessons and eating totally at random. Brontë does not elaborate on the specifics of the

lessons Agnes tries to give, but her record of the young Murrays' behaviour during lessons gives an idea of what the governess has to fight against:

While receiving my instructions, or repeating what they had learnt, they would lounge upon the sofa, lie on the rug, stretch, yawn, talk to each other, or look out of the window; whereas, I could not so much as stir the fire, or pick up the handkerchief I had dropped, without being rebuked for inattention by one of my pupils, or told that 'mamma would not like me to be so careless'. (128)

Such a passage points at the difficulty of maintaining the desired "order, method, and punctuality", if the pupils – or, indeed, their parents – decide to oppose the governess. However, this extract also reveals that Agnes, who was so optimistic before going out to work, is not a capable teacher. Whereas many other governesses manage to cajole their charges into working and obeying, Agnes repeatedly fails. Admittedly, things improve when the boys of the family leave for school; but it is clear that she is not among the better teachers within the genre of governess novels. In Irene Clifton's *The Little Governess*, which shows several similarities with Brontë's novel, the master's spinster sister exposes her shortcomings as a housekeeper by not making sure that breakfast is served early in the morning. The governess Agnes Williams manages to make a favourable impression on the maid by expressing her willingness to help with the children in the morning, as she, on the contrary, is an early riser.

Brontë and Clifton employ the concept of time management as a way of characterisation; in other novels the topic appears in the governess's teaching her pupils not to waste any time in sloth. During her very first interview with Mary, the governess Mrs Montford in *Anecdotes of Mary, or the Good Governess* "talked a great deal about the necessity of making good use of time" (9-10). Throughout the novel, the dialogue between Mrs Montford and Mary is of a didactic nature; the wise governess teaches her pupil how to lead a useful life and avoid being selfish. Mathews's *Ellinor, or the Young Governess* likewise makes much of the importance of time management:

From seven to eight, the hour when the children were accustomed to take their breakfast, [Ellinor] appropriated to reading; the intervening time between that and dinner, was to be given to the study of French, the needle, &c.; the afternoon was dedicated to music; and the evening to rational amusement, instructive conversation, and healthful exercise. (19)

In this short section, the governess appears as a good time manager, both in her own leisure time and in instructing the children. As was urged by manual writers, the children study more demanding subjects in the morning, while lighter employment, such as music, are saved for the afternoon and evening.

In her instruction, Ellinor impresses the need to distribute one's time correctly. She tells a story about Alfred the Great's skills in time management, stating that he "divided the day and night into three equal portions of eight hours each; and though much afflicted with a very painful disorder, assigned only eight hours to sleep, meals, exercise; devoting the remaining sixteen, one half to *reading, writing, and prayer*; the other to public business" (22). Didactic stories like this one, and one where the noble perseverance of Demosthenes is explained to a child despairing over her task, appear throughout the novel. Novels with such instructional passages are reminiscent of the manuals in tone and character, and they mainly occur in pious novels intended for a youthful audience. Elizabeth Sewell's *Amy Herbert* (1844), for instance, contains several scenes where Mrs Herbert tells her little daughter edifying stories that also stress religious duty.

The notion of not wasting one's time was a prominent topic in other kinds of Victorian didactic writing too. For instance, Samuel Smiles's best-selling *Self-Help* (1859) and other forms of conduct books convey such exhortations. In stating that whereas "[l]ost wealth may be replaced by industry, lost knowledge by study, lost health by temperance or medicine, [...] lost time is gone forever", Smiles expressed a general contemporary concern for efficiency (202; see also Wadsö). The idea of time management often surfaces in governess novels. Caroline Mordaunt, for example, experiences in one situation that "[n]ot a moment was lost in the family; even the times of our meals were devoted to some improving discussion or study" (96). In another situation, with the Fenton family where the cold hard-mattress regime prevails, Caroline encounters excessive organisation and regularity.

Felicité de Genlis, whom Mrs Fenton in *Caroline Mordaunt* is said to have read, was apparently a favourite of Mary Martha Sherwood's. As a child she had read some of Genlis's fictional works, and as a mother she later followed her educational advice. For instance, Sherwood recorded how she always made sure that her children "had things to do when I was away which I could judge of when I returned" (Darton 398). Sherwood made two of Caroline Mordaunt's employers into devoted Genlis followers. Apart from Mrs Fenton, who will be discussed presently, the bluestocking Mrs Delaney is described as not only having "seen the delightful philosopher of Ferney" (presumably a reference to Voltaire), but also having had "*eau sucré* with madame de Genlis" (50).

In her *Nouvelle méthode d'enseignement* (1799) Genlis had advocated method and regularity in the education of children, stating that studies should be conducted in an unaltered order every day. To ensure maximum efficiency in education, some kinds of instruction, like conversational training, could be

combined with other activities: “on ne parloit qu’anglois à diner, italien à souper, et les garçons ne parloient qu’allemand à leur promenade du matin” (350). Mrs Fenton appears to bear such advice in mind when informing Caroline of the daily routines of the family: “We walk regularly”, she says, “and in all weathers, twice a day in winter, and three times in summer [...] and we repeat our French verbs during our first walk, and our English grammar during our second walk; for we are extremely regular” (169-170). Although Mrs Fenton’s applications of Genlis’s thoughts on education are clearly exaggerations, Gillian Avery refers to them as “an example of the austerity that prevailed throughout the nineteenth century” (205). Harsh treatment of children, with plain food and plain clothes, was common; but in the genre of governess novels, the Spartan regime of the Fenton children stands out. In most novels it is only the governess – not the children – who is maltreated. What manual writers referred to as efficiency is in some novels converted into plain penny-pinching on the part of the employer. Lady Hamilton Traherne in Harriet Maria Gordon Smythies’s *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence* (1861), for instance, makes the poor governess stay for dinner after her morning lessons, as that would insure an extra hour’s worth of “conversation in French, Italian, and German during dinner” (I:19).

An allegedly autobiographical account of the difficulties faced by a young woman seeking a governess situation in 1858 resembles Caroline Mordaunt’s experiences with the Fentons. A lady in search of a new governess is quoted as having declared that the governess would have to take her morning walk “from five o’clock till six” to be able to get the children ready for morning prayer at seven o’clock. The mother, who said “you will find us very punctual”, then expatiated on the daily routines of the family (*EWJ* 1858, 399). It is easy to smile at exhortations such as these, but the moral implications of adherence to principles and duty were of great significance at the time. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, the Evangelical revival, which was a major force during the first decades of the nineteenth century, encouraged personal discipline and an avoidance of excess. Self-restraint was seen as useful preparation in case adversity should come.

Mrs Pemble in Rosina Bulwer Lytton’s *Very Successful* tries to teach her pupils to take responsibility. Having replaced a governess referred to as superficial, she endeavours to make her pupils cope without the constant attention of servants. As Mrs Pemble has gone through so much in life herself, she believes in teaching the children how to do things like stay-lacing and brushing and arranging their hair themselves. Her next step in disciplining them is to banish hot water and teach them housekeeping. Interestingly enough, Bulwer Lytton does not employ any of Sherwood’s satire, but rather portrays the

new regime as an excellent way of turning the girls into responsible young women. The children's aunt shows some astonishment at the result of Mrs Pemble's pedagogy:

What surprised Miss Charity most in the rapid progress of her nieces was, that though, from the course of domestic economy of which Mrs. Pemble was making them thoroughly mistress, they were oftener below stairs and brought into greater conduct with the servants than ever they had been during the reign of the elegant – or, as she herself would have phrased it, the ‘genteel’ – Miss Prosser [i.e. Mrs Pemble's predecessor], yet not only their manners, but their language was so much improved. (243-244)

It should be added that Mrs Pemble does not focus on the importance of keeping children away from the servants; on the contrary, she believes that contact with work will develop her pupils.

One detail connected with time management that was often mentioned in nineteenth-century England was the topic of novel-reading. Although perceiving the didactic dimensions of literature, Samuel Smiles still warned against making fiction “the exclusive literary diet”. He stated that “to devour the garbage with which the shelves of circulating libraries are crowded, – and to occupy the greater portion of the leisure hours in studying the preposterous pictures of human life which so many of them present, is worse than waste of time, – it is positively pernicious” (263). Smiles was far from alone in calling attention to the dangerous consequences of excessive novel reading. Especially manuals intended for women warned against novel-reading, partly because women were regarded as easily impressionable (Flint 73). Already in *Practical Education*, the Edgeworths urged mothers and governess to supervise their daughters' and pupils' choice of books (550; see also Burdan 9); in *Mothers of England: Their Influence and Responsibility* (1843) Sarah Ellis likewise declared that mothers should always be consulted on which books her daughters read, as a “novel read in secret is a dangerous thing” (338).

On the subject of governesses, Mary Maurice stated that although the governess could “gain the refreshment she seeks in reading works of taste and lighter literature”, it was important that she “avoid those of an exciting character” (1849, 111). Maurice regarded novel-reading as dangerous, because she believed it destroyed “the appetite for solid studies” as well as giving a false view of life (111). Elizabeth Appleton was of the same opinion; according to her, fiction could be dangerous for young girls, as the characters were not realistic, being usually either wholly good and beautiful, or entirely naughty and ugly (79).

It is easy to imagine that a dejected governess could find an emotional escape in reading popular novels, and that manual writers therefore feared their

disruptive influence. A fictional governess who is an avid novel-reader is Miss Perry in Ewing's *Six to Sixteen: A Story for Girls*. Significantly enough, she is far from being a role model for her pupils. Miss Perry, who seems inadequate for her position in every respect, is characterised through her love for romantic gossip and for novels:

She was a great novel-reader, and I think a good many of the things she told us of, as happened to herself, had their real origin in the Riflebury circulating library. For she was one of those strange characters who indulge in egotism and exaggeration, till they seem positively to lose the sense of what is fact and what is fiction. (46)

Miss Perry, who reads her novels by the schoolroom fireside while her pupils plod "through French exercises, which she corrected by a key", is "quite as glad as we were" when lessons are over (46). Needless to say, she does not stay long with the family.

More commonly, novel-readers are contrasted with the governess heroine. In *Emily, the Governess*, the grown-up son of Emily's employers falls in love with her. This Lord Alfred is a fashionable young man, "more polished by art and education than by nature", and when he sees the family governess he decides to make her "the object of his affections" (107). However, his romantic notion of love has been picked up from novels, and he is blind to the fact that his feelings are not returned. Just like the above-mentioned Miss Perry, Lord Alfred lets the imaginary world of his novels take over reality:

He was a great reader of novels and romances, and as the heroines of such tales are frequently met with in situations of obscurity or poverty, Emily appeared in his romantic mind the very heroine of his fancy, while he the rich Cavalier, the dauntless hero, who was to draw her from her solitude and proclaim her the woman of his choice – the sole idol of his affection. (107-108)

Accounting for Lord Alfred's passion by way of a reference to his enthusiasm for novels comes through as a sly authorial comment on this particular novel and of the genre of as such; how many governess heroines are not obscure and poor, or do not suffer from the solitude referred to? What makes Lord Alfred unfit as the 'cavalier' of the governess, however, are his shallowness and lack of sincerity.

In several novels, the bad habit of reading novels is something the governess tries to correct. At one stage, Lucy Clifford in *Chance and Choice, or the Education of Circumstances* is employed to teach the seventeen-year-old niece of a German Baroness. Thérèse is described as being "far from silly" (174), although she is ignorant because of the faulty education she has hitherto received. It is repeatedly made clear that the girl is a compulsive novel-reader, and Lucy has to remind her "that her passion for novels was likely to make her

romantic and fanciful, and [...] fill her mind with vain ideas". The governess makes a distinction between good and bad novels, however, declaring that "it is the class of novels read, and the solitary poring over them, which constitutes the principal evil" (205). In this Lucy herself stands out as an advocate of good literature. In Selous's *The Young Governess* both the pupil and her mother are compulsive novel-readers. The general occupation of the mistress of the house seems to be to lie "on a sofa in her dressing-room, sipping chocolate, over the last novel" (48).

One regular feature in Victorian education was the daily walk. Fresh air was regarded as wholesome by physicians, and manual writers caught on to this, seeing not only the advantages of pauses in schoolroom work, but also the opportunity either to study the world outside the schoolroom, or to repeat lessons while walking. In *The Mothers of England*, Sarah Ellis wrote that "[n]ext in importance to regularity and moderation in diet, is exercise in the open air; and, as often as it can be obtained, the free wild exercise of country life, even at the risk of torn dresses, crushed bonnets, and soiled shoes" (229). Stodart's *Principles of Education Practically Considered* likewise pleaded for physical exercise. Stating that although exercise should not be exaggerated, she believed walking was usually not enough for girls: "There should be buoyancy of spirit, free, unrestrained moment; the full play of all the muscles; the free exercise of every limb" (249). It seems as if such advice was needed; the constrained physical education described by Frances Power Cobbe, for example, does not seem to have allowed for any "unrestrained inoment".

Apart from the physical aspects of the daily walk, its pedagogical value becomes apparent as botany and geography were the branches of science that were generally taught to girls. In *Advice to Governesses* it is suggested that "[i]f the family reside in the country, walking may be made the occasion of constant instruction as well as pleasure [as] there is something vulgar in ignorance of country objects and insensibility to their beauty" (103). Similarly, Sophia F. A. Caulfield advised young governesses to make "[a]stronomy, botany, geology, and natural history [...] outdoor recreations" (*GOP* 1884, 771). The reason for this is that lessons must be interesting, not "the cause of yawning, or of tears" (771). Maurice agreed that "the change of position, the relaxation of mind, and the free circulation of blood occasioned by walking at proper hours" (1849, 110) was of great importance, but she does not seem to have shared the view of Madame de Genlis that the exercise should be combined with other activities: "To allow children to learn lessons during the hours appointed for exercise, is to frustrate the purpose it is intended to fulfil" (110). In connection with the striving for efficiency discussed above, this is a detail of importance, as it points at an ambiguous attitude to children. Should they be made aware of the

importance of constant time management, or should they be left to play in-between lessons?

In some novels, like *The Kind Governess, or, How to Make Home Happy*, promenades are of an instructive nature. During their walks, Mrs Fremont and her pupils find “many curiosities for their winter museum; late flowers to dry in their album, curiously marked snail shells, pebbles of different colours, bright feathers dropped by the birds in flying here and there, berries and leaves of all sorts” (37). The object of using Nature’s resources for instructive material is a recurring feature. A similar scene is found in *Chance and Choice, or the Education of Circumstances*, where Lucy Clifford, hiding in the Polish forests with her little pupil, makes

a collection of beautiful forest plants; she taught Ida her usual lessons, as far as this could be done without books; and she made her practise writing with a pointed stick, on a spot of smooth sand, near the mouth of the stream – a copy-book which the little lady infinitely preferred to those bought of the stationer at Warsaw. (126-127)

Here the forest walk is a necessity to avoid the Russian soldiers chasing them, but the conscientious governess nevertheless manages to find “many sources of occupation and amusement” (126), and she teaches Ida about the wonders of Nature.

In the novels, outdoor activities like walks and excursions seem to be either lessons in botany, or an opportunity to make children aware of God’s omnipresence. Another function of outdoor activities is the possibility they afford for unexpected meetings and accidents. Outside the schoolroom, the governess is less in control and thus more vulnerable. Although accompanied by their pupils, several heroines are involuntarily accosted by men, for example. Clara Mordaunt is beset both by her well-meaning employer Mr Williamson and by the West Indian guest Hercules Marsden on her walks in the park. Because the children are with her, she finds it difficult to ward off the unwanted attention. In other novels, the heroine is exposed to real danger outdoors; in Rachel M’Crindell’s *The English Governess. A Tale of Real Life* (1844), Clara’s stepfather attempts to kill her, and in Clifton’s *The Little Governess*, Agnes Williams and the children are tricked into the wrong direction in the forest by the envious aunt.

Parental devotion: anxiety or interference?

Regarding parents’ attitude to education, differences are discernible between governess manuals on the one hand and the novels on the other. Some manuals

paint a picture of employers as being very much interested in their children's education, and governesses are urged to be keenly alive to their wishes. The novels, however, usually transmit another idea of parents. Fathers are often absent altogether when it comes to their children's education, which leaves the field open for female rivalry between the governess and the mistress of the house. When fathers do take an interest in their children's education and upbringing, however, they often show appreciation for the governess's work. For this they are harshly rebuked by their wives; praise from the father of the house thus serves to underline the irritation and jealousy of the mother towards the governess. Paternal characters that genuinely care for their children's education function as spokesmen for the author's criticism of the prevailing educational system and treatment of governesses. It is noteworthy that so many of these authorial mouthpieces are men. As suggested in Chapter 1, writers may have felt that female governess employers would be more likely to pick up advice from an authoritative but still benevolent male character than from an idealised fictional mistress.

A father of seven girls, Lord Graham in *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* declares that he would not wish for a governess who only imparts accomplishments, but states that she must be "a lady [...] – well born, – soundly and religiously educated, and of manners, not only elegant but lady-like" (155). In the novel, Ross repeatedly lets men voice views that stand in sharp contrast to those expressed by the aristocratic ladies she ridicules. Fathers with views on their children's education are often modern men with modern views. Recalling on of her employers, Sherwood's Caroline Mordaunt says:

[T]he plan which he would wish me to pursue in the education of his children, [particularly required] that, in my historical instructions, I would begin with modern history, and that of my own country and times; and from that point, or points, proceed to that which was more ancient with regard to time, and more remote with respect to place. (41)

Being a governess with neither much imagination nor much knowledge, Caroline replies that she is willing to do so "if you can direct me to any history which is written backwards, and any work on geography where England is made the centre of the world" (41). This method of teaching was probably not as farfetched as Caroline would have it. A few decades after Sherwood's novel was published, Charlotte M. Yonge recalled that "[s]ome wise man recommended teaching history backwards, beginning with the reform Bill" (1876, 46). Like Caroline Mordaunt she appears to have been somewhat sceptical, however, wondering "whether he ever tried it upon children, or reasoned only from men,

to whom elections are realities, and who may need to be shown the why and wherefore” (46).

Mothers, on the other hand, are typically depicted as either uninterested or incompetent to comment on education altogether. When they pay any attention, it is often of an interrupting or obstructing kind. There are mothers, like Mrs Fenton in *Caroline Mordaunt*, who have great educational plans for their children; but they seldom show any interest in implementing them themselves. On the contrary, by employing a governess these women to some extent admit to their own incompetence, and their attitude to the governess’s work may therefore stem from their own sense of educational inferiority.

Parents who hand over the responsibility for their children to the governess generally claim the right to them at their own convenience, however. From the governess heroine’s point of view, such an attitude is disagreeable, if not positively disruptive to her work. The novels of course side with the governess on this issue. Mistresses who take great interest in their children’s education are therefore portrayed as intruders, opponents, even tormentors. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, there are not a large number of actual lessons in governess novels. When they do occur, they are nearly always in some way marred by interference from employers. This seems to have been a problem in real life as well. Manuals urged employers to respect the work of the governess; likewise, the governess was admonished to be firm regarding intrusions. The governess writer of *Hints to Governesses* advised her colleagues not to “allow interruptions during school-hours” (31), and regretted that “[s]ome parents always send for their children when visitors arrive, not considering the harm they do” (31).

Robert Henry Mair’s *The Educator’s Guide, or, Hand Book for Principals of Schools, Parents, Guardians, Governesses and Tutors* (1861) stated that “as the reception rooms are not free to the governess, so should the school-room be inaccessible to the employers during the hours of study” (104). In *Guide to Service. The Governess* (1844), Sir George Stephen likewise argued that the responsibility should be left with governess, as “[w]e do not dictate to our own tailor or shoemaker how to cut the cloth and the calf-skin [...] to take a case more analogous [...] assume the right to control the singing master, or the drawing master, in the course by which he taught his art” (49).

A similar attitude is found in a letter from a governess in *Work & Leisure* in 1880, who signed herself E.C.J. She recalled a situation where “a fond but weak and ill-judging mother” constantly interrupted and changed her plans. The result was that “the mother was dissatisfied and the teacher conscious of lost time”. The failure that characterised this situation could be explained by

the over-anxiety of the interfering mother as well as by the weakness of the governess herself. Therefore, she wrote,

[i]n the engagement immediately succeeding this one I made it a proviso that I should teach on my own plans, and never be interfered with, unless positive failure could be proved. In this instance it so happened that the lady wisely recognised the advantage and even fairness of such a stipulation; and, with six girls instead of two, I think I may say without boasting that I succeeded well – and that was during a course of eight years. (*W&L* 1880, 28)

The professional attitude to teaching revealed in this letter differs from the way novelists handle similar situations. While manuals and other non-fictional sources often stress the educational loss incurred by parental interference and interruptions, novels tend to concentrate on the psychological effect of the indifference shown towards the heroine. This distinction has to do with the relative youth of the heroines. The novels usually deal with women who are just entering the governess trade, not with the experienced ones who would be in a better position to go into discussions with their employers.

In the novels, there are various forms of interference. One type concerns the mistress who wishes to comment on the instruction. In the Hunts' *The Governess* (1912), the schoolroom door is to be left open all day, so the mistress can listen to the lessons and make sure she gets her money's worth out of the governess. Another form of interruption is the break-up of lessons due to the arrival of guests. In *Chance and Choice, or the Education of Circumstances*, Lucy is "giving her two little pupils a lesson in needlework, and at the same time hearing their sister read English", when they are interrupted by the French governess who also resides in the family. This lady, whom the reader knows to be a close ally of the lady of the house, "suddenly entered the room, exclaiming, – 'Mademoiselle Eudoxie, make haste and come down! there is a travelling merchant below, – your mamma and all are there. Oh, he has got such beautiful things! – scarfs – fichus – I know not what!'" (53). The girls run off, and Lucy follows them downstairs "to draw her pupils away from the scene of action, in order that the lessons might be resumed" (54). She is of course not at all seconded in her endeavours by her employer. The only reaction she meets with is a comment from one of her pupils: "Mademoiselle Lucie wants to get us away from these pretty things, because she is jealous that she cannot have any of them for herself" (54). The writer, in exposing how the family puts pleasure before duty, thus effectively both emphasises the moral dignity of the heroine and places her in an awkward situation as she is not in a position to criticise her employers.

Another employer who puts her own pleasure before her daughter's education is Mrs Vincent Robinson in Blessington's *The Governess*. Just like Lucy Clifford, Clara Mordaunt is "in the midst of her lessons" (145) when an announcement calls her to her employer. Mrs Vincent Robinson has hired Clara both as a governess for the girl and as a companion to herself, and these two assignments of course collide. This scene makes Clara's frustration obvious, as Ada Myrrha – her little pupil – is so deeply absorbed in the lesson. Mrs Vincent Robinson does not consider such matters, however, as she deems it more important that Clara converse with her during her breakfast.

There is another form of parental interference in governess novels, besides that of interruptions. Quite a few novels contain what Mary Maurice called over-anxious mothers. This matter will be further addressed in Chapter 5, but a brief comment is in order here. Maurice thought that exaggerated worry in mothers should not be ridiculed and condemned by the governess, even though it may disturb her, "to be constantly reminded of the extreme delicacy of one of her pupils, and the importance of not letting another study much, of the care she must bestow on the figure of the third, and the diet of the fourth" (1849, 104; see also 1847, 58). On the other hand, Maurice asked, what "would be thought of a mother who never troubled herself to look into these things at all? Would she not be condemned as careless and indifferent?" (1849, 104-105).

In the novels, some over-anxious mothers are detrimental to their children's well-being. Caroline Mordaunt's bluestocking employer Mrs Delaney constantly interferes with the governess's plans; "she counteracted and re-arranged every system" Caroline "formed for the improvement of the child" (59). Caroline repeatedly tries to make Mrs Delaney see that the girl is overwrought, but in vain; she "died of over education, in her sixteenth year" (59). It might be noted that both Mrs Delaney and Mrs Fenton, who employs the de Genlis-inspired regime, are mothers actively interested in educational matters. In a similar way, Lady Howard in Catherine Sinclair's *Modern Accomplishments, or the March of Intellect* (1836) drives her children so hard that several of them die. She is also referred to as a bluestocking by her husband, who admits that he is too weak to oppose his wife's educational ideas. He therefore decides to send the remaining sons to school in a desperate attempt to save them. Sinclair's novel, which portrays several families and different kinds of education, is very critical against the aspiration for outward accomplishments. A review in *The Christian Lady's Magazine* sums up the novel in the following way: "The frivolity of fashionable life and conversation, and the absurdity of overloading a young girl with mere accomplishments, together with the evil tendency of such a system of education, are all graphically pourtrayed [*sic*]" (CLM 1836, 5:371).

An opposite kind of parental anxiety is the fear that the children should be over-exposed to studying. Yonge's *Hopes and Fears* features a governess called Miss Fennimore who has much influence over her charges, since the mistress of the house is sickly. As Gillian Avery puts it, Miss Fennimore is "discovered to be virtually an agnostic and to have infected one of her charges, whom she has also overworked and overstimulated to the pitch of brain-fever" (209). In the nineteenth century, there was quite a wide-spread belief that intellectual over-straining was dangerous to the tender female mind, and young women's breakdowns were often connected with their interest in studies. In the 1830s, for instance, a bright girl called Emily Shore received a broad education by her clergyman father and her mother, but in her mid teens she suffered a mental breakdown, which was put down to her having overtaxed her strength (Davidoff and Hall 291). Half a century later, Sophia Caulfield likewise claimed that too much study was dangerous, stating that the "growing brain should never be wearied, nor treated like an insensible machine". She based this conviction on contemporary medical reports concerning "the percentage of cases [...] of inflammation of, and water on, the brain – sometimes resulting in insanity and suicide" (*GOP* 1884, 771).

Such parental worry figures in a number of governess novels. The following examples show how this kind of anxiety – which is far from natural concern – severely hinders the work of the governess. The physical delicacy of children and the harm that hard studies may cause are often referred to. Caroline Mordaunt's first employer, for instance, cautions her "not to irritate [her pupil], – she has a remarkably tender constitution, and a susceptible mind". Instead, Caroline is told that she must try rather to "insinuate [her] instructions, than to force them" upon the girl (20). In a later position, Caroline is told that her pupils

have remarkably delicate constitutions, and are the most nervous little dears on the face of the earth. Your predecessor [...] injured them very seriously [...] by keeping them two hours for lessons, strict regular hours, which were never invaded on any account; and you can have no idea how this dull sort of routine affected their little nerves. (71-72)

Children who are believed by their parents to have "remarkably delicate constitutions" are indeed common in governess novels. Mrs Murray in *Agnes Grey* claims that her son is "so extremely nervous and susceptible, and so utterly unaccustomed to anything but the tenderest treatment" (120). In like manner, Anna Maria Hall's daily governess is asked by one employer to remain after the lesson to help her pupil with her homework because the girl "complains of her eyes [...] Poor darling! we must take care of her eyes!" ("The Daily Governess" 111). This governess feels she cannot refuse as the employer has promised to

recommend her, on which Hall commented that “[t]he daily governess must pay the usual slave-tribute for patronage” (111).

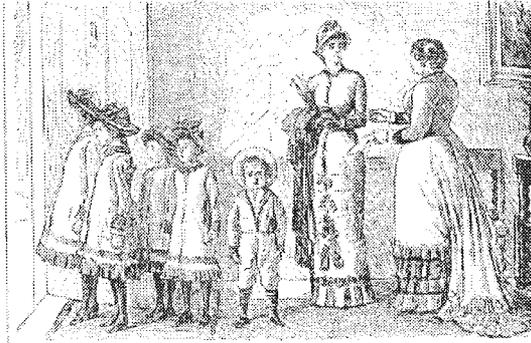
Why, then, do parents in the novels seem to wish to keep their children delicate little things instead of preparing them for life? As Chapter 5 will show, mothers in governess novels are often presented as uncommonly unsuitable child-rearers. Apart from normal parental fondness, their ambivalence at handing over the responsibility to another woman may count for their regarding the children as more delicate than the governess perceives them. Mrs Melville in Cheap’s *The Nursery Governess* – who repeatedly is described as hesitant to hand over her child to someone else – likes to sit in on her daughter’s lessons. Whenever the child shows any sign of remonstrance towards learning, the mother is “always for overlooking the faults, and yielding to the wayward fancies” (108). When the child one day inexplicably refuses to “repeat the successive numbers after 44, but passed to 60” (108), the governess tries to make her say the correct number, but she is interrupted by Mrs Melville, who feels her daughter is overtaxed by the teacher. This misdirected maternal anxiety leads to the dismissal of the governess. Mrs Melville justifies her decision by claiming that the girl is too young for instruction, although the prime reason is a jealous fear that the governess will supersede herself in affection and influence.

As many mistresses do not see much of their children, they consequently do not know much of their true characters. Mrs Bloomfield tells Agnes Grey that she will not find the children

very far advanced in their attainments [...] for I have had so little time to attend to their education myself, and we have thought them too young for a governess till now; but I think they are clever children, and very apt to learn, especially the little boy; he is, I think, the flower of the flock – a generous, noble-spirited boy, one to be led, but not driven, and remarkable for always speaking the truth. (75)

Agnes soon realises that not one word of this is true. The reader is never told why Mrs Bloomfield has not had time to supervise her children’s education, but it is clear that she is not fit to educate her children herself. She next states that the children have been too young for a governess. This is hardly true, as Tom is seven years old, Mary Ann is almost six, and Fanny is four years old. Anthony Thomson was of the opinion that infant education should begin when the child was “old enough, strong enough, and apt enough to retain what it is taught” (25-26), which might be at the age of “three and a half to four years old, – in some cases earlier” (31). Although the age when children commenced their education varied, these figures suggest that the Bloomfield children are quite late in starting their schooling. As the governess was an additional cost, parents might have chosen to postpone employing one until there were several children old

enough for the schoolroom, and this seems a more likely reason in the case of the Bloomfields.



Proud Mother (to the new Governess). “And here is a pencil, Miss Green, and a notebook, in which I wish you to write down all the clever or remarkable things the dear children may say during your walk.”

Fig. 9 “No sinecure” (*Punch* 1878, 75:18)

As was suggested, interfering and over-anxious mothers are seldom sympathetically portrayed in governess novels. A *Punch* illustration from 1878 shows the proud mother of five urging the new governess to take down “all the clever and remarkable things” her children may utter during the daily walk (Fig. 9). The phenomenon of over-anxious mothers, whether they are shielding their children from work or promoting them far beyond their capacity, must be seen in relation to the ambivalence felt by many mothers who left their children’s education to a governess.

The matter of discipline

In governess novels, the heroine usually acts more as a disciplinarian than as an educator vis-à-vis her charges, a function connected with her task of forming the children’s character. Children in governess novels are often surprisingly agreeable in comparison with their parents. All of Clara Mordaunt’s pupils in Blessington’s *The Governess*, for instance, quickly learn to obey and respect her, and the girl in Cheap’s *The Nursery Governess* who at first cries out her aversion against the governess soon comes to love her. Sometimes pure insecurity in the new situation seems to be the reason for the children’s initial

aversion. The daughter of one of Agnes Porter's pupils recalled how her mother "used to describe herself as a very naughty, sulky child when Miss Porter came", but that the governess "with her sweet good sense and discernment of character used to charm her out of her obstinacy" (quoted in Martin 55). Such a quick reversal in pupils is also found in the novels. One reason may be that children are impressionable. In the novels, neither their parents or nurses, nor perhaps former governesses, have treated them with nearly as much respect as they meet with from the heroine.

Some children in governess novels seem to be utterly impossible to curb, however. Agnes Grey finds herself defeated by the Bloomfield children and to some extent also by the Murray ones. Lucy Clifford in *Chance and Choice, or the Education of Circumstances* likewise finds her Russian pupils totally uncontrollable. Both Agnes and Lucy are very young when encountering these pupils. An older and more experienced governess might have had more success, although the narrator of *Chance and Choice* is not certain: "it must be allowed that her task was one which might have puzzled wiser and more experienced governesses than our young heroine" (53). It is worth noting, though, that whenever children come across as truly impossible, their parents are depicted as being even worse. Both Mrs Bloomfield and the Russian Princess leave the total charge of their children to the governess and just cannot be bothered with their upbringing.

In her biography of Anne Brontë, Winifred Gérin tries to explain the disciplinary difficulties that Brontë herself met with in her first situation, with the Inghams, who have been seen as prototypes of the Bloomfields:

The trouble about the little Inghams was that their parents had new-fangled notions on discipline. They had possibly read Thomas Day and Maria Edgeworth. The fact remains that the dear little things were not to be coerced, and it was on this rock that Anne Brontë and the parents split. (128)

It should be pointed out that although the pedagogical writings of both Day and Edgeworth were considered liberal, the Inghams, if they had indeed read their works, had certainly misunderstood them if they acted like the Bloomfields. Thomas Day and Maria Edgeworth (as well as the latter's father) stressed the importance of children's freedom and interest in their studies, but did not by any means suggest that they should run wild. In his memoirs written in the 1820s, Mr Edgeworth acknowledged the mistake he had made in educating his eldest son according to the principles of Rousseau. The boy had been "brought up in imitation of Emile [*sic*], [and] was so hopelessly wild that when he died prematurely in 1796 his father merely remarked that 'it is better ... he has retired from the scene'" (Avery 23).

In most novels children are caught between the moral standards set by the governess and those that prevail in the household. Children often mimic the behaviour of their parents, which leads to problems for the governess when she corrects her pupils. When, for instance, Barbara Wynne in the Hunts' *The Governess* (1912) admonishes her pupils not to repeat what others have said, she is in fact criticising the behaviour of her employers. Manuals generally urged the governess to be sensitive to the wishes of the mistress of the house, and to follow her directions. Although the matter of discipline is not a major issue in the novels, the governess's views on this subject seldom tally with those of the children's mother. Furthermore, many mistresses are equivocal in giving instructions: on the one hand, they wish the governess to be firm with the children; on the other, they cannot stand their little darlings being disciplined by a hireling. This ambiguous stance often leads to conflicts where the difference in opinion becomes apparent.

A delicate matter connected with discipline is the question whether the governess should tell her pupils' parents about their children's acts of mischief and disobedience or if she ought to keep these misdemeanours to herself. A father advising his governess daughter optimistically urged her to consult the lady of the house "as frankly as you would your mother" in all difficult cases (*EJE* 1849, 137). Governess manuals were not in agreement as to whether such an approach was advisable. In 1815, Elizabeth Appleton suggested that the governess keep a "character book" of her pupils' progress and behaviour. It seems clear that she thought that these notes should be presented to the parents. A few decades later, the governess behind *Hints to Governesses* recommended the governess not to "relate every little fault [the children] commit to their parents" (18), while Mary Maurice stated that as

[a] conscientious governess will desire that the mother should be fully acquainted with all that she is doing, she will converse openly with her both on the faults and excellencies of her pupils, asking her counsel and advice, always showing readiness to conform to her wishes, and thankfulness to be told when she has erred, or misunderstood the character of her charge. (1849, 32)

Throughout her book Maurice urged the governess to seek advice and help from her mistress, while the author of *Hints to Governesses* actually invited her to object if she found that the arrangement of the household impeded her work. If the novels mirror reality in this respect, it is not surprising that several manual writers urged governesses to be discerning when relating their pupils' faults. Mrs Bloomfield tells Agnes Grey that the children's defects should be mentioned only to herself, but as Agnes's mother has warned her of such

confidences – “for people did not like to be told of their children’s faults” – Agnes concludes that she had better “keep silence on them altogether” (79).

Agnes’s endeavours to instil discipline are repeatedly thwarted by her employers. When Tom Bloomfield is playing with small nestlings, Agnes entreats him to restore them to where he found them. Her efforts are in vain, however, as he intends to “fettle ’em off” and “wallop ’em” (104). This scene of childish brutality ends with Agnes finding herself forced to save the birds from their tormentor by killing them herself, which evokes a strong reaction from Mrs Bloomfield. She thinks the governess has been most unjust in “putting the dear boy to such misery” (106). Arguing that “the creatures were all created for our convenience”, Mrs Bloomfield gets entangled in an argument with Agnes that presents the governess as a much better contestant, besides the fact that it is made plain that she knows her Bible far better than her employer. Anne Brontë repeatedly used the device of elevating the governess heroine by pointing to intellectual insufficiencies in the employer.

It has been suggested that the bird scene had its origin in Anne Brontë’s own governess experience (Gaskell 1857, 116-117). Hilary Newman discusses Anne Brontë’s consistent use of animals and animal imagery in *Agnes Grey*, stating that “animals both as concrete entities and in the imagery are used to convey the moral strengths and failings of those Agnes meets” (241). For instance, the unruly Bloomfield children are likened to wild animals, and the two clergymen Hatfield and Weston are contrasted in their different ways of handling animals. While the former physically injures both Nancy Brown’s cat and Agnes’s dog Snap, Mr Weston lets the cat sit in his lap and later saves Snap from the rat-catcher that Matilda Murray has sold him to.

Brontë’s love for animals is well recorded, but her fictional use of animals was not without precedent in governess novels. A scene similar to the bird scene in *Agnes Grey* occurs in Kirkham Mathews’s *Ellinor, or the Young Governess*. There young Frederick Selby is described as a “proud, obstinate, and cruel” boy (17) – words which would equally serve to illustrate Tom Bloomfield’s character. Both boys are under the detrimental influence of a relative; while Tom has been influenced by his uncle, Frederick’s arrogant aunt incites him to believe that as an aristocratic heir he is above moral rules (33). Kirkham Mathews writes, “though not more than six years old, his obstinacy of temper appeared incorrigible. His disposition was not only violent, but cruel; he loved to torture harmless and inoffensive creatures, that were not capable of resisting his unfeeling conduct” (33-34). When Frederick Selby has tormented a cat by fastening a pair of doll’s slippers to its feet, the animal turns against him and scratches him badly. The boy swears that he will make the kitten suffer for its reaction, but Ellinor tells him – just like Agnes Grey tells Mrs Bloomfield –

that although man is superior to animals by nature, “it is mean and unworthy of us to become their tyrants” (36). In both these novels, as in *Emily, the Governess* where the heroine’s beloved dog is killed by the rejected Lord Alfred, the governess represents compassion with defenceless animals, while her pupil – or, in *Emily, the Governess* the brother of her pupil – treats them with cruelty. The introduction of animals in scenes involving discipline and social order was not restricted to the governess-novel genre, however. Like charity towards the poor, kindness to animals was a common topic in early nineteenth-century books intended for young readers (see Avery 37-39 and Reed 101).

In both *Agnes Grey* and *Ellinor, or the Young Governess*, the principal tormentors are boys, although in these particular novels their sisters are quite unruly too. In real life, discipline seems to have been more difficult to keep up if the schoolroom included boys. Hughes states that “Victorian autobiographies are full of tales of governess-baiting – a sport in which small boys, chafing under petticoat rule, were only too happy to lead” (68). Charlotte Brontë, for one, was a victim of unruly boy pupils. According to Elizabeth Gaskell, Brontë’s little boy pupil threw stones at her, one of which hit her badly on her temple (1857, 117). The vast majority of pupils in governess novels are girls, however, and the disciplinary problems are often of a somewhat less severe nature than the ones referred to above. Perhaps not surprisingly, girl pupils instead tend to revel in pure insolence and teasing.

Many boy pupils who disobey their governess are guilty of rather innocent crimes. Oliver in *Margaret Stourton, or, a Year of Governess Life* troubles his governess by being “so very careless, and forgetful of good manners [bringing] his dogs and himself, covered with mud, into the school-room” (80). When Oliver counters Margaret’s explicit orders and brings his dog to the schoolroom, the governess feels she has to set an example: “you know this is real disobedience. As it is, I must have him [i.e. the dog] taken away. He will be quite as comfortable in the housekeeper’s room, but of course you may not stay there with him” (80-81). The boy feels angry with the governess and accuses her of being cruel and unfeeling, which makes Margaret have a “talk with him which he did not soon forget” (81). After yet another outburst of disobedience, Oliver gives his governess a present, “not in itself very valuable, but extremely so to Margaret, as proving how perfectly he forgave her for having punished him, and that he felt she had been entirely right in doing so” (81). The pedagogical point made here is of course that the authority of the governess should not be questioned, and when it is, good children soon come to realise that they are punished for their own good.

Emily Peart advised governesses never to show they had lost their temper (49). Probably easier said than done for those who were in charge –

perhaps constantly – of a set of unruly children, this counsel seems rather typical. Governesses in the novels often manage to solve disputes amicably if the children are benevolent, but when the latter have been taught by their parents' example to disrespect governesses, she will of course face greater difficulties. There is no reason to doubt that physical punishment was commonly used all through the nineteenth century, and that disobedient children were threatened with the dark cellar or closet. A woman describing her childhood of the 1830s, for instance, remembered her governess as “a very strict disciplinarian” and that she and her sister “were vigorously punished when we infringed the laws of the schoolroom” (Pollock 197). However, governess manuals as well as the pedagogical debate in a larger context increasingly urged parents and educators to adopt a more humane approach in discipline. In the anonymous *Hints to a Young Governess on Beginning a School* (1857), for instance, it is stated that it is better to encourage and be positive than “continually noticing and punishing what is wrong” (7).

John R. Reed claims that early in the nineteenth century, “the concept of rehabilitation was emerging [and] many reform movements gained force, notably reform of prisons and of the penal code” (99). These, along with educational reforms and the pervasive religious influence, seem to have helped to bring about a new attitude to upbringing and discipline. Those who actually favoured physical punishment strove to represent it as pedagogically justifiable. The anonymous mother behind *Hints on Education Addressed to Mothers* (1852) stated that she “would punish sharply, and have it over” (26). She gives examples of how she would punish her own children; for instance, she would pull her son's hair if he pulled the dog's tail and give him a quick blow if he hit someone else.

In spite of changing attitudes, there were still three “faults which should *never* be passed unnoticed: – actual disobedience, positive instances of untruth (for we should be most cautious in accusing children of falsehood) and any appearance of disrespect, in words or otherwise” (8), as it was put in *Hints to a Young Governess*. It should be noted that discipline was often linked to the concept of sin. In Cheap's *The Nursery Governess*, for instance, a governess reminds her charge that punishment has been inflicted “because you were committing *sin*, in being *obstinate* and *disobedient*” (106). The child learns that not until she “kneel[s] down and ask[s] for that blood to wash out [her] sin” will she be free from her transgression (107). Nineteenth-century children's literature repeatedly featured such religious rhetoric aimed at incurring fear of sin in children. The three misdemeanours mentioned above – disobedience, lying, and disrespect – also seem to be the ones most common in the novels.

It sometimes happens that children leave the premises although they have been explicitly forbidden to do so. In the Hunts' *The Governess*, Barbara Wynne's pupils run away skating, and in Sewell's *Amy Herbert* little Rosa is fatally wounded in a riding accident. In such cases the governess becomes the target of the parents' anger or anxiety, even if she has expressly forbidden her pupils to do what they have done. Agnes Grey is scolded by Mr Bloomfield when she cannot get the children back into the house from which they have run out without permission. Although she tries to "awe them into subjection" with "grim looks and angry words" (95), the unruly youngsters refuse to come back in until their father enters the stage, threatening to horsewhip them. Agnes's main problem is not the actual disobedience of the children, but her employer's lack of sympathy with her situation.

The offence regarding "positive instances of untruth" was frequently commented on. *Hints to Governesses* stated that children do not always tell the truth as they "dread being punished for a fault" (21). This view on the nature of children is discussed by Penny Kane, who states that "the traditional belief that children were a kind of young animal, to be schooled into adult good behaviour by strict discipline" gave way to two widely different attitudes during the nineteenth century (45). The supposition that children were by their very nature constantly trembling on the brink of damnation and therefore needed consistent disciplinary effort to attain goodness and salvation was a widespread notion which gained considerable influence in the Established Church (Kane 46). Hannah More, to mention one writer on the topic, considered it a "fundamental error in Christians to consider children as innocent beings [...] rather than as beings who bring into this world a corrupt nature and evil dispositions, which it should be the great end of education to rectify" (1799, 44). Thus, she thought a good teacher was one who could counteract youthful corruption.

As a fictional illustration of such an unrelenting view, Kane picks the scene from *Jane Eyre* where Mr Brocklehurst, in his first meeting with Jane, hands her a moral guide for children, urging her to "read it with prayer, especially that part containing 'An account of the awfully sudden death of Martha G—, a naughty child addicted to falsehood and deceit'" (Ch Brontë 35). Such exhortatory publications were actually issued in large editions; the Reverend Carus Wilson, who is generally believed to be the real-life person behind the Brocklehurst figure, was himself a prolific publisher of such stories (Kane 46).

If one view of children was to see them as destined for damnation, another, indebted to Rousseau, consisted in regarding them as being essentially innocent and good. Both attitudes seem to have existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. As shown above, Hannah More adhered to the idea of

Original Sin, but her contemporary Richard Lovell Edgeworth was at least initially influenced by Rousseau. Half a century later, Anthony Thomson declared that he did “not believe in ‘depraved children’ as they are called” (335), while the signature “Amica” behind *The Calling and Responsibilities of a Governess* (1852) stated the necessity of breaking the proud spirit of obstinate children.

To return to the serious offences which were not to be accepted according to *Hints to a Young Governess*, the third was that of disrespect. Compared to the other offences, this seems to be much more ambiguous. Most manuals urged the governess to see to it that her pupils were polite to servants, but at the same time they state that children should not spend too much time with domestics. Another kind of respect is that which children were supposed to show towards their parents. As discussed above, the moral standards of the fictional governess often collide with the wishes of her employer. This is certainly the case when it comes to respect for parents and other adults. In several novels, the governess finds that her pupils freely recapitulate what their parents say and what they have heard about others. For instance, a pupil of Clara Mordaunt’s in Blessington’s *The Governess* states that her mother is unreasonable, which makes the governess tell her pupil never to criticise her mother (65). Likewise, Martha Smyth in Selous’s *The Young Governess: A Tale for Girls* feels she has to check her pupil Eleanor for calling her mother’s orders “absurd” (97).

The noble mind of the governess heroine is often expressed in similar situations. By making the governess censure the children when they either calumniate or defy their parents, the author easily wins the reader’s sympathy for the heroine. In Cheap’s *The Nursery Governess* a little girl protests when her mother sends for her. The governess then teaches her that she must always obey her mother, even saying “you must always have pleasure in obeying mamma” (70). These are impressive words from a character who is in fact badly treated by her mistress. A similar scene is found in Hall’s *The Governess*, where the mother interrupts a lesson to take her children for a walk. The girls want the governess to accompany them, but the mother replies in the negative, saying that she has already had her weekly drive. One of the good-natured children then offers to stay behind with the governess, who declines and instructs the child always to do what her mother tells her (32-33).

In the novels we meet all kinds of children. A small number of them are as detestable as the Bloomfields in *Agnes Grey*, but as was pointed out above many fictional governesses encounter docile and easily-managed children. Although children frequently make an unfavourable first impression on their governess, she usually wins their respect and affection. Madame Frémont in *The*

Kind Governess or How to Make Home Happy, whose arrival was much dreaded by her pupils, subtly but firmly transforms them into little angels. In *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*, Gertrude Walcott manages to change her pupils – initially brought up “never [...] to speak to an inferior” (11) – into charitable little girls who voluntarily make clothes for the poor. The disciplinary problems encountered in the novels are connected to the attitude of the employers rather than to actual malice on the part of the children. When pupils in the novels are found to be disobedient, mendacious, or generally disrespectful, they have either been directly encouraged by their parents or are solely imitating their behaviour. An example of this is found in *Adelaide, or the Trials of a Governess*, where the heroine is maltreated and criticised by her mistress. Initially her pupils, too, show her no respect. After some months, however, they “began to feel that they made surest of their own inward approbation when they studied to earn that of the governess” (68).

When it comes to actual punishment, neither manuals nor governess novels are very outspoken. Most of them argue that disobedience should be checked, but do not say how it should be done. In the article “The Nursery Discipline of the Governess”, for example, the signature W.M. urged the governess to “prevent error rather than trust to punishment afterwards” (*GRFE* 1855, 284). The writer records several cases of mischievous little boys, who were punished by “recourse to the rod” (285) or “with sundry slaps on either ear, and an out-thrust to the cellar below” (286). Prior to the punishments, however, the motives of the little culprits should be identified, since “[t]he grand remedy for the tricks of active children is prevention; remove as far as possible from them temptation to commit such misdeeds, or warn them beforehand” (286).

In *The Calling and Responsibilities of a Governess*, however, the signature “Amica” presented a detailed view on how children ought to be punished by means of an example from her own recollections. A nine-year-old boy who proved to be obstinate and idle was put in a closet by his governess. After a quarter of an hour, “the proud spirit was humbled – the pardon asked – the promise of amendment given, and he was allowed to come out [...] The child, whom his sisters represented as a regular schoolroom pest, became one of the most exemplary children I ever saw” (105-106). The fact that the boy was punished for idleness is in line with the striving for efficiency and the dedication to profitable time management that were discussed previously in this chapter. The punishment was successful, as it broke the “proud spirit” of the boy. Somewhat surprisingly, “Amica” later stated that this was the governess’s first day in the house, and that the mistress “took no part in the affair; not even so much as to inquire the cause of the punishment” (105). If the governess had not been so firm, and if the parents had interfered, “Henry might have remained a

thorn in the side of all” (107). “Amica” thus advocated that the total disciplinary responsibility should rest with the governess.

Physical punishment proper is rare in governess novels. One explanation for this might be found in the usual characterisation of the governess as an angelic woman. Although trampled upon and ill-treated, she usually manages to curb unruly children by kind words only. Her sweet image would be somewhat tarnished if she resorted to physical punishment. Agnes Grey, however, ponders whether a “few sound boxes on the ear” or “a good birch rod” (84) would not have been appropriate in the case of Tom Bloomfield. Although she states that “Patience, Firmness, and Perseverance” (85) are her only weapons, it soon becomes clear that she resorts to actual physical punishment. Agnes’s difficulties might owe something to Anne Brontë’s own governess experience; it is recorded how one of her employers when entering the schoolroom found that Brontë had tied her pupils to the table as a way of keeping them at their work (Barker 309).

In Gordon Smythies’s *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence*, punishment is used as a way of emphasising the sensitive and maternal qualities of the governess. One of Lucy Blair’s unruly pupils actually throws “rather a thick French and English Dictionary” at her head, after having been told to re-write an exercise. The poor governess is “stunned mentally, morally, and physically” (I:170); coincidentally, the stern father Sir George Hamilton Traherne enters the room just in time to see his daughter’s misbehaviour. In this novel, the governess does not try to punish her pupil; rather, she tries to shield the child from her father. When Sir George leads the little culprit away, Lucy tries to intercede, but to no avail. Gordon Smythies writes, “[w]hat befell [the girl] in the library, into which [the father] led her, closing the door after him, we are not at liberty to say; but several shrill cries sent the blood to her sisters’ cheeks, and drove it from Lucy’s” (I:173). When the girl is later brought back to the schoolroom, the governess’s sensitiveness is brought up again: “Lucy longed to clasp the little penitent to her heart, but Sir George’s austere manner prevented her” (I:174). The unexpected denouement of this novel, that Lucy Blair is in fact Sir George’s eldest daughter, is to some extent foreboded in this scene, as Sir George “felt a strange, grave, growing interest in the poor governess of his troublesome children” (I:174).

In other nineteenth-century novels, physical discipline suggests a sadistic streak in the governess. In Sir Arthur Hallam Elton’s *Below the Surface* (1857), which is not a governess novel, two governesses discuss punishment. One of them, Miss Beverley, complains that although the lady of the house kisses and praises the children, “the onus of punishing [...] is constantly deputed to *me*” (217). Her colleague, Miss Seton, holds another opinion on the matter, however.

The duty of inflicting punishment “is what keeps one up”, Miss Seton thinks; “You see the passionate girl; the pert, malignant pupil; the dirty slut. A voice says – ‘Do your duty!’ loudly in both ears. You punish. The conscience is satisfied – the child benefited” (217). The dialogue then continues with a discussion on various forms of punishments. When Agnes Grey punishes her pupils, it is out of desperation, but we get a feeling that Miss Seton actually enjoys inflicting punishments. Another novel where this dimension occurs is the allegedly autobiographical *The Adventures of a Young Lady, Who Was First a Governess, and Who Afterwards Fell into the Hands of Pirates; Together with the Account of Her Escape* (1880). In this improbable story, which relates the heroine’s career as a governess at a boys’ school before she is kidnapped by pirates and sold to a harem, the scene of punishment has a sadistic undertone:

The most amusing hour for us was just before bedtime, when the delinquents of the day were punished in the Matron’s room [...] The delinquent was tied on to a chair, and there was generally a good struggle before we could get a boy into the proper position; but when we did, we made him feel the weight of our arms. (7)

Perhaps not surprisingly, the governess who inflicts physical punishment on a young boy came to figure in pornography, and still does (see the Epilogue below).

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The age of the governess novel coincided with an immense public interest in education and self- improvement. Although the novels seldom refer to any specific pedagogical approaches, they draw on the general didactic ideas that were in vogue at the time.

Although young and inexperienced, the heroine usually proves to be a far better implementer of the pedagogical ideas embraced by the author than the children’s mother, who, on the contrary, is portrayed as a warning example of the kind of education that is criticised. This criticism of mothers is an interesting aspect of the governess-novel genre, and the next chapter deals with the function of the governess heroine as a surrogate mother.

5

In a mother's place

[W]e have supplied the place, which the fashion, the necessity, the indolence, or the ignorance, of the mother left unfilled.

(Hall, "The Old Governess" 1842)

Maternity

Although governess work was considered appropriate for women because it involved tasks similar to those of the mother, this analogy also posed a threat to middle-class stability. Since it was assumed that the married woman's principal duty in life was to raise her children, she could be seen as neglecting her natural task by employing a governess. This was the source of repeated comment in the contemporary debate; an article in 1844 typically discussed the "strength of instinct [which] has been given to every mother", stressing the value of instruction given by the mother, rather than by "strangers" (*FM* 1844, 574). The difficulties that could arise when the governess assumed a maternal role in her employer's household constituted a favourite topic in the contemporary governess debate. The ambiguity concerning the mother's responsibility was also something that writers of governess novels seized upon. It is indeed a prominent feature in most novels, and the relation between mistress and governess often harbours an intense conflict. Typically, the governess heroine finds herself employed to perform the mother's tasks, but not supposed to expect anything except her wages in return.

All through the nineteenth century, there was an ongoing discussion as to whether the governess could be left in charge of the children, or whether the mother was necessary for her children's beneficial development. Some critics argued that the governess was unable to replace the mother, as she was not a mother herself. In *Guide to Service: The Governess* (1844), Sir George Stephen

asked how a young and unmarried governess could “inculcate, or even comprehend practically, the functions of a relation which she has never filled herself, and, very possibly, never even seen discharged with good sense?” (21). Such a distrust of governesses is not found in the novels; on the contrary, the heroine is usually endowed with strong maternal characteristics. More often than not, she is depicted as far more competent to deal with her charges than the real mother. Although mistresses in the novels often seem to be devoid of maternal feelings, they still react with jealousy to any emotional bonds that develop between governess and children.

This chapter will investigate the maternal role in governess novels. The nineteenth-century debate concerning issues like women's mission and maternity will be considered in order to form a background to the ensuing discussion of the governess character as a surrogate mother to her pupils. There are different types of relations between governesses and mistresses in the novels. Many stories feature rather unaccommodating employers who resent their children's affection towards the governess, but there are a few notable exceptions that will also have to be taken into account. In some novels there is no mistress in the house, and there the governess naturally finds greater outlet for maternal feelings for her pupils. In other stories, the mother is a weak or insecure figure who learns to appreciate the governess.

One detail which should be mentioned in relation to the discussion of nineteenth-century views on motherhood is the fact that a vast majority of the contemporary writers on this topic were not mothers themselves. Neither Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, Mary Maurice, nor Anna Jameson or Sarah Ellis had children of their own. Therefore, it is not surprising that when the writer actually had first-hand experience of her topic, this would be stated on the front page as well as in the text. *Hints on Early Education Addressed to Mothers: By a Mother* (1852) is one such book; but as early as the 1820s, *Observations on the Importance of Female Education, and Maternal Instruction. By a Mother* (1825) appeared. This book was actually an American production written by Abigail Mott, with an appendix “containing brief hints to parents” by her husband James Mott, a well-known Quaker who, together with his wife, worked for the abolitionist movement.

In another handbook said to be written by a mother, *Thoughts on Domestic Education; The Result of Experience: By a Mother* (1826), the author (presumably Maria Elizabeth Budden) claimed that she had been induced to write the book by a particular statement made by a gentleman. This man had told her that he would gladly have read the educational tracts by Miss Edgeworth and Miss Hamilton, had they been written by *Mrs* Edgeworth and *Mrs* Hamilton. Like some of the other educational manuals included in this

study, the discussion in *Thoughts on Domestic Education* indicates that its author was well versed in educational matters; it contains references to several of the well-known educational writers at the time, such as Felicité de Genlis, Fénelon, and Elizabeth Hamilton.

Woman's mission

The rise of a new powerful urban middle class able to afford the exclusion of women from production led to changes in family structures. On an increasing scale, women could devote themselves fully to reproduction and home management. Middle-class men left home for work, and the house became the wife's domain. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, though, the position of the leisured middle-class woman was ambiguous. On the one hand, she was a symbol of her husband's success; on the other, because she was isolated from the public sphere of paid work, she was an easy target for reproaches of idleness. Some critics viewed the indolence of middle-class women as a degenerate legacy from the aristocracy, which formed a stark contrast to the utilitarian aspects of Victorian society.

The duties of a mother were clearly stated in the educational manuals of the age. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi was far from alone in believing that mothers were competent by nature to care for and raise their children. In *Letters on Early Education* (1827), he wrote, "I would say, the mother is qualified, and qualified by her Creator himself, to become the principal agent in the development of her child" (4). A few decades later, Sir George Stephen defined the maternal duty as "to nurse, to instruct, to aid, to *take care* of her offspring; to watch over its ailments, to provide for its wants, to check its errors, to superintend its efforts" (8). The problem, as Stephen saw it, was that so many mothers did not understand this. Instead, they devoted their time to social duties and delegated their maternal duties to a governess, who thus became a "maternal deputy". Far from alone in his views, Stephen was severe with the mothers of England, claiming that women among the higher classes generally did as little as possible for their children themselves (8-9). As will be remembered from Chapter 4, the ornamentally oriented education of girls in the nineteenth century did not prepare middle-class women for the care and education of their offspring. The resulting insecurity might have been one of the reasons why mothers declared that they had no time for their children.

Mothers who stated lack of time as a reason for not fulfilling their maternal mission were harshly rebuked. For instance, Maria Elizabeth Budden,

the mother behind *Thoughts on Domestic Education: The Result of Experience* exclaimed, “[l]et not mothers fancy they have not time for educating their children. In the gayest and busiest life some portion of the day can be at command, and, in the disposition of time, can any claim be more imperative” (8-9). Likewise, she informed mothers who complained of lack of knowledge that there were many books on education that could be used, and that any mother could learn as she taught. The writer of *The Mother the Best Governess: A Practical System for the Education of Young Ladies* (1839) similarly declared, “[s]urely, there is no mother in the upper classes of society who can say that she has neither time nor ability” (19) for taking an active part in her children’s upbringing and education. In the novels, too, mothers cite lack of time as a reason for engaging a governess, when in fact lack of interest is more in agreement with the truth. As will be remembered, Anne Brontë’s Mrs Bloomfield tells Agnes Grey that the children are not very advanced because she has had “so little time to attend to their education” (75) herself.

Several handbooks stressing the importance of the mother’s work appeared, and the general opinion seems to agree with the anonymous mother behind *Hints on Early Education: Addressed to Mothers*, who stated that “[t]he most important and responsible business that any one can be engaged in, is that of education” (3). According to her, this responsibility should be undertaken by the parents, after having brought the children into this world, and “transmitted to them their own evil disposition and tempers” (4). Not surprisingly, in governess novels, this attitude is not generally held by employers. They would much rather part with any responsibility for their children than relate those children’s conduct or disposition to themselves. In *Thoughts on Domestic Education; the Result of Experience*, it was also argued that a mother “best knows the powers of her children, and can adapt her demands upon their attention accordingly” (10); and Anthony Thomson, in *The English Schoolroom; or Thoughts on Private Tuition, Practical and Suggestive* (1865), declared that “the stranger [i.e. the governess] lacks that mysterious tie between the mother and child that gives the parent such an intuitive insight into a child’s real character and capacity” (22). He admitted that some vain mothers could not judge their offspring correctly, but said that a *true* mother would be able to do this.

Such ideas are important in relation to the governess novels, where parents readily hand over the responsibility for their children to the governess. Many heroines encounter charges that are minor versions of their parents, but after some time they have influenced the children into docility and obedience. In the novels it thus seems as if the maternal influence of the governess is stronger than that of the real mother. This might be one reason behind the rivalry between the two.

The notion that a woman's true calling lay in motherhood was not held only by men. Woman's mission and her position in society were major topics of discussion in feminist circles, too. It is noteworthy that although feminists strove for equality between the sexes concerning matters such as legal rights and opportunities on the labour market, even radical women seem to have acknowledged motherhood as the main task of women. Josephine Butler, a champion of women's higher education and a campaigner against state-regulated prostitution, expressed her views within the ideological framework of her time. In an 1882 Parliamentary testimony concerning prostitutes, she stated "that there is nothing answering in the physical being of a man to the sacredness of the maternal functions in a woman [...] Parliament cannot afford, on this question, to set aside the sentiment of the motherhood of England" (quoted in Horowitz Murray 13). Janet Horowitz Murray points at the time-bound quality of Butler's speech: "[u]nlike a modern feminist, Butler emphasizes women's weakness and maternal role rather than their strength and resistance. But her stance is no less feminist, or even radical, for its grounding in Victorian conventions" (15).

Sally Shuttleworth claims that "[f]ew ideological constructs seem[ed] to arouse such uniform responses in the era" in the Victorian era as that of woman's mission. Not even the rise of the women's movement in the early 1860s created an urge to challenge the ideals of motherhood, she writes (31). One reason why female reformers also stressed this maternal mission might have been an urge to justify the only obvious option for women. In other words, it seems as if the emphasis on motherhood to some extent served both conservative and radical aims. The underlying conflict in the role of the Victorian middle-class woman – on the one hand, she was regarded as an unproductive unit in respect of work and on the other she was idealised as a reproductive unit within the home sphere – must not be underestimated. Shuttleworth states that the idea of motherhood was "a field of potent conflicts in itself", mainly owing to the competing roles that motherhood implied (31).

This is an important statement in relation to governess novels as well. The stress on woman's mission, and the contemporary fear of women encroaching on male privileges within the middle-class domain of paid work, are most significant in a discussion concerning the fictional characterisation of governesses. By exercising what was considered to be woman's mission in exchange for wages, the governess turned things around. She encroached on the male sphere of gainful employment; and as she was employed within the household, she questioned the boundaries of the female sphere too. Through her work, the governess challenged the mother's role, as she was being paid to do what the latter ought to do for free.

Discussing the role of middle-class women in Victorian novels, Elizabeth Langland writes that fiction from that period “stages the ideological conflict between the domestic angel in the house and her other (the worker or servant), exposing through the female characters the mechanisms of middle-class control, including those mechanisms that were themselves fictions, stratagems of desire” (291). Though she does not deal with governess novels at all, Langland’s discussion is still valuable in connection with this genre. Although the governess, like her mistress, was a middle-class woman, her position to some extent resembled that of a servant. She was economically dependent on her employer; and, like servants, she formed part of her employers’ status display. As Langland puts it,

In a gendered politics of power, middle-class Victorian women were subservient to men; but in a class politics of power, they cooperated and participated with men in achieving middle-class control through the management of the lower classes. Ironically, the very signifiers of powerlessness in the gendered frame of reference became eloquent signifiers of powers in a class frame. (294)

The power thus exposed in a class frame was ambiguous in relation to the governess, as there was no appreciable class difference between her and the mistress. In the mistress’s desire to demonstrate social superiority over the governess lies one explanation of arising conflicts. The tensions between mistresses and governesses in the novels involve both the actual tasks of the governess and her presence in the household as a woman. Some novels focus on one of these two features, but often the one influences the other.

The anonymous *Margaret Stourton, or a Year of Governess Life* (1863) treats this problem from an unexpected angle. The heroine has been left in total charge of her pupils as the mistress, Lady North, has been recommended to go abroad with an invalid child. Unlike other mistresses who leave their children, Lady North is portrayed as a loving mother who concludes that it is her ailing daughter who needs her most. The embittered minor governess character Miss Edge – who is openly slighted by her mistress and pupils – shows some initial surprise that Margaret Stourton can be so happy as a governess. Then she draws the conclusion that it must be because her employer is absent: “‘You are your own mistress, too, I think: are you not? I mean that Lady North is away; so you have not the constant irritation of feeling that you are the *inferior*, because your *superior*,’ she said bitterly, ‘is always at hand’” (98). Unlike Margaret Stourton, most governess heroines experience the display of power that Miss Edge laments.

Mary Poovey’s discussion of the Victorian governess concerns her relation to the assumption of a specific maternal instinct. An important part of

the Victorian “ideological equation”, as Poovey calls it, was to uphold the belief in the importance of the mother’s role for “morality and class stability” (143). According to this middle-class ideology, “maternal instinct is paradoxically both what distinguishes the mother from the governess and what naturally qualifies the former to perform the services the latter must be trained to provide” (143). This is a crucial question. Mary Maurice claimed that a mother who employed a governess for her children must realise that “[s]he has a helper, but she cannot have a substitute” (1849, 105), which implied that the mother was in fact irreplaceable. The very fact that Maurice said so indicates that this was a matter of importance and anxiety at the time.

Kathryn Hughes writes that the mere existence of governesses was a provocation to the nineteenth-century woman ideal. The governess’s “presence in the household signalled that some women chose not to dedicate themselves to full-time child-rearing but preferred to hire other women to carry out these duties on their behalf”. This aspect is important for an understanding of the rise of the governess novel. Many novels from the 1830s and 1840s take the form of promotion texts for the cause of the governess. Apart from a clearly voiced desire to draw attention to the difficulties of governesses, they portray the heroine as a helpful hand, rather than as a rivalling intruder. On the other hand, the rivalry and complications that could surface when a governess was present in a household furnished writers with potent material for successful novel plots. This may also be a reason why the theme of female rivalry remains central within the genre all through the century, although it may have been weakened in real life.

While manuals for middle-class women vigorously stressed the importance of maternal qualities, reality did not always corroborate the idealised picture. Davidoff states,

Contrary to much of the moralising literature, in reality motherhood *per se* was not the most important part of the matron’s life [...] being a mother was certainly not expected to absorb all her time and attention. The physical and emotional care of young children was, in fact, considered to be a distraction from the more important business of wider family and social duties. (1973, 53)

For many children, the relationship with the nurse and later with the governess was closer and more natural than that with the mother. The anonymous *The Management of Servants. A Practical Guide to the Routine of Domestic Service* (1880) typically stated that the “nursery is oftener than not the children’s world; their mother is to them the beautiful lady whom they see ten minutes during the day” (182). Furthermore, many mothers took no part in their children’s care until they were a few years old. Although the practice was apparently most

common on the Continent, English parents would also hand over their baby, just after baptism, to a wet-nurse who, significantly enough, did not live in the house (Shorter 175). This practice dwindled all through the nineteenth century, and several influential women writers were in favour of breast-feeding. Isabella Beeton, for instance, described the wet-nurse as a servant employed when the mother, “from illness, suppression of milk, accident, or some natural process [...] is deprived of the pleasure of rearing her infant” (1022). Autobiographical accounts of nineteenth-century childhood among the upper classes corroborate this picture of an emotional – and in big houses indeed physical – distance between mothers and their children. Many Victorian and Edwardian children only met their mother at a fixed hour in the afternoon, or were allowed to come down after dinner for dessert. That kind of remoteness between parents and children accorded poorly with the ideal of woman’s mission as mother.

In governess fiction we meet with a large number of mothers who do not consider the care of children as their prime mission. Barbara Carlyle in Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne* (1861), for example, tells the governess “I should never give up my husband for my baby; never, dearly as I love him” (418). For her, the role of wife comes before that of a mother. It should be noted that Mrs Carlyle is not at all one of the evil or even depraved mothers who are so numerous in the governess novel genre, as in Victorian fiction in general. Rather, she represents a growing nineteenth-century middle-class attitude. The social changes created a wish among social climbers to resemble the upper classes. As a result of this, a new and more unapproachable type of mother emerged. Governess novels condemn such emotional aloofness, and the typical conflict between the heroine and her mistress expresses this.

Versions of motherhood

The prevalence of unmotherly mothers in governess novels is striking. It is not only in this genre that maternal figures are delineated in a disapproving way, however. Barbara Thaden states that “despite th[e] apparent emphasis on pure and self-sacrificing mothers within the dominant cultural ideology, good mothers are not a staple of canonized Victorian literature, even among the female authors. Too often, mothers are either dead, unimportant, ineffective, or destructive” (4). Thaden discusses this conspicuous discrepancy, claiming that one explanation might be that an ideal mother would not make an interesting character. Furthermore, many nineteenth-century novelists were not mothers themselves. Her argument ties in well with Joan Manheimer’s discussion on

“murderous mothers”, which maintains that benevolent heroines in novels by, for instance, Austen, Eliot, and Dickens tend to be contrasted with their ‘terrible’ or ‘murderous’ mothers. Borrowing the expressive term “terrible mother” from Erich Neumann, Manheimer finds that many Victorian fictional mothers are “devouring or disinterested [*sic*], malicious or neglectful; they pose a serious threat to the lives of their offspring” (530).

Although neither Thaden nor Manheimer discuss governess novels, their arguments are relevant in connection with this genre. Governess heroines often enter the house of such ‘murderous’ mothers who, apart from being cold and distant to their children, also neglect their responsibility as employers. It is clear from household manuals from the era that woman’s mission consisted not only of caring for husband and children, but also of looking after other members of the household. In *Mothers of England: Their Influence and Responsibility* (1843), for instance, Sarah Ellis urged employers to extend towards the governess “something of that maternal care and sympathy which their own children enjoy” (359). Such employers are rare within the genre of governess novels, though.

Several heroines compare their mistresses unfavourably to their own mothers, while others clearly seek a surrogate maternal figure after having been orphaned. Emily Seymour in Julia Buckley’s *Emily, the Governess* (1836) finds this new mother in her future mother-in-law; Lucy Clifford in the anonymous *Chance and Choice, or, the Education of Circumstances* (1850), on the other hand, looks upon her last employer as “the friend who has been as a mother to her” (267). Here, too, the maternal figure is, interestingly enough, a relative of her future husband’s. Thus, the families of the governesses and their fiancés are placed on a par and disconnected from the inhospitable employers who have denied them respect. An earlier example of strong bonds between the governess and her employer is found in the anonymous *Gogmagog-Hall; or, the Philosophical Lord and the Governess* (1819), where the mistress is “nearly as ardently loved as a mother” (III:29) by the governess Emily Melville, and even calls the governess her daughter, “for I love her as my own” (III:230). In this novel, the employer openly shows her great respect for the young woman who helps her with the children. However, Emily Melville has not lost her mother, as is the case in both *Emily, the Governess* and in *Chance and Choice, or the Education of Circumstances*.

In trying to prepare the prospective governess for possible difficulties, manual writers discussed different kinds of mothers. Emily Peart, for instance, mentioned the interfering, the jealous, and the kind but inefficient mistress in *A Book for Governesses* (1868, 136-9). Mary Maurice, in *Mothers and Governesses* (1847), was more specific; she actually attempted to identify some

ten different kinds of mothers. Although such characterisations may seem oversimplified, the traits listed in her book correspond to a large extent with the various types of mistresses who occur in governess novels. Therefore, the following discussion will be based on Maurice's classification and expanded to include the varieties of motherhood that are discernible within the genre. As some of Maurice's groups have been discussed earlier, in connection with education and terms of employment, the emphasis here will be on the groups that are of major importance for the relation between the mistress and the governess.

The first group on Maurice's list is that of the "young and inexperienced" mothers (57). Owing to their lack of knowledge of children and education, they do not know what to expect but may face disappointment if they do not meet with perfection in the governess. This particular group is not common in governess novels, perhaps because such mothers would be too much like the young and inexperienced governess heroine. Her next categories, "purse-proud" and "vain and worldly" mothers, are all the more common, however (58). Maurice described these mistresses as thinking "that money [is] the standard of excellence", and that money can buy them everything. This attitude is related to the discussion above, about the existence of paid governesses proving that the office of motherhood could be disposed of to some extent. Connecting the vanity and worldliness of some mistresses with the prevailing education for girls, Maurice said that these women cared only for social accomplishments. Chapter 4 discussed this attitude to female education, and its prevalence in governess novels, but the disposition of the mothers behind such conceptions deserves some attention too. There are a number of mistresses who are too busy visiting friends, giving elaborate parties, or travelling, to be bothered with their children.

Perhaps Miss Ross's *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* (1836) offers the best example of the vain and worldly mistress. The plot revolves around the family of the scheming dowager Lady Lyster and her three daughters, all of whom employ governesses. One of them, Lady Frederick Howard, is a fun-loving woman with two small daughters. She willingly leaves the total responsibility for her children to a nursery governess called Miss Smith, a good-looking but low-born woman who has been highly recommended by Lady Lyster. Miss Smith is shallow and does not endeavour to learn more, but professes satisfaction with the prospect of earning enough money to buy herself nice dresses. One indication of her low level of education and refinement is the form of a letter of her hand, which is referred to as "ill-folded, ill-sealed, and ill-directed" (116). Miss Smith is no doubt a product of the author's indignation with the employment of a governess for status reasons, and she is one of several

governess characters who are contrasted to the heroine of the novel, Gertrude Walcot.

Miss Smith makes the danger of delegating the total care of the children to a governess apparent. Lord Frederick's dismay at his wife's careless attitude to her role as wife and mother opens his eyes to how well Miss Smith – despite her triviality – handles his children. Her way with the children makes a strong impression on Lord Frederick, who actually falls in love and elopes with her. Presumably, he sees more of femininity in the form of maternal love in the governess than in his wife, who spends all evenings away from home. When Lady Frederick Howard learns that her husband has left with the governess, no maternal instincts to rush back to her forsaken daughters awake. Instead, she chooses the opportunity to go on an extended visit to some friends. On the other hand, we may notice that although Lord Frederick was enticed by the governess's warm feelings for his daughters, he does not seem to have considered taking them with him. Instead, it is the novel's heroine, Gertrude Walcot, and her mistress – Lady Frederick's sister – who eventually take care of the children. The fact that Miss Smith, although good with her charges, is portrayed as a trivial lower-class woman should not pass unnoticed. The prevailing fear of untamed sexuality in the lower classes has to be related to the emphasis put on middle- and upper-class women as capable mothers rather than on their being sexual creatures. Lady Frederick could thus be said to admit vice into her house as a result of her own pleasure-seeking lifestyle. Eventually, she is severely punished for her immoral lifestyle, dying in poverty without her children.

Among the vain and worldly mothers in governess novels, the somewhat improbable figures of Mrs Vincent Robinson in Marguerite Blessington's *The Governess* (1839) and Mrs Delaney in Mary Martha Sherwood's *Caroline Mordaunt, or, The Governess* (1835) stand out. As has been observed earlier, both these mistresses come across as caricatured bluestockings. To these ladies their salons are of much more interest than their own children. Significantly enough, although both Clara and Caroline try to nurture their charges, the children die. In Henry Courtney Selous's *The Young Governess. A Tale for Girls* (1871), Martha Smyth at one point states that “[a] governess can never supply the place of a mother” (45), although this is exactly what she has to do; her mistress “Lady Clere was a nervous invalid, and really could not trouble herself with the caprice of a child; it was the governesses' business” (15).

The next group on Maurice's list of mothers is the one that consists of “anxious and over-careful” mothers who are “always interfering” (58). This type was discussed in Chapter 4, and examples from novels were given showing how detrimental the influence of such mothers could be, both to the children's

education and to the governess's self-esteem. In the novels, such mistresses are presented as irksome meddlers. Maurice described two other groups as "the self-opiniated [*sic*] mothers, who fancy that they have peculiar talents for education, and therefore are fond of suggesting, and enforcing, plans of their own, upon those on whom they profess to devolve the charge of teaching" and "the weak and indulgent mothers" who "never let [their children] study for many hours together, for fear they should be over-fatigued" (58-59). Robert Henry Mair, too, criticised interfering mothers, arguing that although the governess should be informed about household arrangements and of course what subjects she was expected to teach, the educational details were to be left to her judgement. He especially commented on mothers who wished to be present during school hours, stating that that would be "unjust both to the children and their teachers" (104). Such mistresses obviously share characteristics with the over-anxious ones. They obstruct the work of the governess, but they also seem to question her legitimacy as a substitute mother. They often have grand schemes concerning the education of their daughters, but seem to have no driving force to implement them.

Manual writers and novelists alike attacked such mothers. Maurice's statement that the mother could find a helper but not a substitute in the governess is important as it emphasises the difficult equation of responsibility. While some other kinds of mothers in the novels hand over this maternal responsibility to the hired governess, the actions of over-anxious mothers point at the complex nature of the problem. Caroline Mordaunt, for instance, meets a family where the entire educational "system consisted in constant interruptions, under the plea of maternal anxiety" (178). Although this mistress – Mrs Fenton, who had been so influenced by Madame de Genlis's works – claims herself to possess "all the tenderness of a mother's heart" (178), the criticism weighed against her is focused on her lack of mothering instincts. She is clearly apprehensive lest her daughters fail to receive the best education, but she does not perceive what is really best for them. By constantly changing their curriculum and exposing them to harsh physical exercise, she comes across as an evil character whose whims Caroline tries to cope with. A fictional mistress who interrupts lessons by constantly imposing new educational ideas is clearly perceived as a nuisance; and this type is criticised in the novels. In Elizabeth Grey's *Sybil Lennard* (1846), the governess finds that her educational ideas do not meet with approval by the mistress: "Mrs. Devereux requested that there might be no deviation from her prescribed rule" (23). In this novel, faulty education is later used to explain the grown-up Sybil's elopement and afflictions.

While most of the novels are presented from the perspective of the governess, Eliza Cheap's *The Nursery Governess* (1845) differs by openly discussing the difficulties that a mother may come across when hiring a governess. This novel to a large extent employs the anxieties of the mistress as a way of presenting the subject. A number of parallel 'case studies' are connected through the character of one Miss Egmont, who is the mistress of an establishment for young, impoverished women in need of training before going out as governesses. This plot structure made it possible for Cheap to present her views on education in general and on governess work in particular. Miss Egmont's lessons resemble the manuals of the era. Anna Jameson's *The Relative Position of Mothers and Governesses* (1846) addressed the two categories separately within the same book. Mary Maurice did something similar in her *Mothers and Governesses*, where separate chapters deal with difficulties met with by employer and governess respectively.

Most governess novels in fact present the mother as a hindrance to the happiness of her children, while *The Nursery Governess* repeatedly stresses the importance of maternal influence. One of the employers in this novel, Mrs Melville, is a woman "much blessed in the providential circumstances that surrounded her", who has come to realise that she is not competent to teach her children (1). When her husband suggests they employ a governess, Mrs Melville hesitates however, as she dreads she will then lose her children's affection. This fear overshadows her realisation that she needs help with her children. Her feelings are contrasted both with Miss Egmont's advice and with that given by Mr Melville, who, like so many other fictional husbands, seems to be far more sensible and benevolent towards the governess than is his wife.

In the terms of Maurice's classification, the kind of mother that is perhaps the most common one in governess novels is "the cold and distant, the hard and unfeeling [mother], who, provided [her] children have justice done to them, [cares] little whether the instrument of accomplishing [her] wishes, lives or dies when her work is ended" (58). Known historical facts of governess employment corroborate this description. Maurice called such mistresses thoughtless since "it has never occurred to them, that governesses were anything more, than necessary evils, to be tolerated till their girls were old enough to come out, and till that time arrives, they must change them as often as they do not suit" (53).

Such a careless attitude to governesses is common in the novels as well. Blessington's Clara Mordaunt, for instance, is twice dismissed owing to false accusations. The upstart Mrs Williamson dismisses Clara when she wrongly believes her husband to have fallen in love with her. Not paying any attention to her children's wishes to keep their "own, dear good-natured governess" (81),

she lets her own selfishness guide her rash judgement. Mrs Williamson also denies that the children have made any progress during Clara's stay, although her husband openly declares his satisfaction. Later in the novel, the Manwarrings dismiss Clara, falsely accusing her of theft. Neither of these employers feels any responsibility for the welfare of the governess they have hired, but see her solely as a means of enhancing their social ambitions.

A few cold-hearted mistresses display their utter neglect of their children by employing singularly unsuitable governesses. In *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*, the pleasure-loving Lady Frederick Howard's sister, the Countess of Oakley, leaves her children altogether in the charge of Miss Mason, whom she openly regards with scorn. Still, she argues that a "governess certainly is a great comfort to rid one of one's children" (55). Miss Mason, who is referred to as a "forbidding looking woman of five-and-thirty, very ill dressed", is clearly employed to fully substitute her mistress in the maternal role (57). She does not seem to be a pleasing personality, and will not let the children play or enjoy themselves at all. There are a few other embittered or even repellent governesses in the novels that likewise reflect their employers' lack of interest in their children. Like Miss Mason, they are minor characters functioning as contrasts to the heroine's benevolent and maternal qualities. This category includes the above-mentioned Miss Edge in *Margaret Stourton or a Year of Governess Life* and the French Madame Simon in *Chance and Choice, or the Education of Circumstances*. Lucy Clifford's first employer personifies the typical nineteenth-century picture of Russians as coarse and egotistical, regarding all employees as serfs. Interestingly enough, however, she has to some extent allied herself with the artful and intriguing French governess Madame Simon, who is employed for the benefit of the eldest daughter.

Although the Russian children in *Chance and Choice, or the Education of Circumstances* are resistant to disciplining, other children of unfeeling and distant parents seek the affection of the governess. In *Emily, the Governess*, Emily Seymour's initial shock at having to go out as a governess is eased when she recognises how much she can help the poor invalid Elizabeth, whose cold and aloof mother Lady Ashbury shows no signs of affection for her disabled daughter. The chilly indifference of the employer forces Emily to sacrifice her own pride, which initially makes governess life very difficult for her. While she does not seem to be much involved with her other pupils, Emily soon becomes a surrogate mother for Elizabeth: "I will be in the place of that mother, and dispel, if possible, the gloom from that young, yet careworn countenance" (79). The girl becomes devoted to the governess, who is the first person to have shown her any sympathy and indeed any maternal feelings.

Coming to realise that her mission is to care for the rejected Elizabeth, Emily develops step by step into a replica of her own mother. To some extent the identification with the child engenders maternal feelings in the governess: "She loved the poor child whose disposition was so similar to her own: the same violent feelings agitated her when assailed by calamity, the same enthusiastic delight did she manifest in the hour of joy or expectation" (116). Such identification with the likewise afflicted is also discernible in novels where the governess heroine cares for animals or the sick and poor in the neighbourhood, as was discussed in Chapter 3. Emily is not the only heroine whose maternal qualities are passed down from her own mother. Back in the eighteenth century, Sarah Fielding employed this motif in letting Jenny Peace, the pupil-teacher in *The Governess, or, the Little Female Academy* (1749), resemble her mother. Jenny is more of a maternal surrogate than Mrs Teachum, as "her abilities to instruct and guide have come from the example of her dead mother, while Mrs. Teachum is the 'mouthpiece' of her husband's teaching" (Vallone 63).

Mary Maurice reacted strongly against the group of "mean, and stingy mothers [who] try, at the lowest possible price, to secure instructors for their children; they exact the utmost labour from those they employ, and yet are never satisfied" (59). Chapter 3 discussed how the low remuneration of governesses was indeed a contemporary topic of interest which was expressed in the novels. The opposite of this group of mothers, Maurice claimed, are "the vulgar, and well-meaning" ones who "have no power of appreciating the talents of their teachers". Such mothers are kind and considerate "provided [the governess has] no attractions, which may possibly lead some of their sons, to form what they would consider, a low connexion" (59). This last group fails to tally with the characterisation of mistresses in governess novels. There are a number of employers who are afraid that their sons, or their husbands, will fall in love with the governess, but they could hardly be referred to as kind and considerate, as Maurice designated them.

Of Maurice's types of mothers, there is only one that she describes in favourable terms. Wise and considerate mothers, as she calls them, feel that their children "are sacred trusts from God; that to him they must answer for bringing them up in the path of his commandments. They seek for an assistant, not to throw off their own responsibility, but to aid in that work, which other duties prevent their fulfilling themselves" (59-60). Maurice makes it clear that the mistress must choose a woman who is her equal or superior in education and social skills. When mistresses in governess novels personify the characteristics that Maurice wished to see in every mother, they often acquire these qualities from the governess, and such employers are expressly contrasted with other mistresses. Mrs Elphinstone in *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* is a prime example. When Gertrud Walcot arrives at Elphinstone, her employer

shows little interest in her children's education. There is only one point on which Mrs Elphinstone is adamant: the children must never speak to inferiors. After Gertrude has let her pupils make clothes for the poor, a verbal fight between the mistress and her mother Lady Lyster follows. Although this act of charity actually defies her earlier orders, Mrs Elphinstone defends Gertrude's initiative. This is the first proof that the mistress has learnt from the governess what maternal mission ought to involve. As she matures into a much more charitable and thoughtful woman, her marriage improves, and so does her relationship with her children. In Blessington's *The Governess* Clara Mordaunt likewise teaches one of her mistresses, Lady Axminster, what a wife's and mother's mission involves. During her stay with the family, Clara makes her mistress give up a flirtatious friendship that is threatening her marriage.

In early governess novels, like the ones just referred to, there is often a benevolent employer who comments on the bad example of other mistresses. In later novels such a contrast is not so common. When the practice of employing governesses had spread to the middle classes, and thus increasingly came to mark social status, governesses were increasingly portrayed as suffering in their employer's house. In like manner, Emily Melville's mistress Mrs Clifford in *Gogmagog-Hall; or, the Philosophical Lord and the Governess* is "both refined and affectionate" and thus treats her children's teacher well. Mrs Clifford's good characteristics are, importantly enough, linked to her maternal qualities:

[H]er children seemed the object and end of her sollicitudes: and as Miss Melville was, as we may say, superogate [*sic*] in the performance of her duties to the Miss Cliffords, which was plainly evinced by their improvement, as well as attachment, the friendship of Mrs. Clifford was commensurate with Miss Melville's exertions. (III:27)

Mrs Clifford shows her high esteem of Emily by introducing her to all company who visit, and by openly ridiculing "the infamous *trait*, which, she was sorry to notice, disfigured many of her acquaintance, who treat such a character as a hired and menial servant; while, at the same time, the said character was entrusted with the manners, the morals, the understanding of their own children" (III:28).

Female rivalry

The force of female rivalry and jealousy should not be underestimated in governess novels. The contemporary debate and many manuals stressed the teamwork of mother and governess, but in the novels this is often turned into

emotional strife. Sophia Caulfield, for instance, wrote that the two should be “fellow-workers”, although the governess had to accept the supremacy of the lady of the house (*GOP* 1884, 630). The personal experience of Charlotte Brontë seems typical of the type of envy which could arise in the relation between the lady of the house and the governess. While working as a governess, Charlotte Brontë wrote to her sister Emily that “Mrs. Sidgwick expects me to do things that I cannot do – to love her children and be entirely devoted to them” (*Letters* 192). This comment could be connected with a well-known incident. When one of her pupils had behaved rudely to her, Brontë chose not to punish him or tell his parents about it. Later that day, the grateful boy took her by the hand and told her that he loved her, upon which Mrs Sidgwick reportedly exclaimed, “love the *governess*, my dear!” (Barker 312). Like many other ladies employing governesses, she seems to have been of the opinion that although another woman could be in charge of the education of her children, no one else deserved their affection.

This type of envy appears to have been common. The manuals discussed it, and it occurs in several novels, too. Most manual writers warned governesses against becoming too emotionally involved with their charges, as that could easily awaken the mistress’s distrust. Emily Peart mentioned the risk of jealousy, defining one type of mothers as “irritated and jealous when [a] stranger obtains an influence over her children which she has never had, because she has never taken the trouble to acquire it” (136). Peart explicitly warned governesses against entering households with such mistresses; “very likely you will be dismissed when she finds out that [the children] respect their governess far more than their mother” (137). Mary Maurice likewise stressed that the governess “must be careful in no way to awaken the jealousy of the mother, by endeavouring to engross the affections of her children” (1847, 51).

A few manuals that addressed employers on this matter tried to explain that the governess had to be not only accepted, but also appreciated, in order to be able to carry out her work. Elizabeth Sewell, for instance, thought that parents must realise that if they employed a governess, they would have to

yield a portion of their parental privilege; that is to say, they must give a certain amount of authority, they must be contented to find another sharing their children’s respect and affection; and they must be willing to admit the person on whom they depend to fulfil the task which they are unable to undertake themselves, to that position in their family which her important office demands. (1865, II:251)

Elizabeth Appleton presented a similar view in *Private Education; or a Practical Plan for the Studies of Young Ladies* (1815). Addressing parents, she wrote,

If the tutor love his pupil, the pupil certainly has a regard for his preceptor; do not be fearful then, in allowing your daughter to love her governess. Her regard for the preceptress does not, in any degree, lessen her love for you; besides, where there is no regard, there is no interest. (4-5)

There are, in fact, a limited number of mothers in the novels who seem to adhere to advice along the lines offered by Appleton and Sewell. Being totally confident of possessing their children's love, they do not fear competition from a governess. The most striking example of this is probably *Margaret Stourton, or a Year of Governess Life*, where the loving mother Lady North confidently leaves the young and inexperienced Margaret in charge of her children. Not surprisingly, perhaps, this novel was accused of being misleading and of idealising the governess occupation (*Victoria Magazine* 1863, quoted in Flint 151).

Most mothers, however, are fiercely jealous of any sign of affection between the children and their governess. In Gabriel Alexander's *Adelaide, or the Trials of a Governess* (1865), the children are so taken by the "gentleness and the earnestness" of the governess that one of the girls exclaims "I will do my best, were it but to please you, Miss Neville" (68). Realising that their mother does not respect Adelaide enough, the little boy of the family tells his mother, "'I'll not taste the good wine, but the sour gooseberry along with Miss Neville, mamma, if ye continue to poison her with such stuff'" (69). Another novel where children come to their governess's defence is Cheap's *The Nursery Governess*, which to some extent discusses the matter of female rivalry from the mistress's point of view. Mrs Melville's jealousy over the simplicity and unaffected character of the governess actually leads to Miss Manners's dismissal. When the daughter soon after tells her mother that she wants her nice governess back, Mrs Melville is painfully convinced that the governess has superseded herself in the child's affections. Likewise, in Halls's *The Governess. A Tale* (1842), Mrs Hylier enters the school-room just as one of her daughters has flung her arms round the neck of her governess Emily Dawson, and told her that she will "certainly do her best to improve" in the future. On seeing this sign of affection towards the governess, the mother exclaims, "Caroline, take your hand out of Miss Dawson's; I hate to see that sort of familiarity" (32).

Like the experience of Charlotte Brontë, these fictional examples indicate the annoyance some mothers feel at their children's attachment to the governess. Since the roles of mother and governess are not truly separated, the presence of the latter reveals the flaws of the mother. In the novels, such incidents become all the more obvious as the governess never tries to challenge her mistress, nor in any way acts so as to supersede her in the children's affection. The bad conscience of the mother is awakened by the perfectly normal

behaviour of the governess. This kind of emotional trap is common in the novels, the most striking example occurring in *East Lynne*. Here, the dilemma of the governess is focused through her remarkable relation to her pupils. The only way for Lady Isabel to make amends after having left her husband for another man is to return disguised as an unsightly French governess, Mme Vine. She thus suffers the humiliation of being the governess in her former home. Although the new Mrs Carlyle does not appear to be a jealous woman – nor is she in fact the children's mother –, she still reacts against the overwhelming goodness of the governess.



Mamma. "Now go and say good-night to your governess, like a good little girl, and give her a kiss."

Little Puss. "I'll say good-night, but I won't give her a kiss."

Mamma. "That's naughty! Why won't you give her a kiss?"

Little Puss. "Because she slaps people's faces when they try to kiss her."

Mamma. "Now, don't talk nonsense; but do as you're told."

Little Puss. "Well, mummy, if you don't believe me, — ask Papa!"

Fig. 10 (*Punch*, 1900, 119:82)

The jealousy of the mistress of the house sometimes extends to the physical appearance of the governess heroine. Historical research shows that many families in the nineteenth century actually wished for a plain or even physically unattractive governess. There might be several explanations for this. Hughes connects it with the contemporary interest in physiognomy, in the way that "plainness [was linked] with moral worth" (127). It was also deemed appropriate, she says, that a woman who was forced to go out as a governess would to some extent have her suffering written on her face. The preference for a

plain governess was a way of un-sexing the governess, and thus keeping her separate from the mistress and daughters of the house. The opening scene of Anstey's comedy *The Man from Blankley* (1893) reveals how sensitive the matter of elegance could be. There will be a party in the evening, and the little girl Gwennie tells her governess, "I do believe [your dress is] smarter than Mummy's" (12), adding that this is "funny [w]hen you are not going in to dinner – or even dessert" (13). The mother soon enters the stage, and likewise exclaims, "Miss Seaton, when I asked you if you had a dress suitable to appear in this evening, I must say I hardly expected to see you in *quite* so elaborate a costume". As in the Hunts' *The Governess* (1912; see Chapter 3 above), the mistress in this play vents her jealousy by accusing the governess of being wasteful.

Although she supposedly came from a good family, the governess was not expected to become a rival to the ladies of the house. The possibility that the governess could infatuate the master of the house was the topic of a *Punch* illustration in 1900 (Fig. 10). In some novels, the good looks of the governess prove to be a serious inconvenience. The spoiled protagonist Lady Arabella Walsingham of Marguerite Blessington's fashionable novel *The Confessions of an Elderly Lady* (1838) makes her doting father concede to her demand that the governess he has decided to employ should be a beautiful lady. The family doctor finds this worrying, as "youth and beauty are so generally objected to in teachers" (33). He wonders if it is a good idea to comply with the girl's wish, as people tend to talk if there is a good-looking young governess in a widower's household. The doctor's misgivings turn out to be justified, as the poor governess who is hired is persecuted by the wicked relatives of her employer. She eventually leaves the house because of all the evil rumours, and when Arabella falls ill from not having her beloved governess around, the father realises that the only way of restoring his daughter's health is to marry the governess. Just as in the case of Miss Smith and Lord Frederick Howard in *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*, however, Lord Walsingham's love for the governess seem to be based on her maternal qualities rather than on real physical attraction. Arabella comments that her stepmother "devoted her whole time to the duties of her new situation, and proved to be the truest, gentlest friend to him, and the most affectionate guide and monitress to me" (68-69).

Marion Crawford based the entire plot of *The Undesirable Governess* (1909) on the jealousy of the mistress, and her fear of beautiful governesses. As Lady Jane Follitt thinks both her husband and her adult sons have been far too interested in previous governesses, she is determined to find an "undesirable" governess for her two unruly teenage daughters. In the advertisement she inserts in the paper, she therefore states that "[c]harm of manner, symmetry of form, and brilliancy of conversation especially not desired, as husband and three

grown-up sons much at home" (23). The accomplishments that the mistress wishes to develop in her daughters, she seems to dread in their governess. For some time Lady Follitt even prefers her daughters to run wild without a governess, as she is so afraid of having her household poisoned by another "Miss Kirk, with her violet eyes, who drew all men in the house after her as easily as the Pied Piper of Hamelin led away the little children" (35). Paradoxically, by employing what she thinks is a remarkably ugly young woman, she actually invites a very attractive girl into her house. By the use of make-up, Ellen Scott has uglified herself in order to get the position. Being secretly engaged to one of the sons of the house, she employs her theatrical talents in order to be close to him – so skilfully that not even he recognises her. The novel ends happily for the young couple, however, and Lady Follitt is forced to realise that her plan has failed. To some extent this improbable novel is a parody, but it points at the horror of having the family peace wrecked by a beautiful intruder.

In Dinah Mulock Craik's *The Woman's Kingdom* (1868), the disadvantages of beauty are also an important topic. Letty Kenderdine has faced major difficulties because of her good looks:

Letitia was one of those remarkably handsome persons [...] Indeed, to tell the truth, Letty Kenderdine's beauty had been the real hindrance to her governess-ship. Wherever she went everybody fell in love with her. Mothers dreaded her for their grown-up sons; weak-minded wives were uneasy concerning their husbands. Not that Letty was in the least to blame; she was so used to admiration that she took it all quite calmly. (I:8-9)

Most governess heroines do not possess such striking beauty, however, but have a gentle and ladylike countenance that attracts both pupils and men. One function of the governess's prepossessing appearance is to act as a contrast to the mistress. The physical difference is the first tangible sign of the antagonism which subsequently develops between governess and the lady of the house. It could be noted that Anne and Charlotte Brontë differ from most writers of governess novels in depicting their heroines as plain and not pretty or attractive.

East Lynne offers an unexpected angle on the discussion of female beauty in governess novels. Lady Isabel's beauty is destroyed in a railway accident, but paradoxically this is what enables her to be reunited with her children. Only when she has lost her attractiveness is she able to return and commence her penance by transforming herself from the beautiful mistress of the house to the plain and ugly governess. Having possessed a "face of surpassing beauty, beauty that is rarely seen, save from the imagination of a painter, [and] dark shining curls falling on her neck" (9) in the opening of the

novel, Lady Isabel the governess is described in the following manner to her employers by a friend who has helped them to engage her: “[y]ou must not mind her appearance [...] She is the oddest-looking person: wears spectacles, caps, enormous bonnets, and has a great scar on her mouth and chin; and though she can’t be more than thirty, her hair is grey: she is also slightly lame” (407). Thus, Lady Isabel resembles a caricature version of the Victorian governess that is found in some *Punch* illustrations, for instance, but seldom in the description of novel heroines. Not only the governess is portrayed in an unusual manner in Wood’s novel, however. When Lady Isabel returns to East Lynne, she is struck by the looks of her husband’s new wife: “[h]er evening dress was of pale sky blue – no other colour suited Barbara so well [...] Her pretty features were attractive as ever, her cheeks were flushed; her blue eyes sparkled, and her light hair was rich and abundant” (412). The new Mrs Carlyle is not at all described as a cold and insensitive woman, but rather as the one who has taken over Lady Isabel’s position in every sense.

The inverted description of governess and mistress in *East Lynne* serves to enhance the change of roles. There are parallels in the actions of Lady Isabel and the new Mrs Carlyle, too. In the early days of Lady Isabel’s and Carlyle’s marriage, Barbara feels a sting of envy when she sees them: “she could distinguish Isabel seated at the piano, and Mr Carlyle standing behind her. She was singing one of the ballads from the opera of the ‘Bohemian Girl’: ‘When other lips’ [Lady Isabel] began the song, singing it exquisitely, in a low, sweet, earnest tone” (161-162). Barbara, on seeing the husband kiss his wife, “turned to the window, a low moan escaping her, as she pressed her forehead on one of its panes, and looked forth into the dusky night” (162). A few years later, the tables are turned. Lady Isabel, now a governess in the house, sees Mr Carlyle with his new wife Barbara by the piano:

She recognized the chords of the music: they were those of the accompaniment to the song he had so loved when she sang it to him [...] Barbara was seated at the piano, and Mr Carlyle stood by her [...] So, once had stolen, so, once had peeped the unhappy Barbara, to hear this self-same song. *She* had been his wife then; she had received his kisses when it was over. Their positions were reversed.

Barbara began. Her voice had not the brilliant power of Lady Isabel’s but it was a sweet and pleasant voice to listen to.

‘When other lips and other hearts
Their tale of love shall tell,
In language whose excess imparts
The power they feel so well.
There may, perhaps, in such a scene
Some recollection be,

Of days that have as happy been –
And you'll remember me.' (440)

In her position as governess, as E. Ann Kaplan notes, Lady Isabel “becomes the voyeur: she is able to look and grieve, but unable to have the gaze of recognition blaze back on her” (83). Employing the governess as a commentator on the lifestyle of the employers is very common in the genre, and the voyeuristic element figures in a number of novels, even when the governess does not stand in such a position to her employers as does Lady Isabel. This narratological device has a twofold aim: to indicate the marginalisation of the governess and to discuss employers' attitude to governesses.

It must be remembered that far from all households portrayed in the novels contain nuclear families with a mistress, a master, and a set of children. Nor, of course, was such a family structure the exclusive norm in nineteenth-century England. Many women were widowed early, as their husbands were considerably older. On the other hand, as many women died in childbirth in the Victorian era, there were large numbers of widowers too. It was not uncommon for unmarried women to become stand-in managers of their brothers' or fathers' houses. Davidoff writes that to some women “such a position could be more attractive than marriage since it meant social power without submission to a husband's rules” (1973, 50). However, the sister who kept house for her brother faced the risk of being dethroned if he married.

If a governess was introduced into such a household, conflicts were somewhat different from the ones that arose in the ordinary nuclear family, as the lady of the house herself held an intermediate position. Emily Peart brought up such arrangements and issued a warning:

One sometimes sees women in the same household whose relation to each other it makes one sad to contemplate: the one by nature – increased tenfold by habit – strong, resolute, stern, unbending; the other – sensitive, weak, nervous, and rendered so nervous by the influence the other has obtained over her, that she positively loses her power of thinking or acting for herself. (142)

Peart juxtaposed the “strong, resolute, stern, unbending” housekeeper with the “sensitive, weak, nervous” governess, stating that “of all respectable social slavery, none is so horrid as that in which a resolute, determined, harsh woman can hold a poor, timid shrinking one” (143). She emphatically urged the young governess “never [to] stay with an employer whom you feel to be gaining *too* much power over you” (144).

In *East Lynne*, Lady Isabel Vane had married a middle-class lawyer, who was very much wrapped up in his career and the social aspirations it involves. His great mistake was that with his middle-class values, he failed to

see the danger of leaving his aristocratic wife out of the active sphere he inhabited. Furthermore, he continued to let his unmarried sister Cordelia care for the household. Kaplan rightly sees Isabel's feeling of exclusion as an important part of her degradation: "even the limited action and power of the maternal domestic role are denied Isabel by class privilege because maids take care of everything including the children" (81). Her dilemma is thus that she "'completes' Carlyle's world but is herself quite incomplete" (81). Cordelia Carlyle is much older than her brother and acts almost like a mother for him. Wood describes her as a powerful woman; "It was said in the town that she was as good a lawyer as her father had been" (47). When Lady Isabel entered the household she was not trusted with the keys, and her sister-in-law made her painfully aware of her ignorance of household matters. Interestingly, however, Mr Carlyle eventually understands his mistake, and when he remarries, he makes sure that Cordelia is out of the way. Rosa Nouchette Carey's *Only the Governess* (1888) resembles *East Lynne* in this respect. The governess Huldah Rossiter is in fact a married woman who has left her husband because she could not stand the husband's spinster sister's bullying her.

There are other powerful spinsters within the genre. In the anonymous *Charlotte's Governess* (1902), the pupil's aunt tries to obstruct the education of her charge, and in Irene Clifton's *The Little Governess* (1900) Agnes Williams soon learns that her master's sister will not accept the fact that a governess is made responsible for the children. She tells her brother, "I think [...] Miss Williams is not a suitable person to instruct and take care of the children. I am their aunt, and I believe I am in some way responsible for their up-bringing!" (26). Although she obviously dislikes her nieces, Miss Dora dreads any competition for their affection, since that will weaken her position in the household.

No mistress in the house

Bearing Charlotte Brontë's experiences as a governess in mind, it is interesting to note that when she created her heroine Jane Eyre, she made her teach a motherless little girl. This has been commented on by several critics; Poovey, for instance, states that there is "no mother to satisfy at Thornfield and no company from which Jane is excluded" (137). A number of governess novels actually feature such a situation. When there is no mistress of the house, it is easier, indeed natural, for the governess to assume the function of surrogate mother.

There are two main types of such surrogate mothers within the genre: the middle-aged governess who also acts as a matron, and the young governess heroine who comes to serve as a substitute for her dead mistress, both as a mother figure to her charges and eventually as the object of her master's love. As was stated above, the reason for masters' falling in love with their children's governess is usually not physical appeal, but rather the way in which she handles the children. It thus seems important that the femininity of the governess is expressed through her maternal qualities towards her charges, rather than by traditional features of attraction such as beauty and accomplishments. Besides, the governess is generally contrasted to the children's mother who has failed in her female mission.



Fig. 11 (Selous, *The Young Governess: A Tale for Girls*, 1871)

The group of middle-aged governesses consists of women like Mammie Chatte in Henry Courtney Selous's *The Young Governess: A Tale for Girls*, who is in charge of three motherless children. As was common in real life in a house where there was no mistress, Mammie Chatte is no longer a young woman. Functioning as a powerful contrast to Martha Smyth, she is well treated by her employer and looked upon by society as a respectable lady chaperone to the girls.

Mammie Chatte also embodies a positive picture of motherhood (Fig. 11). In one scene, one of her pupils sits curled up by her governess's side: "This was just what Adelaide did like; to have a quiet little talk with Mammie Chatte, especially at night; it was so comfortable, sitting on the rug before the fire, with her head leaning against Mammie Chatte's knees, she could always say all she

wanted to say, then" (74). Another similar example is found in *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*, where Mrs Halford acts both as a mother and as a friend to her now grown-up charge. Like Mammie Chatte, Mrs Halford is middle-aged and her relationship with her employer is based on mutual respect and friendship.

In this context, the moving portrait of Miss Maunsell in Anna Maria Hall's "The Old Governess" (1852) must not be overlooked. She differs from Mammie Chatte and Mrs Halford in that her pupils do not hold her in such high esteem; actually, they seem to have forgotten her. Hall published this story explicitly as a plea for aged governesses. Miss Maunsell has been like a mother to her pupils; since the mistress of the house was ill, she came to be almost more important to the two daughters than their own mother. One of the former pupils recalls their youth with the governess, saying to her sister, "I remember when you were ill, and longed for a new doll, her sending express to London for one, sitting up all night to dress it, and watching you as you played with it in the porch, as if she were your mother – not your governess" (11). The picture of a self-effacing governess is stressed all through the story and, as is common within the genre, a male character turns up as the author's mouthpiece. He wishes to marry one of the girls, but feels prevented from proposing after having learnt that the woman he loves has given up contact with her old governess. He thus tells her,

I have always considered early friendships so sacred, as only to be dissolved by death; and if a governess performs her duty faithfully, if in all things she is a SECOND MOTHER to her pupils, while imparting to them the acquirements which either their natural mother has not the time, or the power, to cultivate in herself or her children [...] I cannot fancy a cessation of friendly feeling, or friendly intercourse. (18)

Such an outburst was no doubt a crack at all those cold and distant employers who, to quote Maurice again, "care little whether the instrument of accomplishing their wishes, lives or dies when her work is ended" (1847, 58). The negligent attitude among grown-up women concerning their former governesses gained considerable attention in the 1840s, partly because of the harrowing applications from old and destitute governesses published in the Governesses' Benevolent Institution's annual reports. In *Guide to Service: The Governess*, Sir George Stephen deplored women's lack of interest in their former instructresses, reminding them that these women were to be regarded as "more than a foster-mother" (355).

The most common type of governess who acts as a surrogate mother in the novels is not the middle-aged and sexually inoffensive lady, however, but the young and often pretty governess. If the heroine need fear no competition

from a mistress, her task will be easier and the master of the house sooner or later comes to see her as a possible replacement of the wife he has lost. It should be noted that in real life, many governesses would not accept a position in the house of a widower for reasons of propriety. In "Nur Muth's" allegedly true account "An English Governess in Russia" (1882), the narrator turns down two offers of situations as they were "in families of widowers, and these I knew my mother would not allow me to accept" (*W&L* 1882, 78).

Several novels within the genre portray families like that of the Frederick Howards in *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*, with an erring wife and a governess who takes on the total responsibility for and mothering functions vis-à-vis her charges, thereby gaining the master's respect and affection. In such a scenario, the author succeeds not only in pointing out the important function of the governess, but furthermore in inculcating the danger of parting with maternal responsibility. In novels where the governess replaces the mother, it is interesting to see that although she works very hard, not only in teaching the children but also in assuming a surrogate mother's functions, she is far happier than if her work had been lighter but more curtailed. It is, in fact, when she is not allowed to exercise her motherly feelings that the governess heroine is portrayed as truly miserable.

Most novels where there is no mother in the house end with the marriage of the master and the governess. This is certainly what the conventional and romantic reader expected; moreover it shows that the governess could in fact replace the mistress. The anonymous *She Would Be a Governess: A Domestic Tale* (1861) features a governess, Genevieve Fitzgerald, who takes all the responsibility for her charge Carry after the mistress has deserted her family. Like many other single fathers within the genre, Mr Elsworth is very fond of his child and cannot fail to see what a remarkable change she goes through when Genevieve assumes total responsibility after the elopement of Mrs Elsworth. By her influence, Genevieve transforms Carry from a spoilt, in fact rather unbearable, child into a sweet-tempered little girl. Mr Elsworth also changes and shows a much more human and kind side after his wife has left him. By embodying a female ideal, the governess brings out the goodness of her master and her charge.

In the course of the novel, Genevieve receives two offers of marriage. After she has turned down a neighbour's proposal, her relieved master exclaims, "[o]h, Genevieve, how could Carry and I have parted with you" (166). Already at this stage, she has made herself irreplaceable. Later in this somewhat sensational novel, the little girl is kidnapped by wicked people in league with the mother, by this time a criminal and a drug-addict. The governess's love for her pupil and her strong sense of morality and justice serve to rescue the girl.

However, when Carry is found, she has been so poorly cared for by her own mother that her life cannot be saved. The erring Mrs Elsworth also dies, which leaves the master of the house free to marry the governess. His love for Genevieve is never described as passionate, however; he clearly falls in love with the governess's way of taking care of his beloved daughter.

Published the same year as *She Would Be a Governess*, Harriet Maria Gordon Smythies's *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence* (1861) also contrasts the governess with a mistress who leaves her husband and children. In Lucy Blair's early situation with the Hamilton Trahernes, she is certainly badly treated by her mistress, and also by the daughters of the house. Later in the novel, Lucy Blair receives a letter from Sir George Hamilton Traherne, begging her to resume her position as governess to his daughter Augusta. Lucy is much surprised:

I do not feel as if I ever could knock on that great inhospitable door again, or engage in a task that would recall trials that almost cost me my life. Lady Hamilton Traherne may be abroad, or out of town; but the whole establishment cannot be changed; and except Annette [the lady's maid], who is probably with her mistress, there is not one face on which I have not seen a scowl and a sneer. (III:107)

Lucy soon learns that Lady Hamilton Traherne has deserted her family and is now living on the Continent with another man. *The Daily Governess* differs from the other novels containing eloping mistresses in one important aspect, however. Sir George Hamilton Traherne, unlike Lord Frederick Howard or Mr Elsworth, does not fall in love with the governess. Instead, the novel concludes with the revelation that he is in fact Lucy's father, and that his marriage with Lady Hamilton Traherne is invalid. In a moment, Lucy Blair is transformed from a downtrodden daily governess into a rich heiress. Her social resurrection thus does not include marriage to her master; but being his lawful daughter, she nonetheless outclasses her former mistress.

There are a few novels where the mistress does not leave her family physically, but is either kept in confinement by her husband or is mentally incapacitated. In Selous's *The Young Governess*, Lady Clere embodies the idea of a passive, rich woman who lies on her couch ordering her servants around and showing no interest in her daughter's upbringing. She does not leave her husband and child physically, but emotionally she seems to take no part in their life. Towards the end of this novel her deficiencies as a wife and mother take their toll, as she goes mad after her husband's bankruptcy – an event which, ironically, forces the daughter to go out as a governess. Similar maternal passivity is depicted in Florence Warden's *The House on the Marsh* (1883),

where a criminal man keeps his terror-stricken wife confined in the house and the perplexed governess fails to make much contact with her.

In Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), there is neither a mistress nor a master in the house. When the unnamed governess is first interviewed for the post, she is explicitly told that she must never trouble the children's guardian, but take the whole responsibility of them herself. She differs from heroines of governess novels in her maternal cares for her pupils, however. While several novels describe how the children cling to their governess, the governess in James's story presses her charges to her bosom in a manner that seems more possessive than loving.

The Victorian literary convention to have erring women punished by death is prevalent in governess novels. In addition to Lady Frederick Howard and Mrs Elsworth this group contains Lady Isabel Vane in *East Lynne*, who features both as mistress of the house and as governess. Some erring mothers have already died prior to the arrival of a governess; here we find Mrs Ward in Annie Macgregor's *John Ward's Governess* (1868) and Céline Varens in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). These two characters also point at Victorian prejudice concerning national identity and occupation. Mrs Ward was an Italian opera singer, while Adèle's mother is depicted as a French dancer. It should be pointed out, however, that as Céline Varens was no doubt a kept woman, whom Rochester had no intention of marrying, she falls outside the pattern to some extent.

Religion: Educate not only rational but accountable beings

The rise of the governess novel genre parallels the Evangelical Revival, both in time and, to some extent, in issue. Both Jerome Beaty and Susan Nash have pointed out the importance of religion in governess novels; Nash employs a classification scheme according to which she divides governess novels into 'religious' and 'secular' stories. However, she connects the theme of religion primarily to the characterisation and development of the protagonist, and does not view it in relation to the governess as a teacher and a mother surrogate. It should be pointed out right away that religion in governess novels is a field worth an investigation of its own. The present discussion will by necessity be limited to identifying certain values as they are depicted within the genre, and to discussing how they were treated by the contemporary governess debate. In governess novels religion plays a role similar to that assigned to it by other kinds of nineteenth-century fiction; but a special characteristic in this genre is

the heroine's marginalised position which makes her a suitable vehicle for the authors' discussion of such topics as loss of pride.

Although religion is an issue in many of the novels, it is not generally coupled to the governess as a teacher. Rather, it functions on a narrative level as a way of depicting a stoic heroine and her development. Agnes Grey at one point mockingly describes herself as she believes the Murrays perceive her, admitting to a "strange reverence for matters connected with religion" (129). By this time, it is clear to the reader that her employers by no means share this reverence. While fictional employers are seldom depicted as openly anti-religious, their low moral standards tend to reflect their lack of Christian devotion. Miss Murray goes to church in order to flirt with the vicar and curate, and in many novels children seem to have been brought up with no respect for either parents or other adults. Some novels describe foreign characters whose non-Protestant affiliation is given as a reason for their vile behaviour. I will return to this subject in Chapter 6.

One plausible reason for the prevalence of pious exhortations in governess novels is their didactic character. Novels such as S. E. P.'s *Lucy Smith, the Music Governess* (1868) and Emma Raymond Pitman's *My Governess Life: or, Using My One Talent* (1883), which are set in schools, incorporate religious instruction in scenes of education, as well as in the characterisation of the heroines.

No doubt, the religious and moral revival instigated through the Evangelical movement was one of the most powerful ideological forces of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century England. It profoundly affected diverse areas such as education, social welfare, and, indeed, fiction. As Richard D. Altick states, the term 'Evangelical' could either be applied only to Anglicans, or be used in a broader sense involving the "whole spectrum of Protestantism from the Anglican Evangelical party [...] to the variety of Dissenting sects presided over by the Wesleyans" (167). In the following, I will use the term 'Evangelical' in the latter, more comprehensive, meaning.

A fundamental idea of the Evangelical movement was that religion should form part of the daily routine of every family; household and everyday life thus came to be regarded as the basis for an appropriate religious life. The educational manual *The Mother the Best Governess* declared the necessity of studying religion every day; "for to confine it (*as is generally the case!*) to *Sunday* is absurd, and amounts to a *trifling* with the subject" (30). It is not surprising that the Evangelical Revival was involved in the struggles against slavery and drinking, as well as in the foundation of Sunday Schools. Along with the interest in education and charity, the strong emphasis on moral obligations towards one's fellow beings may be seen as a reaction to the

situation of the Anglican Church. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, many clergymen were badly educated for their office and were sometimes lacking both in devotion and in willingness to care for their parishioners. In *Agnes Grey*, Anne Brontë effectively contrasts Mr Hatfield's Tractarian view of the church with Mr Weston's low church profile. Hatfield is against private reading of the Bible, for instance, while his curate Weston reads the gospel to old Nancy (Wolff 7). The two representatives of the church are thus opposed through their ways of administering their duties towards the poor parishioners. It is of consequence that what first unites Agnes and Mr Weston is their mutual wish to help old Nancy, in whom Mr Hatfield has no interest whatsoever, as she is clearly not in a position to promote him in his worldly career.

Another important factor for the advance of this spiritual revival was the stress laid on the individual and his or her relationship with God. Elisabeth Jay points out that Evangelicalism assured people of a significance that was commonly denied them in the secular world (7). One Evangelical practice that spread to non-Evangelical households was that of the daily family prayers which united all categories of the household. This routine strengthened the idea of community within the household as well as manifesting the authority of the master of the house (Davidoff 1973, 35; Bradley 180-181). Sarah Bennett, who worked as a governess in the 1820s, appreciated the daily family prayers in a general's family. Writing to her brother, she describes her employer's "morning and evening expositions of Scripture" as "delightful", adding that "so are his prayers" (Bennett 19).

Although widespread in Victorian England, this practice is remarkably absent in governess fiction. Thackeray's comment in *The Newcomes* (1855) that the governess is found worshipping a little apart is thus not representative, but nonetheless interesting in the way it points at the marginalised position of the governess in her employer's house. One explanation of the absence of traditional scenes of family prayers in the novels is the lack of religious sentiment among employers. Both in fiction and in the contemporary debate, criticism directed against worldly and egotistic employers was severe; for instance, as was shown in Chapter 3, employers who wished to banish the governess from the house on Sundays were condemned. In the novels it seems as if the governess sometimes takes over a traditionally parental responsibility in the family, thus replacing both the master and the mistress of the house in their religious responsibilities. Unlike the pious Martha Smyth in Selous's *The Young Governess: A Tale for Girls*, her employer Lady Clere is positively against religion. When the vicar urges her and her husband to come to the newly opened

church, she excuses herself by declaring that the morning service will be too early for her, and the evening service will collide with their dinner hour (106).

Many Evangelical notions were readily incorporated by writers of fiction into their depiction of worthy heroes and heroines. Although theatrical performances and novel-reading were denounced by many Evangelicals (Wolff 207), they still recognised the influential power of these arts. An illustrative example is Hannah More's *Cælebs in Search of a Wife: Comprehending Observations on Domestic Habits and Manners, Religion and Morals* (1808) in which morality and sensibility, especially among women, is advocated. When the male protagonist Charles has lost his parents, he visits several friends of his father's, looking for a suitable wife. In one family, the daughters have read only fashionable literature, and seem uneducated; in another, the children seem unruly and in still another, the daughters are too fashionable, wearing transparent dresses. Not until Charles comes to his father's best friend (whom the young man has apparently never met) does he find a suitable wife. Towards the end of the novel it is revealed that the fathers had corresponded for many years and brought up their children in order to suit each other.

The heroine of the novel can be seen as a model of Evangelical womanhood, being unaffected, sensible, and rational. As was pointed out in Chapter 1, the Evangelical movement played an important role in the formation of domestic ideology. Hannah More's heroine has been educated with such ideas in mind, and she is, consequently, the only woman that the male protagonist finds worthy. The virtues of Charles's wife-to-be are made apparent in the way in which More contrasts her to the other young women that Charles encounters. In a similar manner, Sarah Fielding's *The Governess, or Little Female Academy* depicts Jennie Peace in sharp contrast with the other schoolgirls. As Judith Burdan points out, most of Mrs Teachum's pupils are the products of "neglect or indulgence – two serious failings of proper domestic management" (11).

Similarly, as the following pages show, this female ideal can be used to describe a number of governess heroines (as well as many other Victorian heroines, of course). Owing to her deplorable situation, the governess character made a suitable figure for novelists with an interest in imparting religious sentiment. Besides, as many of the authors within the genre were themselves clergymen's daughters they presumably found it natural to combine fiction with pious exhortations.

One important influence of the Evangelical Revival was the necessary struggle against sin and pride, which is a prevalent feature in governess novels. Because of the social and financial degradation of the heroine, the topic could easily be introduced and made much of by devout authors. The heroine's

accepting her new social position and her embracing the Christian faith often constitutes a form of peripeteia in the novel. In Sherwood's *Caroline Mordaunt*, for instance, the governess is humbled through the introduction of religion in her life. In *Margaret Stourton, or a Year of Governess Life*, the bitterness of Miss Edge is explained by Margaret as "the consequence of pride, entirely unsubdued by any principle of religion. I don't mean that she is positively irreligious, but I don't think her religion has been any help or comfort to her" (187). Miss Edge comes to terms with her fate in life to some degree after having met Margaret, who, albeit much better treated by her employer, has early on recognised the necessity of adapting to circumstances. In Buckley's *Emily, The Governess*, loss of pride is depicted in more radical terms. Mrs Seymour's death proves to be necessary to check Emily's initial pride, a fact to which I shall return later in this chapter. It is clear that when her pride is broken, she becomes more at one with the world, and is content in helping others instead of merely brooding over her own losses. Thus, it is stated that Emily "knew by experience that duty was superior to feeling, and that it was her duty not to indulge in vain regrets, but to bear calmly whatever troubles the stream of time left at her feet, and cherish the blessings that still remained" (154). This mature, and indeed happier, attitude should be contrasted with Emily's initial feeling of degradation when she had to go out as a governess.

Although this is by no means specific for governess novels, Biblical references and allusions abound in the genre. In *Bread upon the Waters: A Governess's Life* (1852), for instance, where Dinah Mulock Craik borrowed even the title from a Biblical parable (*Eccl.* 11), faith is employed as a kind of life buoy for the distressed governess. In a similar manner, many novels include introductory mottoes that are either Biblical quotations or extracts from pious poetry. Since the Evangelical movement argued for daily Bible studies in the home, contemporary readers would recognise such references. Altick claims that writers would employ "a prose redolent with Biblical style and dense with Biblical allusion" to enhance the effect (192). An example of this is found in E. W.'s *Ellen Manners; or, Recollections of a Governess* (1875), where the eponymous heroine gradually loses her pride and develops into a better Christian during the course of the novel. When she gets to know an old minister and his daughter during her second situation, Ellen admits,

The time had been – and not very far distant – when I should have considered an invitation from such people almost an affront; certainly I should have had an unpleasant feeling that I was *losing caste* by associating with them; but the scales had fallen from my eyes, and now I could discern real excellence, and value my friends, not on account of the style in which they lived, or according to the size of

their habitation, but for the image of the Great Master, reflected, however humbly, in their lives and conversation. (218-219)

The apparent allusion to *Acts* 9.18 – “And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight” – underlines the heroine’s newly embraced humility.

The case of a pious young woman called Mary Jane Graham is interesting in this context. In the early 1830s the Suffolk vicar Charles Bridges published her memoir, although he had never met her nor her family. Nonetheless, he had been so impressed by the journal Miss Graham had kept during her short life that he decided to publish it in memory of her. This book was much appreciated; it ran through at least eight editions in twenty years. Graham is relevant for the present study since her writings clearly made an impression on Miss Ross, who quoted her on the title page of *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*: “The life of a Governess, however dull and monotonous it may be thought, has pleasures of a very refined and superior nature”. She had intended to publish her letters to a younger cousin on the “Duties of a Governess” (Bridges 301). Throughout the memoir, Mary Jane Graham is depicted as an industrious and deeply religious woman. Although ailing and even bedridden for years, she was a diligent student of topics as diverse as science and languages. To take but one example of her assiduity, Graham translated Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* into French, Latin, and Spanish, and began on an Italian version too. Interestingly enough, for her languages were tools for communication, not social accomplishments. She studied Spanish, for instance, to be able to speak with and help Spanish refugees that had come to her home town.

Bridges’s deeply respectful comments on Graham’s personality are often charged with Biblical quotations. On her devotion to studies, for instance, he says, “she followed Solomon’s advice in everything that she undertook. ‘Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might!’” (72). In a letter to the cousin who was going out as a governess, Graham explained her attitude to studies:

You ask me whether I think study is wrong. I think, on the contrary, if we study with a view to the glory of God, it becomes a duty to do so. If we study merely to please ourselves, I think *it is wrong*. Your situation seems to render study necessary; and when we reflect, how few of those who are engaged in teaching, are truly pious, it ought to stir us up to the best improvement of our time and talents. (36)

The conclusion to be drawn here is that studies that are intended to promote piety were to be encouraged. Even as a child, Graham had herself committed large sections of the Bible to memory. Bridges mentioned especially her feat of

learning the prophecy of Isaiah, the whole Book of Psalms and Milton's *Paradise Lost* by heart: "Indeed her powers of memory were of an extraordinary order" (11).

The responsibility of religious instruction

Educational writers in the nineteenth century treated the question of religious instruction with some ambiguity. The Edgeworths did away with it altogether in *Practical Education* (1798), explaining that they did not want "to gain partizans, or to make proselytes" (viii); others stressed the vital importance of religion without really explaining how it should be approached. Most writers agreed on the necessity of imparting the right faith to children, however. Emily Peart was thus not alone in thinking that the "first duty in the schoolroom [should] be prayer with [the] pupils" (31). In *Observations on the Most Important Subjects of Education: Containing Many Useful Hints to Mothers, But Chiefly Intended for Private Governesses* (1818), R.C. Dallaway generously recommended various religious writers, while the anonymous writer of *Hints to a Young Governess on Beginning a School* (1857) gave examples of prayers and quotations from the Bible suitable for various hours of the day. Elizabeth Mayo chose to hand over the pen to her clergyman brother for a chapter on religious instruction in *Model Lessons for Infant School Teachers and Nursery Governesses* (1848).

Apart from views such as those expressed by the Edgeworths, one possible explanation of the vagueness evinced by many manual writers when it came to actual religious instruction was the abundance of catechisms and other manuals dealing with religious instruction. It might be assumed that governesses who were not clergymen's daughters, or otherwise brought up in a distinctly pious sphere, resorted to those handbooks. Another reason, more important for this study, was the uncertainty as to who was responsible for the religious instruction of children. Davidoff claims that a stricter moral code during the nineteenth century led to an expectation that the governess should sometimes "enforce these codes on the new generation" (1973, 34). Contemporary non-fictional sources vary on this point, however, and so do the novels. As will be seen below, there are examples both of the view that religion should be within the maternal domain, and that it should rest with the governess. However, there seems to be a general consensus on the issue of the importance of maternal influence regarding religion. Interestingly enough, many fictional employers

develop such motherliness only after the governess has gained influence over them.

In the nineteenth century, women were explicitly and repeatedly reminded of their vital task of upholding moral values within the home sphere. Accordingly, the issue of female education was important for Christian writers. The Evangelical Hannah More as well as the Congregationalist Sarah Ellis delivered the message that a woman's first and foremost duty was that of daughter, wife, and mother. Along with other writers, they thought that girls should be trained for their womanly mission at home and preferably by their own mothers. More had stressed the importance of religious instruction instead of accomplishments already in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education; With a View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent Among Women of Rank and Fortune* (1799). There she asked if parents should "not reflect, also, that we are neither to train up Amazons nor Circassians, but that it is our business to form Christians? That we have to educate not only rational but accountable beings" (52). Bearing such an exhortation in mind, it is not surprising that Evangelical ideals found application within the governess-novel genre.

In the novels, there is a clear dividing line between mothers who have given their daughters a fair amount of religious instruction and those who do not at all take an interest in such matters. Not surprisingly, the former group are the real or substitute mothers of governess heroines, while the latter mainly consists of employers. Some governesses who are devout from the outset are able to convert their pupils – and sometimes other people as well – into pious beings. It is worth noticing that not only employers and children are subject to change, but in some cases also the protagonist herself. Emily Seymor, Caroline Mordaunt, and Ellen Manners go through religious conversions as a result of their painful experience of having to go out as governesses. On the other hand, some other heroines, like Gertrude Walcot and Clara Mordaunt, seem to have been born with a pious mind.

Some mothers clearly realised that as well as being deficient in academic subjects, they were not qualified to teach religious matters. The Evangelical revival gave rise to an increasing desire to make mothers aware of their responsibility to prepare their children not only for this world, but more importantly for the eternal one. Sarah Ellis, writing in the 1840s, argued that it was "the sacred duty of the mother to endeavour, with the Divine blessing, to make the basis of her daughter's moral character" (1843, 344). A decade later, similar views were put forward by the anonymous mother behind *Hints on Early Education Addressed to Mothers*. She, however, emphasised the maternal influence, rather than any active teaching on religious matters; "I believe that for

the most part a mother's duty is simply to watch the HOLY SPIRIT'S working in her child" (9).

Sir George Stephen was explicit on a mother's duty towards her children in his *Guide to Service: The Governess*. He partly based his arguments on the experiences of a governess called Miss Thornton, whose autobiography he claims to be quoting from. Miss Thornton had experienced various kinds of mistresses, one of whom was reported to have said: "Their [i.e. the children's] religious instruction, my dear Miss Thornton, is my exclusive province. You will excuse me, I am sure, but I can allow nobody to interfere in this part of the maternal duty" (18). Stephen took this example as his starting-point for discussing the frequency with which governesses were not allowed to take charge of the issue of religion when they were authorised to teach all other subjects. The problem, as he saw it, was that the governess was "discharged from all responsibility, and excluded from all interference", although it was she who had to pass the whole day "with these tender objects of maternal anxiety: every hour of every day is spent with her, and at an age, too, when the mind is most susceptible of impression" (18). As the governess was in all likelihood best acquainted with the children, Stephen thought it reasonable that she should be given the responsibility of supervising their moral and religious education, too. He perceived governesses as more likely to possess the necessary knowledge and wisdom to teach these matters than mothers who, he claimed, were most sadly uneducated. It should be pointed out, however, that Stephen's main argument is not that governesses should be trusted to impart religious instruction, but rather that mothers ought to take more responsibility for their children's education.

Similar arguments were put forward by a number of fictional writers. Although it must be remembered that governess novels generally functioned as texts to promote the cause of a badly treated group of women, the approach to religious matters is not uncomplicated in the genre. Most novelists seem to wish that mothers would take a more active part in labours whose purpose was to ensure their children's well-being; but at the same time it is made clear that they must not encroach on the governess's domain. This might be an explanation for what often comes across as a stereotypical treatment of religion within the genre. In Wood's *East Lynne*, the new Mrs Carlyle makes it clear that she thinks it is the task of nurses and governesses to bring up children, except when it comes to the matter of religion. Declaring that she hopes she will "never fail to gather [her] children around [her] daily, at stated periods, for higher purposes: to instil into them Christian and moral duties; to strive to teach them how best to fulfil life's obligations. *This is a mother's task*" (415). Previous to this passage, she has told the newly arrived governess about the dissipated real mother of the

Carlyle children. Because of the topsy-turvy circumstances in this novel, Barbara Carlyle, seeing herself as the right person for the task of instilling moral values into the children, certainly underlines Lady Isabel's marginalised position. This novel, like many others, has an undercurrent promoting piety. Although she is an erring woman, Lady Isabel functions as the author's mouthpiece, encouraging pious actions and feelings.

Cheap's *The Nursery Governess* repeatedly stresses the necessity of the governess's closeness to God and the importance of religion in education. When Matilda Meadows has recently arrived at Mrs Clifford's house, the author depicts a scene where the children, looking at flowers, talk in the following way:

'Now, I like this,' Susanna said, 'for I have a *reason* why.'

'What reason? mine is much more pretty in colour.'

'But mine is *so sweet*; smell it.'

'But mine will be sweet after it is faded and dead, – yours will not?'

'No, I *know that*.'

'Then yours is like things of *this world*. *Mine* is like things for *heaven!*' (99)

The little child speaking last has learned that happiness is not to be sought in things here and now, but rather in an eternal perspective. The narrator explains the importance of developing the minds of children into such insight as that possessed by the child who chooses the flower which is like "things for *heaven*", rather than one of transient beauty:

In so material a part of parental duty as that of the training of the minds of their young offspring in the ways of the Lord, it is a subject of much surprise how utterly negligent some parents are; acting as though immortal beings had no other concern than for this mortal life, and as if, though they must live eternally, they had no obligation to consider for them *how* they shall so live! (99)

In some novels, like Ross's *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* and Blessington's *The Governess*, religious issues are introduced as a means of creating a bond between the governess and the lady of the house. Here the governess teaches not only the children, but also the mistress. In these particular novels, the aristocratic setting is of consequence for the conversion of the mistress. Ross set her novel in the first part of the nineteenth century. Discussing that period, Altick states,

The flagrant immorality practiced in certain sectors of fashionable society during the Regency [...] attests to the presence, if not of backsliders, then of groups who never went in for church attendance or tract distribution in the first place. Nor did the libertinism and extravagance traditionally attributed to aristocratic life wholly disappear in the Victorian period. There were still fast-living men (and not a few women) in the upper reaches of society. (182-183)

In line with this, Sarah Bennett, who worked as a governess in the 1820s, noted that piety was not as common among the aristocracy as among people of the lower ranks of society. However, she claimed that when “religion springs up and makes its way through the difficulties of high station, it often displays a greater depth of principle, and a holier and more lovely aspect, than in cases where fewer obstacles have stood in the way of its growth” (Bennett 21).

This is exactly what happens in Ross's and Blessington's novels. Both Mrs Elphinstone and Lady Axminster gain moral and spiritual strength from associating with their governesses. For instance, in *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*, the mistress reads and benefits greatly from the religious books that Gertrude presents to her. Sarah Bennett likewise seems to have formed a close friendship with her last mistress. They read the Bible together and proved mutually helpful and supportive when one lost her mother and the other her child. As in the fictional examples, religious belief was apparently a unifying factor between the governess and her employer.

Illness and death

Sickrooms and death scenes are common in governess novels. Such depictions are frequent in the nineteenth-century novel as a whole, and the topic has received recent critical attention (see e.g. Holubetz, Wheeler, Bailin). There are various explanations as to why the sickroom was such a frequent fictional setting. From a purely factual point of view, we may see a correlation with reality; mortality rates were high in nineteenth-century England, and most people had to witness the deaths of loved ones. On a more ideological level, illness and death served to emphasise the fickleness of life and the necessity of preparing for eternity. In this context, it is not surprising that Evangelical writers often laid emphasis on the importance of dying a ‘good death’. The reason why death became such an important part of life was the close links that were made with concepts like sin and atonement. Pat Jalland writes that the immense output of Evangelical tracts and journals abounded with deathbed scenes, which showed people how to live and die (21).

The certainty of life after death, and the importance of preparing for it in a correct manner, was repeatedly made an issue in devout writing during the nineteenth century. Mary Jane Graham, whose views on education and religion were commented on above, was confined to her sickbed from her early twenties. Although she never gave up her studies, she seems to have realised that her life was to be short. The *Memoir* offers rich examples of how Graham, full of

confidence and surrounded by books, diligently prepared herself and her parents for the separation and her subsequent union with her God. Graham's mother cared for her day and night during her last illness, and the young woman's death is described in positive and comforting terms. As Bradley states, "the Evangelicals knew that their estrangement would only be brief and they knew also that the soul was about to make a journey to a happier land" (192).

Mary Martha Sherwood's children's story with the reassuring title *Comfort in Death* (n.d.) is a typical example of the Evangelical interest in good deaths. The mother of a little boy who fears death tells him how her brother George, who had fallen ill at the age of four, had reassuringly told his family, "[w]e shall all be together again, papa, mama, and Ella. Oh, George is so happy! I see the shepherd coming nearer, nearer, nearer!". The mother tells her son that "a glorious smile" had come over George's "sweet face, such a smile as I never saw before, and in a moment afterwards the spirit of my redeemed brother had passed away" (16). A similar scene occurs in Emma Raymond Pitman's *My Governess Life; or Using My One Talent*. As one of the pupils lies dying, she tells her parents, "you will not mourn for me now, as if you had no hope. I am one of Jesus' lambs, and I shall be happy with Him, as soon as I bid you good-bye" (167). The heroine Effie's comment on this death scene conveys the author's credo: nothing is so comforting to the survivors as "the assurance received from the dying one's lips that all is well with regard to eternity" (167).

Although varying as to presentation, when sickrooms and death scenes figure in governess novels the heroine is notably portrayed as a nursing and maternal character. This ties in well with Wheeler's argument that "the presence of a comforter, usually a woman, who ministered to the dying" (31) was a nineteenth-century convention. It should be pointed out that in governess novels, this is the case even if the bedridden character is not the pupil of the protagonist. There is an abundance of versions of the motif apart from the common one of the governess nursing her pupil. These scenes serve to stress the nursing abilities of the heroine and to show how she is a vital agent in the ailing character's preparation for eternity. Sometimes she administers consolation; but in several cases, she herself learns from the sufferer what true devotion is. Jane Eyre, for instance, learns about religion from Helen Burns and is taught that true life comes after death, as does Caroline Mordaunt from her pupil Emily Selburn. Both these girls die after having made a lasting impression on the friend/governess. A variation of the theme is found in S.E.P.'s *Lucy Smith, The Music Governess*, which is set in a school. The young heroine influences her senior colleagues by her strong principles, and her illness and death lead to a conversion in several of them.

In nineteenth-century fiction, the notion of pious children was often coupled with death. John R. Reed claims that in mid-Victorian fiction, “the pure child who succeeds in converting wayward adults” is a common figure (103). Interestingly enough, in governess novels such pious children seem to have little in common with their parents, and little success in converting them. In the governess they find a friend, however. The prevalence of this kind of scene in the genre has been pointed out by Jerome Beaty, who discusses the different uses that Sherwood and Charlotte Brontë made of the motif of the dying child. The connection between Emily Selburn’s death in *Caroline Mordaunt* and that of Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre* was made already by Vineta Colby (165). Beaty points out the similarity of the names Burns and Selburn, and that both characters die of consumption (1977, 623). He also notes the main difference between Sherwood’s and Brontë’s religious credos; while Emily Selburn talks in terms of predestination, Helen Burns believes in universal salvation (623-624).

In a number of novels, the heroine – sometimes aided by the local clergyman or some other benevolent character – visits sick cottagers in the neighbourhood. Such acts of charity were discussed in Chapter 3, but it is worth noticing that this kind of nursing seems to be connected with the governess’s realisation that her maternal or nursing instincts are not appreciated by her employers. Often she has gone through a religious crisis which has made her mission in life clear to her. Thus, Agnes Grey goes to old Nancy after her pupils fail to recognise her benevolence towards them. Through the old woman and, more particularly, through Mr Weston Agnes learns what Christian love is. A similar case is Emily Seymor’s; she learns the pleasures of hard work for her fellow beings primarily through her work with the invalid Elizabeth, but also from her future clergyman husband and his mother. The eponymous heroine of *Ellen Manners; or, Recollections of a Governess* similarly learns piety from the grown-up daughter of her employer and from a lady living close by. In that novel, the anti-religious views of Ellen’s employers, the Shellys, are made clear as they refuse to allow their daughter to marry the lady’s clergyman son. He has decided to go out as a missionary and although this means that she cannot marry him, Miss Shelly as a good Christian fervently states that she does not want to hinder his important work.

As was shown in Chapter 2, the death of a parent, often the father, is a common point of departure in governess novels. The decease does not always occur before the story begins, however. Emily Seymor in *Emily, the Governess* learns to resemble her pious mother when the latter is dying. Not until then does Emily fully learn to follow her advice to “subdue that haughty spirit, to humble that proud heart, and submit herself entirely to the will of God” (76). The reader is made fully aware of Emily’s pride only after her dissipated father has died

and she is forced to go out as a governess. Significantly enough, Emily's father loses his wits and passes away in gruesome agony, while Mrs Seymour, who is confident in her faith, is rewarded with a peaceful death. Mrs Seymour had not been able to prevent her husband from exercising a harmful influence over Emily as long as he was alive, but her own calm assurance of God's benevolence initiates a conversion in the daughter.

When she is orphaned, Emily's haughtiness seems to be totally broken: "All her vain dreams of pride were at that moment forgotten. Riches and all earthly joys appeared empty and insignificant, compared to the redeeming love of Him who had borne her parent to His arms" (128). Emily's experience at her mother's death shows the aptness of Walter Houghton's comment on the importance of those present in the Victorian sickroom as it is presented in fiction: "The heart that is purified by pity for the dead may be readier to feel pity for the living" (277). Emily Seymour is transformed into an exemplary young woman who dedicates her time and energy to her invalid pupil and to the poor people in the neighbourhood.

Emily's vigil by her mother's deathbed is described in typical terms; she was "determined that she alone would be her nurse: with her own hands did she administer the cordials, the strong jellies, and other elixirs of a restorative nature, for the sufferer" (123). The stress on beneficial mixtures affectionately given to the dying characters agrees well with Miriam Bailin's reference to the Victorian sickroom as "a haven of comfort, order, and natural affection" (6). Although many people lay ill and died under miserable conditions in the nineteenth century, literary depictions are generally surprisingly comfortable. It is also common in fictional representations of the period for the patient to be surrounded by his or her loved ones (Bailin 9, Holubetz 16). In governess novels, though, this is not the case when the patient is the pupil of the governess. It is striking that parents seem to abandon their children totally in the hour of illness and death. The characteristic lack of family unity within the genre is especially evident when children face the danger of death.

The most significant deathbed scenes in the genre concern children. Many of the novels feature governess heroines watching by their pupils' side. Beaty sees this as part of the providential qualities of the genre, and necessary for the religious development of the governess character. However, the death of a pious child is in itself so common in fiction of the time, that it is essential to stress that in most governess novels it is not the mother who cares for her child but the governess. As the emotional distance between parents and children was usually great, at least in the upper classes, it was perhaps more natural for the governess, or a nurse, to watch over the dying child than for the mother herself. Still, it is significant for the fictional treatment of governesses that while the

heroine is despised by her employers in many ways, she is still allowed and even expected to care for the child in a critical situation.

However young and inexperienced, the governess character is generally depicted as an efficient and skilful nurse. The very young Ellen Delville in Barbara Hofland's *Ellen, the Teacher* (1814) nurses her employers' son and actually manages to save his life. She notices how the boy "exchanged the ruddiness of health for the glow of fever" (110) when his parents are away, and decides to nurse him. Suspecting the measles, as he is hot and cannot sleep, she stays in his room and soothes him back to health. Even more able than little Ellen Delville is the mature Mrs Pemble in Rosina Bulwer Lytton's *Very Successful* (1856). Being a mother in her own right, she knows how to care for children, and when her little pupil Charley catches scarlet fever it is evident that she is of far more use than the nurse who attends him. It could be mentioned that Rosina Bulwer Lytton herself has been described as an unfit mother by several biographers. Michael Sadleir, for instance, refers to a statement from the writer's old governess, that she was much fonder of her dog than of her two children (167). Rumours of Rosina Bulwer Lytton's lack of maternal feelings were apparently widespread, because her literary executrix, Louisa Devey, contradicted them vigorously in *Life of Rosina, Lady Lytton [...] Published in Vindication of Her Memory* (1887).

To return to *Very Successful*, Mrs Pemble clearly has medical knowledge. Presented as a rational woman, she seems almost scientific in her work in the sickroom. Thus, she takes precautions such as using chloride of lime and what is referred to as a respirator in order to avoid infection. These specific methods were indeed those prescribed at the time. Isabella Beeton, for instance, advocated proper ventilation and suggested that chloride of lime should be "sprinkl[ed ...] on the floor" of sickrooms to avoid "[b]ad smells" (1018). The respirator referred to was probably an apparatus used to "warm the inhaled air or prevent the inhalation of dust, smoke, or other noxious substances" (*OED*). Not surprisingly, the infectious diseases feared most in nineteenth-century England are those encountered in governess novels; apart from the measles, scarlet fever and consumption are the illnesses most commonly mentioned.

Some of the children cared for in governess novels are clearly not loved by their parents. In such cases the heroine acts not only as a surrogate mother, but also actively prevents cruel treatment or actual child abuse. Miss Manners works to improve conditions for her pupil in *Charlotte's Governess*, as does Sherwood's Caroline Mordaunt both in Mrs Delaney's house and in the Fenton family. The child Elizabeth in *Emily, the Governess* is regarded as an invalid both mentally and physically by her parents, who accordingly see no reason to waste education or love on her.

East Lynne contains perhaps the most emotional death scene in all the novels included in the present study. When the eldest child, William, is dying, the governess alone sits by his bed and comforts him in his last agonising hours. Mrs Carlyle has left the house for the day, but Lady Isabel is watching by William's bed. Mr Carlyle spends part of the evening in the sickroom too. The dramatic tension in the scene is almost stifling, as the governess not only witnesses the death of her pupil but also that of her own son. The father's presence in the room enhances Lady Isabel's agony and strengthens her punishment:

Down on her knees, her face buried in the counterpane, a corner of it stuffed into her mouth that it might help to stifle her agony, knelt Lady Isabel. The moment's excitement was wellnigh beyond her power of endurance. Her own child; his child; they alone around its death-bed, and she might not ask or receive from him a word of comfort, of consolation! (596)

The boy's father then leaves the room to go to his wife who has returned, and Isabel is overwhelmed by her motherly feelings:

'Oh, William, darling! in this dying moment let me be to you as your mother!' Again he unclosed his weary eyelids. It is probable that he only partially understood. 'Papa's gone for her.' 'Not *her*! I – I –' Lady Isabel checked herself, and fell sobbing on the bed. No; not even at that last hour when the world was closing on him dared she say, I am your mother. (597)

The scene of Lady Isabel kneeling by William's bed became the standard illustration of *East Lynne*, used both for the novel and for posters advertising the staged versions. In stage versions of the novel, the kneeling Lady Isabel utters the words "Dead! And never called me Mother!" although she never openly gives voice to her grief in the novel (Senelick 10-11). It need hardly be pointed out that a mother kneeling by her bedridden or dying child is likewise a stock motif in Victorian domestic painting.

Most surprisingly, governess heroines who care for their invalid charges seldom themselves succumb to infectious disease. Gaskell's Ruth and Wood's Lady Isabel are exceptions; but as they are erring women, literary convention craved their deaths. When Ellen Manners in the novel of that name spends most of her time with her charges although they have a hired nurse, she falls ill herself, however. The employer Lady Shelly takes no notice of this; on the contrary, it is a good Christian neighbour who restores Ellen to her former health. There is a *Jane Eyre*-like detail in that novel concerning the location of the sickroom. When the situation of one of the girls gets worse, she is moved to a large airy apartment referred to as "the Blue Room" (125). The servants of the

house have told the children about a ghostlike figure walking in a tower opposite this room. In her feverish state, the girl therefore beholds ghost-like apparitions that frighten her.

Ellen's employer Lady Shelly takes her daughters to the seaside as soon as they are well enough to be removed. Typically, she is only made aware of her maternal insufficiencies when her daughters fall ill. It is explained that her reserved manners had kept her children at too great a distance. Ellen notices that "during the illness of her daughters, a slight feeling of jealousy had sprung up in her heart" (130). Making amends for her former deficiencies as a mother, she totally forgets her responsibility towards the governess.

*

By portraying governesses as motherly characters, novelists not only created heroines that fitted the contemporary female ideal. More importantly, they found a profitable way of criticising the lack of maternal feeling and competence which was felt to exist in many middle- and upper-class mothers. The fact that the governess was not a mother herself only enhanced this paradox.

6

Only the governess

“Who is that lovely girl?” said a gentleman who had recently entered.

“Only the governess,” replied the Colonel, in an audible whisper which reached to Emily’s ears, and caused the blood to recede from her cheeks, and then again to cover them with crimson die!

(Buckley, *Emily, the Governess* 1836)

Miss Ross’s *The Governess; or Politics in Private Life* (1836) opens with the narrator stating that “[i]t has always been a favourite opinion of mine, and one which extensive intercourse with society has not induced me to forego, that the world was made up of ‘men, women, and governesses’” (1). By placing the governess outside the common classification of people as either men or women, the author touched on a fundamental element in the nineteenth-century governess debate. The notion of governesses as a category of their own keeps recurring in the genre of governess novels, as well as in the non-fictional material. Not only unkind employers seem to have resorted to such marginalisation of the governess; to some extent, even advocates of the governess cause likewise viewed them as separated from society. It could be argued that the picture of the nineteenth-century governess, both in real life and in fiction, grew out of the social expectations of the time. To travesty Simone de Beauvoir, no one was born a governess, but they became governesses. However, while de Beauvoir’s argument is based on an assumption that women are conceived of as ‘other’ in relation to men, the opening lines of *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* proclaim the existence of another kind of ‘otherness’. As I suggested in Chapter 1, the marginalisation of the governess was more complex because of her professional status. The point is that governesses were contrasted not only with men, but also with other women.

As previous chapters have shown, the governess did not fit into the contemporary picture of middle-class female life. In *Private Education; or a*

Practical Plan for the Studies of Young Ladies (1815), Elizabeth Appleton argued that the situation of governesses was “the most peculiar of any among British females” (26); half a decade later, in *Principles of Education, Drawn from Nature and Revelation, and Applied to Female Education in the Upper Classes* (1865), Elizabeth Sewell stated that the “real discomfort” of the resident governess was that her position was “undefined. She is not a relation, not a guest, not a mistress, not a servant” (II:240). Over and over again, such arguments were put forward. In the 1880s, an anonymous governess pertinently remarked that, as she was “neither ‘fish nor fowl’”, she could neither “be quite on an equality with her master or mistress [...] nor yet make friends with the servants” (*W&L* 1882, 218).

Other articles pointed out that the resident governess was often lonely after her work was done. One writer explained that the governess stood “utterly isolated and alone [...] placed midway between the drawing-room and servant-hall, yet permitted to be a denizen of neither” (*ECJ* 1849, 305). Unlike other working women, who returned to their homes at night, the governess was forced to “bear the echoes from the drawing-room and the offices, feeling that, in a house full of people, they dwell alone” (*FM* 1844, 575; see also *EWJ* 1859, 163).

In the novels, too, this kind of rhetoric occurs. A gentleman in Anna Maria Hall’s *The Governess. A Tale* (1842), for instance, criticises a woman for having treated her last governess “as a creature belonging to an intermediate state of society, which has never been defined or illustrated – being too high for the kitchen, too low for the parlour” (21). The dilemma of the intermediate position was that although the governess was supposedly a lady, she was nonetheless referred to as being *déclassée*. By definition this was of course the case, since she was obliged to work for a living. Difficulties arose when employers did not feel socially confident themselves; in order to justify their own social status, some employers felt a need to weaken the position of their governess.

Not surprisingly, the intermediate position has been in focus in modern historical research concerning the Victorian governess. M. Jeannie Peterson applies the sociological concept of social incongruence to discuss the conflict between the way in which employers viewed the governess and the governess’s own view of her position. Peterson states that “one way of escaping the contradiction of the ‘employed gentlewoman’ was to deny, or at least minimize, the fact of employment” (11). Although the governess entered the economic market-place by taking up employment, Peterson claims that the employer

tried, in his home, to preserve her gentlewoman's position, traditionally defined in terms of personal and familial relationships and not in the contractual terms of modern employment. In situations of incongruence, rejecting the realities of the modern role was a means, artificial perhaps, of reducing the dissonance of family and employee. (14)

This attitude may have been prevalent among a group of employers who did not need to measure their own position in relation to that of the people they employed. Peterson mentions how John Ruskin's parents thus "included the governess in their circle when they entertained" (12). Kathryn Hughes refers to the Kay-Shuttleworths in a similar manner. This Liberal family encouraged the friendship between the governess and their twenty-two-year-old daughter, for instance by sending them on a trip to Europe together (115). Nevertheless, the nineteenth-century governess debate indicated that a large number of employers did treat the governess as a menial as part of their attempts to boost their own social status. There were several ways in which the governess could be marginalised; and there is both a linguistic and a thematic coherence between the contemporary governess debate and the genre of governess novels.

Historical research on the Victorian governess has thus mainly concerned her intermediate and undefined social position. Since one aim of the governess novel genre was to improve the situation of governesses, it is not surprising that this is a major theme in the novels. The fact that agreeable employers in the novels invariably seem to be contrasted with other and less benevolent ones supports this argument. The heroine usually struggles against inhospitable employers and finally overcomes her difficulties, either by transforming her employers or by leaving them. A general theme in the novels is the precarious status of the heroine in her employer's household. While Chapter 5 dealt with the governess's position versus her mistress, it is the social level of the relation between governess and employer that will be at issue in this chapter. When an article in 1860 asked "[w]hat is the position of the governess?" the answer had to be "she has none" (*EWJ* 1859, 163). It is thus not surprising that at least two novels bear the title *Only the Governess* (Carey 1888 and Neville n.d.), and that the phrase was used in other novels as well.

The race of governesses

Words such as 'class', 'race', or 'caste' were frequently used in the nineteenth century to accentuate the separateness of governesses. At the time, these terms did not primarily stand for social or ethnic origin by birth, as they do today; they could also denote a particular group of people who had something in common.

Still, the prevalence of these specific words is noteworthy, as they indicate how governesses were indeed seen as separated from other middle-class women. In 1844, the situation of “the newly risen race of governesses” was discussed in *Fraser’s Magazine* (572) and the statutes of the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution stated as one of its aims “to raise the character of Governesses as a class” (*GBI Report* 1848). One writer even described governesses as “a race apart, pariahs” (*EWJ* 1859, 169). Governesses themselves also resorted to such terminology; in the 1850s, for instance, one writer described how she belonged to “a hard-working, conscientious, well-principled, and well-educated race of young persons” (*HW* 1856, 138).

Such concepts were also frequent in the nineteenth-century debate about women’s work in general. In *What to Do With Our Girls; or, Employments For Women* (1884), Arthur Talbot Vanderbilt argued that there was a connection between the bad situation of governesses and their fear of losing their station in life. Vanderbilt even went so far as to claim that “[c]aste prejudices’ form another form of pauperism” (7). Many people would have agreed with the overbearing Mrs Peacocke in Holme Lee’s *Warp and Woof, or, the Reminiscences of Doris Fletcher* (1861), who informs a young governess that “all working women are at a discount; a woman loses caste the moment she is driven to depend on her own exertions for livelihood” (III:179).

Novelists often stressed the separateness of governess life by using the terms mentioned above. In a letter to her niece, Marguerite Blessington explained that her intention in writing *The Governess* (1839) had been to rouse the “attention and excite sympathy towards a class from which more is expected and to whom less is accorded, than to any other” (quoted in P. Thomson 43). Such discourse is also used in various ways in the novels. In Ross’s *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*, the aristocratic Herbert Lyster tells his sister Mrs Elphinstone how a friend of his, Annesley, has “married, of course a poor woman; and to my horror I heard it, his sister’s governess”. Although Mrs Elphinstone tries to assure him that a governess “may be a delightful woman”, Lyster retorts that he “must see a great many Mrs Annesleys before I can tolerate them as a race” (40-41). It is worth noticing, however, that Herbert Lyster in the end actually marries the governess of his sister’s children. Ross’s use of words hence appears to be conventional.

Other novelists, however, applied expressions denoting marginalisation with an arguably more explicit intention. Charlotte Brontë, who had herself felt humiliated as a governess, wrote to her sister Emily in 1839 that “a private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living and rational being except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil” (*Letters* 191). Perhaps these experiences were reflected in her well-known phrase “the

anathematized race” of governesses in *Jane Eyre* (210). Apart from the way she is treated during the party at Thornfield where she is humiliated by the women present, Jane Eyre the governess is not much marginalised. As a child, however, Jane Eyre is repeatedly humiliated at Gateshead by her cousins in a way that resembles the mortification many governesses suffered. John Reed echoes the rhetoric often used in connection with governessing: “you are a dependent [...] you have no money”, as does Jane’s answer: “you are like a slave-driver” (5-6). The Cinderella-like treatment of Jane during the Christmas celebrations also resembles the situation of a governess:

From every enjoyment I was, of course, excluded: my share of the gaiety consisted in witnessing the daily apparelling of Eliza and Georgiana [...], in listening to the sound of the piano or the harp played below [...]. I would retire from the stairhead to the solitary and silent nursery [...]. I then sat with my doll on my knee till the fire got low, glancing round occasionally to make sure that nothing worse than myself haunted the shadowy room; and when the embers sank to a dull red, I undressed hastily [...] and sought shelter from cold and darkness in my crib. (26-27)

In the governess novels, many heroines feel their loss of caste particularly keenly in connection with social events, such as parties, or when there are visitors in the house. This is not surprising, since they have turned into observers of the kind of life of which they used to be a part. To the heroine of E.W.’s *Ellen Manners; or, Recollections of a Governess* (1875), the feeling of degradation is intensified when her employers wish to see everyone in the house present at their son’s coming-of-age ball. Ellen, who cannot help thinking of her own debut ball, does not wish to participate. A daughter of the house tries to persuade her by telling her that “papa is so anxious that all classes should have a pleasant remembrance of the day”, whereupon the governess thinks, “I belong to no class” (110). *Ellen Manners* is reasonably well treated by her employers; her affliction is mainly related to her own perception of herself as socially degraded and as an outsider. Not surprisingly, the suffering of the heroine is intensified in proportion to her social humiliation.

Another author who achieved a powerful effect with words signalling marginalisation was Louisa M. Alcott. In “Behind a Mask, or, A Woman’s Power” she used and twisted several of the conventions of the governess-novel genre. There are only two characters who display antipathy towards the governess Miss Muir. Both of them express their dislike by declaring their repugnance towards governesses as a group. The grown-up son in the family admits to having “an inveterate aversion to the whole tribe” (3), while his cousin claims that “[t]hese persons [...] are such a mischief-making race” (26). In this specific story, the open display of antagonism towards governesses is interesting, as Miss Muir turns out to be an impostor. She is not truly a member

of the governess class, but actually an actress (which of course meant an even more marginalised position at the time).

Apart from the use of such terms, there were a number of ways of indicating the marginalised qualities of the governess's existence. The naming of governesses is one such significant detail. Unlike servants, governesses were addressed with a 'Miss' prior to their surname. In some novels, this is not the case, however. In these cases, the employer clearly does not deem the station of the governess to be above that of the servants. Lady Gorewell in Gabriel Alexander's *Adelaide, or the Trials of a Governess* (1865) states that she never calls her girls' governess by any other name than by their surname. The Harrington girls in Elizabeth Sewell's *Amy Herbert* (1844) likewise "addressed Miss Morton by her christian [sic] name [while] she in reply always spoke of Miss Harrington and Miss Margaret; indeed, in every possible way, there seemed to be a determination to show her that she was considered quite an inferior person" (72; see also Hughes 65).

Chapter 3 discussed the physical isolation of the governess heroine in relation to her accommodation. It was shown how the actual location of the heroine's room signals her position in the household. Even outside the house, however, the governess's marginalisation is conspicuous. One sign of her lowered social status was her lack of protection. It must be remembered that in the middle and upper classes, propriety forbade an unmarried woman under thirty to go out unchaperoned, or to be alone with a man. She would have to be escorted by a married gentlewoman or a servant. Governesses, however, seem to have been excluded from this code of propriety. As Davidoff points out, they "were allowed to chaperone although it was not necessary to chaperone them" (1973, 50). She claims that this gave them more personal independence, but it could be argued that such independence was not much use to the governess, since she was socially isolated. The contemporary debate, as well as stories featuring daily governesses, recognised the dangers facing young ladies walking the streets alone. In Harriet Maria Gordon Smythies's *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence* (1861) the ladylike qualities of Lucy Blair are questioned by a naughty child who says, "why, she has wages, and walks out by herself, and is only an upper servant" (II:189).

In a few novels, men accost governesses who are out walking with the children. Notably, instead of considering sending a companion with the governess, mistresses usually accuse the governess of impropriety. An illustrative example is found in Hall's *The Governess*. At one point, Emily Dawson in this novel takes a walk in Kensington Gardens together with a French governess. Although they could not prevent "a couple of gentlemen" from escorting them from the park, Emily is heavily rebuked by her employer,

who states that “I do not approve of my governess walking with gentlemen [...] And I should like to know who the gentlemen were”. To this the governess calmly replies “[a]nd so should I, indeed, ma’m”, which only increases the mistress’s annoyance (47-48). In Alexander’s *Adelaide, or the Trials of a Governess*, the heroine also meets a French governess, and they are pursued by men in a manner very similar to the situation portrayed in Hall’s novel, which was published before Alexander’s novel.

Blessington’s Clara Mordaunt unwittingly vexes her first mistress when she receives attention from the master of the house at dessert. Mr Williamson’s benevolence is of such a nature that it could have been granted to any lady at a dinner table; it is clearly the fact that the governess is his object of attention that upsets his wife. Interestingly, however, she does not object to the unsubtle advances of the visiting West Indian Hercules Marsden. To Clara’s horror, he openly flirts with her and before long he has talked his mother into buying her, as he states he wishes to have a governess. Marsden’s attitude, together with the fact that the Williamsons do not make the least pretence of shielding Clara from the assault she is subjected to, puts the governess’s precarious position in focus. Although residency with a family was seen as part of the respectability of the governess’s work, she was obviously in a dangerous position if she could not trust her employers to protect her. Hercules Marsden’s conduct towards the governess is not unique in the genre. In Julia Buckley’s *Emily, the Governess* (1836) a Baron expresses his wish to take lessons from Emily Seymour “[i]f your Ladyship can spare her twice a week [...] My mamma says my elocution is very bad – I suppose she teaches that” (91).

When the employer not only permits but even encourages advances towards the governess, her situation is made even more precarious. In Holme Lee’s *Warp and Woof: or, the Reminiscences of Doris Fletcher*, one of Connie’s mistresses sanctions that an uncle in the family walks with her and the children although Connie objects to it. The seriousness of the situation is increased by Connie’s fiancé having stated his strong dissatisfaction with the idea of her going out as a governess in the first place. His reasons are mainly that he does not wish her to come into contact with situations that are improper for a young woman.

The case could be even worse; when Lucy Blair in *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence* unsuspectingly answers an advertisement, she falls prey to a man who plans to seduce her. Florence Warden’s *The House on the Marsh* (1883) similarly contains an employer who prepares to force himself upon the governess by drugging her. Such an event actually happened in 1818, when a sensational case was tried in Leicestershire. A pamphlet with the intricate title *Another Mawworm! The Extraordinary and Interesting Trial of Michael*

Shipman, of Hinckley in Leicestershire, (a Dissenter,) for Administering Noxious Drugs to Miss Dalton (Governess to Shipman's Children,) for the Purpose of Rendering Her Subservient to his Passions (c1820) records the story of Miss Dalton. She had for some time felt threatened by her employer, who was charged “with having assaulted Miss Dalton, and administered laudanum, or some other exciting drug, for the purpose of producing unconsciousness, insensibility, or appetite in that young lady, with the view of rendering her subservient to his passions” (4). The malicious employer was convicted “to pay a fine of One Hundred Pounds, and to be imprisoned for twelve calendar months” (8).

It is perhaps not surprising that many governesses think of themselves as aligned to other exposed groups. While Lucy Clifford in the anonymous *Chance and Choice, or the Education of Circumstances* (1850) compares herself to the serfs of Russia, Emily Seymour in *Emily, the Governess* sees herself as related to the invalid daughter of her employers. A number of heroines face difficulties that make them feel kinship with the poor and weak whom they visit in charity.

Yet another way for the writer to emphasise the social isolation of the governess heroine was to contrast her with the employer. In many novels the portrayal of the employer’s family seems to be a conscious attempt to criticise contemporary social issues, such as the urge for social advancement. The danger of striving for outward success, thereby losing private happiness, is reflected in the family situations of several employers. In Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* (1847), this element is prominent. Both the Bloomfields and the Murrays are portrayed as exceptionally dysfunctional families where parents and children do not manage, or even try, to communicate or connect.

Recent criticism concerning *Agnes Grey* has commented on the heroine’s relative position vis-à-vis her employers. Costello, for instance, sees a kind of inverted progression regarding family unity in that novel (10). The ultimate failure is of course Rosalie Murray’s marriage, which is caused by her family’s merciless pursuit of status. The Murrays thus stand in stark contrast to the Greys. This is the case in several novels; while the governess’s own parents have clearly married for love – although this may entail loss of position and inheritance – her employers, on the contrary, enter into matrimony for status reasons and consequently become miserable in their marriages. The heroine, who arrives as an outsider in a household, becomes an unwilling witness of marital disputes or parents’ difficulties with, or lack of interest in, their children. Since most writers within the genre seem to have regarded the deplorable situation of governesses as their prime concern, criticising the employer became – as this study has repeatedly indicated – an effective way of showing the heroine’s distress. There are of course many unhappy marriages in Victorian

fiction, and governess novels are not unusual in this respect. However, the narratological position of the governess character furnishes the author with an exceptional tool for observation.

Even when the governess heroine is not physically isolated from other people, she often suffers from being alone and without any friends in such a situation. Although she might realise that something is terribly wrong in her employers' household, she is unable to unburden her mind. Agnes Grey describes herself as "an alien among strangers" in the Murray house (121). Frawley sees this phrase as "[c]apturing [...] the extreme feelings of estrangement and exile that haunt Agnes as she encounters a world emotionally and culturally remote from that which she had known" (85). It is generally the case that the governess can confide in no one in the house, and even if she has a family of her own, she usually does not wish to worry them by revealing her difficulties. Since the governess's discretion would also be taken for granted by the employer, her hands would be tied. As was stated in an article in 1844, the governess "must bear about her heart the sins she witnesses and the responsibilities that crush her; without any consent of her will, she is made the *confidante* of many family secrets" (*FM* 1844, 574).

This problem is addressed in *Warp and Woof: or, the Reminiscences of Doris Fletcher*. In this novel there are three sisters, two of whom hold situations as governesses. The strong-minded Ursula resides with a stone-hearted aristocratic family. Although her visiting sisters notice that she is truly miserable, Ursula refuses to admit to not being fully contented. Convinced that this is the right way, she has persuaded her young sister Connie never to worry anyone with the problems she might encounter as a governess. For quite some time Connie follows this advice, but finally she finds her situation unbearable. Being employed by a lady who lives separated from her abusive husband, Connie initially likes her situation and the fact that her mistress appreciates her. Soon, however, the husband returns, and Connie comes to realise that the marital difficulties may not only be due to the male partner. Her situation becomes increasingly precarious, and finally she opens her heart in a letter to her sister Doris, who is not out as a governess. Connie states, "I stay in my schoolroom out of the way as much as I can; only it is unsettling to live in a house where the skeleton has escaped from the cupboard and marches to and fro indulging in wanton freaks at the expense of everybody's comfort" (II:294-5). Such an exposure of family secrets that the governess would have been happier in not knowing indicates that the situation of the governess could be truly impossible. Not being a member of the family, nor being able to confide in the servants, the governess would stand isolated within the household. A similar uneasiness is of course felt by the protagonist in Florence Warden's *The House*

of the Marsh (1883), when she begins to realise the true situation in her employers' households.

From contemporary records it seems clear that many governesses suffered from nervous symptoms and depression caused by the social isolation to which they were subjected. Their unsought isolation was also brought up as a reason for the alleged high numbers of governesses in mental asylums (see e.g. Martineau *OAW* 1860; M. Bell 1993). Elizabeth Ham recorded "the utter loneliness of the life of a Governess" (Gillett 206) that she experienced in her first situation in the 1820s. She apparently took no part in the employers' social life at all. Charlotte Brontë also felt uncomfortable with her social situation when she was working in the Sidgwick family. In a letter to her friend Ellen Nussey, Brontë excused her writing with a pencil, stating that "I cannot just now procure ink without going into the drawing-room – where I do not wish to go" (*Letters* 193). The difference between Ham's experience and that of Brontë, however, seems to have been that in the latter's case it was shyness that made her dread her employers' society; she was not actually excluded from it. A woman who, in her childhood, had seen Charlotte Brontë in the White family later remembered her as a shy person "sitting apart from the rest of the family in a corner of the room" (quoted in *Letters* 247, n8). Several contemporaries testified to Charlotte Brontë's shyness, and her employers afterwards claimed that she had brought her unhappiness on herself (Barker 354).

In many novels the governess is more or less cut off from social contacts outside her employer's household. Hughes maintains that in real life, governesses were often "allowed to visit locally and to receive their family and friends in their employers' home" (102). Since governesses were commonly employed at some distance from their home area, however, many of them seem to have faced difficulties in making friends. Holidays sometimes gave rise to problems, as the governess quite simply did not have a home to return to. Being orphaned, many governesses had no home; nor would there be any other friends who would care for the penniless female. Another issue was the governess's lodgings during weekends. The article "Going a governessing" describes how a governess, when interviewed for a position, was plainly told by the master of the house that they did not want her in the house on the Sabbath (*EWJ* 1858, 400). In an article entitled "Wanted, A White Slave – Cheap", *Punch* quoted an advertisement in which an "active and cheerful" lady who would be "contented to live entirely in her own rooms, and if possible be absent from Saturday till Monday, unless left in charge" was sought (1865, 48:21). The idea of thus dismissing the governesses on Sundays was commented on as an "ingenious way of escaping [...] the awkwardness of having her in the way on a day when we are apt to be especially reminded of our duty to do unto others as we would

that others should do unto us” (21). It is easy to imagine the difficulties such arrangements would create for a perhaps orphaned governess, far away from any friends. In the 1880s, Sophia Caulfield noted that “compulsory absence from their employer’s house becomes a serious difficulty” for governesses who do not have anywhere to go (*GOP* 1884, 631). Lodging-houses did not wish to receive unmarried women, and many governesses did not have a home to return to during holidays.

This lack of friends and family was not only felt in connection with holidays, however. In the 1890s, an anonymous governess claimed that although she had had no difficulty in “obtaining introductions to one or two of the principal families in the town”, she found herself “condemned to a life of almost utter isolation from the society of [her] equals”. The writer pointed out that even if resident governesses might experience “a certain difficulty about giving and accepting invitations”, social contact with other people was of vital importance (*W&L* 1893, 277).

Employers’ attitudes to the matter are voiced in various ways in the novels. Blessington’s Clara Mordaunt is allowed to see her aunt once a month when she is employed by the Williamsons, while the heroine of Alexander’s *Adelaide, or the Trials of a Governess* is not permitted to see any friends, nor meet visitors to the house. When a lady in Hall’s *The Governess* is asked by her sister and friend whether she will allow her governess to have “followers”, that is male friends outside the household, she exclaims “[o]h, certainly not. What can a governess want of friends? Her pupils ought to have all her time” (8). It seems clear that heroines who are able to make friends outside the household are better equipped to withstand the strains of the occupation, and certainly more likely to be relieved of the governess yoke altogether.

Fictional governesses such as Emily Seymour, Clara Mordaunt, Agnes Grey, and Ellen Manners all gain strength from the friendships they form with people outside the household in which they are employed. After Clara Mordaunt’s aunt has died, her friendship with the Quaker Abraham Jacobs and his daughter helps her to see what is right and wrong. Notably, these people are also friends of Clara’s future husband, Clarence Seymour. Agnes Grey’s meeting with Mr Weston likewise ultimately restores her to the kind of life she knew before going out as a governess. All these friends are portrayed in terms contrasted with those used to describe the governess’s employers. Symptomatically, too, they to some extent resemble her own family.

Sometimes governesses were forced to reconsider their previous notions of social life. As Chapter 5 showed, in some novels the governess’s initial pride is humbled as she gains experience and religious insight. Ellen Manners thus admits that although she has learnt to appreciate the friendship of the old

clergyman and his daughter, there was a time when she would have considered such an association degrading. While working as a governess Charlotte Brontë similarly wrote that she was “getting quite to have a regard for the Carter family. At home I should not care for them, but here they are friends” (*Letters* 191). Mr Carter was a clergyman, and had prepared Charlotte for confirmation at Roe Head (192, n8).

Socialising with the employer

Owing to the intermediate position of the governess, it was not clear whether she was to be seen as a family member and join her employers in their social activities, or whether she was to be reduced to remaining in the schoolroom even after lessons were over for the day. It is important to remember that the governess’s absence from the drawing-room was not necessarily linked to small-mindedness on the part of the employers. New middle-class social patterns, where the head of the family left home for work and only returned in the evening, evolved during the nineteenth century. A new importance was therefore placed on privacy among the upper and middle classes (Davidoff 1973, 22, Langland 294). These social changes are reflected both in the governess debate and in the novels.

As far back as the 1820s, Samuel and Sarah Adams argued that governesses “must possess good sense enough not to intrude on that domestic privacy, and personal independence, which, without offence, is often desirable” (*The Complete Servant* 94). In an article in *The Christian Lady’s Magazine*, the signature M.A.S. likewise stated that for most professional men, the evening was “the only time that the parents can employ in free intercourse with each other” and that it would be “very hard that they should then be fettered by the presence of a third person” (*CLM* 1835, 4:162). Mary Maurice acknowledged that “the lonely evening” was a common lament among governesses, but asked whether it would not be worse to feel oneself in the way than to spend the evening in solitude (1849, 36). This matter was brought up repeatedly in the nineteenth-century governess debate; the governess behind *Hints to Governesses* (1856, 35) commented on it, as did Sewell in *Principles of Education* (II:241).

Before going out as a governess herself, Ursula in Holme Lee’s *Warp and Woof: or, the Reminiscences of Doris Fletcher* declares that if she had been married, “I should not like a girl always planted there between me and my husband when we were sit down for a *cose* – governesses are a necessary nuisance, but they need not be quite so intolerable as *that*” (II:81). Since most

governess novels are set in households where the father does not go out to work, this reason for keeping out of the way is not given much room, however, although the governess often feels uneasy in the presence of her employers.

Sarah Bennett, working as a governess in the 1820s, recorded how one of her employers, General O—, informed her that she was “perfectly at liberty to spend any evening or Saturday afternoon with [her] friends. ‘I do not say this,’ he said, ‘because I want to get rid of you, but only because it is an opportunity you will not have in the country’” (Bennett 19-20). The fact that the General evidently felt a need to explain why he offered her the possibility to see her friends shows how sensitive this subject was. There were indeed employers who wished to have the governess out of the way; as mentioned above, a governess in the 1850s was plainly told by a prospective employer at an interview that the family wished her out of the house on Sundays.

Several writers on the governess issue were concerned with what they saw as a discrepancy between the reason for employing a governess and the way in which she was treated. Elizabeth Appleton asked her readers how it could be that a governess was “worthy of being a pattern of imitation” and still not “entitled to a seat at your table and in a place in your society” (6). In the 1840s, an article similarly claimed that “[o]ne cannot conceive a greater anomaly than that which makes a woman responsible for children, and their exemplar in all things, whose mother treats her as if she were unfit to associate with herself and her guests” (*FM* 1844, 573). It was further argued that children who see that their governess is herself excluded from the social life which she is supposed to prepare them for, “must draw the inference that their governess is a mere machine of teaching. To their eyes, she appears wholly cut off from the links in their chain of sympathies”. Similar arguments were put forth by the signature D. in “The Influence of the Governess, and How She Should Be Treated” (*GRFE* 1855, 248) and in the anonymous “The Governess Question”, where it was argued that “though [the governess’s] habits and manners are to *form* the habits and manners of the young, they are unfit for those already formed” (*EWJ* 1859, 163-164).

The inconsistency between employers’ expectations and their own behaviour is often made into an issue in the novels, as it so pointedly marks the intermediate position of the governess. The sensible Doctor Jameson in *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*, for instance, urges families to welcome the governess into their social life. His main argument is that it would keep “up in her that elegance of manner so necessary in one who is to be the principal instrument in forming the minds and manners of her pupils” (167). Mrs Williamson in Blessington’s *The Governess* forms a different view of this matter. As Clara soon learns, she has told her small daughters that a governess is

never a lady, although she might teach small girls how to behave as ladies (34). Several heroines are made aware of their employers' view of them as not quite lady-like. Emily Seymor, for instance, is conscious of her social degradation. To lessen it, she prefers to spend her evenings with her invalid pupil in the study, as she feels appreciated there. When Emily realises that this is just what her employers wish, she accepts an invitation, which naturally vexes her mistress.

Eliza Cheap's *The Nursery Governess* (1845) presents a stern governess called Miss Oswald. Her mistress Lady Montague finds her intractable and tells her friend Mrs Clifford that

there is such a cold reserve about her [that] it is a real interruption to our family happiness. She never seems to think herself one of us, but always holds the distance of a stranger [... although] I make a point of her being always introduced to my company, and always making one in our drawing-room, when the hours of study are over. (84)

Mrs Clifford, who notices that there is a certain coldness between mistress and governess, suggests that Miss Oswald's pride cannot be subdued unless she feels that there is no hostility on the part of her employer. Lady Montague's reply reveals her resentment at having to compromise at all about a hired person. It is clear that Lady Montague and Mrs Clifford are positioned at opposite ends of the scale concerning the governess's position in the household. Lady Montague's feeling that it "would be very troublesome" (85) to have to consider the happiness of a governess must be linked to her view of Miss Oswald as a hireling employed to relieve her of her maternal cares.

A diametrically opposed view is held by Mrs Clifford, who believes that a governess should be "no stranger, but an adopted welcome inmate and friend" (85). It is probably no coincidence that the writer chose members of different social classes to express the two opposite views. As Anna Jameson wrote, the governess was more likely to meet with social sympathy in middle-class employment than among the aristocracy (36). Although this is certainly not always the case in the novels, the really cold-hearted employers, like Lady H—in Sherwood's *Caroline Mordaunt, or, The Governess* (1835), Lady Ashbury in *Emily, the Governess*, and several of the employers in *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* are aristocrats, while *nouveau riche* middle-class employers display their animosity towards the governess in a more vulgar and demonstrative manner.

When Elizabeth Ham was interviewed for her second situation, her prospective employers the Eltons told her that they would always like to have her with them when they had other company. Ham thought this "was very rational and promising" (Gillett 223), and later felt so much appreciated and

liked by the family that she did not care that her duties included teaching seven girls and one boy. It is clear that the main reason why Elizabeth Ham cherished her position so highly was that her employers always included her in their intellectual and social conversations. She seems to have been unusually fortunate in this situation, however; many nineteenth-century governesses were isolated from their intellectual equals. They talked only to the children, and were left to their own company or perhaps to silently listen to employers' conversation in the evening.

Ham gained much from the friendship with her employer Mr Elton, who was a Unitarian poet. He took a great interest in her poems, discussing them with her and helping her to find a publisher. Ham wrote in her journal that she was grateful for the time he spent with her, although she was aware that his wife thought he spent too much time with the governess (Gillett 226). Although the governess would not in most cases meet the master of the house much, manuals were explicit on her not associating with him in an improper way. Maurice, for instance, declared that "[a]n unobtrusive gentle demeanour is essential to propriety, and all attempt at seeking notice or admiration intolerable" (1849, 52). She thought, however, that it was perfectly all right for the governess to converse with the father of her pupils, or to borrow books from him. In a letter to her brother, Sarah Bennett wrote that her employer the General "considers my comfort in every trifle, and, whilst he preserves the proper dignity of his station, is so affable that I feel quite at liberty" (Bennett 19).

Some novels put great emphasis on the issue of governess participation in the employers' social life, devoting lengthy discussions to the advantageous effects of making her a member of the family circle. One of the most powerful arguments for this is made in Ross's *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life*. It is worth noticing that this particular novel put a finger on several of the issues brought up repeatedly later in the century. The three governess-employing sisters in this novel exemplify different opinions regarding the social status of their children's teachers. The cold-hearted Lady Oakley opposes Mrs Elphinstone's admitting her governess Gertrude Walcot to the dinner table, for instance: "Nothing [...] can be so absurd, so ill-judged, and I am persuaded so repugnant, to the proper feelings of those people of rank and fashion who visit here" (85). The reader, who knows of the Elphinstones' radical improvement since Gertrude's arrival, cannot fail to see that Lady Oakley's comment only reveals her own snobbery.

It can be assumed that Ross was aware of the possible criticism that her novel might evoke among her intended upper-class readers. For instance, she stated her special concern about readers' reaction to her desire of "placing the 'Governess', on an equality with the mistress of the Family" (309). Ross

believed that this wish could provoke comments on who should take care of the children in the evenings if the governess was to amuse herself in the drawing-room. Her own reply was that it would not be a problem, since pupils were either old enough to join their governess in the drawing-room, or young enough to be in bed at the late hour when fashionable parties would start.

A well-known scene that raises and illustrates the topic of the governess's participating in drawing-room activities is Jane Eyre's previously mentioned experience at the big house party at Thornfield Hall. Despite their knowing that Jane is present in the room, the discussion among the lady guests concerns their experiences of governesses. When one of the ladies realises that the governess hears every word of what is said and informs her neighbour about this, the latter answers "I noticed her; I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class" (210). Blessington had depicted a similar humiliating situation in *The Governess*. When Clara Mordaunt is walking in Hyde Park with her second employer Lady Axminster, they meet some friends of the Axminsters, who comment on Clara's good looks. There will always be problems with beautiful governesses, they say, even giving examples from their social circle of governesses who enticed husbands or caused embarrassment in other ways. Blessington made a point of the "peculiarly awkward" position Clara finds herself in here, by stressing that the ladies were "perfectly reckless as to their remarks being overheard by [Clara], that they spoke as loud as if she were not near them" (185).

Such manners could be seen in relation to the way in which middle- and upper-class employers habitually talked openly in front of domestic servants, assuming that they had neither ears nor eyes (see Robbins 108). Peterson explains that "[d]rawing room conversations about the governess served to bring her into public 'view.' [...] Even complaining about a governess was a way of 'showing her off'" (5). Thus, employers could choose to display their governess "as a symbol of [their own] economic power, breeding, and station" (5).

This attitude is found in the novels too. Soon after Emily Seymour has been employed by the Ashburys, who are in fact former acquaintances of her family, she realises that "Lady Ashbury was one of those supercilious persons who are fond of doing a good action for the selfish pleasure of boasting of it to their friends" (82). To some extent, it could be claimed that both governess and employer usually profited from the employment; but autobiographical material as well as the novels point at the humiliation felt by governesses who became showpieces. Having been raised in an upper-class family herself, Emily Seymour thus suffers much from "that silent contempt, or chilling politeness, with which she was so often treated by those who visited the house, and not infrequently by the inmates themselves" (82).

Sometimes governesses would be expected to join their employers in their social activities. This might seem to contradict the earlier discussion regarding the social isolation of the governess, but being called to the drawing-room was often regarded more as a summons than as a welcome invitation. As the male narrator of Anna Maria Hall's short story "Our Governesses" (1844) says, governesses "are always helped last at table, are made to exhibit their superlative accomplishments for the amusements of guests, without either applause or thanks" (*CEJ* 1844, I:179). Even if the governess was requested to come to the drawing-room, she was not always admitted into the social sphere. Although she is fairly well treated by her employers, Honour Haig, the protagonist of Georgiana M. Craik's *Riverston* (1857), is made aware of her marginalised position. Returning with the other women to the drawing-room after a dinner, she states that "there was little there [...] that was likely to prove entertaining for me; but it was not much my mood to break my heart, though I might be forced to sit with my lips closed; so I brought out a flimsy silken work that I kept for such occasions" (I:63-64).

The sensation of isolation and loneliness is, in fact, a general theme in the novels. The two predominant types of social scenes are dinners and musical performances. Although a few fictional governesses, like Jane Eyre, have not previously been accustomed to great parties, a majority have been brought up in the kind of atmosphere to which they are now invited out of pity, as a mark of favour, or in order to entertain their employers.

In the novels such social scenes commonly serve to bring out the governess's recollection of early, happier days. Before the great party in *Ellen Manners; or, Recollections of a Governess*, for instance, the heroine opens a trunk filled with the dresses she used to wear before her father's financial ruin. She is overpowered by the memories that the various dresses bring back of her old life. Realising that the white lace dress she wore for her coming-out ball will appear too expensive for a governess, she turns to a bright pink one instead, sighing "how bright it looked to my eyes, long used to black, or, at least, sombre hues!" (112). In a similar way, piano-playing brings tears of remembrance to both Buckley's Emily Seymor and Irene Clifton's Agnes Williams in *The Little Governess* (1900).

One of the imperative assets for the nineteenth-century governess was to be an accomplished piano-player. This was not only important in her capacity as a teacher, but also for the benefit of her employers. In the novels, piano playing not uncommonly assumes a central role in the heroine's social life with her employers. Barbara Wynne in the Hunts' *The Governess* is one of many fictional governesses expected to come downstairs to play the piano after dinner, as her employers state they are most interested in music. To Barbara's sorrow,

however, the Dulvertons usually fall asleep during the performance. Another piano-player is Eleanor Somers in Emma Marshall's *The Governess: or, Pleading Voices* (1876). The fact that the governess is asked to entertain her employers and their guests every evening is one of the factors behind her mental and physical breakdown which has forced her to give up work.

Although the governess's musical accomplishments were desired, they were sometimes used against her. In several novels, the heroine's command of music gives rise to envy among other women. Interestingly enough, the governess's musical skills, rather than any beauty she may possess, is a chief cause of jealousy. There are a number of governesses who play a little too well according to the lady of the house. Mr Byfield in Hall's *The Governess*, who all through the story comments on employers' manners towards their governesses, lends expression to the jealousy felt by many female characters. He rebukes one lady for expecting her governess to teach all the accomplishments, but still not letting her "play anything in society except quadrilles". The simple but important reason for this restriction was that the governess "played so well that she might eclipse the young ladies who, not being governesses, play for husbands, while she only plays for bread" (22). In Clifton's *The Little Governess*, Agnes's playing and singing one evening only increases the employer's sister Dora's aversion against her. As Dora fears not only that the governess will gain influence over the children's father, but also that the man she herself loves will fall for the young governess, she perceives Agnes's performance at the piano as a major threat.

Martha Smyth in Henry Courtney Selous's *The Young Governess: A Tale for Girls* (1871) annoys her pupil Eleanor by excelling at the piano during a party to which they have both been invited. When the governess is subsequently asked to join the rest of the party in a tableau, Eleanor wonders why the governess was "put forward in this way? Was not she a governess? – in fact, a sort of menial?" (166). The girl's reaction does not surprise the reader, however; Lady Clere has raised her daughter to view governesses as menials. At one point she tells her, "[m]y love, you can give her [i.e. Miss Smyth] to understand that we do not have governesses down-stairs at Clereton Manor" (48-49). Such a statement is singularly significant in this novel, as the roles of the governess and her pupil are reversed towards the end. While Martha is happily (and richly) married, her former pupil has been forced to go out as a governess after her father had gone bankrupt.

Alexander's *Adelaide, or the Trials of a Governess* features the aristocratic Lady Gorewell, who previously had a governess to whom her husband was attracted. To prevent this from happening again, she hires a woman

who apparently doubles as a lady's maid and who is not resident. Lady Gorewell has decided

never again have either a lady-like governess for my charming daughters, nor one that is both young and pretty. Sir William Gorcwell is a gentleman of character [...] But husbands are but husbands, after all; and you know the world is very depraved; so much so, in fact, that I would repudiate and dismiss any female teacher of my children, who plays, sings, or dances, in a finer style than one's self. (44)

This extract expresses the uncertainty as to how lady-like and accomplished the governess was actually permitted to be. Interestingly enough, Hall had depicted a similar scene in *The Governess*. As was seen above in connection with fictional scenes where the governess is unwillingly approached by men, it might be assumed that Alexander had read Hall's novel when he composed his story.

The difficulties of having a resident governess are also brought up by Hall's character Mrs Ryal, who states her decision never to allow a governess to reside in her house again. Asserting that "they are all *exigeant*", this mistress cannot understand what a governess would want with a room of her own. One of her former governesses, she says, "was imprudent enough to wish to get married, and expected to come into the drawing-room when there was company in the evening", while another "occasioned a painful difference between [my husband] and myself; and let *that* be a warning to you, my dear friends, not to admit any pretty, quiet, sentimental young ladies into your domestic circle" (5).

Lady Gorewell's and Mrs Ryal's comments bring up the most prevalent social difficulties of fictional governesses. The topic of the heroine's sexual power, for instance, is closely connected with her presence in the drawing-room. A recurring pattern in the novels seems to be men falling in love with the governess after she has excelled at the piano. In several novels, the heroine's performance actually catches her future husband's attention. When Gertrude Walcot in *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* performs, for instance, Herbert Lyster "was enchanted, wondered at her beauty, her simplicity of manner, and lamented that she should be a 'governess'" (49). In the scene of the tableau in *The Young Governess: A Tale for Girls* mentioned above, Martha Smyth encounters the man she is secretly engaged to but has not seen for a long time.

If the nineteenth-century governess was seen as a lady, she would be invited to take all her meals with her employer. On the other hand, if she was she regarded as a domestic servant, her meals would be served in the nursery, or perhaps in her own room. When she was not welcomed into the social circle of the family, but still expected to share her meals with the family, eating became something of an ordeal. The matter of eating habits in the employer's house was

a cause of difficulty for many governesses and a topic repeatedly brought up in the novels.

The governess behind the article “Resident Governesses” urged adjustment to circumstances, advising the governess to keep a low profile at the table “if she breakfast and lunch with her employers” (*W&L* 1882, 218). It might be noted that it was apparently not even assumed that she have dinner with them. In an article that consisted of the advice given by a father to his governess daughter, the young woman was likewise urged to “always sit down in the lowest seat [at the table] *without* direction”. Furthermore, she was counselled to “consider what you can do to help others: when alternative of fare is given you, say frankly that which you prefer; but if you take, take that of which there is most” (*EJE* 1849, 137). Such servility was taxing for some governesses, mainly because the eating situation made their intermediate position so pronounced. A governess writing in the 1890s recorded how she remembered

arriving, tired from a long journey, at a London house [...] and on sitting down to dinner how keen a sense of friendlessness and isolation it gave me to find myself pointedly helped after the ladies of the house. Of course, it was but a trifle, but such trifles go far to make up the sum of daily life. (*W&L* 1893, 276)

In this context, Agnes Grey’s arrival at the Bloomfields’ might be remembered. Terribly cold after her long winter journey, Agnes feels mortified having to try to master the cold potatoes with her stiff fingers. Apparently, Mrs Bloomfield is not eating herself, but her mere presence and observation make the meal into an exceedingly painful ordeal for the governess.

The article quoted above claims to be written as a reply to another article where it had been stated “that the governess should be punctiliously helped at the table after the grown-up daughters of the house, though she might be allowed precedence over the children – her pupils” (276). It is important to note that although the governess might be invited to the table, she was still not often seen as an equal. Even here, she was expected to take responsibility for her charges. For the governess, meals were hence not an hour of repose. In several novels, the heroine is openly ostracised at the table. The narrator of *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* recalls from her childhood that the governess

was the only individual of the party to whom none was introduced, to whom no sort of attention was paid beyond that of desiring her to ‘help Emma to the breast of the fowl,’ or to see that ‘Julia ate more like a lady,’ and who, in the midst of ravages committed on flesh and fowl, must have risen from her comfortless dinner hungry.

(2)

This scene was repeated almost word by word in Alexander's *Adelaide, or the Trials of a Governess* twenty years later. That novel mentions a lady whose last governess was "the only individual of the party to whom none was introduced" (45). The reader learns that the "only notice taken of the maiden would be, 'Help Emily to the breast of the fowl;' 'See that Eliza eats more like a lady;' or 'You do not, governess, attend to Charles'" (45). The two scenes are so similar that it must be deemed unlikely that Alexander had not read the older novel. It should be added that in this later version, too, the narrator comments on the poor governess's getting up from the table hungry.

The matter of food and eating was highly regulated and hierarchical in Victorian England. Hughes states that "the rituals surrounding the serving and eating of food had for centuries been a means of confirming and displaying social hierarchy" (99). There were, for instance, different sets of food served in the household: adult, nursery, and servant food (Davidoff 1973, 90). Thus, even if the governess ate in the dining room, she and her pupils might sit at another table and be served another menu. Furthermore, eating hours were regulated, and in a number of novels there are references showing that the governess lives according to a nursery time-table rather than one for an adult lady.

According to Elizabeth Napier's instructions in *The Nursery Governess* (1834), food for children should be simple but plentiful. She recommends bread and milk for breakfast, "some kind of meat, with vegetables and, sometimes, pudding" for dinner, and bread and milk again for supper (40). Napier's advice, which includes not giving children food in-between meals, agrees with the general ideas of children's diet. Mary Martha Sherwood recorded how as a girl in the 1790s she "had the plainest possible food; dry bread and cold milk were my principle food, and I never sat on a chair in my mother's presence" (Darton 34). John Locke recommended plain diet for children in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693, 16-20), but while his intention was to prevent aristocratic seventeenth-century parents from giving their children highly spiced food and wine, more than a century later a restricted diet came to be used as a way of forming children's characters.

In some novels, where the governess's arrival leads to changes in the children's diet, eating habits form part of the dichotomy of the rational governess versus the uneducated nurse, as was discussed in Chapter 4. In H. S.'s early *Anecdotes of Mary; or, the Good Governess* (1795), for instance, Mrs Montfort immediately restricts the diet of the spoilt eight-year-old Mary. The girl may no longer drink tea, and she is only given plain bread when hungry between meals. It is worth noting that Mary's mother approves of Mrs Montfort's strict regime, while it is much resented by the maid who has previously lavished food on the girl. In later novels children's diet is also

restricted – but improved – when the governess takes command. Ellen Manners in the novel of that name corrects the “improper diet” and late hours of her pupils, and Madame de Rosier in Edgeworth’s “The Good French Governess” (1801) likewise regulates the children’s diet and thereby incurs the wrath of the maid.

In some novels the governess takes all her meals with the children in the schoolroom; in other stories she eats with the whole family. In still other novels there seems to be no system at all, the irregular temper of the employers determining eating arrangements. In *Warp and Woof: or, the Reminiscences of Doris Fletcher* there is a scene where Ursula discusses governess life with the Layel sisters who are former governesses themselves. Except for general advice as to punctuality and adaptability, Ursula is counselled to have breakfast and tea in the schoolroom if possible, as she would then be independent of “household delays and disarrangement for company” (II:97). In spite of the isolation, the governess would be more in command of her time if she were able to choose a life separated from that of her employers.

Eating habits differ between and even within the novels. Agnes Grey, for instance, eats with the Bloomfields; but in her second situation with the Murray family, she has all her meals with her pupils in the school-room. In her analysis of Brontë’s novel, Costello puts this down to the class difference between the two families (9), but that does not seem to be a generally applicable principle in the genre. Rather, what decides the governess’s place and hours of eating is the employers’ attitude to her.

An example of the social importance attached to eating is found in Dora Russell’s *The Vicar’s Governess* (1874). There the governess initially eats with the vicar and his family. When a grown-up daughter by a first marriage comes home, however, the governess and her pupils are relocated to the schoolroom. Here the question of whether the governess is to eat with the family or not creates a dispute. The daughter, who demands a more fashionable lifestyle than her parents normally adhere to, is upset with her brother who would prefer to have the pretty governess in the dining room: “The idea of having the governess down to a late dinner [is] preposterous!” (85). This comment is interesting, as the protagonist turns out to be a governess in disguise. Another woman who is reluctant to have the governess present is the jealous Lady Jane Follitt in *The Undesirable Governess* (1909). Writing to her future governess, she mentions “that she expected Miss Scott to dine in her own room” (27). The main reason is no doubt Lady Jane’s great fear that the governess might catch the attention of her husband and sons if she were to be included in the family circle. For similar reasons, Adelaide in *Adelaide, or the Trials of a Governess* eats in her own room or in the schoolroom with the children.

In Blessington's *The Governess* the matter of eating is also linked to the governess's dependence on her employers' whims. In her situation with the upstart Williamsons, Clara Mordaunt is expected to dine with the children in the schoolroom, and then bring them down in time for dessert. Those social appearances take on a symbolic function in Clara's relation to her employers. Indeed, she regards the invitations into the dining-room as the most difficult part of her obligations. The reason is that there is no agreement between the employers and the governess; Clara is simply sent for when the capricious Williamsons feel like having her present. On several occasions, Mr Williamson tries to be a gentleman and offers her wine and cake. Being embarrassed by this out-of-place kindness, Clara declines, and Mrs Williamson rebukes her husband for trying to persuade the governess. The lady does not act out of respect for the shy governess, however, but because she cannot accept the interest and good will shown to that inferior person. The public defiance is certainly humiliating for Clara, but it also serves to describe the difficulty of having a governess in the house. Mrs Williamson cannot accept another lady's gaining attention, and especially not one who so blatantly reveals her employers' lack of class.

As has been noted by several critics, many nineteenth-century writers depict heroines' difficulties in ways which would be associated with eating disorders today. The genre of governess novels would yield plenty of material for such a study. While some characters find eating difficult, others are actually starved by their employers. Clara Mordaunt, for instance, is systematically deprived of food by several of her employers. The scene where she has to watch the gourmand Manwarrings eat has already been referred to (Chapter 2), and Mrs Vincent Robinson starves Clara on the ground that it will improve her voice. Helena Michie rightly notes that "Clara's assertions of ladyhood are almost always expressed in terms of food" (49). In Selous's *The Young Governess: A Tale for Girls*, it is the cook who refuses to prepare any food for the governess, as she feels that Martha Smyth gives herself airs when she asks for a cup of tea.

Just as employers or servants could use food as an instrument of exerting power over the governess, the same element could be present in the relation between governess and child. One of the most notorious criminal cases against governesses concerned the French Mlle Doudet, who was accused of child abuse and murder in 1853. She had first worked as a private governess in England, but then gone back to France and opened a school in Paris. Her victims, the daughters of an English doctor who had sent them to her in Paris, had been "systematically deprived of nourishment"; it seemed as if the governess had "rarely given [them] anything but bread and soup" (Hartman 92). The evil governess who starves her charges also features in fiction. In Eliza Meteyard's

Lilian's Golden Hours (1857), for instance, which is a children's story and not a governess novel proper, there is a stereotypically evil governess called Miss Stonebox who withholds food from her pupil.

Working abroad

The surplus of women in nineteenth-century England led to the foundation of certain emigration societies (see e.g. Hammerton). Among the unmarried women who thus left England were governesses who went, for instance, to Australia and South Africa. Patricia Clarke records the experiences of some of those who emigrated with the help of the Female Middle Class Emigration Society. *Punch* commented on this export of teachers in 1862, stating that “[n]ow as we are at liberty to export our Looms, Engines, and Presses, there is no reason why the machinery of education should be kept at home under lock and key” (1862, 43:139). The article discusses governesses emigrating to Australia, stating that while many women “ostensibly [are] going out to cultivate the waste lands of mind, their real destination is the Eden of Matrimony”. This comment ties in well with the idea of women emigrating because of the slight possibilities of marriage at home.

Governess novels do not describe emigration agencies, nor are the Colonies the setting except for John Richard Houlding Hawthorn's *The Pioneer of a Family, or, Adventures of a Young Governess* (1881), which deals with a young woman who accompanies an English family to Australia as their governess. This is not a typical governess novel, however, rather a fictional depiction of settlers' life in Australia. The narrator states that he has lived for many years in that country, and the novel includes a discussion concerning an emigration scheme for skilled male labourers. Another reference to the Colonies is made in the anonymous *Margaret Stourton, or a Year of Governess Life* (1863), where Miss Edge is said to have a sister “who had gone to Canada, also as a governess, and who had married a person in trade there” (101).

Although emigration societies are not an issue in the governess-novel genre, a few novels are nonetheless set partly or altogether outside England. A considerable group of Englishwomen were in fact employed as governesses abroad during the nineteenth century. Although most governess novels located abroad are set on the Continent or in Russia, English governesses were recruited all over the world. Autobiographic testimonies such as Anna Leonowens's *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (1870) and Emmeline Lott's *The English Governess in Egypt: Harem Life in Egypt and Constantinople* (1865)

constitute evidence of this. Both Lott's and Leonowens's books offer exotic descriptions of remote countries, as does – to some extent – Elizabeth Morrison's recent *Governess to King Feisal II of Iraq 1940-1943* (1995). Novels rarely feature such exotic settings, however; the only stories in this study set thus far away are Sydney Carlyon Grier's *His Excellency's English Governess* (1896), which is set in Baghdad, and the anonymous *Adventures of a Young Lady, Who Was First a Governess, and Who Afterwards Fell into the Hands of Pirates; Together with the Account of Her Escape* (1880) – the long title of which sums up its contents.

English teachers seem to have been popular abroad as they were considered to be trustworthy, serious, and diligent in their work with the children. In governess novels set abroad English education is held up as superior, as are English cultural and religious values. The novels tend to be explicit on these differences, as well as on descriptions of the country itself. In E.P. Hamilton's *The English Governess in Russia* (1861), for instance, Adelaide's voyage to St. Petersburg goes by way of Copenhagen, where the heroine visits the Thorvaldsen Museum in the Danish capital. Hamilton's novel was published little more than a decade after the museum had first opened. In *Chance and Choice, or the Education of Circumstances*, there are also references that might have been of interest to the English reader; in addition to Lucy Clifford's own adventures in Russia, Poland, and Germany, her fiancé's search for her takes him by way of the Netherlands, and his short stay in Russia is vividly described.

An English governess working abroad would find some relief from the stigma attached to the occupation in England. Peterson claims that "as foreign governesses in England served to reduce the problem of status incongruence for the Victorian employer, emigration of the English governess served to reduce conflict for her" (16). This seems to be in accordance with the experiences of some heroines. When Lucy Clifford first comes to Germany, she is employed as a maid. For an officer's daughter, such a situation would have been absolutely impossible in England; but as Lucy says, "the familiarity which subsists between mistress and maid in this country, makes me feel the situation less than I should in England" (157). The strict English class divisions were commented upon in other novels too. In *A Woman's Story* (1857), which is not a governess novel, Anna Maria Hall claimed that the relation between master and servant in England was often of "a less confiding, less endearing nature, than in any other part of the world" (I:105-106).

The first English governesses probably went to Russia in the early decades of the nineteenth century (Pitcher viii). One of these pioneers was Claire Clairmont, who was employed in several families between 1824 and

1828. Pitcher points out that the English governess must have been a noticeable figure in Russia, as a number of well known Russia writers, like Pushkin, Tolstoy, and Chekov, all introduce English governesses in their works. In *When Miss Emmie Was in Russia: English Governesses Before, During and After the October Revolution* (1977), Harvey Pitcher tells the stories of a number of British governesses going eastwards. Most of the governesses he deals with were active in the early twentieth century, however, hence later than the action of the governess novels set in Russia. Russian employers often held a higher social position than English employers; most fictional governesses, as well as those depicted by Pitcher, find employment among the nobility. This can be explained by the fact that Russian titles “conferred on one person automatically passed to all his descendants” (Pitcher 34), which made the nobility a much larger class than at home.

In governess novels, Russians are generally described as vulgar and inconsiderate. The vulnerability of the heroine is enhanced by the lack of refinement evinced by foreigners, and their religious practices are represented in a derogative way. Their tyrannical treatment of servants and governesses alike is explained as owing to the fact that serfdom had not yet been abolished in their native country. *Chance and Choice, or the Education of Circumstances* is not the only governess novel to discuss the character of Russians in unfavourable terms. In Hamilton’s *The English Governess in Russia*, the heroine Adelaide is first employed in a high-ranking general’s family where she is well treated. Not surprisingly, though, there are religious differences. Another English governess in St Petersburg is introduced as a contrast to Adelaide. The dreary terms of this woman are described thus: “Thirteen hours daily was she expected to labour, till her health began to give way, not only under the incessant fatigue, but from the total absence of comfort, and want even of the nourishment to which she was accustomed in her own early home” (52). Unfortunately, the woman is bound to her employer by a three-year contract. It seems clear that her employers regard her more or less as a serf.

Broughton and Symes include an extract from this particular novel in their anthology, noting how it combines “the romance of travel, the fervour of evangelicalism and the earnest didacticism of the schoolroom story” (169). This is true, and another important aspect is the intended wish to present a true picture of Russia. To validate the authenticity of the story, the preface of *The English Governess in Russia* asserts that the author has received information from a person who has resided for a long time in Russia. A major aim of the novel is clearly pronounced as giving

information to a large class of English ladies who seek employment in Russia, in the capacity of governesses, and whose eyes are often dazzled with half revealed truths, so that they are in danger of falling into the snares against which we desire to guard them. Our second object is to benefit Russia herself, if she will receive at our hands a statement which may be of advantage to her in a matter of vital moment. – we mean the education of her children. (iii)

Some twenty years after Hamilton's novel, the signature "Nur Muth" – a German-language pseudonym, meaning "Take heart/Be brave" – published the similarly titled story "An English Governess in Russia. A True History" (1882). Although giving a much more positive picture of governess life in a Russian family, the writer still does not refrain from some national prejudice. For instance, she is quite explicit on the detrimental effects of the overheated rooms of her employers: "the atmosphere [was] very trying and unhealthy for all, but especially for a foreigner accustomed to plenty of fresh air" (147).

Most governess novels feature heroines whose personalities are formed by the sorrows they have gone through. Novels dealing with governesses abroad often describe deeply religious heroines who are confronted with foreigners of other religious affiliations. Broughton and Symes head their extract from Rachel M'Crindell's *The English Governess: A Tale of Real Life* (1844) "The governess as missionary", and indeed both Clara Neville in that novel and Adelaide in *The English Governess in Russia* do not seem to aim at imparting a sound English education only; they also work hard to impress everyone around them with their Protestant faith. M'Crindell also wrote other anti-Catholic novels set abroad, for instance *The School-Girl in France; a Narrative Addressed to Christian Parents* (1840).

The Evangelical fervour of *An English Governess in Russia* pervades the novel. Although it is somewhat improbable that she seems to have had no idea of the religious differences between England and Russia before going out as a governess, Adelaide encounters a number of difficulties with her employers. For example, she is distressed that they do not keep the whole Sunday as a holy day, but go out and amuse themselves after Church. At one point, she meets a young aristocratic officer who openly flirts with her. Being a pious woman, she hands him a small French Testament, which he eagerly reads and takes in: "its contents were hid in his heart. It had been to him as light shining in a dark place – the darkness of a soul that knew not God. It had led him to that knowledge which is eternal life – the knowledge of a Saviour" (46-47). This man is only the first in a long line of people whom this governess enlightens with her Evangelical mission. In her next situation, she teaches her single pupil Elise about God: "Adelaide was indeed to her a messenger from God" (108).

Interestingly enough, the parents do not seem to care that the governess imparts her non-Russian faith to their daughter. The local priest, however, is not pleased, but he seems to realise that the Orthodox Church is not quite what it ought to be: "He, too, had often found how powerless were the rites of the Church" (112). When Elise falls ill and dies, Adelaide is informed that her services will no longer be needed in the family. This case is noteworthy, because the governess soon realises that having left an engagement upon the death of her charge, she will face great difficulties in finding a new position in Russia. According to the narrator the reason for this is difficult to know for a foreigner, but concludes that it might be due to Russian superstition.

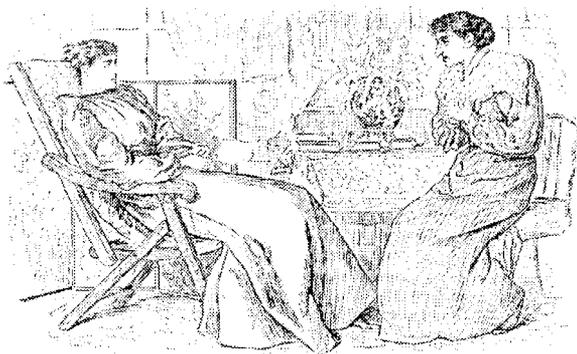
Not only did English governesses go abroad; there were also about 1,500 foreign governesses in England and Wales in 1861 (Horn 399). However, non-English governesses are not common in the novels. When introduced in the genre, they often offer a negative contrast to the English heroine. Edgeworth's French governess Madame de Rosier is one of the few truly positive fictional portraits of a foreign governess. Nonetheless, her employer Mrs Harcourt has one reservation: Madame de Rosier may take all the responsibility for her charges, except that of religion, as Mrs Harcourt fears Catholic influence. Madame de Rosier's teaching resembles much of the pious instruction given by Protestant governesses in other novels, however, which is probably the point. When Mrs Harcourt has realised the beneficial influence of the governess, her fear of Madame de Rosier's Catholicism is softened.

In her autobiography *A Victorian Childhood* (1932), Annabel Huth Jackson, née Grant Duff, a daughter of a politician and later Governor of Madras, who grew up during the second half of the nineteenth century, recorded a succession of French and German-speaking nurses and governesses. Apart from the status lent by a foreign governess and the easy access to foreign languages, she hints at some problems which seem to have been recurrent. For example, as Victorian England was full of xenophobic sentiments, the matter of religion was a constant source of dispute. One of the Grant Duffs' governesses, the German Fräulein Reinking, was described by her pupil as "the worst example of her class, a bigoted Roman Catholic" (27).

Although many of the foreign governesses were Protestants – as were many refugees coming to the British Isles – the demand for European governesses was higher than the Protestant supply. Therefore, Catholic governesses had to be accepted, and their English employers faced a constant fear of their children becoming influenced by the foreign lady in the schoolroom.

In 1896, *Punch* published an engraving illustrating the English fear of foreign governesses (Fig. 12). Here, it might be observed, the governess is not

merely depicted as an impostor; the suggestion is that she is not a Christian at all – her hooked nose and the sneering reference to her ‘Ancient Race’ have unmistakable anti-Semitic undertones.



Mrs. Verdant Green (who is parting with her German Governess). “Oh, but Fräulein, you would never do for the St. Albyns; they’re Roman Catholics, you know; and you gave me to understand, when you came to us, that you were of an old Lutheran family.”

Proud Daughter of an Ancient Race. “Ach, forgif me, matam, for letting you sink I was a Brodestant! I was really a Roman Gassolic all ze time; like my nople ancestors in ze mittle aitches, ze Counts von Meyer-Oppenheim zu Hirsch-Goldsmid-Rosenberg, who fought in ze Grusates!”

Fig. 12 “Opportunism” (*Punch* 1896, 110:138)

As anti-Catholic feeling in England was strong, at least during the first half of the nineteenth century, it is not surprising that parents dreaded influential foreign governesses. This, together with the idea that the mother was the right person to instil religion in children, made the matter of non-English governesses delicate.

The main reason why there are so few foreign governesses in the genre is obviously that it chiefly aimed at improving conditions for English governesses. When non-English governesses do appear, however, they are commonly viewed with suspicion. Although not a governess novel, Dinah Mulock Craik’s *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856) is nevertheless interesting in this context. As was mentioned in Chapter 2 above, Louise D’Argent tries to hide her French descent by calling herself Louise Silver when she is employed by the Halifaxes. She realises that Mrs Halifax, clearly a Francophobe, would never have hired her had she known that Louise is the daughter of a Jacobin.

Incidentally, the idea of a French lady in exile disguising herself as a governess had appeared already in Edgeworth's "The Good French Governess" and surfaced again in James Fenimore Cooper's *The French Governess; or, The Embroidered Handkerchief: A Romance* (1843). In Cooper's story the protagonist is a beautifully worked lace handkerchief, which its maker Adrienne is forced to sell during the French Revolution. She then flees her native France for America where she becomes a governess. Ultimately, she finds her handkerchief – after it has repeatedly been sold and admired – and the two are united. What is interesting in this story from the governess point of view is that Adrienne is depicted as possessing the usual characteristics of the governess heroine; she is impoverished, benevolent, brave and ultimately rewarded and restored to a worthy social position.

In Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), Lady Isabel Vane's assumed French identity automatically makes her more eccentric, and Thackeray's Becky Sharp's dubious morals are explained by the fact that she is half-French. In Anna Maria Hall's *Marian, or a Maid's Fortune* (1840), a lady is considering whether to discharge her English nurse in order to hire her friend's Swiss maid, as her child could then learn French without any expense. This turns out to be a bad move, however, as the Swiss maid is apparently both a liar and a mischief-maker. Likewise, the French governess Madame Simon in the Russian family in *Chance and Choice, or the Education of Circumstances* is artful and scheming, especially against the English governess Lucy Clifford whom she perceives as a threat to her own favoured position. Yet another example of a malignant foreigner is found in Selous's *The Young Governess: A Tale for Girls*. Adèle, the French lady's maid, knows that Martha Smyth lives with the Cleres under a false name, but instead of trying to find out why the governess wishes to keep her background to herself, she spreads false rumours that Martha is a milliner's daughter.

Marry the governess?

So far, my investigation of the governess-novel genre points to great similarities between the fictional depiction of governesses and facts known from real life. Thus, the heroines of the governess-novel genre go out as governesses for reasons similar to those stated by the annual reports of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution, for instance. They also face the same problems in procuring a situation, and then meet with similar difficulties with employers, as did real-life governesses at the time. It seems clear that the genre used well-

known and much discussed contemporary problems partly in order to promote the cause of governesses, partly as a means of creating a successful story. One important difference between fact and fiction, however, concerns the topic of marriage.

A vast majority of governesses in Victorian England remained single. There were various reasons for this. The article "The Governess Question" argued that the governess would have stood a much better chance of getting married if she had been engaged in trade or other employment, rather than in teaching (*EWJ* 1859, 167). Like servants, resident governesses would be expected to remain single, and governesses, at least, certainly did not have many opportunities of meeting an eligible bachelor. Furthermore, the female surplus was of some consequence, as was the fact that governesses lacked funds and were thus not considered to be good matches. While many real-life governesses were compelled to work as long as anyone was willing to pay for their services, and then face poverty in old age, the life of the fictional governess often ends far more satisfactorily. The Victorian novel typically ends with marriage if the protagonist is a heroine. If, on the contrary, she has led a sinful life, her fate is sealed towards the end of the story. The governess novel is no exception to this formula. Except in a few, albeit notable, novels, the protagonist is usually relieved of her governess yoke by marriage.

Protagonists that do not marry may be divided into three groups, one of which consists of governesses who die towards the end of the story. There are some erring women within the genre who, adhering to literary conventions, die in the last chapters. Ellen Wood's Lady Isabel Vane in *East Lynne* and Elizabeth Gaskell's eponymous heroine in *Ruth* (1853) are perhaps the best known among these characters. It may be noted, however, that they both die while doing penance for their sins. Furthermore, Lady Isabel's coming back to East Lynne as a governess to her own children is to some extent a reunion with her former husband, as is Ruth's caring for the dying father of her child. A sort of pseudo-death occurs in W.M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847) and in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862). Becky Sharp and Lady Audley do not actually die, but are reduced to poverty and insanity, respectively.

A few more notable deaths occur among governesses who are altogether free from sin, however. Emily Dawson in Hall's *The Governess*, who is sent out as a governess by her grandfather Mr Byfield as a kind of social experiment, belongs to this group. Not until it is too late does Mr Byfield realise that the poor girl has been so maltreated that she is actually dying. Another dying heroine is found in S. E. P.'s strongly religious *Lucy Smith, The Music Governess* (1886), who succumbs to illness after having converted her colleagues at the school where she works. In Emma Marshall's *The Governess:*

or, *Pleading Voices*, inconsiderate employers are under attack. Eleanor Somers has been so overstrained that she has had to give up her situation and come home, very ill. We do not know if she will live, but it is clear that her health has been broken: "There she lay, over-taxed, over-wrought – a confirmed *invalid*, and, as far as could be seen, likely to remain so" (93).

The main group of non-marrying protagonists – which probably best conforms to reality – consists of the old, forlorn women. Several of these characters were obviously created for the explicit purpose of supporting the governess cause, by raising sympathy among readers. Hall's and Martineau's stories both titled "The Old Governess" depict ageing, exceedingly poor women whose fate resembles that of the women who applied for support from the Governesses' Benevolent Institution. Harriet Martineau's *Deerbrook* (1839) and Dinah Mulock Craik's *Bread upon the Waters: A Governess's Life* (1852) also belong to this group. Maria Young and Felicia Lyne are both initially attractive, but their social degradation – in both cases enhanced by their being crippled – excludes them from the marriage market.

Martineau's Maria Young stoically witnesses her former fiancé marry another woman after she has been both physically and economically reduced to dependence as a governess. Craik's Felicia Lyne actually receives two proposals during the novel, but she turns both of them down in favour of caring for her two younger brothers and later for their children. It is noticeable that love is not given any expression in either of these proposals. When her first employer asks Felicia to marry him, she records the fact that this middle-aged widower does not try to give her "silly, flattering speeches". Instead, she writes, "this man, – asking no love, only the right of showing tenderness; ready to be father, brother, friend, husband, – every thing – to poor forlorn me, – it went to my heart's core!" (44). Later in the novel the man she loves, Sir Godfrey Redwood, proposes, but since Felicia feels he is doing it out of pity – and she believes he would be happier with another woman –, she heroically declines and carries on her work.

The third group of novels featuring non-marrying governesses consists of those with a more open ending. Sewell's *Amy Herbert*, for instance, closes happily, but not with a marriage. The heroine Emily Morton is liberated from governessing and restored to the position of elder daughter in the Herbert family. The reunion of the Herberts – the Colonel comes back after many years in India – functions as an alternative to the traditional ending of novels at the time.

Although Elizabeth Appleton was probably correct when she told governesses "of marriage and domestic comfort you should banish every idea. You cannot expect offers from men of birth and fortune" (28), the vast majority

of governess novels actually end with the marriage of the heroine. Among the governess novels included in this study, a large majority close with the governess exchanging the position of governess for that of wife. One of the characteristics of the genre, according to Beaty, is that the governess, if she is a heroine, “marries a gentleman or clergyman” (Beaty 1977, 640). This does not seem to be the whole truth, however. Firstly, governess heroines are more catholic in their choice of husbands, and secondly, the marriage theme is generally complicated by conflicting views concerning the idea of marriage to a governess. In several cases, unworthy but high-ranking men, whose families reject the idea of marrying a governess, assail the heroine. In *Chance and Choice, or the Education of Circumstances*, the uncle of Lucy Clifford’s Russian pupils falls in love with her. Although he has no intent “beyond beguiling his idle time at Tœplitz” (71), Lucy’s employer is

overcome with anger and indignation, that her brother-in-law, Prince Ivan Drascovitz, should stoop to pay attentions to a poor governess. ‘And what,’ thought she, ‘if, with his perverse and wilful disposition, he should be weak enough to marry her? Knowing it to be the very thing to displease all his family, – what a horrible idea! (71)

For a large part of the novel, the Russian Prince pursues Lucy, not at all reflecting upon her lack of consent. Rather, he regards Lucy as conquerable by tact or force.

Prince Ivan’s antithesis in the novel is another military man, the gentlemanly Colonel Falconer. Having been posted to India, he has not known about his fiancée’s difficulties. Back in England, he sets out across Europe in search of her as soon as he learns about her having gone out as a governess. A similar pair of contrasted male characters is found in E. P. Hamilton’s *The English Governess in Russia*, where a man who has neither wife nor children employs the unsuspecting Adelaide. As soon as her fiancé learns about her precarious situation, he embarks on a voyage to rescue her. However, both Lucy and Adelaide manage to escape from their Russian villains unaided, but later marry their fiancés.

Like the Russian princess in *Chance and Choice, or the Education of Circumstances*, Lady Ashbury in *Emily, the Governess* is outraged when she realises that her son wishes to marry the governess:

I could not, in honour to my pedigree, or in justice to my son, keep a governess in my house whom he professes to love. A pretty degeneracy for the noble ancestry of Ashbury too, for the heir to marry a gambler’s daughter! His ancestors would break the fetters of the tomb to prevent so great a degradation! (146-147)

However, neither Lucy Clifford nor Emily Seymor has the least interest in the aristocratic men whose desire they have unwittingly aroused. As a contrast to the unwanted attention, the heroine is respectfully wooed by the man she later marries. Even if the contrast is not always as clear-cut, many novels delineate an opposition between two men who are attracted to the governess. It may be noted, too, that several of the male characters who imperil the honour of the heroine are decidedly non-English; in addition to the Russians referred to above, the West-Indian Hercules Marsden in Blessington's *The Governess* is the total opposite of Clara's fiancé Clarence Seymour. Although the reader never doubts the heroines' virtue, the encounter with dangerous men who try to seduce them can be seen as a kind of test that the governess character has to master on her developmental journey. A common trait in the novel of development is the protagonist's meeting with virtue and vice.

What kinds of men do governess characters marry, then? To a certain extent, there is conformity between the professions of the heroine's father and that of her future husband. Thus, clergymen's daughters like Caroline Mordaunt and Agnes Grey marry men of the Church; gentlemen's daughters such as Clara Mordaunt marry titled men, and Lucy Clifford who is an officer's daughter marries a military man. It is noteworthy that although Agnes Grey may be seen as an exception, several protagonists who marry clergymen do not describe their feelings for their husbands as at all connected to passion. Caroline Mordaunt, for instance, states in forthright terms that her husband had asked for his hand as he wished for a housekeeper: "I made no difficulty, for he was pious and humble, and possessed all that natural courtesy which originates from piety and humility" (211). When Ellen Manners leaves her last governess situation, she goes to live with and care for her old mother and an uncle. She marries the uncle's curate, who is five years her junior. The marriage is described as happy, but after ten years she is widowed and again alone.

In novels where the heroine marries a gentleman, there seems to be more scope for love. It should be observed, however, that the heroine's moral principles are often made into an issue. For instance, Harriet Maria Gordon Smythies describes the marriage between Lucy Blair in *The Daily Governess; or, Self-Dependence* (1861) and her long-time fiancé in the following way: "Henry Greville led to the altar the loving and lovely LUCY BLAIR, who had been tried in the balance and not found wanting, and who, in the drudgery of the life of a daily governess, had learnt and practised all those virtues which make a model wife" (III:334).

Chapter 5 discussed how the governess heroine could, by assuming a maternal function towards her pupils, become attractive in the eyes of a widowed or otherwise single master of the house. Hughes gives some examples

of real-life governesses marrying into their employers' families. For instance, Charles Kingsley's children's governess – a distant cousin of the family – married his younger brother in the 1860s. As Hughes states, her status thus changed “from that of a distant relative, to paid employee and, finally, to full family member” (43).

It was sometimes assumed that governesses from lower ranks of society saw the occupation as a means of finding a husband. This is not common in the novels, however, although F.C. Philips's “Eliza Clarke, Governess” (1900), presents a governess who has started out “with hopeful ideas of teaching children in a rich family, where there might be an available elder son or a widowed father” (9-10). She actually receives a proposal from her middle-aged employer but turns it down, telling him that “[m]ost girls in my position would jump at your offer, but if I feel I could not make you happy I think it would be dishonest of me to accept you” (41). The major reason for her refusing is that she has set her mind on marrying well. The girl who does not take a good offer when it is given is a well-known topos, and in this story it is employed in a slightly patronising way by the writer; Eliza's tactics for upward mobility fail, as the man she hopes to marry offers her not marriage, but only a house and his devotion. This story, which appears to have been first published in *Punch*, illustrates the precarious position of the single and orphan governess.

When governess heroines marry, their educational journey comes to a close. After having been thrown upon the world and encountered difficulties, they are eventually re-established in society by marriage. In a few cases, such as Blessington's *The Governess* and *Jane Eyre*, marriage is preceded by an unexpected inheritance making the governess heroine independent.

Suggestions for improvement

A governess in the 1880s, who claimed to be speaking from personal experience, stressed that it was important for governesses to take command over their situation and realise that they “have the remedy in their own hands” (*W&L* 1882, 218). She thought that “[t]he grand secret of a happy life as a resident governess is unselfishness and the earnest desire to please others”. In short, the writer recommended adaptation to circumstances: “if the governess is pleasant in manner [...has] plenty of tact and common sense, and the fact clearly established in her own mind that she *is* the governess, she has a very good chance of spending a happy life” (218). Half a century earlier, the signature M. A. S. had discussed the same issue, drawing the conclusion that “[d]iscontent is one of our besetting national sins; and pride is at the root of discontent” (*CLM*

1835, 4:257). Such statements are interesting in relation to the novels. Although most heroines do their best to fit in and conform to what is expected, they do not spend “a happy life” with their employers.

To a certain extent, though, the governess heroine does have the remedy in her own hands. For instance, Emily Seymour’s and Ellen Manners’s situations are greatly improved when they manage to cast off their initial pride. On the title page of *Emily, the Governess*, a motto stressing adaptation to circumstances sets the tone of the novel:

Whate’er thy lot, thankful for what is sent;
If rich, be liberal, and if poor, content.
With firm submission learn each woe to bear,
For all who taste of life must taste of care.

Similarly, heroines like Agnes Grey find an outlet in their frustration by being able to help other people in need. The best way to overcome difficulties, however, was to get out of governessing. This may come across as a resigned attitude to the problem; but the truth is that there are very few novels that end with the heroine still being employed as a governess.

Both non-fictional material and the novels come up with various suggestions as to what a lady-like governess could do to ameliorate her situation. Although manuals urged adaptation to circumstances, the governess’s own responsibility was often stressed. In *Principles on Education*, Elizabeth Sewell pointed out that the true misery in the governess’s position lay in its lack of definition. She claimed that things would only improve if the governess could “make her own position by defining it herself instead of leaving it for others to define it for her” (II:244). Therefore, she urged the governess to have self-respect, but warned her against pride. In *Warp and Woof: or, the Reminiscences of Doris Fletcher*, there is a scene illustrating the matter. The narrator of the novel states that she has “heard a lady suggest to a young governess on a visit at her house [...] that she should be careful not to betray her occupation”. The reason was “that people in that neighbourhood looked down on a governess, and never thought her *quite* a lady”. Fortunately enough, however, “the poor lassie said she would make no false pretences; she was not degraded by her work, and she would not degrade it by concealment”. The narrator comments that this is the spirit in which “women must learn to look with at their labour, or it will never rise into respect” (III:187).

Like several earlier governess novels, Holme Lee’s *Warp and Woof* systematically reviews the difficulties connected with governess life. Unlike novels such as *Caroline Mordaunt* and Blessington’s *The Governess*, however, Lee’s story actually offers suggestions for improvement. Ursula, for instance, says that “[i]f I want anything, I ask for it, and I invariably get it; if I dislike

anything, I complain, and the grievance is removed" (II:186). It should be acknowledged that Ursula is a character of big words and perhaps not quite as much stamina, but her argumentation here and elsewhere is in line with the contemporary debate. The Layel sisters, who have been governesses too, hold a more conservative position. In this novel more than in others, there is a clear difference in attitudes between older and younger women. One of the former governesses argues that it is no wonder that there are problems, as so many women going out as governesses are not well prepared, nor qualified for the occupation. She states that "[h]alf the cry over [governesses'] grievances is only cant; it gained the public ear once and has been traded on ever since; and the real case has been damaged by overestimates and misrepresentations" (II:86). This is a singular opinion from a woman who has been in the trade herself.

Generally, grumbling governesses function as contrasting pictures to the heroine. Thus, the dissatisfaction of Miss Edge in *Margaret Stourton, or a Year of Governess Life* is underscored by the circumstance that she does not do anything to improve her situation. The heroine Margaret Stourton thinks that she signals the attitude of "you are trampling upon me, but I am hard as a rock, and you cannot crush me, although you try your utmost", which certainly will not draw any sympathy. Margaret, who states that she has "often thought governesses make a mistake in looking upon their position as degrading" (100), tries to make Miss Edge see that she will not be happy as long as she feels sorry for herself.

To some governesses, refraining from association with the servants was deemed necessary to keep up class appearances. That is probably the reason why Caroline Mordaunt, after her socialising with the maid in one family makes her lose her situation, refrains from every contact with the servants in the next position. The disliked Miss Mason in *The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life* also spends the evenings with her mistress's French maid, which is questioned, as her charges thus "sit with servants" in the evening (74). Similarly, Ursula in *Warp and Woof* is determined to "check every approach of confidential familiarity" from the nurse, stating that she is "not of the class that sits in housekeepers' rooms" (II:185).

The intermediate position of the governess could prove to be advantageous, however. For instance, it made her the only person in the household who could – if she wished to – associate both with the gentry and the servants. Agnes Porter's journal from the 1790s records how she had tea with the housekeeper, but likewise that she visited with her aristocratic employers. A fictional governess who found a friend in the housekeeper is of course Jane Eyre. It should be pointed out, however, that Mrs Fairfax, although a

Only the governess

housekeeper, was a distant relative of Mr Rochester's and thus not regarded as a mere servant.

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The Governess; or, Politics in Private Life closes with an authorial wish:

In presenting my little work to the Public, I am fully aware of the criticism and the censure to which I expose myself; if, however, I succeed in bringing the subject on which I have principally written, into discussion, I shall be satisfied. My labour will not have been in vain; for I am persuaded, it is one which, if freely and impartially canvassed, must be amended. (309)

Miss Ross was one of many writers who chose the governess character as a central figure not only for the reason that she could be made into a romantic heroine, but explicitly because they wished to improve the situation of a vulnerable group of women. By bringing up those issues that were repeatedly put forward in the contemporary debate concerning governesses' working conditions and social position, novelists took an active part in this debate.

Conclusion

This study has examined a large number of novels that have not attracted much attention from modern literary critics. The Victorian governess as a social phenomenon has been the focus of several studies; but the literary genre that grew out of the wish to discuss the situation of this group of early professional women has – with surprisingly few exceptions – been overlooked. One reason for this is that the novels themselves have been more or less forgotten. When governess employment diminished in real life, the genre and readers' interest in it declined as well. One might of course ask how important it is to revitalise the governess novel today. Can a study of the literary depiction of governesses expand our knowledge of the Victorian era to any appreciable extent? My unconditioned answer to that question is 'yes'. By focusing on this specific character, it is possible to perceive such issues such as education, class mobility, and femininity in nineteenth-century England from fresh points of view.

This study has mapped out the literary terrain of the governess novel as a specific genre. The novels within the study may be very diverse, but they share a common core of genre characteristics. Typically, these incorporate a catalytic opening which forces the heroine to go out as a governess. Her initial difficulties usually consist of social and financial degradation of the family; subsequently, the heroine's worries and difficulties in finding a situation and her journey to her employers' house are discussed. Having taken up a situation as governess, the heroine will face further difficulties connected with her socially intermediate position.

Governess novels deal with a specific group of women. Through their status as wage-earning middle-class women, governesses contradicted the feminine ideals of the middle classes and were thus, as a group, open to criticism. One important aspect of the genre is that the precarious situation of the governess brought issues such as female work, class, and motherhood into focus. By depicting the vulnerable position of women without protection, governess novels thus gave voice to problems that affected people outside this specific group of women, too.

It has been my intention to prove how intimately connected the literary genre of governess novels was with the contemporary governess debate. A large number of these novels should be seen as direct contributions to the debate.

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They express issues discussed in the manuals and press articles in the guise of fiction. Some of these issues take up more space in the debate (salaries, for instance), while other matters are dealt with in greater detail in the novels (e.g. accommodation). The one major difference between the novels and the non-fictional debate is the romantic aspect which is present in almost all the novels. This is surely partly due to literary convention and to readers' wish for a happy ending; but another aspect come into it, too: there was a feeling among novelists that the governess deserved to be treated as any young lady. Her financial degradation should not make her less attractive to the hero of the story.

As this study has made clear, the genre of governess novels coincided in time with the large increase of governesses in Victorian England. The mid-nineteenth century was characterised by economic insecurity, and the instability felt at the time is very clearly perceived in the novels. Using traits from the *Bildungsroman*, several writers depicted the precarious situation of young women who had to leave their family home in order to take up work. In a society, which has been seen as consisting of separate spheres for men and women, the governess character actually has to take on the traditionally male role of going out into the world on her own. The genre demonstrates the wide meshes of the safety net of the aspiring middle classes. For instance, the lack of paternal protection is often commented upon in the novels.

I would argue that the genre could be seen as an expression of a wider fear of failure, and here is one reason for the large number of nineteenth-century novels that deal with governesses and governess work. The governess character served different purposes for different groups of writers. For instance, those who wished to share their experience of governess work could give more or less straightforward accounts of the difficulties connected with the occupation. Writers who wanted to draw attention to the dangers of social climbing found that the governess heroine served as a perfect pivot around which their discussions could be structured. Sensation writers were quick to see the potentials of the governess character; being a woman of whom little was known, she could set intricate plot schemes in motion. Although the genre of governess novels may seem fairly heterogeneous, this study has sought to pinpoint the generic traits that were attractive and operative for as different writers as Anne Brontë, Lady Blessington, Dinah Mulock Craik, and Ellen Wood.

One difficulty with the present project has been the sheer vastness of the material included. By necessity, a structure that allowed for discussion of some aspects, while perforce omitting others had to be adopted. Choosing a disposition of the material that focuses on the structure of the novels, I have aimed at showing how similar the novels within the genre actually are. I have also maintained that they agree in respect of subject matter, rhetoric and

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structure with the non-fictional material, such as advice books and articles. A thematic approach, focusing specifically on gender or class aspects within the genre, would have highlighted properties that have had to stand back a little in the present study. For instance, I believe that some novels which previous critics have not read specifically as governess novels, such as Ellen Wood's *East Lynne*, would benefit from a closer study from the governess perspective.

Being "neither fish nor fowl" (*W&L* 1882, 218), as a governess in the 1880s described the situation, makes work and social life strenuous for the heroine. This intermediate position is of course also what constitutes the strength of the governess as a literary character. By not fitting into the master/servant dichotomy, the governess heroine exposes underlying tensions in the household, but also in society on a more general level. Her combined intermediate and marginalised position opens many possible angles of interrogation into the Victorian private sphere.



Fig.13. (Hall, *The Governess: A Tale* (1842) in *Tales of a Woman's Trials* edition, 1858)

Epilogue

Women's possibilities of paid employment went through big changes during the last decades of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries. Since the governess novel was so closely linked to the society in which it was created, it is not surprising that the genre had seen its heyday in the early twentieth century. However, although society changed, the fictional governess remained popular. Novels that to some extent comply with the characteristics of the Victorian governess novel have been published all through the twentieth century.

There are a large number of modern romances that feature governesses, and many of them have borrowed traits from the Victorian governess novel. Twentieth-century romance writers have found the governess heroine a useful instrument for romantic thrillers in upper-class settings. Victoria Holt's (i.e. Eleanor Hibbert) *Mistress of Mellyn* (1961) as well as Barbara Cartland's *Lessons in Love* (1974) and the similar *The Poor Governess* (1983), and Joanna Sinclair's *Dangerous to Love* (1979), show kinship with the Victorian governess novel genre in plot, characterisation and setting. Holt's novel, for instance, is a gothic thriller with *Jane Eyre*-like mysteries, such as a missing wife and an ancient castle setting. In Holt's and Cartland's modern versions of the governess novel the masters are slightly demonic but still attractive single or widowed men whom the heroines marry. The children seem to be unloved by the master, and the governess can thus easily step into a maternal role. Furthermore, the threatening and unwanted advances from men other than the master of the house figure in all these novels. In both the Cartland stories, the heroines successfully defend themselves with a gun. Cartland seems to have been aware of the governess character's potentiality as an observer; in both novels her heroines become governesses as a way of gathering material because they wish to become writers. Joanna Sinclair's novel is set in St Petersburg, and although rather different from the nineteenth-century governess novels set in Russia, she to some extent resorts to the xenophobic picture of Russians as coarse, loud, and drunk.

The governess also figures in modern pornography. Some years ago, I ordered a book called *The Governess at St. Agatha's* (1995) by Yolanda Celbridge, although it sounded like a school-story rather than a governess novel

set in a private family. The book turned out to be a pornographic story, complete with whips, masochistic men, and a stern governess. The British Library holds six novels by Celbridge, three of which have the word ‘governess’ in the title, and another two of which indicate a school-setting. Celbridge (presumably a pseudonym) is only one of many pornographers who build their stories around the stereotypical stern governess or schoolmistress – who is, of course, very far from the kind of character scrutinised in the present study. Perhaps the best-known post-Victorian governess pornographer is John Glassco, whose *Harriet Marwood, Governess* (1967) has also been dealt with by literary critics. Patricia Whitney, for instance, points out the similarities between Glassco’s story and a French pornographic novel entitled *La Gouvernante* (1913) by Aimé Van Rod.

Within more innocent fields of entertainment, the governess has never lost her popularity. The success of musicals and films like *The Sound of Music* and *The King and I* bears witness to the potential of the governess character. Anna Leonowens’s autobiography *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (1870), which is the original story behind *The King and I*, has received much attention in the twentieth century. Margaret Landon’s best-selling novel *Anna and the King of Siam*, which was based on Leonowens’s experiences, appeared in the 1940s. The following decade it was remade into the highly successful musical and film *The King and I*, and it has recently been made into an animated film, as well as into a new feature film. Another recent contribution to governess films is Sandra Goldbacher’s *The Governess* (1998), which features a Jewish heroine who – under disguise – becomes a governess in a family in Scotland.

In an episode of *Star Trek: Voyager* entitled “Persistence of Vision” (1995), the tough Captain Janeway is suffering from stress. She is therefore ordered by the doctor to relax in her holonovel, which is a kind of holographic imaginary game in which the participant becomes a character. Interestingly enough, Janeway chooses a Victorian governess novel setting as her escape from the demanding reality as commander of a starship. The holonovel – the story of which goes totally wrong because of the schemes of an evil intruder in the starship – seems to be a substandard rehash of the Victorian governess novel with a mysterious upper floor, a seductive master, and an evil housekeeper. More than 150 years after its birth, the governess novel has gone where no one has gone before.

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A large majority of the novels included in this study have not received any critical attention in our time. A probable reason for the fact that most governess novels have fallen into obscurity, although they were widely read in their own day, is their highly specialized topic. Nevertheless, they deserve to be acknowledged as part of the nineteenth-century debate concerning female employment. They also make important observations on other aspects of Victorian middle-class ideology, such as motherhood and education.

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